



# **ALAGAPPA UNIVERSITY**

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(A State University Established by the Government of Tamil Nadu)

**KARAIKUDI – 630 003**



## **Directorate of Distance Education**

**M.A. [English]**

**I - Semester**

**320 13**

**DRAMA**

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E-28, Sector-8, Noida - 201301 (UP)

Phone: 0120-4078900 • Fax: 0120-4078999

Regd. Office: 7361, Ravindra Mansion, Ram Nagar, New Delhi 110 055

• Website: [www.vikaspublishing.com](http://www.vikaspublishing.com) • Email: [helpline@vikaspublishing.com](mailto:helpline@vikaspublishing.com)

**Work Order No.AU/DDE/DE1-333/Printing of Course Materials/2018 Dated 27.12.2018 Copies - 1000**

# SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

## Drama

Syllabi	Mapping in Book
<b>BLOCK I: DRAMA I - IV</b>	
<b>UNIT - I:</b> Drama : Introduction- Objective - Concepts	<b>Unit 1:</b> An Introduction to Drama (Pages 1-25);
<b>UNIT - II:</b> Sophocles : Oedipus Rex	<b>Unit 2:</b> Sophocles: <i>Oedipus Rex</i> (Pages 26-42);
<b>UNIT - III:</b> Ibsen : A Doll's House	<b>Unit 3:</b> Ibsen: <i>A Doll's House</i> (Pages 43-54);
<b>UNIT - IV:</b> Marlowe : Dr. Faustus	<b>Unit 4:</b> <i>Doctor Faustus</i> by Christopher Marlowe (Pages 55-75)
<b>BLOCK II: DRAMA V - VIII</b>	
<b>UNIT - V:</b> Goldsmith : She Stoops to Conquer	<b>Unit 5:</b> Oliver Goldsmith: <i>She Stoops to Conquer</i> (Pages 76-100);
<b>UNIT - VI:</b> Pinter : The Birthday Party	<b>Unit 6:</b> <i>The Birthday Party</i> by Harold Pinter (Pages 101-132);
<b>UNIT - VII:</b> T. S. Elliot : The Cocktail Party	<b>Unit 7:</b> T.S. Eliot: <i>The Cocktail Party</i> (Pages 133-150);
<b>UNIT - VIII:</b> Arthur Miller : All my sons	<b>Unit 8:</b> Arthur Miller's: <i>All My Sons</i> (Pages 151-160)
<b>BLOCK III: DRAMA IX - XI</b>	
<b>UNIT - IX:</b> George Ryga : The Ecstasy of Rita Joe	<b>Unit 9:</b> George Ryga: <i>The Ecstasy of Rita Joe</i> (Pages 161-171);
<b>UNIT - X:</b> Girish Karnad : Tughlaq	<b>Unit 10:</b> Girish Karnad: <i>Tughlaq</i> (Pages 172-193);
<b>UNIT - XI:</b> Tendulkar : Silence! The Court is in Session	<b>Unit 11:</b> Tendulkar: <i>Silence! The Court is in Session</i> (Pages 194-212)
<b>BLOCK IV: DRAMA XII - XIV</b>	
<b>UNIT - XII:</b> Girish Karnad : Hayavadana	<b>Unit 12:</b> Girish Karnad: <i>Hayavadana</i> (Pages 213-233);
<b>UNIT - XIII:</b> Tennessee : Cat on a Hot Tin Roof	<b>Unit 13:</b> Tennessee Williams: <i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i> (Pages 234-247);
<b>UNIT - XIV:</b> Sheridan : The School of Scandal	<b>Unit 14:</b> Richard Brinsley Sheridan: <i>The School of Scandal</i> (Pages 248-256)

---

# CONTENTS

---

## INTRODUCTION

### BLOCK I: DRAMA I - IV

#### UNIT 1 AN INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA 1-25

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Concept of Drama
- 1.3 Western Drama from Ancient to Modern Times
- 1.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 Key Words
- 1.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 1.8 Further Readings

#### UNIT 2 SOPHOCLES: *OEDIPUS REX* 26-42

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Sophocles as a Dramatist
  - 2.2.1 Characters in *Oedipus Rex*; 2.2.2 Plot – *Oedipus Trilogy*
  - 2.2.3 Summary of *Oedipus at Colonus*; 2.2.4 Play Summary of *Antigone*
  - 2.2.5 *Oedipus Rex* as a Classical Tragedy; 2.2.6 Fate and *Oedipus Rex*
  - 2.2.7 Irony in *Oedipus Rex*; 2.2.8 Significance of the Chorus
- 2.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 Key Words
- 2.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 2.7 Further Readings

#### UNIT 3 IBSEN: *A DOLL'S HOUSE* 43-54

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Life of Henrik Ibsen
- 3.3 Critical Analysis of *A Doll's House*
  - 3.3.1 Plot; 3.3.2 Dramatic Technique
  - 3.3.3 Characters; 3.3.4 Themes
- 3.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 3.5 Summary
- 3.6 Key Words
- 3.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 3.8 Further Readings

#### UNIT 4 *DOCTOR FAUSTUS* BY CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE 55-75

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives

- 4.2 An Introduction to the Play
- 4.3 Scene-by-Scene Interpretation
- 4.4 Chief Character Sketches
  - 4.4.1 Faustus; 4.4.2 Mephistopheles
- 4.5 The Element of Autobiography in *Doctor Faustus*
- 4.6 *Doctor Faustus*: A Morality Play
- 4.7 Allegorical Symbolism in *Doctor Faustus*
- 4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.9 Summary
- 4.10 Key Words
- 4.11 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 4.12 Further Readings

## **BLOCK II: DRAMA V - VIII**

### **UNIT 5 OLIVER GOLDSMITH: *SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER* 76-100**

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Life and Works of Oliver Goldsmith
- 5.3 Summary of the Play: *She Stoops to Conquer*
- 5.4 Act-Wise Summary of the Play
  - 5.4.1 Prologue; 5.4.2 Epilogue; 5.4.3 Themes and Characters
- 5.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 5.6 Summary
- 5.7 Key Words
- 5.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 5.9 Further Readings

### **UNIT 6 *THE BIRTHDAY PARTY* BY HAROLD PINTER 101-132**

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Background of the Author
- 6.3 Reception of *The Birthday Party*
- 6.4 Summary and Critical Comments
  - 6.4.1 Act I; 6.4.2 Act II; 6.4.3 Act III
- 6.5 The Theme of Protest and Subversion
  - 6.5.1 Language, Silence and Pause; 6.5.2 Language and Structure: Dashes and Pauses
- 6.6 Society and the Individual
- 6.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 6.8 Summary
- 6.9 Key Words
- 6.10 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 6.11 Further Readings

### **UNIT 7 T.S. ELIOT: *THE COCKTAIL PARTY* 133-150**

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 T. S. Eliot: *The Cocktail Party*
  - 7.2.1 Historical Background of *The Cocktail Party*; 7.2.2 Synopsis and Theme of *The Cocktail Party*
  - 7.2.3 Critical Appreciation of *The Cocktail Party*; 7.2.4 Issues and Analysis

- 7.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 7.4 Summary
- 7.5 Key Words
- 7.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 7.7 Further Readings

UNIT 8 ARTHUR MILLER'S: *ALL MY SONS*

**151-160**

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 Overview of the Play *All My Sons*
- 8.3 Analysis of the Play
- 8.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 8.5 Summary
- 8.6 Key Words
- 8.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 8.8 Further Readings

### BLOCK III: DRAMA IX - XI

UNIT 9 GEORGE RYGA: *THE ECSTASY OF RITA JOE*

161-171

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 A Short Note on the Dramatist George Ryga
- 9.3 Summary of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*
  - 9.3.1 Critical Comments on *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*;
  - 9.3.2 Influences on George Ryga
- 9.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 9.5 Summary
- 9.6 Key Words
- 9.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 9.8 Further Readings

UNIT 10 GIRISH KARNAD: *TUGHLAQ*

172-193

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 Analysis of the Play
  - 10.2.1 Master of Structure and Paradoxes; 10.2.2 Subtext and Structure of the Play
  - 10.2.3 *Tughlaq*: A Historical Play; 10.2.4 A Note on Existentialism
  - 10.2.5 Literary Techniques used in *Tughlaq*; 10.2.6 Character Analysis
  - 10.2.7 *Tughlaq*: A Visionary but not a Strategist; 10.2.8 *Tughlaq*: A Man Ahead of the Times
- 10.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 10.4 Summary
- 10.5 Key Words
- 10.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 10.7 Further Readings

UNIT 11 TENDULKAR: *SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION*

194-212

- ## 11.0 Introduction
- ### 11.1 Objectives
- ### 11.2 Life and Works of Tendulkar

- 11.3 Summary of the Play
- 11.4 Themes
  - 11.4.1 Dramatic Techniques Used in the Play
- 11.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 11.6 Summary
- 11.7 Key Words
- 11.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 11.9 Further Readings

## **BLOCK IV: DRAMA XII - XIV**

### **UNIT 12 GIRISH KARNAD: *HAYAVADANA* 213-233**

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 Life and Works of Girish Karnad
- 12.3 Summary of the Text: *Hayavadana*
- 12.4 Dramatic Techniques
- 12.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 12.6 Summary
- 12.7 Key Words
- 12.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 12.9 Further Readings

### **UNIT 13 TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF* 234-247**

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 A Short Note on the Dramatist Tennessee Williams
- 13.3 Summary of the Play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
- 13.4 Critical Issues in the Play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
- 13.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 13.6 Summary
- 13.7 Key Words
- 13.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 13.9 Further Readings

### **UNIT 14 RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN: *THE SCHOOL OF SCANDAL* 248-256**

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Objectives
- 14.2 A Short Note on the Dramatist Richard Brinsley Sheridan
- 14.3 *The School of Scandal*: Summary
  - 14.3.1 Critical Analysis
- 14.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 14.5 Summary
- 14.6 Key Words
- 14.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 14.8 Further Readings

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## INTRODUCTION

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### NOTES

Drama has been in existence since times immemorial when it was integral to religious rites and rituals. Drama is an organic form and a genre of art that comes closest to the human need for expression. Whenever there is birth, marriage or death, there is drama in all places, all times. From the elaboration of ceremony in worship to the solemnity of ritual in death, there is drama. Drama is the only form of art that engages the body as well as the mind. It explores all the potential of the human condition in expression.

Drama was introduced to England from Europe by the Romans, and auditoriums were constructed across the country for this purpose. By the medieval period, the mummers' plays had developed, a form of early street theatre associated with the Morris dance, concentrating on themes such as Saint George and the Dragon and Robin Hood. These were folk tales retelling old stories, and the actors travelled from town to town performing these for their audiences in return for money and hospitality. The medieval mystery plays and morality plays, which dealt with Christian themes, were performed at religious festivals. Perhaps the most famous playwright in the world, William Shakespeare from Stratford-upon-Avon, wrote plays that are still performed in theatres across the world to this day. Some of the important playwrights of the Renaissance period include Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson. Most playwrights tended to specialize in one or another of these, but Shakespeare is remarkable in that he produced all three types.

This book, *Drama*, is divided into fourteen units that follow the self-instruction mode with each unit beginning with an Introduction to the unit, followed by an outline of the Objectives. The detailed content is then presented in a simple but structured manner interspersed with Check Your Progress Questions to test the student's understanding of the topic. A Summary along with a list of Key Words and a set of Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit for recapitulation.

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**BLOCK - I**  
**DRAMA I - IV**

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*An Introduction to  
Drama*

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**UNIT 1 AN INTRODUCTION TO  
DRAMA**

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**NOTES**

**Structure**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Concept of Drama
- 1.3 Western Drama from Ancient to Modern Times
- 1.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 Key Words
- 1.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 1.8 Further Readings

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

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‘What is drama?’ The answer to this question would require pages and pages of elaboration. For some, as in its colloquial usage, drama is anything that is to do with heightened emotion and exaggeration. For the others, it is the delight of visual spectacle. If we look closely at the common references to drama, we will notice the presence of art, spectacle, exaggeration, structure, organization, pace, gesture and music. These elements all combine to shape the form of drama. This unit provides an introduction to drama. It assesses its evolution and forms, and traces the Western drama from the ancient times to the modern times.

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**1.1 OBJECTIVES**

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

- Analyse the evolution of drama as an organic form and a genre of art
- Assess the forms of drama and the elements of tragedy
- Evaluate Western drama from the ancient times to the modern times

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**1.2 CONCEPT OF DRAMA**

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Drama is an organic form and a genre of art that comes closest to the human need for expression. Whenever there is birth, marriage or death, there is drama in all

## NOTES

places, all times. From the elaboration of ceremony in worship to the solemnity of ritual in death, there is drama. Drama is the only form of art that engages the body as well as the mind. It explores all the potential of the human condition in expression. In ancient India, the stage was considered a sacred space and Bharata composed the *Natyasastra* as the 'fifth veda' (pancham veda). From the extensions of fingers to the movement of the eye-lids, the human body can convey a multiplicity of meanings. In drama, music and dance come together with poetry to create an organic medium for expression.

When Ion tells Socrates that he is transported every time he sings Homer and that he cannot help being in a state of rapture and tears flow down from his eyes, he is referring to the dramatic power of Homer's poetry. In his state of aesthetic bliss, he sings Homer and that is performance. Drama has no beginning; it has always existed with humans in their desire to express the sacred and the beautiful.

From the earliest times, drama was integral to religious rites and rituals. The history of Western drama begins with the pre-Christian societies' ceremonies and rituals. The combination of spectacle, music and dance in these ceremonies produced drama of great visual power and psychological effect. From the earliest to the modern and post-modern times, drama has continued to exert its influence to transport, entertain and at times even change the audience who view it.

### Forms of Drama

The two earliest forms of drama are tragedy and comedy. The tragic and the comic elements have been present in the earliest of folk rituals, and are present in all aspects of modern living as well. These are the two principle forms on which drama has developed from the ancient to the modern times.

#### (a) Tragedy

The form of tragedy has evolved from the sacrificial 'goat dance' of pre-Christian communities. At a certain time of the year, a goat was selected as a symbol believed to represent humanity and it was sacrificed to placate the angry gods and ancestral spirits for any wrongs that may have been committed during that year. The transition from one year to another was completed with the tradition of cleansing the soul of the community. In one opinion regarding the etymology, Athenaeus of Naucratis (2nd-3rd c. AD) mentions the original form of the word as *trygodia* from *trygos* (grape harvest) and *ode* (song), because those events were first introduced during grape harvest. In *Poetics*, Aristotle says that this form of drama developed from the improvisations of the leader of choral dithyrambs (hymns sung and danced in praise of Dionysos, the god of wine and fertility)

Tragedy in drama is a form that ends with purgation (catharsis) of pity and fear.

## (b) Comedy

The word 'comedy' is derived from the Classical Greek *kômôithía*, which is a combination of *kômos* (revel) or *kSmç* (village) and (singing). The modern sense of comedy as the evocation of laughter comes through the Latin *comoedia* and Italian *commedia* and with time, has taken on varying meanings. For the Greeks and Romans, 'comedy' meant stage plays with cheerful endings. In the middle ages the term broadened to comprise narrative poems with happy endings and a lighter tone. Gradually the term came to denote any performance that brought on laughter.

### Aristotle: *Poetics*

Aristotle's *Poetics* is the foundational text for the reading of drama, irrespective of the genre or age being studied. This treatise on aesthetics introduces key concepts in theatre, concepts which are integral to the understanding of theatre. Given below are some of the major concepts and terms explained by Aristotle.

**Mimesis:** Mimesis is a critical and philosophical term that carries a wide range of meanings including: imitation, representation, mimicry, receptivity, non-sensuous similarity, the act of resembling, the act of expression, and the presentation of the self. According to Aristotle, mimesis is the power that poets possess so they can reach closest to the Ideal. As the poets imitate the beauty of the existing world, they imitate the supreme reality itself. This was Aristotle's materialistic argument in defence of poetry against the charges of the idealist Plato.

**Peripeteia:** Aristotle defined it as 'a change by which the action veers round to its opposite, subject always to our rule of probability or necessity.' According to him, peripeteia, along with discovery, is the most effective when it comes to drama, particularly in a tragedy. Aristotle wrote 'The finest form of Discovery is one attended by Peripeteia, like that which goes with the Discovery in *Oedipus*'. In *Oedipus Rex*, when Oedipus discovers the truth about himself and his parents, it is a moment of recognition, and the action 'veers round to its opposite': a mighty ruler turns into a guilt ravaged blind man.

**Catharsis:** This term derives from its meaning in medicine as 'purgation'. According to Aristotle, catharsis of pity and fear is essential to drama, specifically, tragedy. After watching a performance of *Oedipus*, for instance, the audience experiences a purgation of these two weak emotions and like in medicine, their soul is cleansed. This term has come to be applied to all forms of art now.

**Anagnorisis:** Anagnorisis originally meant recognition in its Greek context, not only of a person but also of what that person stood for. It referred to the hero's abrupt comprehension of the situation, the knowledge of things as they stood, and finally, the hero's perception of the relationship with an often hostile character in Aristotelian tragedy.

## NOTES

## NOTES

**Hamartia:** In Greek dramaturgy, hamartia is the tragic flaw of the protagonist in a given tragedy. The word hamartia comes from the idea of missing the mark (hamartanein) and covers a broad spectrum that includes accident and mistake, as well as wrongdoing, error, or sin.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines hamartia as one of the three kinds of injuries that a person can commit against another person. Hamartia is an injury committed in ignorance (when the person affected or the results are not what the agent supposed they were).

### Six Elements of Tragedy

The six elements of tragedy are as follows:

1. **Mythos (Plot):** Aristotle defines plot in Chapter 13 of *Poetics* as a variation of two different ‘change types’ and three different ‘character types’.
2. **Tragic plot:** A tragic plot is said to be a movement or change flanked by the end points of good and bad fortune. This gives rise to two kinds of change. This includes change which begins on good fortune and ends in bad fortune, and change which starts in bad fortune but ends up in good fortune. Three possible character types have been identified. These are characters of ‘decent’ people, people ‘outstanding in excellence and justice’, ‘evil people’ and the ‘in-between man’. Aristotle contends in *Poetics* Chapter 13 that the most desirable plot involves ‘An in-between person who changes from good to bad fortune, due to hamartia.
3. **Ethos:** Ethos is a Greek word that signifies the guiding beliefs or ideals that exemplify a community, a nation or an ideology. Initially this word was used by the Greeks to refer to the power of music to influence its hearer’s emotions, behaviours, and even morals. This idea is demonstrated convincingly in the early stories of Orpheus. The ways in which characters in Greek tragedies were constructed is important when considering ethos, or character, in Greek tragedy.
4. **Dianoia:** It is a term used by Plato for a type of knowledge, specifically, knowledge of mathematical and technical subjects. It is the capacity for, process of, or result of discursive thinking, in contrast with the immediate apprehension that is characteristic of noesis. Dianoia is further divided into the theoretical (episteme), and the practical, which includes techne and phronesis.
5. **Lexis:** According to Plato, lexis is the manner of speaking. Plato said that lexis can be divided into mimesis (imitation properly speaking) and diegesis (simple narrative).
6. **Melos:** Melos is a Greek word that means ‘melody’. In Aristotle’s view, music was the base on which poetry rested and its place in tragedy is very important. The chorus in Greek tragedy often sings as part of the structure of the narrative.

7. **Opsis:** Opsis means ‘spectacle’ in the theatre and performance. Its first use has been traced back to Aristotle’s *Poetics*.

It is now taken up by theatre critics, historians, and theorists to describe the ‘mise en scène’ of a performance or theatrical event.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. What are the elements that comprise drama?
2. Where was drama practiced in the earliest times?
3. What is ethos?
4. What is lexis?

## 1.3 WESTERN DRAMA FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN TIMES

This section gives an overview of Western drama from the ancient times to the modern times. We will first begin with Greek drama.

### (i) Greek Drama

The famous Greek dramatists were as follows:

**Sophocles:** Sophocles was born in 495 BC in a place about a mile northwest of Athens city. As the son of a wealthy merchant, Sophocles was privileged to have studied all of the arts. Sophocles’ grace was highly acknowledged even at the young age of sixteen. During the festivities to mark the victory of Salamis, he even led a choir of boys. For him being a winner was inherent. The very first competition he took part in was at the festival held at the Theatre of Dionysus in the city of Dionysia. This was a place where new plays were presented every year. Sophocles secured the first place defeating Aeschylus, another notable dramatist. Sophocles talents were manifold. His skill as an actor was brought forth with his acting in many of his own plays, for e.g. *Nausicaa* or *The Women Washing Clothes* in which he performed a famous juggling act. His talents were not just limited to the theatre. He was also an ordained priest for many years in the service of two local heroes—Alcon and Asclepius, the god of medicine. He served for a while also on the Board of Generals, a committee that administered civil and military affairs in Athens. He was also the director of the Treasury and was in charge of controlling the funds of the association of states called the Delian Confederacy. Sophocles favoured treating each tragedy as a comprehensive whole as a result of which his plays were tighter in dramatic action as compared to Aeschylus who preferred the trilogy for telling a story.

Sophocles wrote over 120 plays out of which only seven remain in their entirety. The most famous of these is *Oedipus the King*. This tragedy concerns

## NOTES

the deepest of human psychological fears—the term ‘Oedipus complex’ coined by Sigmund Freud owes to the thematic depth of this play. In trying his hardest to escape the prophecy of the Oracle, Oedipus ends up committing probably the most disturbing of human sins—he unknowingly becomes the murderer of his own father and weds his own mother. In the sequel *Oedipus at Colonus*, the protagonist finally finds peace within himself after expiating for his sins having endured the worst the fates had to offer.

Another famous play, *Antigone* has for its plot the story of a passionate young woman who defies authority when she is forbidden a proper burial for her brother Polyneices. This play can be read as a powerful social document of its times as it shows the rival claims of the State and the individual conscience. *The Women of Trachis* deals with the jealousy of a woman Deianira and the story revolves around her and her husband Heracles. The play *Electra* too explores the psychology of a woman who wants to murder her own mother. Soon after the production of *Oedipus at Colonus* in 405, Sophocles passed away.

**Euripides:** The son of Mnesarchides, Euripides, was born about 480 BC, somewhere in the vicinity of Athens. He presented his first set of tragedies at the Great Dionysia in 455 BC, but won the first award only in 441 BC. Euripides wrote about 92 plays and was compared, even during his lifetime, to the great minds like Aeschylus and Sophocles. He refused to overlook and condone the superstitions and moral hypocrisy of his contemporary society as a result of which he had to lead the life of a loner.

As a child, Euripides served as cup-bearer to the guild of dancers performing at the altar of Apollo. As the son of a powerful family, he was privileged to be exposed to the great thinkers of the time. The radical philosophy he read inculcated in him the spirit of questioning and an insatiable hunger for truth.

In his plays, Euripides created characters who confronted personal psychological issues, and not just questions of the State. In his plays *Hippolytus* and *The Bacchae*, he explores the psyche of men trying to deny a natural life-force like sexuality or emotional release. The play *Medea* focuses on the passionate jealousy of a woman who has lost the interest of her middle-aged husband. Euripides is known for introducing the common man on the stage—a forerunner to the Naturalist movement. In his plays, characters like Agamemnon and Menelaus are presented as human, devoid of their heroic and epic qualities.

His plays *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba* are strong criticisms of war and its glorification. His last play *Iphigenia at Aulis* is a scathing indictment of superstition and cowardice, where Agamemnon’s unfortunate daughter Iphigenia is lured to the Greek camp under the pretext of marrying Achilles whereas she is to be sacrificed by her father and his fleet in order to appease the gods. *The Cyclops*, the only complete extant satyr play is a grotesquely funny account of Odysseus’ encounter with the one-eyed cannibal Polyphemus. In many of his plays, Euripides experimented with mixing up dramatic forms thereby challenging the rigid parameters of tragedy.

**Aeschylus:** Known as the ‘Father of Tragedy,’ Aeschylus was born in 525 BC in the city of Eleusis. From his childhood, he was immersed in the mystic rites of the city and the worship of the Mother and Earth goddess Demeter. The story goes that once he was sent as a child to watch grapes ripening in the countryside where in his sleep, Dionysus appeared to him in a dream and ordered him to write tragedies.

Aeschylus commenced writing at the time when theatre had just started progressing. Plays were just an extension of vibrant oratorios or choral poetry enhanced with expressive dance. The plays featured a single actor who portrayed several roles using masks. A chorus danced alongside exchanging dialogues with the single actor.

A circular dancing area was the place where most of the action took place. This place was called ‘orchestra’. This is carried down from the time when drama had been nothing more than a circular dance around a sacred object.

Drama went a step forward when Aeschylus introduced a second actor. In addition, he tried to make the chorus a part of the action of a play. In *Agamemnon*, the chorus of Elders quarrels with the queen’s lover, and in *The Eumenides*, a chorus of Furies pursues the grief-stricken Orestes. Aeschylus was the director of many of his own productions, and according to ancient critics, he is said to have brought the Furies onstage in so realistic a manner that women miscarried in the audience. Even though ninety plays have been written by Aeschylus, merely seven have survived. His first existing work, *The Suppliant*, shows a young Aeschylus still struggling with the problems of choral drama. This is the story of the fifty daughters of Danaus who try to find protection from the unwanted attentions of the fifty sons of Aegyptus. The second extant drama, *The Persians*, narrates the battle of Salamis in which Aeschylus and his brother actually fought. For the most part it deals with the reception of the news at the imperial court. This play contains the first ‘ghost scene’ of extant drama.

Aeschylus’ third extant play is *Prometheus Bound* where he deals with the myth of Prometheus, the world’s first humanitarian. The play commences with Prometheus being bound against his will to a peak in the Caucasian mountains for giving mankind the gift of fire without the consent of the gods. Prometheus is aware of Zeus’ doom. He, in fact, also knows that the cause behind it is a certain woman whose name he will not reveal. . Even amid the fire from heaven that is hurled at him in a frightening climax, Prometheus remains fearless and silent.

Aeschylus deals with patricide and incest in *Seven Against Thebe*. He was not, however, willing to reconcile to the conservative rationalization of the ‘family curse’. On deep examination, he came to the conclusion that heredity is nothing more than a predisposition and one cannot take this as an excuse for ‘acts of wickedness’. The real reason for this is ambition, greed and a weak moral structure. Aeschylus stressed that men should take responsibility for their actions.

## NOTES

## NOTES

The *Oresteia*, a trilogy, was performed in 458 BC, less than two years before Aeschylus' death.

The theme touched upon tragedy of a royal house, a 'heredity curse'. The curse started in a faint world of make believe in which Tantalus was cast into the pit of Tartarus as punishment for revealing the secrets of the gods to mankind.

A similar situation occurred in Aeschylus' own life. He was allegedly charged with irreverence for revealing the Eleusinian mysteries, the secret rites of the city of his birth, to outsiders. In all probability, these charges were politically motivated hence he was not convicted.

Aeschylus' death apparently occurred when an eagle, mistaking his bald head for a rock, dropped a tortoise on it. Aeschylus' life created the groundwork for dramatic arts to thrive. After his death, two outstanding successors were there to take his place. They were Sophocles and Euripides. Aeschylus also left behind two sons who carried forth his dramatic legacy. One of them, Euphorion, would even claim first prize at the City Dionysia, defeating both Sophocles and Euripides in 431 BC.

**Aristophanes:** Aristophanes is regarded as the greatest comedian of his age, and an inspiring figure for drama in all ages. His dates of birth and death are not clear, as they have not been recorded. From inference from his dramatic works, it has been estimated that he was born in 456 BC and died in 380 BC. Many cities vie for the honour of giving him birth, the most probable story making him the son of Philippus of Ægina, and therefore only an adopted citizen of Athens. His was educated at Athens and is believed to have been a disciple of Prodicus, the reputed sophist.

Aristophanes was responsible for the development of the old Attic comedy. One of the distinguishing features of comedy as a genre was the acquisition of a chorus of masked actors, of scenery and machinery, and by a corresponding literary elaboration and elegance of style. It remained true both to its origin and to the purposes of its introduction into the free imperial city. In many respects of dramatic elements, comedy borrowed much from tragedy, but some distinguishing elements that came from ritual were phallic abandonment, license of word and gesture, and the audacious directness of personal invective. These characteristics though not peculiar to Aristophanes, were improved and refined by the great comedian. For instance, in boldness, as he boasted himself, he had no equal, and the arrows of his wit, though at times tinged with very acidic and fowl venom, smarted highly.

Some critics have accused him of not representing Athenian history accurately. But, partisan as he was, he was also a genuine patriot, and his political sympathies—which were conservative—were such as have often stimulated the most effective political satire. Satire in comedy was its defining feature; and unlike slapstick and vulgar humour of the consumerist market of today, comedies written in this period served a very important social and political purpose—of highlighting

## NOTES

the wrongs of the State (or individuals). Aristophanes lacked all reverence and his love for Athens was that of the most free-spoken of sons. His religious views were flexible, ready to be revised and changed as he went on learning, and in the true spirit of a comic poet, he could be witty at the expense even of his friends, and, at times, himself. In wealth of fancy and in beauty of lyric melody he ranks high among the great poets of all times.

In his *Symposium*, Plato makes Aristophanes deliver a discourse on love, which the latter explains in a sensual manner, but with incredible imagination. Aristodemus, one of the guests, fell asleep at the end of the banquet, 'and, as the nights were long, took a good rest. When he was awakened, toward daybreak, by the crowing of cocks, the others were also asleep or had gone away, and there remained awake only Aristophanes, Agathon and Socrates, who were drinking out of a large goblet that was passed around, while Socrates was discoursing to them. Aristodemus did not hear all the discourse, for he was only half awake; but he remembered Socrates insisting to the other two that the genius of comedy was the same as that of tragedy, and that the writer of the one should also be a writer of the other. To this they were compelled to assent, being sleepy, and not quite understanding what he meant. And first Aristophanes fell asleep, and then, when the day was dawning, Agathon.'

The language in Aristophanes' works is infinitely graceful; abounding in the purest Atticism, He adapts it with great skill to all tones, from the most familiar dialogue to the lofty flight of the dithyrambic ode. His elegance seems the more attractive by contrast, with rude expressions of the folk, the dialects, and even the mutilated Greek of barbarians on one hand, and lyricism, imagination and imitation of sound producing beautiful and memorable words on the other. His verse matches that of the tragedians in cadence and meter, though his characters are presented as ordinary and foolish compared to the magnificent and noble characters in tragedies.

From his audience, Aristophanes demanded an accurate acquaintance with the history and constitution of their country, with public events and proceedings, with the personal circumstances of almost all remarkable contemporaries, as these were necessary for a just appreciation of his satires. Besides this, listening to his works also required developed aesthetic taste and poetic culture; for instance remembering the tragic masterpieces, almost word by word, to be able to understand his parodies.

The old comedy of the Greeks was able to flourish under a complete and free democracy, because it was unsparing in its indictment of public and private life, statesmanship, political and social events, education and literature, or anything that concerned the city or its citizens. Combined with the revelry of the Dionysian festival, Greek comedy was licentious, bold and unsparing of any folly, individual or collective.

As a patriot and a conscious citizen of Athens, Aristophanes' comedy was intended at identification and correction for the use of his people. 'Aristophanes,'

## NOTES

as one of his critic's remarks, 'is for us, the representative of old comedy.' The superb pieces of lyric writing expose to us his truest and highest faculty. He has the ability to rise beyond everything that can move laughter and tears. He makes the clear air trill with the notes of a song as liberated, as melodious and as untamed as that of a nightingale invoked by his own chorus in the *Birds*. The speech of True Logic in the *Clouds*, the praises of country life in the *Peace*, the serenade in the *Eccleziastusae*, the songs of the Spartan and Athenian maidens in the *Lysistrata*, above all, perhaps the chorus in the *Frogs*, the beautiful chant of the Initiated—these passages are the hallmark of the greatness of Aristophanes.

As a poet, Aristophanes remains immortal; and, his fancy takes on a spontaneous flight that takes him to great heights of poetry:

'Pouring out his full soul

In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.'

**Menander:** Menander was born at Athens in 342 BC, the son of Diopieithes, a well-known general. Much of his youth was spent in the company of his uncle who tutored him in poetry and philosophy. From Theophrastus he probably derived the knowledge of character for which was his notable attribute. At the young age of twenty one Menander produced his first comedy. He went on to write more than a hundred plays, eight of which were prize winning. He died at the age of fifty while bathing in the harbour at Piraeus. He was a disciple of the Epicurean school. He enjoyed a life of luxury and comfort. His relationship with his mistress Glycera earned him notoriety. Among the Greeks, Menander is considered as the finest writer of the 'comedy of manners'. Some of the plays of Terence, who is considered as demi-Menander by Julius Caesar, are proof of his skill in creating unique plots. He copied Euripides and according to Quintilian, his comedies were not the same as tragic-comedies of his master as they lacked mythical subjects and a chorus. Like Euripides, he was a good rhetorician, and Quintilian has ascribed to him some orations published in the name of Charisius.

The subjects he chose to imitate were commonplace events that occurred in the daily life of his countrymen, and manners and characters of regular occurrence. His plots are skilful and tight, and often feature the stock figures of a harsh father, a profligate son and a roguish slave. Menander as a playwright was held in great esteem in Athens, where a statue was erected to his memory in the theatre of Dionysus.

### (ii) Roman Drama

The famous Roman dramatists were as follows:

**Plautus:** In ancient Rome, Plautus has been recognized as one of the greatest playwrights. He was born sometime around 254 BC, in the small village of Sarsina high in the Apennines of Umbria. His full name was Titus Maccius Plautus. Born 'Plautus' or 'splay-foot', he was able to transcend the limitations of being born in

a backward place at a young age by joining one of the itinerant theatrical troupes which normally travelled from village to village performing short and loud farces.

At some point in his life, Plautus decided to switch over from being an actor to becoming a Roman soldier, and this may have been the time when the beauty of the Greek stage was unfurled in front of him especially Greek New Comedy and the plays of Menander. Changing professions he became a sea-merchant but was unsuccessful at that and at the age of forty-five he discovered that he was a pauper. To earn a living he now became a wandering miller walking the streets with a hand-mill, grinding corn for householders.

During this time, translations of Greek New Comedy had become the rage. Plautus, remembering the comedies of Menander from the days when he was a soldier in Southern Italy, thought of exploring this area too and commenced writing for the stage. While he was still earning a living through his hand-mill, Plautus wrote his earliest plays, *Addictus* and *Saturio*.

Very soon his comedies began to be appreciated by the public, and he retired from milling to become a full time playwright. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Plautus' plays were not mere translations of Menander's works. He borrowed from the environments he understood best—the military camp and the marketplace—and his plays featured elements that were wild and boisterous like the Roman farces he may have participated in as an actor in his young days.

In those times, plays did not enjoy the aesthetic privileges of today. They were presented at public celebrations and had to compete with public entertainment events like chariot races, horse races, boxing matches, and circuses. Since a close translation of a play by the refined Menander would have been unable to hold the interest of a rowdy Roman crowd, Plautus departed quickly parted company from the Greek original. He generally took only the outline of the plot, the characters, and selected segments of dialogue—then added features and a style of his own. To keep the attention of his audience fixed by entertaining them thoroughly, Plautus often included scenes of song and dance in his plays. Unfortunately, the musical accompaniments to his plays have now been lost.

Plautus composed around 130 pieces most of which did not survive through the ages. Only around twenty-one pieces are now extant. He was eventually granted citizenship and given permission to assume three names like a true-born Roman. The name he chose for himself was Titus Maccius ('clown') Plautus.

He carried on with the custom of social satire started by Aristophanes. His *Miles Gloriosus* is about the imprisonment of the poet Naevius for satirizing the aristocracy, while his *Cistellaria* alludes to the conflict with Carthage. *Epidiculus* and *Aulularia* refer to the repeal of the puritanic Oppian Laws, and *Captivi* and *Bacchides* mention the wars in Greece and Magnesia. The technique he usually favoured was that of the more recent Greek writers like Menander. Together with his younger Roman counterpart, Terence (whom we introduce next), Plautus kept

## NOTES

## NOTES

Greek New Comedy alive for forthcoming generations of audience and comedy lovers.

Plautus' works have been adapted by many later playwrights. Giraudoux's *Amphitryon 38* was based on Plautus' *Amphitryo*. His *Menaechmi* or *The Menaechmus Twins* inspired, among others, Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* and Rodgers' and Hart's *The Boys from Syracuse*. *The Pot of Gold* became Moliere's *The Miser*. And *Pseudolus*, *Casina* and several other plays were combined in Stephen Sondheim's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

**Terence:** The other important Roman comedian was Publius Terentius named after, a Phoenician, who was born about 190 BC in Carthage. He was brought to Rome as a slave, but on recognizing the young man's hidden talents, the master chose to liberate him and provide him with a classic Roman education. Terence did not find favour with the general public but was appreciated by the aristocracy. His sophisticated literary abilities made the young man a popular companion of the cosmopolitans of high society, earning the appreciation of figures such as Cicero and Horace.

Terence was inspired by Menander. His first play, *Andria*—which was written at the age of nineteen—was later adapted by Richard Steele in *The Conscious Lovers*. *Phormio*, was the only play of Terence not adapted from Menander. It was based on the work of Apollodorus, another writer of New Comedy. Moliere, the French playwright of comedies, adapted *Phormio* in one of his earliest plays, *The Trickeries of Scapin*.

Terence steadfastly imbibed the spirit of the Greek originals which he adapted. A certain sophistication of emotion existed in his plays. Subtlety is the key word which he employs. Instead of laughter we see smiles and in place of derision there is irony. Unlike other Roman playwrights, Terence sought flawlessness instead of giving immediate pleasure. His characterization is subtle, and his dialogue combines grace with economy.

He did not write many plays because he was more concerned with refinement and perfection of style and therefore took his time in composing his works. He could not give the masses the kind of work they wanted and this denied him widespread recognition. They preferred the instant appeal of ribald and coarse jokes so that a playwright such as Plautus enjoyed more popularity over the refined writer like Publius Terentius.

After Terence's death, Roman drama did not flourish for long. The general populace gave up the theatre almost entirely in favor of elaborate spectacles, gaudy processions of captives and slaves, circuses, gladiators slashing each other to death, and mimic sea battles in Naumachiae. By the time the Roman Empire finally collapsed, pantomimists, jugglers and acrobats were the only survivors that remained from what was once a proud tradition of drama.

### (iii) Medieval Drama

From the Classical times of ancient Greece and Rome, we now move on to Medieval English drama. To understand the features of modern drama, one must first learn about the trajectory of development of drama from ancient through medieval to modern times. Like any other genre in literature, the way one cannot appreciate the accomplishments of Lawrence or Joyce unless one is thorough with the rise and gradual shaping up of the English novel from its Continental counterparts, one cannot understand the novelty of Beckett or the challenges of Ibsen unless one views western drama in a holistic perspective. From animistic and ritualistic origins, drama shifted to the precincts of the Church in medieval times. This meant thematic focus as well as limitations of certain kinds.

In the medieval period, drama was largely confined to the Church where the mystery and morality plays were enacted depicting the life of Jesus or the feats of the holy saints. The allegorical method was preferred by playwrights who wrote plays that featured the age-old moral struggle between good and evil. They conceived the different desires and appetites of Man as personalities, named them Greed, Pride, Vanity, Good Will, Patience, and the like, and they wove their plots so as to capture the soul of the hero, who was given names such as Everyman, Humanum Genus, or Man.

Besides the personified desires, there were also in most plays other characters such as the Doctor, the Priest, or a public officer. God and the Devil were always present, fighting with each other for the capture of man's soul.

The first recorded English morality play was on the subject of the Lord's Prayer, and was performed at York sometime during the fourteenth century.

Though it is now lost, it had such an intense effect that a company was instantly formed for the purpose of providing frequent and regular performances. By the end of the fourteenth century, the company had grown to include one hundred members and their wives. The earliest existing morality play in English is *The Castle of Perseverance* belonging to the fifteenth century. The play depicts the entire life span of man. Called Humanum Genus, it shows man's journey from birth to death. Two other very early English moralities exist; one titled *Spirit, Will and Understanding*, the other titled *Humanity*.

All the moralities were to use the same or comparable abstractions for their allegories; but a French writer, Nicolas de la Chesnaye, was resourceful enough to make a slight deviation. Called *The Condemnation of Banquets*, his play is nothing less than a tract on restraint in both eating and drinking. It is very long, with more than 3,600 lines and featuring thirty-nine characters. By far the most interesting extant morality is *Everyman*, ascribed by many scholars to the Dutch Dorlandus. It appeared in English translation four times between 1493 and 1530, and opens with these lines: 'Here beginneth a treatise how the High Father of Heaven sendeth Death to summon every creature to come and give an account of their lives in this world, and is in manner of a moral play.'

### NOTES

## NOTES

Slowly, the plays began to adopt a secular attitude and thus drama entered the common arena of life. These can be classified into the following categories:

- Carnival or Shrovetide plays
- Interludes
- Farces
- Puppet shows
- ‘Feasts’ of various sorts, being travesties of Church rituals

Some of these types are as ancient as the sacred play, while others developed from it.

When we see the thematic limitations of medieval drama, we appreciate the work of Elizabethan dramatists like Marlowe and Chapman who understood the origins of drama and explored its potential for writing great works of universal interest. In the next section, we shall briefly read about the great dramatists of the Elizabethan period, which include the likes of Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Chapman among others.

### (iv) Elizabethan Drama

The Elizabethan period witnessed great works being written in both poetry and drama. The latter was now expanding its scope and reinventing its form to include works of both tragedy and comedy. Shakespeare is well known to have revised the ‘Three Unities’ of Aristotle, thereby giving another mode to drama at large. Influences of writers from the continent are profound upon English playwrights of this period.

**George Gascoigne (1539-1577):** In 1566, the prose comedy *Gli-Suppositi* was translated by George Gascoigne translated from Ariosto. This play was performed under the title of *The Supposes* and has come to be known as the first comedy written in English prose. Shakespeare is believed to have used its plot and situations in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Gascoigne also translated the prose tale of *Jeronimi* from the original Italian of Bandello, wrote the mock-heroic poem of *Dan Bartholomew*, an attempt at rivalling the mock-heroic poetry of the Italians, wrote three acts of *Jocasta*, the first adaptation of a Greek tragedy performed on the English stage, wrote masques for Queen Elizabeth, composed a ‘tragical comedy’ in prose *The Glass Government*: and wrote the *Steel Glass*, the first extensive English satire.

**Robert Greene (1560-1592):** Greene initially wrote love-tales or novels in prose dotted with songs and lyrics. As a dramatist he can be considered a follower of John Lyly and Christopher Marlowe, while in pastoral lyrics he preceded and inspired Marlowe.

An early production of Greene’s is *Mamillia*, an imitation to a certain extent of Lyly’s *Euphues*, published in 1583. Some love-pamphlets he wrote were:

*Menaphon*, *Morando*, *Perimedes the Blacksmith*, *Pandosto—the Triumph of Time* (reprinted by Mr. Collier as the foundation of *The Winter's Tale*), *Philmela*, *the Lady Fitzwater's Nightingale*. His well-known dramas are: *Orlando Furioso* (published 1594); *Looking-Glass for London and England* (1594, written in conjunction with Lodge); *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1594); *James the Fourth* (1598); *Alphonsus, King of Arragon* (1599).

The spontaneity in Greene's language and the sensuous imagery are believed to have influenced Shakespeare, maybe even more than Marlowe had inspired the latter.

**Marlowe (1564-1593):** The pathos and passion of Christopher Marlowe's tragedies have never been equalled. The son of a shoemaker, Marlowe studied at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where he received his bachelor's degree in 1583. Before he was awarded his master's degree in 1587, his greatest tragic drama had been performed on the stage. His friends included the prominent literary figures Kyd, Nash, Greene, Sir Walter Raleigh and probably Shakespeare. Marlowe's literary career left lasting impressions on the English stage. His *Jew of Malta* is recorded to have been performed 38 times in four years. The legend of Faust was first dramatized by Marlowe in the eponymous *Dr. Faustus*. *Edward II* is a powerful historical drama, while *Hero and Leander* is a poem on the tragedy of Queen Dido.

The master of blank verse, Marlowe explored the psychological and spiritual depths of the human condition. Swinburne's characterization of Marlowe is most revealing: 'He came to London to seek his fortune . . . a boy in years, a man in genius, a god in ambition. Who knows to what heights he might have risen but for his untimely end?'

## Shakespeare

To summarize Shakespeare's life and contribution to English drama, one would need another book altogether. To briefly comment on this genius, would be a farce. However, we shall look at the main plays of the most renowned English bard.

Shakespeare's dramatic output is broadly divided into four periods:

1. **The experimental period ending about 1593:** Includes plays like *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *A Comedy of Errors*.
2. **The period ending about 1601:** By this time he was established in the English dramatic scene, with the production of famous plays like *The Merchant of Venice* and, according to some commentators, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
3. **The first ten years of the 17th century:** This period witnessed tragic works like *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

## NOTES

## NOTES

### 4. The years from 1610 to his death: Included final ponderous works like *A Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*.

**Ben Jonson (1573-1637):** Ben Jonson's name resounds in literary history for his humour. Jonson is best known for *Every Man in His Humour* that he wrote in 1598. This play followed another remarkable production, *Every Man Out of His Humour*.

Jonson collaborated with George Chapman and John Marston on *Eastward Ho!*, a controversial play of its times. The following year, Jonson produced *Volpone*, which is the story of a rich merchant who fakes his own death in order to gain gifts. This play is a scathing criticism of greed and the levels to which a man may stoop to satisfy it.

**Thomas Kyd (1558-1595):** Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (also known as *Hieronimo* in Kyd's time) was produced in 1587 and made an indelible impression on the Elizabethan stage. Thomas Kyd was born to a London scrivener. He received his formal education at the Merchant Taylor's School where he learnt the basics of Latin, French, Italian and Spanish.

It is reported that around or shortly after the production of the *Spanish Tragedy* Kyd and Marlowe became associated with each other. These two renowned Elizabethan playwrights were in the service of the same 'noble lord' from 1590 to 1593.

The *Spanish Tragedy* consisted of these elements- insanity, ghosts, murder, suicide; doesn't sound too different from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*? Shakespearean commentators acknowledge his indebtedness to Kyd's 'tragedy of blood' for some of the tropes of *Hamlet*.

In Germany and Holland, *The Spanish Tragedy* remained the best known and influential English play for quite some time.

**John Lyly (1554-1606):** John Lyly, or the Euphuist, 'the witty, comical, facetiously quick and unparalleled John Lyly,' is credited with the writing of first and extensive English comedies. His literary oeuvre consists of nine pieces— seven in prose, one in blank verse, and one in rhyme. In blank verse, *The Woman in the Moon* ( which Lyly called 'his first dream in Phoebus' holy bower,' printed in 1597); *Sappho and Phao* (1584), *Alexander and Campaspe* (printed in 1584);; *Endymion* (1591); *Galathea* (1592); *Midas* (1592); *Mother Bombie* (1594); *The Maid's Metamorphosis* (in rhyme and only probably his, 1600); *Love's Metamorphosis* (1601).

Lyly is believed to be conscious of his audience that comprised primarily of ladies; the actors in his plays being children of the Revels. In *Endymion*, Tellus is astonished that Corsites, being a captain, 'who should sound nothing but terror, and suck nothing but blood,' talks so softly and politely. 'It agreeth not with your calling,' she says, 'to use words so soft as that of love.' And Corsites proffers a reply with the utmost sophistication—'Lady, it were unfit of wars to discourse

with women, into whose minds nothing can sink but smoothness.’ In keeping with this idea, Lyly’s subjects, except in *Alexander and Campaspe* and *Mother Bombie*, are mostly mythological and rustic: and lacking any profound emotion or thrill. The fabric is so slight and artificial that we stand in danger of undervaluing the powers of the genius, who was a most ingenious and original man, and deserved all the adjectives of his publisher. Wit being defined as ‘What oft was thought but n’er so well expressed’ (Pope) Lyly’s comedies are full of it. There is hard to find a sentence in the whole of them that misses some pun, or clever antithesis, or a far-fetched image. In *Alexander and Campaspe*, Lyly’s first published play, he attempted, after the model of Edwards’s *Damon and Pythias*, more substantial characters than he afterwards produced in his mythological and pastoral works. One of his most complicated characters is Sir Tophas, in *Endymion*, a fat, vainglorious, imprudent squire, who walks about armed with artillery of sport, and breathing out bloodthirsty sentiments against wrens, blackbirds, sheep, and other such harmless enemies. Sir Tophas is the Falstaff of children, and also resembles Pistol, Holofernes, and Don Armado.

**Middleton:** Thomas Middleton was born to William Middleton and Anne Snow and was christened at St. Lawrence in the Old Jewry on 18 April 1580. As a teenager he published *The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased* (1597) and *Micro-Cynicon, Six Snarling Satires* (1599), and in April, 1598, matriculated at Queen’s College, Oxford. He collaborated with well-known playwrights like Dekker and Rowley. Two satirical tales, *The Black Book* and *Father Hubbard’s Tale*, published in 1604, betray his early interest in the seamy side of London life, which he used brilliantly in his comedies of manners composed between 1604 and 1611. Some of these include: *Trick to Catch the Old One*; *A Mad World, My Masters*; and *Michaelmas Term*—all portraying the duping of an unsuspecting victim by London sharpers; *Your Five Gallants* which exposes the wiles of five different types of swindlers and ruffians; and the farce, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Middleton’s solo work was a tragedy—*Women, Beware Women*, written about 1612, and was followed next year by his first masque, *The Triumphs of Truth*; and until his death he remained in demand as a writer of this type of entertainment. The temporary amalgamation of the companies of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Charles in 1614/ 1615 brought Middleton and Rowley together, and their period of collaboration started shortly thereafter resulting in the famous *The Changeling*. Middleton held the office of city chronologer from 1620 to his death. He was buried in the Newington Butts Parish Church on July 4, 1627.

Middleton’s literary strength is in his dramatic sense, which gives a rapidity of movement and effectiveness to his scenes, and his pictures of low London life seem realistic. These features are well illustrated in *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1604-06).

*The Changeling* has been rightly accorded high praise as a psychological tragedy and as one of the most successful plays written in collaboration in the entire range of Elizabethan drama.

## NOTES

## NOTES

### (v) Jacobean Drama

The period in English literary history that is marked by the reign of James II is known as the Jacobean period. Though Webster was the most renowned playwright of this period, some of Shakespeare's plays like *Antony and Cleopatra* also belong to this period. The dramatic works of this period abound in the macabre, blood and violence, and intrigue, as noticeable clearly in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.

**Webster (1580-1632):** Webster is the master of the macabre and intrigues. Though not many of Webster's works are known, *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623) stands out for its eerie echoes of the frailty of the human heart. The other works include *Guise, or the Massacre of France*, *The Devil's Law Case*, *The White Devil*, *Appius and Virginia*. Webster chose themes and subjects from the medieval Italian court intrigues and blended the pathetic and the horrible to evoke moments of tragic greatness. Webster borrowed not only from 'skulls, and graves, and epitaphs,' but at times the lyrical beauty in his verse finds the reader musing upon a rose in the middle of a graveyard.

### (vi) Restoration Drama

The Restoration period is a very important period in the history of English drama. Following the closing of theatres in the Puritan regime of Oliver Cromwell until the Restoration of monarchy with Charles II coming back to the English crown, drama and the arts had suffered a great deal. Considered by the Puritans as exercising evil influence, the theatres were closed down, and English drama had come to stagnate. There is no recorded dramatic work in this period. In 1660, monarchy was restored, and Charles II returned from France and brought along with him, the French spirit that was to mark the English stage with exuberance, spectacle, bawdry and general fun.

**Dryden (1631-1700):** Any discussion of Restoration literature is incomplete without the mention of John Dryden, satirist, playwright, poet and critic. He was born at Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, in 1631. Interestingly, Dryden belonged to a Puritan family, which had been for years very active in the political world. He went to school at Westminster and in 1650 he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, and took a degree of B.A. His first significant literary effort, 'Heroic Stanzas to the memory of Cromwell', was published in 1659. The next year, he wrote verses celebrating the return of Charles II. On stage, his first play was *The Wild Gallant*, in 1663. *The Rival Ladies*, a popular work was produced the same year too. In collaboration with Sir Robert Howard, Dryden composed *The Indian Queen* (1664), and followed it with *The Indian Emperor* (1665). From the re-opening of the theatres in 1666, to 1681, Dryden extensively wrote plays. The famous play *All for Love* was performed in 1678.

Dryden wrote extensive critical work on the tastes, merits and styles of English drama. His knowledge of Spanish and French literary traditions enriched both his drama and his criticism of English drama.

**Congreve (1670-1729):** William Congreve was born in 1670 at Bardsey near Leeds. His first play was a successful comedy, *The Old Bachelor*. His early works were not very different from the conventions of stage tradition; but he lent a unique style and made the types his own. His great work *Love for Love* appeared in 1695. In 1697 appeared *The Mourning Bride* and kept the English audience enchanted for a long time. He passed away on January 19, 1729, as a result of an injury received on a journey to Bath by the upsetting of his carriage. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

**Aphra Behn:** Amongst the group of Restoration playwrights, Aphra Behn or 'the Divine Astræa,' as she was known as, is the only female playwright to stand on her own. A daring playwright and a popular actress, Behn had to withstand insensitive criticism and biased judgments of fellow playwrights and writers, especially Addison and Steele. The exact year of her birth is not known, though it is documented that she came of a good family in Canterbury by the name Johnson. Two of her plays *The Amorous Prince* and *The Forced Marriage* were printed in 1671; between 1671 and 1687, she produced thirteen other comedies or tragicomedies, with one tragedy *Abdelazar* appearing in 1677. The plays *The Widow Ranter* was produced at the Theatre Royal in 1690, and *The Younger Brother* at Drury-lane Theatre in 1696; both posthumously. In the preface to *Lucky Chance* (1687), Behn said that she offended in this respect no more than her neighbours, while in the preface to *The Rover*, she proclaimed that the play was written by a man. She definitely had better taste and turns of phrases than many of these 'neighbours', and she was a woman. In 1684, 1685, and 1688, she published three volumes of miscellanies in verse, which also included pieces by the Earl of Rochester and Sir George Etherege, together with a translation of Roche Foucault's *Maxims*. One of her most remarkable pieces is a version of Ovid's Epistle, *Oenone to Paris*, which, along with others was printed under the sanction of a preface by Dryden. She passed away on the 16th of April, 1689, after a tedious illness and was buried in the eastern ambulatory of the cloisters of Westminster Abbey. The author of *Oroonoko* has left a lasting impression on the period. Her plays easily matched and often surpassed the plays of her contemporaries. They were ribald, vulgar, raunchy and subversive—all qualities that a woman of those times couldn't be expected to possess. And therefore, men also stooped to the level of commenting carelessly on her character and morality.

### (vii) Modern Drama

The latter part of nineteenth century witnessed changes in world perception. With the development of photography and psychoanalysis, new ways of perceiving the human condition and the world were emerging. The movement of Naturalism in

## NOTES

## NOTES

theatre and later movements like the Absurd were results of the ontological questioning and epistemological revisioning. Modern drama now focused on exploring the subjectivities of man, a step much far away from the allegorical morality plays of medieval period. Like Kurosawa's 'Rashomon Effect', truth could now be perceived from different angles and there was no given universal truth that needed to be told. If Dr. Faustus was faced with the predicament of having sold his soul to the devil in modern times, he probably would not have dreaded the ticking of the clock for his final hour, but like Beckett's tramps in *Waiting for Godot*, questioned the very basis for predestination, or like Ibsen's Nora proudly challenge the devil or even walk out on him. The following are some of the well-known modern world dramatists. Being familiar with the nature and scope of their work is important before proceeding on a detailed reading of nine modern dramatists in this paper. For reasons of inter-textuality and stylistic influences, we must closely read about the life and work of the dramatists mentioned below.

**Ionesco (1909-1994):** 'Drama is one of the oldest arts. And I can't help thinking we cannot do without it. We cannot resist the desire to people a stage with live characters that are at the same time real and invented...To bring phantoms to life...is a prodigious adventure, so unique that I myself was absolutely amazed, during the rehearsals of my first play, when I suddenly saw, moving on the stage...characters who owed their life to me. It was a terrifying experience. What right had I to do a thing like that? Was it allowed? It was almost diabolical' (Ionesco).

Ionesco's first play was *The Bald Soprano*, followed by the second *The Lesson*. Ionesco also acted the role of Stepan Trofimovich in an adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*. While he questioned the theatrical viability of Moliere (calling his mind 'unmetaphysical' and situations 'petty'), he at the same time betrayed his indebtedness to 'the Master' through many of his works. In fact, he denied having relished traditional theatre, as either reader or hearer:

Every gesture, every attitude, every speech spoken on the stage destroyed for me a world that these same gestures, attitudes and speeches were specifically designed to evoke...as if there were two planes of reality, the concrete, physical, impoverished, empty and limited reality of these ordinary human beings...and the reality of imagination...two antagonistic worlds failing to...unite. Ionesco explained: 'I have attempted...to exteriorize, by using objects, the anguish of my characters, to make the set speak and the action on the stage more visual, to translate into concrete images terror, regret or remorse, and estrangement, to play with words (but not to send them packing) and even perhaps to deform them—which is generally accepted in the work of poets and humourists. I have thus sought to extend the idiom of the theatre.'

He opted for referring to his work as 'theatre of derision.' Throughout his lifetime, he remained an independent thinker, neither completely apolitical, nor a 'joiner.'

**Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953):** Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was an American playwright. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1936. His drama was the earliest on modern American stage to introduce elements of Realism inspired from the works of Chekhov, Ibsen and Strindberg. His plays were among the first to include speeches in American vernacular and involve characters on the fringes of society, engaging in depraved behaviour, who are portrayed as struggling to maintain their hopes and aspirations, but ultimately sliding into disillusionment and despair. His important works include the following four all of which were awarded the Pulitzer Prize- *Long Day's Journey into Night* (produced 1956), *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), *Anna Christie* (1922), *Strange Interlude* (1928), and *Ah, Wilderness!* (the only comedy), *The Iceman Cometh* (1946). O'Neill's plays are widely read and performed, and is believed to be the most widely translated playwright, next only to Shakespeare and Shaw.

**Tennessee Williams (1911–1983):** Thomas Lanier Williams was a modern American playwright. His works include short stories, novels, essays and occasional screenplays. Many of his plays have come to be recognized as classics of the American stage. He received many of the top theatrical awards for his works of drama, including a Tony Award for best play for *The Rose Tattoo* (1951) and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1948) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). In 1980 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by then President Jimmy Carter. *A Streetcar Named Desire* has been adapted into a film and is considered a landmark in modern world drama.

**Pirandello (1867–1936):** Luigi Pirandello was an Italian dramatist, novelist, and short story writer. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1934, for his 'bold and brilliant renovation of the drama and the stage.' Pirandello's works include novels, hundreds of short stories, and about 40 plays, some of which are written in Sicilian. Pirandello's tragic farces are often seen as forerunners for Theatre of the Absurd. His play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is well-known and considered an inspiration for Absurdist theatre.

**Mayakovsky (1893–1930):** Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky was a Russian poet and playwright, among the first representatives of early twentieth century Russian Futurism. The 1912 Futurist publication *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* showcased Mayakovsky's first published poems: *Night* and *Morning*. His satirical play *Mystery-Bouffe* was first staged in 1918, and again, more successfully, in 1921.

An active supporter of the 'agit-prop' theatre, Mayakovsky, while working for the Russian State Telegraph Agency (ROSTA) created, both graphic and text satirical Agitprop posters. Towards the end of the 1920s, Mayakovsky became increasingly disillusioned with the course of the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin: his satirical plays *The Bedbug* (Êëï, 1929) and *The Bathhouse* (Áàïÿ, 1930), which deal with the Soviet philistinism and bureaucracy, show this development. He had a tragic and abrupt ending when on the evening of April 14, 1930, he shot himself. In modern drama, Mayakovsky's plays represent the anguish of the modern

## NOTES

## NOTES

playwright, living under absolutist conditions like the Stalin rule, and committed to bringing about awareness and change in the perception of people.

**Arnold Wesker (b. 1932):** Sir Arnold Wesker the modern British dramatist is well known for his contributions to ‘kitchen sink drama’. This term characterizes many plays of the post-World War II period in Britain when socially committed plays were being written by the ‘Angry Young Men’ questioning the moral hypocrisy, class divide, cultural decadence and status quo in British society. Wesker wrote 42 plays, 4 volumes of short stories, 2 volumes of essays, a book on journalism, a children’s book, and poetry. His plays have been translated into 17 languages and performed worldwide. Most of Wesker’s plays had underlying political themes, and he was open about his admiration of the working class side of the ‘class struggle’. Wesker joined with enthusiasm the Royal Court group on the Aldermaston March in 1959. Wesker’s period in modern drama is identified by his, along with John Osborne’s writings, as politically conscious, socially motivated and extremely angry outbursts by sensitive, frustrated and committed British artists.

**Dario Fo (1926):** Dario Fo is an Italian activist, playwright, theatre director, actor, and composer. Taking inspiration from the tradition of *commedia dell’arte*, a theatrical style popular with the proletariat in Italy. Dario Fo created new poetics of laughter in modern theatre. His 1997 Nobel Prize in Literature citation described him as a writer ‘who emulates the jesters of the Middle Ages in scourging authority and upholding the dignity of the downtrodden.’

Fo’s works are highly critical and raise contemporary issues like organized crime, worker’s rights, political corruption, political murders, Catholic policy on abortion and conflict in the Middle East. Some of his well-known works are: *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (it has been brilliantly adapted into Hindi, by Arvind Gaur), *Mistero Buffo*, *Can’t Pay! Won’t Pay!*. While *Mistero Buffo* has been translated into 30 languages and widely performed outside Italy, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* has been adapted and performed to suit the Indian context with titles like *Ek Aur Durghatna*, focusing on unexplained deaths in Delhi prisons. In accordance with the *commedia dell’arte* tradition of on-stage improvisation, Dario Fo is open to adaptations, improvisations and revisions of his plays. Along with his wife and comrade Franca Rame, Dario Fo is a committed activist who questions, disturbs and leaves his plays open ended to prevent ‘catharsis’, as he once pointed out. His aim is to jolt the audience out of their complacency so that they are agitated even while they are in splits watching his plays on stage.

### Check Your Progress

5. Who is known as the ‘father of tragedy’?
6. Who is considered as the finest writer of ‘comedy of manners’?
7. Why did Terence not write many plays?
8. Who is known as the master of blank verse?

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## 1.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. The presence of art, spectacle, exaggeration, structure, organization, pace, gesture and music combine to shape the form of drama.
2. From the earliest times, drama took place as part of religious rites and rituals.
3. Ethos is a Greek word that signifies the guiding beliefs or ideals that exemplify a community, a nation or an ideology.
4. According to Plato, lexis is the manner of speaking. Plato said that lexis can be divided into mimesis (imitation properly speaking) and diegesis (simple narrative).
5. Aeschylus is known as the father of tragedy.
6. Menander is considered as the finest writer of 'comedy of manners'.
7. Terence did not write many plays because he was more concerned with refinement and perfection of style and therefore took his time in composing his works.
8. Marlowe is known as the master of blank verse.

## NOTES

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## 1.5 SUMMARY

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- In its colloquial usage, drama is anything that is to do with heightened emotion and exaggeration. For the others, it is the delight of visual spectacle.
- If we look closely at the common references to drama, we will notice the presence of art, spectacle, exaggeration, structure, organization, pace, gesture and music. These elements all combine to shape the form of drama.
- Drama is an organic form and a genre of art that comes closest to the human need for expression.
- From the earliest times, drama was integral to religious rites and rituals. The history of Western drama begins with the pre-Christian societies' ceremonies and rituals.
- The two earliest forms of drama are tragedy and comedy. The tragic and the comic elements have been present in the earliest of folk rituals, and are present in all aspects of modern living as well. These are the two principle forms on which drama has developed from the ancient to the modern times.
- The form of tragedy has evolved from the sacrificial 'goat dance' of pre-Christian communities. The word evolves from 'tragos—goat' and 'aeidein—to sing'.

## NOTES

- The modern sense of comedy as the evocation of laughter comes through the Latin *comoedia* and Italian *commedia* and with time, has taken on varying meanings.
- Aristotle's *Poetics* is the foundational text for the reading of drama, irrespective of the genre or age being studied. This treatise on aesthetics introduces key concepts in theatre, concepts which are integral to the understanding of theatre.
- Some of the major concepts and terms explained by Aristotle are mimesis, peripeteia, catharsis, anagnorisis and hamartia.
- Western drama from ancient to modern can be classified into different periods: Greek drama which includes writers like Sophocles, Euripides, Aeschylus, Aristophanes and Menander; Roman drama which includes Plautus and Terence; Medieval drama; Elizabethan drama which includes George Gascoigne, Robert Greene, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Thomas Kyd, John Lyly, Middleton and Chapman; Jacobean drama; Restoration drama which includes John Dryden, William Congreve and Aphra Behn; Modern drama which includes Ionesco, Jean Genet, Strindberg, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Pirandello, Mayakovsky, Caryl Churchill, Arnold Wesker and Dario Fo.
- The various movements and forms in modern European drama include absurd theatre, naturalistic drama, agit-prop and theatre of cruelty.

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## 1.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Mimesis:** It is the process by which the work reflects and reinterprets the world around it.
- **Catharsis:** It is an emotional discharge through which one can achieve a state of moral or spiritual renewal or achieve a state of liberation from anxiety and stress.
- **Peripeteia:** It is a sudden change in a story which results in a negative reversal of circumstances.
- **Anagnorisis:** It is a moment in a plot or story, specifically a tragedy where the main character recognizes or identifies his/her true nature, or that of the other character's true identity, or discovers true nature of his situation, or that of the others, leading to the resolution of the story.
- **Hamartia:** It is a personal error in a protagonist's personality that brings about his tragic downfall in a tragedy.
- **Commedia dell'arte:** It is a theatrical form characterized by improvised dialogue and a cast of colourful stock characters that emerged in northern Italy in the fifteenth century and rapidly gained popularity throughout Europe.

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## 1.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short-Answer Questions

1. What is 'hamartia'?
2. Write a short note on Arnold Wesker and his 'kitchen-sink' drama.
3. Write a short note on Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty.
4. What is the contribution of 'agit-prop' theatre to world drama?

### Long- Answer Questions

1. Explain the meaning of peripeteia and catharsis.
2. Discuss the evolution of comedy in drama.
3. Write a detailed note on Sophocles and his works.
4. Discuss some of the important dramatists of Elizabethan theatre.

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## 1.8 FURTHER READINGS

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### NOTES

## UNIT 2 SOPHOCLES: *OEDIPUS REX*

### NOTES

#### Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Sophocles as a Dramatist
  - 2.2.1 Characters in *Oedipus Rex*
  - 2.2.2 Plot – *Oedipus Trilogy*
  - 2.2.3 Summary of *Oedipus at Colonus*
  - 2.2.4 Play Summary of *Antigone*
  - 2.2.5 *Oedipus Rex* as a Classical Tragedy
  - 2.2.6 Fate and *Oedipus Rex*
  - 2.2.7 Irony in *Oedipus Rex*
  - 2.2.8 Significance of the Chorus
- 2.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 Key Words
- 2.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 2.7 Further Readings

### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

Sophocles is one of three ancient Greek tragedians whose plays have survived. His first plays were written later than those of Aeschylus, and earlier than or contemporary with those of Euripides. Sophocles wrote 120 plays during the course of his life, out of which only seven have survived in a complete form. These were *Ajax*, *Antigone*, *The Women of Trachis*, *Oedipus the King*, *Electra*, *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. The most famous tragedies of Sophocles feature *Oedipus* and also *Antigone*. These are generally known as the Theban plays. However, each play was actually a part of a different tetralogy, the other members of which are now lost. Sophocles played a vital role in the development of the drama. He was very influential in adding a third actor, thereby, reducing the importance of the chorus in the presentation of the plot. He also developed his characters to a greater extent than earlier playwrights, such as Aeschylus.

*Oedipus the King*, also known by its Latin title *Oedipus Rex*, is an Athenian tragedy by Sophocles that was first performed around 429 BC. Of his three Theban Plays that deal with Oedipus, *Oedipus the King* was the second to be written. However, in terms of the chronology of events that the plays describe, it comes first, followed by *Oedipus at Colonus* and then *Antigone*. *Oedipus the King* describes the story of Oedipus, a man who becomes the king of Thebes, while innocently fulfilling a prophecy that he would kill his father, Laius, and marry his

mother, Jocasta. Aristotle wrote in his *Poetics* that *Oedipus the King* was the great example of a Greek tragedy; the play is now widely regarded as Sophocles' masterpiece.

*Sophocles: Oedipus Rex*

## 2.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the life and works of Sophocles
- Critically analyse *Oedipus Rex* as a tragic drama
- Examine the use of techniques, devices and strategies in *Oedipus Rex*

## 2.2 SOPHOCLES AS A DRAMATIST

Sophocles was born in 496 BC in a place called Hippeios Colonus in Attica, which is situated in Greece. He died in 406 BC in Athens at the age of ninety approximately. Sophocles has composed 123 dramas and his most popular one is *Oedipus the King*.

Interestingly, Sophocles was younger than his contemporary Aeschylus, while on the other hand, he was senior than his contemporary Euripides. Sophocles' father was Sophilus. He was a wealthy manufacturer who specialized in producing armour. Due to the affluence, Sophocles managed to receive a superior education. Sophocles was blessed with physical beauty, was powerful in athletics and was skilful in music. Due to his skills and looks, in the year 480, he was chosen to lead the paean. The occasion was to celebrate the Greek victory on sea over the Persians which was held at the Battle of Salamis that changed the course of history.

In the year 468, Sophocles won his first victory that took place in Dionysian dramatic festival. In the process, he defeated the great Aeschylus in the contest. This set the stage for a career of unforeseen success and timelessness. It is assumed that Sophocles won twenty-four victories which is much more than what Aeschylus won (thirteen) or even Euripides won (four).

The quintessential aspect to Sophocles' use of language is that it allows for a certain element of flexibility that helped to enhance dramatic needs. At times, it is unexpectedly weighty and at times swift-moving; many a times, it is emotionally charged or even easy-going. The language could be highly decorative but it could be perfectly plain as well as simple. Sophocles' power over form and diction was greatly appreciated and respected by the people of his times. Sophocles has been unanimously appreciated for the ethos and vividness with which he sketched and evolved his characters; of course, most notable were the tragic women he created like Electra or Antigone. Hardly few dramatists show this deft in handling situation and plot that reflect such power and certainty. One encounters references to Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* in Aristotle's *Poetics*. This is more than enough an

## NOTES

## NOTES

evidence to prove that Aristotle considered this play as a masterpiece in terms of construction. It must be mentioned that Sophocles is also like none other, especially in those moments when he creates images of high dramatic tension and usages of tragic irony.

Many critics insist that Sophocles was nothing more than a superb artist. Sophocles never involved himself with religious problems, neither with intellectual troubles. Sophocles easily incorporated the gods of Greek religion in his plays that reflected a spirit unfound before. Moreover, Sophocles contented himself describing human characters along with human conflicts in the most natural fashion. But it will not be wrong to say that for Sophocles, the gods were seemed to have represented those natural powers of the universe to which human beings fall prey irrespective of their consent. According to Sophocles, for the most part, human beings survived in darkness of ignorance. It was so because human beings were cut off from these permanent yet never changing ‘forces and structures of reality’.

### 2.2.1 Characters in *Oedipus Rex*

In this section, we will discuss and analyse the characters of the play.

**Oedipus:** He is the protagonist of *Oedipus the King* as well as that of *Oedipus at Colonus*. Oedipus is crowned the king of Thebes much before the events of *Oedipus the King* rolls on. Oedipus has gained popularity for his intelligence which helps him solve the most unexpected riddles. Oedipus through his intelligence saved the city of Thebes by solving the riddle of the Sphinx, and as a result, was crowned as the king. But Oedipus was unfortunately unaware of the truth regarding himself. The literal meaning of his name was actually a clue to his identity. As a baby, Oedipus was taken away from the house of Laius. He was left amidst the mountains while his feet were bound together. But as the story progresses, we see that he killed his biological father (unaware of who he was), while getting married to Jocasta (not knowing she was his biological mother).

**Jocasta:** Simultaneously wife and mother of Oedipus. She was also Creon’s sister. We see Jocasta appearing only in the ultimate scenes of the *Oedipus the King*. The initial words that she utters shows that she is making efforts to establish peace between Oedipus and Creon. She is shown pleading Oedipus not to banish Creon. We see her comforting her husband while making efforts to convince him to reject the prophecies narrated by Tiresias as nothing but false. Even Jocasta manages to solve the riddle about the identity of Oedipus much before he does it for himself. Jocasta professes her love for her son as well as for her husband in her desire to save him from the knowledge that she already has about him.

**Antigone:** She is the child of Oedipus and Jocasta. Thus, she becomes both Oedipus’s daughter as well as his sister. We see Antigone appearing briefly only at the end of the play *Oedipus the King*. We can see her appearing for greater lengths in *Oedipus at Colonus*. She leads and cares for her old and blind father while he is in exile. But we see Antigone acting as protagonist in *Antigone*.

In this play, she demonstrated a courage along with clarity of sight that was unprecedented by any other character who appear in the Theban play trilogy. As we see, certain characters like Creon, Oedipus and Polynices are unwilling to understand the consequences of their own actions. But on the other hand, Antigone is definitely unabashed as far as her conviction was concerned.

**Creon:** He was Oedipus's brother-in-law. He seems to appear at more regular intervals than any other character in the trilogy. It is through him that we get a glimpse of the gradual rise and fall of a single man's power and folly. In the initial segment of *Oedipus the King*, we see that Creon claims to harness absolute no desire for kingship. But when Creon encounters opportunity, he decides to grasp it at the end of that play, and of course, Creon appeared extremely eager. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, we get to know that he was willing to fight with his dearest nephews all for the sake of power. We get to know in *Antigone* that Creon is ruling Thebes with a stubbornness that was similar to the blindness which was reminiscent of Oedipus's rule. Yet Creon never manages to garner sympathy from the audience in the way Oedipus does. This is so because Creon is bossy as well as bureaucratic who was hell bent on asserting his own power.

**Polynices:** He was the son of Oedipus as well as his brother. We find Polynices appearing only very briefly just in *Oedipus at Colonus*. We see him arriving at Colonus where he is trying to seek his father's blessing for that battle that he was waging against his brother Eteocles. As usual, this was for power to wield in Thebes. In the course of the play, Polynices tries to draw parallel between his own life and that of Oedipus. Yet his words appears more opportunistic than filial, and this was a fact that Oedipus too points out at some point of time.

**Tiresias:** Tiresias was the blind soothsayer who resided in Thebes. He appears consecutively in *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*. But in *Oedipus the King*, Tiresias informs Oedipus that he was the murderer for whom he had been looking for. Interestingly, Oedipus never believes him. Again in *Antigone*, we see Tiresias telling Creon that he was bringing upon himself disaster at Thebes; yet as expected, Creon never believes him. We see that both Oedipus as well as Creon trust Tiresias deeply. Such literal blindness of the soothsayer also implies at the metaphorical blindness, especially of those who never agree to believe any truth about themselves only when they hear it being spelt out.

**Haemon:** He is Creon's son. He appears only in the play *Antigone*. We see Haemon is engaged to wed Antigone. Thus, being motivated by his love for her, Haemon picks up a fight with Creon, especially about the Creon's decision to punish her.

**Ismene:** She is the daughter of Oedipus. She appears only at the end of *Oedipus the King*. We also see her appearing in a limited extent in *Oedipus at Colonus* along with *Antigone*. Her minor role only highlights her sister's grandeur as well as her valour. Even though Ismene is scared to help Antigone in trying to bury Polynices, she courageously offers to die beside Antigone, especially when

## NOTES

## NOTES

Creon sentences her to be killed. But Antigone refuses to let her sister to be martyred for an action to which she never had the courage to stand up for.

**Theseus:** He is the king of Athens in *Oedipus at Colonus*. He is both a renowned as well as a powerful warrior. As we get to know, Theseus manages to take pity on Oedipus and protects him against Creon. It is Theseus who is the only person (apart from Oedipus himself) who knows the very specific spot at which Oedipus managed to descend to the underworld. This was a secret that he had vowed to Oedipus that he will hold forever.

**Chorus:** They are many a times comically obtuse or at times simply fickle. They are sometimes perceptive, while at other times melodramatic. The role of Chorus was to react to the events on stage. As we already know, the Chorus's reactions can be seen as lessons in how the audience is expected to interpret what s/he is viewing,

### 2.2.2 Plot – *Oedipus Trilogy*

In this section, we will discuss, in detail, the plot of the play.

#### **Oedipus the King**

The play *Oedipus the King* unfolds as a murder mystery, a political thriller and a psychological mystery. As the play—which is about a mythic story related to patricide and incest—gets deeper and clearer, Sophocles chooses to emphasize on the irony of an individual's determination to find out, expose and finally punish an assassin that turns out to be nobody else but himself.

As *Oedipus the King* begins, we see the citizens of Thebes pleading their crowned king (Oedipus) to do something to lift the plague that has been threatening at large to destroy the city. To take stock of the situation, we are told, Oedipus has already sent Creon (his brother-in-law) to meet the oracle and then decide as what to do.

After he returned, Creon informed that the oracle has advised them to find the murderer of Laius. Laius was the king who had ruled the land of Thebes before Oedipus took over the throne. This discovery as well as punishment to the murderer was bound to end the plague. Immediately, Oedipus launches himself to solve the murder.

Within no time, Oedipus summoned Tiresias. He at first refused to speak on the matter, but at the end, accuses Oedipus of killing king Laius. Hearing this, Oedipus not only mocks at the blind man but also rejects the idea angrily. He orders the blind prophet to leave at once. But before leaving, Tiresias directly hints about an incestuous marriage which will lead to future of blindness and result in infamy, and lifelong wandering.

Oedipus tries his best to obtain advice from Jocasta. Jocasta tries her best to persuade him to ignore prophecies. She explains to him that a prophet had once told her that Laius would eventually be killed by their son. Jocasta continued

suggesting that the prophecy could be evaded because the baby was consumed by death once left abandoned. As far as Laius was concerned, he was killed by a band of robbers.

Jocasta's remarks distresses Oedipus because right before he came to Thebes, he had happened to kill a man who had striking resemblance with Laius. But to understand the truth, Oedipus looks up for a shepherd who was the only other witness to the murder.

Apart from this, there was another concern that haunted Oedipus. When he was a young man, he had come to know from an oracle that it was his destiny to kill his father. After this, he was expected to marry his mother. This fearful prophecy had driven him away from his home. That is how he had finally landed in Thebes. But despite all these, Jocasta asks him not to pay heed to the prophecies.

Soon Oedipus gets to know from a messenger that Polybus has died a natural death due to old age. This makes Jocasta very happy. She considers this as a proof that the prophecy Oedipus had heard years back was worthless. But somehow Oedipus still keeps worrying about fulfilling the prophecy with regards to Merope (his mother). This was a concern that Jocasta outright dismisses.

On hearing this, the messenger suggests something that he considers will be a happy news. He states that Polybus and Merope were not the real parents of Oedipus. The messenger claims that he himself had given Oedipus to the royal couple. A shepherd had offered him a baby that was abandoned and was from the royal house of Laius.

This makes Oedipus more determined to find out the shepherd and, thus, understand the true nature of his birth. But this suddenly terrifies Jocasta. She begs Oedipus to stop investigating and then runs away to the palace. She was filled with grief.

But Oedipus was confident that the only horrible thing that can happen to him is a disclosure on the tale of his lowly birth. Hence, Oedipus keenly awaits for the shepherd. In the initial stage, the shepherd denies to speak up. Once he was under the threat of death, he acknowledges that Oedipus is the biological son of Laius as well as that of Jocasta.

Thus, despite all his best intentions and precautions, the only thing that Oedipus dreaded was to actually hear the prophecy turn real one day. He soon realizes that he has killed his father, while unwittingly has married his mother. This led Oedipus to agonize his fate.

Soon Oedipus rushed into the palace. There he finds that the queen has already taken her own life. Thus, left tortured and agonized, Oedipus takes out the pin from the gown of the queen, and within no time, rakes his own eyes out. He did this to avoid looking upon the misery that has been brought down because of him. Left blinded as well as disgraced, Oedipus turns upon to Creon and begs him to kill him. Yet we realize that by the end of the play, Oedipus without much

*Sophocles: Oedipus Rex*

## NOTES

arguments submits to the leadership offered by Creon. Oedipus quietly awaits the oracle which will eventually determine whether he should continue staying in Thebes or some other course of action will be undertaken.

## NOTES

### 2.2.3 Summary of *Oedipus at Colonus*

In the play *Oedipus at Colonus*, we see Sophocles dramatizing the tragic hero's end. He highlights symbolic significance of this action for Athens and its people. As the play proceeds, we see that Oedipus undergoes a certain kind of transformation. He moves on from being an abject beggar to become a banished from his own kingdom due to his sins and transforms into a symbol of unbelievable power.

In the play, Oedipus is shown to be moving around as a blind beggar who has been banished from Thebes. Both Oedipus and Antigone (who also acts as his daughter and his guide) get to know that they have reached Colonus. It was a city near Athens. They are left standing on the same ground that is considered sacred to the Eumenides. On discovering this, Oedipus insists that Theseus (now the king of Athens) should be brought to him. On the other hand, Ismene comes to meet them from Thebes. She informs them that Creon and Eteocles are keen to have Oedipus back in Thebes. They want this in order to secure Oedipus's blessing and get rid of the terrible fate that the oracle has suggested will fall back on them. But Oedipus refuses to return. So finally when Theseus arrives to meet Oedipus, he (Oedipus) tells him that it will be a blessing for the city if the king allows him to stay and eventually die as well as be buried at Colonus.

Hearing this, Theseus promises to help. Soon Creon approaches the city threatening of war and insists that he will hold the daughters as hostage until Oedipus makes up his mind and decides to return. But the Athenian king manages to compel Creon to leave and frees Oedipus's daughters. Immediately after the departure of Creon, Polynices reaches the city and begs his father to support him in the war that he is waging to get back the Theban throne which is now seized by his brother along with Creon. Instead of supporting, Oedipus gets enraged and immediately curses Polynices. As per his prophesy, both Polynices and Eteocles will lose their lives at one another's hand.

Immediately after this, Oedipus manages to hear a thunder and instantly declares that his death is approaching. That is why he leads Ismene, Theseus and Antigone to a place that was in the hidden part of the grove. He makes them ritually prepare for his commencing death. Despite all the arrangement, it was only Theseus who had actually managed to witness the end of Oedipus.

As Oedipus chooses to finally rest at Colonus, Athens received his final blessings as well as his protection. Thus, in turn, it was Thebes who earns the curse. By the time the play concludes, we see Antigone along with Ismene returning to Thebes. They come back expecting to avoid a civil war.

### 2.2.4 Play Summary of *Antigone*

*Sophocles: Oedipus Rex*

In *Antigone*, we see that Polynices along with his allies had sieged Thebes in a devastating battle. Interestingly, both Polynices as well as his brother Eteocles are both dead, following the course of the curse of Oedipus.

While standing outside the city gates, we see Antigone having a discussion with Ismene. She tells Ismene that Creon has ordered that Eteocles must be buried with proper respect. On the other hand, Polynices must be left to die on his own. To make things worse, Creon declares that anybody who makes an attempt to bury Polynices will bear consequences. S/he will be stoned to death in public. This annoys Antigone. She reveals to Ismene that they must hatch a plan to bury Polynices so that everything is done in secret and Creon is never told about it. On hearing this, Ismene timidly refuses to be a part of the plan which expects her to defy the king. This enrages Antigone, and she rejects her association and moves on alone to find a way to bury her brother.

Soon Creon learns that someone has made an attempt to offer a ritual burial to none other than Polynices despite his orders. As expected, he demands that the one guilty of the crime must be found at the earliest and brought before him. As it is discovered later that Antigone is the one who has dared to defy his order, Creon gets extremely furious. After being caught, Antigone makes an argument which suggests that Creon's declarations are definitely against the laws laid out by the gods as well. Being extremely infuriated by Antigone's denial to submit to his orders, Creon announces that she along with her sister must be put to death.

But Haemon asks his father to ponder over his decision. This leads to a major argument between the father and son where we see the son insisting that Creon is arrogant. In turn, Creon accused Haemon of displaying unprecedented weakness by taking sides with a woman. Finally, Haemon leaves the palace promising never to return to the same place. But not accepting that Haemon might be correct, Creon makes a minor change to his pronouncement. The latest declaration suggested that Ismene will continue to live. However, Antigone has been sealed alive inside a tomb and will eventually die in there because of starvation. Thus, her being stoned to death will now no longer be valid.

The blind prophet Tiresias once again enters. He now warns Creon that for all the right reasons, the gods will disapprove of his not attending to Polynices body and leaving it unburied. This will only be punished with the death of king's son. On hearing this, Creon gets angry but later decides to reconsider his decision and finally buries Polynices while freeing Antigone.

Unfortunately, Creon's change of heart takes place a bit too late. By this time, Antigone has killed herself by hanging and Haemon due to extreme pain also killed himself. When Eurydice hears the news of her son's death she too kills herself and before her death curses Creon.

### NOTES

Left alone, Creon agrees that he is responsible for all the tragedy that has befallen and asks for a quick death to gods. This play comes to an end with a warning being issued by the chorus that pride will sooner or later be punished.

## NOTES

### 2.2.5 *Oedipus Rex* as a Classical Tragedy

*Oedipus Rex* is a mythical play by Sophocles and a significant one that is considered to be one of the most prominent examples of classical tragedy. Aristotle in his seminal work the *Poetics* includes examples from the tragedy of Oedipus. More often than not, the play is identified a great example of tragic play based on a few criteria.

*Oedipus Rex* has the element of tragic setting. It has the atmosphere and mood that is conducive to a typical classical tragedy. It includes tragic characters with tragic hamartia. *Oedipus Rex* contains a plot design that definitely moves towards tragic disintegration. Thus, we have tragic realization experienced by the characters as well as by the audience.

Even the dialogues (including the language of the chorus) goes to great lengths to emphasize the tragic message—the tragic life of Oedipus Rex and his ill fate on which he had no control.

*Oedipus Rex* is an example of ancient Greek tragedy. It contained such stereotypes from the classical tragedies that even Aristotle had to look up to it as an example ‘to define and illustrate the qualities of a tragedy’. The definition that Aristotle includes is a descriptive one. And over the years, the definition of tragedy has been modified because since the time of Aristotle, many tragedies have been composed without adhering to the Aristotelian guidelines. But despite everything, it is feasible to consider this tragedy from Aristotelian definition.

Aristotle identified tragedy in terms three aspects: plot, character and action. This means that the plot of a good tragedy must contain a complete action. Along with this, each segment of the play should contribute to the ultimate tragic end. But it is important that both cause and effect must be logically linked with each other. Under no circumstance can an external force intervene and change the course of action. The protagonist or the tragic character must be the possessor of significant status along with the best ideal qualities. Yet the protagonist must have one weakness. This one is definitely not a moral flaw, and this kind of weakness was termed as ‘hamartia’. The results of the protagonist’s own error of judgment which might lead to wrong actions, and this is responsible for the fall. There is no escape from this. Such action was meant to give us a sense of inevitability. This was meant to make the audience realize the actuality of the situation and understand the weakness of the character. While this was all good, the reversal as well as the discovery must be there to reveal the character and the audience.

Apart from the tragic plot, there has to be a typically tragic character. In this play, we have Oedipus. Oedipus fulfils all the characteristics of a tragic character—

he is a man of greatness with virtuous ideals. He was filled with a commitment to seek the truth that would eventually lead to cure the problem which was plaguing the country. Yet like an absolute tragic character, Oedipus was suffering from a tragic weakness. The tragic weakness that engulfed Oedipus had to do with the confidence of what he knows or even what he can know. That is why in the course of the play, he becomes too careless as well as disrespectful towards the gods. He loses track of the fate that the oracles had laid bare before him.

The other tragic element that one finds in the play *Oedipus Rex* is the tragic ambience. Since the beginning till the end of the play, the audience is exposed to serious as well as frightening actions. The conflict of drama that the characters experience as well as the dramatic tension that gets sketched in our minds actually never gets sorted out. Moreover, there is a complete absence of comic element. Just as a typical tragedy should be, Sophocles has designed the dialogues in such a way that they create as well as maintain a very sombre mood throughout. The hopes that almost always takes us towards fear along with the anxiety and always takes us towards our frustration actually contributes to the catharsis. Thus, our false hopes as well as wishes gets prompted through the chorus and ultimately collapse into the purification that takes place through the emotions accompanied by the tragic change within the characters.

### 2.2.6 Fate and *Oedipus Rex*

We still know that fate is intricately associated with each human. No human can ever deny this supernatural connection. Critics suggest that for the Greeks, 'fate' meant the foretelling of what the future held in store. Fate was an essential part of all Greek tragedies as well as the epics. Thus, in the case of *Oedipus Rex*, we also find a similar connection being set. As we get to see, we realize that the even though the characters of the Greek tragedies are born free, their freedom is always intersected with their destiny. Sophocles in *Oedipus Rex* makes fate an important element that controls the destiny of some of the important characters. Fate ultimately controls the lives of Oedipus, Jocasta and Laius. It pre-determines the significant events that takes place in their lives. Yet at the same time, Sophocles has highlighted that the characters are definitely not mere pawns in the schema of fate. As these characters are presented on the stage, they come to the audience as free agents who enjoy the freedom to choose various course of actions.

Much before the birth of Oedipus, it was already announced from the Delphi that the child who would be born would kill his father as well as marry his own mother. In the course of the play, every character through his/her act of kindness or through intellect/inquiry and various other actions only acted to execute this prophecy. In the play, every character makes an effort to trick the fate. Yet at some point of time, they come to realize that the fate under no circumstance be fooled. As of now, we have already encountered emotions like bravery, pity, cruelty or even foresight being employed so as to circumvent fate. But in trying to do so, they have actually got themselves more intricately woven into the web of fate.

## NOTES

## NOTES

Fate definitely controls the life of Jocasta. She was aware what the oracle had prophesized, yet she went ahead and bore Laius's child. After that, she attempted to get a way out of the consequences of the fate. Jocasta had even expressed the desire to kill the child so as to stop all the horror of what he might be able to do. Thus, she makes up her mind and gets herself engrossed in a course of action that only brought upon her doom.

Fate played an influential role in the life of the character Laius. Laius tried everything to prevent the fateful course of events as pronounced by the Delphi. To evade the fate, Laius chained and handed over the child to a man of inferior social standing. But this man in turn passed on the baby to a shepherd who was from Corinth. This shepherd also passed the baby to the Corinthian king. Thus, the unwanted child grew up as the child of Polybus and Merope. Eventually, Oedipus (the adopted child) killed his father and, thus, fulfilled the prophecy that the oracles had foretold.

The fate also has the contribution in bringing about the tragedy in the life of Oedipus. He came to know about the terrible prediction that revolved around him from the oracle. Just like his parents, Oedipus too tried his best to avoid such an unfortunate fate. Oedipus fled away from Corinth. He had made up his mind to never set his eyes on the country where his (supposed) father and mother lived and ruled. But on the way of his sojourn, unexpectedly Oedipus killed his biological father (Laius). Eventually, he also married his mother (Laius' widow). She was Jocasta, Oedipus' biological mother. She was instrumental in saving the city Thebes from the dreadful monster Sphinx.

The reason which brings about the agonies and pains in the lives of Jocasta, Laius as well as Oedipus seem to be the work of fate. Each of these characters indulged in the troublesome acts as a result of their unfruitful attempts to escape the unfortunate fate that the oracle at Delphi had prophesized to them. In the beginning, only these characters are informed that they will definitely become the victims of some terrible events. All the characters take every precaution to avert these events but unfortunately nothing changes and the prophecies turn true.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle mentions that the tragic hero has to be a part of a socially affluent family and his downfall will be brought about due to the error in judgement. Considered from this respect, Oedipus is definitely a tragic hero, even though he partly fulfils the criterion. This happens because, for Oedipus, his downfall was pre-ordained. But his downfall was executed finally because of his inquisition nature that finally brought about his downfall.

Of course, one cannot argue over whether his inquisitive nature would have at all developed had the gods not sent plague to the city of Thebes, as this disease was the reason that people decided to search for the person who had killed their king. Thus, through the downfall of Oedipus we get to know of the humbling task of a great man who had to submit to the whims of fate or gods. As readers, we feel that Oedipus never deserved it. What happened was not a punishment for any

kind of insolence, nor was it because of any error in judgment per se. We realize that the gods had decided to wield their power because they have to. But of course, we cannot argue as to why Oedipus is punished for certain sins, especially when he had no knowledge about them.

Yet on the other side of the argument, Oedipus is not a person devoid of flaws. Oedipus has way too many faults. Oedipus is considered to be rash and hot-tempered. Due to this, he always was hasty in forming judgments. He was someone who was easily provoked and had an extremely inquisitive mind. Hence, we cannot argue that all of his acts are pre-ordained. Oedipus definitely was a free agent who merrily choose to indulge in a series of actions that lead to his own downfall. We have to understand that the oracle's prediction was devoid of any conditions. Nowhere did it say that if Oedipus indulged in any such thing, only then will he kill his father or even marry his mother. Oedipus never managed to understand that not every difficulty is a riddle which can be solved by the usage of pure intellect.

If we take into account all the above-said arguments, we can rightly say that Oedipus is neither an individual with a free will, nor is he a simple victim of fate. Even though the significant events of his life are demarcated by fate, his personal acts have only managed to intensify the disaster.

### 2.2.7 Irony in *Oedipus Rex*

In literature, as we already know by now that dramatic irony is used as a plot device where the audience's or the reader's understanding of actions surpasses the understanding of the characters. The dialogues as well as the actions of the characters take on a different shape. One can say that this kind of thing happens especially when a character reacts to a situation in an unlikely manner and displays little self-awareness, and, hence, lands up acting under false assumptions. Such kind of device is full in a work of tragedy.

*Oedipus Rex* is both an entertaining play as well as an insightful piece of play. The playwright, Sophocles, goes on to contribute in elevating the play to another level. Sophocles incorporates literary devices like that of irony to make the story more refined. Dramatic irony, as we see, is interwoven in the play, and is used well to underline the development of the characters.

Since the early part of the play, we get to know a lot of information about Oedipus. We all know that he was a hero. At the same time, he was also the leader of the land. In this play, it is very clear from the early segments that the city is in trouble again. Moreover, it was Oedipus again who could have helped. In the initial stage, we feel as if he is very honest and sincere, and he is genuinely trying to help his people. Yet with passage of time, we get acquainted with a different aspects of Oedipus. Let us consider the case when Tiresias first met Oedipus. In the beginning of their interaction, Oedipus appeared to be more troubled with his people and their problems, and he appeared engrossed in trying to fix the plague.

## NOTES

Yet as soon as Tiresias suggests that Oedipus might be the reason behind the trouble, he immediately turns defensive and furious. Soon we learn that Oedipus is more focused with himself than with the well-being of his people.

## NOTES

The play is imbued with examples of dramatic irony. While Oedipus goes out to seek the murderer of the preceding king to resolve the problems of the plague, he turns out to be the reason. The further efforts and endeavours he undertakes, the further problematic things turn out to be.

Another example of dramatic irony one comes across is when the old prophecy teller visits the king. Our protagonist, Oedipus, makes fun of the man merely because he is blind. This infuriates Tiresias and in a fit of anger, he announces to the king that even though he (Oedipus) is blessed with sight he is still 'blind' to the truth. So finally when Oedipus turns physically blind, he comes to realize the truth that a man speaks. Ironical though it might seem, but ultimately it is the blind man who actually manages to see clearly.

In the play *Oedipus Rex*, readers also encounter dramatic irony in the form of Oedipus's long speeches. Readers soon realize that Oedipus regularly sees things incorrectly. Moreover, he is in constant denial that he has probably killed his father and has unintentionally married his own mother. Such an insistent approach is apparent when Oedipus first demands the death of the man who had managed to kill Laius. Within no time, Oedipus labels the man who has committed this as an evil murderer. Oedipus believes that since that now he has become a citizen of Thebes, he probably could not be the murderer of Laius. In some other segment in the play, Oedipus verbally accuses Creon of intentionally framing him up so that he could get the throne.

Needless to say, Sophocles' writing styles were far ahead of his times. He had used irony very effectively in his play. This literary device added a whole new dimension to the play. It also forced the readers to look not just into the text but also beyond it.

### 2.2.8 Significance of the Chorus

In drama and music, chorus are those who perform in a group and use their voices during the performance as opposed to those who perform individually. 'The chorus in Classical Greek drama was a group of actors who described and commented upon the main action of a play with song, dance, and recitation.' It must be mentioned here that the Greek tragedy had its foundation in such choral performances. In these, at least a group of fifty odd men danced while singing dithyrambs. Records suggest that by the middle of the 6th century BC, the poet Thespis probably became the first real actor when he decided to engage in dialogue which would be spelt by the chorus leaders. These kinds of choral performances continued to dominate the dramatic scenes well into the 5th century BC. To Aeschylus' credit, he added a second actor and randomly reduced the number of chorus from fifty to twelve participants. Sophocles, on the other hand, incorporated a third actor but

he increased the number of chorus to fifteen. Yet at the same time, he limited it to commentarial role as we find in the play *Oedipus Rex*.

*Sophocles: Oedipus Rex*

One major hallmark of Greek tragedies is the passivity of the chorus and the active participation of the regular actors. As we realize that the tragic protagonists try and move beyond the defiance limits (as set by the gods), the chorus moves around expressing their innate fears, hopes and judgment regarding the course of actions, and about the polity and the work of the average citizens. This kind of judgement is always about the benefit of history.

Many argue that the chorus is actually like the peanut-gallery. Sophocles, on his part, uses this group to comment upon the course of action adopted by the play, while it can showcase the future events as well. Sophocles also used the chorus to comment on the greater impact of the actions carried out by the characters as well as to comment upon the play's central ideas and intentions. In *Oedipus Rex*, we see that the choral odes are sung on every issue including tyranny to the negative effects of blasphemy.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. Shortly describe the character of Haemon in the play *Antigone*.
2. Does *Oedipus Rex* have the element of tragic setting?
3. How does Aristotle identify tragedy?
4. In what way does Oedipus fulfil all the characteristics of a tragic character?
5. Give an example of dramatic irony in *Oedipus Rex*.

## 2.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Haemon is Creon's son. He appears only in the play *Antigone*. We see Haemon is engaged to wed Antigone. Thus, being motivated by his love for her, Haemon picks up a fight with Creon, especially about the Creon's decision to punish her.
2. *Oedipus Rex* has the element of tragic setting. It has the atmosphere and mood that is conducive to a typical classical tragedy. It includes tragic characters with tragic hamartia. *Oedipus Rex* contains a plot design that definitely moves towards tragic disintegration. Thus, we have tragic realization experienced by the characters as well as by the audience.
3. Aristotle identified tragedy in terms three aspects: plot, character and action. This means that the plot of a good tragedy must contain a complete action. Along with this, each segment of the play should contribute to the ultimate tragic end. But it is important that both cause and effect must be logically

## NOTES

linked with each other. Under no circumstance can an external force intervene and change the course of action.

4. Oedipus fulfils all the characteristics of a tragic character—he is a man of greatness with virtuous ideals. He was filled with a commitment to seek the truth that would eventually lead to cure the problem which was plaguing the country. Yet like an absolute tragic character, Oedipus was suffering from a tragic weakness. The tragic weakness that engulfed Oedipus had to do with the confidence of what he knows or even what he can know. That is why in the course of the play, he becomes too careless as well as disrespectful towards the gods. He loses track of the fate that the oracles had laid bare before him.
5. In *Oedipus Rex*, an example of dramatic irony one comes across is when the old prophecy teller visits the king. Our protagonist, Oedipus, makes fun of the man merely because he is blind. This infuriates Tiresias and in a fit of anger, he announces to the king that even though he (Oedipus) is blessed with sight he is still ‘blind’ to the truth. So finally When Oedipus turns physically blind, he comes to realize the truth that a man speaks. Ironical though it might seem, but ultimately it is the blind man who actually manages to see clearly.

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## 2.4 SUMMARY

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- Sophocles was born in 496 BC in a place called Hippeios Colonus in Attica, which is situated in Greece. He died in 406 BC in Athens at the age of ninety approximately.
- Sophocles has composed 123 dramas and his most popular one is *Oedipus the King*.
- The quintessential aspect to Sophocles’ use of language is that it allows for a certain element of flexibility that helped to enhance dramatic needs.
- Sophocles easily incorporated the gods of Greek religion in his plays that reflected a spirit unfound before.
- Oedipus is the protagonist of *Oedipus the King* as well as that of *Oedipus at Colonus*. He is crowned the king of Thebes much before the events of *Oedipus the King* rolls on.
- The play *Oedipus the King* unfolds as a murder mystery, a political thriller and a psychological mystery.
- In the play *Oedipus at Colonus*, we see Sophocles dramatizing the tragic hero’s end. He highlights symbolic significance of this action for Athens and its people.

- *Oedipus Rex* is a mythical play by Sophocles and a significant one that is considered to be one of the most prominent examples of classical tragedy.
- *Oedipus Rex* has the element of tragic setting. It has the atmosphere and mood that is conducive to a typical classical tragedy. It includes tragic characters with tragic hamartia.
- *Oedipus Rex* is an example of ancient Greek tragedy. It contained such stereotypes from the classical tragedies that even Aristotle had to look up to it as an example 'to define and illustrate the qualities of a tragedy'.
- Aristotle identified tragedy in terms three aspects: plot, character and action. This means that the plot of a good tragedy must contain a complete action. Along with this, each segment of the play should contribute to the ultimate tragic end.
- Sophocles' writing styles were far ahead of his times. He had used irony very effectively in his play. This literary device added a whole new dimension to the play.
- In drama and music, chorus are those who perform in a group and use their voices during the performance as opposed to those who perform individually.
- In *Oedipus Rex*, we see that the choral odes are sung on every issue including tyranny to the negative effects of blasphemy.

## NOTES

### 2.5 KEY WORDS

- **Paean:** It is a joyous song or hymn of praise, tribute, thanksgiving or triumph; a work that praises or honours its subject.
- **Hamartia:** It refers to a fatal flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine.
- **Oracle:** In this, a priest or priestess acts as a medium through whom advice or prophecy was sought from the gods in classical antiquity.
- **Dithyrambs:** It is a Greek choral song or chant of vehement or wild character and of usually irregular form, originally in honour of Dionysus or Bacchus.

### 2.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

#### Short-Answer Questions

1. Briefly describe the life and works of Sophocles.
2. Write a short note on Sophocles' use of language.
3. Outline Antigone's role in the play *Oedipus Rex*.

4. Summarize the play *Oedipus at Colonus*.
5. What is the significance of the chorus in *Oedipus Rex*?

## NOTES

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically analyse the characters of *Oedipus Rex*. Choose a character who appears in two or more plays of the *Oedipus Trilogy*, and discuss the similarities and differences in characterization in the plays.
2. Discuss *Oedipus Rex* as a classical tragedy. What role does fate play in *Oedipus Rex*?
3. 'The play *Oedipus Rex* is imbued with examples of dramatic irony.' Elaborate.
4. 'As a prophet, Tiresias speaks for the gods and for fate.' Explain how the character of Tiresias functions dramatically in *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*.
5. In *Antigone*, who is the real main character—Antigone or Creon? Make a case to support your answer.

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## 2.7 FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 3 IBSEN: *A DOLL'S HOUSE*

### Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Life of Henrik Ibsen
- 3.3 Critical Analysis of *A Doll's House*
  - 3.3.1 Plot
  - 3.3.2 Dramatic Technique
  - 3.3.3 Characters
  - 3.3.4 Themes
- 3.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 3.5 Summary
- 3.6 Key Words
- 3.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 3.8 Further Readings

### NOTES

### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

Ibsen dared to represent on stage the reality behind the perfect façade of marriage in his controversial play *A Doll's House*. This play, a scathing critique of Victorian marriage with its norms and hypocrisies, established Ibsen as a force to reckon with on the modern stage. Ibsen's play is path breaking in many ways for its form and its theme. Ibsen was successful in creating a naturalistic setting in his play, and he dared to explore a much controversial subject - marriage.

### 3.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the plot and dramatic technique used in Ibsen's play
- Discuss the important characters and the themes of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*
- Examine the use of realism in *A Doll's House*

### 3.2 LIFE OF HENRIK IBSEN

Henrik Johan Ibsen (20 March 1828–23 May 1906) was an important and influential Norwegian playwright who is rightly considered the father of modern realistic drama.

His plays were declared sacrilegious at the time when Victorian bourgeois principles of family, marriage and respectability were still the custom, and to defy them was immediately considered wrong and shameful. Ibsen's work critiqued

## NOTES

and questioned the realities that lay behind the façade which the society of that time lacked the courage to confront.

On the modern stage, Ibsen's contribution lies in introducing a critical eye and free inquiry into the conditions of life and issues of morality. Prior to him, plays were generally considered to be moral dramas with noble protagonists pitted against vice darker forces, and characters appeared as mere black or white coloured cut-outs. The shade of grey was missing, and in E.M. Forster's terms, characters were 'flat' and not 'round'. Ibsen did a total turnaround to the accepted endings where goodness lead to contentment and joy and sin paved the way to pain, by testing the beliefs of the times and crushing the illusions of his audiences.

Ibsen was born into a comparatively affluent family in the small port town of Skein, Norway, which was famous for shipping timber. Soon after he was born, his family's financial situation deteriorated drastically. His parents were badly affected by this unexpected turn of events. His mother sought the comfort of religion while his father became severely depressed. Therefore, with personal influence, the characters in his plays often mirror his parents, and his themes are seen to often deal with issues of financial difficulty.

Ibsen left home and became an apprentice druggist at fifteen, and began writing plays. His first play, *Catilina* (1848), was published when he was only 20, but was not performed. His first play to be performed was *The Burial Mound* (1850), but this play was unable to gather a great deal of interest. This did not in any way diminish his desire to be a playwright though for some years following, he did not write again. The next few years were spent at the Norwegian Theatre where Ibsen's role as writer, director and producer saw his involvement in the production of more than 145 plays. He did not, however, publish any new plays of his own. Even though as a playwright recognition and achievement eluded him, the time spent at the Norwegian Theatre was valuable as it gave Ibsen a lot of practical experience of drama. This was to later prove very beneficial to Ibsen when he took to writing again.

Ibsen returned to Oslo in 1857, where he lived in very poor financial circumstances. He was married in 1859. He became very disenchanted with his life in Norway, and left for Italy in 1864. He did not return to his native land for the next 27 years, and when he did, he had already become a noted playwright, controversial but highly influential.

His next play was *Brand* (1865) which brought him the critical acclaim he sought, along with a measure of financial success, and was followed with a similar response with his next play, *Peer Gynt* (1867).

With success on the stage, Ibsen gained confidence and began to introduce more of his own beliefs and judgments into the drama, exploring what he termed the "drama of ideas". His next series of plays are often considered his Golden Age, when he established himself as a playwright with a cause and reached the centre of dramatic controversy across Europe.

Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) was a strong indictment of the conventional roles imposed on men and women in the institution of Victorian marriage. In the play, the protagonist Nora in the end leaves her husband in search of the inner meaning to her life, realizing that she has been confined to a 'doll's house' all her life. In a life dependent on her husband who refers to her as his 'squirrel', Nora is given a role much subservient to the man of the house. She is not even entrusted with a key to the mailbox. When she is threatened due to an apparently inappropriate folly she committed in order to save her husband's life by forging her father's name on a note, her husband takes a moral high ground oblivious of the fact that his life is due to her. He is only concerned with his own reputation, despite her love for him which prompted her to risk her marriage for his sake.

Finally, the blackmailer recants, but instead of presenting a happy resolution to the audience, Ibsen, presents a situation which has been an eye opener for Nora for whom it is too late to go back to the way things were. Her illusions shattered, she decides she must leave her husband and their children, and leave her Doll's House to discover her true self and her worth. To the Victorian morality, this decision to step out of marriage was scandalous as nothing was considered more sacrosanct than the covenant of marriage, and to portray it in such a way was completely objectionable. The play did not find favour with some theatre houses who refused to stage it forcing Ibsen to write an alternate ending more appropriate to the moral values of the society. The role of Nora too had no takers as no actress would did not like to play the role of a modern woman who puts her interests higher than those of her husband and children.

This distressed Ibsen considerably, and he actually on one occasion at the last minute submitted a "correction" to the actors on opening night.

Ibsen followed *A Doll's House* with *Ghosts* (1881), another scathing commentary on Victorian morality. In it, a widow reveals to her pastor that she has hidden the evils of her marriage only in order to preserve it. The hypocrisy of the institution of marriage and the complexities involved in it are brought out in the play. Going with the wishes of the pastor, she had married her then fiancé (now dead husband) despite his philandering hoping that her love would change him for the better.

Love does rather have the capability to exert a powerful and constructive sway over a person but not so in the case of this widow. Her wishes were all in vain as her husband continued with his ways right up to his death. As a result of his notorious behaviour, his son inherited syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease. During those days, even the mere mention of venereal disease was taboo and Ibsen had been bold enough to bring this subject up in a play that was performed for the public. On top of that, to show that even a person who followed the society's ideals of morality could not escape it was totally unacceptable as it upset the audience's balance of morality and judgment completely.

Society was very critical of Ibsen but among them were people who were daring enough to realize that what was presented was indeed a mirror of society.

## NOTES

## NOTES

They saw their own ugly reflections in that mirror and were not averse to seeing Ibsen's plays because they believed that he only presented what was real. Ibsen's situation can, in a way, be compared to that of Sadat Hasan Manto, the Urdu writer who sought to fight against and expose the unyielding morality of a hypocritical modern India. Manto, like Ibsen, was criticized by society and not accepted and notwithstanding his genius, had to lead the life of a loner. These are the creative artists one must look up to and seek to be inspired by their zeal and commitment to truth, qualities rare in today's consumerist world.

Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1882) was another controversial play where the entire community was portrayed as the antagonist. The play was pro-individual and supported the view that an individual who stands alone can also be right as against the entire community who can be wrong. The power of a lone person should not be taken as negligible. Ibsen out rightly challenged the Victorian view that the community, a noble establishment, can never be wrong.

The protagonist of this play, a doctor, is a well-respected member of the community of a town which, being a vacation town, has as its main attraction a public bath. The doctor discovers that the water which is being used gets contaminated as it seeps through the grounds of a local tannery. Instead of recognizing his efforts to save the townsfolk of diseases that may occur due to this, he is made out to be a villain who is opposing the community needs. He is tormented by the locals who turn against him and even stone his window.

At the end of the play he is shown to be totally disliked and unaccepted by society. Singlehandedly he stands against corruption and malpractice but his voice is crushed under the thunder of collective righteousness.

Ibsen's next play, *The Wild Duck* (1884) is considered by many to be his most excellent work, and it is certainly the most intricate. It tells the story of Gregers Werle, a young man who returns to his hometown after being deported for a long time and is reunited with his boyhood friend Hjalmar Ekdal. As the plot opens, the many secrets that lie behind the Ekdals' apparently happy home are revealed to Gregers, who insists on pursuing the absolute truth, or the "Summons of the Ideal". These truths are: Gregers' father impregnated his servant Gina, and then got her married to Hjalmar to legitimize the child. Another man has been dishonored and is behind bars for a crime the elder Werle committed. Hjalmar's days are spent working on some imaginary discovery while his wife is the bread winner for the family.

Ibsen's use of irony is brilliant regardless of his persistence of truth. The audience only gets to know what Gregers thinks not by actual words spoken by him but by insinuations. He is never understood till the end of the play.

Gregers hammers away at Hjalmar through innuendo and coded phrases until he realizes the truth; Gina's daughter, Hedvig, is not his child. Blinded by Gregers' persistence on complete truth, he disavows the child. Seeing the harm he has created, Gregers determines to patch up things, and suggests to Hedvig that she sacrifice the wild duck, her wounded pet, to prove her love for Hjalmar.

Hedvig is the only one who recognizes that Gregers always speaks in code, and looks for the deeper meaning in the first important statement Gregers makes which does not contain one. She kills herself rather than the duck in order to prove her love for him in the ultimate act of self-sacrifice. Only too late do Hjalmar and Gregers realize that the absolute truth of the “ideal” is sometimes too much for the human heart to bear.

A widely performed play by Ibsen is *Hedda Gabler* (1890), the leading female role is considered as one of the most challenging and rewarding for an actress till date. As far as the characters are concerned, one can notice many similarities between Hedda and Nora in *A Doll's House*.

Ibsen was successful in completely rewriting the rules of drama with a realism which was to be practiced by Chekhov and others, and which we see in socially committed theatre to this day. In India, an Ibsen festival is celebrated every year in New Delhi showcasing adaptations of Ibsen's plays across languages and cultures. From Ibsen onwards, challenging assumptions and directly interrogating issues has been considered one of the factors that make a play art rather than entertainment, and that add meaning to drama in general.

Finally, Ibsen returned to Norway in 1891, but the Norway he had left had changed considerably. Ibsen passed away in Oslo, leaving a style, movement and ethos in world drama behind him.

### Important Works of Ibsen

- *A Doll's House* (1879)
- *Ghosts* (1881)
- *An Enemy of the People* (1882)
- *The Wild Duck* (1884)
- *Hedda Gabler* (1890)
- *When We Dead Awaken* (1899)

### Check Your Progress

1. What was the theme of Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People*?
2. Why does Nora leave her house at the end of the play *A Doll's House*?

## 3.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *A DOLL'S HOUSE*

Let us examine the different aspects of the play *A Doll's House*:

### 3.3.1 Plot

The play is realistically set and structured. The plot is linear and the narrative follows causality. The story is developed around a secret the audience realizes has

## NOTES

## NOTES

remained only with the protagonist Nora so far. There are hints and references to it and at a point Nora even reveals it partially to Mrs. Linde. The audience learns of it through a scene between Nora and Krogstad, the only other concerned party to it. Through Act One and Two the story develops towards climactic tension with possibilities of Nora's secret being revealed to all, especially her husband. It is in Act Three towards the end, that Helmer learns of the hyped secret and then the play moves into another direction. The playwright's genius lies in raising the expectations of the audience and then, instead of bringing them down, they are channelled into another direction, where larger issues and questions regarding identity and love are raised. Through the play, one would expect that the plot concerns the letter Krogstad has written to Helmer. However, it is after Helmer reads the letter that the real issue changes. The important issue throughout the play, as throughout Nora's life has been regarding her identity as a woman, and as she herself admits, the betrayal of the secret comes as a shock to her in making her realize something about herself and her life. The plot is developed in a linear manner with constant references to Nora's past and a particular act of her in the past. In the end, the resolution is daring and challenges dramatic as well as moral conventions. The woman walking out of her home as an end to her marriage but a beginning for her discovering her identity was controversial in its time to say the least. Since then Ibsen has inspired dramatists from Strindberg to Mohan Rakesh with his Realism and daring social inquiry.

### 3.3.2 Dramatic Technique

- (i) **Naturalism:** Naturalism as a movement in theatre is an offshoot of Realism. The intellectuals and practitioners of realism included, amongst others like Dostoevsky, Balzac Turgenev, Emile Zola, who in works like *Therese Raquin*, created characters who were products of their environment-in senses economic, ideological as well as natural. The philosophy of Naturalism was based on the belief that man's natural surroundings shape his/her character and personality and that there are no given morals or an inherent ethical sense. As opposed to the 'moral sense school of philosophy', these thinkers believed in man, in Locke's words, as a 'tabula rasa', literally a blank slate on which things are written as one lives in the world. These writers also believed in the importance of heredity in shaping an individual's character. One's heredity and environment determine what one is and not some supernatural spiritual order. Therefore, Therese is an independent woman with the animal like passion and obstinacy that she has inherited from her tribal mother; Miss Julie in Strindberg's *Miss Julie* is a man hater because of her mother and her upbringing.

In Naturalistic plays, the settings are kept close to life so that the stage becomes a replica of any real life location. In such plays, a 'suspension of disbelief' is expected from the audience who, while watching the play are never conscious of the fact that it is an artificial stage. This feature in dramatic

terms is described as the 'fourth wall', where for the actors on stage there exists an imaginary wall between them and the audience. The audience looks through an imaginary peephole at real life situations and people. This experiment in theatre proved very successful with dramatists like Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg writing scathing critiques of exploitative social systems and creating powerful convincing characters like Nora in *A Doll's House*.

In a Naturalistic play, the narrative is linear, where causality is observed. The behaviour, dialogues and traits of characters as well as the development of the plot are logical and in keeping with the cause and effect structure. In these plays, detailed description of characters is included in the introduction along with a point to point elaboration of the stage setting.

- (ii) **Symbolism:** Ibsen has deplored symbolism both in the use of the title and in Helmer's references to Nora as a squirrel. Both these symbols depict the passivity and sexual appeal of women. Dolls and squirrels are innocuous, appealing figures and images men would like to see their women appropriating. In the end Nora says, 'But our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was Papa's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been, Torvald.' In her speech Nora makes it clear that she has realized that she has been objectified by her father and husband.

### 3.3.3 Characters

The major characters of the play are as follows:

- (i) **Nora:** Nora is the protagonist of the play. The title of the play is symbolic of her identity as a woman in the patriarchal eyes of men. She admits that her father treated her like a doll, following which her husband took over the role. This realization comes to Nora towards the end of the play, following the revelation of her secret to her husband. Nora is portrayed from the opening of the play as a devoted wife, a woman who is very happy ('merry' as she says later) in her perfect domestic setup. As the story unfolds, one realizes that the happiness Nora has been talking about is probably superficial and one that has been achieved at great cost to her honour and self-respect. Nora has been a devoted wife who takes it upon herself to provide for her husband's nursing in his time of life threatening illness. Her sacrifices are later revealed in the light of suspicion and falsehood. Her husband's reaction of disgust and anger throws Nora into contemplation and she arrives at the bold decision of leaving her house and family. Ibsen's protagonist demanded answers from a conservative and patriarchal society that lacked the courage to face up its moral standards. The role of Nora was considered so controversial and the stepping out of the sacred institution of marriage as

## NOTES

## NOTES

sacrilege that it was difficult to find any actress to play the part in its earliest productions. Till today, Nora remains the symbol of the new woman without the clichés and stereotypes associated with her. She is independent but not amoral, loving and not indifferent. Her character has a very important place in the history of modern drama and in the minds of sensitive intellectuals.

- (ii) **Helmer:** Helmer's character is closest to the model of an educated and conservative husband. He is Nora's husband and the man of the house. His behaviour is typical of middle class men, who expect their wives to be docile, gentle, beautiful and dutiful. His expectations from Nora reflect the attitude of men in the society at large. He refers to Nora as a pretty squirrel and believes her to be nothing more than that. When Nora confronts him with her suffocation at being objectified like a doll, his inability to comprehend her feelings also reflects his indifference and lack of sensitivity towards men. Helmer is not a peculiar man; he is like most men. He tells Nora that he wishes to protect her all her life, just as her father did before him. For him, his honour is associated with his assuming the role of the protector and provider of his family. His discovery of Nora's forgery sends him into cynical dismissal of his love for her. His reaction is the opposite of what Nora had expected. Instead of feeling grateful to her for saving his life, he dismisses her sacrifice as her wifely duty and obsesses with the possible negative repercussions it may bring to his name. Helmer's ego as a man suffers a jolt with the realization that his wife not only provided for him but he also owes his life to her. This obligation goes against the sense of self pride and control that is supposed to define manhood. In the end, Helmer's conventional views are directly challenged by Nora and he is left perplexed and hurt. The ending of the play shows both Helmer and Nora to be victims of gender specified roles that are imposed upon us by the society we live in.
- (iii) **Krogstad:** Krogstad is the only character who is privy to Nora's secret in the play. He is the man who lent her money and has discovered her forgery of her father's signature. He is a man who suffered financial losses in his life and along with and because of it he lost the woman in his life. These events make him selfish and opportunistic. In his conversations with Nora he appears to be like her in his spirit of doing anything to preserve his family and home. He tries to manipulate Helmer and oust him from his position in the bank but towards the end, it is clear that this trait in him was due to his hopeless financial situation and not because of any essential malaise. When Christine makes him the offer of spending her life with him, he repents for his actions and makes amends. Krogstad's character is crucial to the plot of the play as his letter remains at the centre of the climax. Krogstad as the professional rival of Helmer also stands in contrast with him emotionally. When he learns of Christine's reasons for leaving him and her offering herself to him again, he is filled with warmth and hopes for a new life. In return, he cancels the bond he had made with Nora. On the other hand, when Helmer learns of

Nora's forgery, he is only concerned about his name and the possibility that he could be implicated in the legal crime too. Krogstad is representative of middle class men who wish to do well for their family and become desperate at the hands of an unsympathetic fate.

- (iv) **Dr. Rank:** Dr. Rank is a close friend of the Helmers and as he reveals at a point in the play, also Nora's secret admirer. When he declares his love to her, Nora follows the codes of propriety and discourages him. Dr. Rank's death in the play and his premonition of it mirrors Nora's foretelling of 'something wonderful' happening. Towards the end, Dr. Rank disappears from their life as he decides to withdraw into isolation to wait for his final hour.
- (v) **Mrs. Linde:** Mrs. Linde is Nora's friend and Krogstad's ex-lover in the play. Her situation of childless widowhood leads her to Nora's world in search of work. She requests Helmer to arrange a position for her in his bank which he agrees to do. Mrs. Linde (Christine) is a helpless woman who was forced to betray her lover and settle for a loveless marriage in order to provide for her ailing mother and dependent brothers. Her situation shows the position women find themselves in because of a social system that encourages their economic dependence on men. After her husband passes away, she takes on different jobs to be able to sustain herself. Christine has been portrayed as a morally upright individual who constantly prods Nora to reveal her secret to her husband. As a well-meaning friend, Christine desires her friend to be an honest and sincere wife to her husband. However, it is her sense of moral right that she inherits from a patriarchal social order that leads to her interference in Nora's life. At the climax when Krogstad decides to withdraw his letter, it is Christine who insists that the truth should come out and things should be open between Torvald and Nora. In her conventional morality, she ignores the irony that in a marriage, while a man is allowed to keep secrets, a woman's truth is unacceptable to the man. This is exactly what happens between Torvald and Nora.

### 3.3.4 Themes

Let us discuss the themes of the play:

- (i) **Marriage:** The marriage of Nora and Helmer is the main theme of the play. Ibsen explores the power struggles, sexual politics and issues of trust and betrayal in a marriage through the relationship of Nora and Helmer. When Nora decides to take the final step of walking out on her marriage in the end, it was unacceptable to the audience when the play was first staged. It took courage on part of Ibsen to portray the dirty linen of marriage, an institution considered sacred till then. According to Victorian understanding of marriage, it was considered a sacred institution with set roles for men and women and any attempting at portraying marriage as merely a system based on human needs, desires as well as proclivities was unacceptable. It

## NOTES

## NOTES

was to portray marriage as basically a social institution which operates on its own power struggles that Ibsen chose to depict the ending of marriage as no blasphemy but a simple choice made by an individual, more importantly, a woman. What Nora does was probably shocking to people then, but her decision is representative of that final step that many women are unable to take in their lives. Marriages are made not in heaven, but between two individuals on this earth and these two individuals will be different from each other. Their attempts to cohabit based on mutual love and trust is marriage. *A Doll's House* is a play that rends the veil hiding the dark face of human relationships in marriage. Christine's decision to marry Mr. Linde is out of pure financial compulsion, her reunion with Krogstad is also out of a financial arrangement, while Nora's stepping out is out of a need to identify and understand herself.

- (ii) **Morality:** In this play, Ibsen highlights the various aspects of morality and the fact that it is not a divinely preordained thing but an opinion made by individuals based on their experiences and compulsions in life. When Christine first hears of Nora's sacrifice, she is aghast at her secrecy and throughout the play insists on her revealing the truth to Helmer. Nora's accusations of selfishness to Krogstad are refuted by him as he tells her of his family's needs. Later, Christine marries the same man she had betrayed years ago, without qualms. Throughout the play, one sees characters settling for things they find convenient, while they lecture others on morality. In the end, Nora rejects the patriarchal notion of moral justice and chooses her own code of ethics.

#### Check Your Progress

3. List some of the practitioners of realism.
4. What is the main theme of the play?

### 3.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1882) was another controversial play where the entire community was portrayed as the antagonist. The play was pro-individual and supported the view that an individual who stands alone can also be right as against the entire community who can be wrong.
2. In the play, the protagonist Nora in the end leaves her husband in search of the inner meaning to her life, realizing that she has been confined to a 'doll's house' all her life.
3. The intellectuals and practitioners of realism included, amongst others like Dostoevsky, Balzac Turgenev, Emile Zola, etc.

4. The marriage of Nora and Helmer is the main theme of the play. Ibsen explores the power struggles, sexual politics and issues of trust and betrayal in a marriage through the relationship of Nora and Helmer.

*Ibsen: A Doll's House*

### 3.5 SUMMARY

### NOTES

- Henrik Johan Ibsen (20 March 1828–23 May 1906) was an important and influential Norwegian playwright who is rightly considered the father of modern realistic drama.
- Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) was a strong indictment of the conventional roles imposed on men and women in the institution of Victorian marriage.
- Ibsen followed *A Doll's House* with *Ghosts* (1881), another scathing commentary on Victorian morality.
- The play *A Doll's House* is realistically set and structured. The plot is linear and the narrative follows causality. The story is developed around a secret the audience realizes has remained only with the protagonist Nora so far.
- Through Act One and Two the story develops towards climactic tension with possibilities of Nora's secret being revealed to all, especially her husband. It is in Act Three towards the end, that Helmer learns of the hyped secret and then the play moves into another direction.
- Ibsen has deplored symbolism both in the use of the title and in Helmer's references to Nora as a squirrel. Both these symbols depict the passivity and sexual appeal of women.
- Nora is the protagonist of the play. The title of the play is symbolic of her identity as a woman in the patriarchal eyes of men.
- Krogstad is the only character who is privy to Nora's secret in the play. He is the man who lent her money and has discovered her forgery of her father's signature.
- The marriage of Nora and Helmer is the main theme of the play. Ibsen explores the power struggles, sexual politics and issues of trust and betrayal in a marriage through the relationship of Nora and Helmer.
- In this play, Ibsen highlights the various aspects of morality and the fact that it is not a divinely preordained thing but an opinion made by individuals based on their experiences and compulsions in life.

### 3.6 KEY WORDS

- **Realism:** It is an artistic or literary movement or style characterized by the representation of people or things as they actually are.
- **Naturalism:** In art and literature, it is a style and theory of representation based on the accurate depiction of detail.

- **Victorian Morality:** It is a distillation of the moral views of people living during the time of Queen Victoria, characterised by sexual restraint, zero acceptance of criminal activity and a stern demeanour.

## NOTES

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### 3.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short-Answer Questions

1. How has the subject of morality been dealt with in *A Doll's House*?
2. Write a short-note on the life of Henrik Ibsen.
3. Discuss the character of Krogstad.

#### Long-Answer Questions

1. Helmer and Nora are victims of gender specified roles that are imposed upon us by the society we live in. Discuss.
2. Discuss the plot of the play *A Doll's House*.
3. Examine the themes of Ibsen's play.

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### 3.8 FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 4 *DOCTOR FAUSTUS* BY CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

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*Doctor Faustus* by  
Christopher Marlowe

### NOTES

#### Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 An Introduction to the Play
- 4.3 Scene-by-Scene Interpretation
- 4.4 Chief Character Sketches
  - 4.4.1 Faustus
  - 4.4.2 Mephistopheles
- 4.5 The Element of Autobiography in *Doctor Faustus*
- 4.6 *Doctor Faustus*: A Morality Play
- 4.7 Allegorical Symbolism in *Doctor Faustus*
- 4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.9 Summary
- 4.10 Key Words
- 4.11 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 4.12 Further Readings

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### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

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Born in the same year as William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe was a well-known actor, poet and playwright. Marlowe's education was such that people thought he would enter into the service of the ministry but Marlowe chose to pursue his literary ambitions. After leaving Cambridge, Marlowe migrated to London where he realized his ambition of becoming a playwright. In his short life and career, Marlowe produced seven plays which gained immediate popularity. His extensive use of the blank verse (non-rhyming lines of iambic pentameter) was a fresh contribution to the stage which later even Shakespeare incorporated in his writings. Embroiled in several skirmishes, Marlowe's life and career was brutally cut short on 30 May 1593. After being released from prison for heresy, Marlowe got killed in a tavern accident leaving many scholars to speculate the possibility of murder endorsed by the government. However, there is little evidence to support these arguments.

In all probability, *Doctor Faustus* was written in 1592. The central theme of the play—of selling one's soul to the devil was considered to be an old Christian folktale; one that had become associated with an astrologer of ill repute who lived in Germany in the 1500s. The immediate source of Marlowe's play seems to be the anonymous German work *Historia von D. Iohan Fausten* of 1587, which was translated into English in 1592, and from which Marlowe lifted the bulk of the

## NOTES

plot for his drama. There have been several literary representations of Faust prior to Marlowe's play; *Doctor Faustus* is the first famous version of the story. Subsequent versions include the long and famous poem *Faust* by the nineteenth-century Romantic writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, as well as operas by Charles Gounod and Arrigo Boito and a symphony by Hector Berlioz. Meanwhile, the English lexicon recognizes the phrase 'Faustian bargain' as a reference to any deal made for a short-term gain with great costs in the long run.

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### 4.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Summarize the acts of the play
- Critically analyze all the major characters
- Discuss the element of autobiography
- Support the argument of *Doctor Faustus* being a morality play
- Identify the allegorical symbolism in *Doctor Faustus*

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### 4.2 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

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Christopher Marlowe was born at Canterbury, England, in February 1564 to John Marlowe, a shoemaker and his wife, Catherine. Writing plays and poems was the favourite leisure occupation of the young boy, who grew up to be a great scholar, dramatist and poet. Ben Jonson praised his blank verse, calling it 'Marlowe's mighty line.' Marlowe died an unnatural death on 30 May 1593.

Like Sanskrit drama, early English drama too had its source in religion. The earliest English plays were generally of two types – 'The Mysteries' and 'The Miracles'. The first one was based on the anecdotes of the Bible, while the second type dealt with the lives of saints. These plays were acted chiefly in twelfth-century England. In the beginning, these plays were acted in the church, then in the churchyards and later, on the stages erected in the open air. The church had clear control over early English drama.

With the passage of time, plays became secular by abandoning scriptural and legendary characters. Drama now started using symbolic characters with a view to amuse and instruct the audience. 'Miracle plays' took a new shape, and came to be known as 'Morality plays'. Latin was replaced by English and the common man was allowed to take part in plays, in place of the clergy. Morality plays were also didactic in nature like the 'mysteries' as the characters represented vice and virtue. 'Everyman' is the best example of a 'Morality play'.

'Masque' was another form of drama. In the beginning, these were dumb shows and gradually music and dances were added to them, which made them

very popular. After the Reformation, the public rejected the Mystery and Morality plays. They wanted plays to depict human life as it was. A new form therefore entered the dramatic world, and this was the Interlude. It was a sort of diversion from the seriousness of Miracle and Morality plays. John Heywood was the father of Interludes. His characters were real men and women as opposed to abstractions and allegorical figures.

The Renaissance and the subsequent renewed interest in classical drama of Greece opened a new chapter in English drama. First there was Comedy and then Tragedy and after that a period of conflict between Classicism and Romanticism. Authors such as Sir Philip Sydney stood for classicism, advocating the imitation of ancient models of Greece. On the other hand, there were people who did not like to follow the old classical traditions. They wanted to amuse the common man with plots and styles of their own. These were the Romantics. While Ben Jonson followed Classicism, Shakespeare preferred Romanticism. By the end of the Elizabethan age, Romantic drama had taken a firm root. This happened due to the efforts of a handful of young playwrights, just preceding Shakespeare, called the University Wits – Greene, Peele, Lodge, Nash and Kyd. They were called so as they were a group of University men who had been trained in the Classics and had learned much there about dramatic workmanship. Christopher Marlowe was the last of these Wits. Till the time of Marlowe, English stage was enchained by Medievalism. Marlowe revolted against the conventions of Medievalism and paved the way for Shakespeare.

Thus, the English drama began its journey as a Miracle play, which depicted the legends of saints. After the Miracle plays, the Mystery plays became popular which represented a theme from the Bible. After that came Morality plays, with an Interlude. At the beginning of the Renaissance, Comedies and Tragedies were written, and then came the University Wits and Marlowe.

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### 4.3 SCENE-BY-SCENE INTERPRETATION

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Let us discuss some of the importance scenes in the play.

#### **The Prologue**

The poet does not intend to sing of love affairs nor of great heroes. According to the chorus the play is about the ups and down of Doctor Faustus. Having been born of humble parents in Germany, he went to Wittenberg for higher studies. Very soon he became well-versed in Theology and was awarded the Doctor's degree. In many other subjects too Faustus became a scholar. He now wanted to attain superhuman knowledge for which he started studying back magic. His condition became like that of Icarus (a legendary Greek character) who wished to fly to the sun with the help of wings that were stuck to his body with wax. When he came too close to the sun, the wax melted, the wings fell off and Icarus fell into the sea and was drowned.

### NOTES

## NOTES

### ACT I Scene I

Sitting in his study, Faustus is talking to himself. He has mastered many subjects and now he is assessing the comparative value of Philosophy, Logic, Theology, Law and Medicine. Logic attracts him but it is just to argue well and nothing else. The aim of medicine is only to keep health in good condition. Law is nothing but to settle disputes. Theology is not unambiguous. If one masters all these subjects, thinks Faustus, he is still a common man. So after prolonged rumination Faustus makes up his mind to study the black art of magic, as that will bring him both honour and power. Then he asks his servant, Wagner, to request his friends Valdes and Cornelius to come to him. They are well-versed in magic. So their advice will be of immense value to Faustus.

When he is alone, the Good Angel and the Evil Angel come before him. The Good Angel advises Faustus to put the book of magic aside and study The Bible, as the book of magic will bring the anger of God upon his soul. The Evil Angel, on the contrary, tempts Faustus to study black magic so that he may become as powerful as God. The Angels depart and Faustus decides to study black magic so that he achieves supernatural powers. He dreams of having the wealth of India, pearls of the ocean, delicacies from the four corners of the world, answers to every question and much more.

Meanwhile, his friends Valdes and Cornelius arrive. Faustus tells them that he has decided to study black magic. He requests them for their guidance, to which they gladly agree, adding that the spirits will be at his beck and call. He asks his friends to demonstrate to him how to conjure up the spirits of the dead. Valdes advises him to go to some lonely grove with some books of magic. Faustus is determined to call up the spirits that very night even if it costs him his life.

### ACT I Scene II

Two scholars, friends to Faustus, are lost in conversation near Faustus' house. They feel that there is surely something wrong with Faustus as he is not seen in the University. They ask Wagner the whereabouts of his master and his reply is, 'God in Heaven knows.' Seeing them perplexed the servant tells them that his master is dining with his friends and that they should not disturb him. Feeling that Faustus has fallen into bad company, they decide to approach the Rector and request him to discourage Faustus from the evil path of magic.

### ACT I Scene III

Late in the night Faustus is talking to himself. He has come to a lonely place to experiment with magic formulae. He is drawing lines and circles to raise the spirits. At once there appears Mephistopheles. Faustus sends him back ordering him to come back in the form of a friar. Mephistopheles, obeying him, goes back. Faustus is glad to see his commands being obeyed. He is sure he will soon be the greatest magician on earth.

## NOTES

After a while Mephistopheles comes back and informs Faustus that he cannot obey him without the permission of Lucifer as he is the servant of Lucifer, not of Faustus. He has come only of his own and if he (Faustus) wishes to see the underworld spirits at his command he must forthwith renounce faith in God and the Bible and must pray only to Lucifer. Faustus then wants to know something more about Lucifer. Mephistopheles tells him that Lucifer was also an Angel once. But he rebelled against God and was hence thrown into Hell. His companions also met the same fate. Mephistopheles warns Faustus against black magic, but Faustus is adamant. He asks Mephistopheles to go to Lucifer and inform him of his decision to surrender himself to Lucifer completely in return for leading a life of unbridled sensuousness for twenty-four years. Mephistopheles goes away and Faustus starts thinking of the powers of magic he will one day possess, performing even the impossible with Mephistopheles at his command.

### **Act I, Scene IV**

Wagner, the servant of Faustus is seen meeting a villager in the street. Wagner promises to give him some coins if he becomes his servant. When the man refuses to become his servant, Wagner conjures up two evil spirits to frighten him. The poor man is frightened and promises to serve Wagner if he teaches him the art of calling up the spirits of the dead.

### **ACT II Scene I**

Fasbustus is sitting in his study at midnight. He is wavering between accepting God or the devil. Then he feels there is no use thinking of God and Heaven as his damnation is certain. Just then the Good Angel and the Evil Angel appear before him. The Good Angel once again advises him to beg for God's mercy while the Evil Angel asks him to seek only wealth and power. The mention of wealth fires the heart of Faustus to try to get power and wealth.

After the departure of the two Angels, Mephistopheles comes again. He informs Faustus that Lucifer has agreed to let Mephistopheles be in constant company of Faustus, provided Faustus pledges his soul to the devil through a deed written in his own blood. Faustus agrees to the condition and writes the deed in his own blood. Mephistopheles is now to remain at Faustus' beck and call for twenty-four years after which Faustus' soul will be carried to Hell for eternal damnation. After the deed is written, Mephistopheles calls in some spirits to provide entertainment.

Then Faustus wishes to know the exact location of Hell. Mephistopheles informs him that Hell is not limited to a single place. It is there where sinners are. Every place which is not Heaven is Hell. Faustus then asks him for a very beautiful woman to become his wife. Mephistopheles does not like the idea of marriage but brings in a devil in the form of a lady. Faustus does not like her at all. Then Mephistopheles gives him some books which contain formulae through which he

## NOTES

can have gold, cause rain and tempests and have mastery over astrology, botany and other sciences.

### ACT II Scene II

Again, Faustus is sitting in his study with Mephistopheles. He chides Mephistopheles for having deprived him of the joys of Heaven. He wishes to repent of the sins he has committed. The two Angels appear again. The Good Angel asks him to repent, as God will pardon him. The Evil Angel, on the contrary, says God can never feel pity on him as he is a black magician now. The Angels then go away. Faustus wishes to repent but he is unable to speak. He sees images of daggers, hanging ropes and poison, thinking that perhaps he should kill himself, but worldly allurements prevent him from taking the last step. He is reminded of the magic powers he has gained and says, "Faustus shall never repent."

Then he is shown having a discussion with Mephistopheles on astronomy and the positions and movements of various planets. Now he demands to know who the Creator is. Mephistopheles tells him that it is against their law to answer this question as that will make him think of God. Mephistopheles departs and the Angels come again. The Evil Angel warns him against repentance, as the devils will tear him to pieces. The Good Angel encourages him to repent as, then, the evil power will become quite incapable of harming him.

Now Mephistopheles comes to Faustus again, with Lucifer and Beelzebub. Lucifer says that as he has signed the contract, Faustus now has no right to his soul. It is unjust of him to think of God now. Christ cannot save him as he (Lucifer) is the master of Faustus' soul. Faustus is frightened and promises never to take the name of God again. Lucifer is highly pleased and entertains him with a show of Seven Deadly Sins. In response to his queries, every Sin tells Faustus of its parentage and characteristics. Lucifer departs with a promise to show Faustus Hell that very night.

### ACT III

#### Chorus

The Chorus informs us what Faustus has been doing after surrendering his soul to the Devil. During his period Faustus has been traveling round the world. For eight days he moved from the East to the West. His friends welcomed him when he came back home. He narrated the accounts of his exploits and his friends wondered at his knowledge of astronomy. His fame spreads far and wide and even Charles V invites him to his court to perform some magic feats there. Faustus plans to visit Rome to see the Pope and his court and to participate in St. Peter's feast.

### **ACT III Scene I**

*Doctor Faustus by  
Christopher Marlowe*

Faustus tells Mephistopheles that they have already visited France and Italy. Now he wants to play tricks on the Pope, and hence asks Mephistopheles to make him invisible. Mephistopheles does so.

The scene is now the chamber of the Pope. Many Cardinals and monks arrive along with the Pope for the feast on St. Peter's Day. As the Pope gives a dish to the Cardinal, Faustus takes it away. This trick is repeated several times. The guests are confused, as Faustus is not visible to anybody. They take it to be the act of some ghost, having come out of Purgatory. Then the friars start a funeral service to frighten away the ghost. As soon as the Pope crosses himself, Faustus boxes him on the ear. The Pope and the guests run away. Soon they return to sing a dirge to drive away the ghost, but Faustus and Mephistopheles beat up the friars and throw fireworks among them. They all run away frightened.

### **NOTES**

### **ACT IV**

#### **Chorus**

This chorus, between Act III and IV, tells us that Faustus is back in his home after a tour of many cities, courts and countries. He has narrated his experiences to his friends, who are wonder-struck by his knowledge. Faustus has become famous far and wide. Even Charles V, the Emperor, invites him to dinner. His performances please the Emperor very much.

### **ACT IV Scene I**

Robin, a stableman, has stolen Faustus book of magic with a view to conjuring up spirits with it. He asks Robin to do some cleaning. Robin tells him that with the help of the magic books he can perform great feats. He can even call up the spirits from the underworld. In the beginning Ralph shows no interest in it. But when Robin says that he can even bring Nan, the kitchen maid, for him if he so likes, Ralph shows interest. They decide to do their cleaning job first and then to start practising conjuring.

### **ACT IV Scene II**

This scene is in continuation of the previous one. Robin and Ralph have stolen a silver goblet from a wine-seller, who now comes in search of it. The two deny having any knowledge of the wine cup. Even then the wine-seller searches their pockets. Robin wants to teach him a lesson for suspecting their honesty. With the help of the magic books he calls up Mephistopheles who appears at once to them. He throws some fire-works at them and frightened, they give back the cup to the wine-seller. Mephistopheles is very angry as he has to come from far away. In his anger, he transforms Robin and Ralph into an ape and a dog when they offer him six pence for his supper.

## NOTES

### ACT IV Scene IV

Faustus and Mephistopheles are resting on a grassy spot. Faustus feels that now his days on earth are numbered. According to the contract he has to give his soul to the Devil. He, therefore, wants to reach Wittenberg as soon as possible by walking through that lovely green spot. Meanwhile a horse-dealer arrives. He wants to purchase Faustus's horse for forty dollars. After some haggling Faustus sells his horse with a clear warning that in no situation should he take the horse to water. Again Faustus starts thinking over his condemned soul. Soon the horse-dealer comes back all wet and crying. Not following the warning of Faustus he rode the horse through water and when he was in the middle of it the horse turned into a bundle of hay. He thinks that he has been cheated. So he wants to settle the dispute with Faustus then and there. The dealer finds Faustus sleeping. Mephistopheles refuses to awaken him. In order to wake up Faustus the man shouts and then pulls him by the leg. To his horror, Faustus' leg comes off his body. Mephistopheles threatens to give him to the Police. The horse-trader is frightened and promises to pay forty dollars more. Faustus, who is awake by now, lets him go.

Just then Wagner arrives and informs Faustus that the Duke of Vanholt is eager to see the magic of Faustus, at which Faustus agrees to go to the Duke's court.

### ACT IV Scene V

Faustus arrives in the court of the Duke of Vanholt. The Duke is pleased with his magic feats. Faustus now asks the Duchess if she wishes to have any special dish of her liking. She demands grapes. With the help of Mephistopheles, a dish of the best grapes is brought instantly. All present are astonished as it is not the season for grapes. Faustus then reveals that there are two atmospheres. While there is winter in one half, there is summer in the other. The Duke suitably rewards the Master Doctor.

### ACT V Scene I

Wagner is talking to himself. He fears that his master is going to die. Faustus, on the contrary, is enjoying the company of his friends and Mephistopheles. They argue about who is the most beautiful woman and conclude that it is Helen. At the request of one of his friends, Faustus calls up the spirit of Helen in her worldly form. They are wonderstruck to see her beauty, thank Faustus, and depart. Helen also disappears.

Then an Old Man, none other than the Good Angel, arrives and urges Faustus to repent. Then comes Mephistopheles and threatens to tear Faustus to pieces if he breaks his word. Faustus is frightened and submits meekly. He even asks Mephistopheles to punish the Old Man. Mephistopheles says he is unable to do so. Then Helen is called up again. Faustus kisses her and desires to have her as his mistress.

## ACT V Scene II

*Doctor Faustus by  
Christopher Marlowe*

This short scene is laid in Faustus house. The Old Man comes again and tries for the last time to save Faustus. But nothing helps as the Devils enter at the same time and begin to torture Faustus. The Old Man flies unto his God; the Devils also depart.

## NOTES

## ACT V Scene III

It is the last scene, where Faustus is to be taken away. It is the last day of the period of twenty-four years, which was allowed to Faustus to enjoy worldly pleasures. Faustus takes his friends into confidence and tells them the secret of his contract with Lucifer. They are terrified and advise him to pray to God. Faustus does try but cannot do so. He cannot even weep. It is beyond his power to raise his hands to pray to God. He fears that the Devil will tear him to pieces. His friends are helpless. They retire to the adjoining room to pray for his soul.

The clock strikes eleven. He has but one hour on earth. He wishes the clock would stop and the hour would stretch to a year, month, week or even a day so that he could find time to repent. He appeals to the spheres of the Heaven to stop their movement so that the appointed time of midnight never comes. He seems to have a vision of Christ's blood trickling in the sky. He knows even one drop of the Saviour's blood can save him but at the very mention of Christ he feels that the Devil is tearing his heart out. Then he sees God stretching out his arms and looking out angrily at him. Faustus appeals to mountains to fall down and cover him and to the earth to open wide and swallow him, and to the stars to raise him up like a mass of vapour into the clouds to save him from the clutches of the Devil. But all these appeals are fruitless.

The clock strikes half past eleven. Now only half an hour is left to Faustus on the earth. He wishes that if he cannot be saved from damnation, there should be at least some limit to his damnation. Faustus is ready to live in Hell for a thousand years or a hundred thousand years. But his damnation should not be forever. He says that it would have been far better if he had been born as a beast without a soul, but nobody hears him. The clock, at last, strikes twelve. There is lightning and thunder. The devils enter, strangle him and tear his body to pieces and carry away his soul to Hell for eternal damnation.

## Chorus

The Chorus comes on the stage for the last time. They moralize upon the great rise and tragic end of Doctor Faustus. Faustus was a learned man and could have achieved great success. But his vicious way of gaining power and pelf brought about his eternal damnation. The tragic end teaches a lesson to all—never seeks things unwarranted by God; scholars should not 'practise more than Heavenly power permits.'

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. Comment on the early source of English drama.
2. Define 'masques' and 'Interludes'.
3. State the central theme of the play.

## 4.4 CHIEF CHARACTER SKETCHES

Let us discuss the chief characters in the play.

### 4.4.1 Faustus

According to the Chorus, Doctor Faustus' parents are 'base of stock.' He was born in a German town called Rhodes. When he grew up, he was sent to Wittenberg for higher studies. There he was brought up by his relatives. At Wittenberg he studied theology deeply and soon he came to be known as a great scholar of Divinity. He was also awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Then he started taking part in debates and discussions, and defeated all his opponents 'in Heavenly matters of theology.'

### A Great Intellect

The first discernable quality of Faustus's character is his ability to reason. In other words, he was a man of good understanding, sharp memory, and sound reasoning power. It was his great intellect which kept him in good stead as a student of divinity. It also helped him earn the Doctorate degree and gave him victory over his opponents in theological debates. In the Epilogue the chorus also calls him a 'forward word.'

### His Self-Conceit

In the Prologue, the chorus says that after getting victory over other scholars, Faustus becomes swollen with 'self-conceit.' It means that he begins to hold a high opinion of himself and his own abilities. This fact is established by his own statements in Act I, Scene I, when he examines one profession after another for himself. He rejects Analytics, saying: 'A greater subject fitteth Faustus' wit.' He rejects law, saying (Act I, Scene II):

*His study fits a mercenary drudge  
Who aims at nothing but external trash;  
Too servile and illiberal for me.*

Further, in Act II, Scene II, he asks Mephistopheles whether all the Heavenly bodies have only one motion with regard to direction and time. Mephistopheles replies that they move east to west in twenty-four hours but their orbits are different.

Thereupon Faustus replies that such petty answers even his own servant Wagner can make. These speeches prove that he holds a very high opinion of his intellectual prowess.

### **His Insatiable Thirst for Knowledge**

The most outstanding quality of his character is his insatiable thirst for knowledge. By this time he has already taken a Doctorate degree in Divinity. Yet he is never at rest. He advises himself 'to level at the end of every art.' He also has a great love for the classics. He wants to 'live and die in Aristotle's works', he chooses to study necromancy chiefly because the spirits can give him great knowledge and make him 'as cunning as Agrippa was.' When he has sold his soul to Lucifer he asks Mephistopheles questions about the universe, Heaven, Hell, etc. in order to satisfy his hunger for knowledge. Then seated in a chariot drawn by dragons he watches the whole universe as if to know everything about it. He also watches the sky in order to discover the secrets of astronomy. In this respect, Faustus is a man of the Renaissance. To him knowledge is God, and source of power and wealth.

### **His Thirst for Beauty**

Faustus is also thirsty for beauty of every kind. He asks Mephistopheles for a wife, the fairest maid in Germany. He causes Mephistopheles to raise the spirit of blind Homer and sing him the story of Alexander and Oenan. He also raises the spirit of Amphion and listens to his music which in ancient Greece had raised a wall of fortification around Thebes. He also asks Mephistopheles to call up the spirit of Helen. He even kisses her and declares that he will act as Paris for her. In short, he is charmed by the beauty of classical poetry, classical mythology, music, etc. In this respect, too, Faustus is a man of the Renaissance.

### **His Surging Individualism**

Faustus is an embodiment of individualism. He is in revolt against the dogmatism of the middle Ages, and tries to free himself from the meshes of religious myths, concepts of sin, Heaven, Hell, etc. If the principles of medieval religion had prevailed, there would have been no discoveries and inventions of science. But Faustus tried his best to free his will and intellect from the iron frame of the Middle Ages. According to George Santayana, 'Marlowe's Faustus is a martyr to everything that the Renaissance valued – power, curious knowledge, enterprise; wealth and beauty.'

### **His Scepticism and Mental Conflict**

Faustus is a sceptic, not a confirmed atheist. He has a fair sense of good and evil. Yet he believes that necromancy is a science of Nature. When he decides to study necromancy, the Good Angel and Evil Angel appear before him. They may be taken to represent two sides of his mind. The Good Angel tells him that black magic is a damned thing, but the Evil Angel tells him that 'all Nature's treasure is contained' in the study of necromancy. He believes the latter. Thereafter he

## **NOTES**

## NOTES

experiences mental conflict till the last hour of his death. But he is never fully sure of being damned except in the last hour. His scepticism and the force of voluptuous pleasures push him to the point of no-return.

### Highly Imaginative and Sentimental

Faustus is also highly imaginative. Even when he decides to become a magician, he begins to imagine the spirits running at his command to this or that place. He perceives them 'fly to India for gold' and 'ransack the ocean for Orient pearl.' Under the heat of an intensely painful sentiment, he begins to have hallucinations of swords, knives, halts, etc. to commit suicide with. In the last scene, he perceives first a stream of Christ's blood flowing in the sky and then Christ's angry face. In a fit of grief, he begins to repent of his sins. Soon he begins to have hallucinations. When the clock strikes twelve, he meets his tragic end in a most pathetic manner.

### Faustus as a Tragic Hero

As tragic hero, Faustus is possessed by a number of qualities in the extreme. He is possessed by a superhuman ambition for ruling the world. He has an insatiable thirst for knowledge. He utilizes most of his magic power to satisfy this thirst. He is possessed by a great thirst for beauty of every kind. He is also possessed by surging individualism that incites him to rebel against everything that is oppressive. Because of his individualism he often curses Mephistopheles. Over and above, he is a sceptic, and also highly self-possessed.

### Man of the Renaissance

Faustus's inexhaustible thirst for knowledge, his worship of beauty, his passion for the classics, his scepticisms, his interest in sorcery and magic, and his superhuman pursuit of ideals of beauty and power prove Faustus (and Marlowe) to be a man of the Renaissance.

#### 4.4.2 Mephistopheles

In the plot of *Doctor Faustus*, Mephistopheles is 'a servant to great Lucifer', as he himself tells Faustus. Lucifer is the Arch-Regent and commander of all spirits. Mephistopheles is one of those unhappy spirits who were thrown, along with Lucifer, into Hell when they rose against God. And now he (Mephistopheles) lives in Hell, being damned with Lucifer to live there forever. He is gifted with a number of magic powers, but nothing seems to make him happy.

### Gloomy and Unhappy

Although he has many powers, he is most unhappy as he is bound to live in Hell forever. The memory of his Heavenly bliss makes him miserable. So he says to Faustus (Act I, Scene II):

*Thinkest thou that I, who saw the face of God  
And tasted the eternal joys of Heaven.*

*Am not tormented with her thousand Hells  
In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss?*

*Doctor Faustus by  
Christopher Marlowe*

He is not happy even when a damned person summons him. So when Faustus summons him, he bluntly asks him what he wants him to do. When Robin and Ralph summon him up in Act IV, Scene II, he curses them angrily and changes them into an ape and a dog respectively. After Faustus's agreement with Lucifer, Mephistopheles lives with Faustus till the last hour of Faustus's life. Yet he is always gloomy and serious.

### **His Hatred of Christian Values**

He has a hatred of Christian values. When Faustus asks him for a wife through 'marriage', he says to Faustus (Act II, Scene II):

*Tut, Faustus,  
Marriage is but a ceremonial toy.*

### **A Believer but a Follower of Lucifer**

Mephistopheles is a believer in the existence of God, Heaven and Hell. He has seen the face of God and has enjoyed the bliss of Heaven. Yet he is not ready to repent and turn to God. When he meets Faustus for the first time, he utters the word 'God' two times. But afterwards he is not ready to tell Faustus who made the universe. It means that he has a bitter hatred of God in his heart. He admits that God is more powerful than Lucifer. Yet he is not ready to give up Lucifer and to go to God for his own well-being.

Conversely, he is a most faithful servant of Lucifer. Under Lucifer's command, he accepts Faustus as his master for twenty-four years. He obeys every one of his commands to establish Faustus as the greatest magician in the world. Yet, whenever Faustus waivers or tries to go back to the fold of Christianity, Mephistopheles calls him a traitor. He also curses him and even gives him a dagger to commit suicide with. In Act V, scene I, he even forces Faustus to write in his blood another deed of gift bequeathing his soul to Lucifer a second time. During the last hour of Faustus's life, he even tears Faustus's heart, when the latter remembers God and Christ.

### **Omniscient Devil**

Mephistopheles is an omniscient devil. He answers all the questions of Faustus about the universe, Heaven, Hell, Heavenly bodies, their movements, etc. For example, Faustus asks him as to how many Heavens and spheres are there in the universe. Like a professor of astronomy, Mephistopheles replies (Act II, Scene II):

*Nine; the seven planets, the firmament, and the empyreal Heaven.*

And Faustus is satisfied. Today this answer may be questioned, but in Marlowe's day, it was supposed to be correct.

## **NOTES**

## NOTES

### Function of Mephistopheles

Doctor Faustus is an Elizabethan drama, in which the character of Mephistopheles discharges the following functions. First, he creates the atmosphere of Christian beliefs in the existence of God, His son Christ, Heaven, Hell, Lucifer and his followers, the damned spirits, good, evil, damnation, salvation, etc. Second, he establishes belief in magic, sorcery, necromancy, and supernatural powers of all kinds. Third, he confirms the belief that a life of sensual pleasures is a life of devil's rule over man. Thus, even an intellectual curiosity to know the nature of objects is a sin, since the mind itself is a sense organ.

Fourth, his answers about Heavenly bodies, their motions, etc. educated the Elizabethans in ideas and beliefs of scholastic philosophies of the Renaissance period. Fifth, his entering the Pope's chamber and beating the Friars shows Marlowe's disrespect to Roman Catholic Church and its rituals. Sixth, his presence with Faustus impels Faustus to get out of the devil's domination every now and then, since Faustus hates oppression of every kind. Seventh, taken as the symbol of Faustus's evil self, or as the spirit of his imagination, Mephistopheles is the cause of the great drama and the great poetry that have made Doctor Faustus a classic of English drama.

### Conclusion

Evidently Mephistopheles is a conventional character of religious drama, but it is possible to look upon him as Faustus' devilish ambition for unlimited knowledge and also the unfettered power of his poetic imagination. It is he who takes Faustus all over the world, and produces whatever Faustus likes. It is he who produces Helen before him as if he were Faustus's power of hallucination.

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## 4.5 THE ELEMENT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

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Of all the Arts, drama is the most objective. In other arts, chiefly in poetry, the poet projects his personality fearlessly. The dramatist on the contrary has to hide himself behind the curtain. If he has anything to say, he may do so only through a character, that too, very carefully.

In Doctor Faustus Marlowe has projected his own self. According to one critic, 'Marlowe seems to have been a young man of bold self-assurance, of passionate and fiery temper . . . and of a biting and sarcastic tongue. He was apt to speak irreverently and flippantly upon religious matters. (He) had for six years been subjected to the arid routine of scholastic philosophy....' It seems as if we are shedding light on the life of Faustus. Marlowe died prematurely at the young age of twenty-nine and Faustus is taken to Hell after a life of twenty-four years of pleasure in this world. Both met with miserable deaths. The chorus is correct in saying and moralizing (Act V, Scene III):

*Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight  
 And burned is Appolo's laurel-bough,  
 That sometimes grew writh in this learned man  
 Faustus is gone; regard his Hellish fall,  
 Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise,  
 Only to wonder at unlawful things,  
 Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits  
 To practise more than Heavenly power permits*

*Doctor Faustus by  
 Christopher Marlowe*

## NOTES

Undoubtedly the life of Faustus and also of Marlowe was abruptly cut short. Marlowe was an atheist who hated Papal authority. Faustus, likewise, asks Mephistopheles to go to Rome, where the Pope would be having a grand feast on St. Peter's Day. Faustus is made invisible and has fun at the cost of the Pope and the Cardinals. He snatches the dish from the hands of the Cardinal several times. This is the crudest sort of fun.

Doctor Faustus is Marlowe's greatest tragedy, worked out in terms of Marlowe's mind and imagination. The tragedy turns upon his intellectual rejection of Christianity and also his emotional attachment to it. The following lines spoken by Mephistopheles signify this state of absence from God, which was also Marlowe's own private Hell (Act I, Scene II):

*Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God  
 And tasted the eternal joys of Heaven,  
 Am not tormented with ten thousand Hells  
 In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss?*

### 4.6 DOCTOR FAUSTUS: A MORALITY PLAY

A Morality play shows a conflict between good and evil, and uses a didactic tone. *Doctor Faustus* represents this conflict, and so is said to be in the English morality tradition.

#### Conflict between Good and Evil

The conflict between good and evil is an essential characteristic of the Morality play. The Good and Evil angels, the Seven Deadly Sins and the Old Man are all characters in traditional Morality plays. From the very beginning there is a conflict—the hero is tempted towards evil, he struggles against this temptation and in this process he undergoes spiritual anguish. Both good and evil angels appear before him several times and let him know the pros and cons of black magic and repentance. He is told that if he controls his desire for acquiring magic power and turns to God, he will be pardoned and will enjoy the fruits of Heaven. Faustus is given a clear choice between damnation and salvation of his soul. The option remains open to him till his last day on Earth. His soul is the battleground of the

## NOTES

forces of good and evil. He prefers the life of worldly pleasures for twenty-four years and writes a bond to pay the penalty—eternal damnation of his soul. A medieval morality play often shows this sort of conflict.

### Didactic Tone

Every Morality play was didactic in its aim and *Doctor Faustus* is a great sermon against temptation and excessive curiosity. The last chorus – speaking of the miserable damnation of Faustus- sums up the moral of the play. It gives a clear warning that by going into the black arts; even the most learned are ruined.

### Abstract Characters

The characters in Morality plays used to be abstractions which were personified as characters on the stage. *Doctor Faustus* contains not only the Good and Bad Angels but the Old Man, the Devil, Helen, and the Seven Deadly Sins (Pride, Covetousness, Wrath, Envy, Gluttony, Sloth and Lechery) etc. as personified characters. Mephistopheles too, is none other than the devil in person.

### One Central Figure

One of the chief characteristics of Morality plays was that there was but one great figure around which the story unfolded. Other characters were nominal, only in name. In *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus is the main figure, around whom other characters revolve. Marlowe's other plays too unfold around a central character. Throughout *Doctor Faustus* the attention is focused on the hero, while other characters are mere sketches. Mephistopheles may be an exception, but he is always at the beck and call of the hero.

### Comic Element

Marlowe did try to bring an element of comic relief in *Doctor Faustus*. Many critics are of the opinion that the comic scenes in the play are not the creation of the playwright but an insertion by others when Marlowe was no more. The comic scenes in this play, howsoever crude they may seem, do provide relief in tense situations. A famous comic scene is that of the horse-trader. He does not remember the warning of Faustus and carries the horse through the water as a result of which the horse is turned into a bundle of hay. Then the horse dealer comes back and pulls Faustus by the leg which, to his utter horror, comes off. Another comic scene is where Faustus plants horns on the head of the knight who insults him.

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## 4.7 ALLEGORICAL SYMBOLISM IN *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

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An allegory is a literary work with a dual meaning, in which the author narrates a seemingly simple story while he wishes to say something else. The author does not directly teach a lesson, but conveys the meaning indirectly through symbols.

Therefore, in order to fully understand the author's intention, the symbols must be understood as allegory.

*Doctor Faustus* may be taken as an allegory as it tells the story of a medieval magician who surrendered his soul eternally to the Devil for worldly pleasures; beneath it there is a drama of a Christian defying God's doctrine. The hidden moral of the story is that any man, who violates the moral law, must suffer eternal damnation. Almost all the characters in the play-Mephistopheles, the Old man, Good angel, Evil angel, Helen, Seven Deadly Sins - are symbolic and allegorical in their meanings. They connote something more beyond their literal meanings.

### **Mephistopheles**

Mephistopheles is the most important character after Faustus himself. He is drawn as a reliable assistant of Lucifer, the greatest power of Hell. Mephistopheles is responsible for everything- rise and fall of Faustus, his inner conflict and his final damnation. Mephistopheles is a symbol of the unbridled power of Hell.

### **The Old Man**

The Old Man appears in Act V, Scene I of the play. He comes after the hero has just praised Helen, to his scholar friends. He symbolizes the voice of Christianity, the force of morality. Seeing that Faustus has completely surrendered himself to the devil, the Old Man says that he has come with a purpose:

*That I might prevail*

*To guide thy steps upto the way of life*

*By which sweet path thou may'st attain the goal*

*That shall conduct thee to celestial rest!*

Mephistopheles, in the meantime, shows Dr. Faustus the path to commit suicide. In this situation, the Old Man is a symbol of the last ray of hope by which Faustus may come out of the clutches of Mephistopheles.

### **The Angels**

As the very names suggest, these two Angels are the personified abstractions of good and evil, which are diametrically opposite. They first appear in the beginning of the Second Act when Faustus, in his study, is soliloquizing whether to turn to God or to remain with the devil. The Good Angel asks Faustus to leave the art of magic and take to prayer and repentance. The Evil Angel immediately opposes the good one by saying (Act II, Scene I):

*Rather illusions, fruits of lunacy.*

He knows the weakest point of Faustus; hence he exhorts him only to think of power and wealth. Whenever Faustus thinks of the devil the good angel comes and gives Faustus a timely warning. The evil angel, on the contrary, always tries to pull Faustus towards the path of evil, sin and damnation.

*Doctor Faustus by  
Christopher Marlowe*

## **NOTES**

## NOTES

### Helen

Helen is simply an apparition, he is told. Helen's beauty and charm are so fascinating that Faustus is unable to control himself and wishes to be immortalized with a kiss of hers. It is obvious that Helen is an embodiment of matchless beauty and charm that fired the Renaissance imagination. She also symbolizes lust and immoral attraction.

### Seven Deadly Sins

Lucifer comes from Hell to show Faustus the seven deadly sins. These are Pride, Covetousness, Wrath, Envy, Gluttony, Sloth and Lechery. They are the most dangerous sins as they are the cause of man's downfall. They are the personified representations of their abstract names. Such symbolism was common in Medieval English drama. These sins are the symbols of the negative qualities of Faustus himself. Thus, most of the characters and incidents in *Doctor Faustus* are more than what they seem at first sight.

#### Check Your Progress

4. What does a morality play show?
5. Comment on the relevance of comic scenes in the play.
6. What is the chief allegory that runs parallel with the play?

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## 4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Early English drama too had its source in religion. The earliest English plays were generally of two types – 'The Mysteries' and 'The Miracles'. The first one was based on the anecdotes of the Bible, while the second type dealt with the lives of saints. These plays were acted chiefly in twelfth-century England. In the beginning, these plays were acted in the church, then in the churchyards and later, on the stages erected in the open air. The church had clear control over early English drama.
2. 'Masque' was another form of drama. In the beginning, these were dumb shows and gradually music and dances were added to them, which made them very popular. After the Reformation, the public rejected the Mystery and Morality plays. They wanted plays to depict human life as it was. A new form therefore entered the dramatic world, and this was the Interlude. It was a sort of diversion from the seriousness of Miracle and Morality plays.
3. The central theme of the play *Doctor Faustus* is the event of the scholar selling his soul to the devil in exchange of knowledge.

4. A morality play shows a conflict between good and evil, and uses a didactic tone. *Doctor Faustus* represents this conflict, and so is said to be in the English morality tradition.
5. Marlowe did try to bring an element of comic relief in *Doctor Faustus*. Many critics are of the opinion that the comic scenes in the play are not the creation of the playwright but an insertion by others when Marlowe was no more. The comic scenes in this play, howsoever crude they may seem, do provide relief in tense situations. A famous comic scene is that of the horse-trader. He does not remember the warning of Faustus and carries the horse through the water as a result of which the horse is turned into a bundle of hay. Then the horse dealer comes back and pulls Faustus by the leg which, to his utter horror, comes off. Another comic scene is where Faustus plants horns on the head of the knight who insults him.
6. *Doctor Faustus* may be taken as an allegory as it tells the story of a medieval magician who surrendered his soul eternally to the Devil for worldly pleasures; beneath it there is a drama of a Christian defying God's doctrine. The hidden moral of the story is that any man, who violates the moral law, must suffer eternal damnation. Almost all the characters in the play-Mephistopheles, the Old man, Good angel, Evil angel, Helen, Seven Deadly Sins - are symbolic and allegorical in their meanings. They connote something more beyond their literal meanings.

## NOTES

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### 4.9 SUMMARY

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- Born in the same year as William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe was a well-known actor, poet and playwright.
- The play *Doctor Faustus* can be classified as a morality play, as it depicts the conflict between good and evil.
- The play opens with the chorus, which informs us of the birth and parentage of Faustus, his going to Wittenberg, obtaining the Doctor's degree, pondering over many subjects, brushing them away, taking to black magic, his pursuit of power, bringing upon himself, the eternal damnation of Hell.
- According to the Chorus, Doctor Faustus' parents are 'base of stock.' He was born in a German town called Rhodes. When he grew up, he was sent to Wittenberg for higher studies.
- In the plot of *Doctor Faustus*, Mephistopheles is 'a servant to great Lucifer', as he himself tells Faustus. Lucifer is the Arch-Regent and commander of all spirits.
- The conflict between good and evil is an essential characteristic of the Morality play. The Good and Evil angels, the Seven Deadly Sins and the Old Man are all characters in traditional Morality plays.

## NOTES

- All the major and minor characters are allegorical. The play also has an autobiographical element.
- *Doctor Faustus* may be taken as an allegory as it tells the story of a medieval magician who surrendered his soul eternally to the Devil for worldly pleasures; beneath it there is a drama of a Christian defying God's doctrine.

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### 4.10 KEY WORDS

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- **Mystery play:** It is a popular medieval play based on biblical stories or the lives of the saints.
- **Morality play:** It is an allegorical drama in which the central figure has certain abstract qualities through which the story unfolds.
- **Mephistopheles:** He is one of Lucifer's minions, personifies wickedness.
- **Beelzebub:** He is another of Lucifer's devils, sometimes refers to Lucifer himself

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### 4.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short-Answer Questions

1. Discuss *Doctor Faustus* as a morality play.
2. State any two of Faustus' exploits after his negotiation with Mephistopheles.
3. Discuss the importance of the Old Man and the Good Angel.
4. Why is Mephistopheles an important character in the play?
5. Describe the last scene where Faustus is to be taken away.

#### Long-Answer Questions

1. The first discernable quality of Faustus's character is his ability to reason. Comment.
2. Give a brief overview of the journey of English Drama.
3. Discuss the importance of Faustus as a university wit. You may refer to the opening scene in his study for exact textual analysis.
4. Through Mephistopheles what is it that we learn of Hell?
5. State the Seven Deadly Sins and comment on the way in which Marlowe uses it as a device to bring out Faustus' tragic flaw.
6. Faustus' desecration is caused by the oppressive powers of God (Jehovah) and Lucifer. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

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## 4.12 FURTHER READINGS

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- Kocher, P.H. 1990. *Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning and Character*. London: Russell and Russell.
- Brook, N. 1952. *Doctor Faustus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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*Doctor Faustus by  
Christopher Marlowe*

## NOTES

## NOTES

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## UNIT 5 OLIVER GOLDSMITH: *SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER*

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### Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Life and Works of Oliver Goldsmith
- 5.3 Summary of the Play: *She Stoops to Conquer*
- 5.4 Act-Wise Summary of the Play
  - 5.4.1 Prologue
  - 5.4.2 Epilogue
  - 5.4.3 Themes and Characters
- 5.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 5.6 Summary
- 5.7 Key Words
- 5.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 5.9 Further Readings

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### 5.0 INTRODUCTION

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Eighteenth century poets — Alexander Pope, Oliver Goldsmith and Thomas Gray — belong to the Age of Enlightenment. Oliver Goldsmith is recognized as a fascinating English writer of the eighteenth century. He wrote a number of novels, plays, poems, essays and biographies. His works deal with themes such as social class and position, and wealth and poverty. His well-known works include *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *The Deserted Village*, 'Citizen of the World', and *She Stoops to Conquer*. In this unit, you will study the act-wise summary of the play *She Stoops to Conquer*, the character portrayal of the main characters and the depiction of the main themes of the play.

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### 5.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Prepare a brief biographical sketch of Oliver Goldsmith
- Assess prominent works of Oliver Goldsmith
- Explain the main themes of the play *She Stoops to Conquer*
- Analyse the main characters of the play *She Stoops to Conquer*

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## 5.2 LIFE AND WORKS OF OLIVER GOLDSMITH

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Oliver Goldsmith: *She  
Stoops to Conquer*

Several details about the life of Oliver Goldsmith are precisely unknown. It is believed that Goldsmith was born in 1728 in Ireland. His father was a poor clergyman in a Church of Ireland. Due to meagre financial resources, Goldsmith struggled for education and later for his livelihood. He spent most of his youth in the Lissoy village. Goldsmith joined the Trinity College, Dublin in 1745 under the sizar system which allowed poor students to study in lieu of the work they did as servants for the tutors. He never enjoyed a good reputation at college because he did not do well in studies, violated the rules and also participated in a riot in which several people died. He received his degree in 1749. In 1752, he moved to Edinburgh to study medicine but left it without a degree. From 1753–56, he travelled across the British continent.

Goldsmith worked hard on the subject of theology for a couple of years but was rejected by the ministry. He failed as a teacher. He struggled to make a living as a tutor, a comedian, an apothecary's assistant, a physician in Southwark, an usher in a country school, all without any success. Eventually, he started writing reviews and essays for periodicals and embarked on a career as a Grub Street journalist and hack writer. He also started proofreading for the novelist and printer Samuel Richardson. The first book that appeared under the name of Goldsmith was entitled *The Citizen of the World; or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher Residing in London to His Friends in the East*. These letters were published as a series of essays. These were fictionalized letters presumed to be written by a Chinese mandarin visiting England. Under the identity of an Asian visitor, Goldsmith satirized the follies and foibles of the fashionable London society. These letters brought Goldsmith into limelight and to the attention of Samuel Johnson. Through Johnson's friendship, Goldsmith became a member of the city's exclusive Literary Club, which included writers— James Boswell, Edmund Burke, and Thomas Percy, painter Sir Joshua Reynolds, and actor David Garrick. At the age of 47, Goldsmith fell sick of fever and died in 1774.

### Works

Oliver Goldsmith was a poet, a novelist, a playwright and an essayist. As a journalist, he contributed articles to several magazines like Tobias Smollett's *Critical Review*, Ralph Griffith's *Monthly Review*, *The Busy Body*, *The British Magazine*, *The Bee* and *The Lady's Magazine: or, Polite Companion for the Fair Sex*, and *The Westminster Magazine*. He wrote many essays including 'The Citizen of the World' in two volumes, 'The Life of Richard Nash,' 'The Mystery Revealed,' and 'History of England' in four volumes, 'Roman History' in two volumes, 'The Life of Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke,' and 'The Life of Thomas Parnell' and his most famous essay 'On Theatre: A Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy'. He wrote numerous poems like *Edwin and Angelina*,

### NOTES

*The Traveller*, *The Deserted Village*, *Retaliation* and *The Haunch of Venison*. His significant plays include *The Good Natur'd Man*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *The Grumbler* and a novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

## NOTES

Goldsmith's fame chiefly rests on his masterpiece, a novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*, two plays *The Good Natur'd Man* and *She Stoops to Conquer*, two poems *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* was published in 1773.

### Check Your Progress

1. Name the prominent works of Oliver Goldsmith.
2. When was *She Stoops to Conquer* published?

## 5.3 SUMMARY OF THE PLAY: *SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER*

Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) is seen as the first successful reaction to the sentimental comedy initiated by Steele. In a nutshell, the hero of the play Marlow is shy with ladies of his own social status, but quite open with servants, barmaids, and women of lower class. So the heroine, Miss Kate Hardcastle, decides to make him fall in love with her as someone from the lower class. She 'stoops' to an acceptable level to 'conquer' him. The play entertains and provokes laughter with its intrigues and mischievous tricks that are not malicious. The play also marked an important step in the development of comedy by eclipsing the popular 'sentimental comedy' of the times. Though Horace Walpole, an advocate of sentimental comedy, attacked the play *She Stoops to Conquer* for being devoid of a moral lesson, the play proved to be an outstanding popular success when it debuted in 1773.

Sentimental comedy was developed in response to the perceived immorality of the Restoration theatre. It was founded on the belief that man is innately good and that he can be softened through tears that flow from contemplation on undeserved suffering. Goldsmith challenged sentimental comedy in his essay 'A Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy' published in 1773. In this essay, Goldsmith has written that comedy should excite laughter, by ridiculously exhibiting the follies of the lower part of mankind. All the classic writers of comedy aimed only at rendering folly or vice ridiculous. They never exalted their characters or made what Voltaire humourously calls a tradesman's tragedy. He writes that in sentimental comedies, the virtues of private life and distress are exhibited while the vices and faults of mankind are not exposed. Sentimental comedies were successful among the people of his age. These plays portray all the characters as good and generous souls. Such plays did not do justice to the genre of comedy since they

were more serious and moralizing in tone and the actors had block faces when they showed emotions. With the abundance of sentiment and feeling the plays lacked humour. The spectator was expected to pardon the faults or foibles, if any, in consideration of the goodness of their hearts. To Goldsmith, a genuine comedy is one that is a great source of entertainment and sentimental comedy provided none. Instead of ridiculing, it commended folly. Goldsmith believed if humour is banished from the stage, people would be deprived of the art of laughing. With *She Stoops to Conquer*, Goldsmith succeeded in introducing humour, mirth and delight, driving out the pathos of the sentimental comedy. The play proved to be innovative and exhibited a new kind of comedy.

Oscar James Campbell noted in an introduction to *Chief Plays of Goldsmith and Sheridan: The School for Scandal, She Stoops to Conquer, The Rivals* that the central idea of this play was suggested to Goldsmith by an incident of his boyhood. He was told that the house of Mr Featherstone was an inn and directed there for entertainment. Goldsmith, easily deceived by a practical joke, had gone to the squire's house and treated him as a host. From this situation, grew his character and their games of cross purposes.

#### Check Your Progress

3. Who is the hero of the play *She Stoops to Conquer*?
4. What is sentimental comedy?

## 5.4 ACT-WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Let us go through an Act-wise summary of the play *She Stoops to Conquer*.

### 5.4.1 Prologue

Mr Woodward, the speaker, is dressed in black and holding a handkerchief to his eyes. He is mourning for the death of 'Comic muse' that is genuine comedy. He argues that comedy which produced genuine laughter and candidly entertained people is now dead. It has been replaced by a new type of comedy known as the sentimental comedy. If sentimental comedy takes over the stage completely then the comic actors like himself and Ned Shuter (who played the role of Hardcastle) will have no work in future. Woodward tries to imitate a sentimental comedy actor and feels hopeless as he realizes that moralizing will not work for comic actors like him.

The speaker hopes that Oliver Goldsmith, who, like a doctor, will restore an ailing patient, with five potions corresponding to the five acts of his comedy. Goldsmith will infuse comedy with lively and amusing situations and revive it by entertaining and giving comic relief to the audience. At the end of the play, the

Oliver Goldsmith: *She Stoops to Conquer*

## NOTES

audience will decide whether the doctor is qualified or just another quack like many others of the time.

### Critical Analysis

#### NOTES

Prologues and epilogues were written to comment on the play and to introduce the audience with the objectives of writing the play. The Prologue also gave the reasons for composing the drama.

The Prologue of *She Stoops to Conquer* was written by Mr David Garrick, a well-known actor and producer of his times. He was a manager of a patent house in Drury Lane. The Prologue was spoken by Mr Edward Woodward, a contemporary comic actor. He was offered the role of Tony Lumpkin but the actor turned down the offer thinking that the play would not be successful. Ned Shutter, another comic actor of the times, played the role of Mr Hardcastle in the play. The Prologue is presented in the form of a metaphor where genuine comedy is the patient dying of sentimentalism while Oliver Goldsmith is the doctor who will resuscitate it through his play *She Stoops to Conquer*.

### Act I Scene I

#### Summary

Scene I of the play begins with the entry of Mr and Mrs Hardcastle. Mrs Hardcastle is unhappy with their old fashioned house that resembles an old inn. She grumbles about not visiting the town every now and then like many others in the neighbourhood. She also complains that no one pays them a visit except Mrs Oddfish, the curate's wife and Cripplegate, the lame dancing master. Besides, another source of entertainment are the old stories of Prince Eugene and the Duke of Marlborough told by Mr Hardcastle over and over again. Mrs Hardcastle does not enjoy these stories anymore and dismisses them as old fashion trumpery. She snubs her husband for always accusing her son Tony. Tony is neither educated nor mature; he has never been to school which Mrs Hardcastle says was due to his sickness. She believes as long as Tony has fortunes, education is insignificant. Mrs Hardcastle thinks Latin is a suitable form of schooling for Tony. Mr Hardcastle expresses fondness for everything old, old friends, old wine, old books, and old manners. He is critical of Tony, that he is a drunkard, growing fat, is a trickster and knows only mischief. He is not fit for any education. The only schools that he can visit are the ale-house and a stable. Mr Hardcastle believes that Tony and his mother have spoiled each other.

As Tony enters the stage, he is in a hurry to reach the alehouse, The Three Pigeons. His mother dissuades him from keeping the company of low and paltry set of fellows at the ale house. Dick Muggins, Jack Slang, Little Aminabad, Tom Twist are Tony's companions at the alehouse, whom he does not find of low disposition. Moreover, he cannot disappoint himself by not visiting the alehouse and leaves with his mother running behind him.

As Kate Hardcastle enters, Mr Hardcastle comments on her dress. He loathes the superfluous silk with laces which he feels are trimmings of vanity. He does not like this show. She reminds her father of the deal they have that she can wear fashionable silk dresses of her choice during the day to receive visitors of her interest each day. In the evening, she dresses up according to her father's taste and welcomes his guests.

Mr Hardcastle informs Kate that he has invited his prospective son-in-law, a young man Marlow, who is the son of his long-time friend Sir Charles Marlow. No one from the family has ever met him. Mr Hardcastle has heard of him to be scholar, a well-bred young man with excellent services and will be employed to serve his nation. Marlow is said to be brave, generous, handsome, bashful and reserved. Mr Hardcastle believes that modesty resides in people who are endowed with noble virtues and, therefore, he likes Marlow for his reserved nature. Kate feels that Marlow's reserved nature has undone all his other accomplishments. Though impressed by his good looks, Kate is not enamoured by the quality of being reserved since such men become suspicious husbands. She also believes it would be difficult to develop friendliness and love in a marriage fixed like a business. Nevertheless, Kate agrees to take Marlow as her husband to fulfil her father's desire. Mr Hardcastle informs, it may happen that Marlow may reject her. Kate takes it lightly, she will not cry on rejection and indifference, instead will set out to find a gentleman of newer fashion. For Kate, it is more important for her husband to be handsome and young rather than be sensible and good natured. She is apprehensive about having a reserved husband. She would first secure a lover and then a husband.

Miss Constance Neville, a very dear friend of Kate, is the last person to enter the stage in Scene I of Act I. Kate breaks the news of Marlow to Constance. The audience learns from Constance that her beloved Hastings will accompany Marlow. The two gentlemen are inseparable friends. Constance appreciates Marlow for his good reputation and virtues. She also says that Marlow is timid and diffident in the company of modest ladies of her own class but he mixes well with girls of low social class. Another information divulged through their communication is that Mrs Hardcastle is the guardian of Constance's fortune. She wants Constance to marry Tony because of this good fortune, as this marriage will secure her son's future. Constance keeps Mrs Hardcastle happy by portraying a good picture of Tony and pretending to be in love with him though she knows they both do not love each other. Mrs Hardcastle also does not suspect Constance to have feelings for another man. She says if her relationship with Hastings grows and culminates into marriage she does not mind leaving the fortune. She will happily leave it for her aunt. Even Tony does not want to marry Constance. He would be happy to see her marry someone else.

## NOTES

## NOTES

### Critical Analysis

The Act introduces the audience to the place of action that is a small countryside, in the house of Mr Hardcastle. Some background information, necessary to understand the play, is given to the audience. Mr and Mrs Hardcastle is an old couple and for both it is their second marriage. Mrs Hardcastle has a son Tony Lumpkin from her first marriage. Mr Hardcastle too has a daughter named Kate Hardcastle from his first wife.

Through a conversation between the two, Goldsmith instantly presents a contrasting nature of the two characters. While, Mrs Hardcastle has an interest in the London society and she takes a lively interest in the fashions of the day, Mr Hardcastle, on the other hand, is a traditional man. Their tastes also present a contrast between the hustling bustling life of London and its people and the serene, countryside and the simplicity of the rustics. Mr Hardcastle criticizes the vanities and affectation of the town, lamenting the loss of traditional values as the people of this age are lacking in sense and discretion. He believes whoever goes to London only comes back with fopperies and affectations. The worst is that earlier very few were affected by pretentiousness and snobbery but now it travels faster. Even her daughter Kate has become pretentious, influenced by the fashion, manners and French frippery after spending two years in London.

Although we see nothing of the surrounding countryside yet we hear about some of the neighbouring inhabitants. Miss Hoggs, Mrs Grigsby (a grig is a grasshopper) and Mrs Oddfish, all sound truly rural. Then there are Tony Lumpkin's low class friends who have rustic names and their occupations reflect their social class. Dick Muggins is the excise man, Jack Slang the horse doctor and there is Tom Twist.

The conversation between the couple throws light on some of the major characters and prepares the audience for their entry. Tony's entry confirms that Mr Hardcastle has given a more realistic account of Tony. He scarcely pays heed and respect either to his mother or his stepfather. Kate's entry immediately after Tony's exit puts them in stark contrast. She is polite in addressing both her father and stepmother; obedient in following Hardcastle's whim requiring her to wear simple dresses of her father's choice and meeting people of his choice in the evening.

The circumstances leading to plot development have also been established. Mrs Hardcastle's description of the mansion, comparing it with an inn prepares the audience for Marlow and Hastings to mistake the house for an inn and for Kate to be taken for a barmaid because of her plain attire in the evening.

Themes of wealth and inheritance are introduced. Tony Lumpkin has inherited an annuity from his father and Constance Neville owns a considerable quantity of jewellery which her aunt manages for her. She has to marry with the consent of her aunt or else lose her fortune.

The personalities of all the major characters of the play are revealed through their actions and dialogues. Kate is a confident and independent woman who will marry for love. At the same time, she ensures her father's happiness by making the man of his choice fall in love with her. We come to know about Marlow through Mr Hardcastle and Constance. Tony is fat, uneducated and outspoken. He is a trickster and loves to drink with his rowdy fellows. Hardcastle's description and his own actions confirm it.

## NOTES

### Act I Scene II

#### Summary

Scene II of Act I is set in the alehouse, The Three Pigeons. Tony is sitting at the head of the table, which is a little higher, with the ease of being very much at home. A gathering of shabby looking fellows with punch (cigar) and tobacco surround him, all shouting and singing. Holding a mallet in his hand, he sings a song, in which he raises a toast to all drunkards, shuns learning, education, and dismisses schoolmasters and Methodist preachers. The third verse of his song is in praise of the low life at the countryside. The alehouse landlord announces the arrival of two gentlemen from London standing outside. They have lost their way and are asking for directions to Mr Hardcastle's house. Tony is sure that one of them is a gentleman who has come to court his sister Kate. Instantly, Tony Lumpkin hits on a plan to avenge his stepfather's constant grumbles about his behaviour. He asks the landlord to bring them in.

As the gentlemen ask about the Hardcastles, in his own fantasy, Lumpkin describes Mr Hardcastle as a cross-grained, old-fashioned, whimsical old man with an ugly face. He describes Kate as an 'all trapesing, trolloping, talkative maypole'. He presents the old man's son (himself) as a pretty, well-bred, agreeable youth, that everybody is fond of. Marlow is reluctant to believe the information they have gathered about the father and his daughter from Tony's account. The daughter is said to be well-bred and beautiful and the son is an awkward brat spoiled by his mother. Tony and the landlord fabricate the description of the countryside as an area of boggy roads, hills and dangerous commons. As Marlow and Hastings express their desire to rest tonight in the tavern, Tony says there is no space. He directs them to his stepfather's house, describing it as an inn named The Buck Head run by an eccentric innkeeper who fancies himself as a gentleman. He presents Mr Hardcastle as an innkeeper on the verge of retirement aspiring to be recognized as one of the gentry. The deluded travellers leave for the inn.

#### Critical Analysis

Act I, Scene II lays the basis for the ensuing plot that begins to work immediately. The mistakes of the night begin with Marlow and Hastings believing that Hardcastle's house is The Buck's Head inn and Hardcastle is the old, idiosyncratic innkeeper.

## NOTES

The scene further unfolds Tony's character. His picture presented in the previous scene matches his actions. His seating position shows his dominating position in the group which includes the rustics named in Scene I. Tony is happy drinking and merry-making. He asserts that he chooses his company. No one dictates him. He is his own master. We get a glimpse into Tony's background. People, in general know, that his father has left him considerable wealth which he will inherit when he comes of age. He is a living replica of his father, who excels in country pursuits. He also says that he will soon be a worth fifteen hundred pound a year on marrying Constance.

Goldsmith also creates two scenes of the countryside. One scene is set in Mr Hardcastle's mansion which lacks the fashion of the town but there is decorum and refinement. The other scene is set in the alehouse, a hub for the rowdy and boisterous low class rustics and drunkards like Tony. The setting and characters further present a social order with class bias.

## Act II

### Summary

The scene is set in Hardcastle's house. Mr Hardcastle, awaiting the visit of his prospective son-in-law Marlow, is seen instructing his servants Diggory, Roger and others on how to behave when the guests come to their house. These servants are not used to receiving guests and waiting at the table. Diggory, the head servant, is very talkative and loves to eat. Hardcastle instructs them not to talk, eat, drink or laugh hard in their presence and be attentive. He finds it hard to teach these servants who do not know anything about table etiquettes. The servants are only more confused. The scene is interrupted by the news of the arrival of Marlow and Hastings. Mr Hardcastle goes to receive his guests.

Marlow and Hastings, with their servants, arrive at the scene. They admire the house instantly, clean and creditable, which as intended by Tony, is taken to be an inn. We learn from their conversation that Marlow has spent much of his life travelling, residing at the college or in an inn. This kind of life has not given him an opportunity to interact with reputable ladies. This factor is also responsible for his low confidence in the company of modest women. He does not remember of being acquainted with a single modest woman, except his mother. On rare occasions meeting a young cultured lady of his own class has left him petrified. He always looks for an opportunity to leave the room as he loses his confidence when the lady looks at him. He is also unable to counterfeit impudence since he is a modest man. He considers a modest woman, dressed out in all her finery, the most tremendous object of the whole creation.

On the contrary, Marlow is affable and boisterous with serving women and barmaids. He can say the finest things to the barmaid and the college bed maker but not a word of it to modest women. Jokingly, Hastings remarks that with this

diffident attitude Marlow will never be able to get married unless his bride is courted by a proxy. Marlow is not even sure how will he court this woman whom he has come to meet and will simply answer her questions in yes and no. Hastings is surprised to know that a warm friend can be a cold lover. Marlow also asserts that he has come here to see the reconciliation of Hastings with Miss Constance Neville.

Mistaking Hardcastle to be an innkeeper, as intended by Tony, Marlow behaves arrogantly with him. Mr Hardcastle welcomes the two gentlemen in the Liberty Hall, at which the two young men poke fun throughout the conversation. While Marlow and Hastings speak of the need to change from travelling clothes into something fine like silk, the old man talks of his colonel uncle of which Marlowe and Hastings make fun in an aside. The young men call for a cup of punch and then discuss the evening meal. They ask Mr Hardcastle for a bill of fare. It is a long menu because it has been prepared for special guests, Mr Hardcastle's prospective son-in-law and his friend. Marlow and Hastings are amazed at the quality and quantity of the proposed meal. They shun it thinking this big menu is to extract money from them. They ask for simple two-three things on the table. They force the old man to show them their bedroom. Mr Hardcastle is surprised to witness such imprudent and flippant behaviour. Nonetheless, he does what they desire. Marlow feels that the desire and learning to be a gentleman, has made the old man brazen. Finding the old man becoming troublesome, Marlow leaves the Liberty Hall to inspect his bedroom followed by the protest of Mr Hardcastle.

Hastings is surprised to see Miss Neville in an inn. Understanding that Hastings and Marlow have been duped by Tony, Constance clears the confusion. She tells him that it is her guardian Mrs Hardcastle's house and since it is old, it does look like an inn. She also mentions that Mrs Hardcastle is courting her on behalf of her son Tony who dislikes Constance. Hastings divulges his ploy to seize this opportunity to enter Constance's family and elope with her. Once the horses are refreshed they can travel to France. He wants to go to France because France gives freedom even to the slaves to choose their partners and the law of marriage among slaves is also respected. However, Constance is reluctant to leave without her jewels. She is anxious to get her jewels and secure her future. She has been asking for it from her aunt to wear it and will be successful very soon. Hastings does not desire anything but her. Together the lovers decide to leave Marlow in the deception that he is staying at an inn because telling Marlow all this abruptly will make him leave the house and their plan to elope will not be executed.

Hastings informs Marlow that Constance and Kate have arrived. The family had come to dine in the neighbourhood and stayed back refreshing the horses at the inn. Marlow is reluctant to meet Kate. Constance and Hastings persuade Marlow to stay. After introducing Marlow and Kate to each other Hastings and Constance leave the place. A humorous conversation ensues between Kate and

*Oliver Goldsmith: She  
Stoops to Conquer*

## NOTES

## NOTES

Marlow. Marlow is overcome by shyness, faltering and stuttering, scarcely able to complete his own sentences. In her solus, Kate sums up her impression of Marlow. She finds him attractive and a man of sentiment, sober, a serious, honourable and highly sensitive young man. He has good sense, but is ignorant of it. He is extremely engrossed in his fears. She determines to find out how she can boost his confidence and help him in overcoming his shyness.

The fashion styles of London are the topics of discussion for Mrs Hardcastle and Hastings as they re-enter the room. Hastings flatters Mrs Hardcastle on her hairstyle, her dress and her youthful appearance. Mrs Hardcastle is impressed with his talks of London which she loves and regrets that she has not been there. Hastings, to impress her, says it seems that she has been brought up in London as her manners are like the fashionable elite of London.

Mrs Hardcastle finds similarities of face and height in the two young people Tony and Constance and sees it as an auspicious sign of their suitability for each other. Meanwhile, Constance and Tony are fighting, Tony tells Constance to keep distance and that he does not wish to have any relationship with her. Mrs Hardcastle calls these fightings falling in and out of love many times a day as if they are already husband and wife. Tony Lumpkin upsets his doting mother and a rant between Tony and his mother ensues. She calls him a viper, a monster who is never seen in the house when in good humour or spirits. He is always found in the ale house, and that he never fulfils any duty towards his mother. She calls him a dear, sweet, pretty, provoking, and undutiful boy. The two ladies leave.

Tony and Hastings are left in each other's company. Hastings tries to know about his feelings for Neville. Tony makes fun of Constance and Kate. He calls Constance a bitter cantankerous toad in all Christendom, with lots of tricks in her thicket, as loud as a hog in a gate with friends, eyes as black as shoes, and cheeks as broad and red as a pulpit cushion. Hastings exhibits his feelings for Constance; she is well-tempered, silent and sensible. Her meekness and modesty charms him. Tony says Hastings finds her to be a well-tempered girl because he does not know her as well as him. Hastings loves Constance and wants to marry her, while Tony detests the thought of marrying her. He is being urged by his mother so that she can maintain control of Constance's fortune for his son. Hastings requests Tony to help him elope with Constance. Tony instantly agrees since he wishes to get rid of her as soon as possible. He also promises to help them get Constance's fortune.

### Critical Analysis

The servants' scene once again emphasizes the contrast between the low lives of the rustics to that of the gentry. The gap between the expectations of polished behaviour and what the servants can manage adds humour to the scene. The servants, in their conversation also emphasize that Mr Hardcastle is a great teller of military tales, which was also mentioned by Mrs Hardcastle.

The ploy that Tony Lumpkin conceived starts working. Hastings and Marlow mistake Mr Hardcastle to be an old innkeeper who wishes to be a part of the gentry. The whole scene reveals the condition of taverns and inn and their owners. The maintenance of large mansions usually made the owners bankrupt, who later turned them into inns for their livelihood. Marlow, in spite of travelling widely, still lacks the assurance about these inns. The bad inns fleece and starve the travellers and the good ones tax them dearly for the luxuries. Everything appears so hospitable to them that the two fear the high charges for all of it.

The conversation between Hastings and Mrs Hardcastle exhibits the contrast between the opinion held by Mrs Hardcastle about the metropolitan city, London and the actual scenario. Mrs Hardcastle dwells in her own imaginative view of the world of the fashionable metropolitan London society. Her opinion of the elite London society which she has not experienced is based on the information given in 'the Scandalous Magazine' which contained reviews of books, plays and social circulars. Hastings has fun at her expense. Tower Wharf was certainly not a fashionable place. The Pantheon was in Oxford Street, the Grotto Gardens were less fashionable than Ranelagh and the Borough of Southwark was by this date not a place where the nobility resided. He pokes fun at Mrs Hardcastle's incomplete knowledge of London's fashionable society, of which she so yearns to be a part of. When Mrs Hardcastle joins Hasting's talk with Constance, her conversation reveals her pretensions and ignorance of the fashionable London life. Mr Hardcastle, too, is transported to the other world of campaigns in war. It is also a fabricated one with incorrect dates and names of places. Often, he narrates stories of valour and gallantry from the past.

Marlow, as described earlier, admits being shy and reserved with ladies of his own class, confident and boisterous with women of low class, and stating the reasons for such behaviour. He becomes uncomfortable and uneasy talking to a lady from the same class. Not once did he lift his eyes to look at Kate's face directly. He fumbled over the words throughout the conversation with the lady. Marlow's impudent behaviour with females of the lower class and refined conduct in the company of women of reputation, as well as his misbehaviour with Mr Hardcastle, thinking him to be the innkeeper and the servants emphasizes the entrenched system of class division in eighteenth century England.

The plan to elope to France where there is freedom to choose one's partner and respect for the institution of marriage is a critical statement on England's class conscious society where individuals marry with the intention of upholding their status rather than for love.

There is also one scene in the play in which Lumpkin has been presented as a friendly and agreeable person. Hastings draws attention of the audience to his virtue that he looks like a lad of spirit. Tony promises to get Constance jewels so that she can take them with her.

## NOTES

## Act III

### Summary

#### NOTES

The scene in Act III is set in Mr Hardcastle's mansion. Mr Hardcastle alone is perplexed and wonders why his friend, Sir Marlow, recommended that Kate should marry young Marlow, who seems rude and unmannered. He believes that Kate, too, will be shocked to meet such an insolent man. As it is evening, Kate has changed her dress to live upto her commitment to her father to dress up with simplicity in the evening. Mr Hardcastle and his daughter share their views on Marlow. While Kate praises Marlow and approves of his ways which, she concludes, he has acquired from travelling across the world. She finds everything natural about the man. She is thoroughly impressed with his timidity. She claims to have not seen anyone so modest as Marlow, who met her with a respectful bow, stammering voice and a look fixed on the ground. He treated her with diffidence and respect, admired the prudence of girls that never laughed, tired her with apologies for being tiresome and then left the room with a bow. Mr Hardcastle disapproves of Marlow's ways and is convinced that he has acquired all that immodesty by travelling across the world, from the bad company and French dance masters. He is aghast by his brazen immodesty, asking twenty questions, and never waiting for an answer, interrupting his remarks with some silly pun, asking him to make punch (drink). He compares Marlow to a bully called Dawson from earlier in the century. Mr Hardcastle discerns that the first sight of Marlow has deceived his daughter.

Finally, father and daughter agree to reject Marlow as unsuitable, but for different reasons, Hardcastle because of Marlow's impudence, Kate because of his apparent bashfulness. Although Kate does not dismiss Marlow completely yet she feels that he may have some good qualities behind his diffident appearance. For her, a smooth face represents good sense and virtue. Hardcastle says if Marlow, whom he addresses as Mr Brazen, is able to reconcile the contradictions in his personality then only he can please both of them. Both are of the opinion that they are neither completely right nor wholly wrong about Marlow and proceed to find more about him.

Tony enters with a casket of jewels that he has stolen from Mrs Hardcastle's drawer and gives them to Hastings. Tony has the keys to all the drawers in his mother's bureau and that is how he was also able to go to the alehouse every day. He does not want Constance to be cheated of her fortune. Hastings believes it would be better if Mrs Hardcastle gives the jewel casket to Miss Neville herself. Tony tells him to keep the box till she gets it directly from his mother which is like parting with her tooth. Hastings is worried about her disappointment when she finds jewels are not in her bureau.

In the next scene, Constance is seen requesting her aunt to give her the casket of jewels. Mrs Hardcastle reprimands her with remarks about the

unsuitability of wearing ornaments at such a young age. She will need them when her beauty will fade. Constance retorts something that will repair beauty at 40 years of age will improve beauty at 20 years of age. Mrs Hardcastle praises Neville's beauty which is absolutely natural blush and is beyond the beauty of thousand ornaments. Mrs Hardcastle tries to convince Constance saying that jewels are out of fashion and offers her own unfashionable semi-precious ornaments to Constance, which she refuses to accept. In an aside, Mrs Hardcastle tells Tony that she will hang on to the jewels till Tony and Constance get married and the fortune passes on to Tony. As she leaves to bring her own jewellery, Tony informs Constance that he has given the jewels to Hastings and they both can elope. Tony Lumpkin, as mischievous as he can get, suggests Mrs Hardcastle to tell Constance that the jewels have been stolen and he is witness to this incident. She does so. Moments later a dreadful wailing breaks out as Mrs Hardcastle discovers that the jewels are missing. Lumpkin continues with his mischief appreciating Mrs Hardcastle for being a fantastic actor. She bemoans that her son is unable to distinguish between jest and earnest and feels sorry for her niece. Ironically, she is the one who has been tricked.

Kate, simply dressed, is accompanied by her maid Pimple. Her simple dress led Marlow to believe that she is a barmaid in the inn. Every woman in the country wears simple dress in the evening and changes only when she visits or receives company. Also, Marlow did not look up at her face even once when she met him first as Kate Hardcastle. Also, Kate's face was hidden behind the bonnet. Therefore, he does not recognize her in her evening dress. Kate wishes to keep up that delusion. It is by keeping up the mistake she wishes to be seen, and that is no small advantage to a girl who brings her face to the market. By stooping to conquer she would make an acquaintance and victory gained over one who never addresses any but the wildest of her sex. Her chief aim is to take Marlow off his guard and examine his heart. Marlow enters whistling, happy to find himself away from the people of the house all alone. He muses that Miss Hardcastle is too grave and sentimental for him and she squints. Kate meets Marlow as a maid. The moment he looks at her, he wants to steal a kiss from her. He behaves the way Hastings had mentioned earlier about his behaviour in the company of women from the lower strata. He is unabashed with barmaids and others of the like. Marlow mentions he is a great favourite among ladies but he does not know what makes him so popular. At the Ladies Club in the town, a reference is made to a famous female coterie; he is called by the name Rattle. Telling his name Solomon, he flirts with Kate, mistaking her to be a bar maid. Offers to kiss her, salute her, to be at her service. He admits that cards, suppers, wine, and old women make him merry. Tries to hold her hand and kiss but fails and leaves.

Once again, Mr Hardcastle is shocked to see the impudence of the young man. But Kate wants to prove Marlow to be a modest man and wants to get a chance to convince her father of Marlow's modesty. She believes that he has only

*Oliver Goldsmith: She  
Stoops to Conquer*

## NOTES

## NOTES

the faults that will pass off with time, and the virtues that will improve with age, and hopes that her father forgives him.

This Act highlights the diverse views held by Mr Hardcastle and Kate about Marlow's character. It seems Kate and Mr Hardcastle are talking about two different people. With Mr Hardcastle, whom he believes to be an eccentric innkeeper, Marlow shows his unruly side. Knowing Kate to be a fine lady, however, Marlow remains reserved.

This Act further confirms the personality traits of Kate, Marlow and Tony. Kate takes pleasure in being obedient to her father. Marlow is modest and shy in the company of his own class and wild when with the barmaids. Tony shows his righteousness by giving the casket of jewels to Hastings and making arrangements for him to leave with Constance.

### Act IV

#### Summary

Mr Hardcastle receives a letter informing that Sir Charles Marlow will arrive shortly. Constance apprises Hastings of this information. The plans for elopement are made and Hastings wants to be out on their way to France as soon as possible because of the fear of getting caught since Charles Marlow recognizes him. He has given the jewels casket to Marlow. Marlow is a little confused about the casket. He has given it to Mrs Hardcastle to keep it secure and safe. Hastings is horrified to know that the jewels casket is in the possession of Mrs Hardcastle and decides to leave without it.

Enchanted by the barmaid, Marlow is unable to free himself of her thoughts. He also expresses his intense desire to be one with her. He is totally in awe of her personality. He regrets not being able to kiss her.

Mr Hardcastle is exasperated with Marlow and his servants. He tolerates Marlow only because he is his friend's son. Angrily Mr Hardcastle commands Marlow to leave his house with the drunken pack of his servants immediately. He has endured Marlow's insolence for more than four hours and still there seem to be no end to his immodesty. Marlow, on the contrary, not only refuses to leave but also claims to never have met with such impudence in his whole life before. Mr Hardcastle reveals that Sir Charles Marlow's letter made him believe Marlow to be a well-bred and modest man but he is no better than a coxcomb and a bully. Mr Hardcastle informs Marlow of his father's arrival anytime soon which leaves Marlow puzzled.

A conversation follows between Kate and Marlow. He wishes to confirm whether the place is an inn and she is a barmaid or not. Kate calls herself a poor relation of Mr Hardcastle to whom the mansion belongs. She only manages the household. Marlow is ashamed for thinking Kate to be a barmaid. He feels sorry

for his misbehaviour and for mistaking her simplicity for allurements. He expresses his feelings for Kate, thinking her to be a poor relation of Hardcastle, and that he is bewitched by her simplicity and he would be undone, if he stays any longer. Kate pretends to weep and Marlow calls it the first mark of tenderness he ever had from a modest woman. He is deeply touched. She is the only one from the family whom he would leave with reluctance. Owing to their different status Marlow cannot make her his wife.

Constance requests Tony to get the casket of jewels again; he refuses and informs her he has arranged for a horse for them to elope. Mrs Hardcastle arrives. Diggory, the servant brings a letter for Tony. Constance recognizes the handwriting, the letter is from Hastings. She tries to keep Mrs Hardcastle engaged so that their plan is not revealed. As Tony could not understand the handwriting, it is Mrs Harcastle who reads it, comes to know about their plan, and decides to send Constance to live with aunt Pedigree. She immediately prepares to leave for aunt Pedigree's house.

Hastings accuses Tony of disclosing the plan to his mother. Marlow blames Hastings for hiding the truth and not stopping him from the wrong act. Marlow tells Tony that it is because of his mischief that all here are in trouble and, hence, unhappy. All present on the stage are disappointed with the happenings.

### **Critical Analysis**

The mistaken identities and circumstances start unfolding. As Mr Hardcastle mentions Marlow's father, he begins to think of mistaking the mansion to be an inn. Kate tells him it is Mr Hardcastle's house. Marlow confesses to have feelings for Kate and Kate also reciprocates those feelings. Hastings plan to elope with Constance is also disclosed to Mrs Hastings.

The conversation between Marlow and Hastings also throws light on Marlow's opinion about women belonging to the low class. Hastings warns Marlow that he cannot rob a woman of his honour to which the reply comes that firstly, barmaid of an inn does not have any honour and secondly, there is nothing in this inn for which he cannot pay. He means to say that he will pay the barmaid to be with him. And if she has virtue, he should be the last man in the world that would attempt to corrupt it. The scenes also reveals Marlow's character a little more and his thoughts about women of lower class. Once again the class differences are highlighted and the necessity to be in relationship only with people of the same class is asserted. As Marlow says that if, he were alone in this world with no social obligations he could have married her. But the opinion of the world matters to him. According to Marlow, difference of birth, fortune and education has prevented him from marrying her. Kate has also fallen in love with Marlow and reiterates the title of the play that she will preserve the character to which she has stooped to conquer her love.

### **NOTES**

## Act V Scene I

### Summary

#### NOTES

Charles Marlow and Mr Hardcastle have come to know about Marlow's mistakes. Marlow possesses a fortune more than a competence already, and can want nothing but a good and virtuous girl to share and increase his happiness.

Marlow feels sorry for his misconduct. He apprises his father and Mr Hastings that he has not given Miss Hardcastle the slightest mark of his attachment or even the most distant hint to suspect him of affection. They have just had one interview, and that was formal, modest and uninteresting. The old men are unable to believe this statement. As he leaves, Kate joins the two old men. She admits that Marlow has professed of a lasting attachment and love, has said civil things to her, talked much of his want of merit, and her greatness. Old Marlow mentions his son's submissive nature and inability to have conversation with modest women. Kate suggests them to hide and see Marlow professing his love for her.

### Scene II

Scene II is set in the back garden. Tony tells Hastings that he took the ladies for a round and brought them back to the Hardcastle's house instead of taking them to aunt Pedigree's house. Moreover, Mrs Hardcastle falls into the pond. She does not know that it is her own house. She sees someone coming and Tony frightens her saying it is a highwayman. It is actually Mr Hardcastle, who has come listening to the cry for help. Anxious, she hides behind a tree. Tony convinces Mr Hardcastle there is no one around and his mother along with Constance is at aunt Pedigree's house. Mr Hardcastle is surprised that they have covered such a long journey in such a short time. Mrs Hardcastle, thinking the old man to be a highwayman, pleads for mercy to take all the money but spare her son. Recognizing the voice of his wife, Mr Hastings thinks she is out of her senses. Blinded by her fears, she is amazed to see Mr Hardcastle in a frightful place, far from home. Mr Hardcastle understood that Tony has played a prank on her. Mrs Hardcastle swears to teach Tony a lesson. Tony retorts that the whole parish is of the opinion that Mrs Hardcastle has spoiled her son so she should also bear the fruits of the same.

Constance is reluctant to elope and wishes to marry with the consent of everyone in the family and also get her fortune. Hastings tries to persuade her to elope, stay in love from the moment, let fortune perish. Love and contentment will increase their fortune beyond the monarch's revenue. Constance wishes to be prudent. She believes that hasty decisions taken in a moment of passion lead to repentance in the long run. She has decided to talk to Mr Harcastle to resolve the issue for he is compassionate and just. Hastings is apprehensive because Mr Hardcastle may have the will to relieve her but not the power to do so since Mrs Hardcastle is her guardian and fortune keeper.

### Scene III

*Oliver Goldsmith: She  
Stoops to Conquer*

Marlow admits to Kate (disguised as a poor relation) his inability to marry her. It agonizes him to be separated from her. Kate asks him to wait for a couple of more days and see his uneasiness subside. He confesses that he has already trifled too long with his heart. Now pride begins to surrender to his passion. The disparity of education and fortune, the anger of parents, and the contempt of his peers, begin to lose their ground. There is nothing that can restore him to himself except this painful effort of resolution. Kate, still playing the role of a poor relation, says his sufferings for her are of little value as they will soon be gone in a day or two once he leaves for his city. Soon, he will regret the feeling he harbours for her. She does not urge him to stay. Kate tells Marlow that her family and education is as good as Miss Hardcastle's family but they come to nothing if the family is not affluent. Acting sorry, she says she must remain contented with the slight approbation of credited merit. Kate says what began with indifference should also end with indifference. Any connection between them would appear mercenary on her part and imprudence on his part. She will never feel the confidence of being addressed by a secure admirer.

Marlow defends himself. He does not care for the fortune; it is her beauty at first sight that caught his attention. He likes spending time with her. He decides to stay and tell his father about her. He is sure that after seeing her, his father will not question about her class. Marlow will not repent any decision except that he did not understand her merit before and would like to atone for his past misconduct. Every moment reveals a new merit in her and increases his diffidence and confusion. Marlow kneels down and expresses his feelings to make her feel confident and secure.

Both the fathers, Charles Marlow and Mr Hastings, who were listening to the conversation hiding behind the screen, chide Marlow for wooing Miss Hardcastle in private but not accepting it before them. Marlow is surprised to hear that Kate is Mr Hardcastle's daughter. Kate pokes fun at him and asks which Marlow should she address, one who is a faltering gentleman, with looks on the ground, that speaks just to be heard, and hates hypocrisy; or the one who is loud, confident and keeps it up with Mrs. Mantrap, and old Miss Biddy Buckskin, till three in the morning. The two old men pardon Marlow for everything.

Mrs Hardcastle believes Hastings and Constance have eloped but Constance has not taken her fortune. Mr Hardcastle knows she cannot be so mercenary. Hastings and Constance enter the stage and announce they could not go without the consent of everyone. Hardcastle asks Tony whether he refuses to take Constance as his wife or not. Tony says that he has not come of age yet to pronounce this statement. Mr Hardcastle discloses the secret that Tony has come

### NOTES

## NOTES

of age three months ago and his wife asked him not to reveal this fact. Tony formally announces his refusal to make Constance his wife. Marlow and Kate reconcile and decide to have a merry morning.

### Critical Analysis

Themes of class, marriage and money are again reinforced in this Act. Marriages are about making bonds stronger, as the old men say, and this will further lead to union of families. To own wealth and fortune is vital to be respectable in the society. As Kate mentions being affluent is more important than to have good education and family. The fact that it is Mrs Hardcastle who is responsible for spoiling her son, everyone believes it, is once again fortified. Kate, who stooped to conquer, wins Marlow's heart as a woman of social class lesser than his own. That justifies the title of the play. Marlow not only expresses his love to her but also firmly decides to convince his father and make Kate (belonging to low class) as his wife going against all restrictions of class.

The Act ends with the announcement of the union of both sets of lovers and that too with the consent of the family members.

### 5.4.2 Epilogue

Epilogue one is spoken by the actress who played the part of Kate Hardcastle. She speaks in the person of a barmaid. It summarizes the action, hoping that the humorous tale of how Kate, who 'stooped to conquer' justifies the author's abandonment of sentimental comedy. She stooped to conquer and win a husband for herself without any aid from her fortunes. And Marlow falls in love with the simplicity of the barmaid and not the fashionable Kate and her fortunes. She begins and ends the epilogue with the plea to obtain the appreciation of the audience for the play. She narrates the five stages of the barmaid's life. The structure of the epilogue corresponds with the lines spoken by Jacques in *As You Like It*.

The second epilogue is spoken by J. Cradock, who plays the role of Tony Lumpkin. This epilogue reiterates the theme of the play that assumptions of money and class should not matter much to anyone. He says that now he has renounced Miss Constance and will soon start receiving a thousand pounds a year. He will go to London since there people have some regard for the innate qualities of a person, no matter what he inherits. He will show the world what good taste is. He will set new fashions and prove it to the London gentry that they too are gentlemen.

### Critical Analysis of the Setting

The play is set in eighteenth century England. The play is set in a country side, away from the urban London society. The place of action is in and around Mr Hardcastle's mansion. One of the scenes is set in the alehouse called The Three Pigeons, Tony's favourite hangout.

### 5.4.3 Themes and Characters

*Oliver Goldsmith: She  
Stoops to Conquer*

Let us now study the prominent themes of the play.

#### **Class**

The play showcases the reality of class distinctions and class snobbery. People belonging to the upper class are keen to find suitable partners from the same class for their children. Young men from good families might consider sleeping with a barmaid, but would not normally consider marrying one.

Nevertheless, Goldsmith views class as more of a psychological construct, class prejudices are the product of social and psychological conditioning. The perspectives of the characters are influenced by the class to which they belong. For instance, Tony Lumpkin is a squire's son and like his biological father, prefers alehouse companions and country folk to people of his own class. He does not spend much time with any of his family members too. He is the only one who enjoys the company of low class people. Another example is that of Marlow. He is terrified of the respectability of women of his class like Kate Hardcastle. When he confronts Kate as a barmaid, Marlow is sexually interested in her, and gets emotionally involved when he comes to know that Kate is a poor relative of Mr. Hardcastle. But Marlow shows inability to marry a woman outside his class. Kate is the same person who plays different roles, and it is Marlow who invests those roles with social and psychological value. Kate, in disguise, cuts across the social boundaries and stoops to conquer love. Marlow's attitude towards Kate Hardcastle is another example of the vital role played by class in eighteenth century England. His behaviour throughout the play is natural and genuine.

#### **Inheritance**

The theme of inheritance is a common one which was largely found in the plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth century England. In these plays, the fortunes of young men and women were often controlled by their guardians. If they married without the consent of their guardian these young people would lose their fortunes. Continuing with the tradition, Goldsmith also sets the same condition for Miss Constance, niece of Mrs Hardcastle. She has to marry the man of his aunt's choice or she will have to part with the jewels that her uncle has left for her in his will. And it is to save Tony's future that Mrs Hardcastle wishes Miss Constance to marry Tony.

#### **Money**

Money is a practical need of life. Even amidst emotions, it is important to think of money. Kate, when playing the role of a poor relative to Mr Hardcastle, mentions to Marlow that men of their class marry women not for love but for their fortunes. Even Constance is reluctant to leave her casket of jewels behind. The characters are judged on the basis of lack or access to money. Marlow would hide his emotions for a woman who belongs to the lower class because his father would not accept

#### **NOTES**

## NOTES

this and, hence, will not give his approval for marriage. Even Mr Hardcastle is treated with disrespect till the moment he is thought to be the innkeeper. Mrs Hardcastle wants Tony to marry Constance for her fortune. It is Hastings who is ready to elope with Constance without her casket of jewels. He needs only her companionship and not her money. Tony is another character who does not care for money. He refuses to marry Constance because he does not like her. It does not matter to him if he loses the inherited wealth. Nonetheless, he can afford extravagance because he has access to wealth.

### Love

The theme of love runs throughout the play. Hastings accompanies Marlow only for his love for Constance. It does not matter to him whether Constance is able to get her money from Mrs Hastings or not. All he wishes for is to get married to her. This is the reason he decides to run away to France where love marriages are accepted.

Kate makes it clear in the beginning of the play that she would not marry someone whom she does not love. She has, therefore, 'stooped' from her status to make Marlow fall in love with her. This way she obediently respects her father's decision as well as fulfils her own desire to marry a man for love.

Mr and Mrs Hardcastle also share a bond of love that is strong and resilient. It is their second marriage. Mrs Hardcastle is loud, pretentious, greedy, a fashion freak and eccentric. She is the one who is responsible for Tony's presumptuousness. Mr Hardcastle loves the lady and treats her with all regards. He loves her with all her faults and attends her gently and in good humour. Mr Hardcastle is a loving and an affectionate father to both his obedient daughter Kate and his boisterous step son Tony. Mrs Hardcastle loves her son so much that she covers up all his mischief. In order to protect Tony's future she wants Constance and Tony to get married even when she know they do not love each other. It is believed that Mrs Hardcastle's love and pampering has spoiled Tony.

### City vs Countryside

Mr Hardcastle views town manners as pretentious. The conversation between Mr and Mrs Hardcastle and their respective tastes present a contrast between the hustling bustling life of London and its people and the serene, countryside and the simplicity of the rustics. Mr Hardcastle criticizes the vanities and affectation of the town, lamenting the loss of traditional values as the people of this age are devoid of sense and discretion. He believes whoever goes to London only comes back with fopperies and affectations. In his song in the alehouse, Tony praises the countryside and he is the one who enjoys the company of his rustic friends.

Kate provides a combination of being refined and simple at the same time. It is Marlow who praises her for having a refined simplicity. Having lived in town, she is able to appreciate the values of both sides of life and can find happiness in appreciating the contradictions that exist between them.

## Characters

Oliver Goldsmith: *She Stoops to Conquer*

Mr Hardcastle, an old fashioned romantic, is a traditionalist who loves the past times, old manners, old books and old wine, and a rustic way of life. He is critical of the fashionable London society, which he believes, breeds vanity and affectation. He is a caring husband and an affectionate father. As a husband he loves his second wife with all her faults and treats her with his usual gentle good humour. As a stepfather, he is only gently critical of Tony. Mr Hardcastle understands Tony better than his mother and gives a more realistic appraisal of Tony's character. He is a doting father who wants his daughter to be happy in marriage and, therefore, firm in his decision to find a compatible match for Kate, but of course with her daughter's consent. He believes in class hierarchy.

Mrs Dorothy Hardcastle is an admirer of the fashionable London society. She yearns for it. Her first dialogues with her husband express her longing for a trip to the town. She takes lively interest in fashion. To accommodate the latest fashions she tries to look younger than her age. Her love for Tony, her son has spoilt him. Being a doting mother, she is not ready to admit any faults of Tony. In her selfish pursuit, she wants Miss Neville to marry Tony because of her inheritance and social standing. She is not at all concerned whether the two love each other or not.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

5. Who wrote the Prologue of the play *She Stoops to Conquer*?
6. How does Scene I Act I of the play *She Stoops to Conquer* begin?
7. What is the setting of Act I Scene II?
8. Why does Mrs Hardcastle want Constance to marry Tony?
9. Whom does Mr Hardcastle want his daughter Kate to marry?
10. How does Marlow's treatment of ladies of low class and high class differ?

## 5.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The prominent works of Oliver Goldsmith are *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *The Good Natur'd Man*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*.
2. *She Stoops to Conquer* was published in 1773.
3. Marlow is the hero of the play *She Stoops to Conquer*.
4. Sentimental comedy is a genre of the eighteenth century literature in which comedy is aimed at producing tears rather than laughter.

## NOTES

5. The Prologue of *She Stoops to Conquer* was written by Mr David Garrick, a well-known actor and producer of his times.
6. Scene I Act I of the play *She Stoops to Conquer* begins with the entry of Mr and Mrs Hardcastle.
7. Scene II of Act I is set in the alehouse, The Three Pigeons.
8. Mrs Hardcastle wants Constance to marry Tony because Constance Neville has a fortune to her name. Hence, through this marriage Tony's future would be secured.
9. Mr Hardcastle wants his daughter Kate to marry his friend's son Marlow.
10. Marlow is affable and boisterous with serving women and barnmaids. He can say the finest things to the barmaid and the college bed maker but not a word of it to women of high class. He is extremely shy and lacks confidence in front of women of high class.

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## 5.6 SUMMARY

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- It is believed Goldsmith was born in 1728 in Ireland. His father was a poor clergyman in a church of Ireland. Due to meagre financial resources, Goldsmith struggled for education and later for his livelihood.
- Goldsmith received his degree in 1749. In 1752, he moved to Edinburgh to study medicine but left it without a degree. From 1753–56, he travelled across the British continent.
- Oliver Goldsmith was a poet, a novelist, a playwright and an essayist.
- Goldsmith wrote numerous poems like *Edwin and Angelina*, *The Traveller*, *The Deserted Village*, *Retaliation* and *The Haunch of Venison*. His significant plays include *The Good Natur'd Man*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *The Grumbler* and a novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*.
- Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) is seen as the first successful reaction to the sentimental comedy initiated by Steele.
- Sentimental comedy was developed in response to the perceived immorality of the Restoration theatre. It was founded on the belief that man is innately good and that he can be softened through tears that flow from contemplation on undeserved suffering.
- Act I presents a contrast between the characters of Mr and Mrs Hardcastle. While, Mrs Hardcastle has an interest in the London society and she takes a lively interest in the fashions of the day, Mr Hardcastle, on the other hand, is a traditional man.
- Act I Scene II highlights Tony's character. Tony is happy drinking and merry-making. He asserts that he chooses his company. No one dictates him. He is his own master.

- The servants' scene in Act II once again emphasizes the contrast between the low lives of the rustics to that of the gentry. The gap between the expectations of polished behaviour and what the servants can manage adds humour to the scene.
- Marlow admits being shy and reserved with ladies of his own class, confident and boisterous with women of low class, and stating the reasons for such behaviour. He becomes uncomfortable and uneasy talking to a lady from the same class.
- Act III further confirms the personality traits of Kate, Marlow and Tony. Kate takes pleasure in being obedient to her father. Marlow is modest and shy in the company of his own class and wild when with the barmaids. Tony shows his righteousness by giving the casket of jewels to Hastings and making arrangements for him to leave with Constance.
- In Act IV Marlow confirms that difference of birth, fortune and education has prevented him from marrying Kate (woman of low class). Kate has also fallen in love with Marlow and reiterates the title of the play that she will preserve the character to which she has stooped to conquer her love.
- Themes of class, marriage and money are again reinforced in Act V. Marriages are about making bonds stronger, as the old men say, and this will further lead to union of families.
- The Act ends with the announcement of the union of both sets of lovers and that too with the consent of the family members.
- The play showcases the reality of class distinctions and class snobbery. People belonging to the upper class are keen to find suitable partners from the same class for their children.
- The theme of inheritance is a common one which was largely found in the plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth century England.
- The theme of love runs throughout the play. Hastings accompanies Marlow only for his love for Constance. It does not matter to him whether Constance is able to get her money from Mrs Hastings or not.

## NOTES

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### 5.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Sizar system:** This system appears to have begun in the late sixteenth century in Cambridge and Dublin. This system allowed poor students to study in lieu of the work they did as servants for the tutors.
- **Foible:** It is a minor weakness or eccentricity in someone's character.
- **Solus:** It is alone or unaccompanied (used especially as a stage direction).
- **Coterie:** It refers to a small group of people with shared interests or tastes, especially one that is exclusive of other people.

- **Fop:** This term refers to a man who is excessively vain and concerned about his dress, appearance, and manners.

## NOTES

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### 5.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short-Answer Questions

1. Prepare a brief biographical sketch of Oliver Goldsmith.
2. Summarize the play *She Stoops to Conquer*.
3. Write a short note on the Prologue and Epilogue of the play *She Stoops to Conquer*.
4. Briefly summarize the role of Kate Hardcastle in the play.

#### Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyse *She Stoops to Conquer* as a sentimental comedy.
2. Discuss the title of the play *She Stoops to Conquer*.
3. Critically analyse the theme of wealth and inheritance as presented in the play.
4. Evaluate the characteristics of Marlow's personality.

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### 5.9 FURTHER READINGS

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- Baugh, Albert Croll. 1967. *A Literary History of England*, 2nd ed. New York, USA: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
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## UNIT 6    *THE BIRTHDAY PARTY BY* *HAROLD PINTER*

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*The Birthday Party by*  
*Harold Pinter*

### NOTES

#### Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Background of the Author
- 6.3 Reception of *The Birthday Party*
- 6.4 Summary and Critical Comments
  - 6.4.1 Act I
  - 6.4.2 Act II
  - 6.4.3 Act III
- 6.5 The Theme of Protest and Subversion
  - 6.5.1 Language, Silence and Pause
  - 6.5.2 Language and Structure: Dashes and Pauses
- 6.6 Society and the Individual
- 6.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 6.8 Summary
- 6.9 Key Words
- 6.10 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 6.11 Further Readings

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### 6.0 INTRODUCTION

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*The Birthday Party* was Harold Pinter's first commercial production as a playwright. It was a full-length play. He started to write this after his work as an actor, in a theatrical tour. Those were the times during which, his lifestyle was in 'filthy insane digs' (as described by him). Later, he described his acquaintance with 'a great bulging scrag of a woman' and a man who lived in the sordid place. This cheap place of living became a prototype for a shabby boarding house for the play, the woman and her tenant, the models. It also housed the characters of Meg Boles and Stanley Webber.

His previous piece of work, *The Room*, was a play that had a single act. In *The Room*, Pinter's work was based on themes and motifs that he had also planned to use for *The Birthday Party*, in addition to a few of his subsequent plays. Part of these themes are the failure of language to function as a satisfactory tool of communication, the use of place in the form of a sanctum that is desecrated by intimidating impostors and strange uncertainties that shroud or warp fact.

This complete full-length play was also directed by Pinter. Its premier show was launched in Cambridge, England, at the Arts Theatre, on 28 April 1958. It achieved a lot of success there and also in its tour to Oxford. However, when Peter Wood ordered for it be moved to London and then be opened at the Lyric

## NOTES

Opera House in Hammersmith, it was reviewed harshly. This resulted in it closing down within a week. Of all the reviewers, Harold Hobson of the Sunday Times was the only one who felt that the play was promising. In his view, Pinter's work was very original and was 'the most disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London.' However, the timing of his review was not sufficiently quick to benefit the production in any way. The show had already stopped due to feeble spectatorship, which comprised one matinee audience of six and continuously aggressive reviews. A large number of critics were of the opinion that Pinter was struggling in darkness and was negatively affected of Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*), Eugene Ionesco (*The Bald Prima Donna*) and other avant-garde writers.

Soon after, Pinter was awestruck when in London the play was given a thoroughly ruthless treatment by critics. However, he was aware that this was the first instance when he had received negative reviews and it failed to dim his passion for writing. Actually, his work became the dramatist's first full-length 'comedy of menace'. A group of protagonists held Pinter's status as a leading playwright who thought ahead of his time. The productions that followed were reviewed more positively. These included the play's 1964 revival at London's Aldwych Theatre and its 1968 Broadway premier at the Booth Theatre in New York. By the mid-1960s, the growing admiration of drama and the success of other plays by Pinter, including *The Dumbwaiter* (1959) and *The Caretaker* (1960), had made up for negativity directed at *The Birthday Party*. Then, *The Birthday Party* gained reputation as a classic in the genre of drama, a genre that was defined as Theatre of the Absurd by literary critic Martin Esslin.

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## 6.1 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the life of Harold Pinter
- Comment on the works of Harold Pinter
- Summarize and critically comment on Acts I, II and III of *The Birthday Party*
- Discuss the theme of protest and subversion

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## 6.2 BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR

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Harold Pinter was born in Hackney, in a neighbourhood of working people in the east end of London. His father was a tailor. His parents were Jews, who were born in England.

During his childhood, Pinter was close to his mother. However, he was not comfortable with his father, who was a domineering person. When World War II

broke out, Pinter was moved from the city to Cornwall; he suffered a great deal of trauma when he was separated from his parents. His literary works comprised twenty-nine plays, which included: *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming* and *Betrayal*. He had twenty-one screenplays to his credit. These comprised *The Servant*, *The Go-Between*, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, etc.

Pinter also directed twenty-seven theatre productions, which included *James Joyce's Exiles*, *David Mamet's Oleanna*, seven plays by Simon Gray and many of his own plays including his latest, *Celebration*, paired with his first, *The Room at The Almeida Theatre, London in the spring of 2000*. Pinter began to write plays in 1957. He had spoken about his idea about a play to a friend who was an employee of the drama department at Bristol University. This friend found the idea to be so good that he asked Pinter to send him the play. The only hurdle was that for the university to perform the play, the script had to be prepared in one week. Pinter replied to his friend's letter asking him to reject the whole idea. Later, he sat down and wrote the play in four days.

His hard work resulted in a one-act play which was titled *The Room*. This play had a large number of constituents that would portray Pinter's subsequent works, namely routine circumstances which progressively featured menace and mystery. These circumstances deliberately omitted the justification or motive for action. Further, in the same year, Pinter built his style in another one-act, *The Dumb Waiter*. This was about two contract killers who worked for a secret organization. They are assigned to kill an unknown person. In this second play, Pinter introduced humour, generally in the form of vibrant trivial conversation. The increasing nervousness of both the men is concealed within this humour. Their conversation on whether it would be correct to say 'light the kettle' or 'light the gas' is full of crazy humour and terrific absurdity. The debut performance of *The Dumb Waiter* was at the Hampstead Theatre Club in London, in 1960. Pinter continued writing many absurdist works of art. These comprised *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming*, *Betrayal*, *Old Times* and *Ashes to Ashes*. He even composed several radio plays and many books of poetry. His screenplays comprise *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, *The Last Tycoon* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. Many awards were conferred upon him. These awards included the *Berlin Film Festival Silver Bear*, *BAFTA* awards, the *Hamburg Shakespeare Prize*, the *Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or*, the *Commonwealth Award* and the *Nobel Prize for Literature*. His rare approach and knack for building suspense and thrill without being flamboyant earned him utmost respect among the playwrights of his day. Harold Pinter passed away on 24 December 2008, when he was 78. He had been battling cancer since a long time. He is survived by his wife, Lady Antonia Fraser.

### Important Events

Harold Pinter was born on 10 October 1930. His father's name was Jack and that of his mother was Frances. He first experienced war in 1939. This was World

*The Birthday Party by  
Harold Pinter*

### NOTES

## NOTES

War II. The early times spent by him at Hackney Downs Grammar School are significant because:

- He came in contact with an English teacher, Joe Brearley.
- He portrayed the character of Macbeth in an amateur school production, which attracted reviews in the *News Chronicle*.

These events took place from 1944 to 1947, which was the most receptive age for Pinter. Thereafter, he enrolled himself in the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, during the autumn of 1948. In the early years of his life two incidents stood out distinctly, his deep interest in English as a language and drama as an art and his power of resistance. When Pinter was selected for National Service, he refused to enlist and declared himself as a conscientious objector. This incident took place in October 1948. As a result of this, in 1949 he was summoned before the military tribunal and arrested and fined twice.

Following this, he quit the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and focused completely on reading and writing. His career got boosted with small roles on BBC radio. In 1950, his first professional performance came in the form of *Focus on Football Pools* and two of his poems also got published in the August number of *Poetry London*. At one point of time Harold Pinter got completely pre-occupied with learning the art of speech. He attended two terms at the Central School of Speech and Drama, from January to July 1951. This was the time that gave Pinter the break that his career was in need of. Anew Mc Masterto engaged him to play Shakespeare and other classical drama in Ireland. For six months Pinter was engaged in acting, writing, reading and consolidating his position in the world of literature and drama. He launched on his first book, *Dwarf*, with simultaneously shifting between dramatic companies. His stage name became David Baron and he married Vivien Merchant, who was his co-star in *Bournemouth*. This was on 14 September 1956. Since 1957, after the production of Pinter's 'The Room' at Bristol University Drama Department, he never looked behind. Since this production, Pinter has been played all over Europe, in the United States and in Russia too. Pinter was the actor, director and producer for his own plays and also for those written by others. Films were made, based on his plays and his association with production and acting on BBC, Radio as well as television, had been a close one. His was astoundingly versatile.

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### 6.3 RECEPTION OF *THE BIRTHDAY PARTY*

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When *The Birthday Party* came to fore in 1958, all critics united against it. The play shocked reviewers, when they first saw it in London. 'What all this means only Mr Pinter knows' (Manchester *Guardian Review*, 29/5/1958). The majority

of senior critics inclusive of Kenneth Tynan spoke on the play. Tynan defined it as ‘a clever fragment grown dropsically, with symbolic content, a piece.... full of those paranoid overtures that seem inseparable from much of the avant-garde drama’. This observation featured in *The Observer* of 5/6/1960. After two years, Tynan, accepted his failure to recognize the quality and promise of Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*.

Harold Hobson stood out against the flow of opposing criticism; he acknowledged the dramatic power of Pinter, announcing, ‘Mr Pinter, on the evidence of his work, possesses the most original, disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London’. Herber spotted a unique vagueness and unconformity in Pinter’s plots. The feature which people regarded as ambiguity was the highlight of Pinter’s success and charm. Catherine Itzin and Simon Trussler, who worked in close association with Pinter, as directors of the production of his play recollect their first response to Pinter, ‘Michael Godron sent me *The Birthday Party* when it was first going to be done. I didn’t know who Harold Pinter was but I liked the play immensely’.

Peter Raby has traced change in the reactions of the public and the critics towards Pinter. To begin with the response of the academia, Raby says, ‘If Pinter was embraced warmly and relatively early by the academia, he had been treated a little more erratically by theatre critics. *The Birthday Party* foxed them in the 1950s with the striking exception of Harold Hobson, who had the benefit of seeing *The Room* in Bristol. *The Birthday Party* was a new type of theatrical literature that was a challenge for the director, actors and the audience. Audience at Cambridge and Oxford were not affected by any critical lead and their response was positive. As years passed by, the reviewer’s response got adjusted to both, early Pinter and successive shifts and developments in his work.

Batty remembers that *The Caretaker*, received later in 1960s, was received very positively. It was portrayed as a fascinating and uncompromising work of art and was an indication of a kind of masterpiece. He says that the reason that responses to *The Birthday Party* earlier were negative was the shock with which it was received. The shocks stemmed from its allegorical structure and enigmatic characteristics. He also remembers that *The Birthday Party*, which signified Pinter’s first major entry into the theatres of London West Ends, was a recipient of critical backing and snobbishness.

### Check Your Progress

1. Name any two plays written by Harold Pinter.
2. How was ‘*The Birthday Party*’ treated, when it appeared in 1958?

*The Birthday Party by  
Harold Pinter*

### NOTES

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## 6.4 SUMMARY AND CRITICAL COMMENTS

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Let us analyse each of the acts in detail.

### NOTES

#### 6.4.1 Act I

The play opens in a living room set-up of a house, in a seaside town. The room is almost without any furniture or any artificial look. As seen by us, the room has a table and chairs and opens into the kitchen. The kitchen has a hatch, which Meg, the lady of the house, uses not only for transferring things but also to converse. The first scene introduces the following two characters, Petey, the husband and Meg, his wife. She talks to Petey through the hatch, as he comes into the room, sits on the chair and starts read the paper that he has got with him. The start of talks between Meg and Petey is about cornflakes, fried bread and the news in the paper. This conversation is pretty dull and routine. They live in harmony and are not persistent in their thinking. The blending of the difference between the awful food they have and the silence of serving it, is funny. Questions from Meg like, 'Are you back?' and 'You got your paper?' indicate that she is willing to start a conversation. She has seen Petey walk in and read the paper, still she begins questioning, although aware that he will not be answering them; the conversation is as routine as cornflakes and bread. Petey's answers to Meg are generally in the form of 'yes, the cornflakes is nice; outside is nice'. The next question from Meg asking if Stanley was up, also lacks relevance as she is aware that Petey has not seen him, since, he had just walked in: Meg tries to catch Petey's attention, she desires his appreciation of the breakfast served by her and shows no hesitation in appreciating him for having read some nice bits from the paper, yesterday.

Her ignorance in comparison to Petey is evident with her 'Oh!', when he tells her that 'it gets light later in winter'. When she picks up socks to mend them and other simple chores carried out by both of them confirms how simple the family is. The first scene shows some of the methods that Pinter uses for creating the atmosphere of his choice. According to John Russell Brown, the play had succeeded because of the language and silence used by Pinter. 'The play starts with silence and the twice repeated question of Meg, who is far behind the stage is answered by Petey only in line 6.' Meg's initial three questions sounded repetitive at firsts. However, progressive changes to the tone disclose their actual motive.

Meg shows that she is curious about the name of the girl, who has given birth to a baby. She also exhibits her immature worry at her having a baby girl. Her wish to have a little boy is also evident. Her way of conversing makes her an amiable comic character. In the meanwhile, Meg and Petey have talked about Stanley, who lives with them and whom Meg is concerned about. It is worthy to consider Nigel Alexander's observations about their simple household:

'The opening sequence opens a gap between the aspirations of the characters and their behaviour that is maintained in increasingly painful fashion until the end of the play.... What it establishes is a domestic routine of almost killing boredom yet

## NOTES

Meg's enquiries about the cornflakes and her interest in the girl baby that the newspaper announces has been born to Lady Mary Splatt indicate great expectations that have somehow withstood the withering of age and the staling of custom. One of the reasons that she sounds like a silly old woman is that her vocabulary is still that of a bride enjoying providing breakfast for her husband and looking forward to the baby that she hopes will be a boy. Her unquenchable folly and Petey's resigned acceptance of her good intentions have a quality of heroism, which survives even the laughter of the audience.'

Petey says that two men came to him on the beach, the night before, to ask if they could stay in their house for two days. When Meg asks what he had told them, he says that he said nothing and that they will be coming again to find out. The repetitive questions and short answers indicate Pinter's manipulation of language as he wills. Meg's anxiety and avid desire to be socially approved are evident in the conversation that follows:

**Meg:** Are they coming?

**Petey:** Well, they said they would

**Meg:** Had they heard about us, Petey?

**Petey:** They must have done.

**Meg:** Yes, they must have done. They must have heard this was a very good boarding house. It is. This house is on the list.

Irrespective of the fact, it is obvious that Meg wants the house to be on the list. She also fantasizes of succeeding as an enterprising boarding house owner. The irony is visible when it is known that there is no one besides Stanley Webber who is staying at the guest house. 'The house on the list' also has other implications. Meg is prepared for visitors. She has room ready for them. This was not expected because earlier, there were no guests at the boarding house and Meg had no clue of them either. Her willingness for Goldberg and McCann also shows that the house is destined for what follows. Meg then says, that she was going to wake Stanley. Her words show her concern for him. When Petey talks about a show, coming to the town, she immediately thinks of Stanley. She reacts that Stanley could have been in it, had it been on the pier. When Petey tells her that Stanley had no role to play in it because it was a show without dancing or singing, she is completely shocked. How could a show be without singing or dancing?

Meg had liked to hear Stanley playing the Piano. As she remembers Stanley, she decides to call him down. Petey asks if she had taken him a cup of tea and if he had drunk. This shows that this is Meg's daily routine, so is her routing of waking him up. Her style of calling and warning sufficiently establish a deeper affection in Meg for Stanley, than a landlady would generally have.

**Petey:** Did he drink it?

**Meg:** I made him. I stood there till he did. I am going to call him. Stan! Stanny! Stan! I'm coming up to fetch you if you don't come down! I'm coming up! I'm going to count three! One! Two! Three! I'm coming to get you.

## NOTES

Finally, when Meg reaches Stanley's room, she exhibits no formality. Stanley's shouts and Meg's laughter inform us of her being informally physical. (When she returns, she is breathless and arranges her hair). Petey has a quiet disposition and would never rebuke Meg; he greets Stanley with a good morning and remains calm all the while. The character of Stanley is unsuccessful, unshaven, undisciplined and shabbily dressed. He is wearing a pyjama jacket and glasses. It is not easy to judge Meg's feelings for Stanley. She reproaches him all the while and he is impudent with his negative responses.

**Meg:** So he has come down at last, has he? He's come down at last for his breakfast. But he doesn't deserve any, does he Petey? Did you sleep well?

**Stanley:** I didn't sleep at all.

**Meg:** You did not sleep at all? Did you hear that Petey? Too tired to eat your breakfast, I suppose? Now you eat up those cornflakes like a good boy. Go on.

Meg reprimands him like a child. Stanley teases her like a friend.

**Meg:** What are the cornflakes like, Stan?

**Stanley:** Horrible.

Meg is disgusted. Petey had praised the same flakes some time back. Even the advertisement said that they were revitalizing.

When Stanley recommends that he go to the second course, Meg instantly responds. Noted that when Meg criticizes Stanley, she always addresses him in the third person, as 'he', even when she is talking to him. The dialogue between Stanley and Meg has a very delicate comedy, griping you though the situations and the characters are dull.

**Stanley:** No breakfast. All night long I have been dreaming about this breakfast.

**Meg:** I thought you said you didn't sleep.

**Stanley:** Day dreaming. All night long.

He cautions Meg that he would go and have breakfast at one of the elegant hotels on the front. Her instant response is that he wouldn't get a better breakfast there.

Petey gives no opinion about food, weather or people. When Stanley questions him about the weather, his simple response is that there was a good breeze blowing, without calling it cold or warm. He supports Stanley when Meg refuses to give him breakfast and goes back to work, without tea or any word of complaint. Stanley criticizes sour milk and holds Meg responsible for Petey going away without having tea.

The conversation between Stanley and Meg is pleasant and affectionate.

The scene where Stanley and Meg are alone reveals a bit of their relationship. Nigel Alexander describes it as normal concern assorted with Meg's sexual awareness of him as a man.

‘What is unusual is the use of this comedy to provide information. This information helps the audience to predict the relationship between Meg and Stanley before his appearance. Her frustrated maternal sexuality is clear, dangerously unstable and likely to explode. Stanley’s frantic flare-up has been predicted although its form will be unexpected’.

Stanley carries on rebuking Meg. He even taunts her about the boarding house.

**Stanley:** Visitors! Do you know how many visitors you have had since I have been here? **Meg:** How many?

**Stanley:** One.

**Meg:** Who?

**Stanley:** Me! I’m your visitor.

The sentence from Meg is a significant repetition of the house being ‘on the list.’ Meg’s does not have to try to draw Stanley’s attention to her. It is natural. Her objection to Stanley using the word ‘succulent’ for the bread, suggests her own physical properties, conveying that he could not reach for her. She was married and Stanley had to speak discreetly; yet her remark ‘you’re bad’ sounded more loving and indicative.

The following conversation discloses a clandestine nearness, not seen before. Meg ruffles Stanley’s hair as she passes, while Stanley throws her arm away. However, immediately after rebuking her, Stanley admits his dependence on her by saying, ‘I don’t know what I’d do without you Meg. You don’t deserve it though.’ Then he says ‘Get out of it. You succulent old washing bag.’

**Meg:** I’m not! And it isn’t your place to tell me if I am!

**Stanley:** And it isn’t your place to come into a man’s bedroom and wake him up.

These lines show how Stanley was woken up by Meg. Meg’s is not satisfied with only her housekeeping and cooking being praised. She desires to be courted and pursued too. She wants Stanley to praise the cup of tea and also say that she was desirable. She ignores Stanley’s attempts to oppose her and she tries to get him to respond. Try to get the hidden meaning of the following conversation.

**Meg:** Stanley! Don’t you like your cup of tea of the morning- the one I bring you?

(and later)

**Meg:** (shyly) Am I really succulent?

When Stanley says that he would prefer her to a cold in the nose, she dares him to do that.

**Meg:** You’re just saying that.

Stanley’s declining patience and Meg’s increasing sensuality ultimately ends with Stanley’s eruption of disgust. He discards Meg’s tea as horrible. Obviously, he is tired with Meg’s overtures. He suddenly becomes a formal guest and reminds her that he was only a boarder.

*The Birthday Party by  
Harold Pinter*

## NOTES

## NOTES

**Stanley:** (violently) Look why don't you get this place cleared up! It's a pigsty. And another thing, what about my room? It needs sweeping. It needs papering. I need a new room.

**Meg:** (Sensual, stroking his arm) Oh! Stan, that's a lovely room. I've had some lovely afternoons there.

Stanley irritatingly recoils from her. He goes out and quickly comes back with a cigarette. Meg continuously pursues Stanley erotically. Stanley's anger is clear when she asks for a cigarette and tickles the back of his neck. The sinister inclination of the guests, whom Meg refers to, is clear as she announces their chances of coming. Stanley's fear of being found and hunted down is clear when he does not want to believe Meg. He is also anxious to know their names and more about them. Stanley seems to know them when he wants to keep them away from the house. His nervousness is extreme when he asks, 'why didn't they come last night, if they were coming?' It was possible that he was temporarily relieved thinking that they may not come at all.

When he addresses Meg as Mrs Boles his breakdown is evident. He becomes weak and all his responses are grunts. He groans, falls forward and holds his head with his hands.

Meg is kind and skillful with Stanley. She commends his Piano skills and coaxes him to play it again. She tries comic, when he is depressed and sad. Mark Batty believes that Stanley's fears are related to some guilt of his past life, which he is evading. As Meg and Stanley talk about his past, we know about his career as a pianist and about an aborted concert. Surprisingly during this conversation,

Stanley is so much affected by the fear of the two mysterious men coming to his safe haven.

As Stanley is intrigued by the new visitors, we wonder what was troubling him. Meg fears Stanley going away.

**Meg:** But you wouldn't have to go away if you got a job, would you?  
You could play the piano on the pier.

His past success and failure are connected with his piano skills. Stanley's reference to his career as a pianist is both, comic and pathetic. The drama lies in the sequence in which Stanley makes these statements. Later Meg, says that she enjoyed watching him play the piano, she repeats his story about the concert and is funny in getting the details wrong. She dents status still further when she gives him a toy drum for his birthday.

Stanley's daydream of his success in the past can be considered tragic, because now it is lost. Nigel Alexander finds Stanley's frenzied outburst logical to Meg and his relationship with his own parents. 'His relationship with his parents has been uneasy. As he talks of his 'great success' (the concert at Lower Edmonton). 'My father nearly came down to hear me. Well I dropped him a card anyway. But I don't think he could make it, No I lost the address that was it.'

## NOTES

Surely, he does not want to recognize himself as the son and lover of Meg's desire. His fury has always been part of his history. Stanley has no precise answers to Meg's questions. He has no specific reply about the place and payment. 'At Berlin, it is a fabulous salary and all found. Then to Constantinople, Zagreb, Vladivostok, it is world tour with flying visits to what's its name. What is the name is the question.' Stanley keeps Meg spell bound by the narration his concert at Lower Edmonton. Everyone had champagne that night, the whole lot of them. So far, Stanley's ascension suggests a rise, towards a throne, but this is immediately followed by a fall. Stanley talks of being crowned the King of Artists and then, a victim of a conspiracy. Stanley's father could not see the great splendour and adoration. Was it because the father did not turn up? Was there any impact of his father's absence? Why did Stanley initially say that he had sent him a card when he had lost his address? Did he even have the address or was there no contact between them, before the concert. There are no answers to these questions, still the play is enjoyed.

Stanley now confides in Meg. He wants to talk about their bad treatment. He was appointed to play in another concert, of which he does not remember the location. The space is now vague and unidentified. When he went to play, the place was deserted. They wanted to subdue Stanley. He hates the whole thing; he wants to know their identity to settle his score with them. He tells Jack that he can collect that information, but we are not told who that Jack is.

Stanley's coarse words to Meg, 'You're just an old piece of rock cake.' and her cracking words of fear suggest a threat. Meg's entreating words 'Don't you go away, Stan. You stay here, you'll be better off. You stay with your old Meg', are words of concern as well as fear for Stanley. Stanley stubbornly rejects his fear, about the visitors who were supposed to arrive, or any enemies of the past.

His joke about their arrival today, with a wheel barrow is strange. It diverts our attention away from the men who are coming. The suspense persists though Stanley has tried to nullify Meg's fear.

Lulu comes when Meg is getting ready for her shopping. Lulu is a neighbour and part of the extended family of Meg and Petey. We find out that she had bought something that was kept a secret. All through Mrs Boles and Lulu's conversation, Stanley sidles to the door, trying to listen to what they say.

The conversation between Lulu and Stanley after Meg's departure is informal but not simple. Lulu's remark that the room was stifling gets an absurd response from Stanley when he says that he had sanitized it that morning. Stanley carries on cheating and baffling people with small lies. His story to Lulu about being at the sea at half-past six in the morning, before his breakfast, was a lie. Stanley knows that Lulu knows about his lies and Lulu knows that Stanley was aware of it.

Lulu's nearness with the Boles family is ascertained when she enters the play. She tells Stanley that he should shave and change. She indirectly tells us that Stanley never goes out.

## NOTES

‘Don’t you ever go out?— I mean what do you do, just sit around the house all day long— hasn’t Mrs Boles got enough to do without having you under her feet all day long?’

Stanley shows his presence of mind as well as a turn of phrase. The second retort, after ‘ I —— in the room this very morning, I always stand on the table— when she sweeps the floor is followed by the ‘where’ and ‘no-where game of words between them.

When Lulu goes out, Stanley inspects himself in the mirror. When he looks at himself and washes his face, it shows that he was affected, though he does not show it.

McCann and Goldberg arrive when Stanley is all alone. He sidles behind the door and avoids as far as possible. Goldberg and McCann come in through the rear door. Goldberg has a briefcase while McCann has two suitcases. Stanley has by now sneaked out. Mystery and suspense rise when McCann asks Goldberg if they were in the right house for he saw no number on the gate. ‘I wasn’t looking for a number’, says Goldberg, which means that he had found what he was looking for. Goldberg’s clearly commands McCann, which is evident from his speech. He has brought McCann for a holiday. He tells McCann how to relax, ‘The secret is breathing. Take my tip. It’s a well-known fact. Breathe in, breathe out, take a chance, let yourself go, what can you lose?’

Goldberg knows that McCann’s is uneasy tries to restore his confidence. He remembers Uncle Barney, who is his ideal. He nostalgically recollects his visits to the sea-side resorts, Brighton, Canvey Islands, Rottingan where he went with his uncle, every second Friday of the month, Goldberg finds words insufficient to describe the enormity of the man and adds, ‘he was a cosmopolitan’.

Three things emerge in the scene between Goldberg and McCann. The first, that Goldberg had a son ‘who used to carry a few coppers, for a newspaper, probably, to see how the M.C.C was getting on overseas’. He himself never carried any money; he only carried a good name, as per the advice of his grand uncle Barney. The second thing we learn about Goldberg is the enormity and power of his position. We also learn about the trust between McCann and Goldberg. Goldberg has done a lot for McCann and McCann has proved his trustworthiness.

Goldberg’s formal attitude and address in the nature of their present occupation gives a professional look to the entire situation.

Goldberg points out the similarities and differences between his current and previous businesses. Goldberg continues to speak when Meg walks in. He is polite and well-mannered with her. Goldberg asks Meg what her husband did. The question seems irrelevant since Goldberg has met Petey earlier and asked him about staying in their boarding house.

**Meg:** Very pleased to meet you.

**Goldberg:** We are pleased to meet you too.

**Meg:** That's very nice.

**Goldberg:** You are right. How often do you meet someone its pleasure to meet?

**McCann:** Never.

**Goldberg:** But today it's different. How are you keeping Mrs Boles?

Goldberg asks Meg questions about the Stanley and Meg answers him enthusiastically. Meg's response shows that she is naive and lacks grooming. She confuses the sequence of events and tips them about Stanley. Meg continues to be amused and pleased with herself. During the conversation Meg mentions that it was Stanley's birthday. She tells them that she wants him to play the piano that day.

Goldberg suggests that they celebrate Stanley's birthday. He takes over the situation. Goldberg's said, 'What do you think of that McCann? There's a gentleman who lives here. He's got a birthday today and he has forgotten all about it. So we are going to remind him, we're going to give him a party'. His words lead towards the final disaster.

Meg's childlike enthusiasm for the party is jeered at by the two men, who call her a 'tulip'. Stanley enters after Meg has shown them their room. He is disturbed to hear Goldberg's name but does not show it. Not aware of this, Meg tries to comfort and pacify him. She gives him the parcel and tells him to open it since it contained his birthday present. When she sees Stanley's shock, she tells him that she had got that boy's drum for him because he did not have a piano. This ushers a change in Stanley's attitude towards Meg. He kisses Meg on the cheek without hesitation. He has no retaliatory strength. Stanley's initial bafflement and apprehension is indicated by the changing rhythm of the beat, from normal to irregular and hysterical. He knows the tension of the menacing hold that is forthcoming.

#### **6.4.2 Act II**

Act II has two key events, the cross-examination and the birthday party. The first scene has McCann sitting at the table ripping a newspaper page into five equivalent strips. Stanley comes in and greets McCann. He immediately walks into the kitchen and is about to leave after drinking water, when he is stopped by McCann. McCann asks Stanley his name, which he says, is Webber. Stanley's asks McCann whether he will be staying here for long. McCann's action of stopping Stanley can be perceived as a prologue to placing of a cordon, which will follow. McCann conveys that Stanley is in detention. Stanley is stopped from going out, without any physical force. His movement is constrained in a different way. Stanley's feels that he had met McCann before and McCann's repeatedly denies it. Both of them are lying. We also know about Stanley's past. He was born in an attractive town and lived in a quiet place, far from the main road. In Maiden land, he went to the Fullers tea shop for tea and a Boots library. Stanley tells McCann that he reminds him of High Street, but McCann consistently denies it. Stanley's talk with McCann tells us that

#### **NOTES**

## NOTES

he liked loneliness and that his small private business, due to which, he left his house and came here. His love for tranquillity is born out of his initial desire to be all by himself on his birthday. When he reveals his plans to go back home, we know about his happiness of living in his own home. He spontaneously describes his quiet life. One can understand that his staying indoors was not new to him. He remained idle at home and never ventured out. 'I played records, that's about all'. Stanley also talks about a small business and a private income that he earned. But for Stanley there was no place like home. He repeatedly adds that it was never possible to get used to someone else's house.

Stanley speaks mostly. He regrets changing his life; he talks haltingly of his past and tells McCann that his present appearance were misleading. He had those lines on his face because of his drinking habit. He continuously talks of his appearance, in the past. He tells McCann that although he did not look the same, he was essentially the same man.

Stanley wants to clear McCann's of any misgivings about him. 'You wouldn't think, to look at me really—I mean not really, that I was the bloke to cause any trouble—would you?' Stanley wants to let his own misgivings and anxieties rest by ensuring McCann that he was not the one they wanted because he could never create trouble.

McCann's regular reminder to Stanley to stay away from the strips of paper is mysterious. Stanley carries on trying to find McCann and Goldberg's business and misguiding them at the same time.

McCann's dialogue shows that he is completely aware of Stanley's state of mind. He tells him 'you are a very dejected on your birthday', which Stanley rejects right away. Noticing his nervousness, McCann even asks Stanley if he would like to stable himself. Stanley's inability to control his nervousness in the face of impending danger can be seen in his hysteria towards McCann, 'There's a lot you don't know. I think someone's leading you up the garden path.'

He is worried about their plans. McCann's objects to Stanley's holding his arm and savagely pushes Stanley away. This is symbolic of Stanley's weakness and McCann strength. Stanley's final hope of persuading McCann crashes when Goldberg's walks in. Stanley failed in wooing, convincing and pleading to McCann.

Stanley tries to cajole McCann in different ways. He tries flattery by praising the countryside of Ireland. He also proposes to invite him to a pub for a drink of 'Draught Guinness.' After a brief introduction with Stanley, Goldberg continues with his thinking. He compares the young generation of his times with the young generation of the present times. Goldberg remembers having left the girl with just a kiss on her cheek. Goldberg experienced pure joy from that kiss. Later he also tipped his hat to the toddlers and also helped a couple of stray dogs. Kindness and love are natural when one is content and overjoyed. Goldberg's particular curiosity of Stanley's childhood has led to imaginary assumptions, though the things mentioned are usual, hot water bottle and hot milk, etc.

## NOTES

Petey abruptly says that he cannot attend the party because it was his chess-night. Goldberg swears that he will save some drink for him and asks him return to the party soon. He asks him to beat his opponent and win the game. Stanley and Goldberg are alone in the next scene as McCann has gone to get the bottles of drink. Stanley is more spiteful to Goldberg, than he was to McCann. He asks Goldberg to leave the room since it was already reserved. Goldberg pays no attention to him and proceeds with another of his speeches. He tries to express the meaning of birth, stressing that it means differently to different people. Morning for him was another birth.

Goldberg's description of men, who get up late in the morning can be elucidated in several ways. Is hinting at Stanley not wanting to wake up to reality? They complained that the mornings were not joyful when you woke up, your skin was irritable, you needed a shave, your eyes were full of dirt, your nose was blocked, etc. Goldberg continues to explain other things, which are just as disgusting. In the morning, men are like corpses waiting to be washed. Is Stanley, too, like a corpse, waiting to be washed. Is he disapproving Stanley's unshaven, disheveled appearance, suggesting that he required a overhauling?

McCann's return and Goldberg's composed cool, enraged Stanley even more. He tells them that the house has no license for liquor and that he would not let them take advantage of Mr and Mrs Boles. He is persistent in defending himself, telling them that there was nothing for them in that house from any angle and that as for him they were just a dirty joke, they did not matter to him.

Stanley's defiance of them and his attempt to get an advantageous position fail. Stanley is first graciously asked to sit, when he declines; McCann and Goldberg turn slightly firm till he finally gives in to McCann and sits. Their attitude gradually turns more intimidating, infecting the viewers with Stanley's nervousness. An interesting thing in Pinter's novel method of portraying characters is the concern it can gather for the non-hero protagonist, despite all his flaws. Stanley can neither be trusted, nor be hated and yet no one wants to see him harmed. Everyone wants him to be safe.

Stanley does not get intimidated by Goldberg and McCann. He is daring and does not hesitate to reject Goldberg's authority when Goldberg tries to dominate him. Stanley tries everything to frustrate them. But Goldberg and McCann are unyielding; they are determined and use every tactic to control Stanley.

Stanley's test begins on the most chimerical base. He is blamed with getting on everybody's wick; he is accused of treating the young lady Lulu, like a leper. He is asked to explain why he forced Petey to go out to play chess and drive Meg crazy. Irrelevant questions, such as where had he gone yesterday and the day before? What did he wear last week? And where did he keep his suits? Follow. These are meant to intimidate and weaken him. The comedy gradually transforms into a crime thriller. Why did Stanley abandon their organization? Goldberg's mention of the 'old mum' and a 'personal hurt' hint that he may have known

## NOTES

Stanley more closely, or may be related to him. However, Stanley's response indicates his carelessness. After a ridiculous exchange of words, meant to keep ridiculousness of the play intact, the dialogue is restricted to short sentences as in the case of a pursuit. They are hunting Stanley and the words are like darts to injure and weaken him.

Stanley is accused of his wife's murder, then of escaping from the wedding itself. The beginning of the conversation looks like a hide and seek of words:

**Goldberg:** Where did you come from?

**Stanley:** Somewhere else

**Goldberg:** Why did you come here?

**Stanley:** My feet hurt

**Goldberg:** Why did you stay?

**Stanley:** I had a headache

**Goldberg:** Did you take anything for it?

**Stanley:** Yes

**Goldberg:** What?

**Stanley:** Fruit Salts

**Goldberg:** Enos or Andrews?

**Stanley:** En-AN—

**Goldberg:** Did you stir properly? Did they fuzz?

**Stanley:** Now-now, wait you

**Goldberg:** Did they fuzz? Did they fuzz or didn't they fuzz?

All questions end with the verdict that Stanley had been disloyal to the organization. Goldberg asks one last question which confirms that Stanley was part of their group. Stanley is caught, when McCann takes his glasses away. More questions evoke memories and confirm the places Stanley is linked to. Stanley had washed the last cup at Lyon's Corner house at Marble Arch on the Christmas before last and his old mom was at the sanatorium.

What was the reason for Stanley leaving the girl he was about to marry, why did he not come to the Church? Goldberg and McCann try to trap Stanley with their words. Stanley is being victimized by words that are weakening his will. They are targeting his sensory nervous system and diminishing his power to resist.

What was the reason for Stanley to change his name? They do not find Stanley's answer to be funny. He had changed his name because he did not remember the other one. The answer sounds like a lie. Joe Soap is his new name, which he gives them. Goldberg calls him a sinner.

The most critical question asked is if Stanley recognized 'the external force' qualifying the external force with 'responsible for you', 'suffering for you'. When Stanley breaks down, Goldberg and McCann consistently bog him by strange and confusing possibilities and ask him to solve problems that have no solution.

One such weird question was whether number 846 was a possibility or a necessity, or both.

McCann's job is to contain and force people to toe Goldberg's line and to endorse Goldberg's ruling as well as implement it. Goldberg's ultimate declaration of what he has been trying to assert is revealed by his words, 'Right! We are right! And you are wrong, Webber, all along the line. McCann supports him with an endnote, 'all along the line.'

Stanley is now being morally accused; he is called the root of contamination of womankind and also a lecher. He will be avenged for this. The following questions increase Stanley's nervousness to the level of incoherence. The continuous questions: 'Why don't you pay the rent? Why do you pick your nose and what's your trade?', become rapid and more frantic. He is questioned about history, cricket and gossips and end up with the typical riddle about whether the chicken came first or the egg.

Goldberg and McCann bank on Stanley's failing senses and nerves with expletives of 'he doesn't understand! He doesn't understand! He was a traitor to the cloth (the one he uses as pyjamas) and that he had manipulated his birth sheet (sin of incest). Stanley's punishment was due for betraying the country, deserting or killing his wife, sins with women, etc. Stanley's seems helpless, at utter loss and in extreme need of help.

Stanley's abrupt outbreak when he kicks Goldberg in the stomach is followed by his running with a chair on his head to protect himself, with McCann on his heels. Goldberg remains calm. They try to look normal only when Meg arrives. She looks ridiculous when she asks McCann how she looked in her party dress. Her enthusiasm looks imbecile. Goldberg's words reflect his culture; he praises her superficially. He is equally well-mannered to Petey and Lulu and is rude to Stanley only when needed and inevitable. Goldberg's naughtiness in admiring Meg reflects his hypocrisy. Initially, Meg was a tulip, now she seems a gladioli. Meg's has astounding appetite for admiration and the experienced Goldberg knew it immediately. He asks for every light to be turned out and tells McCann to switch his torch on, to create an aura like that of a dream.

Goldberg's mesmerizing voice and kind words, though a deception, are effective. He is able to comfort people and make them confident. He coaxes Meg to raise a toast and when she is nervous, he tells her to speak from the heart. He overcomes her to reveal her real feelings when she looks at Stanley. Goldberg also deals with the stage. Just as Meg is about to start her speech, he tells McCann to shine the light on the birthday boy, instead of Meg.

Though there is simplicity in Meg's speech, it not only reveals her feelings for Stanley but also shows her womanliness. As her speech is spontaneous, the words are liberal and sincere. She describes her long connection with Stanley. She openly praises him, 'he is a good boy, although sometimes he is bad'. Her affection for Stanley is undivided and no one in the world knows Stanley better than her, although Stanley does not believe it. She publicly announces her absolute

*The Birthday Party by  
Harold Pinter*

## NOTES

## NOTES

love for him; she could do everything for him. Meg's emotional sobs, when Stanley is there on his birthday reveal her gentle feelings for him.

She shows that she is glad because of everyone's (Goldberg and McCann) presence there that night. This is an irony in context with the incidents that follow. When Lulu's comes to the party, enthusiasm is added to it. Stanley is made to sit as Goldberg speaks on how valuable true feelings are in the life of a man. He exhibits regret on missing the age when he could express love, feeling of cheerful friendship and affection without being ashamed or self-conscious. He shows that he is happy at having heard Meg's toast to Stanley, which was not common in today's world, with its sincerity and deep sentiments. He was happy to see that love is still alive in a few hidden corners. He again speaks about the things he cherished in life. Goldberg believed that life should have quality and not just be long. His belief is in living close to everything offered by nature and enjoying the plain joys of man's labour and toil. His definition of recreation is good humour, a day of fishing and some gardening. He had even constructed a greenhouse. Goldberg abruptly moves to the other joys of life in a town. Although by chance but deeply linked to the theme of the play, Goldberg talks about the same places that Stanley had earlier talked about to McCann. He had also asked him whether he was aware of these places. The two places spoken about by Stanley are Tea in Fullers and Boots Library. When Goldberg refers to the same places, it casts suspicion on Stanley's credentials. Then, Goldberg begins to speak about Meg's speech again. Her speech was really sentimental and heart renting for him.

Goldberg is awestruck by Meg's complete commitment to Stanley and congratulates Stanley for it. Lulu focuses her attention on Goldberg, whose speech, she says, was superb. Meg returns to Stanley kissing and patronizing him.

When Lulu asks Goldberg from where he had learnt to speak so well, He tells them that his first speech was at the Ethical hall in Bays water and the speech was on 'The necessary and the possible'. The reader would remember that previously when Goldberg was interrogating Stanley, he had asked him the same question about 'Necessary and Possible'. Lulu and Goldberg paired with each other. Meg and McCann can be seen drinking together. The event that follows can be visualized a drunken revelry, almost close to an orgy. There are simultaneous overtures between Meg and McCann. Lulu perches herself on Goldberg's lap after he has praised her for being a bouncy girl. She says that she could bounce up to the ceiling and indeed does so. Lulu's physical closeness to Goldberg is evident when Goldberg's remarks, 'Mind how you go, you're cracking a rib'. Lulu is captivated, she responds with the same compliment in her eyes. She is happy that Goldberg's has appeared out of nowhere and soon after meeting him, surrenders herself to him. When Lulu's questions him about his wife his answer is the same as was about his mother. The adaptation has been altered to some extent; instead of the canal, it is the park and the young girl he had kissed in the first episode is missing. He also remembers to mention the little boys and girls clarifying that he has not differentiated between them. Although Nat is his real name, his wife also

addressed him as Simey. She always served the nicest food to him and urged him to eat it while it was hot. Lulu's asks Goldberg if he knew her when she was a girl. This hints at an identity crisis, knowing links and a telepathic quest. Identity is lost as a result of missing roots. Meg speaks of her father, who had promised to take her to Ireland, but had finally left alone.

Meg and McCann are now talking about their childhood memories. Their retreat to childhood is a refuge into the peace and comfort of the past, into a world of fantasy. Half of the things they talk about are either overstated or completely invented.

Meg talks about a pink room, with pink curtains and a pink carpet and musical boxes all over the room. She never fell sick because her father was a doctor. Meg's magical world is not yet over. Her nanny sung for her. All of them appear completely drunk now. Meg compliments McCann about his voice. When he is asked by Goldberg to give them a love song, he begins to sing a folk song about the lovers, Paddy Reilly and Bally-James-Duff. After the song Lulu suddenly says that she wants to play a game. They agree to play blind man's bluff. Meg plays blind first, since McCann shows that he does not know the game. Lulu explains it to him. In the middle of the game, Goldberg is seen patting Lulu and Meg is seen touching McCann.

When Stanley plays the blind man, McCann breaks his glasses and puts the drum in his way. Stanley's foot is caught in the drum and he falls. Stanley tries to throttle Meg and vitiate Lulu. As the lights go out and McCann loses his torch Stanley tries to get even with the women. He also dislikes men who are self-indulging with other men and drinks. This shows Stanley's increased annoyance about Meg's pleasure-seeking attitude towards him. Stanley is seen bending over Lulu whom he has placed on the table. When McCann and Goldberg see him in the torchlight, he simply chuckles. He chuckles louder as McCann and Goldberg come closer to him.

### 6.4.3 Act III

The following morning, Petey as usual, walks in with a newspaper. Meg's question from the hatch indicates that it was Stanley and not Petey who she was expecting. Once she is aware that it is Petey, at once she tells him that she has nothing for breakfast. She pours some tea for Petey and informs him that she was going to shop for something nice for the two men. She says that she has a bad headache and Petey tells her that her sleep was deep.

Meg's behaviour shows that she was so drunk last night that she noticed nothing. Meg's speech that follows later reveals the risk to Stanley, although she herself does not understand what she had seen. In the morning, when Meg had taken a cup of tea to Stanley's room, the door was opened by McCann, who said that he had already made tea for Stanley. She is astonished that they were awake and wonders why Stanley was awake so early. She feels strange and slightly uncomfortable. Did Stanley know them? Since Stanley had many friends, his

*The Birthday Party by  
Harold Pinter*

## NOTES

## NOTES

acquaintance with Goldberg and McCann does not surprise her. She wonders why Goldberg and McCann had come down for breakfast in the morning. Why did Stanley not come? However, she consoles herself with the thought that he must have slept again.

As Meg gets ready to go shopping, she hears the sound of a door being slammed upstairs and stops, wondering whether Stanley was coming down. She is concerned about his breakfast because there were no cornflakes. To Meg's surprise, it is Goldberg who comes down. When Meg asks if Stanley was coming down and his reply hints at Stanley's fate.

**Goldberg:** Down? Of course he's coming down. On a lovely sunny day like this he shouldn't come down? He'll be up and about in next to no time.

Goldberg's comment indicates that he does not consider Stanley better than himself.

Now Meg is in love with by Goldberg's car. She goes for shopping with a slightly uncertain state of mind, concerned about Stanley's breakfast. Petey enquires about Stanley, which Goldberg does not give a clear indication about. He again talks about his reluctance to comment on Stanley's state. He had doubted the authenticity of his diagnosis since he had no certificate. We know now that Stanley was being attended on by Dermot, because he had a nervous breakdown.

To answer Petey on the reason for the sudden nervous breakdown, Goldberg replies judiciously. He refers to Stanley's nervous breakdown as a foregone conclusion.

The previous night's incidents are a perplexing mystery for Petey. When he reached the house, there were no lights. This was weird. It was even stranger that the lights came back as soon as he inserted a shilling in the slot. Goldberg rejected the whole incident as a minor breakdown of fuse.

Petey's concern about Stanley increases and he says that he would have to call a doctor in case there was no improvement in Stanley's condition. However, McCann tells him that everything has been taken of and he did not need to worry about Stanley because he had been 'treated' by him. When McCann said that 'Stanley was absolutely quiet now' creates a morbid atmosphere. Things that were grotesque have now turned completely horrific.

Dermot is not known to anyone. No one besides Petey has met him. His power is compared to that of a demon: hideous and unspoken. McCann has prepared the suitcases and is awaiting Goldberg's signal. He enquires if Stanley was ready and is told to go and see for himself. Eventually, McCann tells Goldberg that he has returned Stanley's spectacles. Goldberg asks him if Stanley was glad to have them back. Goldberg and McCann succeed in tricking Petey and promise him that if Stanley's condition does not improve, they will take him to Monty.

## NOTES

Petey is still not completely aware of their motives. Goldberg does not want him to interfere. Goldberg informs Petey that they will not come back for lunch and forces him to go back to the seaside. Petey leaves them alone. Goldberg turns serious now. His distress can be clearly seen, he shouts at McCann for his tendency of tearing the paper into strips and for asking too many irritating questions.

Goldberg admits to his restlessness, in the operation of the present ‘thing’, in his words. He surprises himself, because rarely did he lose his calm. Goldberg’s conversation with McCann discloses a new angle about them. McCann is curious about Goldberg’s reality and uses his name, ‘Simey’, to find the facts. Goldberg warns McCann, not to use that name and gets violent when McCann goes up. Is Goldberg emotionally disturbed because he doesn’t want Stanley to suffer?

When he talks to McCann about life and his principles, he says that he has followed ‘the line’. Goldberg repeatedly speaks about his parents. Goldberg was a self-made man. In school, he was good in every subject and he learnt everything by heart. More importantly his physical fitness was at its peak. Goldberg recalls his father’s words before his death. Note that his father called him Benny and not Simey. Two of the many principles that he learnt from his father were: to forgive and let live and to go home to the wife. Goldberg’s father told him that all his life he had served others. He taught Goldberg to perform his duty and avoid being judgmental. He had also told him to look after people who were socially backward. The courtesy of wishing ‘good morning’ to the neighbours was also considered significant. Nevertheless, the most important principle was to keep the family united. The family is the base of one’s existence and should never be ignored. Goldberg’s disperses his thoughts into the past in an attempt to trace his family tree. His thinking goes out of control for a while but later, regains control after a short silence. He again admires his fitness. He expresses the importance of his motto, ‘work hard and play hard— and respect thy father and they mother.’ The irony is that immediately after he declares fit, he is breathless and asks McCann to give him mouth-to-mouth respiration.

Lulu enters as soon as McCann has helped Goldberg to breathe normally. McCann is shrewd to leave them alone.

When Goldberg and Lulu are left alone, they blame each other for being taken in. Lulu accuses him of ravishing her innocence. She expresses doubt at his intention of walking into her room at night, with his briefcase. Goldberg remarks that she too was not innocent. Pinter’s use of repartee is at its best when Goldberg and Lulu are talking.

**Goldberg:** A girl like you, at your age, at your time of health and you don’t take to games?

**Lulu:** You’re very smart

**Goldberg:** Anyway, who says you don’t take to them

**Lulu:** Do you think I’m like all other girls?

**Goldberg:** Are all the other girls like that too?

## NOTES

When Lulu accuses Goldberg of using her, he straight away refutes her by asking 'who used who?' Lulu replies that a boy 'Eddie' was her first love. She forgets to say that he was the last one too.

Her complaint turns funny and hilarious indeed. 'You quenched your ugly thirst. You taught me things a girl shouldn't know before she's been married at least three times.' Goldberg's calling her Schumulu and Lullalu shows his contempt for her. The implications of McCann, being attached to the Church is necessary for understanding Pinter's view on the Church and the Clergy. When he dismisses Lulu by accusing her kind of spending 'too much time in bed', he preaches what everyone does but no one practices. He advocates Goldberg's attitude because Lulu herself had asked for it.

McCann catches hold of Lulu and starts terrorizing her with a torrent of questions. Lulu is not able to comprehend all this at first, but when she does, she quits the room. Stanley is now wearing a dark well-cut suit. He has shaved and is holding his broken spectacles. Goldberg and McCann seem satisfied in the way they have changed Stanley. He not only looks better, but is 'a new man.'

In the last scene Stanley is totally submissive. He does not react to Goldberg and McCann's 'relish' in their victory. Their savage misbehaviour and festivity of Stanley's trampled spirit enlivens the demon within them. Their delight with their win on Stanley frightens the audience. They tell Stanley that they have saved him. He had many ailments and was cockeyed. He was in a mess and had turned from bad to worse. He looked pale and rheumatic. He was also short-sighted epileptic. They had saved him from falling over the edge.

They had a way to cure him, a place for him to recuperate. They would give him a new pair of spectacles, season tickets and discount on inflammable goods. In short, they will care and treat him. The advantages and perks promised by them are usually identified with the life of a successful man. 'Club Bar' reserved table, a free pass. They promised to care for his spiritual as well as physical well-being. Stanley will conform to the physical, socio-economical and religious pattern of society. They will be proud of him.

Stanley is unable to control his body as well as his mind. This can be seen in his response to Goldberg's and McCann's last questions. He is not able to talk and he only makes incoherent sounds; he clenches and unclenches his fists till they start to tremble.

In the end, he is completely paralysed. Goldberg and McCann consider him fit to be taken away now. When Petey enters the house, Stanley is completely defenseless. He has now turned into a vegetable in the hands of Goldberg and McCann, who will control him the way they want.

They ignore Petey's protests and Goldberg threatens Petey that if he tries to stop them, they may take him along with Stanley.

Petey is not strong enough to fight them but he does not want Stanley to surrender. Finally he tells Stanley, 'Stan, don't let them tell you what to do.'

The play ends with many questions and controversies. Meg is not aware that Stanley has been taken away. Even, Petey does not tell her about it.

*The Birthday Party by  
Harold Pinter*

### Check Your Progress

3. Which two important events does Act II comprise?
4. How does Pinter make his comedy successfully comic and menacing at the same time?

### NOTES

## 6.5 THE THEME OF PROTEST AND SUBVERSION

Pinter's introduced protest and subversion in his plays. In his interview to BBC, in the programme 'Omnibus', Pinter reiterated the importance of protest and subversion in his drama. He repeated the same to Mel Gussow after two months, in 1988.

*The Birthday Party* can be visualized as a drama full of protest and subversion from different angles. Although outwardly, Goldberg and McCann seem like intruders, but Stanley is also one of them. Goldberg and McCann blame him of depravity, violation and sabotaging their organization to which he too belonged.

Stanley protests as the key protagonist, who is afflicted, exploited and finally destroyed by oppressors. It does not matter what these oppressors stand for, which is a bigger problem. The play is a show of angry reaction and physical assault by Stanley. Stanley kicks Goldberg in the stomach and his patience ends in a comic but evasive manner.

According to Batty, the reason for man's weak position is his uncertain future and his lack of knowledge of external forces, social or other. Though the play criticizes organizations and social arrangements that symbolize submission and obedience, yet it is not geared for communicating such a message.

The resistance within the play presides over the dramatic energies of Pinter's early plays. They successfully convey both, existent and implicit political suggestions. Irving Wardle used the 'comedy of menace' to describe Pinter's works.

Other writers like Michael Scott, perceive in Pinter's plays, a deeper focus on the victim than the invader. However, in '*The Birthday Party*', Goldberg and McCann are the dominating characters. According to Michael, the play showcases Stanley's existence and his vulnerability. Both, the language and the characters of the play are dislocated. Stanley the victim becomes the aggressor when it comes to Meg. Take the following as an example:

Look at her. You're just an old piece of rock cake, aren't you?) That's what you are, aren't you? When there is no centre of stability, no foundation for one's existence, a victim can be an aggressor, an aggressor a victim, and words such as 'good' and 'evil' become meaningless. These divisions don't exist in Pinter's

## NOTES

characters: “It’s rather ridiculous to try to understand people in those kinds of terms. Evil people. What the hell does that mean? Or bad people. And who are you then if you say that, and what are you?”

The point of focus is not morality but relationships among people and how people deal with each other within ‘a territorial struggle’? In this context, Francesca Coppa discusses three chief issues in his essay— ‘The Sacred joke: comedy and politics in Pinter’s early Plays’. These issues are political concerns of Pinter, responses of the audiences and Freud’s joke theory in context of Pinter’s plays. The fact that the characters of Pinter cannot be forgiven and Pinter tries to create sympathy for them, makes it difficult to decide how audiences would respond in such situations.

Pinter creates such situations in which the audiences are almost forced to support either the victim or the joke teller. If the audiences choose to laugh, it would be equivalent to take the aggressor’s side and not to laugh would mean that they are supporting the victim. Thus, the comedy of Pinter works as a test to find out whom the audiences support.

According to Francesca Coppa, Freud’s joke theory is a valuable key to understand Pinter’s plays which he wrote in the beginning of his career as a playwright. In this context, Christopher Innes says that the plays written by Pinter are ‘variations on the subject of dominance, control, exploitation, subjugation and victimization. They are models of power structures.’ It is also said that the jokes used in Pinter plays are capable of creating moments which can cause dramatic crisis.

### 6.5.1 Language, Silence and Pause

In 1962, while delivering a speech at Bristol University, Pinter said, ‘A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, can do all these things. The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression’. This statement is enough to understand how Pinter uses language in his plays. Pinter does not like to use language that is dead and stale. The quote given below shows what kind of words and language pleases him or saddens him:

‘I have mixed feelings about words myself. Moving among them, sorting them out, watching them appear on the page, from this I derive a considerable pleasure. But at the same time I have another strong feeling about words, which amounts to nothing less than nausea. Such a weight of words confronts us day in, day out, words spoken in a context such as this, words written by me and by others; the bulk of it a stale dead terminology, ideas endlessly repeated and permuted become platitudinous, trite, and meaningless. Given this nausea, it’s very easy to be overcome by it and step back into paralysis. But if it is possible to confront this nausea, to follow it to its hilt, to move through it and out of it, then it is possible to say that something has occurred, that something has even been achieved...’

The language arises when we are not able to express ourselves, when we are trying to hide something or when we are not willing to express ourselves. In the characters created by Pinter, silence speaks louder than the spoken word. In order to express this point of view, Pinter says, 'There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen that keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness.'

## NOTES

### 6.5.2 Language and Structure: Dashes and Pauses

The most striking feature of Pinter's comedy is that his comedy is successful as well as menacing. In order to achieve both these opposite effects, he uses a high-level comic technique. To create the specific effect as per his wishes, he uses a structured and cut-to-size language. The use of this kind of language is appreciated even by Pinter's critics. Questions asked by Goldberg-McCann from stressed Stanley Webber 'Is the number 846 possible or necessary?' and 'why did the Chicken cross the road?' is able to maintain comic facade of his play as well as complicate Stanley's life.

The fact that these questions are not reasonable creates laughter among the audiences and at the same time makes them worrisome as they are not aware of the intention of the speaker in posing these questions from Stanley. Francesco Coppa says, 'Behind Pinter's comedy one can perceive something more serious, alarming and disturbing, yet not fully exposed in the words that have been used.' Another comic device used by Pinter is that of repetition. For instance, repetitive use of the word 'nice' by Meg in the play titled, 'The Birthday Party'. The reason behind Pinter's comedy is not only to create pleasurable situations but to map the themes of the play.

The tendentious joke structure, used by Pinter, works at macro level as well as micro level. If the audiences do not laugh during the final event, it does not mean that his work is not funny. It means that the audiences have taken the side of victim and not the victimizer.

The form of communication used in Pinter's plays is that of absence of direct explanation. The drama in his plays is created not by the apparent meaning of the words used in the play but by the subtext of the play. There are two layers in Pinter's subtexts. These layers are the hidden meaning/intention behind the words and meaning of words when a character does not utter any word. According to Michael Scott, Pinter, within the subtext, uses 'the strategy of pause and silence which in Pinter's plays are as important as the tense dialogue or the comic repartee or the long monologue.'

Another peculiar feature of Pinter's writings is 'Pinter pause'. Under this feature, he uses three trail dots, silence and indication pause, all at a time when the

## NOTES

audiences are waiting to hear the dialogues of character. Some critics feel that Pinter uses these pauses for his convenience. To this, he answered, these pauses are ‘not formal conveniences or stresses but part of the body of the action’. He adds that if actors play his characters properly, they would realize that all the pauses given in his plays are inevitable.

To justify his point of view, he also says, ‘The pause is a pause because of what has just happened in the minds and guts of the characters and a silence equally means that something has happened to create the impossibility of anyone speaking for a certain amount of time- until they can recover from whatever happened before that silence.’

Thus, these pauses are an important part of his play which guides the actors and director about the tempo and rhythm that they have to follow while enacting his plays.

While talking about the use of dots and dashes in his plays, Pinter ironically says,

‘I’ve had two full-length plays produced in London. The first ran a week and the second ran a year. Of course, there are differences between the two plays. In ‘The Birthday Party’ I employed a certain amount of dashes in the text, between phrases. In ‘The Caretaker’ I cut down the dashes and used dots instead. So that instead of ‘Look, dash, who, dash, I, dash, dash, dash,” the text would read: ‘Look, dot, dot, dot, who, dot, dot, dot, I, dot, dot, dot, dot.’ So it’s possible to deduce from this that dots are more popular than dashes and that’s why ‘The Caretaker’ had a longer run than ‘The Birthday party’. The fact that in neither case could you hear the dots and dashes in performance is besides the point. You can’t fool the critics for long. They can tell a dot from a dash a mile off, even if they can hear nothing.’

In addition to ‘Pinter pause’, he also uses sounds like caahhs and uh-gug to express love, coquette, domesticity, external danger, solace, threat and internal fear.

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## 6.6 SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

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Let us look at Goldberg, McCann and Stanley Webber in ‘*The Birthday Party*’. Each one of the four plays by Harold Pinter ends in the virtual annihilation of a person. In ‘The Birthday Party’, it is Stanley who is virtually annihilated. He is taken for special treatment from where he had taken refuge. Pinter is not able to properly define the system that he is trying to personify through the two characters of Goldberg and McCann. How Pinter asserts humanity is quite puzzling since he makes the very institutions that are responsible for structuring human morality and welfare, the agents of immorality and destruction.

The hero, who is also the victim, is not free from blame either because it is not easy to link him with humanity. Although he manages to gain the readers' sympathy, he does not really get our approval.

### **Stanley**

Pinter portrays Stanley as an obese, shambling and unpreventable individual who is residing in a rundown boarding house near the sea. He is the lone guest in that dilapidated house and gets the opportunity to boss over the adoring lady who owns the property. He is recognized as an accomplished pianist.

However, even this convenient and protected atmosphere is intruded upon. He is unable to forget the memory of him arriving for a recital only to discover the hall all locked up. He is surrounded by foes, who when they actually land, they seem to be in the form of a fluent Jew accompanied by an Irish henchman. They appear to be the characters from Stanley's nightmares.

He falls fast. At the end he is taken away in a state of trance, all scrubbed, and cleaned and bundled into shapeless trousers. It is not easy to describe the tragic-comedy of his characters in the existing pattern of society. Stanley's life at the boarding house and the visit by Goldberg and McCann on holiday is far from realistic although all of it seems socially recognizable.

### **Goldberg**

This character is definitely ruthless in showing and exerting his power. However, he does not use his power to please himself. He acts as the crusader and is there to confront Stanley who has betrayed the organization they all worked for and vanished after committing fraud. Goldberg is said to represent threat to the individual's freedom in the name of care and social responsibility. He is a semi-educated Jew who is able to flannel well. However, the pattern and the total effect of his speeches that the play is dominated by, reflect the culture of a person who is successfully heading a family and a business.

In Act II, Goldberg's speeches clearly praise the pleasures associated with boyhood, how the fit man enjoys his walk in the sunshine, etc. all of which tantamount to verbal torture for Stanley. However, by the time we reach Act III Goldberg's patterned loquacity becomes more arbitrary. Goldberg's speeches, in particular, when he is alone with McCann have no role to play other than 'creating a scene' and drawing attention to the lack of culture in Goldberg by forcing him to utter slogans.

At this point, we do not respond to the parody of institutionalized caring. The description of the same is quite a farce, restricted only to the image of the helpless victim and how he is rendered speechless.

The way Goldberg seduces Lulu by engaging her emotionally is characteristic of any man of position in society. It also contradicts Goldberg's claim of self-control.

*The Birthday Party by  
Harold Pinter*

### **NOTES**

## NOTES

The gap between what he preaches and practices is clear in the contrast between the Sunday school teacher, whom he only kissed and his present behaviour.

His speech about how the youth of his day and age whose hallmark was temperance differed from today's youth who are perverted appears jarring.

"When I was a youngster, of a Friday, I used to go for a walk down the canal with a girl who lived down my road. A beautiful girl. What a voice that bird had! A nightingale, my word of honour. Good? Pure? She wasn't a Sunday school teacher for nothing. Anyway, I'd leave her with a little kiss on the cheek — I never took liberties—we weren't like the young men these days in those days. We knew the meaning of respect."

This speech is in contrast with his dialogues with Meg and Lulu where he is at his flirtatious best and proves what a rascal he is.

"Walk up the boulevard. Let's have a look at you. What a carriage. What's your opinion, McCann? Like a Countess, nothing less. Madam, now turn about and promenade to the kitchen. What deportment!"

Goldberg is a shrewd man who can identify the weakness of a woman the moment he meets them. He is able to gauge Meg's liking for good clothes, simple pleasures, partying and of course her love for Stanley.

Goldberg is capable of satisfying all of Meg's desires without letting her doubt his intentions even once. He also knows that Lulu is not only younger but far more vulnerable as compared with Meg. Lulu has less inhibition than Meg and is completely knocked down by Goldberg. She falls for him in a short span of time and trusts him completely within minutes of meeting him.

She expects seriousness from Goldberg when she meets him in the last Act but is hurt by his casual demeanour. She ends up accusing him of taking advantage of her.

Goldberg's off-hand manner with Lulu, in this scene reflects how capable he is of relaxing in even the most critical or serious circumstances.

**Goldberg:** Who opened the briefcase, me or you? Lulu, schmulu, let bygones be bygones, do me a turn. Kiss and make up.

**Lulu:** I wouldn't touch you.

**Goldberg:** And today I am leaving.

**Lulu:** You are leaving?

**Goldberg:** Today.

**Lulu:** (with growing anger) You used me for a night. A passing fancy.

**Goldberg:** Who used who?

**Lulu:** You made use of me by cunning when my defences were down.

**Goldberg:** Who took them down?

**Lulu:** That's what you did. You quenched your ugly thirst. You taught me things girl shouldn't know before she has been married at least three times!

**Goldberg:** Now you are a jump ahead! What are you complaining about?

Enter McCann quickly.

**Lulu:** You didn't appreciate me for myself. You took all those liberties only to satisfy your appetite. Oh Nat, why did you do it?

**Goldberg:** You wanted me to do it, Lulula, so I did it.

Goldberg draws the blue print, commands as well as commissions and McCann carries it out. They are the culprits and they have assigned different roles to themselves. Goldberg keeps his civility as well as good manners while McCann does his dirty jobs.

In the previous scene with Lulu, it is McCann who gets her going. Other than Stanley, she is the only other person in the play who gets subjected to interrogation by McCann. It is done to keep her out of their way.

**McCann:** Your sort, you spend too much time in bed.

**Lulu:** What do you mean?

**McCann:** Have you got nothing to confess?

**Lulu:** What?

**McCann:** (savagely) Confess!

**Lulu:** Confess what?

**McCann:** Down on your knees and confess!

**Lulu:** What does he mean?

**Goldberg:** Confess. What can you lose?

**Lulu:** What, to him?

**Goldberg:** He's only been unfrocked six months.

**McCann:** Kneel down woman and tell me the latest!

**Lulu:** (retreating to the back door) I've seen everything that's happened. I know what's going on. I've got a pretty shrewd idea.

**McCann:** (advancing) I've seen you hanging about the Rock of Cashel, profaning the soil with your goings on. Out of my sight!

**Lulu:** I'm going. Goldberg is like almost all of Pinter's characters, a liar. So are McCann, Stanley and Lulu. It is difficult to count the lies they tell, they not only revert to them, and they plan them for calculated ends and purposes.

Stanley, McCann and Goldberg studied in the light of Guido Almansi's essay *Pinter's Idiom of Lies* emerge as confirmed liars, perverted humanized animals who have no grain of truth left in them.

'But although the Pinterian hero is often as hesitant as a pig, stumbling pitifully on every word, covering a pitifully narrow area of meaning with his utterances,

## NOTES

## NOTES

blathering through his life he does not, like any honest animal seem to complain or grunt or giggle or grumble to give an outlet to his instincts, desires, passions of fears.

He mumbles in order to hide something else. Even when he grunts, his grunt is a lie. Pinter's characters are often hopeless, stupid, vile and aggressive, but they are always intelligent enough in their capacity as careful and persistent liars, whether lying to others or to themselves, to hide the truth if they know truth's truthful abode. They are too cunning in their cowardice to be compared to noble animals. They are perverted in their actions and speech: hence human.

He rejects Pinter's language as it is based on a policy of reciprocal misunderstanding and misinformation. It spurns sincerity, honesty; linguistic generosity and openness in favour of the diabolical game of hide and seek.

It is true of the language used by all the characters in *The Birthday Party* except Petey. Their sojourns into the past are lies, lies and only lies. Stanley's success story as a pianist, Goldberg's as an orator, a beloved son and husband and Meg's pink room in her father's house have been woven on the spot. None of the characters except Petey is trustworthy.

The presence of uncertainty in the language of the characters is not due to the indeterminacy of their thoughts or intentions; it is elusive and disruptive by intention, as a weapon of attack and exploitation. The rhythms of words are used for enhancing the effect of ritual and litany. The cross-examination of Stanley Webber is held in the manner of a ritual with the speech that is completely dehumanized: resulting into an incoherence of the logic of the exercise. Matter has already been settled, the ritual serves only as a catalyst to the final catastrophe.

### Check Your Progress

5. How can *The Birthday Party* be visualized from different angles?
6. What do you learn about Goldberg's character from his interaction with Lulu and Meg?

## 6.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. *The Dumbwaiter* (1959) and *The Caretaker* (1960) are two of the plays written by Pinter.
2. *The Birthday Party* was treated with almost unanimous critical hostility, when it appeared in 1958.
3. Act two comprises the interrogation and the birthday party.
4. Pinter makes his comedy successfully comic and menacing at the same time with a high-level comedic technique.

5. *The Birthday Party* can be visualized as a drama full of protest and subversion from different angles.
6. Goldberg is clearly a charmer who is able to give a woman exactly what she wants. He knows what every woman's weakness is and is able to behave with them in the manner that appeals to them. This is evident in the manner in which he treats Lulu and Meg who have very different personalities. He is also capable of making serious situations appear casual.

*The Birthday Party by  
Harold Pinter*

## NOTES

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### 6.8 SUMMARY

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- Pinter's complete collection that includes Radio, TV and stage plays is available in the four Play Collections, published by Faber and Faber. A list of their publications sufficiently contains all his works. The only play, which is not part of this list, is *Celebrations of the Year 2002*. The publications also comprise his poetry and prose, *Celebration and the Room* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), *Collected Screenplays I* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), *Collected Screenplays II* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), *Collected Screenplays III* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001) and *The Dwarfs* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990).
- *The Caretaker* gave Pinter the break his career needed. After this play, Pinter got serious attention, which a playwright of his stature deserved. Pinter could present his theme in a more distinct way. Batty found a theme that was common in all his plays. He says; *The Caretaker* was a refined form of the thematic concerns that was the driving force behind most of Pinter's writing.
- Harold Pinter's dramatic piece, *The Birthday Party* was dedicated to cinema in 1968 by prospective Exorcist director, William Friedkin. It is showcased in a squalid British beach-resort rooming house.
- The property-owner (Meg) holds a cheerless birthday party for Stanley (her tenant), which is invaded by two shady characters named Goldberg and McCann. No one knows why they're there except for Stanley. Stanley, after being continually disgraced by the appalling pair is taken away by them to an unknown destination. *The Birthday Party* culminates with 30 seconds of a totally blank screen.

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### 6.9 KEY WORDS

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- **Playwright:** It refers to a person who writes plays for the theatre, television, or radio.
- **Criticism:** It means the act of expressing disapproval of someone or something and opinions about their faults or bad qualities.
- **Impudent:** It means having no showing respect for other people.

## NOTES

- **Daydream:** It means pleasant thoughts that make you forget about the present.
- **Misgivings:** It refers to feelings of doubt or anxiety about what might happen, or about whether or not something is the right thing to do.
- **Overhauling:** It means an examination of a machine or system, including doing repairs on it or making changes to it.

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## 6.10 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short-Answer Questions

1. What were the important events in Pinter's life?
2. List some of the works of Harold Pinter.
3. What are the two key events in Act II of the play *The Birthday Party*?
4. Who is Goldberg?

### Long-Answer Questions

1. How was *The Birthday Party* received?
2. Explain the use of language, silence and pause in *The Birthday Party*.
3. Write a detailed note on: the theme of protest and subversion.
4. Discuss how society and the individual are depicted in the play.

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## 6.11 FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 7 T.S. ELIOT: *THE COCKTAIL PARTY*

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T.S. Eliot: *The Cocktail Party*

### NOTES

#### Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 T. S. Eliot: *The Cocktail Party*
  - 7.2.1 Historical Background of *The Cocktail Party*
  - 7.2.2 Synopsis and Theme of *The Cocktail Party*
  - 7.2.3 Critical Appreciation of *The Cocktail Party*
  - 7.2.4 Issues and Analysis
- 7.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 7.4 Summary
- 7.5 Key Words
- 7.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 7.7 Further Readings

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### 7.0 INTRODUCTION

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The early 20th century is recognized as the age of modernist approach. 'Modernism' does not mean 'modern' as contemporary, or 'modern age' to be the age of renaissance. Rather a collective effort to revive Western Literature in the period after the World War is termed as modernism.

The revival of poetic drama is one of the developments of the inter-war period, which gained considerable attention through the plays of Thomas Stearns Eliot. T.S. Eliot became the most prominent poet of 20th century. Besides being a poet, Eliot is also known as an essayist, literary and social critic, playwright and publisher. In 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', Eliot dwells upon the difficulties faced by the modern verse drama, but he believes that poetry used as a medium rather than a mere embellishment can contribute much more to the genre of poetic drama. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* is a play by T. S. Eliot. Elements of the play are based on *Alcestris*, by the Ancient Greek playwright Euripides. The play was the most popular of Eliot's seven plays in his lifetime.

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### 7.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe T. S. Eliot's early life and literary career
- Analyse the play *The Cocktail Party*
- Explain the issues that Eliot discusses in the play *The Cocktail Party*

## NOTES

### 7.2 T. S. ELIOT: *THE COCKTAIL PARTY*

T. S. Eliot was born on 26 September 1888 in the city of St. Louis in the United States. In the year 1914, when Eliot was 25, he relocated to England, where he lived for the rest of his life. It was in England that he worked and married. In 1927, when he was 39, Eliot became a British citizen, giving up his American citizenship and passport.

Eliot was an acclaimed poet and playwright of the Modernist movement. He received great recognition and fame for his poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* which he wrote in 1915. This was followed by other great poems: *The Waste Land* (1922), *The Hollow Men* (1925), and *Ash Wednesday* (1930). These poems were followed by others such as *Four Quartets* which was written in 1943. Eliot is also known for his plays. These included *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *The Cocktail Party* (1949). Eliot won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948 for his 'outstanding pioneering contribution to modern-day poetry'. Some of his works were either republished or published for the first time after his death on 4 January 1965. These included *To Criticise the Critic* which was published in 1965, *The Waste Land: Facsimile Edition* which was published in 1974. In 1996, a collection of his poems written between 1909 and 1917 was published titled *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909–1917*.

Eliot was afflicted with a congenital double inguinal hernia which made it impossible for him to take part in physical activities and have friends of his own age. It was this enforced isolation probably that made Eliot find solace in literature which became his passion as he grew older. When he first learnt to read, he began at once to read stories of the Wild West, and thrillers and the adventures of *Tom Sawyer*. This was not surprising as most young boys love to read Tom Sawyer's adventures. Suffering the constant physical pain of his congenital malady must have been difficult for a young boy, and the large volumes of books he read while curling up on a window seat must have helped begin the creative journey, allowing him to dream and imagine for hours at a time.

Between the years 1899 and 1905, Eliot learnt languages at the Smith Academy. These languages included German, French, Ancient Greek and Latin. When Eliot was 14, he read a translation of the poetry of Omar Khayyam by Edward Fitzgerald titled *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. This inspired the young Eliot to start writing poetry.

In February 1905, as a school exercise, Eliot wrote a poem, which was the first poem to be published in the Smith Academy Record. The poem was called *A Fable for Feasters*. In April the same year, the Smith Academy Record published a poem which was untitled at that time. This was later edited and published with the title *Song* in Harvard University's student journal called *Harvard Advocate*.

Besides the two plays *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*, Eliot has written five more plays. These included: *Sweeney Agonistes* published

in 1934, *The Rock* also published in 1934, *The Family Reunion* published in 1939, *The Confidential Clerk* published in 1953, and *The Elder Statesman* first published in 1959 but was first performed in 1958.

It is a well-known fact that writers and artists are influenced a great deal by their faith and religious beliefs. On 29 June 1927, Eliot converted to Anglicanism from Unitarianism that had been practised by his family. In November the same year, Eliot became a British citizen and gave up his American passport. He also became a warden of his parish church. Another significant change in his life was that he became a life member of the Society of King Charles the Martyr. Eliot then described himself as being Anglo Catholic in religious belief and faith, Royalist in political affiliation, and Classicist in literature.

### 7.2.1 Historical Background of *The Cocktail Party*

The play *The Cocktail Party* by Thomas Stearns Eliot was probably one of the most critically acclaimed of the seven plays he had written. It is significant to note that *The Cocktail Party* has been interwoven with multiple aspects from the Ancient Greek play titled *Alcestris* written by Euripides.

First performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1949, it was critically acclaimed and ran to full houses at both London and New York theatres in 1950. It was the same year, in 1950 that *The Cocktail Party* received the Tony Award for Best Play.

The play explores the complexities of human relationships and in particular between a husband and wife. The entire play has been set against the backdrop of the Chamberlayne couple, Edward and Lavinia, and their marital problems. It appears that the marital problems between married couples and the role of the mistress in such troubled marriages had formed a common thread in most of the plays written by Thomas Eliot.

It is a well-known fact that Eliot had had a troubled and an unsuccessful marriage with Vivienne, who he had married after an extremely brief acquaintance. Events that unfolded in his marriage after that would have revealed that Eliot had possibly married Vivienne to alleviate his loneliness. However, because loneliness is certainly not a reason people should marry, the marriage had not been a happy one.

In the play *The Cocktail Party*, the playwright has explored the concept that man is essentially a lonely being and people who accept this truth would be better able to deal with most problems within their marital relations. Two people who marry are seldom alike and having to live in close proximity is not easy. In relation to man being an essentially lonely being, here is a quote by Thomas Eliot from the play *The Cocktail Party*:

*Everyone's alone—or so it seems to me.*

*They make noises, and think they are talking to each other;*

*They make faces, and think they understand each other,*

*And I'm sure they don't. Is that delusion?*

*Can we only love something created in our own imaginations?*

*T.S. Eliot: The Cocktail  
Party*

## NOTES

## NOTES

This was a profound thought. Eliot had been born with a congenital double hernia which had forced him to lead an extremely isolated childhood. He had found solace in literature and spent hours reading books. This forced isolation had perhaps shaped his life and way of thinking. This was perhaps also the reason why human relationships, especially between married couples, had been a constant theme in most of his plays.

The play *The Cocktail Party* explores two aspects of human relations. These are the human psyche and the intricacies of marital relationships. Or perhaps the play has explored the reality of the human psyche and the strength of the human mind with marital relationships.

### 7.2.2 Synopsis and Theme of *The Cocktail Party*

The play *The Cocktail Party* was written by the playwright and poet Thomas Stearns Eliot and was first performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1949. The following year, in 1950, the play ran successfully both in London as well as at New York theatres. *The Cocktail Party*, when it was performed on Broadway, received the Tony Award for Best Play for the year 1950.

The focal point of the plot of the play is the troubled and complicated marital relationship between a couple, Edward and Lavinia. A mysterious stranger, who remains unintroduced and unidentified through the first Act, is revealed later to be a psychiatrist. When this psychiatrist intervenes and counsels the couple, they realize that they love each other, and the struggles and hard work they will need to put in in order to save and nurture their marriage will be worth it.

When the play opens in the drawing room of the Chamberlayne flat in London, it appears to be a satire on traditional cocktail parties which were a common feature of the upper class society during that period.

However, as the play proceeds, the audience begin to understand that the narrative is intended to describe the darker and more complicated side of relationships between married couples. It appears that the character of the mistress is a common feature in many plays of Eliot. Not just the character of the mistress, but the playwright has also apparently portrayed the mistress to be a sort of martyr with shades of Christian martyrdom, or the sacrificing and suffering mistress.

In this play *The Cocktail Party* as well, Eliot has depicted the character of Celia, who has apparently been the protagonist Edward's mistress for quite some time, to sacrifice her desires to marry her lover and find acceptance in society, when he conveniently informs her that he has decided to make his marriage with Lavinia work with professional help from a psychiatrist.

Looking at these elements, it is easy to wonder if the playwright had perhaps based the play *The Cocktail Party* on his own first marriage to Vivienne and his obvious disinterest in trying to save that relationship. While still legally married to Vivienne, Eliot had had a female companion with whom he had made all his public appearances for many years. They had never married however, and the liaison

had ended, perhaps providing the sacrificing character of a mistress which he found necessary to incorporate into most of his plays.

Eliot had studied Ancient Greek as one of the subjects at school. He had based some aspects of the play *The Cocktail Party* on the play *Alcestris* by the Ancient Greek playwright Euripides. Although *The Cocktail Party* had become the most popular and well-received play written by Eliot when he was alive, it is not well remembered in modern times. On the other hand, his first play *Murder in the Cathedral* which had been written in 1935, is still considered his most successful play.

According to the narrative of the play *The Cocktail Party*, Edward and Lavinia Chamberlayne have been married for almost five years. From the narrative, we come to know that they are rich and they hosted regular cocktail parties at their large flat in London as per the custom of that period.

When the play opens, one such cocktail party is again being hosted by the Chamberlaynes, but Lavinia is not present. Although embarrassed and clearly extremely upset by her absence, Edward attempts to pass off her absence as a sudden and unexpected one, because she had ostensibly fallen sick and had gone to his aunt's home to recuperate.

The guests do not appear to be very concerned by her absence and continue chattering and drinking. Edward is shown to become increasingly irritated as the party proceeds. The guests appear to be familiar with one another, except for a stranger. The stranger does not indulge in any conversation with any of the guests throughout the party and remains both un-introduced and unidentified through the entire first Act.

Edward appears to be visibly relieved when the guests prepare to leave because he is obviously impatiently waiting to talk to the as yet unknown guest. When the guests finally leave, the audience realizes that the unknown guest is a psychiatrist who assures Edward that he will bring Lavinia back the next day. The psychiatrist advises Edward that things need to change between them and that he will help them make things work out.

When Celia returns to the flat, admitting that she is aware that Lavinia has actually left him, and that they should take the opportunity to get married, she is surprised to hear that Edward wants to end their affair because he has realized he loves his wife and wants to make things work with her. This is obviously the sacrificing mistress character.

In the second Act, it is revealed that Lavinia in the meantime has not remained the quiet and self-suffering wife, but has also been engaged in a secret liaison with another regular guest at their cocktail parties, Peter. Despite this startling revelation, both Edward and Lavinia realize that they still love each other and with counselling and guidance from the psychiatrist, Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly, they decide to work out their marriage.

## NOTES

## NOTES

As the play comes to an end, Edward and Lavinia are shown to be together and are seen to prepare to host another cocktail party with the same regular guests.

Eliot has written some notable quotes during the entire narrative of the play *The Cocktail Party*. One of his most noteworthy quotes on the complexities and realities of human relationships is given here:

We die to each other daily. What we know of other people is only our memory of the moments during which we knew them. And they have changed since then. To pretend that they and we are the same is a useful and convenient social convention which must sometimes be broken. We must also remember that at every meeting we are meeting a stranger.

This quote expressed Eliot's conviction that human beings keep changing and evolving on an almost daily basis. This means that it is just not possible that any person remains the same over even two consecutive days. This means that even though we are meeting someone we have already met or have supposedly known for some length of time, people must always understand and remember this significant fact of life: We should always go by the premise that every time they meet someone, they must view and accept the person as a complete stranger, and begin building a relationship from that moment on.

### Theme

The playwright T. S. Eliot has woven a number of themes into his play titled *The Cocktail Party*. The play which has three Acts, is used by the playwright to describe human relationships and their complexities, especially in the so-called upper or elitist classes. Apparently, cocktail parties are hosted and attended by the upper classes. Within those human relationships, Eliot has focused on the relationship between a husband and his wife. The relationship between a husband and his wife is something that is precious, sensitive and extremely private.

It is possible that either or both partners within a marriage may at times stray, or be attracted to someone outside the marriage. Usually, when this happens, the marriage breaks down, resulting in a divorce or separation. A marriage is so precious a relationship that it is necessary at the outset for both partners to be entirely certain that they do want to get married to the person concerned. After the marriage takes place, there should be no space within that relationship for a third person to enter that space, whether for a single night or for a longer period of time.

The playwright has focused on the need for a man and a woman to understand that no two people are alike or perfect, yet the relationship of marriage is so precious and sensitive that both partners involved need to struggle with their own and the partner's past, the guilt or shame involved, and accept those flaws and idiosyncrasies. No one is perfect, yet when two people love one another and decide to be married to one another, it means they accept the other person as they are. The flaws and the follies should not matter at all.

## NOTES

Eliot has based his play on the premise that although it is possible that either one or both partners within a marriage may find momentary diversion with someone outside their marital relationship, it is possible to save and nurture that marital relationship either with the help of a third person or by sitting down and discussing the problems with each other. Sometimes, the third person could be related to them, or it could be a psychiatrist or marriage counsellor.

Within the play *The Cocktail Party*, the playwright has shown how the main protagonists Edward and his wife Lavinia are having problems with their marriage because they have both been involved in a relationship with someone outside their marriage. Yet both partners, Edward and Lavinia, discover that they love each other and need to save their marriage and work on it. Eliot has shown that both the partners decide to seek professional help and approach a psychiatrist, Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly. These complexities within a relationship between Edward and Lavinia draw the attention of the audience to the fact that while the central theme of the play is based on human relations, there are multiple sub themes woven into the central theme, in order to describe how two people married to each other can make their marriage work, survive and flourish if they really love their partner and want to be with that person.

Eliot has also explored the actuality of cocktail parties, or rather of the upper classes. Eliot has described as to how the rich and elite classes actually live through these parties. Eliot himself did not belong to a wealthy family. His father had been a successful businessman, but Eliot needed to work at multiple teaching jobs in order to make some extra money. Perhaps the cost of living a good life in England was too high during his that period. It was however true that Eliot had had to work in the publishing industry and at various teaching positions in order to earn consistently well.

Human relationships are always complex because no two human beings resemble each other or think like each other. Relationships between husbands and wives in the upper classes could become as strained and farcical as they do in the middle classes. In fact such relationships are perhaps more farcical in the upper classes because the upper classes are always called upon to present a pretty and happy exterior to the outside world.

The middle or the working classes are perhaps more open and able to be more honest and transparent in their relationships. Upper class couples who experience problems in their marriage do not have the luxury of divulging these problems to either their family or friends, since they always need to put on a happy front in public. It is easy to understand and relate to the complex confusions emanating from always being forced to pretend, not just to the world at large, but also to themselves. At some point, the external masks may be revealed and the ensuing exposure of pompous arrogance and ridiculous reality has been very well described by Eliot.

## NOTES

Eliot has tried to expose the dynamics of two distinct relationships between three characters in the play. Edward is the main male protagonist in the play and Lavinia is his wife. The other female character of some significance is Celia, who as the play progresses, is revealed to the audience as being the woman who is involved with Edward.

Edward is depicted as a large and bumbling man, who is not very attractive to the women he meets. In spite of this, he is rich, and this is why he is able to indulge in a secret liaison with Celia. However, a young man is shown to seek advice from Edward about his romantic interest in Celia. According to the young man, Celia appears to be leading him on, or doing nothing in any case to put an end to the advances from the young man.

In spite of this divulgence, upon finding out that Lavinia has apparently left her husband for whatever reasons, Celia confronts Edward with the suggestion that he should take this opportunity to get a divorce from his wife and marry her. Edward, who seemed to be happy with both his marriage and his extra marital liaison till then, now suddenly seemed to be having second thoughts about his extra marital liaison with Celia. Contrary to her expectations, Edward wants his wife back and wants to make his marriage with Lavinia work.

Another important sub-plot is the constant struggle that people need to go through in order to achieve something. As the play unfolds, the audience observe how Edward struggles with himself, his past and his conscience, to understand and reach a decision that helps him understand that he will need to struggle to make his marriage with Lavinia work. But he loves his wife too much to let his marriage suffer. Hence, any struggle would be worth making his marriage with Lavinia work. Celia who wants to marry Edward, upon realizing that Edward wants his wife back in his life in spite of the underlying problems, struggles to come to terms with this truth and let go of her desires and dreams. Lavinia, for her part, who may have decided to leave her husband because of his involvement and liaison with Celia, decides to return to her husband, obviously after having to struggle with the burden of her sadness, heartbreak and jealousy, in an effort to make her marriage with Edward work.

Yet another significant plot or theme explored in this play is that of acceptance. Eliot perhaps taking a page from his own life, appears to suggest that a couple needs to make their marriage or relationship survive and thrive, but in order to be able to do this, they both need to accept that as individuals, they both have had their pasts. In order to make their present relationship flourish and blossom, they both need to abandon their egos and their pasts, and build something meaningful with what they have on their plate at the present moment.

Eliot has chosen love as the constant plot or undercurrent across the entire narrative. Edward who has an extra marital liaison with Celia is forced to reconsider his feelings for his wife, Lavinia. At the final calling, when he is forced to actually choose between his wife Lavinia and the other woman Celia, he realizes that he is

unhappy without his wife, that he actually loves his wife Lavinia, and that he will work hard to make his marriage with her work when she returns to their home the following day. It is love and acceptance that are essential ingredients to make a marriage flourish, and for any couple to live contentedly and happily with one another. This level of love and acceptance makes everything else trivial and unimportant.

### 7.2.3 Critical Appreciation of *The Cocktail Party*

*The Cocktail Party* was written by the poet and playwright T. S. Eliot in 1949. The play is based on human relationships and explores the different aspects and nuances of relationships between couples and those around them.

At the beginning of the play, Eliot introduces the entire cast and major characters who are attending a cocktail party at the London flat belonging to the Chamberlayne couple, Edward and Lavinia. These characters include Edward who is the host, Julia, Celia, Alex, Peter as well as the guest who remains unidentified and unintroduced until the end of the play.

In spite of being unknown, this guest is shown to have a great deal of influence and impact on Edward and the decisions he will eventually make with regard to his marriage and relations with his wife Lavinia. To a large extent, this unknown guest, precisely because of being unintroduced until the end, does not have much to say to the other guests attending the cocktail party.

The play opens on the interiors of a large flat belonging to Edward and Lavinia Chamberlayne, who are hosting a cocktail party. The host, who is the main protagonist, appears to be uneasy because his wife Lavinia is not at home to greet their guests. A male guest named Alex begins telling tales of his travels to exotic places such as India. He talks of some Maharaja he had met on his travels. Julia, another guest, appears to be regular at most cocktail parties. She is described as being sharp-eyed and sharp-tongued. However, she is also described as always missing the point of every story being told or narrated at such cocktail parties. The guests ask Julia to perform her usual imitation of an inimitable Lady Klotz and her wedding cake. It is apparent that Julia narrates this tale and imitates at every party she attends and all the guests have perhaps heard her many times. But it feels as though she is usually invited to such parties just because she can entertain the guests with her imitation. However, this time, Julia appears reluctant to repeat the same tale, or perhaps she has something new to narrate. She begins talking about a family she had met who had a son. The guests wonder why the son should be mentioned as a separate entity when the tale is about the family as a collective unit. Julia goes on to expand her tale. She tells the guests present and the audience that the son was more fascinating than the parents because he was gifted. The son, says Julia, was fascinating because he was able to hear the cries of bats, possibly which no one else could.

A young man named Peter present in the party is a playwright who describes a scene or a play that he had written, but which was obviously to his chagrin, never

## NOTES

## NOTES

performed on stage or published. Through this entire narrative, Edward becomes increasingly more irritated and tense. He is obviously extremely disturbed by his wife's absence. Although most of the guest appear to be familiar with one another and are introduced to the audience when others call out to them, there is one guest who remains both unintroduced and unidentified to both—the other guests in the party as well as to the audience. His presence is significant because he appears to have some extent of influence over Edward and his decisions. Obviously embarrassed and upset that his wife Lavinia is not present at the party, Edward asks his old and sick aunt to tell the guests that Lavinia is sick and resting at her house and sends her apologies.

After some time, the guests seem ready to leave. This seems to relieve the host, Edward. Everyone leaves, except the unidentified person. When the others leave, he sits down to have a drink with Edward and they begin talking about Lavinia. The unidentified person informs Edward that he knows Lavinia is not actually at his aunt's place. The guest assures the host that Lavinia will return to Edward within 24 hours, but that she will not be the same person who had left the house. She will be a completely different person, a changed woman. Her arrival will change things between the couple, bringing changes into Edward's life as well. The guest suggests that Edward and Lavinia will need to rebuild their relationship on a fresh start from that point onwards. After the unidentified guest leaves, Julia and Peter come in. Julia is looking for her keys, but after a short futile search, realizes that her keys have been in her purse all the time. She leaves without Peter.

Peter tells Edward that he has returned because he wants his advice and help. Peter claims he has fallen in love with Celia and although she seemed to be interested in him for some time, she had begun to distance herself from him recently. Peter requests Edward to talk to Celia on his behalf.

After Peter leaves, Celia re-enters the flat. Her intentions and place in Edward's life become clear. She informs Edward that she has discovered that his wife Lavinia is not actually at his aunt's home, but has left him. Celia suggests that he should take this opportunity to file a divorce and instead marry Celia. Obviously, still uneasy and disturbed, Edward at first agrees. But he then informs Celia that his wife is returning home the next day and that he is actually trying to make his marriage work.

At the end of Act I, however, when Lavinia returns home, Edward does not seem to be very happy and his wife begins cleaning up the flat after the party and doing the routine chores.

In Act II, the unidentified guest from the first Act is revealed to be a psychiatrist named Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly. Sir Henry, during the second Act, invites Edward and Lavinia to his office to talk about their relationship and to work at making it successful. The discussion between the couple reveals that while Edward was having an affair with Celia, Lavinia had also been involved with another character, Peter. At the end of the second Act, Sir Henry is shown to assess the human relationship.

When the psychiatrist is shown to recite a poem on destiny, life and death, perhaps, then Eliot may possibly have written this significant quote:

*It will do you no harm to find yourself ridiculous.*

*Resign yourself to be the fool you are...*

*...We must always take risks. That is our destiny...*

These words perhaps reveal how Eliot may have believed in destiny and how nothing is greater than our destiny. Human beings, according to Eliot, must not be afraid to take risks or make mistakes. Destiny demands that whether people make mistakes or take risks, they must continue to live and interact with other people. People should not be afraid of being a fool or a laughing stock in front of others. There may be times, there may be various people who view a person as a fool. The point is people must continue to interact in social scenarios. People must always accept being treated like a fool or joker by at least one or two people in a crowd or gathering. On the other hand, if people could accept themselves or view themselves as fools, and being ridiculous, it would save them much heartburn.

The third and final Act is set two years later. Edward and Lavinia are in their flat, hosting another cocktail party. During the party, Peter hears of Celia's sudden and violent death. Sir Henry is shown to recite a poem depicting destiny, life and death. The play *The Cocktail Party* closes on the Chamberlaynes', Edward and his wife Lavinia, together at playing their individual and collective roles in society.

The narrative is interspersed with incidents where characters are reciting poetry and writing plays of their own. These sub plots as well as the complexities of human relations, the struggles to make marriages work, are all obviously pages taken from the life of the playwright himself. Eliot has obviously interspersed these incidents into the play to convey to his audience that relations between couples needs to be worked at consistently and with determination, if couples want their marriage to work then nothing external is important enough to enter and impact those marriages.

The play moves effortlessly through the entire narrative, while Eliot has ensured that some emotions and nuances remain consistent throughout the entire narrative. While the playwright, on the surface of it, appears to criticize the lifestyle of the rich and elite society, and uses sarcasm to convey his criticism, there are other undercurrents.

Eliot appears to suggest that human relationships, especially relations between couples, need to be worked at. Both partners need to struggle hard and constantly in order to let go of their own and their partner's pasts and any flaws. This struggle is essential if they want to make their relationship work and flourish. The plot could have been inspired from his own life because his first marriage with Vivienne was unhappy and unsuccessful.

This struggle and acceptance is important if a relationship is to survive and flourish. Edward admits to Celia at the final moment that he loves his wife Lavinia who will return to their home and that he will work hard at making their marriage

*T.S. Eliot: The Cocktail  
Party*

## NOTES

## NOTES

work. It is obvious that Celia had probably not been expecting this response from her lover and Eliot has described how Celia would also need to struggle to accept Edward's decision to remain with his wife and let her, Celia, go.

### 7.2.4 Issues and Analysis

The play *The Cocktail Party* was first performed in 1949 at the Edinburgh Festival. The narrative has been divided into three Acts. The play has been set in London and for the most part revolves around the large London flat of the two main protagonists, Edward and Lavinia Chamberlayne. It is possible that the plot or the main theme of this play was inspired by the breakdown of marriage between Thomas Stearns Eliot and his wife Vivienne.

It is common knowledge that writers and playwrights are most often inspired by events taking place either in their own lives or in the society they live in. Since the play was first performed in the year 1949, it would be certainly acceptable to assume that it was set in London during the 1940s. Moreover, some aspects of the content or narrative could have been influenced by an Ancient Greek play by Euripides that perhaps Eliot studied at school.

It is a well-known fact that the playwright T. S. Eliot usually used complex relationships between married couples as an inspiration for his plays, thus intertwining the concept of marital relationships into his plays at some point. Another feature common in most of his plays is the concept of the mistress involved in an extra marital liaison with the husband but who is depicted as a suffering and sacrificing character who, according to Christianity, allows the husband to return to his wife.

During the lifetime of the playwright, the play *The Cocktail Party* is said to have become extremely popular, running full shows whenever and wherever it was performed. It had also won the Tony Award for Best Play in 1950.

What is noteworthy is that Eliot appeared to harbour the conservative and narrow minded way of thinking that was common in those times. This is apparent from the fact that most of his plays are said to depict a marriage between a man and a woman, and the character of the mistress sacrificing her desire and love and letting the husband return to his wife. Analysing this aspect shows that the husband in most plays was shown to actually have his cake and eat it too. This meant that while it suited him or until it suited him, the husband enjoyed the extra marital liaison with a mistress. Yet, when the sanctity of his marriage was threatened or in other words his wife decided she had had enough and wanted to walk out of the marriage, the husband suddenly wakes up to the fact that he actually still loved his wife, and wanted to return to his wife. He suddenly decided to work at making his marriage survive and flourish, ending his affair with his mistress.

This aspect of marriage is a common one in most marriages even in modern times. The theme has been used in plenty plays and movies down the ages. Yet, it appears that the play *The Cocktail Party* is not remembered so well today. In fact, it is Thomas Eliot's first play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, written in 1935, that is still remembered till date.

Perhaps it was the title of the play *The Cocktail Party* that made the play so popular at that time because cocktail parties were a common feature and event within the high society during those years. In the late 20th and 21st centuries, however, cocktail parties have lost their prominence, perhaps contributing to the fact that the play *The Cocktail Party* is not so popular now.

Perhaps one important addition to the central theme of the play *The Cocktail Party* could be the fact that Eliot has described Lavinia Chamberlayne to be as strong minded and strong willed as her husband. This was perhaps the first time Eliot had shown the female protagonist to also indulge in an extra marital liaison. In fact, she is shown to not just have had an extra marital liaison, but to have chosen a younger man to be engaged with.

Another surprising element in the play is that when Lavinia leaves her husband, no one actually knows where she has gone, but the young man she has so far been involved in an extra marital liaison with, Peter, approaches Edward after the party, to request him to intervene on his behalf, and ask the older lady he is involved with to live with him, Peter. However, probably, unable to confess the entire truth to Edward at this point, Peter is described as telling Edward that he has been involved in an affair with Celia who has suddenly turned cold turkey. Edward is obviously shocked at this piece of information because Celia is the woman he himself has been having an extra marital affair with.

The audience, who soon realize the actual state of affairs between Edward and Celia, are left to wonder if Celia has actually been cheating on Edward. Edward calls Celia at the end of the first Act and she comes to meet him. Celia tells Edward that she has discovered that Lavinia has actually left him and this is the opportune moment they have both waiting for. Edward could now file for divorce, according to Celia, and he and Celia could get married.

However, Celia is shocked to hear Edward inform her that he is ending his affair with her and returning to his wife. Edward tells Celia that the unknown guest at the party that night was a psychiatrist and with his help Lavinia would return to their home the next day. Edward informs Celia that he wants to make his marriage work because he realized that he still loved his wife very much.

How complex marriages are is a theme explored by many writers and playwrights. It was perhaps the first time that a playwright had attempted to describe how a wife is also having an affair, that too with a younger man. It is not until the second Act that both the main protagonist Edward as well as the audience realize that the older lady Peter had been talking about was not actually Celia.

On their visit to the office of the psychiatrist Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly, Lavinia informs them that while Edward had been enjoying an extra marital liaison with Celia, she herself had been engaged in an extra marital affair with Peter. The audience is left to wonder whether Edward Chamberlayne would have decided to end his affair with Celia if Peter had had the courage to inform him the truth that he was in love with Lavinia and wanted to be with her. The audience is also left to wonder whether Edward Chamberlayne would have decided to rethink and rework

## NOTES

## NOTES

on his marriage if he had known the truth about his wife's affair with another man. It is only the timely intervention by the psychiatrist Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly that both Edward and Lavinia decide to actually end their extra marital affairs and rework on their marriage and not just work but flourish as well.

The scene in the office of the psychiatrist Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly in fact reveal two startling truths. Edward Chamberlayne who had been certain that his wife Lavinia had walked out of their marriage because she had discovered that her husband had been involved in an extra marital liaison with Celia, suddenly realizes that as a matter of fact his wife had had no inkling of his affair with Celia at all. Lavinia informs him in the presence of the psychiatrist that she had decided to walk out of their marriage because she had been involved in an extra marital affair with Peter. Edward then reveals the fact that he himself had been involved in an extra marital affair with Celia. Truly, human relationships are extremely complex. Eliot had decided to give a voice to the character of Lavinia in his play *The Cocktail Party* which was a rare occurrence in those times.

One is left to wonder if perhaps Eliot had been trying to make peace with his own conscience because in his private and personal life he had not attempted to rework his own first marriage with Vivienne. On the contrary, Eliot had made public appearances for several years with another woman with whom he had been involved even when he was still legally married to Vivienne. Vivienne was then admitted to a mental health institute after legal separation from her husband Eliot, where she had remained until her death.

Cocktail parties had been a regular and popular feature of the rich and elite society in London during Eliot's time. The interactions between the various guests at the cocktail party hosted by Edward and Lavinia appear to express Eliot's satirical disdain for such events. While the character of Alex is shown to narrate his travels to exotic places, Julia is another character who is shown to regale the guests at every party with her imitations of a certain Lady Klootz and her wedding cake. The character of Peter is shown to be a budding playwright who has written a play. He narrates scenes from the play but is disappointed since it had still not been performed. The audience is left to wonder whether perhaps this was a reflection on a play written by Eliot that had still not been staged.

On consideration it would appear that Eliot had been greatly influenced and inspired by plenty of events taking place in his own life. He was a well-known and successful poet as well and the psychiatrist Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly is shown to recite a poem on destiny, life and death in his office after both Edward and Lavinia have discussed their individual affairs. It could be that the poem was written by Eliot himself since he was also a brilliant poet. Eliot, who appears to have used the play *The Cocktail Party* to make peace with his conscience about the breakdown of his own marriage to Vivienne, had made an important observation about the burden people carry:

*Your burden is not to clear your conscience. But to learn how to bear the burdens on your conscience.*

## NOTES

The truth about guilty conscience is that people should understand that no matter how hard they try or how much they work at it, their guilt at having hurt another human being will never really and absolutely go away. The burden of that guilty conscience will always remain with them and haunt them till they die. On the other hand, according to what Eliot possibly believes, the burden of the guilt they carry will not be their actual burden. On the contrary, the real burden they will need to carry and consider will be to find ways to deal with the guilt they carry.

In another instance, through the narrative of the play *The Cocktail Party*, Eliot expressed another profound thought. Human beings, in their interactions with the people around them, usually begin to think that there is something wrong with the people or more probably with the world around them. But that thought itself would be enough to drive the people completely crazy. Here is what Eliot had to say about this in *The Cocktail Party*:

I must tell you that I should really like to think there's something wrong with me- Because, if there isn't, then there's something wrong with the world itself-and that's much more frightening! That would be terrible. So I'd rather believe there is something wrong with me, that could be put right.

From the above lines, we can infer that Eliot would have advised people to live by the premise that they should all think and believe that something was wrong with them, individually. Because if people lived by the premise that something was wrong with the people around them or the world that they lived in, it would be too frightening to consider that thought. Imagine looking at everyone around them, everything around them with suspicion or with fear, trying to figure out what people were thinking and what everything was doing to harm them! On the other hand, if people had to live by the premise that something was profoundly wrong with themselves, there would always be room to seek help, approach people who were professionally qualified or trained to help them correct that wrong. This thought holds true for every human being, across all generations and for all social environments or economic backgrounds.

In another instance, during the narrative of the play *The Cocktail Party*, the playwright makes yet another profound observation. This observation also had a reference, obviously to the complexity and sensitivity of a marital relationship between a man and a woman. This is what he had to say about marriage in *The Cocktail Party*:

Reilly: The human condition...they may remember the vision they have had, but they cease to regret it, maintain themselves by the common routine, learn to avoid excessive expectation, Become tolerant of themselves and others, Giving and taking, in the usual actions what there is to give and take. They do not repine; Are contented with the morning that separates and with the evening that brings together for casual talk before the fire. Two people who know they do not understand each other, breeding children whom they do not understand and who will never understand them.

## NOTES

Once more, this observation had been based on events that had taken place in Eliot's personal life. As has been mentioned elsewhere, Eliot had spent most of his life in total isolation, not interacting with peers of his own age, or perhaps even with his own siblings. In any case, his siblings were much older than him. These facts probably shaped his thoughts that two people could never really live together because they were complete strangers to one another. Having to live together in the same house, as complete strangers, would be frightening. Because when two people live together, they need to be tolerant of one another, of their own idiosyncrasies, of one another's mood swings, temperaments, and living habits. Most often, people always find something in the other person, they do not like or are unable to tolerate.

The thought of two people marry one another and live together in the same house, sharing the same bed and having children frightened Eliot. Two people who are actually strangers and living together in such close proximity was a frightening thought to Eliot. Because going by the premise that they were both strangers, they would never really be able to understand one another completely. But having to bear children was more frightening. Because those children would also remain complete strangers to their parents. So, in effect, according to Eliot, neither would the parents ever completely understand their children, nor would the children ever completely understand either their parents or each other.

When we analyse these thoughts of the playwright, we must accept that these concepts hold some relevance even in the present times. How much do we actually understand people around us, even the people who are supposedly closest to us?

### Check Your Progress

1. What made it impossible for Eliot to take part in physical activities and have friends of his own age in his childhood days?
2. When did Eliot convert to Anglicanism from Unitarianism?
3. What are the two aspects explored by Eliot in the play *The Cocktail Party*?
4. Who was the stranger present in the cocktail party hosted by Edward in *The Cocktail Party*?

## 7.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Eliot was afflicted with a congenital double inguinal hernia which made it impossible for him to take part in physical activities and have friends of his own age.

2. On 29 June 1927, Eliot converted to Anglicanism from Unitarianism that had been practised by his family.
3. The play *The Cocktail Party* explores two aspects of human relations. These are the human psyche and the intricacies of marital relationships.
4. The stranger was a psychiatrist, Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly, who had come to help Edward and Lavinia to make their marriage work and to reunite them.

*T.S. Eliot: The Cocktail Party*

## NOTES

### 7.4 SUMMARY

- Thomas Stearns Eliot became the most prominent poet of 20th century. Besides being a poet, Eliot is also known as an essayist, literary and social critic, playwright and publisher.
- T. S. Eliot was born on 26 September 1888 in the city of St. Louis in the United States. In the year 1914, when Eliot was 25, he relocated to England, where he lived for the rest of his life.
- Eliot had been born with a congenital double hernia which had forced him to lead an extremely isolated childhood. He had found solace in literature and spent hours reading books.
- The play *The Cocktail Party* by Thomas Stearns Eliot was probably one of the most critically acclaimed of the seven plays he had written. It is significant to note that *The Cocktail Party* has been interwoven with multiple aspects from the Ancient Greek play titled *Alceste* written by Euripides.
- The play explores the complexities of human relationships and in particular between a husband and wife. The entire play has been set against the backdrop of the Chamberlayne couple, Edward and Lavinia, and their marital problems.
- The play which has three Acts, is used by the playwright to describe human relationships and their complexities, especially in the so-called upper or elitist classes. Apparently, cocktail parties are hosted and attended by the upper classes. Within those human relationships, Eliot has focused on the relationship between a husband and his wife. The relationship between a husband and his wife is something that is precious, sensitive and extremely private.
- What is noteworthy is that Eliot appeared to harbour the conservative and narrow minded way of thinking that was common in those times. This is apparent from the fact that most of his plays are said to depict a marriage between a man and a woman, and the character of the mistress sacrificing her desire and love and letting the husband return to his wife.
- Cocktail parties had been a regular and popular feature of the rich and elite society in London during Eliot's time. The interactions between the various guests at the cocktail party hosted by Edward and Lavinia appear to express Eliot's satirical disdain for such events.

## NOTES

- The thought of two people marry one another and live together in the same house, sharing the same bed and having children frightened Eliot. Two people who are actually strangers and living together in such close proximity was a frightening thought to Eliot.

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### 7.5 KEY WORDS

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- **Bumbling:** It refers to acting in a confused or ineffectual way; incompetent.
  - **Modernism:** It is a movement in literature dating from early 20th century to 1930s which pertains to all creative arts especially poetry, fiction, drama, music, etc.
  - **Cocktail:** It is an alcoholic drink consisting of a spirit or spirits mixed with other ingredients, such as fruit juice or cream.
  - **Mood Swings:** It refers to abrupt and unaccountable changes of mood.
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### 7.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short-Answer Questions

1. What is the theme of Eliot's play *The Cocktail Party*?
2. How has Eliot described Julia in the play *The Cocktail Party*?
3. How has Eliot described the concept of marriage and the relationship between a husband and a wife in *The Cocktail Party*?

#### Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe T. S. Eliot's early life and his literary career.
  2. Critically analyse the play *The Cocktail Party*.
  3. What are the issues that Eliot discusses in the play *The Cocktail Party*? Explain in detail.
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### 7.7 FURTHER READINGS

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- Gale. 2001. *A Study Guide for T. S. Eliot's 'The Cocktail Party'*. Michigan: Gale Group.
- Phelan, Virginia B. 1990. *Two Ways of Life and Death: Alcestis and The Cocktail Party*. Garland: University of Michigan.
- Jones, E., David. 1965. *The Plays of T. S. Eliot*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
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## UNIT 8 ARTHUR MILLER'S: *ALL MY SONS*

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Arthur Miller's:  
*All My Sons*

### NOTES

#### Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 Overview of the Play *All My Sons*
- 8.3 Analysis of the Play
- 8.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 8.5 Summary
- 8.6 Key Words
- 8.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 8.8 Further Readings

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### 8.0 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit, you will learn the various aspects related to Arthur Miller's play *All My Sons*.

*All My Sons* is Arthur Miller's first commercially successful play, in which Miller has examined the morality of a man who places his responsibility to his immediate family above his duty to the men who depend on the integrity of his work. In this play, Miller demonstrated the strong influence of both Henrik Ibsen and Greek tragedy. Miller started writing the play in 1945, taking inspiration from World War II and the true-life story of a woman who warned authorities about her father's wrong-doing during wartime. The play features the ideas of social responsibility and uses symbolism throughout to express the idea of finality and death.

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### 8.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the life of Arthur Miller
- Analyze the use of language, dramatic techniques and themes in *All My Sons*
- Assess the portrayal of the major characters in the play
- Describe the recreation of historical periods and the hypocrisies of religion in *All My Sons*

## NOTES

## 8.2 OVERVIEW OF THE PLAY *ALL MY SONS*

Arthur Miller was an inspiring modern American playwright, best known for his powerful play *The Crucible* that commented on the contemporary political witch hunting during the Cold War period, using the historical backdrop of the Salem witch trials of 17th century.

*All My Sons* is a play about truth, commitment and guilt. The story is about the Keller family and their neighbours Deever who end up paying for the mistake of Joe Keller. It is about Joe Keller, his fatal decision and his lies. The story is powerful and raises questions concerning individual ethics, social commitment and the nature of truth.

Arthur Miller wrote *All My Sons* after his first play *The Man Who Had All the Luck* had been a complete failure on Broadway lasting only four performances. Miller wrote the play as a final attempt at writing a commercially successful play - if the play failed to find an audience, Miller had vowed to 'find some other line of work'.

*All My Sons* is based upon a true story, which was pointed out by Arthur Miller's then mother-in-law in an Ohio newspaper. The story depicted how a woman informed on her father who had sold faulty parts to the U.S. military during World War II.

Miller was influenced by Henrik Ibsen's play *The Wild Duck*, where Miller took the idea of two partners in a business in which one is compelled to take moral and legal responsibility for the other. This is mirrored in *All My Sons*. He also borrowed the idea of a character's idealism being the source of a problem.

The criticism of the American Dream, which is a central theme of *All My Sons*, was one reason why Arthur Miller was called to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) during the 1950s, when America was gripped by anti-communist hysteria. Miller sent a copy of the play to Elia Kazan who directed the original stage version of *All My Sons*. Kazan was a former member of the Communist Party who shared Miller's left-wing views. However, their relationship was severed when Kazan gave names of suspected Communists to the HUAC during the Red Scare.

Arthur Miller's writing in *All My Sons* often portrays great respect for the great Greek tragedies of the likes of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. In these plays, the tragic hero or protagonist will commit an offence, often unknowingly, which will return to haunt him, sometimes many years later. The play summarizes all the consequences from the offense into a twenty-four hour time span. During that day, the protagonist must learn his fault and suffer as a result, and perhaps even die. In this way, the gods are shown to be just and moral order is restored. In *All My Sons*, these elements are all present; it takes place within a twenty-four hour period, has a protagonist suffering from a previous offense and punishment

for that offense. Moreover, it explores the father-son relationship, also a common theme in Grecian tragedies. Ann Deever could also be seen to parallel a messenger as her letter is proof of Larry's death.

Arthur Miller's:  
*All My Sons*

In Joe Keller, Arthur Miller creates just a representative type. Joe is portrayed as a very ordinary man, decent, hard-working and charitable, a man no-one could dislike. However, like the protagonist of the ancient drama, he has a flaw or weakness. This, in turn, causes him to act in a wrong manner. He is forced to accept responsibility - his suicide is necessary to restore the moral order of the universe, and allows his son, Chris, to live free from guilt and persecution. Arthur Miller later uses the everyman in a criticism of the American Dream in *Death of a Salesman*, which is in many ways similar to *All My Sons*.

## NOTES

### Life of Miller

Arthur Asher Miller was born on 17 October 1915, in New York City, to Isidore and Augusta Miller, who were Polish-Jewish immigrants. Miller graduated in 1932 from Abraham Lincoln High School, following which he worked at several menial jobs to pay for his college tuition.

At the University of Michigan, Miller took his degree in journalism first and worked as a reporter and night editor for the student paper, the *Michigan Daily*. During this time, he wrote his first work, *No Villain*. Miller switched his major to English, and consequently received the Avery Hopwood Award for *No Villain*. Miller graduated with a BA in English in 1938, following which he joined the Federal Theatre Project, a New Deal agency established to provide jobs in the theatre.

Miller wrote *The Man Who Had All the Luck* in 1940; it was produced in New Jersey the same year and won the Theatre Guild's National Award. However, the play closed after four performances and devastating reviews. In his book *Trinity of Passion*, author Alan M. Wald surmises that Miller was 'a member of a writer's unit of the Communist Party around 1946', using the pseudonym Matt Wayne, and edited a drama column in the magazine *The New Masses*. *All My Sons* came out in 1946, which was the result of continuous thought put by Miller in his writing since 1941. It was a success on Broadway and also contributed to Miller's literary career by earning him his first Tony Award for Best Author.

In 1948, Miller built a small studio in Roxbury, Connecticut where he wrote Act I of *Death of a Salesman*, one of the classics of modern world theatre, in less than a day. He completed the rest of the play within six weeks. *Death of a Salesman* premiered on Broadway on 10 February 1949 at the Morosco Theatre, directed by Elia Kazan, and starring Lee J. Cobb as Willy Loman, Mildred Dunnock as Linda, Arthur Kennedy as Biff and Cameron Mitchell as Happy. The play was commercially successful and critically acclaimed. It won Miller a Tony Award for Best Author again, the New York Drama Circle Critics' Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. It was the first play to win all three of these major awards.

In 1952, Kazan appeared before the HUAC; fearful of being blacklisted from Hollywood, Kazan named eight members of the Group Theatre, including

## NOTES

Clifford Odets, Paula Strasberg, Lillian Hellman, Joe Bromberg and John Garfield, who in recent years had been fellow members of the Communist Party. After a discussion with Kazan about his testimony, Miller travelled to Salem, Massachusetts to research the witch trials of 1692. Miller's play *The Crucible* was a result of this conversation and subsequent research, in which he compared the situation with the HUAC to the witch hunt in Salem. On 22 January 1953, this play opened at the Beck Theatre on Broadway. Though widely considered, it was only somewhat successful at the time of its initial release.

Miller's experience with the HUAC was to affect him throughout his life. In June 1956, a one-act version of Miller's verse drama, *A View from the Bridge*, opened on Broadway in a joint bill with one of Miller's lesser-known plays, *A Memory of Two Mondays*. In 1957, Miller returned to *A View from the Bridge*, revising it into a two-act prose version, which Peter Brook produced in London. In 1964, Miller's next play *After the Fall* was produced. The play is a deeply personal view of Miller's experiences of marriage with actress Marilyn Monroe.

In 1983, Miller travelled to the People's Republic of China to produce and direct *Death of a Salesman* at the People's Art Theatre in Beijing, China, where the play was a success. In 1984, *Salesman in Beijing*, a book about Miller's experiences in Beijing, was published. In 1993, Miller won the National Medal of Arts. In 2001, Miller was selected by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for the Jefferson Lecture, the U.S. federal government's highest honour for achievement in the humanities. Miller's lecture was entitled '*On Politics and the Art of Acting*.' Miller's lecture analyzed political events (including the recent U.S. presidential election of 2000) in terms of the 'arts of performance'. The lecture was termed 'a disgrace' by the conservative Jay Nordlinger, while George Will argued that Miller was not legitimately a 'scholar'.

Miller died at the age of eighty-nine on the evening of 10 February 2005 due to heart failure. 10th February 2005 was also the 56th anniversary of the Broadway debut of *Death of a Salesman*.

### Check Your Progress

1. List any four important plays by Arthur Miller.
2. Why was Arthur Miller called to appear before the House of Un-American Activities?

## 8.3 ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

Let us examine the various aspects of the play.

### I. Plot

The play is divided into three Acts. Every act ends at a point of dramatic tension and leaves hints for the development of action in the next act. The narrative is

linear with heightened points of dramatic tension in between. The end of the play is tragic with Joe Keller shooting himself, unable to bear the guilt of his action. The opening of the play is with the theme of death, and the ending is literally with death. The suspense that is created regarding Larry's death is cleared in the end when his letter is read by all.

The plot concerns a neighbourhood of an American town in the early part of the 20th century and is set in the time of war. The family of Kellers and their neighbours are the central characters in the play. The plot is linear with action developing in a causal manner. The central theme of the plot is betrayal, and as the plot unfolds, truth unfolds. Joe Keller turns out to be guilty of betraying his friend and partner Deever who suffers in prison due to him. The third act of the play is the site where tension is developed to lead the audience to the truth. Finally, Chris discovers the truth of his father's involvement in the crashing of airplanes, and thereby the death of twenty-one pilots. The truth also reveals the involvement of Joe in the death of his son Larry who is overcome with guilt to lead to his own death.

## II. Dramatic Techniques

The dramatic techniques used in the play are as follows:

- (i) **Realism:** Miller's play is realistically set with convincing stage setting and simple dialogues. The action takes place mostly in and around the Keller house. The language is simplistic and real-like. The setting is life-like, ordinary and easy to relate to. These features in the play make it possible for the audience to identify and analyze the larger issues of morality and truth as brought out in the play.
- (ii) **Symbolism:** Symbolism is also employed by the playwright, for instance, with the mention of Larry's tree. From the opening of the play, dramatic tension is built around this tree and later around Larry's letter. The tree and the letter are constant reminders of Larry's absence on stage and symbolize finality and death.

## III. Characters

The important characters in the play are as follows:

- (i) **Joe Keller:** Joe Keller comes across as the most stable character in the play. Till the end, Joe seems to be the man of the house who is devoted to his wife and son, and is also easy going about Chris' relationship with Ann. Joe is presented from the opening of the play as a likeable man in the neighbourhood with Dr Jim Bayliss and Frank visiting him on a Sunday morning. It is also mentioned by Ann how people are fond of him as they come over to play cards with him. Joe's character is revealed to be complex and pitiable in the end, when the truth of his involvement in the war mishaps is revealed. It turns out that he is also responsible in an indirect way for his son's death, who is overcome with a sense of remorse and guilt in learning

## NOTES

## NOTES

the truth about his father and goes to his own death. Joe describes his situation to his family who are unable to empathize with him. He shows himself to be a man who is torn between a sense of responsibility for his family and a moral responsibility for the life of many soldiers at war. He takes the fatal decision of passing a consignment of faulty cylinder which when used in aircrafts lead to deaths of twenty-one pilots.

However, it is difficult to identify Joe as a culprit because as he admits he was intent on revealing the truth to authorities but could not do it in time. He wanted to do well for the sake of his family, and therefore lies to his partner on whom the blame is eventually fixed. He lives with the weight of guilt on his shoulders and tries to keep things in balance. Joe's problems increase when George Deever visits them having learnt the truth from his father. Joe tries to make up to his partner by offering to place him on his release but as Larry's letter is discovered, Joe is betrayed as the one responsible for the calamity. Therefore, Chris labels him a murderer for being responsible for the death not just of his own son, but many other sons. Joe, unable to bear all, shoots himself in the end. Joe's problems are not uncommon; they are representative of the problems of all middle class men who have the challenge of running their family and taking care of all. Joe tries to fulfil the roles of a good husband and a good father who sets up a thriving business for his son. Joe's moral dilemma cannot be called to judgement easily as he tries to balance his personal and social responsibility in life. However, an error of judgement and bad timing lead to irreparable consequences for him and his family.

- (ii) **Kate Keller:** Kate Keller or Mother as she is referred to in the play is the nervous and depressed mother of Chris and Larry. She is introduced to the audience through a conversation between Frank and Joe regarding her desire to interpret Larry's horoscope and the falling of the tree planted in the memory of Larry till her actual appearance onstage. Kate is referred to as 'Mother' by the playwright, probably in order to assert the theme of the play derived from its title. It is a play about 'all their sons' as Joe admits to in the end:

Joe: '...Sure he was my son. But I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were....'

Kate is a loving and sensitive woman, as her love for George and concern for him reveals. However, as far as her other son Chris is concerned, she harbours a compulsive obsession about Larry's return and thereby suffers from a sense of guilt concerning Chris' moving on in life. When she learns of his desire to wed Ann, who was betrothed to Larry when he was alive, she blames Chris and questions Ann regarding her devotion to Larry. The development of dramatic tension in the play owes much to the character of Kate.

- (iii) **Chris Keller:** Chris is the son of Joe and Kate and the brother of Larry. He is a morally upright character, who has a keen sense of right and wrong. Ann says of Chris

'I think it's mostly that whenever I need somebody to tell me the truth I've always thought of Chris. When he tells you something you know it's so.'

Sue mentions the same qualities of Chris but in a negative manner. To her, it's the sense of moral certitude that upsets her about Chris and that unsettles people like her husband.

Chris is a devoted son who loves his parents, and at the same time, a dependable partner who believes in commitment to Ann. He is a family-oriented man, and therefore stays on with his parents despite his mother's hectoring. He comes across as an independent man when he asserts his desire to marry the woman of his choice who he is certain his mother would not approve of. Chris resembles his brother in his moral aspects as the reaction of both of them is extreme when they learn of the truth about their father. While Larry flies himself to his death, Chris decides to punish his father. For them, the fact that their life has advanced on money that has been stained with blood is unbearable. For Chris, as Joe mentions, all the other men on the plane were their sons. He insists on Joe respecting his duty of social commitment and the need to owe up to the death of twenty-one young men who were soldiers like him and Larry, and sons like them too.

- (iv) **Ann Deever:** Ann's character is important in the play as she brings together the dramatic tension that has been suggested from the beginning of the play. She was Larry's sweetheart who has now become his brother Chris' woman. The plot centres on her relationship with Chris and the strands of stories that it unties. Ann is a devoted woman whose love for Larry is as true as it is for Chris. The letter in her possession becomes the instrument of revelation of the real truth in the end of the play. It not only confirms Larry's death but also brings clarity to the perceived involvement of Joe in the mishap for which her father suffers punishment. However, Ann does not react violently like Chris but accepts the truth with a will to move on in life. She is not vindictive like her brother but appears forgiving and practical. As a young woman, she is independent minded and wilful. These are her qualities apart from her beauty that make her character charming amongst the people of the neighbourhood.
- (v) **George Deever:** George Deever is Ann's brother whose entry onstage is at the point of heightened dramatic tension. He learns of the truth regarding Joe directly from his father, and Joe and Kate are shown to be apprehensive about the same even before his arrival. George is a man who has faced hardships of life owing to his father's arrest, and turns out to become a vindictive young man. He quarrels with Chris regarding Joe's truth and it is established in the end that George had been right throughout. He is opposed to his sister's relationship with the son of the man who is responsible for his father's incarceration. George appears onstage in fury and exits in the same state of mind. His character is essential to the development of the plot.

## NOTES

## NOTES

### IV. Themes

The various themes in the play are discussed below.

- (i) **Ethics:** An essential theme of the play is ethics or morality. Arthur Miller has explored the social and personal aspects of morality through the reactions of different characters to the truth as it is learnt in the end. Joe Keller's sense of social ethics does not interfere with his personal ethics of providing for his family. He takes an unfortunate decision that results in the deaths of a score and one soldiers, and also to the suicide of his son. However, Joe is overcome with the instinct of self-preservation that makes him prevaricate in the court and transfer the blame onto his partner, Deever.

However, it is this decision of Joe's that triggers guilt in his two sons, one of whom commits suicide and the other decides to sever ties with him. For them, both soldiers at war, every individual owes much to one's society, and therefore Joe's careless decision that cost so many lives is unpardonable. For Chris, social commitment is essential to every citizen as his involvement in the building of modern civil society can be seen as direct through protecting the civilians by going to war. George sees Joe as a criminal and his father as innocent in clear black and white terms. The women in the play, Kate and Ann, seem more concerned about personal ethics, than that of commitment and loyalty. For Kate, loyalty to her son through constant mourning is more important than anything and she leads her life in the blind faith of his return. Ann is a modern woman who is lonely and is looking for a companion that she finds in Chris. Even after learning the truth, she is keen on her relationship with Chris to whom she has expressed her love and devotion. Commitment and responsibility are therefore themes that are understood by different characters in different ways in the play.

- (ii) **Fate:** The theme of fate is highlighted through the character of Frank who is interested in horoscopes and believes in fate. Kate believes in the same along with him and wants to reiterate her hope for Larry through this. Frank discovers that the date that is stipulated as Larry's death day was a favourable day for him and a man could not die on his favourable day. However, as it turns out, that was the day when Larry died, not a natural but a willing death. The concept of fate is linked to circumstances in the play. At the opening of the play, Larry's ex-beloved arrives and his symbolic tree collapses. For Kate, this is a sign that Larry is still alive. However, as it turns out, Ann's arrival proves to be tragic in other ways. It leads to the discovery of truth and ultimately to Joe's death. From hope to guilt, the story covers all aspects of fate.

#### Check Your Progress

3. Who are the unseen characters in the play *All My Sons*?
4. In the play *All My Sons*, what does the letter reveal in the end?

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## 8.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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Arthur Miller's:  
*All My Sons*

1. The four important plays by Arthur Miller are:
  - *No Villain* (1936)
  - *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1940)
  - *Death of a Salesman* (1949)
  - *The Crucible* (1953)
2. The criticism of the American Dream, which is a central theme of *All My Sons*, was one reason why Arthur Miller was called to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) during the 1950s, when America was gripped by anti-communist hysteria.
3. The unseen characters in the play *All My Sons* are:
  - Larry Keller
  - Steve Deever
4. In the play *All My Sons*, the letter reveals the truth in the end, which had built the suspense throughout the play. Chris discovers the truth of his father's involvement in the crashing of airplanes, and thereby the death of twenty-one pilots. The truth also reveals the involvement of Joe in the death of his son Larry who is overcome with guilt to lead to his own death.

## NOTES

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## 8.5 SUMMARY

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- Miller's *All My Sons* is a play about truth, commitment and guilt. The story is about the Keller family and their neighbours Deever who end up paying for the fatal decision and lies of Joe Keller. The story is powerful and raises questions concerning individual ethics, social commitment and the nature of truth.
- The play is based upon a true story, which depicted how a woman informed on her father who had sold faulty parts to the U.S. military during World War II. Miller also took his inspiration from Henrik Ibsen's play *The Wild Duck* and Greek tragedy.
- The central theme of the play is the criticism of the American Dream.
- The play is divided into three Acts, each of which ends at a point of dramatic tension and leaves hints for the development of action in the next act.
- The opening of the play is with the theme of death, and the ending is literally with death.
- The play is realistically set with convincing stage setting and simple dialogues.

- Symbolism is also employed by the playwright, for instance, the tree and the letter, which are constant reminders of Larry's absence on stage and symbolize finality and death.

## NOTES

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### 8.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Realism:** It refers to the quality or fact of representing a person or thing in a way that is accurate and true to life.
  - **Symbolism:** It means the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities.
  - **Fate:** It refers to the development of events outside a person's control, regarded as predetermined by a supernatural power.
  - **Ethics:** It means the moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity.
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### 8.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short-Answer Questions

1. How is Miller's play *All My Sons* similar to the great Greek tragedies?
2. Discuss the character of Joe Keller.
3. Write a short note on the plot of the play *All My Sons*.

#### Long-Answer Questions

1. Examine the dramatic techniques in the play *All My Sons*.
  2. Discuss the themes of Arthur Miller's play *All My Sons*.
  3. Describe the life of Arthur Miller with a reference to his literary career.
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### 8.8 FURTHER READINGS

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**BLOCK - III**  
**DRAMA IX - XI**

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*George Ryga: The  
Ecstasy of Rita Joe*

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**UNIT 9    GEORGE RYGA: *THE  
ECSTASY OF RITA JOE***

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**NOTES**

**Structure**

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 A Short Note on the Dramatist George Ryga
- 9.3 Summary of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*
  - 9.3.1 Critical Comments on *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*
  - 9.3.2 Influences on George Ryga
- 9.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 9.5 Summary
- 9.6 Key Words
- 9.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 9.8 Further Readings

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**9.0    INTRODUCTION**

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George Ryga is a Canadian dramatist and writer who is known for his plays, especially *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. The play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* is a seminal text in the history of Canadian literature, especially drama. It deals with the sad plight of an American Indian or indigenous woman named Rita Joe in the urban atmosphere of Canada. Ryga in the play portrays an urban white society that refuses to accept Rita and exploits her to such an extent that even living becomes hell. At the end of the play, she is ravaged by three white thugs that leads to her death and also the death of her partner Jaimie Paul as he is thrown before an approaching train. George Ryga presents the horrible conditions under which indigenous aboriginal people in Canada are living and the way they are treated as second class citizens by white society. The hopeless situation that the play portrays often makes people think that George Ryga was much influenced by the Theatre of Cruelty of French Dramatist Antonin Artaud. Critics also assume that Ryga was influenced by Bertolt Brecht and the didactic element of Epic Theatre as well as Expressionism.

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**9.1    OBJECTIVES**

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

- Summarise the play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*
- Examine the significant themes of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*

## NOTES

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### 9.2 A SHORT NOTE ON THE DRAMATIST GEORGE RYGA

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George Ryga is a dramatist and a writer from Canada who started with his professional career in 1962 and went on to become a successful dramatist writing many plays as well as a book on poetry and three novels. *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, a two act play, is one of the most significant plays written by him and it talks about an Aboriginal women's plight when she is in the city.

The play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* is historically significant too for the time in which it premiered. It premiered at the Vancouver Play House on November 23, 1967, the centennial year of the Canadian nation. It is interesting because in the Centennial Year when things are in a celebratory mood, George Ryga through his play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* tried to present how a significant section of the Canadian population are still not living under any kind of support from the state and they are moreover living in conditions which are similar to hell. In those terms, it can be said that the play makes a strong critique of the Canadian nation and tries to present the internal strife that exists within the Canadian nation which the white population of Canada would not want to accept in public.

Since its outstanding debut in 1969, the play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* has been performed across the world for its popular appeal as well as for its thematic concerns. Today the play is prescribed in many universities across the world.

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### 9.3 SUMMARY OF *THE ECSTASY OF RITA JOE*

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As the title of the play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* suggests, the play deals with the life of Rita Joe, an indigenous woman, in a city in Canada where she is victimized by the white population. It is her marginalized status which is the subject matter of the play. She is marginalized on many accounts and it is her marginalization which makes us understand how such people are being treated – with malice, with violence, with torture, with such disdain and contempt that it becomes difficult for them to live their lives in proper terms. This is what happens with Rita Joe in the Canadian city where she has come with the hope of better life. The city is not named, but is based on the city of Vancouver.

When the white population came to the American shores for the first time, the indigenous aboriginal population owned all the land and gradually the whites took over their land and displaced them. This makes Rita Joe's uncle, Dan Joe, say when he is in his death bed – "Long ago the white man come with the Bibles, to talk to my people, who had the land. They talk for hundred years ... then we had all the bibles, an' the white man had our land...". This summarizes the way indigenous peoples have been subjected to the dispossession of their traditional lands and how they have been exploited by the whites. In the play, the priest tells Rita Joe, 'Don't blame the church! We are trying to help ...'. But in the name of

help, what the church also has been doing is to pressurize and make the native population fall into the trap from where they have no way out.

In the play, Rita Joe and her partner Jaimie Paul – the young generations of the indigenous population are shown to be rebellious against the white order. They are rebellious because the years of injustices that they have suffered and have been suffering have made them realize that there is nothing that they can get by submitting themselves to the whites. They are the youth of the Indian community who find out that they have no way to escape the oppression of the whites and therefore they try their best to put their best foot forward to rebel against the whites. Even though they try to rebel, their voices are not heard, and moreover, they are subdued. In the play, we are shown that Rita Joe is constantly being taken to the Magistrate for different petty crimes, such as vagrancy, prostitution, stealing, etc.

The opening scene of the play is itself very pathetic in the court of law, where Rita Joe has been brought by two policemen. When the Judge sees her, the first thing that is asked is – “Who is she? Can she speak English?” – which shows the mentality of the Magistrate towards the indigenous people. The aboriginal population are perceived as being outsiders by the white community in Canada; they are perceived as the ‘other’ whereas they are the original inhabitants of these lands. But their status has become so marginalized in Canadian society that they are now perceived as outsiders and are not welcome in the mainstream. If someone like Rita Joe tries to come to the mainstream, she is not accepted. In the play we see that Rita Joe’s sister Eileen is not given a tailoring job as she is an indigenous woman. Similarly, Rita Joe is given a job in a tire store but her white boss Steve Laporte tries to molest and marginalize her. In front of the magistrate, Laporte states, ‘Gave her a job in my tire store ... took her over to my place after work once ... She was scared when I tried a trick ... Well. Sir. She took the money, then she stood in front of the window, her head high an’ her naked shoulders shakin’ like she was cold ... she cried a little an’ then she says, “Goddammit, but I wish I was a school teacher ...’

Instead of putting up a defence for Rita Joe, her employer presents her in a bad light. So does the school teacher when she states – ‘I tried to teach you, but your head was in the clouds, and as for your body ... Arguing ... always trying to upset me ... and in grade four ... I saw it then ... pawing the ground for men like a bitch in heat.’ All white people, whether it be the school teacher Miss Donahue, or her employer Steve Laporte or the English Priest, none of them come to testify for Rita Joe in the court as she is an indigenous aboriginal woman. It is as if being an aboriginal woman means that one is meant to live a doomed life, that one is meant to suffer and get crushed, and if one is a female then one is meant to get sexually abused and oppressed. Rita Joe is often brought to the court and in the fourth trial before the Magistrate, it is stated, ‘this is the seventh charge against you in a year ... Laws are not made to be violated... why did you steal?’. While reading or watching the play it seems obvious to all of us that Rita Joe is deliberately

*George Ryga: The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*

## NOTES

## NOTES

being victimized because she belongs to the aboriginal community. The magistrate probably knows that very well, but will not accept that to her or to himself because accepting that would mean trying to give a proper place to indigenous people in Canadian society. Instead, the Magistrate sermonizes, 'To understand life in a given society, one must understand laws of that society. All relationships ... Man to man ... man to woman ... man to property, man to the state ... freedom that was yours today. Your home and well-being were protected.' This speech of the Magistrate seems to be twisting the arguments so that people like Rita Joe cannot live their life in proper terms.

At the end of the play, we see that Rita Joe and her partner, Jaimie Paul are attacked by three white thugs. While Jaimie Paul is thrown before an approaching train and dies, Rita is brutally abused and raped, which leads to her death. Thus, the play ends in a tragic note when we see how the younger generation of the indigenous community are pathetically crushed by the whites in Canada.

### 9.3.1 Critical Comments on *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*

*The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* is a two act play in which the victimization of the protagonist Rita Joe and her Jaimie Paul is represented in both acts. Apparently, when one looks at the play it seems that the play is only about the aboriginal population in Canada, but is it the play only about them? All the marginalized people in the world are more or less treated in the similar manner. Think about the state of the aboriginals in Australia and the way they were wiped out of Australian history through different processes – sometimes through marginalization and sometimes through assimilation. Think about the Dalits in India – they have been victimized for ages under the diktats of the Hindu scriptures. Or think about the tribal people in India. There are many such examples in the history of mankind of the ways in which the marginalized people are being victimized in more than one ways.

One of the significant roles of any writer is to show this victimization and marginalization of people so as to make people aware of how such practices are going on and what needs to be changed. The writers or dramatists who have taken up the mantle to talk on behalf of these 'subaltern' people are the ones who can be talked about as committed writers – their commitment to the freedom of all people in this world.

As a first topic related to the criticism of George Ryga's play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* we will therefore take up the issue of the commitment of the writer/dramatist.

### Writer and Commitment

Jean Paul Sartre in his famous book *What is Literature?* writes:

'The "committed" writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change ... the function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that no body may say that he is innocent of what it is all about.' (14, emphasis added)

## NOTES

George Ryga has taken the responsibility of ‘revealing’ to the world how the Native Americans are victimized and marginalized. What Ryga is doing in the play is to ‘reveal’ to the people of Canada as well as of the world in what ways the indigenous aboriginal people are subjected to various kinds of atrocities. These atrocities are discussed in the summary of the essay. So without further discussing them here, it is essential that we understand that any conscious committed writer / dramatist would take up the cause of the downtrodden, the subaltern, the victimized because they cannot speak on their own behalf. Even if they speak about the atrocities that they encounter, those voices are not heard. So it is essential that someone needs to take up the voices of these people so as to make it heard around the world. In this context, it is essential to understand the point of view of Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak in her essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’

Spivak is one of the foremost contemporary feminist deconstructionists who pays careful attention to issues of gender and race. Her writings have also enriched the post-colonial theoretical framework. In the essay, Spivak addresses the way the subaltern women is constructed, as absent or silent or not listened to. The silence of women in post-colonial societies is one of the main issues which her work deals with. The main argument of her essay is that between patriarchy and imperialism, the figure of women disappears not into a pristine nothingness, but into a marginal position between tradition and modernization.

But Spivak uses the word ‘subaltern’ to mean more than just women in the colonized set up. For her, the term also suggests blacks, the colonized and the working class. Subalternity suggests the repressive dominance of white western thinking. It also entails an allegory of the gendered and colonized violence that is violence inflicted by the western forms of thought upon the East. She probes the way the third world is a creation of the West that tries to bind the non-Western cultures into an imperial representation. She even traces this ‘predicament of the postcolonial intellectual’ in a neo-colonized world where she maps the strategy of ‘negotiating with the structures of violence’ imposed by Western liberalism.

This is in close co-relation to her more consuming concern about the question of ‘voice’ of who speaks. In her essay Spivak raises the problem of representing some of the most marginalized people – ‘men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban sub-proletariat.’ (‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, 25). Spivak contests the argument of Foucault that the oppressed if given a chance can speak and know their conditions. Among the subaltern subjects too the woman is even more silent. Both as an object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of revolt and ideology the male subaltern is supposedly dominant.

‘If the subaltern has no history and cannot speak the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow ...’ (‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ 28)

So if the subaltern cannot speak for themselves then it is essential that someone should take up the mantle to speak on their behalf. In case of *The Ecstasy*

## NOTES

of *Rita Joe*, George Ryga has taken the responsibility of making the Canadian population aware of the atrocities that the native or aboriginal population has suffered from in the Centennial Year of the Canadian nation. Canadians need to look at their own selves from the point of view of the aboriginal population so as to construct their nation in a truer sense where the development of everyone is taken into account – where the indigenous population are also as much a part of the Canadian nation as the white population.

James Barber in his study *Vancouver Province* rightly states that ‘George Ryga has painted a simple, disturbing picture of life without dignity and without hope ... it is not the mistake of Ryga to paint a disturbing picture. It is the duty of an artist, a dramatist to cut open the social blisters and remove the puss and make the society a healthy one.’ That is what a committed artist should aspire to do. A committed artist knows that through his or her writing, s/he can bring change to the society. He or she knows that by showing the ‘blisters’ of the society in such a fashion as Ryga does, the society can be made aware of the things in its true proportion so that they can take corrective steps to develop in the right direction. Yet, at the same time, it is true that George Ryga does not preach in his plays. As the critic Jack Richards states, ‘Ryga does not preach. He does not paint either side with the colours of martyrs or saints. He says that there are two worlds in our society and neither understands, nor accepts the other.’ Till the time these two sides will not understand each other, this kind of injustices will keep on happening to the aboriginal people and if one wants a way out of this then it is the whites who need to take the initiative by incorporating the aboriginal people within the mould of the Canadian civilization.

### **The Victimization of Rita Joe and Jaimie Paul**

At the end of the play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, we see that Jaimie Paul is killed by white criminals after being thrown under an approaching train and Rita Joe is sexually assaulted leading to her death. The question naturally comes – why did George Ryga present the young indigenous people in such terms when they are just being represented as the victimized race. It is true that both of them are rebellious against the white civilization and order – it is also true that from time to time, they have tried to assert their rights to the white civilization and present to the world how injustices are being done on them time and again. Suffering such injustices had become a daily ritual for indigenous people.

Probably Rita Joe’s father, David Joe is accustomed to these kinds of victimizations and accepted it as his fate; but people like Rita and Jaimie want to fight back against the system – they do not want to be subdued by the white civilization. But however much they try to assert themselves, their efforts are always going to be in vain as from all corners they are marginalized and their voices were not being heard at all. In the Judiciary, in the police station, in the school premises, in their place of work, in their neighbourhood, and even in their church, indigenous people are made to undergo humiliations again and again – they are discriminated,

tortured and abused to such an extent that they are not able to stand up for their own rights. If people like Rita Joe and Jaimie Paul try to assert themselves in such circumstances then it is definitely heroic as amidst all disdain, despair and death, they try to affirm their lives so as to challenge white supremacy.

The dramatist George Ryga seems to be presenting a pitiable ghoulish kind of existence of the indigenous population as he wants people to realize that these people cannot and should not be treated in such a fashion. It is quite unjustified for white society to think about them and to treat them in terms such as when the police picks up Rita, gives her five dollars, abuses her and then takes her to the police station to produce her in court the next day accusing her of vagrancy and prostitution. Rita Joe is sent to the prison for thirty days for no fault of hers. It is just that white society needs something to tirade and look disdainfully at the indigenous people and to make them present in such a fashion as if they are by birth criminals. The critic Nahen Cohen says about the play, 'The only thing real in the entire performance is the author's sense of outrage. Clearly he feels that Indians are harshly treated, and society is insensitive to its crime and to its need to make expiation.' George Ryga is outraged as he does not know how to react against such a civilization which tries to abuse and look disdainfully at its own people and make them feel so alienated in their own country that they fear everything. Even when they want to start a family and have children, they fear for their future and think otherwise. When one lives under such circumstances, one's freedom, one's movement, one's very being gets jeopardized and one necessarily becomes more of a recluse or becomes rebellious. The young blood in Rita and Jaimie makes them rebellious and they face the consequences of it at the end face- brutally dying at the hands of the white thugs.

The question is – why does George Ryga end the play in such a pessimistic and macabre note – what is it which makes the playwright present such a nightmarish and cruel image of the repression and oppression that the indigenous people suffer from in Canada. There may be many reasons for it, but at least two reasons stand out:

- (a) He was influenced by the theatre of cruelty (which we will be discussing in the section Influences on George Ryga); and
- (b) Such a cruel ending was necessary to jolt the sensibilities of the inhuman white society so that they realize where they have gone wrong with their treatment of the indigenous people. It is true that the white civilization in its drive of 'progress' of modernity forgot that there are more ways in which the world can be perceived than just the ways in which they perceive it. That the aboriginal way of life is also a culture in its own right and that they also have a right to live, and live peacefully with respect and honour. The white civilization needs to be shaken and stirred so that their conscience is pricked and they realize how grossly mistaken they are in their way of thinking and treatment of the indigenous population.

*George Ryga: The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*

## NOTES

### 9.3.2 Influences on George Ryga

George Ryga was influenced by many things and people when he wrote the play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. The influences are presented as follows –

#### NOTES

- (a) Firstly, regarding the theme of the play – the macabre treatment of the indigenous people by the Whites – George Ryga was obviously influenced by the real racial injustices faced by the native population of the land. He must have seen first-hand the way the aboriginal people are treated which made him think that this social and cultural ‘blister’ needs to be treated so as to make Canada a nation rich in its tradition and heritage. It is to be remembered here that his experiences told him that in the centennial year of the Canadian nation it is important to understand where the aboriginal people stand within Canada and how they need to be given proper respect and right to live with dignity.
- (b) George Ryga was also influenced by Bertolt Brecht and his notion of Epic theatre which talked about the alienation effect. In the process of alienation, the audience/reader turns from a mere ‘spectator’ to an ‘observer’ and analyses the situation objectively and consequently ‘arouses his capacity for action.’ Brecht’s plays are thus very political in its nature as they are not only an exposition of some moral truths, but at the same time, the plays make the audience motivated enough to act according to the tenets set by the playwright. According to Friedrich Schiller, ‘the theatre is supposed to be a moral institution.’ Epic theatre is often objected as being too moralizing which Brecht denies in the essay ‘Brecht on Theatre.’ In the essay Brecht states, ‘... in the epic theatre moral arguments only took second place. Its aim was less to moralize than to observe. That is to say it observed, and then the thick end of the wedge followed: the story’s moral.’ George Ryga was very much influenced by the Brechtian theatre and employed many of its techniques in *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* – such as the use of songs. Moreover, in the element of didacticism that is inherent in the play, it seems that George Ryga was very much influenced by Brecht.
- (c) It is also believed that George Ryga was very much influenced by expressionism and the theatre of cruelty. Both expressionism and the theatre of cruelty believed in shocking the audience with violence, distortion and exaggeration. M. H. Abrams defines expressionism in the following terms – ‘A German movement in literature and the other arts (especially the visual arts) which was at its height between 1910 and 1925—that is, in the period just before, during, and after World War I. Its chief precursors were artists and writers who had in various ways departed from realistic depictions of life and the world, by incorporating in their art visionary or powerfully emotional states of mind that are expressed and transmitted by means of distorted representations of the outer world.’ Similarly, the French dramatist Antonin Artaud’s theatre of cruelty presented the audience with a primitive, subconscious level by means of gesture, movement, sounds and symbols to

such an extreme that they are shocked by the experience of the theatre. George Ryga seems to be very much influenced by these two as he presents the nightmarish experiences of Rita Joe and Jaimie Paul as well as the entrapments of the indigenous people in Canada in such a fashion that the readers and the audience are jolted from their comfort zone into thinking about the situations of the aboriginal people in a newer light.

George Ryga: *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. When did Ryga start his professional career?
2. When did the play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* premier?
3. What is the fate of Jaime at the end of the play?
4. What is the alienation effect according to Brecht?

## 9.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. George Ryga is a dramatist and a writer from Canada who started with his professional career in 1962.
2. The play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* premiered at the Vancouver Play House on November 23, 1967, the centennial year of the Canadian nation.
3. At the end of the play, we see that Jaimie Paul is killed by white criminals after being thrown under an approaching train.
4. According to Brecht, as a result of the alienation effect, the audience/reader turns from a mere 'spectator' to an 'observer' and analyses the situation objectively and consequently 'arouses his capacity for action.'

## 9.5 SUMMARY

- George Ryga is a Canadian dramatist and writer who is known for his plays, especially *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. The play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* is a seminal text in the history of Canadian literature, especially drama.
- The play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* deals with the sad plight of an American Indian or indigenous woman named Rita Joe in the urban atmosphere of Canada. Ryga in the play portrays an urban white society that refuses to accept Rita and exploits her to such an extent that even living becomes hell.
- All the marginalized people in the world are more or less treated in the similar manner. Think about the state of the aboriginals in Australia and the way they were wiped out of Australian history through different processes – sometimes through marginalization and sometimes through assimilation.

## NOTES

- George Ryga has taken the responsibility of ‘revealing’ to the world how the indigenous population are victimized and marginalized. What Ryga is doing in the play is to ‘reveal’ to the people of Canada as well as to the world the ways in which indigenous population are subjected to atrocities.
- The dramatist George Ryga seems to be presenting a pitiable ghoulis kind of existence of the indigenous population as he wants people to realize that these people cannot and should not be treated in such a fashion.
- George Ryga was influenced by many things and people when he wrote the play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. The influences include Brecht’s notion of epic theatre, expressionism and the theatre of cruelty.

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## 9.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Epic Theatre:** It is a modern episodic drama that seeks to provoke objective understanding of a social problem through a series of loosely connected scenes that avoid illusion and often interrupt the action to address the audience directly with analysis or argument.
- **Indigenous People:** It refers to ethnic groups who are the original inhabitants of a given region, in contrast to groups that have settled, occupied or colonized the area more recently.
- **Subaltern:** The term designates the populations which are socially, politically, and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the colony and of the colonial.

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## 9.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short-Answer Questions

1. What according to you is the main theme of George Ryga’s play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*?
2. Write a character sketch of Rita Joe and Jaimie Paul.
3. Write a short critical note on the commitment of George Ryga with reference to the play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*.
4. What aspects of the white civilization of Canada is represented in the play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*? Discuss with close reference to the play.

### Long-Answer Questions

1. With reference to George Ryga’s play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* discuss the theme of marginalization and victimization of Native American Indians in the then Canada.

2. What do you think are the major influences on George Ryga when he wrote *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*?
3. The play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* deals with racial prejudices as well as victimization. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Discuss the main influences on George Ryga's dramatic techniques in *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*.

George Ryga: *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*

## NOTES

### 9.8 FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 10 GIRISH KARNAD: *TUGHLAQ*

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### NOTES

#### Structure

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 Analysis of the Play
  - 10.2.1 Master of Structure and Paradoxes
  - 10.2.2 Subtext and Structure of the Play
  - 10.2.3 *Tughlaq*: A Historical Play
  - 10.2.4 A Note on Existentialism
  - 10.2.5 Literary Techniques used in *Tughlaq*
  - 10.2.6 Character Analysis
  - 10.2.7 *Tughlaq*: A Visionary but not a Strategist
  - 10.2.8 *Tughlaq*: A Man Ahead of the Times
- 10.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 10.4 Summary
- 10.5 Key Words
- 10.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 10.7 Further Readings

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### 10.0 INTRODUCTION

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Girish Raghunath Karnad is a well-known Indian actor, film director, writer and playwright who mainly works in South Indian cinema. He rose as a playwright in 1960s which marked the advent of modern Indian playwriting in Kannada. He is a recipient of the 1998 Jnanpith Award, a prestigious literary honour conferred in India.

Karnad's *Tughlaq* is a well-known drama featuring Mohammad-bin-Tughlaq. The play brings to light his idiosyncrasies, his life and his work. The author delineates Tughlaq as both a generous and a cruel sovereign. Karnad's presentation of Tughlaq is intended to show the king's weaknesses and irregularities, proving that he was a hypocrite and a tyrant of the worst kind. Karnad has also depicted the other officials of the court and shown how they deceived the Sultan.

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### 10.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the use of opposites and paradoxes as a structural form in *Tughlaq*
- Appreciate the contemporariness of a historical subject
- Delineate the traditional and modern elements of theatre
- Assess the Karnad's simple and taut yet evocative use of language

## 10.2 ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

Born on 19 May 1938 in Matheran, a town near Mumbai, Girish Karnad has earned international acclaim as an actor, poet, playwright, director, critic and translator. Karnad hails from the Marathi-Kannada-speaking Saraswat community. While growing up in Sirsi, he had ample opportunity to watch plays in Kannada, the language that he later chose to write his plays in. He used to go to company *Natak* performances with his father, who was a doctor and always had free passes. This made a lasting impression on him. Though his parents did not approve of them, young Karnad also attended traditional *Yakshagana* performances with the servants.

During his formative years, Karnad went through diverse influences and was exposed to a literary scene where there was a direct clash between the Western and the native tradition. The India of the 1950s and 1960s saw two streams of thought in all walks of life—the adoption of new modernistic techniques, a legacy of the colonial rule and adherence to the rich cultural past of the country.

Karnad was fascinated by the traditional Indian theatre and it has strongly influenced the technical aspects of his plays. Nonetheless, the Western playwrights he had read during his college days opened up for him ‘a new world of magical possibilities’ and he has absorbed the best from Western theatre too. In an attempt to trace the influence of the World Drama, one can find infusion from the double plot of William Shakespeare, the comic genius of Moliere, the social problems of Henrik Ibsen, the dramatic lyricism of Anton Chekhov, the naturalism of John Strindberg, the symbolic expressionism of Eugene O’Neill, the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht, and the religious quest of T. S. Eliot. These qualities of the Indian and the global traditions of drama enabled him to portray the contemporary psycho-religious, socio-political, and literary and cultural turmoil authentically and admirably.

Like traditional Indian drama, including Kannada theatre, Karnad too took legend, history and myth as the main source for his three important plays, *Yayati*, *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*. But compared to other plays in Kannada literature, Karnad’s plays are innovatively directed. In other words, Karnad moved away from the regionalist tradition that had given Kannada literature its identity in the early years of the century. He has also completely rejected the professional stage established by Kailasam and Sri Ranga, two makers of modern Kannada drama, and tried to bring to his plays a first-hand knowledge of the practical demands of the stage and a better understanding of dramatic style and technique. Like the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett who wrote his immortal plays, *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, in French and then translated them into English to become an icon of contemporary British drama, Karnad too has authored his monumental plays—*Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and The Rain*—in Kannada and then translated them into English to emerge as the emblem of a vibrant and rich contemporary Indian English drama for the whole world.

### NOTES

## NOTES

Critics like V. K. Gokak and A. K. Ramanujan explore the characteristic qualities of Karnad's 'Indian imagination', a phrase, which embraces the vast labyrinth of the multicultural sub-continent of India, 'encompassing the philosophical and religious beliefs, the flora and fauna, the historical developments and the political, social, and scientific transformations.'

Karnad's creative imagination is thoroughly and originally Indian. So much so that, he once remarked, 'My three years in England had convinced me Western theatre had nothing to offer us.' Karnad was preparing himself assiduously to 'own up' the British culture, but he found himself 'nailed to my past', to borrow his own words.

### 10.2.1 Master of Structure and Paradoxes

Karnad, who is the pioneer of new drama, shows how drama is meant to fulfil a serious purpose of highlighting the disparities in our social life. It is also aimed to reconciling paradoxes and contraries in life, which lie at the root of all the sufferings.

The plots of his plays are precise which are worked out by devices, such as parallelism and contrast, suspense and surprise in the logical progression. Karnad deftly organizes the incidents and situations into an artistic design and correlates them with the characters in such a way that it creates a unity of impression. For example, consider *Tughlaq* where the incidents and events originate from the paradoxical actions of the protagonist and the plot is based on opposites and paradoxes. The devices of parallelism and contrast have been vividly employed and the intrigues manipulated to create the discipline of art. In this context, Ananthamurthy, contemporary writer and critic in the Kannada language, observes in the 'Introduction' of the play *Tughlaq*:

Both *Tughlaq* and his enemies initially appear to be idealists; yet in the pursuit of the ideal, they penetrate its opposite. The whole play is structured on these opposites; the ideal and the real, the divine aspiration and the deft intrigue.

Out of the tensions and conflicts, which weave the texture of the plot, leads to the development of the climax that resolves into denouement. The plots of his plays are well knit and marked by the architectonic quality. In depicting his characters, Karnad observes economy, precision and conciseness as they are meant to fulfil certain demands of the plot through their action and dialogues. Karnad creates a kind of rapport between the character and the situation. For example, take the following dialogue of *Tughlaq* which reveals his disillusionment with himself to the same degree as is the disillusionment of the people with him:

I am teetering on the brink of madness, Barani, but the madness of God still eludes me, (shouting).

And why should I deserve that madness? I have condemned my mother to death and I'm not even sure she was guilty of the crime.

It is action or intention, dialogue or some comment by other characters that precipitates or intensifies the inner conflict and, thus, throws light on other characters and develops the plot.

Karnad's language is appropriate and effective. With great command over English and rich vocabulary, he manages to write dialogues which are flexible and precise, and which change according to the nuances of the plot and characters. For instance, consider the opening scenes where Tughlaq's language is highly poetic and imaginative as it communicates his idealism:

Let's laugh and cry together and then let's pray. Let's pray till our bodies melt and flow and our blood turns into air. History is ours to play with – ours now! Let's be the light and cover the earth with greenery. Let's be darkness and cover up the boundaries of nations. Come! I am waiting to embrace you all.

Karnad's characters use language that suits their status and temperament. The cheat, Aziz, uses matter-of-fact and even crude language. The language becomes symbolic and other items and events like chess, prayer and python become symbols in the play. The chess suggests the quality in Tughlaq's nature. Being a skilful chess player, he uses his political opponents as pawns on the chessboard of politics. Prayer is the leitmotif of the play and the python suggests Tughlaq's inhumanity and barbarity. There are many mythical references which are meant to add an epic-like quality to his plays or make them amusingly ironical. There are certain references from Persian and Greek drama. In the case of *Tughlaq*, they hold a special appeal because Tughlaq was a scholar.

A number of the Indian habits and beliefs are also reflected in Karnad's plays. Aziz the scoundrel in *Tughlaq* is appointed a state officer for looking into cases of tampering with the law and cozening the crown. Such scandalous persons are very much active in the contemporary political scenario too. It shows Karnad's perception of Indian reality. It also confirms Indian poet and scholar of Indian literature A. K. Ramanujan's observation on the Indian characteristic of inconsistency and hypocrisy.

Karnad's plays depict the conflict between the ancient and the modern, karma and individual freedom, old and young, religion and science, high caste and low caste and many other dichotomies. The conflict, interestingly, provides him ample opportunities to reveal his sense of humour and response to the stratified society of India as can be seen in *Tughlaq*.

Among other characteristic features of drama like plot, character dialogue and language, there are two important factors which make Karnad one of India's greatest playwrights:

- (a) His view or vision of life and
- (b) Exemplary Indian imagination seen in his choice of subject matter, dramatic form, setting, myths and legends, literary allusions, philosophy of karma and rebirth, other social stratifications and practices and language.

All of Karnad's eight plays have been translated into major Indian languages and five of them into English. Karnad has also forayed into the world cinema, working alternately as an actor, director and screenwriter. He has won numerous

## NOTES

## NOTES

awards in his various avatars, including the President's Gold Medal for the Best Indian Film for *Samskara* (1970), the Homi Bhabha Fellowship for creative work in folk theatre (1970–72), the Sangeet Natak Academy and the National Award for Excellence in Direction.

### 10.2.2 Subtext and Structure of the Play

*Tughlaq* explores the paradox of the idealistic Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq, whose reign is considered one of the most spectacular failures in Indian history. What is most interesting and striking in *Tughlaq* historically is the fact that the ruler is the most intelligent king ever to ascend the throne of Delhi and one of the greatest disappointments too. Within a span of twenty years, this man of tremendous potential whittled away an entire empire.

Karnad's main objective is to highlight the contradictions in the Sultan's complex personality, who is a visionary and a man of action, devout and irreligious, generous and unkind, humane and barbarian.

#### The Subtext

One can enjoy the play on the stage without paying much attention to its rich and complex symbolism and subtle weaving of different motifs. The play has an interesting story, an intricate plot, scope for spectacle and dramatic conventions like the comic pair, Aziz and Aazam—the two opportunists who take the best possible advantage of Tughlaq's idealistic policies and befool him. Another reason for *Tughlaq*'s appeal to Indian audience is that it is a play of the 1960s and reflects, as no other play perhaps does, the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism. In other words, there is something contemporary about Tughlaq's story. Karnad himself commented on the contemporaneity of *Tughlaq* in *Enact*, June 1971:

What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq's history was that it was contemporary. The fact that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever come to the throne of Delhi... and one of the greatest failure also. And within a span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as the shortcomings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty, his feeling that he had only correct answer. And I felt in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction – the twenty-year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel.

The play tends to be more than a political allegory. It has an irreducible, puzzling quality which comes from the ambiguities of Tughlaq's character and relates to the philosophical questions on the nature of man and the destiny of a whole kingdom which a dreamer like him controls.

Karnad's *Tughlaq* bears several resemblances with Shakespeare's *Richard II* as in both the plays the protagonists are temperamental and whimsical. *Tughlaq*

is noticeable for consummate and flawless technique, precision and compactness, irony and paradox, symbolism and modernity.

Girish Karnad: *Tughlaq*

### The Structure

Karnad's account of Tughlaq's character, administration, politics, ruthlessness and even savagery is based on Zia-ud-din Barani's *Tarikh-I-Firuz Shahi* as well as other historical accounts. He has, however, deviated a little from the facts, to aid the dramatic purpose. The play has been written in the episodic, scenic division like Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. However, Karnad has used the Company *Natak* convention of the comic pairs, Aziz and Aazam. There is also the Company *Natak* technique of deep and shallow scenes, the interior of the palace and the exterior of the street. The cat-and-mouse game between Tughlaq and Aziz ends up in an ironic equation between the two inside the palace at the end of the play. Karnad ingeniously creates the atmosphere of Tughlaq's days, an atmosphere of distrust, communal intolerance, frustrated idealism, endless corruption, religious bigotry, and Tughlaq's mindless bloodthirstiness and final disillusionment.

#### 10.2.3 *Tughlaq*: A Historical Play

Karnad's *Tughlaq* is featured upon the life and turbulent reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq, who ruled over India for almost twenty-six years from 1324 to 1351. However, Karnad has taken only five years (1327 to 1332) from the total duration of these many years. The action of the play begins in the year 1327, and proceeds on the road from Delhi to Daulatabad, and lastly in and around the fort in Daulatabad.

Karnad is indebted to the contemporary historians like Ziauddin Barani and Ibn Battuta. Karnad follows the traditional sources which present Tughlaq as one who combines in him the opposites—a dreamer and a man of action, extremely benevolent and unpredictably cruel, devout and godless. Tughlaq, both in history as well as in Karnad's play, is a profound scholar, idealist and visionary. He stands for administrative reforms, for the policy of Hindu-Muslim amity and friendship, and due recognition of merit irrespective of caste and creed. He is a keen administrator who reorganizes administrative machinery and taxation structure for the establishment of an egalitarian society in which all of his subject would enjoy fundamental human rights and justice, equal opportunities and freedom of faith or religion. This departure from the holy tenets enrages the orthodox people and they oppose and condemn him. They think of him as a misbeliever in Islam simply because he abolishes *jizya* tax and treats Hindus and Muslims with equal respect. This aspect is dramatized in the opening scene of the play through the Old Man who represented the orthodox Muslim and the Young Man who stood for Sultan's point of view. The opening lines make this conflict absolutely clear:

Old Man: God, what's this country coming to!

Young Man: What are you worried about, grandfather? The country's in perfectly safe hands—safer than any you've seen before.

### NOTES

## NOTES

The Old Man accuses the Sultan and calls him ‘a thing.’ He feels that he has been insulting Islam despite the fact that the Sultan made five times prayers a day compulsory as no earlier Sultan had done. Karnad’s account of the behaviour of Tughlaq in this respect corroborates with that of Ibn Battuta. Karnad closely follows history in showing Tughlaq’s liberal and rational religious views, humanism and idealism being a celebrated scholar. Tughlaq tells Imam-ud-din who warns him against his liberal attitudes in religion and politics:

I still remember the days when I read the Greeks—Sukarat who took poison so that he could give the world the drink of gods, Aflatoon who condemned poets and wrote incomparably beautiful poetry himself—and I can still feel the thrill with which I found a new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran. They tore me into shreds. And to be whole now, I shall have to kill the part of me which sang to them. And my kingdom too is what I am—torn into pieces by visions whose validity I can’t deny. You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greek in me and you propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha.

Karnad follows history in presenting Tughlaq as a shrewd politician guilty of fratricide and patricide. He killed his father at prayer time. Karnad uses prayer as a leitmotif with a rare dramatic effect in a way not employed earlier. In the introduction to the play Ananthamurthy writes:

Although the theme of the play is from history - there are many such plays in Kannada – Karnad’s treatment of the theme is not historical. Take, for instance, the use Karnad makes of the leitmotiv of the play, ‘prayer’ in the scene where the Muslim chieftains along with Sheik Shams-ud-din, a pacifist priest, conspire for the murder of Tughlaq while at prayer. The use of prayer for the murder is reminiscent of what Tughlaq himself did to kill his father. That prayer which is most dear to Tughlaq, is vitiated by him as well as his enemies, is symbolic of the fact that his life is corrupted at its very source. The whole episode is ironic.

Karnad’s Tughlaq is not repentant over the murder of his father and brother but according to history he attempted to atone for the crime and immediately after his coronation saw to it that his father’s name was inscribed on coins, as Ishwari Prasad mentions in his book *A History of Quraunah Turks in India*.

Karnad gives a historical evidence about Tughlaq’s decision to shift the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. These evidences prove that the decision to change the capital is taken for effective administration and control of the South and in particular Daulatabad itself. Being a Hindu-dominated town, the king wanted to weaken its strength. The Amirs and Sayyids were against the Sultan’s decision. Tughlaq explains in the first scene the reasons for his decision:

My ministers and I took this decision after careful thought and decision. My empire is large now and embraces the South and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too near the border and as you know its peace is never free from the fear of invaders. But for me the most

important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom. I invite you all to accompany me to Daulatabad. This is only an invitation and an order.

*Girish Karnad: Tughlaq*

Modern historians have discovered that the plan of building an empire with Daulatabad as its capital was implemented in stages keeping in mind the convenience of the people. At the distance of every two miles along the road from Delhi to Daulatabad, the Sultan got constructed halting station and developed the entire uninhabited area into a habitation. He was so considerate that before shifting the people of Delhi, he had purchased houses for them, and provided facilities of travel and conveyance to the migrants. Even Barani, who was dead against the Sultan, writes, 'he made liberal gifts to the people both at the time of the departure, and on their arrival at Daulatabad.'

## NOTES

Girish Karnad, who presents his act of transferring the capital as an act of personal whim, ignores the fact of generosity. He describes the move as a whim of the tyrant and as a mass exodus. In this aspect Karnad follows the contemporary historians like Barani who focus on Sultan's inhumanity and callous attitude.

Karnad's Tughlaq is a ruthless and vindictive person. In the sixth scene of the play, he tells Najib:

Najib, I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. I was too soft, I can see that now. They'll only understand the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not a wisp of smoke should rise from its chimneys. Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now.

This sort of forced exodus caused immense sufferings, destitution and starvation on men, women and children. Whatever relief measures were provided by Tughlaq were misused and even misappropriated by the corrupt officers like Aziz in the play. In scene eight, the Old Man talks to the Young Man about it, thus:

The merciful Sultan had made perfect arrangements. But do you know, you can love a city like a woman? My old father had lived in Delhi all his life. He died of a broken heart. Then my son Ismail. He was six year old – would have been ten now! The fine dust that hung in the air, fine as silk, it covered him like a silken shroud. After him, his mother.

Historians like Barani and Isami magnified the limited exodus of the upper classes from Delhi into a mass exodus. It is significant to state that when Ibn Battuta reached Delhi in 1334, he found it full of scholars, literati and mystics and no after effects of the exodus were visible. The Sultan also permitted the people to return to Delhi in 1335–37.

However, it is a historical fact that no other event brought so much of unpopularity and infamy to the Sultan as the forced exodus which provoked strong reactions and the behaviour of Sultan's corrupt officers like Aziz and Aazam in *Tughlaq* who misappropriated the relief measures. Hence, Girish Karnad does

## NOTES

not deviate from history so far as the untold miseries and sufferings of the people due to exodus are described. The Sultan lost the confidence of the people though the change of the capital strengthened the feeling of national integration about which Karnad is absolutely silent because he has a different purpose in mind, that is to describe the political situation of the India of the Nehru regime and secondly to project Tughlaq as a cruel but weak character.

Karnad ignores the achievements of Tughlaq altogether. It is pertinent to note that Karnad has taken only a partial and even one-sided view of the history of Tughlaq's reign and considers the historical sources provided by Barani only and the group of historians who were biased to the Sultan. There were numerous rebellions during Tughlaq's time which made him ruthless and he inflicted 'draconian punishments' on his subjects, as Nizami mentions in *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. 5:

The Sultan began to punish both the guilty and the innocent on very suspicion in the hope that bloodshed on a large scale would terrorize his officers and make them obedient; on the other hand, his officers, knowing his military weakness, preferred rebellion to punishment without trial.

Actually, in an atmosphere of perpetual distrust and rebellion, Tughlaq became suspicious and vindictive but there are evidences with historians like Dr Ishwari Prasad, who says in the book quoted above that:

We have sufficient data to prove that Muhammad was no monster who took delight in shedding blood for its own sake and those who stigmatize him as a callous tyrant forget the age in which he lived and the circumstances in which he was placed.

Tughlaq himself called the historian Barani and described to him the condition of his kingdom in these pathetic words: 'My kingdom is diseased and no treatment cures it.' Similarly, in Karnad's play also, Tughlaq says to Barani:

What should I do Barani? What would you prescribe for this honeycomb of diseases? I have tried everything. But what cures one disease just worsens another..... It isn't as easy as leaving the patient in the wilderness because there's no cure for his disease.... Don't you see that the only way I could abdicate is by killing myself?... But what can you do when every moment you expect a beak to dig into you and tear a muscle out? What can you do? Barani, what vengeance is driving these shapes after me?

Girish Karnad greatly alters the historical facts of the rebellion of Ain-ul-Mulk, perhaps to expose the weaknesses of Tughlaq and to show that he was the worst kind of daredevil. He sends Sheikh Imam-ud-din as his official envoy with the message of peace to Ain-ul-Mulk. The Sheikh resembles the Sultan. Dressed up in ceremonial clothes, the Sheikh marched toward Ain-ul-Mulk's army. The elephant on which the Sheikh was riding halted about a hundred yards from the enemy and the Sheikh stood up on it to say something when a trumpeter on the Sultan's side sounded charge. The Sheikh was wounded and succumbed to his injuries. Thus, Sheikh Imam-ud-din, who had led a rebellion against Tughlaq in

Danpur, was murdered. Ain-ul-Mulk was pardoned and the governorship of Avad was restored to him. Later, he was transferred to Deccan. Thus, it is obvious that Karnad deviates from history in the depiction of the rebellion of Aim-ul-Mulk in order to prove that the Sultan was a vindictive and revengeful, intriguing and treacherous man.

Karnad takes up the issue of the token currency only to emphasize the Sultan's failure and makes no comment on his farsightedness and on the unimaginative and non-cooperative approach of his officers as well as his subjects. Tughlaq's policy of taxation, which deviated from canon law, offended the orthodox Muslims. Karnad follows Barani and other historians who opposed Sultan's rationalized tax-structure and enlightened measures and does not appreciate his moves. Karnad refers to famine and plague that ravaged India during Sultan's reign but he does not sympathize with Tughlaq who faced a number of natural and man-made calamities. Karnad has portrayed Najib as an important character who exerts influence on the Sultan. He is presented as the Sultan's evil genius and is later on murdered by the machinations of his stepmother. In history, Najib is not such an important character.

The episode of Aziz and Aazam is also included with the view to creating humour, irony, paradoxes and parallels, and highlighting the failure of Tughlaq's administration. There is enough evidence to prove that Karnad departs from history when it suits him as per the needs of his dramatic art. He has drawn the plot of Tughlaq from Barani and other orthodox historical sources, and lacks the just and impartial treatment of the historical theme. M. K. Naik comments in his book, *A History of Indian English Literature*:

Tughlaq fails to emerge as tragedy, chiefly because the dramatist seems to deny himself the artist's privilege to present an integrated vision of a character full of conflicting tendencies.

#### 10.2.4 A Note on Existentialism

The term 'existentialism' means 'pertaining to existence'; or in logic, 'predicating existence'. Philosophically, it now applies to a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place, and function in the world, relationship or lack of one with God. This philosophical label is applied to several differing schools of thought. Existentialism is widely believed to have derived from the thinking of Danish philosopher Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813–55). He repeatedly expressed and elaborated his faith that tensions and discontent may be freed, and man may find peace of mind and spiritual serenity through God and in God. Kierkegaard became the pioneer of modern Christian existentialism. An important feature of atheistic existentialism is the argument that existence precedes essence which is the reverse of many traditional forms of philosophy, for it is held that man fashions his own existence and only exists by doing so, and in that process, and by the choice of what he does or does not do, gives essence to that existence.

Jean Paul Sartre is the hierophant of modern existentialism. In his vision, man is born into a kind of void, a mud. He has the liberty to remain in this mud and

## NOTES

## NOTES

thus lead a passive, acquiescent existence in a 'semi-conscious' state and in which he is scarcely aware of himself. If he comes out of his passive situation and would become increasingly aware of himself, he would have a sense of the absurdity of his predicament and suffer moral anguish and despair. The energy deriving from this awareness would enable him to 'drag himself out of the mud', and begin to exist. By exercising the power of choice, he can give meaning to existence and the universe. Thus, in brief, the human being is obliged to make himself what he is, and has to be what he is.

Both the groups of existentialists, however, hold certain elements in common: the concern with man's being, the feeling that reason is insufficient to understand the mysteries of the universe, the awareness that anguish is a universal phenomenon, and the idea that morality has validity only when there is positive participation.

Existentialism has influenced all genres of literature of the twentieth century world over. It is a philosophy based on the concrete experiences of life and puts stress on the dignity of man. It is generally believed that poetry and fiction offer a better scope for subjective consciousness and internalization of experience and confessional mode, while drama is expected to present more objective and externalized conflict between the individual protagonist and a hostile, indifferent society, or a meaningless universe. However, the continental drama, especially the plays of Sartre and Camus, reveal that existentialist situations can be effectively depicted in drama as the urgent predicament of man's being in the world, along with an individual's 'crucial and terrible freedom of choice'.

Girish Karnad's plays are imbued with existential thought and deal with freedom of choice, alienation, despair, anguish and absurdity, which characterize all schools of existentialism. *Tughlaq* too is an existentialist play, which deals with philosophical questions on the nature of man and the destiny of the whole kingdom, which a dreamer like Muhammad Tughlaq controls. His alienation from traditional religion arises primarily from the fact that he is an existentialist in his religious beliefs, which come into conflict with the orthodox and fundamental faith.

Tughlaq faces an existential predicament—a situation of confrontation with orthodox and fanatic Muslims who intend to oppose him at every step. He tries his level best to put his ideals into practice and fully realizes his duties to the kingdom and his subjects both Hindus and Muslims. He makes an independent choice to convert India into an egalitarian society based on secularism and mutual amity of these communities. Like a true existentialist, he sees to it that justice works in his kingdom and convinces the crowd in the opening scene that it would be all possible without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. His intention is to guarantee freedom of choice to his countrymen. In other words, he tries to promote the understanding of human situation amidst the dearth and disparities, and wants them to rise above the sufferings and insecurities. He is restless because he feels his primary responsibility is to awaken his countrymen to feel the truth. He identifies himself with their sufferings and spends sleepless nights. He tells his stepmother in scene two:

I pray to the Almighty to save me from sleep. All day long I have to worry about tomorrow but it's only when the night falls that I can step beyond all that. I look at the Pleiades and I think of Ibn-ul-Mottazz who thought it was an ostrich egg and Dur-rumma who thought it was a swallow. And then I go back to their poetry and sink myself in their words. Then again I want to climb up, up to the top of the tallest tree in the world, and call out to my people: 'Come, my people, I am waiting for you.

Confide in me your worries .... Let's be light and cover the earth with greenery. Let's be darkness and cover up the boundaries of nations. Come I am waiting to embrace you all!'... I wish I could believe in recurring births like the Hindu but I have only one life, one body, and my hopes, my people, my God are all fighting for it.

Karnad's Tughlaq finds himself in the tight existential condition and makes a difficult choice. Otherwise too choosing is to commit oneself to one's decision. Tughlaq is convinced about the authenticity of his choice and refuses to relent to the tough opposition from the narrow-minded citizens who question his integrity. He frankly admits how other philosophical thoughts of the Greeks, especially of Sukrat and Aflatoon, have shaped his personality when he talks to Imam-ud-din in scene three.

In her article 'Introducing Existentialism', literary critic Margaret Chatterjee highlights another characteristic of Existentialism, that is, the indefinable nature of man who remains a bundle of contradictions despite the freedom of choice. She observes that various schools of existentialist thought have emphasized the need for 'the quest for meaning in a world which has become opaque to human understanding and intransigent to human effort, especially, ameliorist effort to transform it'. Tughlaq always faces such situations, which are demanding and complicated, where his idealism and policies are resisted and challenged. Such responses make him rash and reckless. He adopts the tricks of masking himself and behaves treacherously. He recourses to stratagems and manages to kill Sheikh Imam-ud-din, Shihab-ud-din, and millions of innocent people. He becomes pretentious, poses to be religious and acts in a totally irreligious and even inhuman manner. According to Ratan Singh, Tughlaq is 'an honest scoundrel'. In order to achieve his ideals and execute his policies, Tughlaq deliberately chooses to indulge in patricide and fratricide, murders his opponents and uses religion as a political game. Tughlaq's wilful acts are the worst example of the freedom of choice that a man can avail himself of as every choice he makes leads to crisis, to situations which are totally absurd and drag him down in the 'mud'. All these acts are the result of 'bad faith' and cause self-deception, sense of guilt, anguish, despair and dread. In utter despair, he says:

God, God in Heaven, please help me. Please don't let go my hand.  
My skin drips with blood and I don't know how much of it is mine  
and how much of others I started in Your path, Lord, why am I  
wandering naked in this desert now? I started in search of You. Why  
am I become a pig rolling in this gory mud?

## NOTES

## NOTES

In *Tughlaq*, Karnad focuses on the existential problem, that is, of action and not of contemplation. Man should choose, decide and act accordingly. Then not only is the riddle of existence solved, it would also create the perfect climate for moral growth. The comic pair Aziz and Aazam are in the beginning totally desperate, alienated individuals but they form what the critics call an 'alternative society.' Aziz is a *dhobi* and Aazam is a pickpocket but once they develop an understanding the former assumes the role of a leader and the latter acts as a detached philosopher. These two derelicts are shown by Karnad as estranged from society and alienated. Aziz, who is an opportunist, misappropriates Tughlaq's plans to suit his own interests and assumes several disguises, kills people and commits all sorts of crimes and in the end, succeeds. Aziz's deliberate acts of choice are existentialist decisions, and despite being immoral, bring him success. He lives in the present and makes efforts to gain power despite the absurdity in the act and situation. Aazam, on the other hand, is sick of the existential absurdities and wants to live an honourable life:

Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world— politics! My dear fellow, that's where our future is – politics! It's a beautiful world - wealth, success, position, power – and yet it is full of brainless people, people with not an idea in their head.... It's a fantastic world.

Aziz kills Aazam when he decides to get rid of his company. In complicated existential game/situation, both Tughlaq and Aazam fail while Aziz succeeds. As it occurs, in majority of existentialist literature, Karnad's *Tughlaq* also handles the problem of discovering the truth of human existence. Even after the emergence of truth, Tughlaq fails miserably. Life remains as unpredictable and meaningless as it ever is.

The only message, which the play leaves behind, is that man should try to cultivate understanding and compassion for one another in the pursuit to make life and world worth living. It may then offers an opportunity of ideal existential condition and reduce the existential absurdity to a great extent.

### 10.2.5 Literary Techniques Used in *Tughlaq*

Drama is 'literature that walks', as British author and poet Marjorie Boulton states. It is the plot of the play which is the source of all the action, development of its characters and dialogues. Its language imaginatively carries the meaning of all the sights, sounds and action of the play, and makes a demand on the visual imagination of the reader or the viewer. The plot is an essential framework of incidents, simple or complex happenings and events. It is not the theme; it is an artistic organization of the events and incidents upon which the drama is constructed.

The plot of Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* grows out the paradoxical events of the protagonist and his opponents. It is woven by the conflict between opposites. In the first scene, the old people who are the staunch followers of Islam think that their country is unsafe in the hands of the liberal ruler who deviates from the holy

Koran. The young admire him for his rational and modern outlook. One of the young men says, 'The country's in perfectly safe hands... safer than you've seen before' because he wishes to be 'human' first.

The opposites keep playing the central role in constructing the plot. It is sheer irony that Aziz, disguised as Brahmin Vishnu Prasad, exploits Tughlaq's policy of Hindu-Muslim unity. It is also ironical that the Sultan punishes all those who oppose his scheme of shifting the capital. Both Hindus and Muslims unite to hatch a conspiracy to kill him at prayer time. Ratan Singh is the first to initiate the idea but when the rebellion is crushed the Hindu soldiers protect the Sultan. The Hindus whom the Sultan supported disagree with his policy of introducing token currency but misuse it and make counterfeit coins. The Sultan's move to shift the capital was meant to help the Hindus but it is a great paradox that it causes disaster to both Hindus and Muslims. Both suffer poverty and death.

Idealism and realism are two opposite poles on which the plot of the play is erected. They crumble like a pack of cards when the king's idealism dashes against the hard rock of reality. Notorious murderers and cheats like Aziz attain success and prosperity and the virtuous suffer. An idealist like Tughlaq turns a murderer and becomes lonely and frustrated. He finds himself on the 'brink of madness, which 'the madness of God eludes'.

Another powerful opposite that clings to the plot of the play is between religion and politics. Tughlaq punishes even the learned religious leaders for hobnobbing with politics, but ironically, he stoops down to petty political tricks to get the better of his political opponents. Sheikh Imam-ud-din warns him: 'Religion! Politics take heed Sultan, one day these verbal distinctions will rip you into two.' Thus, Karnad skilfully employs opposites to build the structure of the plot.

In the play, both Tughlaq and his political rivals misuse religion to fulfil their political ends. Both corrupt religion. In other words, Karnad employs opposites to develop the plot structure and these opposites carry the implicit irony of human existence. In *Tughlaq*, irony finds its most eloquent expression through the contradiction in the character of Tughlaq. Idealism and intrigue build the duality of his character. The surprises are knitted into the plot of the play, which Karnad does through the symbol of chess—a game traditionally known for the element of surprise and suspense. He maintains the suspense till the end about Aziz who gets rewarded for his misdeeds.

The play has a great symbolic significance as Karnad himself stated that he felt 'in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction (of failures)—the twenty year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel'. From this point of view, the critics have called *Tughlaq* to be 'a political allegory'.

There are many important symbols used to submit the details, for example, the symbol of chess where he has 'solved the most famous problems' or the prayer symbol which is used as leitmotif for the central theme of the play. The word 'prayer' is used so often in various ways and even in an ironic manner. Similarly,

*Girish Karnad: Tughlaq*

## NOTES

## NOTES

the python symbol in scene eight indicates Tughlaq's utter cruelty and inhumanity. When the Old Man and the Young Man talk about a passage in the Fort in Daulatabad, the former says:

Yes, it's a long passage, a big passage, coiled like an enormous hollow python inside the belly of the fort. And we shall be far, far happier when that python breaks out and swallows everything in sight – everyman, woman, child, and beast.

The very opening sentences of the play make an artistic use of the verbal irony as does the speech of Tughlaq when he elaborates his ideals and administrative reforms. Tughlaq's diplomatic moves are marked by ironical implications as in the following lines:

You can't deny that this war will mean a slaughter of Muslims at the hands of fellow Muslims. Isn't that enough for the great Sheikh Ima-ud-din?

It is the inharmonious situations, created by the Sultan's complicated personality that constitute the dramatic irony in the play. Take the lines of Aziz who calls himself to be the Sultan's close disciple:

It's hardly flattering you, Your Majesty, to say I am your disciple. But I have watched Your Majesty try to explain your ideas and acts to the people. And I have seen with regret how few have understood them.

The plot reaches its climax in scene seven when the capital has been shifted to Daulatabad. There has been a mass exodus. This unfortunate decision of the Sultan makes him unpopular and precipitates his downfall. Those who oppose his decision are killed even on suspicion. His kingdom is stricken with rebellions. His policy of introducing token currency fails badly. He is frustrated. His idealism gradually vanishes. Najib, who acts as his evil genius, gets killed by his stepmother and she, in turn, is sentenced to death. This is the turning point in the play because without Najib, the Sultan he is all alone and none understand him. As the plot develops, the kingdom gradually sinks into utter chaos.

Karnad uses the flashback technique to give glimpses of his youthful idealism and skilfully knit the comic story of Aziz and the tragic tale of Tughlaq's life. Karnad does not follow the pattern of observing three dramatic unities of time, place and action but builds tempo and sustained intensity to create unity of effect. In other words, all the episodes contribute to the unity of impression.

*Tughlaq* is unique in the use of humour, irony and satire. They are meant to provide comic relief, and at the same time, create a sense of horror and farce. Tughlaq's humour is sinister, sardonic and devoid of geniality, frankness and humanity. When he plays a sinister joke with his mother, stating, 'Look at the past Sultans of Delhi. They couldn't bear the weight of their crown,' she, knowing fully well about his patricide and fratricide, grimly says: 'Nothing—I can't bear to see you joking about murder.'

It is in the last scene that Tughlaq loses his grim and sardonic humour, and he is trapped in the net of Aziz's words. Aziz and Aazam are the comic pair, and

they provide comic relief after the scenes of tension. Aziz, who is *dhobi* by caste but is disguised as a Brahmin, has a very fertile imagination comparable to the Sultan himself. He has unfailing sense of humour, which results from the success of his tricks and cunningness. He employs them to exploit the Sultan. Aziz delights in his perversions and has no kindness. In other words, his humour grows out of the enormity of crime. He rejoices and dances after killing Ghiasuddin Abbasid. He is a black humourist. For instance, consider the following dialogue with the Sultan:

We had to shift the corpses of all the rebels executed by the State and hang them up for exhibition. Such famous kings, warriors and leaders of men passed through our hands then! Beautiful and strong bodies and bodies eaten-up by corruption – all, all were stuffed with straw and went to the top of the poles.

When Sultan calls him ‘a *dhobi* masquerading as a saint’? Aziz replies:

What if I am a *dhobi*, Your Majesty? When it comes to washing away filth no saint is a match for a *dhobi*.

His comment is pungent and sarcastic. There is comedy and irony when the Sultan promotes him to be an army officer instead of punishing him. Thus, *Tughlaq* is known for grim and sardonic humour as well as contrast and irony which weave the texture of his play.

### 10.2.6 Character Analysis

Karnad has presented the titular hero of the play, Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq, with a great psychological depth and dexterity. The other characters dramatize various aspects of his complex personality, and at the same time, they also exist as individuals in their own right. For example, consider the character of Barani, the scholarly historian, and Najib, the shrewd politician. These two characters form the two opposite selves of the Sultan. Aziz, the notorious cheat, represents the imaginative, shrewd, intelligent and pragmatic side of the ruler’s personality. The whole play revolves around Tughlaq who seems to be a unifying factor for the play.

### Man of Contradictions

Tughlaq’s character is self-contradictory. He is at once an idealist and a man of quick action; a man of cruel and base mentality, but also just and humane. In the opening scene of the play, Tughlaq is portrayed as an idealist and visionary, a forward-looking emperor. In his first address to the crowd, he says:

My beloved people, you have heard the judgement of the Kazi and seen for yourselves how justice works in my kingdom – without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. May this moment burn bright and light up our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace.

Karnad delineates Tughlaq as both a generous and a cruel-hearted sovereign. On one hand, some people like Aziz, who is disguised as Brahmin Vishnu Prasad, enjoy the king’s bounty liberally and on the other, there are people like Sheikh

## NOTES

## NOTES

Imam-ud-din who get killed ruthlessly and unscrupulously. Ratan Singh, talking to Shihab-ud-din, says:

I have never seen an honest scoundrel like your Sultan. He murders a man calmly and then actually enjoys the feeling of guilt.

In the face of opposition from priests and courtiers to his plans of shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, Tughlaq issues a mindless and inconsiderate order:

Najib, I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight...Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not a wisp of smoke should rise from its chimneys.

When thousands of people die of hunger in the scorching heat of the sun enroute to Daulatabad, Tughlaq is not moved with pity or remorse.

But Tughlaq also comes across as a profound man. He is a great admirer of Greek thinkers like Socrates and Aristotle. His philosophy of life has a deep influence of these great thinkers of the time. It is of a great disadvantage to him as a ruler because the orthodox Muslims criticize him for it and even oppose him. He asks Imam-ud-din:

I still remember the days when I read the Greeks... I can still feel the thrill with which I found the new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran...You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greek in me and you propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha.

### 10.2.7 Tughlaq: A Visionary but not a Strategist

Tughlaq applies unconventional methods and techniques to the problems of life and does not believe in the stereotyped solutions. His outstanding original bent of mind makes the public issues still more complex and far-fetched. He is a visionary politician and wishes to achieve political and administrative unity for India. According to him, the North and South should join hands and all religious and cultural barriers should be neutralized. He kept the same views in his mind while shifting his capital to Daulatabad but he becomes extremely unpopular because his decision brings untold sufferings to the people.

Similarly, his decision to release token currency fails miserably, as instead of boosting the economy, it shatters it completely. It encourages corruption in form of minting imitative coins. Here it is pertinent to note that his subjects are given to intellectual lethargy and offer no cooperation, discouraging his forward-looking thoughts.

These plans are rightly proposed but badly executed and 'disastrously abandoned'. Tughlaq was superb in formulating new plans but he lacked the psychological understanding of his subjects—something which is absolutely necessary for a successful ruler. His failures made him doubt his own people and they, in turn, suspected his motives and designs. The result was a gulf between him

and his people, and it filled the atmosphere with bitterness and hostility on both the sides.

*Girish Karnad: Tughlaq*

### 10.2.8 *Tughlaq*: A Man Ahead of the Times

Tughlaq strives to build an egalitarian society in which justice would prevail. He seems to be an enlightened person who seeks the support and cooperation of the people to execute his new plans to reform the society. He is liberal to the Hindus but this invites bitterness from the Muslim community.

He believes in offering any office to a person rich in talent rather than preferring the caste and creed of the person. For doing so, he invites only ill will and hatred and is called ‘Mad Tughlaq’.

However, it is also true that Tughlaq surrounded himself with the worst kind of opposition because of the Islamic leaders regarding him as ‘a disgrace to Islam’. He made the Muslims pray five times a day but in a fit of utter frustration, prohibited prayers until Caliph Abbasid visited India.

On the surface, this may seem erratic, but a close look at the Sultan’s life tells us that he was deeply religious and philosophical. It was sheer frustration that made him behave in such an unpredictable manner. He knows well that when religion becomes a ritual, it loses its substance; and agnosticism and atheism can never be answers to human problems and needs. He ultimately takes a rationalistic stand to deeply probe into the religious situations, but to the religious people, this approach seemed like a denial of religious sentiments.

From the opening scene, Tughlaq is seen as a man estranged from his society, primarily because he is a man ahead of his age. He is misunderstood by the society because his ideas and ideals are far above the comprehension of his contemporaries. However, he is not alienated from the human existence and craves for being ‘understood’. He says to Barani, ‘All your life you wait for someone who understands you. And then – you meet him – punishment for waiting too much.’ This sort of realization is not of a mad man but of a tragic character who is misunderstood through and through, whose every effort to do good yields negative consequences, who is betrayed by fate, chance and his own people, and whom even ‘sleep avoided’ for ‘five years’.

### Projecting Contemporary Disillusionments

Girish Karnad’s presentation of Tughlaq’s character is intended towards showing his weaknesses and irregularities, proving that he was a hypocrite and a tyrant. It is due to two important factors:

- (a) Karnad follows the historical records of Barani and other orthodox historians who were biased against the Sultan and
- (b) Karnad’s purpose of writing this play is to exhibit the political disillusionment prevailing in the 1960s in India and this made him highlight the negative aspects of the Sultan’s personality.

### NOTES

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. What was the source of Karnad's plays?
2. How does Karnad use language in his plays?
3. State Karnad's main objective in his play Tughlaq.
4. What is the main source of Karnad's work Tughlaq?
5. Outline the existential element in Tughlaq.

## 10.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Like traditional Indian drama, including Kannada theatre, Karnad took legend, history and myth as the main source for his three important plays, *Yayati*, *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*. But compared to other plays in Kannada literature, Karnad's plays are innovatively directed.
2. Karnad's language is appropriate and effective. With great command over English and rich vocabulary, he manages to write dialogues which are flexible and precise, and which change according to the nuances of the plot and characters. Karnad's characters use language that suits their status and temperament.
3. In *Tughlaq*, Karnad's main objective is to highlight the contradictions in the Sultan's complex personality, who is a visionary and a man of action, devout and irreligious, generous and unkind, humane and barbarian.
4. Karnad's account of Tughlaq's character, administration, politics, ruthlessness and even savagery is based on Zia-ud-din Barani's *Tarikh-I-Firuz Shahi* as well as other historical accounts. He has, however, deviated a little from the facts, to aid the dramatic purpose. The play has been written in the episodic, scenic division like Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. However, Karnad has used the Company *Natak* convention of the comic pairs, Aziz and Aazam.
5. *Tughlaq* too is an existentialist play, which deals with philosophical questions on the nature of man and the destiny of the whole kingdom, which a dreamer like Muhammad Tughlaq controls. His alienation from traditional religion arises primarily from the fact that he is an existentialist in his religious beliefs, which come into conflict with the orthodox and fundamental faith.

## 10.4 SUMMARY

- Born on 19 May 1938 in Matheran, a town near Mumbai, Girish Karnad has earned international acclaim as an actor, poet, playwright, director, critic and translator.
- Like traditional Indian drama, including Kannada theatre, Karnad too took legend, history and myth as the main source for his three important plays, *Yayati*, *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*.
- Karnad has authored his monumental plays—*Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and The Rain*—in Kannada and then translated them into English to emerge as the emblem of a vibrant and rich contemporary Indian English drama for the whole world.
- Karnad, who is the pioneer of new drama, shows how drama is meant to fulfil a serious purpose of highlighting the disparities in our social life. It is also aimed to reconciling paradoxes and contraries in life, which lie at the root of all the sufferings.
- The plots of his plays are well knit and marked by the architectonic quality. In depicting his characters, Karnad observes economy, precision and conciseness as they are meant to fulfil certain demands of the plot through their action and dialogues.
- Karnad's plays depict the conflict between the ancient and the modern, karma and individual freedom, old and young, religion and science, high caste and low caste and many other dichotomies.
- The conflict provides him ample opportunities to reveal his sense of humour and response to the stratified society of India as can be seen in *Tughlaq*.
- *Tughlaq* explores the paradox of the idealistic Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq, whose reign is considered one of the most spectacular failures in Indian history.
- Karnad's account of Tughlaq's character, administration, politics, ruthlessness and even savagery is based on Zia-ud-din Barani's *Tarikh-I-Firuz Shahi* as well as other historical accounts.
- Karnad's *Tughlaq* is featured upon the life and turbulent reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq, who ruled over India for almost twenty-six years from 1324 to 1351.
- The plot of Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* grows out the paradoxical events of the protagonist and his opponents. It is woven by the conflict between opposites.

## NOTES

## NOTES

- Karnad has presented the titular hero of the play, Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq, with a great psychological depth and dexterity. The other characters dramatize various aspects of his complex personality, and at the same time, they also exist as individuals in their own right.

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### 10.5 KEY WORDS

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- **Hierophant:** It means the presiding priest who initiated candidates into the Eleusinian mysteries; hence, one who teaches the mysteries and duties of religion.
- **Idealism:** It refers to any of various systems of thought in which the objects of knowledge are held to be in some way dependent on the activity of mind.
- **Existentialism:** It is a philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will.
- **Jizya:** It is a religiously required per capita yearly tax historically levied by Islamic states on certain non-Muslim subjects—dhimmis—permanently residing in Muslim lands under Islamic law.

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### 10.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short-Answer Questions

1. State any two important symbols used in *Tughlaq*.
2. Briefly sketch the role of Aziz.
3. What is the relevance of *Tughlaq* to the contemporary Indian political scenario?
4. Give any two examples of Karnad's use of history in *Tughlaq*.
5. Write a short note on the comic element in *Tughlaq*.
6. Outline the symbolism of prayer in the play.

#### Long-Answer Questions

1. Comment on *Tughlaq* as a historical play.
2. What do you understand by the term 'opposites' in Tughlaq's character?
3. Discuss the use of paradox and irony in *Tughlaq*. Explain your answer in detail.

4. Discuss the qualities of Karnad's language, illustrating your answer from *Tughlaq*.
5. Write a critical note on *Tughlaq* as an existential play.

*Girish Karnad: Tughlaq*

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## 10.7 FURTHER READINGS

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## NOTES

## NOTES

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# UNIT 11 TENDULKAR: *SILENCE!* *THE COURT IS IN SESSION*

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### Structure

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 Life and Works of Tendulkar
- 11.3 Summary of the Play
- 11.4 Themes
  - 11.4.1 Dramatic Techniques Used in the Play
- 11.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 11.6 Summary
- 11.7 Key Words
- 11.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 11.9 Further Readings

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## 11.0 INTRODUCTION

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This unit discusses Vijay Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session*. The play was first published in 1967. The play was Tendulkar's first to become part of the New Indian Drama phenomenon of the 1960s, and the first important modern Indian play in any language to centre on woman as the central character and the victim. The protagonist of the play is woman named Leela Benare, who has a natural lust for life and ignores social norms and traditions. Being different from the others she is easily isolated and made the victim of a cruel game cunningly planned by her co-actors.

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## 11.1 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Discuss the life and work of the writer
- Analyze the various aspects of the play
- Discern the underlying themes explored in the play
- Examine the background of the play

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## 11.2 LIFE AND WORKS OF TENDULKAR

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Vijay Tendulkar is a path-breaking theatre writer with international acclaim. In Indian theatre he stands along with other prominent writers such as Girish Karnad and Mohan Rakesh who have taken Indian drama to a higher level. He has been

a forerunner of not just Marathi but Indian theatre for the past forty years. A creative writer with a fine sensibility, he has beautifully used the medium of theatre to reveal the alienation of the newly Independent Indian individual to contemporary politics. His plays explore the various relationships in society- men's dominance over women, the class divide in the society, the individual (particularly females) expressing freedom in their thoughts, words and deed with those of the society. One of the main theme in his plays is the depiction of women's vulnerability in the Indian social hierarchy. Tendulkar's central concern has been the relationship between individual and society. In play after play, he has made effective presentation of the latent violence and lust in middle class life, the consequent devastation and the essential loneliness of man.

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar was born in Kolhapur in the state of Maharashtra on January 6, 1928. He died in 2008 leaving an everlasting impression on theatre, be it Marathi or Indian traditional theatre. He was born in a Saraswat Brahmin family and received a rich literary exposure in his childhood owing to the publication business of his father. He is said to have composed his first story at the age of six. Tendulkar witnessed social development in India from pre independent India to the turbulence experienced by nascent independent India and post-independence India. All such experiences had a huge impact on the creative mind of Tendulkar, and being a well-read person he had a lot to say and write about at a very young age itself. He displayed this creativity and literary sensibility at a very young age of eleven when he composed his first play. The Quit India Movement created an urge within the young, perceptive mind of Tendulkar and he went against his family members wishes to join the movement. Tendulkar had a keen literary sense and was sensible enough to deeply perceive the social order around him and could see the hypocrisy being practiced in the society. His first job was that of a journalist in Pune. He worked as a journalist for several years before becoming the Chief Sub editor of a Marathi Daily. Soon after he quit his job and worked as a freelance writer and served as a regular columnist for The Maharashtra Times. He became editor of Navbharat in 1948. His creativity found another outlet in short stories. His stories and narratives usually contained dialogues in detail, so he felt encouraged and initiated writing one act plays as well. The exercise proved fulfilling and satisfying to the creative writer and he subsequently wrote full- fledged plays. Tendulkar also provided guidance to students studying 'playwright writing' in US universities. His creative writing cover a vast span of five decades during which he has written 27 full-length plays and 25 one-act plays. Tendulkar died battling the effects of myasthenia gravis in Pune on May 19, 2008. He received several awards for his work, some of them are listed below:

Tendulkar's initial attempts as a playwright were not successful, however, he did not get discouraged and continued his efforts. In 1956, he wrote *Shrimant*, which established him as a playwright of substance. He emerged as a playwright, ready to explore unconventional themes and social changes occurring around him with a critical perspective.

*Tendulkar: Silence!*  
*The Court is in Session*

## NOTES

## NOTES

*Shrimant* explored a rather radical storyline- an unmarried young woman decides to keep her unborn child. Her rich father, on the other hand tries to 'buy' his social prestige by getting someone to marry her. In *Shrimant* and other plays as well Tendulkar challenges the social moral values and taboos being practiced by the middle class in society. The idea was to provoke the audience to become more realistic and bring about a social change. This questioning and criticism remains in his later work as well. Many of the famous classic plays of Marathi theatre and modern Indian Theatre were penned down by Tendulkar. His success is registered by the fact that they have been translated and performed in many Indian languages and are still being popularly staged in India as well as abroad. *Ghashiram Kotwal* (*Ghashiram the Constable*) (1972), is one of the longest running plays in the world. It is a musical combining Marathi folk performance styles with the contemporary theatrical techniques. The play has received over six thousand performances in India and abroad, in the original as well as in translation.

*Shantata* is one of his another masterpiece and is a play in Three Acts. Similar to *Shrimant*, the protagonist of this play also is an unconventional woman. The play depicts how a woman's unconventional conduct draws criticism for her. The other members of the society accuse her for threatening the very edifice of the society, by making her unconventional choice. The play makes a realistic depiction of the plight of such a woman in society. People are not concerned about their conduct, but they seek sadistic pleasure in hunting her down for her decisions and subsequent actions.

The play *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe* (1967) is a famous play in Marathi, translated into English as *Silence! The Court is in Session* by Priya Adarkar in 1978. The play is originally based on Friedrich Durrenmatt's story *Die Panne* (Traps). The initial production was not received well by the audience owing to its scathing portrayal of the hypocrisy practiced in society. However, in 1970, when it was honoured the prestigious Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Award for the best play of the year, the play and the playwright became a hit all over the country. This play marked the entry of Tendulkar in the league of great writers of the time and he became a familiar name in the literary circle. It was first staged in 1967 and is acknowledged to be one of his mature works.

### Check Your Progress

1. List some of the issues discussed in Vijay Tendulkar's plays?
2. What is the storyline of the play *Shrimant*?

## 11.3 SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

This play is located in the India of 1950, thus documenting the social life, believes, values, morals and taboos of the society of those times. The plot of the play is

inspired from a short story, written in German by a Swiss writer which was translated in English. The play depicts newly independent Indian society, experiencing changes owing to modernization and challenges of democracy. It was also a period of social change, when the people were willing to give way to new ways of living, assessing the validity of age old practices, social customs and believes. The style used by Tendulkar in this play is also an attempt to try something unconventional, testing the contemporary against the old practices and vice versa. In this play “*Silence! The Court Is In Session*,” Tendulkar introduces nursery rhymes and poems, through its characters. This is a traditional theatrical technique used in Indian drama, wherein the characters freely engage in poetic dialogues. Thus, emotions find free expressions and the portrayal is more comprehensive and realistic. According to the author and critic Shailja Wadikar, ‘Tendulkar is a silent social activist who covertly wishes to bring about a change in people’s mode of thinking, feeling and behaving’.

The protagonist of the play is an unconventional woman. Her experience places her in a vulnerable position in a rigid society that runs on orthodox social codes. The young woman and the choices she makes are seen as threatening the very edifice of the society she lives in. Her existence therefore becomes problematic and she is perforce silenced in the course of the play. The Play *Silence! The Court is in Session* is a play in three acts dealing with the lives of ordinary people in a small town. Coming from diverse backgrounds, around ten characters are shown to be engaged in a group activity. They are the members of ‘The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association (SMTPA)’. It is a socially committed group whose main objective is to sensitize the public towards social evils and facilitate them to work for a social cause.

For this particular evening, the group is supposed to be meeting for performing a mock trial protesting against President Johnson’s production of atomic weapons. This idea of mock trial, used by Tendulkar is a wonderful strategy. The ‘court’ is visualized by people as the only place where the righteous conduct happens and where truth will prevail and it is believed that the guilty will definitely be punished. It is seen as the sacred place in society where the problems are resolved in order to establish a just and peaceful society.

The people working for the court, lawyers and judges are accorded the highest respect and are kept in very high esteem in the society. They are expected to be fair, just and committed in their dealings. However, the play shows that even this institution is affected with hypocrisy. There is no responsible behaviour evidenced by the audience from the court officials (judge and lawyer). They are shown to be highly manipulative, prejudiced, biased and unjust. Tendulkar employs an open discussion forum, possible in a court for depicting the social conflict. The mock trial portrays a group of people, holding respectable positions in the society, playing the dangerous game of targeting a lone woman, who is the victim of their activity. She is not even aware initially that she is being hunted by the so called fellow mates. It takes the group members a few minutes to alienate her from their group

*Tendulkar: Silence!  
The Court is in Session*

## NOTES

## NOTES

and assault her personal life. The first act of the play takes place in an empty hall. It is usually used for hosting public functions in the village such as speeches, receptions, weddings, women's bhajans and magic shows. The audience is introduced to all the characters in the play in the first act itself as all the members of the SMPTA arrive for rehearsals. The amateur theatre group works with the objective of spreading awareness and working for a social cause.

### Characters

Let us discuss some of the different characters in the play. These are:

- **Raghu Samant:** He is portrayed as a gentle person with mild manners and friendly temperament. He is shown as appearing on the stage, holding a green cloth parrot. He is said to be a person who earns 'enough to keep body and soul together'. He tells the audience that he is unmarried and stays with his brother and sister-in-law and is very fond of his nephew. He is shown to assist the group in running their small errands. Later on in the play he acts as the fourth witness as well.
- **Leela Benare:** She is an experienced school teacher and comes across as an intelligent, straightforward spirited woman having a mind of her own. She has a good sense of humour and gets amused at the behaviour of fellow group members. She is not afraid in voicing her opinion. She comes out as a strong woman with independent thinking.
- **Sukhatme:** Arrives on stage smoking a beedi and is introduced as a lawyer along with the rest of the characters.
- **Servant:** He is apparently one of the general factotum which arrives on stage. He is probably a hired porter by the group members. He is shown to carry 'two wooden enclosures, the dock and the witness box' which he puts down on the left side of the wings, and returns to face Ponkshe, who paid him money for his services. Next moment he leaves the stage.
- **Balu Rokde:** He comes along with the Kashikars and follows their orders. It is told that he is indebted to the family for he was given shelter by the Kashikars, at a very young age. They fed, clothed and educated him.
- **Ponkshe:** The Science student in the play who failed his intermediate examinations, as per Leela Benare. He shares that clearing these examinations would have made him eligible for the university education. Ponkshe works as a clerk at the Central Telegraph office, smokes a pipe and has appeared second time for his inter exam.
- **Mrs. Kashikar:** Mrs Kashikar, is given the epithet of 'the hand that rocks the cradle'. She has no children of her own and nurtures and provides secondary support as a housewife. She is referred to as Mrs Kashikar – her maiden name is not mentioned throughout the play. It appears this is her only public identity. She works like a shadow to her husband, who calls all the shots and is depicted as a being rude and indifferent to her. The notion

of females being known by the surname of her husband after marriage is being questioned, as it is no less than a gradual diminishing of a female identity and personality. Mrs Kashikar appears to be unmindful of her husband's dominating personality. She has accepted it as a way of life.

- **Mr. Kashikar:** The personality of Mr Kashikar is penned as a very rude, dominating person, who wants to have his way on all occasion. Being the dominant spouse, as expected in a tradition Indian family, he indulges his wife by stopping on the way to the hall and buys her flowers to put in her hair. Benare refers to him as the chairman of the amateur theatre group. He is a self-assured person with a very high self-esteem and self-importance.
- **Local Resident Karnik:** He is addicted to pan chewing and is said to be an experimental theatre actor.

Keeping the traditional Sanskrit drama style, this play also has major and minor characters. The setting is one single evening. There are young men, a single young woman and a married matured woman in this play. However, the theme of the play is not love and commitment. Instead, we find a cross section of people from the middle class assembling together for staging a mock trial on certain social issues. The characters are not related to each other on the personal front. It is their common interest in acting and desire to work for social cause that brings them together in one place at one time. The Kashikars are an exception as they are husband and wife and Balu Rokde has been brought up by them. Rest of the characters are different from each other, in terms of their age, gender, experience, personality and social status. This is a new and crucial aspect of Tendulkar's play as it deals with issues of collective psychology and how it shapes individuals. The play draws upon an older tradition of Indian drama. It documents the lives, values and culture of people in India of 1950. It exposes the hypocrisy of the middle class of that period.

### Act I of the Play

The play takes place in an old community hall, used by the residents of the village for social gathering and performing various activities such as bhajans, wedding etc. The stage directions tell us that Samant enters carrying a lock and a key and a green cloth parrot. Miss Benare, follows him, carrying a purse and a basket of equipment. The objects they bring with them are stage props. Besides there are broken chairs and several other artefacts on the stage such as 'worn out portraits of national leaders.'

### Act II of the Play

This Act begins on a different note. While Act I allowed Benare to modulate our responses to all the other characters, we observe a major shift in Act II. Earlier in Act I, we learnt about the rest of the characters through Benare. Act II reveals to us new aspects of Benare's life, provided gratuitously by the rest of the characters assembled on the stage. She is now on trial in more ways than one. Benare is

*Tendulkar: Silence!  
The Court is in Session*

## NOTES

## NOTES

shaken and startled by the accusation that is levelled against her. She tries to regain her composure at the beginning of Act II.

After a few false starts, slapstick and comic in nature, Benare who is charged with the crime of infanticide denies it. This is followed by the argument of the prosecution, represented by Sukhatame. Sukhatame pontificates on the significance of motherhood and highlights the glorification and deification of the role of the mother in Indian culture. Kashikar adds to this, quoting from the Sanskrit and reiterates the high status of the mother and the motherland, both of which supersede even that of heaven. Such exalted constructions of women as mothers are part of the history of the nationalist movements and of the period preceding it wherein women's identities were fixed within the domestic procreative space and subsequently mythologized around notions of the motherland. How do such constructions translate when examined in the context of real women? Do we, for instance, see any evidence of the exalted role played by any mother within the world of the play? Is there any lived record of the vestiges of this older ideology? If we look at how Mrs. Kashikar is treated, we see very little evidence of any status accorded to her. It is true that Mrs. Kashikar has no children of her own. Therefore, one conclusion that we could possibly draw is that in this group of people women without children are not held in high esteem. Does this change when we encounter women with children? The play itself does not deal directly with any actual mother figure. Samant's sister in law is the only point of indirect reference that we get. So in a mock trial where the judge and the prosecution award the highest status to the figure of the mother, we need to see how the court will treat an expectant mother. Benare's observation that all the pontification offered by Sukhatame and Kashikar on the subject of motherhood sounds like it is out of textbooks is significant. After declaring that the status of a mother is hallowed, the court proceeds to cross examine Benare. What exactly is the nature of this cross examination?

At first, the meaning of the term infanticide needs to be explained to Samant. On understanding its implication Samant informs everyone present that a widow had been tried in their village 'one or two years ago' for the same crime. This little anecdote provided by Samant goes back a long way into the history of women's lives in patriarchal Maharashtra. Before we move into any further analysis of Act II of the play, it is important to examine some very significant historical details that will sharpen our understanding of the issues raised in the play.

In the year 1882, Tarabai Shinde, a woman activist from Buldhana wrote a tract entitled *Stri Purusha Tulna* in Marathi. Her 52 page tract was a response to the death sentence of one Vijayalakshmi in the Bombay High Court, a twenty four year old widow, who had been found guilty of infanticide. While Vijayalakshmi's sentence was mitigated from death by hanging to one of transportation, sensational publicity accompanied the event. The attention she received and the public discussions and debates that accompanied her case pushed Tarabai Shinde to draw attention to harsh and prescriptive patriarchal attitudes to women in her

time. Tarabai rightly points out that women are singled out for blame. *Stree Purush Tulna* analysed the attitudes to women in a patriarchal society. In Vijayalakshmi's case, the offending male is never mentioned. He is never discussed or named along with her although common sense would allow us to deduce that ordinarily a man would be responsible for impregnating a woman. As denizens of the twenty first century, we could perhaps consider ourselves far away in actual time from the issue that Tarabai Shinde raises.

Let us however look at the points of similarity and difference in both stories. Benare, as Act II lets us deduce, is a young unmarried woman who is pregnant. Vijayalakshmi too was a young woman who was obliged to follow the cruel and heartless systems of denial and self-abnegation prescribed in orthodox Hindu communities for widows. Although they belong to two different centuries, the reactions to their transgression share much in common. Again, what both women have in common is the fact that in conventional and traditional societies both unmarried and widowed women are disallowed any sexual proclivity. They are also not allowed to bear children. What both Benare and Vijayalakshmi have in common is that their identities of unmarried woman/widow do not allow them any access to the males in their community. Vijayalakshmi's life as a widow only allowed her a constricted life within the domestic sphere. As a young woman in independent India Benare has access to the public sphere. However, the fact of their pregnancies leaves everyone in the community agog. Vijayalakshmi has the local policeman patrol her, while in Benare's case all the members of her troupe and onlookers view her with suspicion. Their pregnant condition is the starting point for the generation of tremendous social outrage. In the eyes of the legal system Vijayalakshmi is charged with a criminal offence and punished for it. Benare is also charged with infanticide. So although Tendulkar's play is set in modern India, it draws upon practices and prejudices that are drawn from a hoary past. Tarabai's tract is very pertinent to our understanding of Tendulkar's play despite having been written almost seventy years before the play. Look now at the responses to the news of Benare's pregnancy that each of the characters in *Shantata* offers.

As we hear the responses of each character in Act II who has some evidence to offer against Benare, we are very disturbed by the viciousness and malice that is directed at her. Some of this information, we must remember, is actually fictitious detail which is concocted impromptu by the characters in order to have a case for the prosecution. In the first instance, Benare is accused of the crime of infanticide. Nothing is offered by way of concrete evidence to support this claim. Instead, the entire court scene degenerates into a series of discussions pertaining to Benare's personal life and mores. Why is there this sudden shift? Why does the play move from the question of infanticide to an exploration of personal relationships in Benare's case? As a matter of fact, the earliest speculations are offered by Samant, who, as the audience and the characters are aware, is making up a story as he goes along. Does this give us any new insights into the personality of Samant? Is this really the man who came across as timid and simple at the beginning of the play? Does he

*Tendulkar: Silence!*  
*The Court is in Session*

## NOTES

## NOTES

seem rather conservative, perhaps even unused to the idea of accepting women in the public sphere? Is he representative of a hidebound patriarchal system of belief that readily damns all women who do not conform to prescriptive patterns of behaviour?

Samant's reference to the widow who was accused of the crime of infanticide links the current narrative to an older past evoking a host of associations. It also asks us to look at the issue of infanticide as a problem that continues to plague us in contemporary times despite being punishable as a heinous crime. Where does the impetus for infanticide originate? Does the act stem from cruel heartless women, who kill their young or from an inflexible societal code that prescribes rules for women and then ruthlessly polices them? Samant we must remember is a voracious reader of racy bestsellers written in the hundreds. It is possible to argue that the imagined narrative that Samant provides so effortlessly to implicate Benare is deeply rooted in a world view that borders on misogyny. This would explain why every character in the play adds details to sully Benare's reputation and present her as a forward and immoral young woman who makes a play for every man she sees. A great deal of vicarious pleasure and smugness is displayed by all the characters who offer gossipy details of their exchanges with Benare.

While ostensibly Benare is accused of the crime of infanticide, what the second act does is to make insinuations about her. Kashikar, who plays the judge suggests mildly that Benare's real life cannot be discussed in the mock trial but Sukhatme as counsel overrules him. Kashikar himself is shown as enjoying the stories being concocted by the witnesses, despite his faint demurral.

This is really the private secret that is slowly unveiling itself in Act II and will finally be made public in Act III, namely how men view women and how the very mention of women conjures up certain stereotypical roles and identities for women. There are violent undercurrents that run through Act II and reach a crescendo in Act III. Ram Sharma has drawn attention to the fact that the undercurrent of violence that the audience is made to encounter draws its inspiration from Antonin Artaud's 'theatre of cruelty'. As he points out:

Vijay Tendulkar symbolizes the new awareness and attempts of Indian dramatists of the century to depict the agonies, suffocations and cries of man, focusing on the middle class society. In all his plays, he harps upon the theme of isolation of the individual and his confrontation with the hostile surroundings. Influenced by Artaud, Tendulkar, relates the problem of anguish to the theme of violence in most of his plays. He does not consider the occurrence of human violence as something loathsome or disgusting in as much as it is in note in human nature. He says, "Unlike the communists I don't think violence can be eliminated in a classless society, or for that matter, in any society. The spirit of aggression is something that human being is born with. Not that it is bad. Without violence man might have turned into a vegetable." While depicting violence on the stage, Tendulkar does not dress it up with any fancy trapping so as to make it palatable.

The introduction of violence on the stage is certainly an influence that Tendulkar incorporates from his readings of world theatre. However, this is not to suggest that violence is non-existent in Indian society, ancient or modern. In fact, it may be argued that violence is endemic in societies like ours where coercive hierarchies of caste and gender are operative features. So Tendulkar is depicting quite accurately the perspectives that govern the way we live our lives on the stage.

To move now to the moot point of the play, in Act II, all manner of insinuations are now levelled against Benare. Each of the male characters who speaks of Benare does so in a disparaging manner and Kashikar allows this, insisting that this is only a mock trial. Benare at first tries to deal with the cross examination light-heartedly and displays a sense of flippant humour in the initial stages. However, as the act proceeds, she becomes tense and agitated. As the questions become more intimidating and shrill, Benare protests that her private life cannot be discussed in a mock trial. Benare's bursting into tears and leaving the scene of the mock trial is intended to arouse the suspicions of the rest of the characters and also perhaps the audience. In her absence Kashikar remarks that 'The whole fabric of society is being soiled these days.' Sukhatme's comments, 'we must all get together. We must act,' recalls for us the end of Act I, where a decision to stage a mock trial and make Benare the prime accused was set into motion. Then as now, Benare's absence from the stage is significant. Benare returns to pick up her bag and purse and tries to leave the room through the only doorway to the outside. Unfortunately for her, the door is stuck and she is not able to open it. The locked door becomes symbolic of the absence of escape routes for Benare. Despite not wanting to continue with the play, she is forced to continue with it. Act II ends on a note of unease. Kashikar, the judge and Sukhatme, the prosecutor, who press for the continuance of the mock trial, are shown as actively interested in the procedure. Act I suggested undercurrents of tension, beneath the façade of bonhomie. In Act II, all attempts at maintaining a sense of camaraderie are split wide open. What begins in jest as a mock trial swiftly assumes ugly dimensions.

### **Act III of the Play**

Act I and Act II are more or less of the same duration. Act III is a tad longer than the two earlier Acts. In an actual presentation, this may perhaps escape the notice of the audience. Act III is also the most intense and most serious of all the three acts.

When Act III opens, the cast has not even changed their position. Benare stands still. At the end of Act II she had tried desperately to leave the hall. Now she refuses to respond to the directive of entering the witness box. Mrs. Kashikar drags Benare into the witness box. At the beginning of Act II, Benare had agreed in good faith to play the role of the accused, although the idea had been mooted in her absence. If at that time we had a suspicion of the mal intent of the other characters, the sequence in Act II has succeeded in convincing us that there is

## **NOTES**

## NOTES

definitely some malice and mischief afoot. In Act III Benare does not agree to occupy the witness box. She is placed there by force. The cross examination now is insistent and relentless. She does not answer any of the questions that are directed at her. If this was just a friendly exchange, or if any of the other characters were really her friends, they should have stopped the cross examination and asked her why she was so upset. This was not done in Act II. It is not going to be done in Act III either. Instead the characters harp on how this is only a mock trial. Increasingly the audience is forced to recognize that Benare's cross examination crosses the boundaries of reasonable argument and propriety. We cannot help noticing the insensitivity of the rest of the cast. Benare's silence is quickly translated as contempt of court. Her sense of outrage is quickly interpreted as defiance and provides an opportunity for most of the characters to testify against her. Other than Samant, who is really not in the game, as he is not part of the living courtroom team, no one is willing to speak favourably on her behalf. Instead of rallying around her, the rest of the characters begin answering on her behalf. All the veiled insinuations and suggestions made in Act II are now made openly in Act III. All manner of impertinent questions are put to her, under the guise of finding out the truth. She is asked her name, her age, and also why she is unmarried. All of these become an opportunity to frame her. There is little evidence of the infanticide that she is accused of. Instead there is an attempt on the part of most of the characters to tarnish her reputation. There is an attempt to present her as an immoral woman of dubious character. All her associations and actions are viewed with jaundiced eyes. In Act II we could tell the difference between a fabricated story and a real one. In Act III we can no longer distinguish the lies from the truth. What are articulated in the course of compiling evidence against her are petty prejudices and a reiteration of hidebound expectations that women are usually buried under in patriarchal societies. Benare's remaining unmarried at the age of thirty four is seen as a deliberate choice of promiscuity and invites the censure of all the characters. No discussion is provided of the men who give evidence against Benare, nor are they cross examined. In fact the differing viewpoints work as the point of view of a cross section of society on the questions of morals and codes prescribed for young women.

By providing such a perspective, Tendulkar is asking us to view critically the mind-set of a society which thrives on two sets of rules; one for men and another for women. We are made aware of the authority wielded by the powerful and the helplessness of the small individuals who are trapped within the snare of antediluvian social mores and constraints. We discover in the course of Act III that Benare has contacted several men and put forward a proposal of marriage. This very detail shocks the characters in the play. We need perhaps to ask why this should be so. After all, in everyday life, marriage proposals/advertisements create a space in which a prospective bridegroom may interview several young women in the process of finding a wife. Why should Benare's quest to find herself a husband be viewed as untoward? Benare herself comes across as far more attractive and intelligent when compared to all the men she supposedly propositioned. Why does each one of them turn her down? The fact that she is

pregnant and is looking for support in the form of a father for the child is ostensibly the reason for rejecting her. Benare is not contemplating infanticide. She seeks instead a secure future for her child in a myopic society. Unfortunately for her, the men she knows and approaches are shown up as pathetic. All they can contribute to her life is scurrilous gossip and exaggerated versions of her plight, which they milk for sagacious detail. This is true of the maternal uncle who exploited her when she was fourteen, Damle, the married professor with five children, who deserts her. It is equally true of the weak and unsupportive Ponkshe and Rokde as also the Chairman of the Education Society who dismisses Benare from her job as a teacher once he finds out that she is unmarried and is carrying a child. All these men, ostensibly the upholders of a society which venerates and glorifies motherhood, will not lift a finger to support an expectant mother. What is even worse is that they do not stop at denying her help. They go out of their way to make her personal and professional life hell. The entire focus of Act III shifts from an investigation of the possibility of infanticide to a gradually constructed narrative of Benare's licentiousness, her immorality and an indictment of her very presence which is seen as a 'canker in society.'

In doing so, Tendulkar exposes the actual culprits in society. Earlier feminist tracts such as the one written by Tarabai Shinde point out the persecution and victimization of women in Benare's situation. Tendulkar joins issue with Tarabai Shinde and her ilk by showing us the actual forces behind such acts of persecution. It is the judges and prosecutors, the respectable men and women in powerful positions in society who are seen as the perpetrators. It is their blinkered vision, and their lack of compassion and humaneness that results in countless infanticides. When they give her ten seconds to speak, this is only a perfunctory gesture. Each of the other characters is probably aware of the real story. Yet none of them want to really approach Benare's problem in a humane manner or treat her with dignity. This is highlighted through the extraordinary sequence during which Benare breaks her silence in Act III and communes with the audience, putting forward her version. You would have noticed that the characters in the play freeze and that at this juncture Benare occupies centre stage. She is eloquent and puts forward a very moving narrative that allows the audience to view her in the light of a vulnerable young woman who has had a raw deal, once as a young girl, and then as a young adult. It is remarkable that she has struggled and survived against such odds and achieved so much. She draws attention to the group that is persecuting her and women in her position by referring to them as 'cultured men of the twentieth century' with ferocious faces, worn out phrases and bellies full of unfulfilled desires.' Despite this powerful indictment, Benare's heartrending soliloquy speaks of her fighting spirit and her commitment to her work, her love for the children she teaches and her passion for life. Her affirmative beliefs evoke a sympathetic chord.

Yet, given the thrust of the play, is there any possibility of a happy conclusion? As we will discover, this is not the case. Benare's soliloquy allows the audience to view her situation from a different perspective. Yet, literally and metaphorically, the characters in the play who represent the community she lives in do not hear

*Tendulkar: Silence!  
The Court is in Session*

## NOTES

## NOTES

her. Her version falls on deaf ears and frozen hearts and brains. Kashikar, the judge announces the verdict of the mock trial. Benare is seen as attempting to short circuit all social codes and mores. She is accused of having committed a terrible crime and she is informed that the child in her womb will be destroyed. This is the only punitive solution that the living law court has been able to provide. Tendulkar drives home the horrifying recognition that nothing has really changed in terms of people's attitudes. It usually takes a man and a woman to bring forth a child, irrespective of whether they are married or otherwise. While the offending male is excused, the vulnerable woman, who can very often be a victim is put on trial as in this case and condemned universally. In all such situations, the magnificent act of creation, that is solely the privilege of women is marginalized as irrelevant. There is a sharp divide between the deification of the mother as goddess and the real flesh and blood mother who is put in the dock. Benare breaks down and puts her head on the table sobbing uncontrollably, on hearing Kashikar's verdict. She says she will not allow them to destroy her child. At this point the mock trial comes to an end and the door to the hallway is unlocked in preparation for the evening's program. Patting her head and cajoling her not to be so sensitive and telling her that it was only a game, all the characters hurry away to prepare for the show. Only Benare lies motionless on the stage. Attempts to persuade her to get up are in vain. Samant comes in and leaves the cloth parrot beside her. The last image on the stage is that of a Benare who struggles to move, but cannot. Like the toy bird, the play ends with a song of a grieving sparrow whose secure world has been destroyed by predators. The play ends here. The focus is on an immobile and broken Benare who has been crushed by the hostility and viciousness of her peers and her community. She is bereft and has no support. Will she rise and recover. The playwright leaves it to us to mull over this fact. Even if Benare were to eventually get up, rehabilitating herself will be an uphill task. She has no economic support, no job, no male protection and she has also been ostracized by society. Her future is deliberately left bleak.

### Key Issues under Discussion

Some of the key issues under discussion in the unit are:

1. While the play is set in modern independent India that has a constitution that provides equal rights to everyone irrespective of caste creed or gender, Tendulkar's play demonstrates that this is not the case in real life situations.
2. The wielders of authority, the controllers of opinion, the initiators of action are usually powerful people with a long history of support systems. Their understanding of their new role is not as citizens of a democracy, it dates back to a hierarchical socio economic system that is much older.
3. Their notion of social reform and change is largely superficial. As Tendulkar proves, by scratching a little, their deep seated convictions and prejudices are uncovered. It takes very little to rupture the thin façade of emancipation and liberalism that they try to project.

4. Women in this world are still extremely vulnerable and subject to most danger, both in the private sphere and in the public sphere.
5. How is this society, ostensibly free and rational an improvement on that which existed before? Is this the question that the playwright would like the audience to ponder over?
6. This is where the very important role played by literature is highlighted. By creating a real life situation and giving us all the points of view through a host of characters the playwright expects us to mull over the issue, Benare's story ends sadly, but it has definitely alerted us to women's vulnerability and exploitation in patriarchal societies. It has also alerted us to the prejudice and meanness displayed by people in positions of power and control.
7. Like Benare, we as readers, are unable to avenge ourselves on the Damles, Kashikars and Sukhatmes of this world. However, they have been demystified for us. We no longer look at them with awe nor do we feel anything other than anger and contempt for them.
8. The play also sensitizes us to Benare's precarious position in this hostile and unfair society. It also enables us to understand why Mrs. Kashikar and Rokde behave in the way they do. Completely under Kashikar's control, neither of them has the power to break free from him and think differently. They are allowed to survive because they collude with the authority figures and are hostile to Benare, who threatens them by her free thinking and independence.
9. Samant reveals to us the dangers of limited exposure. Despite his best intentions, Samant remains to the end largely uncomprehending of the whole issue.

*Tendulkar: Silence!  
The Court is in Session*

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

3. When is the play located?
4. Where is the play set?

## 11.4 THEMES

The play *Silence! The Court is in Session* known for its artistic ingenuity. According to the critic Arundhati Banerjee, the play combines social criticism with the tragedy of an individual victimized by society. The play originated from a real life incident in which Tendulkar happened to overhear a group of amateur players whom he was guiding to their destination, Vile Parle, the Mumbai suburb in which he lived, where the group was going to stage a mock-trial. The play is in the form of a play within a play or a play in the form of a rehearsal. In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar has depicted the difficulty of a young woman, who is a victim of the

## NOTES

male dominated society. Tendulkar has criticized the follies prevailing in the society. The play carries all the vitalities of contemporary life. It focuses on the human mind and detects the ugliness in it. All the plays of Tendulkar are the result of his surveillance of the life, society and different incidents of his own life. It deals with the problem of unmarried motherhood.

Leela Benare is the female protagonist of the play who stands as a rebel against the established values of the orthodox society. Tendulkar has treated the character of Ms. Benare with great compassion and understanding while projecting her against the selfish, hypocritical and ambitious male dominated society. By profession, she is a school teacher, sincere and dedicated in her teaching work and an enlightened artist by heart. So, she has joined the amateur theatre group. The other members of the group are Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar, Balu Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponkshe, Karnik, Prof. Damle and Mr. Rawte, who belong to the urban middle-class of Mumbai. Leela Benare is totally different from others in the sense that she has a zeal and zest for life. She wants to share her happiness with others but hardly succeeds because her generous nature is not appreciated by her companions. In the exposure of private life of Benare, their inferiority complex reflects frustration and repressed desires of their life. They cannot understand, appreciate and share the joy of others. According to Shailja Wadikar, 'The character of Leela Benare reminds us of Ibsen's famous character Nora in *A Doll's House*, a womanly woman who tries to face the bitter realities of actual world that is full of hardships and challenges.' Miss Benare is cheated twice in love; first by her maternal uncle and later by Prof. Damle. In the first case, the thing subsides with the passage of time but in the other, she is caught in a trap through a cruel game cunningly played by her companions as her love affair has already been exposed by her pregnancy. At the very beginning of the mock trial, Benare is accused of the charge of infanticide. The mock trial takes a serious turn when her co-actors arrange it in such a cunning manner so as to discuss and dissect her private life. Being isolated and victimized by society, she offers to marry any of her companions but no one comes forward to accept her proposal. On the contrary, she is denied both the right of living as she is dismissed from her job and the right that God has given to a woman to become mother as the sentence is passed to destroy the baby in her womb. Prof. Damle, who is equally responsible for the same crime, goes unnoticed and unpunished. Although Benare's character symbolizes simplicity, innocence and straightforwardness, the character of her fellow companions symbolize meanness and cruelty. Her tragedy reveals the fact that in the male dominated society, a woman's innocence is punished and a man's deliberateness and violence goes scot-free. In the play, Tendulkar throws light on the evil practices inherent in human nature like crookedness, cruelty and violence. Here in the play, the white collar educated and civilized middle-class people become aggressive and violent against their fellow companion who is a female and entertain themselves at the cost of her honour and dignity. Benare suffers for the crime that she has not committed as she says, 'These are the mortal remains of some cultured men of the twentieth century. See their faces – how ferocious they look! Their lips are full of

lovely worn-out phrases! And their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires.’ In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar directs his criticism against the hypocritical male attitude in Indian society where a woman is quite suppressed and any small attempt by a woman for her freedom is highly deteriorated. Benare’s tragedy reveals the fact that women are born to suffer even in the most sophisticated, civilized section of the society. While tracing the structure of society, his plays hold a mirror to the desires, dreams and despairs of the ordinary people engaged in their day-to-day struggle of life. He investigates deep into the human consciousness to find out the causes of their misery and suffering. His plays illustrate human lives stagnating in the mire of lust, greed and violence. Therefore, the study of Vijay Tendulkar’s plays will help us to understand his vision of society and human life.

*Tendulkar: Silence!  
The Court is in Session*

## NOTES

### 11.4.1 Dramatic Techniques Used in the Play

The outstanding characteristic features of the play are its uncompromising realism, its merciless probing of human nature, its candid security of individual and group psychology and its experimental technique. Vijay Tendulkar is highly realistic not only in the delineation of characters and human relationships, but also in the depiction of the setting in which these characters enact the drama of their lives. The locale of the play is a mofussil town and all the actions of the play take place in a single room.

The theatre group in the play *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* comes to perform at a village is a minuscule cross section of middle class society and the members who belong to the different substrata of the society. The play is radical in its subject and a bit aggressive in tone. The play is radical in its subject and a bit aggressive in tone. Tendulkar set a new trend in Marathi theatre and introduced new themes to the theatre in general. He created a new path leading to a modernistic movement in theatre. The play incurred Tendulkar the wrath of the censors and of the conservative section of the society. Tendulkar, who is known as the young angry man of Indian theatre created a havoc with the production of this play.

#### Check Your Progress

5. What are the outstanding characteristic features of the play?
6. What is Leela Benare’s profession?

## 11.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. His plays explore the various relationships in society- men’s dominance over women, the class divide in the society, the individual (particularly females) expressing freedom in their thoughts, words and deed with those of the society.

## NOTES

2. *Shrimant* explored a rather radical storyline- an unmarried young woman decides to keep her unborn child.
3. This play is located in the India of 1950, thus documenting the social life, believes, values, morals and taboos of the society of those times.
4. The play takes place in an old community hall, used by the residents of the village for social gathering and performing various activities such as bhajans, wedding etc.
5. The outstanding characteristic features of the play are its uncompromising realism, its merciless probing of human nature, its candid security of individual and group psychology and its experimental technique.
6. By profession, she is a school teacher, sincere and dedicated in her teaching work and an enlightened artist by heart.

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## 11.6 SUMMARY

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- Vijay Tendulkar is a path-breaking theatre writer with international acclaim. In Indian theatre he stands along with other prominent writers such as Girish Karnad and Mohan Rakesh who have taken Indian drama to a higher level.
- Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar was born in Kolhapur in the state of Maharashtra on January 6, 1928.
- His creative writing cover a vast span of five decades during which he has written 27 full-length plays and 25 one-act plays.
- This play *Silence! The Court is in Session* is located in the India of 1950, thus documenting the social life, believes, values, morals and taboos of the society of those times.
- The plot of the play is inspired from a short story, written in German by a Swiss writer which was translated in English.
- The play depicts newly independent Indian society, experiencing changes owing to modernization and challenges of democracy.
- The protagonist of the play is an unconventional woman. Her experience places her in a vulnerable position in a rigid society that runs on orthodox social codes.
- Keeping the traditional Sanskrit drama style, this play also has major and minor characters. The setting is one single evening. There are young men, a single young woman and a married matured woman in this play.
- According to the critic Arundhati Banerjee, the play combines social criticism with the tragedy of an individual victimized by society.
- Although Benare's character symbolizes simplicity, innocence and straightforwardness, the character of her fellow companions symbolize meanness and cruelty.

- The outstanding characteristic features of the play are its uncompromising realism, its merciless probing of human nature, its candid security of individual and group psychology and its experimental technique.

*Tendulkar: Silence!*  
*The Court is in Session*

## 11.7 KEY WORDS

- **Infanticide:** It refers to the crime of a mother killing her child within a year of birth.
- **Mock Trial:** It is an act or imitation trial. It is similar to a moot court, but mock trials simulate lower-court trials, while moot court simulates appellate court hearings.
- **Coercive:** It means forcing another party to act in an involuntary manner by use of threats or force.
- **Jaundiced Eyes:** It means a prejudiced view.
- **Ingenuity:** It is the ability to think creatively about a situation or to solve problems in a clever way.

## 11.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short-note on the life and career of Vijay Tendulkar.
2. Briefly describe the dramatic techniques used in the play.
3. Discuss the character of Mr. Kashikar in the play.
4. Summarize the plot of the play *Silence! The Court is in Session*.

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Leela Benare's experiences places her in a vulnerable position in a rigid society that runs on orthodox social codes. Discuss with reference to the text.
2. Examine how Tendulkar uses the device of the mock trial to expose the violence inherent in this male dominated patriarchal society.
3. Assess the similarities between how women were treated during Tarabai Shinde's time and during the period where Tendulkar sets his play.
4. With references to the text, examine the conclusion of *Silence! The Court is in Session*.

## NOTES

## NOTES

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## 11.9 FURTHER READINGS

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- Gokhale, Shanta, 2000. *Playwright at the Centre: Marathi Drama from 1843 to the Present*. Kolkata: Seagull.
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- Wadikar, Shailja B. 2008. *Vijay Tendulkar: A Pioneer Playwright*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publisher.

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**BLOCK - IV**  
**DRAMA XII - XIV**

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*Girish Karnad:*  
*Hayavadana*

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**UNIT 12 GIRISH KARNAD:**  
***HAYAVADANA***

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**NOTES**

**Structure**

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 Life and Works of Girish Karnad
- 12.3 Summary of the Text: *Hayavadana*
- 12.4 Dramatic Techniques
- 12.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 12.6 Summary
- 12.7 Key Words
- 12.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 12.9 Further Readings

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**12.0 INTRODUCTION**

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We have already discussed Girish Karnad's play *Tughlaq* in a previous unit. This unit introduces you to Karnad's play *Hayavadana*. *Hayavadana* was published in 1972. The play is inspired by the work of Thomas Mann titled *The Transposed Heads* which in turn was inspired by a collection of Sanskrit stories titled 'Kathasaritsagara'. Mann in his work uses mock-heroic tone to tell the story while Karnad emphasizes on themes such as incompleteness, twisting relations, humanity and the dark nature of humans. The play is written in two acts with the involvement of Bhagavata who is the commentator to the actions done in the play.

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**12.1 OBJECTIVES**

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

- Gain insight on the life and work of the writer Girish Karnad
- Analyze the dramatic style of the play *Hayavadana*
- Examine the themes of the play *Hayavadana*

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**12.2 LIFE AND WORKS OF GIRISH KARNAD**

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Matheran born Girish Raghunath Karnad is an acclaimed actor, film director, playwright, all rolled into one. He was born on May 19, 1938 in Maharashtra. His

*Self-Instructional*  
*Material*

## NOTES

talent has been appreciated and acknowledged both at National level as well as at International platforms. He is a contemporary of Badal Sarkar, Vijay Tendulkar and Mohan Rakesh. His plays marked a new beginning in the literary field of Kannada and modern Indian literature, particularly drama. In 1998 the Jnanpith Award, highest literary honour was conferred on him for his contributions. In his plays he has used an amalgamation of history and mythology to address issues of contemporary times. His plays have been received well by known directors such as Ebrahim Alkazi, B. V. Karanth, Alyque Padamsee, Prasanna, Arvind Gaur, Satyadev Dubey, Vijaya Mehta, Shyamanand Jalan, Amal Allana and Zafer Mohiuddin who have translated his plays in other Indian languages and directed them as well. He has carved a niche for himself in Indian cinema, particularly Hindi and Kannada, where he adorned several caps viz actor, director, screen writer. He won three Filmfare awards for Best Director – Kannada and was also conferred the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the Government of India. He received the fourth Filmfare award for Best Screenplay.

Girish Karnad's early life had huge impact on his values, thoughts and ideology. His mother Krishnabai née Mankikar was a young widow. For her living, she went for training to be a nurse where she met Dr. Raghunath Karnad, a doctor in the Bombay Medical Service. After five years the duo married. Girish was their third child, and received his initial schooling in Marathi. As a youngster, he was greatly charmed by the Natak mandalis of those times and was impressed by Yakshagana. At the age of 14 years, his family moved to Dharwad, Karnataka. In 1958, he earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics and Statistics from Karnataka Arts College, Dharwad, Karnataka University.

He went to England as a Rhodes Scholar (1960–63) where he studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Magdalen in Oxford. He worked for Oxford University Press, Chennai for seven years (1963–70), after which he realized his call for writing. He promptly resigned from OUP to do what his spirit yearned to do – pen down his thoughts, ideas, experiences and feelings on paper. There after he got associated with the local amateur theatre group, the Madras Players. During his stay at the University of Chicago, where he served as a visiting professor and Fulbright playwright-in-residence, he wrote *Nagamandala*. The play had its world premiere at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis in (1987–88). The play earned Karnad the Karnataka Sahitya Award for most creative work of 1989.

Karnad also served as director of the Film and Television Institute of India (1974–1975). Another feather in his cap was his term as a chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the National Academy of the Performing Arts in 1988–93. He also served as a director of the Nehru Centre and as Minister of Culture, in the Indian High Commission, London (2000–2003).

The literature of the times when Karnad took to writing was largely influenced by the Western world. Writers, in those times were complacent to write on subject and themes completely alien to them. They were writing with a set audience in mind, rather than for expressing their beliefs, emotions and experiences. The urge

for acceptance amongst English literary circle moved writers to produce work with a different lens. It was in those times that Karnad set out to carve a niche for himself by evolving a unique style of his own. He worked on creating a style in which he could explore various themes in a setting of his choice and in a language that was his. He engaged in drawing historical and mythological sources to address contemporary themes and resolve the conflicts of human predicament.

Karnad has made several contributions in acting, directing and producing, both in Hindi and Kannada. Some of these are listed below for your reference:

- Acted and wrote screen play for a Kannada movie, *Samskara* (1970). The movie won the first President's Golden Lotus Award for Kannada cinema.
- Played the role of Swami's father in the TV series *Malgudi Days* (1986–1987).
- Hosted the science magazine Turning Point on Doordarshan, in the early 1990s.
- Debuted as a director for *Vamsha Vriksha* (1971), which won him the National Film Award for Best Direction.
- Directed several renowned films in Hindi and Kannada such as *Godhuli* (1977) and *Utsav* (1984).
- Contributed significantly to documentaries such as those of Kannada poet D. R. Bendre (1972) and medieval Bhakti poets of Karnataka, Kanaka Dasa and Purandara Dasa. Another one, *The Lamp in the Niche* (English, 1989) was based on Sufism and the Bhakti movement.
- Famous Kannada movies include *Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane*, *Ondanondu Kaladalli*, *Cheluvi*, *Kaadu*, *Kanooru Heggaditi*.
- Acclaimed Hindi movies include *Nishaant* (1975), *Manthan* (1976), *Swami* (1977) and *Pukar* (2000).
- Received critical acclaim for his role as a ruthless cricket coach in *Iqbal* (2005), followed by *Dor* (2006), *8x10 Tasveer* (2009), and *Aashayein* (2010). He came back to Hindi movies after three years. He played a key role in Yash Raj Film's movie *Ek tha Tiger* (2012) and *Tiger Zinda Hai* (2017).
- Provided voice over for the audiobook of Kalam's autobiography by Charkha Audiobooks *Wings of Fire*.

Owing to his creativity, talent and unique style of blending the old with the new, he has been a recipient of several awards. His efforts have reinstated the worth of ancient Indian theatre style and dramatic forms. The awards are an acknowledgment of his innovative, creative, critical and ingenious spirit. Some of these are listed below:

Karnad is married to Dr. Saraswathy Ganapathy, has two children who are well established in their chosen field. Karnad is a proponent of multiculturalism

Girish Karnad:  
Hayavadana

## NOTES

and freedom of expression and is a staunch critic of religious fundamentalism in India.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. What play earned the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the Most Creative Work of 1989 for Karnad?
2. Name some of Karnad's contemporaries.

## 12.3 SUMMARY OF THE TEXT: *HAYAVADANA*

*Hayavadana* has an interesting combination of various theatre forms such as Sanskrit theatre, folk theatre, yakshagana and Brechtian theatre. It marks the splendour inherent in traditional Indian theatre and its excellence in rendering the various themes of contemporary era on stage in an eloquent manner surpassing western traditions. This play exalted the status of Karnad in the literary world, as he showed how the potential of Indian drama forms can be harnessed creatively for expounding the issues, concerns and themes of the modern day man, particularly India in the post-independence era.

This play is written in two acts and the commentator role is played by Bhagavata, quite similar to the sutradhar (Sanskrit drama), who gives his views on the characters and action in between the play. He gives the audience a sense of alienation as well. The summary of the two acts is given below for your reference.

### Act One

Keeping with the tradition Sanskrit and folk theatre, of beginning any creative and promising work with a solemn prayer, this play too starts with a Ganesh vandana, wherein Bhagvata recites verses for the blessings of the Lord for success of the play.

O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness, we pay homage to you  
and start our play.

The selection of this deity for invocation, in itself serves a purpose, that of 'incompleteness' and 'hybridity' which is one of the main themes of this play. The existential struggle of human beings for perfection and completeness, and the human predicament is very well displayed by means of this invocation. The following lines are significant in this context:

Could it be that this Image of purity and Holiness, this Mangala-moorty,  
intends to signify by his very appearance that the completeness of  
God is something no poor mortal can comprehend?

The narrator, very explicitly talks of the incompleteness of God and states that the human beings lack sufficient wisdom to articulate such perfection, let alone attain it. Man can never really say what is complete and what is incomplete. So acceptance of what God has given to us by nature is the only course of action.

Bhagavata informs the audience about the place and setting of the play, as the city of Dharmapura, which was ruled by the King Dharmasheela. The two lead characters are subsequently introduced – Devadatta and Kapila. The words used to describe the two personalities are very precise and symbolic to help the audience outline their character and personality.

Devadatta, son of Brahmin Vidyasagara, is introduced as a great scholar endowed with poetic abilities. Kapila, son of Ironsmith Lohita, is introduced as a strong and brave personality with unmatched physical strength and skills.

Soon after, a scream is heard off the stage. Bhagavata pauses for a while, dismissing the scream, he carries on with the description of the two. He seals the friendship of the two lead characters by saying that Devadatta and Kapila are inseparable friends and they are no less than brothers. Their relationship is sanctified as none less than that of mythical legends such as Ram – Lakshman, Krishna-Balaram and others. Suddenly, there is another scream, from the same direction and the narrator wonders aloud what is causing the disturbance. He locates an anxious actor, coming towards the narrator with strange expressions. He is unable to spell out what he has seen, he is so disturbed. After Bhagavata calms him down with soothing words, the actor readily shares the horrific sight. He explains that he was in the process of relieving himself on the road when he was approached by a horse headed man who spoke to him. The actor shares that the horse headed creature discouraged him from urinating in public. Bhagavata dismisses the actors description and orders the actor to leave the matter and concentrate on the play. However, the actor says that with such a terrifying experience, he has no confidence left to hold the sword and play his role on the stage. Seeing the reluctance and fear of the actor, Bhagavata asks him to leave the stage and look for that horse headed creature, in order to solve the puzzle of the speaking creature.

As Bhagavata tries to take the play further, the actor comes back shouting that it or he is coming this way. Uncertain of what will happen next, Bhagavata asks the curtains to be lowered and himself goes behind the stage to see things for himself. Thereafter, Bhagavata discovers a strange being, possessing the head of a horse and body of a man. Initially, he believes that the horse head is actually a facade put up by an actor wearing the mask. So, with the help of the actor, he tries to remove it but fails. Bhagavata thus realizes that the horse head is indeed real and the strange being is half horse and half man.

Bhagavata asks the being of what led him in such a dreadful state, was it the curse of a sage or discretion of pilgrimage or is it a result of wrongful doing to a righteous wife. The horse headed man denies all the charges levied against him and wears a sullen look for the wrong accusations made against him. Bhagavata tries to console him and asks him to give his introduction. The being introduces himself as Hayavadana. The narrator enquires about the head and he is told that he was born with it. Hayavadana believes that the narrator and actors can help him to gain completeness as they are righteous and virtuous in conduct. The narrator tries to make him realistic and says:

*Girish Karnad:  
Hayavadana*

## NOTES

## NOTES

BHAGAVATA: Hayavadana, what's written on our foreheads cannot be altered.

HAYAVADANA: [*slapping himself on the forehead*] But what a forehead! What a forehead! If it was a forehead like yours, I would have accepted anything. But this! I have tried to accept my fate. My personal life has naturally been blameless. So I took interest in the social life of the Nation—Civics, Politics, Patriotism, Nationalism, Indianization, the Socialist Pattern of Society. . . I have tried everything! But where's my society? Where? You must help me to become a complete man,

Bhagavata: Sir, But how? What can I do?

The theme of the conflict between the head and body is neatly expounded by Bhagavata, that the head is supreme. It also goes on to reinstate the superiority of fate and nature over Man's actions. The yearning for completeness, an eternal struggle of man is also registered in the beginning of the play, very subtly Karnad mentions that the society cannot experience completeness unless its multiplicity is celebrated, unified and respected by the citizens. Thus, a society is incomplete, if it is divided into multiple levels.

The story of Hayavadana is unfolded subsequently. This is the subplot in the main plot of this drama, which is very much in keeping with the traditions of the Sanskrit drama. Hayavadana narrates his story, the Princess of Karnataka, a very lovely girl, was allowed to choose a husband of her own choice. Interested grooms from all regions of the world such as Africa, Persia and China visited her palace. However, she did not find anyone suitable. Then one day Prince of Araby came to her place. He was riding on his white stallion. The moment she looks at the scene, she faints. Taking this as a visible sign of acceptance, her parents decide to marry her off to the prince. Upon regaining consciousness, the princess says that she is in love with the white stallion instead. She vehemently expressed her desire on marrying the horse and the parents had no choice but to comply with her wishes. The princess and the horse live together for fifteen years. One fine day, a miracle happens, the horse transforms into a celestial being – Gandharva. Gandharva went through the terrible times owing to a curse by Lord Kubera for misbehaving. Gandharva could break the magic spell only after fifteen years and thus regains his actual state after leading a life where he could get human love.

After transforming he offers the princess to come to the Heavens and live with him forever. This transformation was, however, not a welcoming one for her, she refused to go with him to his heavenly abode. This denial angers the celestial being and he curses her to become a horse forever. Quite contrary to anybody's expectation, the princess was too happy to contain her joy, and she gallops away in her new form, as a horse. This shows that the princess preferred a free life. Karnad, once again stresses on the 'freedom' desired by females in marital life, he seems to be challenging the role of females in a marriage. Usually, females have been portrayed as the ones who are coy and are bound by the social norms of the society. They are at the receiving end in the conjugal bond. Following the running

of the princess, Gandharva leaves the palace and goes to Heaven. In such a scenario, the fate of the child born to them becomes rather unfortunate. He is left with no family, no identity and no acceptance by the parents and society. He experiences a state of incompleteness.

Hayavadana appeals to Bhagavata for a solution of his problem. He requests him to suggest a way by which he can attain completeness. Bhagavata suggests that he should visit temples for appeasing God and Goddess. However, Hayavadana says that he has already tried it all. Bhagavata thereafter shares that the visit to the Kali Temple of Chitrakoot may help Hayavadana. Hayavadana feels very happy and says that he will start immediately. However, the narrator asks the actor to go with Hayavadana. Bhagavata comes back to the story of the two friends – Devadatta and Kapila. The narrator speaks of the two friends who are about to meet a girl.

Two friends there were—one mind, one heart. They saw a girl and forgot themselves. But they could not understand the song she sang.

Then, the female chorus is heard singing a song representing the girl's desires. The song is provoking as it calls for a head for each breast – thus expressing the revolutionary emotion of the girl for multiple relations – a taboo in Indian society.

Female chorus:

Why should love stick to the sap of a single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many-petalled, many-flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower?

The scene shows Devadatta sitting in a chair when Kapila approaches him.

Devadatta enters and sits on the chair. He is a slender, delicate-looking person and is wearing a pale-coloured mask. He is lost in thought. Kapila enters. He is powerfully built and wears a dark mask

The character and personality of Devadatta is mentioned as 'slender', 'delicate looking', wearing a 'pale mask'. He is the creative mind, a poet with intellectual power. Kapila is on the other hand shown as a 'powerful' man wearing a 'dark mask'. Devadatta appears preoccupied while Kapila eloquently tells about his wrestling match against a great wrestler he fought. Kapila is appeased to hear the wrestler praise his technique of wrestling and is hopeful of a great future. Soon, he realizes that Devadatta is thinking of something. He tries to probe him about things that preoccupy his mind. Devadatta reveals that he has been smitten by a girl he met. Kapila recalls similar situations with Devadatta earlier and believes it is not so serious. However, he offers to help him. He gets the place of her place of living and leaves Devadatta to his thoughts. Devadatta, however, has doubts on the competence of Kapila for this job. He prays to God Rudra and says that he would offer him his head if everything goes in his favour. Simultaneously he offers Goddess Kali his hands if things go in his favour.

“DEVADATTA: Kapila, with you as my witness I swear, if I ever get her as my wife, I'll sacrifice my two arms to the goddess Kali. I'll sacrifice my head to Lord Rudra...

KAPILA: Ts! Ts! [*Aside.*] This is a serious situation.”

Girish Karnad:  
Hayavadana

## NOTES

## NOTES

Such an exhortation by Devadatta convinces Kapila that he is serious about this girl. Kapila reaches the street mentioned by Devadatta and finds the house of girl. He approaches the house and knocks the door. He is bewitched by the beauty of the girl who opens the door. He speaks aside and finds her more beautiful than the eternal dancers of the Heaven and the celestial beings on earth. However, he keeps his feelings to himself and announces that Devadatta wishes to marry her. Padmini, blushes and directs attention to her mother. Bhagavata later announces the audience that Devadatta and Padmini are married.

As the play moves on, Padmini is shown as being pregnant and the couple is shown to be preparing for a journey. Devadatta, plays a concerned father role and expresses his unhappiness over the journey. Further, he shares his insecurity over taking Kapila along as it will disturb his privacy Padmini. He openly expresses the overexcitement of Kapila in the presence of Padmini. Padmini tries to convince him for the journey as she loves pulling Kapila's leg to make fun of him. In aside, Devadatta shares that in the presence of Padmini, Kapila blushes quite often and that it is quite unbecoming for Padmini to entertain such a behaviour.

Aloud, he resists going on the journey, saying that Kapila is not used to women. Padmini understands the suspicion in his words. They engage in a squabble, which is followed by the cancellation of the trip. Padmini is asked to leave the room and go inside, by Devadatta. It is decided that they would tell Kapila that she is ill. Padmini agrees and pretends to go inside the room. However, she decides to go and stand in a corner as Kapila arrives, so as to overhear the conversation. Kapila arrives with a cart and expresses apology for being late. While he tries to explain the reasons for his delay, Devadatta announces that their trip to Ujjain is cancelled as Padmini is not well. Kapila resigns to this decision and decides to send off the cart. Aside, Kapila expresses his sadness over the abrupt decision. He even says that it will become difficult for him to pass the remaining days of the week. Such a comment indicates his attraction towards Padmini, and proves that Devadatta's suspicion was not unfounded.

Meanwhile Devadatta asks Kapila to sit with him and chat for a while, and to their utter surprise, Padmini walks into the room and enquires about the preparations for the trip. Kapila asks about her health, to which she nonchalantly replies that it was a minor headache which has been taken care of by a simple medicine. She expresses her keen desire to go on the trip and implores Devadatta to give the final nod. She tries to convince him by saying that it would be disheartening for Kapila as he has been working hard for arranging the trip all this while. Devadatta is speechless and finally agrees to go to Ujjain along with Padmini and Kapila.

On the way to Ujjain, Padmini compares her husband and Kapila's skill of driving. She praises Kapila's skills loudly and vehemently at the same time criticizing the awful driving skills of Devadatta. As they move deep in the forest, they come across a tree, Padmini is fascinated by the beauty of the tree. Padmini expresses her desire to have flowers of that tree. Kapila seems eager to please her and tells

her that it is a Fortunate Ladies Flower and promptly goes to bring one for her. The swift movement of Kapila's body over the tree entices Padmini so much that Devadatta feels jealous. Padmini finds the physical body of Kapila very appealing. Devadatta is aware of the physical charms of Kapila's body and doesn't blame Padmini for getting attracted towards him. Soon, Kapila comes back with a bountiful of flowers for Padmini. While offering the bunch to Padmini, he tells her that the bunch contains all those colours which a married woman must have. They continue their journey speaking of several other matters. Kapila mentions of the Rudra Temple and Kali Temple in the area and Devadatta suddenly recalls his promise made to the two deities. Kapila asks Padmini and Devadatta to come along with him to the Rudra Temple, but Devadatta insists that he would stay put. After a brief tussle between the trio, Kapila and Padmini decide to visit Rudra temple.

As they leave for Rudra temple, Devadatta wishes them good luck and walks towards the Temple of Kali. He begs goddess Kali to forgive him for forgetting his promise after getting married to Padmini. In a quick instance, he finds a sword and chops off his head as an offering to Goddess Kali.

Upon their return Padmini and Kapila are surprised to find the cart empty. Kapila expresses his concern for the safety of Devadatta. Padmini is surprised to see this behaviour as Kapila appeared to be more worried about Devadatta as compared to her. Kapila gets the shock of his life when he enters the Kali temple, where the decapitated body of Devadatta, his friend was lying on the ground.

Kapila is in a state of shock, and feels that Devadatta should not have done such a terrible thing, he could have drowned himself in a river instead. He realizes that his behaviour towards Padmini must have triggered such a reaction. He feels that such an end could have been avoided had there been a dialogue between the two. Only if Devadatta had told him that his action towards Padmini were signs of an unintelligent man, he would have stopped and resisted such action and impulse. In profound words he praises Devadatta, calling him a friend, brother, guru and everything. Soon after Kapila picks up the same sword and chops off his head.

All this while, Padmini was standing outside, waiting for the two men. She is surprised over the delay. She assumes that Devadatta must be confronting Kapila over his behaviour. Finally, she could not control herself and goes out looking for them, and she enters the Kali temple. She is horrified to find the two dead bodies of her husband and paramour. Quite contrary to one's expectations, she expresses no grief for the loss, rather she is more concerned for the impending chastisement by the society. Padmini is afraid that the society would call her a whore, for whom the two men – who were good friends fought and ultimately took their life. Afraid of this social stigma, she moves to kill herself, when goddess Kali appears and stops her.

Goddess Kali appears in an unconventional style, yawning as if her sleep has been disturbed. She asks Padmini to stop sacrificing her life and asks her what she wants. Padmini points to the dead bodies, to which Kali suggests that she should place the two heads quickly over the body and keep the sword, with her

## NOTES

## NOTES

powers she will make the two bodies full of life once again. Padmini tries to shower praises on Kali, but Kali dismisses it and asks her to hurry up as she wants to sleep. Padmini is surprised as to why Kali allowed the two men to kill themselves in front of her, why didn't she stop them? For which Kali gives two reasons- her sleep and the lying nature of the two men.

Goddess Kali tells her that Devadatta had offered his head to Rudra before marriage. But he forgot, and instead cut off his head in her temple. She acknowledges that Devadatta is a noble man as after a long gap he realized his mistake and came here to fulfil his promise, but got confused, which led him to such a state. Goddess Kali is disturbed by Kapila's action because he did not cite any reason before beheading himself and giving away his life. She is of the opinion that Kapila was afraid that the people would blame him of Devadatta's murder and out of fear he killed himself. Speaking to Padmini she says that of all the three people, only Padmini was honest, as she spoke the truth, although it revealed her selfish nature. Goddess Kali commands Padmini to reattach the heads on the two bodies, soon there is beating of great drums and lights and the deity disappears. Padmini is left alone on the stage with the two bodies, waiting for her fate. To her horror, as she opens her eyes, she realizes her mistake, in a hurry she had switched the heads of Devadatta and Kapila. She had quite unknowingly attached them to the bodies of Kapila and Devadatta. Padmini stands humiliated to see the consequence of her action. But, contrary to her emotions, the two men laugh out about their newfound self. They thank Padmini for bringing them closer, as they are now blood relation. The initial joy and excitement subsides when they start discussing as to who will take Padmini.

Kapila says Devadatta, my friend, I confess to you I'm feeling uneasy. You are a gentle soul. You can't bear a bitter word or an evil thought. But this one is fast as lightning—and as sharp. She is not for the likes of you. What she needs is a man of steel.

KAPILA. [*Raising his right hand.*] This is the hand that accepted her at the wedding. This is the body she's lived with all these months. And the child she's carrying is the seed of this body.

Of all the human limbs the topmost—in position as well as in importance—is the head. I have Devadatta's head, and it follows that I am Devadatta.

Padmini feels that Devadatta would be her legal husband who has the body of Kapila. However, Kapila with the body of Devadatta refuses to accept her choice and the disagreement continues. Bhagavata, the narrator enters at this point, the actors freeze for a while and puts the question to the audience about the critical situation. Such an effect has 'alienation' effect on the audience, who are constantly reminded that they are watching a play and their objective view is being asked by the narrator. Thus, like the Brechtian theatre, the play encourages the audience to be active, critically looking in to the state of affairs and suggesting a way out, they are not expected to be silent spectators, watching a play and enjoying the writer's script passively.

Girish Karnad is at his best throughout the first act, very subtly drawing the comparison between the expectations and realities. There are abrupt disruptions throughout the play by means of introduction of absurd elements, unfortunate decisions and other such events. This abruptness is introduced by the writer with a purpose, to maintain confusion and curiosity, so that the audience is forced to think and get involved. The first act introduces three different characters to the audience – righteous, sinners and those falling in-between. Hayavadana is revealed as a righteous character who could not escape his fate. Padmini, crudely honest in her desires to have the two men. In the contemporary era, such desires of a female would not be looked down upon, but the time in which the play is situated, her desires and decision are not righteous and becoming of a good, loyal wife. Devadatta and Kapila, on the other hand, are neither good nor bad. They are characterized based on their reaction to the situations. They emerge as hypocrites who cleverly try to justify their means through a proper end. However, they do possess some respectable traits such as love, friendship, morals, commitment. This makes them worthy people in the society.

Girish Karnad analyzes the three individuals – Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini through the lens of goddess Kali. Kali finds Devadatta as a noble man who forgets his promise; Kapila is found to be living a disguised life as he covers his true feelings even before killing himself and Padmini is warned for being selfish and too honest [during the reattachment of heads]. The switching over of the heads to the two bodies hints that Padmini could be ruthless enough to do what she wants from life, irrespective of what the society would think of the act, unmindful of others' reaction to it. It is suggested that Padmini might have done the switch over quite deliberately.

As the curtain is removed, the narrator poses the question to the audience and shares the story of King Vikrama and Betal. The king had answered that the head is superior to body; hence the person with the head is the real person. Moving the course of action, Bhagavata reveals that the three approach a wise man (rishi) to find a solution for the problem. The verdict of the rishi is announced in the background. The rishi pronounces the person with the head of Devadatta as the logical husband of Padmini. Devadatta and Padmini are overjoyed with the decision that they express their feeling by embracing and speaking softly to each other. Padmini calls Devadatta as '... celestial-bodied Gandharva... My sun-faced Indra.... What a wide chest. ...' She seems to revel in the completeness of her husband's new founded personality. They move away bidding Kapila farewell. Before separating, Padmini tries to console Kapila, saying that it is his body which Devadatta is carrying so it's a win-win situation for him as well. Kapila does not react and the couple is shown to move forward.

## Act Two

Bhagavata informs the audience that Kapila goes into the forest. The couple move to their city and enjoy married life. The scene changes and Devadatta is shown entering a room carrying two dolls. Padmini loves the dolls, while she goes on to

## NOTES

## NOTES

ask about the fair went alone. Devadatta informs her of how he picked up a fight with a known wrestler with a beautiful body and how he managed to pin him down on the ground. He was happy and no one suspected him as they believed that this physical prowess must have been shared by Kapila. The couple go out of the room, leaving the two dolls behind. The two dolls are then shown to be talking about the two characters, they don't like the way Devadatta holds them as his is a very tight grip. For them he lacks sensibility and instead he is a brute, beast and a peasant unable to handle dolls or any delicate objects. This is followed by the entry of Bhagavata, who tosses the dolls with excitement. The audience is informed that Padmini has given birth to beautiful boy child.

There is a long pause, the stage is cleared. The dolls are shown having a conversation, complaining about the crying baby and how it appears to be a lump of flesh. Gradually, during the conversation, it is revealed, that with the arrival of baby, Padmini has stopped playing with the dolls. That it has been over six months and the dolls have been deserted.

Padmini expresses her desire of going to the lake with the baby to Devadatta. To the surprise of Padmini and the audience, Devadatta reminds her that he is Brahmin and that he has certain other duties to perform, swimming and sports no longer interest him. Devadatta is shown moving the doll to take a book, even the doll reports the change in Devadatta's touch, it is softer now. The dolls further seal this bodily change of Devadatta over time and that his stomach also loosened.

Padmini is shown as singing a lullaby to the child when Devadatta comes to her. The duo fall asleep while the dolls notice that Padmini is having a queer dream. They see Padmini approached by a man, other than her husband. This dream gets repeated next time as well.

DOLL II: Especially last night—I mean—that dream...

DOLL I: Tut-tut—One shouldn't talk about such things!

DOLL II: It was so shameless...

DOLL I: I said be quiet...

DOLL II: Honestly! The way they...

DOLL I: Look, if we must talk about it, let me.

DOLL II: You didn't want to talk about it. So...

The dolls engage in fighting and debating over this shameful act of Padmini. Due to the fight their clothes get dirty and wear a rugged look. Their shabbiness is noticed by Padmini and she is not willing to let the child play with them. She asks Devadatta to bring new dolls from the Ujjain fair. The dolls unhappy with their desertion curse the couple for thinking of their replacement. As Devadatta picks them and sets on his journey, the dolls tell him about the other man in Padmini's life, but he is unable to hear them.

As Devadatta goes to the Ujjain fair, Padmini immediately sets on her journey to the dark forest. Meanwhile, Bhagavata locates Kapila who has regained

his former strong self. The narrator enquires Kapila about his whereabouts and informs him about the death of his parents and of Padmini bearing a son. Kapila appears to be visibly angry and disturbed with this news and walks away from Bhagavata. Soon after Padmini walks across the forest and is shown confronting Kapila. Seeing Padmini before himself overwhelms Kapila. After composing himself, he asks her why she is in the forest. She tells him that she wanted their child to experience Nature. He enquires about the child and she goes on to say that the child belongs to Kapila as well [because of Kapila's body]. Kapila, however, does not accept that and says that Devadatta is the child's true father. When he takes the child in his arms, Padmini mentions the resemblance, saying that the boy has a mole on the same spot as in the body of Kapila. Kapila is unmoved and says that he does not care about it. He goes on to narrate his hardship and difficulties after the couple left him in the jungle. He says that his struggle has not been in vain, he is in complete control of his body. Padmini, once again without resisting her feelings says that she came specially to see him. Initially Kapila resists her, but soon they indulge in their desires.

Meanwhile, Devadatta comes to the forest in search of Padmini and confronts Kapila. They feel that they are back to their normal selves. This is followed by Kapila's appreciation of Devadatta's body, of how he was able to look at things with great imagination after the reversal. Kapila expresses his hopefulness that the trio can live together in future. Padmini, however, expresses nothing. Therefore, Devadatta comes straight to point and draws his sword. He asks Kapila to bring his sword as well. Both are very much clear that the solution to the problem lies in their death. Hence, they fight and die together. Padmini is left alone once again and stands flabbergasted at her fate. She points out that the two men thought of only themselves and forgot about her.

"I know it in my blood you couldn't have lived together. Because you knew death you died in each other's arms. You could only have lived ripping each other to pieces. I had to drive you to death. You forgave each other, but again—left me out."

They forgave each other and showed least concern for her emotions and life. The one who is left behind always has to face the life. Bhagavata enters at this moment and is shocked to find the dead bodies. Padmini asks him to take care of her child, resting in a hut in the forest. She commands the narrator to handover the child to the hunters in the forest and tell them that it is the child of Kapila. After five years, she asks the boy to be given to the father of Devadatta – Brahmin Vidyasagara and tell him that he is his grandson, the son of Devadatta. The dolls are given to the narrator. When enquired by Bhagavata, about the fate of Padmini, she declares that she will find solace in death along with Devadatta and Kapila. She announces that she will undergo Sati. She has realized that her life after the death of the two would be meaningless, as all sort of charges would be levied against him by the society. Hence, it appeared a better option to gain the love and respect of society in the age old custom of Sati. Bhagavata talks at length about the virtuous wives of India and the uniqueness of Padmini. He informs the audience that no one

## NOTES

## NOTES

knows the spot of Sati and that the hunters only point at the Fortunate Lady Tree. He says that in full moon and new moon a song is heard near the tree.

Why should love stick to the sap of a single body?

Just as Bhagavata is preparing to end the play a loud scream is heard on stage. An actor comes horrified announces that a horse is singing the National Anthem and other patriotic songs. As they are speaking, another actor enters with a boy who appears to be very serious. The boy has two dolls, which are somewhat dirtier than before. Bhagavata asks about Hayavadana and gets to know that the actor was sent away by Hayavadana on reaching the Temple of Kali. The actor says that all this while he lived in a village of hunters where a woman handed him over a boy to be taken to the city. Bhagavata sees the connection between the woman and the dolls. He tries to go near the boy. The narrator assures the child that he will not take the dolls and looks at his shoulder. He spots the mole on his shoulders and is confirmed that the child is that of Padmini.

Amidst all this, Hayavadana enters and greets Bhagavata. Hayavadana and the actor engage in a jovial conversation. The boy too laughs and the dolls fall off from his hands. Bhagavata explains to Hayavadana that the body does not experience emotions of laughter, sorrow. He tells Hayavadana that it is because of him that there is smile on the face of dolls. Hayavadana is very happy to know this fact. He (Hayavadana) then narrates his journey and explained how he became a complete horse. Upon entering the Temple of Kali, Hayavadana finds a sword and offers his head to the Goddess. Goddess Kali appeared and said:

Why don't you people go somewhere else if you want to chop off your stupid heads? Why do you come to me?

Hayavadana continues that Kali asked him for his wish. He told her that he wishes to be complete. She grants the wish and disappears even before he could finish expressing his desire to be a complete man. Thus, he became a complete horse instead of complete man. Bhagavata feels sorry for him, but Hayavadana is happy and claims that being a horse is a great experience. However, Hayavadana has concerns over the presence of human voice, which reminds him of his incompleteness. Bhagavata expresses helplessness in solving this problem. Hayavadana says that he believes singing the National Anthem and other patriotic songs loudly will definitely help him lose his voice.

That's why I sing all these patriotic songs—and the National Anthem!  
That particularly! I have noticed that the people singing the National Anthem always seem to have ruined their voices—So I try.

After saying this, Hayavadana starts crying and the little boy tries to soothe him and provide some comfort.

What's there in a song, Hayavadana? The real beauty lies in the child's laughter—in the innocent joy of that laughter. No tragedy can touch it.

Hayavadana gets some solace in this company and asks the boy to sing the National Anthem along with him. The boy has no idea of a National Anthem,

therefore, Hayavadana asks him to sing a song he knows. The boy sings the lullaby that his mother used to sing to comfort him. Hayavadana finds the song a bit sad but is happy to see the child smile. Hayavadana entreats the child to sing some other song, but as the child knows no other song he asks him to continue singing the lullaby. The repeated rendering of the song by the child makes Hayavadana burst into laughter, and soon the laughter slowly turns into a neighing sound.

Hayavadana is excited about his new found uniqueness. Bhagavata asks the actors to go and inform Brahmin Vidyasagara about the auspicious occasion of his grandson's arrival on a grand horse. The narrator thanks to Lord Ganesha for fulfilling the desires of Brahmin Vidyasagara, the boy and horse- man - Hayavadana. Together all of them pray for the prosperity of their mother land and the play comes to a smooth conclusion.

Thus, we find the second act ending on a positive note of satisfaction and positivity. The second act highlights the theme of struggle between body and head for supremacy. Three instances prove that indeed the head is superior over the body. Devadatta regaining of his Brahmin self again over a period of time. Kapila becomes a strong personality again, losing the delicate physical structure of Devadatta. Hayavadana, regains his completeness in the form of a horse, as he has a head of horse. Padmini is the only character in this play who has not been able to attain a fruitful conclusion. She is said to be the 'one to be placed in the list of historical whores who ruined lives with absurd desires'.

Karnad uses the persona of Bhagavata skilfully making him appear at strategic points, for giving meaningful insights and necessary impetus to the pace of the play. He is the crucial link between the plot and subplots of the play and is helpful in taking the play further. Karnad projects a very unconventional image of Gods, Goddess Kali is shown to be indifferent towards humans. They are not very interested in solving the problem of each and every individual on this earth. The play shows that the virtues such as righteousness, patience and innocence are worth enduring for man. Vidyasagar's patience blesses him with a grandson, Hayavadana's righteousness earns him completeness. The innocent boy of Padmini, Devadatta and Kapila is rewarded with a grandfather and a dear trusted friend – Hayavadana.

The three characters are contented and complete in every sense. Perhaps the play sends a message to everyone that God helps those who are only patient, engage in righteous conduct and are innocent in their dealings with the world.

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## 12.4 DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

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This play earned fame for Karnad owing to its unique style. The influence of Sanskrit theatre, yakshagana, folk theatre and western theatre, specially – Brechtian theatre is self-evident in this play.

The play begins with a traditional invocation of the Lord for support in writing and staging of the play, keeping the theatre pattern of Sanskrit drama, in

## NOTES

## NOTES

between the play also songs and lyrics find a unique place. Karnad adopts the tradition with slight modification, and puts a mask of Ganesh on the chair for worship. Lord Ganesh, in his play becomes an embodiment of the highest ideal of this play, the concept of completeness and incompleteness.

Mimes, music, masks are also used depicting the traditional influence on this play, besides the use of willing suspension of belief. Thus, the audience is asked to imagine the halls of kings, the forest scene etc. The play depicts passage of time and place by means of movement, similar to the technique used in traditional play. The narrator or sutradhar keeps the audience actively engaged by talking to them directly and keeping their creative and critical faculty alive. Masks usually work at two levels. One as a metaphor in the text and two as a device on stage. Aside, as a dramatic technique is also used by the writer. The mask also represents archetypes and reflects basic emotional and mental states. The folk theatre uses the ritual of chariot, which is used in this play as well. Yakshagana also makes use of weapons like bows, arrows, swords and spears, Hayavadana follows the tradition and the sword is used in the beheading scene. Another technique used in folk theatre is concealment, characters enter the stage while their headgear and feet are concealed from the audience. The characters dance and arouse the curiosity among audience by showing themselves little by little as the curtain is gradually lowered. The same technique is used in *Hayavadana* at the entrance of Hayavadana and the Goddess Kali. In *Hayavadana* the playwright also makes use of painted curtains to denote the setting. The Kali temple is denoted by a curtain with the picture of the Goddess, The scene of Padmini's 'sati' is shown with the help of a painted curtain with leaping flames behind which Padmini disappears.

Another hallmark of Indian folk and tribal arts form is the puppet theatre stream which is more vibrant and dynamic than 'live theatre'. *Hayavadana* uses dolls which are quite distinct from puppets. They are significant to the themes of the play. The doll enters in the second act of the play Karnad adopts strategies of puppetry to strengthen the thematic and technical design of the play. The dolls depict clearly that the human point of view is not the ultimate. Puppets allow give space and the artist to speak with remarkable freedom. Another aspect is comic element in folk theatre. Karnad's plays employs the use of humour as a presentational devices similar to various folk forms in South India. Other elements of Sanskrit drama, including visible, sutrdhar, unified plot, use of expository device and subplots find apt use in Kanada's play. *Hayavadana* also makes use of background music, such as loud drum beating, in order to add to the effect of scenes, this is in keeping with the traditional south Indian folk drama.

Sanskrit dramatic convention was established on a mutual understanding between audience and performance to accept certain signs as acts. Karnad wisely followed this stylized form of acting in *Hayavadana*. One of the significant conventions of Sanskrit drama was on the covering of a long distance. The actor would circle the stage once or twice to give the impression of ground traversed.

This convention is repeatedly used in *Hayavadana* in various scenes. All other actions in the play are mimed. For instance, the cart ride to Ujjain is mimed with Kapila playing the driver and Devadatta and Padmini as the passengers.

Girish Karnad:  
*Hayavadana*

Dramatic devices like the aside and soliloquy, play-within-the play were also long present in the Indian classical tradition. Karnad uninhibitedly uses these devices to unravel the inner thoughts of his characters. The most interesting example of the aside takes place in *Hayavadana* during the cart ride to Ujjain. As Kapila goes to collect the Fortune Lady's flowers for Padmini. He leaves the stage but this is followed by alternating asides of Devadatta and Padmini, who give a commentary on his action. This simple act helps in preparing the ground for the climax. Such a device helps the dramatist in giving explanation which lead to the main event.

Soliloquies are also used in the play, for instance, when Devadatta reveals his disappointment at having to take the trip to Ujjain instead of spending time alone with his wife. Another instance is when Padmini voices her inner feelings of transformation and helplessness.

Certain traditions of Brechtian theatre also find use in this play. Epic theatre generally takes recourse to old and familiar tales, as they find the mythological plays better than historical plays. Myths allow the writer to draw attention to the political and social aspects of human lives and probe deeper into more complex issues relating to the basic tenets of our lives. *Hayavadana* very effectively subverts the generally accepted notion of the superiority of head over body, brain over brawn while making a critique of futile and unreasonable human hopes and aspirations.

Karnad projects core issues and does not follow conventional pattern. The marriage of Devadatta and Padmini is only narrated in brief. The epic play differs from the traditional modes of drama in creating space for the audience. It has narrators and sometimes actors themselves directly addressing the audience. The play is recognized as a device produced for the benefit of the audience who responds to the intellectual needs of the audience rather than merely the emotional appetites.

Brecht's depiction of violence on stage is one of his techniques by which he arouses his audience. This goes against the traditional Indian dictum on the suitability of subject matter for the stage. However, Karnad's plays have violent and gory scenes. In *Hayavadana*, the beheading scene, the duel and the performance of sati are gory scenes shown with the help of theatrical props.

Karnad by working on familiar tales opens up new avenues of thought and creates a greater human and social consciousness. In the story of the transposition of heads, for example, earlier writers like Thomas Mann only emphasized on the philosophical argument. Karnad uses the myth for multiple purpose – including the individual and social dimension as well. Karnad's use of myth as dramatic material can be compared with Jean Anouilh. The use of myth to project a 'greater reality' is a twentieth century preoccupation, not only in drama but also in poetry and

## NOTES

## NOTES

fiction. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* are significant examples of twentieth century literature.

Myth in Karnad's works is reworked in such a way so as to make it immediately significant to the modern audience. Elsewhere, Karnad observed, 'if I have a contemporary sensibility anything that excites me as a writer should have contemporary relevance.' In *Anouilh* often it is used to illustrate disparity in social classes and in Karnad's work it includes negative norms established by society. In Karnad, the higher caste is portrayed as debauched and degenerated while pristine goodness is reflected in the low tribals and lower caste. A similar effect is visible in *Hayavadana*. Padmini, belonging to a high caste, the princess who ran away, leaving her baby behind, are portrayed as utterly selfish people, whereas Hayavadana, horse headed man is shown to be a righteous person.

The existential theatre depicts the conflict of man with societal norms, despite the emotional and physical propensities an individual cannot forgo one's social and metaphysical boundaries. The characters have to accept failure and fate. When the impossible cannot take the shape of reality and the opposites cannot be reconciled, the only alternative is death. Padmini in *Hayavadana* takes this course of action. Karnad's plays present certain existential themes namely, the isolation and alienation of man, illusion of friendship, the difficulty of communication and the quest for identity and meaning in an uncertain and unintelligible world. Karnad also uses dream or fantasy as a device. Padmini in *Hayavadana* daydreams about the lover which she could never possess in real life. This device further helps in bringing out the climax of the play. The technique of shape shifting is also skilfully used in the play. The language used in the play adds value to its effects. Words from Indian languages 'Kali' etc., are used freely, along with symbolism, imagery, idioms and other expressions to add to the richness of the text.

### Themes

The themes explored in the play include:

- Hybridity and incompleteness
- The Mind vs. The Body
- Alienation
- Complexity of human relationship
- Nationalism
- Reconciliation of social paradoxes and contraries in life
- Women position in society- value of chastity and loyalty
- Quest for identity

### Conclusion

To put it in a nutshell, Karnad makes use of techniques that are an integral part of folk and Sanskrit theatres in India. His dramatic acumen is greatly appreciated for

his skill and intelligence in expanding the horizon of drama by assimilating the western dramatic techniques with our own in a unique manner. The play *Hayavadana* is an achievement from the technique point of view. In this regard, the observation of M.K. Naik is very significant, 'Karnad's technical experiment with an indigenous dramatic form is a triumph which has opened up fresh lines of fruitful exploration for the Indian English playwright'. (Naik, *History of Indian English Literature* 265). Karnad is said to be a progressive dramatist to early Kannada playwrights. The play is a perfect example of modern existentialist drama.

Girish Karnad:  
*Hayavadana*

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

3. What are the various combination of theatre forms in Karnad's *Hayavadana*?
4. How does the play begin?
5. What does existential theatre depict?

## 12.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. *Naga-Mandala* earned the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the Most Creative Work of 1989 for Karnad.
2. Some of Karnad's contemporaries include Badal Sarkar, Vijay Tendulkar and Mohan Rakesh.
3. *Hayavadana* has an interesting combination of various theatre forms such as Sanskrit theatre, folk theatre, yakshagana and Brechtian theatre.
4. The play begins with a traditional invocation of the Lord for support in writing and staging of the play, keeping the theatre pattern of Sanskrit drama.
5. The existential theatre depicts the conflict of man with societal norms, despite the emotional and physical propensities an individual cannot forgo one's social and metaphysical boundaries.

## 12.6 SUMMARY

- Girish Raghunath Karnad is an acclaimed actor, film director, playwright, all rolled into one.
- Girish Karnad's early life had huge impact on his values, thoughts and ideology.
- The literature of the times when Karnad took to writing was largely influenced by the Western world.

## NOTES

- *Hayavadana* has an interesting combination of various theatre forms such as Sanskrit theatre, folk theatre, yakshagana and Brechtian theatre.
- The play exalted the status of Karnad in the literary world, as he showed how the potential of Indian drama forms can be harnessed creatively for expounding the issues, concerns and themes of the modern day man, particularly India in the post-independence era.
- This play is written in two acts and the commentator role is played by Bhagavata, quite similar to the sutradhar (Sanskrit drama), who gives his views on the characters and action in between the play. He gives the audience a sense of alienation as well.
- Mimes, music, masks are also used depicting the traditional influence on this play, besides the use of willing suspension of belief.
- Myth in Karnad's works is reworked in such a way so as to make it immediately significant to the modern audience.
- Karnad makes use of techniques that are an integral part of folk and Sanskrit theatres in India.

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## 12.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Folk Theatre:** It is a composite art form in India with a fusion of elements from music, dance, pantomime, versification, epic and ballad recitation, graphic and plastic arts, religion and festival peasantry.
- **Mythological:** It means something relating to, based on, or appearing in myths or mythology.
- **Deity:** It refers to a god or goddess (in a polytheistic religion).
- **Invocation:** It is an appeal to a higher power for help, such as a prayer for serenity or a plea to the rain gods during a drought.

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## 12.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short-note on the life of Girish Karnad.
2. How does the play depict the passage of time?
3. List some of the themes explored in the play.

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Examine the different dramatic techniques that Karnad uses in the play.
2. Discuss the depiction of the character of Padmini in the play.

3. In Karnad, the higher caste is portrayed as debauched and degenerated while pristine goodness is reflected in the low tribals and lower caste. Examine with reference to the different characters in the play.

*Girish Karnad:  
Hayavadana*

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## 12.9 FURTHER READINGS

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- Nimsarkar, P.D. 2009. *Women in Girish Karnad's Plays: A Critical Perspective*. New Delhi: Creative Books.
- Girish Karnad. 2009. *Three Plays, Naga-Mandala, Hayavadana, Tughlaq*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
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- Kurtkoti, Kirthinath. 2006. *Hayavadana*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Gokak, V.K. 1975. *Kannada Literature: Contemporary Indian Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy.

## NOTES

## NOTES

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# UNIT 13 TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF*

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### Structure

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 A Short Note on the Dramatist Tennessee Williams
- 13.3 Summary of the Play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
- 13.4 Critical Issues in the Play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
- 13.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 13.6 Summary
- 13.7 Key Words
- 13.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 13.9 Further Readings

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## 13.0 INTRODUCTION

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Tennessee Williams is a Pulitzer Prize winning American dramatist who is well known throughout the world for his plays such as *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *The Street Car Named Desire* and others. All these plays display the greatness of a dramatist who is able to portray the dilemmas and problems of the mid twentieth century generation in the United States of America, when the society was going through immense changes leading to many psychological adjustments and metaphysical anguishes. Tennessee Williams had grown up in different cities of America and these experiences find manifestation in the plays that he wrote. Many of his plays were also made into successful movies. He is not only a dramatist, but also a screenplay writer, a novelist, a poet, a short story writer. Williams' wrote more than seventy one act plays.

In the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Tennessee Williams presents the dilemmas of the mid twentieth century American people as they live their lives amongst existential dilemmas. In the play we see the character of Brick Pollitt having given up on life and has taken to drinking and deceiving himself. While Brick is deceiving himself, all others in the play are living in a state where mendacity is the prime motif of their lives. Brick Pollitt's father Big Daddy is detected with cancer and has probably a few days of life left with him, which makes everyone in the family think in terms of who will inherit the big estate of Big Daddy. Big Daddy has not made a will, so in the play we see that different characters are trying to present to Big Daddy their best selves so as to gain favour from him. The play is about these pretences, these lies, and this mendacity. Therefore, it can be said that the play, *A Cat on Hot Tin Roof*, apart from the existential dilemmas also deals with the theme of mendacity as well. The play also discusses Maggie's concern of getting back her husband and for that she is ready to be all sneaky as a cat. It is because of the sneakiness of Maggie that the play is entitled as *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* opened at the Morosco Theatre in New York on March 24, 1955. The play was adapted as a motion picture of the same name in 1958, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Paul Newman as Maggie and Brick, with Burl Ives and Madeleine Sherwood recreating their stage roles. On July 10, 1974, the play was restaged by the American Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford, Connecticut, with a rewritten third act and other substantial revisions, followed by a Broadway run that opened September 24, 1974, at the Anta Theatre.

Tennessee Williams:  
*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

## NOTES

### 13.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the life of the American playwright Tennessee Williams
- Summarise the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
- Critically analyse the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
- Examine the themes and thematic relevance of the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

### 13.2 A SHORT NOTE ON THE DRAMATIST TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Tennessee Williams was a Pulitzer Prize-winning dramatist whose works include *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Street car Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and others. The world still remembers him for these plays which are unique in their representation of the times. Apart from plays, he also wrote short stories, novels, poems and screenplays.

Born as Thomas Lanier Williams on March 26, 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi, Tennessee Williams was the second son of three siblings. He was primarily raised by his mother Edwina Williams, as his father was busy with his job as a salesman. He had less time for parenting which led Tennessee Williams' mother to take up the responsibility of parenting. Even though, he describes his childhood to be happy, but it was revealed later that he grew up in a tense home atmosphere as there used to be frequent fights between his parents. The dramatist was so much influenced by his mother that he created the figure of Amanda Wingfield in the play *The Glass Menagerie* based on her. Similarly, it is thought that the figure of Big Daddy in the present play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is based on the model of his father.

In 1929, Tennessee Williams joined University of Missouri to study journalism, but was soon withdrawn from the university by his father. Williams went back home despondently and joined a job as a sales clerk of a shoe company which he hated from the core of his heart. The job took a toll on his mental health and soon he suffered a nervous breakdown. At the same time he again went back to his studies and this time he even started writing. Soon in 1938 he graduated from the University of Iowa. When Tennessee Williams was twenty eight, he moved to New Orleans

## NOTES

and changed his name to Tennessee. In 1940, Williams' play *Battle of Angels* debuted in Boston. Though the play did not do well, it had potential and therefore Tennessee Williams reworked and revised the play and brought it back as *Orpheus Descending* which was also later made into a movie. Other works followed soon as he was working hard to get himself noticed. On March 31, 1945, his play *The Glass Menagerie* was performed and critics and audience liked the play very much. This changed the fortunes of the dramatist and he carried on producing one play after another with popular success. Two years later, his play *A Street Car Named Desire* was performed even with greater success, establishing him on a firm ground as a dramatist. This play also earned him the Drama Critics' Award and his first Pulitzer Prize. He then continued writing more and more plays such as *Camino Real*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

Then started a decline in his dramatic career as his plays were not so well received. This phase was a difficult one for him. He became an alcoholic and after prolonged suffering, he died in a New York Hotel on February, 25, 1983.

### Check Your Progress

1. Who was the figure of Amanda Wingfield based upon in *The Glass Menagerie*?
2. Which play earned Williams his first Pulitzer Prize?

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## 13.3 SUMMARY OF THE PLAY *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF*

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The play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is a three act play set in an evening on the suite of a big estate (Cotton Plantation) of Big Daddy Pollitt. It is advised that you read the original play before you go any further with the study matter so as to acquaint yourself with the play first hand. There is no way that an original text can be reproduced in the summary. The summary that is given here below is just an attempt to understand the play in a better fashion and not meant to be a substitute for reading the play.

### Act One

The setting of the play *Can on a Hot Tin Roof* is a cotton plantation home of a large estate which is located in the Mississippi Delta. The setting is that of 1950s America. All the actions in the play happen in the big house of the Pollitt Family. As the play begins we come across this idea that Brick and Maggie (Brick's wife, full name Margaret) are childless. Maggie complains to Brick that Brick's brother Gooper and his sister-in-law, Mae, are consciously and deliberately displaying their kids in front of Brick's father who is named Big Daddy. They are doing so in order to persuade him to leave his estate to them when he is no more as they have come to know that Big Daddy has cancer and he is soon going to die.

## NOTES

We meet Brick when he has a cast in his leg as he had broken an ankle in a drunken state the previous night. He is with a crutch. Even though Maggie shows much concern about their not having any kids and about the property of Big Daddy, Brick seems to be completely detached and disinterested about his wife Maggie's concerns. Maggie therefore again states that Big Daddy really has a liking for Brick and does not share the same kind of liking for Gooper and Mae.

Maggie also complains to Brick that he does not like and love her anymore the same way he used to do earlier. She seems to be frustrated that Brick does not make love to her any more. She fondly remembers those days when Brick was passionately in love with Maggie. Even though, Maggie carries on talking about all these, her husband, Brick still shows no concern for whatever she carries on speaking. He seems to be lost in his own world without being concerned about Maggie and her wishes at all. Even when Maggie asks her husband Brick to sing Big Daddy's birthday card, he refuses to do the same. He seems to be disinterested in everything around him.

At this point, Mae enters the scene and starts bragging about her children. Maggie cannot take it any longer and starts making fun of Mae and Gooper's children which makes Mae furious and she leaves the scene suddenly. At this situation, it seems that Maggie is nervous – she seems moreover like a cat on a hot tin roof. Brick suggests at this point of time that she should jump off the roof and take a lover. To which, Maggie merely states that she only wants Brick and no one else. At this point, Big Mama enters the scene and informs that Big Daddy probably does not have cancer. Maggie feels that this is a lie as the doctors must be lying about the cancer to avoid breaking the bad news. The news stuns Brick.

Then a significant revelation is done by Maggie when she speaks that she has made love with Brick's friend Skipper, though both of them wanted to come closer to Brick. Moreover, it is claimed that Brick had a homosexual relationship with his friend Skipper. Though Maggie knows that Brick does not have any homosexual feelings for his friend, but Skipper definitely has some feelings though he denies it. Moreover, Skipper made love to Maggie only to prove that he was not gay. Skipper then drank a lot leading to his death. After listening to all these allegations from Maggie, Brick loses his control and tries to hit Maggie with his crutch, though he misses. At this moment, other people come in to the room for the birthday celebration of Big Daddy.

### Act Two

Act Two begins with the birthday celebration of Big Daddy Pollitt where Gooper, Mae, Big Mama, Reverend Tooker, Doctor Baugh, and Maggie celebrate his sixty fifth birthday. Big Daddy, though a part of the celebrations, shows his disgust for his wife Big Mama; and Brick remains detached from the whole celebration and carries on drinking more and more liquor. Big Daddy shouts at Big Mama, calls her a hypocrite pretending to be happy about Big Daddy not having cancer while she was really looking forward to his death and take control of the big estate.

## NOTES

At this moment, Big Daddy Pollitt wants to have a private talk with his son Brick and therefore he asks all guests, including Big Mama, to leave. Brick informs Big Daddy that both Maggie and Mae are afraid that they will not inherit Big Daddy's big estate. Big Daddy at this moment is confident that he does not have cancer and says that for inheriting the estate they will have to wait for more time. Though Big Daddy carries on talking, Brick seems disinterested as he does not care too much about these issues. Big Daddy still insists that they talk and also keeps on wondering why his son Brick has got into the habit of drinking too much. Brick claims here that he is disgusted about the mendacity, deception and lying that he has to deal with. According to Brick, he is disgusted with all the lies and mendacity that he sees all across him and he cannot take it anymore. Listening to this, Big Daddy informs him that he has lived his entire life with mendacity.

At this moment, Big Daddy thinks aloud about the fact that when he thought that he was going to die, then to whom to leave his estate to – whether to Brick or to Gooper or to Mae. Brick tells him that he does not care to whom the estate goes to after Big Daddy is no more. Big Daddy then asks if Brick has started drinking much after Skipper's death as he feels that Brick had a homosexual leaning towards Skipper. This horrifies Brick and he merely states that he only had a deep, decent friendship with Skipper and nothing else. At this Big Daddy wonders why Brick has become so? At first, Brick claims that it is Maggie's affair with Skipper which has made him so, but Big Daddy informs that this story is a complete lie. Brick then admits that Skipper once had confessed about his homosexual feelings for Brick to which Brick did not respond and therefore Skipper went on a drinking binge and consequently died. Big Daddy then accuses Brick that he is the reason behind Skipper's death to which he states that no one can face the truth of this world. At this moment, Brick lets Big Daddy know that he really has cancer which stuns Big Daddy and he leaves, calling everyone liars.

### Act Three

Maggie (Margaret), Mae, Gooper, Reverend Tooker, and Doctor Baugh join Brick in the room. At this point, Mae thinks that Doctor Baugh should tell Big Mama the truth that Big Daddy really has cancer. Big Mama enters the scene at this point and she becomes suspicious about the rest of them. Brick gets another drink for himself and Big Mama asks him to come and sit with him which Brick refuses as he does not want to be a part of anything. Doctor Baugh tells Big Mama that Big Daddy really has cancer which is in a dangerous stage. At this moment, Reverend Tooker and Doctor Baugh leave the scene. Gooper shows Big Mama a preliminary trusteeship, which would give him control of the estate. Big Mama feels that Gooper's plan is very disgusting and at this point Big Daddy enters the room.

Maggie informs Big Daddy that she is pregnant which Big Daddy readily believes. Big Daddy informs that before he gives up his estate to others, he wants to go to the roof and have a look at his estate. Big Daddy and Big Mama, therefore, leaves the scene. Mae accuses Maggie of lying about her pregnancy and then leaves with Gooper.

Brick takes the opportunity to take his drink and go out onto the gallery. Maggie is left alone in the room, she then locks up Brick's liquor. When Brick returns to the room, Maggie informs him that it is now a good time for her to conceive a baby and informs Brick that she has locked up Brick's liquor and will only give it to him if he has sex with her. What Maggie wanted from the beginning of the play, she gets it by hook or crook which shows her catty nature. Brick is amazed by this and agrees to his wife. Maggie at this point of time expresses her love for Brick to which Brick reacts by saying 'Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?'.  


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*Tennessee Williams:  
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

## NOTES

### 13.4 CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE PLAY *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF*

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The following section of the study matter will engage itself with dealing with the play from a critical point of view.

#### **Brick Pollitt's Retreat from Life – the Existential Dilemma**

The play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams deals with Brick Pollitt's retreat from life as he has become an alcoholic and seems to be fighting a battle within himself. Therefore it is often thought that the play deals with the existential crisis of Brick Pollitt. American Drama in the mid twentieth century depicted the existential crisis of the protagonists and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* seems to be no different.

The above section from M. H. Abrams' *The Glossary of Literary Terms* probably has given you some notion of existentialist philosophy as it developed in the middle of the twentieth century when man felt not at peace with himself when he pondered over the question of the meaning of life. Men felt at odds with themselves and often therefore thought that life was meaningless. Tennessee Williams' play *Cat on a Hot Roof* deals with this question when one looks at the way in which Brick Pollitt behaves in the play where he is unconcerned about anything in this world and seems to be engaged only with his drinking.

Tennessee Williams portrays the way in which the Pollitt family is celebrating the birthday of Big Daddy, and on his birthday everyone is more concerned with Big Daddy's impending death due to cancer and to whom he is going to leave his big estate to, rather than about his wellbeing. Brick is the only character in the play who seems not to be concerned about the big estate and he has completely secluded himself from all these by pouring himself in the world of liquor. Moreover, the whole family goes through some kind of existential turmoil as they hear the news of Big Daddy's cancer. Big Daddy, as he came to know about his cancer, wants to establish a strong relationship with his son Brick. In Act II, Big Daddy says:

Y'know how much I'm worth? Guess how much I'm worth! Close on ten million in cash an' blue chip stocks, outside, mind you, of twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile! But a man can't buy back his life with it, he can't buy his life

## NOTES

back, his life with it when his life has been spent, that's one thing not offered in the Europe fire-sale or in the American markets or any markets on earth, a man can't buy life with it, he can't buy back his life when his life is finished ... I'm wiser and sadder, Brick, for this experience which I just gone through.

Big Daddy's this dialogue makes it pretty clear to the readers and audience that Big Daddy has gone through a big realization as waits for his death. Apart from Brick, Big Daddy has cared about no one else so much throughout his life and now that he is on the verge of death, his concern becomes much more as he wants to establish a cordial relationship with his son Brick and take Brick out of his self-deception and alcoholic stupor. William Sharp makes a pertinent comment when he says:

Like a most real writers of tragedy, Williams sees man as something unique, special in the universe. The problem in his plays is how the human being can realize this uniqueness... Williams' heroes and heroines are confused, they are naive, they fear the grave. Their intelligence is limited, their goals are unsure, but their real struggle for meaning in life is a real struggle that has its parallels in our own living experience.

### The Problem of Mendacity

Tennessee Williams characters have some realizations in the play. Especially Big Daddy has a great realization when he encounters a brush with death. This realization probably means that he will be dealing with life in a different fashion. It is evident in the play how the problem of mendacity (as against honesty) is something that perturbs Brick Pollitt, which makes him take up liquor, as he himself states in the play. He is of the opinion that the mendacity of the people around him has affected him so much that he does not have any more urges towards life. At this point, therefore, Big Daddy informs Brick that he has lived with mendacity all his life – which means that throughout his life, Big Daddy has been fighting a battle against untruth. He knew very well that there are all lies across his life and yet he carried on. So in Act III, when he comes to know that he has cancer for sure, he wants to go to the roof to have a look at the large estate. This probably signifies that he wants to compare his large state with his puny self and wants to compare and see how he has been living a life where the estate has been a concern of every family member except Brick, and yet the same estate cannot save Big Daddy's life. It is this realization which makes Big Daddy's character stand out in the play.

The play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is also about family relationships. It shows how the different members of the Pollitt family react when they hear the news of Big Daddy's cancer. What most of the members of the Pollitt family are concerned about is not the health and life of Big Daddy; but they are more interested in who will inherit his estate. At one level, the play seems to be a commentary on the issue of family relationships in modern times.

Act I seems to be mostly about the conversation between Maggie and Brick as they talk about Big Daddy's cancer and Brick's detachment from

everything. Act I is composed almost entirely of a conversation between husband and wife as Maggie attempts to shake Brick from the emotional lethargy threatening their marriage. As Maggie tells Brick:

*Laws of silence don't work ... When something is festering in your memory or your imagination, laws of silence don't work, it's just like shutting a door and locking it on a house on fire in hopes of forgetting that the house is burning. But not facing a fire doesn't put it out. Silence about a thing just magnifies it. It grows and festers in silence, becomes malignant....*

Each member in the family is putting up a face of pretence to the other, which Big Daddy refers to as 'mendacity'. This mendacity is taking away from the Pollitt family its lack of warmth for each other as well as eating away its spiritual aspects. In Act II, though the family gathers in one place to celebrate Big Daddy's birthday, yet we find that soon Big Daddy dismisses everyone so that he could talk to his son Brick. This conversation seems to be central moment of the drama as Big Daddy explains how his life has changed after his brief encounter with the news of his cancer. Therefore, Big Daddy tells his son Brick –

Life is important. There's nothing else to hold onto. A man that drinks is throwing his life away. Don't do it, hold onto your life. There's nothing else to hold onto ...

Big Daddy declares that throughout his life he has lived amongst people who have always pretended – in other words, he had a great encounter with mendacity. Yet it did not lead him to give up on life as has happened with Brick. Therefore, he berates his son in the following terms – 'What do you know about this mendacity thing? Hell! I could write a book on it!' So, instead of holding onto a death-in-life existence as Brick has done, one should 'hold onto' life as Big Daddy suggests. Instead of being stuck with the 'moral paralysis' of the past, Big Daddy suggests to his son Brick that he should urge himself for the realization of the present. The following conversation between Big Daddy and Brick therefore is very significant –

*BIG DADDY*

*WAIT! - Brick...*

*Don't let's —leave it like this, like them other talks we've had, we've always—talked around things, we've talked around things for some rotten reason. I don't know what, it's always like something was left not spoken, something avoided because neither of us was honest enough with the —other...*

*BRICK*

*I never lied to you, Big Daddy.*

*BIG DADDY*

*Did I ever to you?*

*BRICK*

*No sir...*

*Tennessee Williams:  
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

## NOTES

## NOTES

### *BIG DADDY*

*Then there is as least two people that never lied to each other.*

### *BRICK*

*But we've never talked to each other.*

### *BIG DADDY*

We can now.

Big Daddy is able to take responsibility for his own life at this point of time. In other words, the brush with death makes him realize that he should talk to his son in a much more honest way so as to bring him back to life. :

*What do you know about this mendacity thing? Hell! I could write a book on it! Don't you know that? I could write a book on it and still not cover the subject. Well, I could, I could write a goodam book on it and still not cover the subject anywhere near enough!! Think of all the lies I got to put up with—*

*Pretenses! Ain't that mendacity? Having to pretend stuff you don't think or feel or have an idea of? Having for instance to act like I care for Big Mama!—I haven't even been able to stand the sight, sound, or even smell of that woman for forty years now!—even when I laid her! Regular as a position... Pretend to love that son of a bitch of a Gooper and his wife Mae and those five same screeches out there like parrots in a jungle! Jesus! Can't stand to look at 'em'! Church!—it bores the Bejesus out of me but I go!—I go an' sit there and listen to the fool preacher! Clubs!—Elks! Masons! Rotary!—crap!.*

### **Gooper and Mae and their Mendacity**

Act III is also a verbal confrontation, as Gooper and Mae confront the rest of the family with the inevitability of Big Daddy's death. Even though initially the act seems to be much about Gooper and Mae; but soon we realize that it is more about Big Daddy. Thus, in the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, we see that family relationships are on the verge of collapse. Everyone in the family is repelled by the other; even Big Daddy and Brick who have been apparently honest with each other till this time. This is because they have never communicated between themselves. Gooper and Mae show their mendacity towards the family as they want Big Daddy to bequeath to them the estate. What they try to present is that while Brick has been completely dependent on alcohol, Gooper is sober about the family as well as about the plantation. They also point out that Maggie is barren while Mae is fertile. So in some sense, they (Gooper and Mae) are more worthy to have Big Daddy's love as well as money and estate. While they make an extra effort to show their filial devotion to Big Daddy, their extra devotion seems disgusting to Big Daddy.

### **Maggie – the Cat**

If Gooper and Mae are duplicitous with Big Daddy, Maggie is also the same. She thinks of doing anything she can to get the favour of Big Daddy and make Brick

get his share of inheritance. Apart from that she even pretends to be a happily married woman who tries to evoke some interest of her husband, Brick in her so that they can have a child. So from the very beginning of the play till the end, she repeatedly pleads to Brick to regain some interest in her and to make their love life exciting. So at the end of the play, Maggie goes to the extreme of locking up Brick's liquor and telling him that only if he has sex with her will she return the liquor bottles.

It can be said that Tennessee Williams uses the symbol of cat on a hot tin roof to convey the determination with which Maggie shows her ambitious concern to go up the social ladder. She is hell bent on acquiring the estate from Big Daddy as an inheritance and for that she is ready to do anything. It is on her that the title of the play is based. Though Brick and Big Daddy seems to be the centre of the play, but when one looks at the title one feels that the play is about Maggie too. She is the one with whom the play begins and the play ends. She is the one whose ambition seems to be one of the centres of the play. When one looks at her character, one realizes that she is having difficulties in her marriage; but instead of being cowed down by those difficulties, she resolves to face them bravely. The difficulties of life probably has made her much 'catty' about things and now to achieve her ambitions she has decided that she will go to any extent possible. At the beginning of the play, therefore, she urges her husband Brick to show interest in her so that they can have a child and claim Big Daddy's inheritance. She even informs the assembled family that she is pregnant and so to get pregnant at the end of the play she takes the refuge of locking up Brick's liquor bottles so that he agrees to have sex with her. At one point in the play when Maggie looks at her own reflection in the mirror it seems to her that she has crouched like a cat and in a mocking voice, she says, 'I am Maggie the Cat.' Maggie stays on the hot roof of her marriage and therefore probably she has turned into a cat and continues in the play to howl so as to get what she desires.

It is interesting that Tennessee Williams decided to name the play after her because in doing so the play suggests how a woman needs to become extremely 'cat-like' to achieve her own ends. So if on the one hand, there is a character like Brick who has given up on life and has taken recourse to alcohol, there on the other end, is the character of Maggie who wants to take charge of her life in all possible ways so as to attain things for herself.

In this context it is very important to realize cats, even though they are kept as pets, have their own distinctive individuality and do not think of their masters as masters like dogs do. In this context of the play, it is to be seen that Maggie does not submit to the authority of the Pollitt household. Though the Pollitt family may demand her to be submissive – but for that reason, Maggie is not willing to submit. From the point of view of femininity, she seems to be the central character of the play as she is the one who is willing to take charge of things. She does not want to be in mere service of men, but wants to take charge of her own life and for that even if she needs to be a cat, then it does not matter. So, it can be said that Maggie

*Tennessee Williams:  
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

## NOTES

stays on the hot tin of the roof of her marriage; she actually takes on some of the temperament of a cat, such as howling in heat to get what she wants.

### The Symbol of Crutch

#### NOTES

The crutch has been used as an important symbol in the play as Brick takes recourse to crutches. A crutch is symbolic as in order to cope up with the mendacity of others, Brick has taken to alcohol as a crutch. Brick's dependence on alcohol seems to be a tangible reality in the play which may be due to numerous reasons. Brick says it is because of the mendacity of others, while both Maggie and Big Daddy feel that it is because of homosexual leanings of Skipper and his eventual death that Brick has become bitter. Homosexuality has been another significant theme which has been discussed in the play to a great extent. We come to know from the play that Brick had no homosexual feelings for his friend Skipper, but his friend Skipper did have feelings for him. Moreover, after that declaration when Skipper does not get appropriate response from Brick, he delves himself into alcohol leading to his death. Big Daddy in the play states to Brick that he should not be living in the past and should value the present. He should not be dependent on the crutch of alcohol to live life as it does not mean enjoying the present. So the crutch has to be taken away from him so that he can live life in proper terms. Later in the play, Maggie throws the crutch away from the window – yet another symbolical representation of doing away with Brick's dependence on alcohol. The crutch is thus a significant symbol used in the play.

#### Check Your Progress

3. Where is the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* set?
4. What does Tennessee Williams use the symbol of cat on a hot tin roof to convey?
5. What is the crutch in the play symbolic of?

### 13.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The dramatist was so much influenced by his mother that he created the figure of Amanda Wingfield in the play *The Glass Menagerie* based on her.
2. *A Street Car Named Desire* earned Williams' his first Pulitzer Prize.
3. The play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is a three act play set in an evening on the suite of a big estate (Cotton Plantation) of Big Daddy Pollitt.

4. It can be said that Tennessee Williams uses the symbol of cat on a hot tin roof to convey the determination with which Maggie shows her ambitious concern to go up the social ladder.
5. The crutch in the play is symbolic as in order to cope up with the mendacity of others, Brick has taken to alcohol as a crutch.

*Tennessee Williams:  
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

## NOTES

### 13.6 SUMMARY

- Tennessee Williams is a Pulitzer Prize winning American dramatist who is well known throughout the world for his plays such as *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *The Street Car Named Desire*.
- In the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Tennessee Williams presents the problems of the mid twentieth century American people as they live their lives amongst existential dilemmas.
- The play apart from the existential dilemmas also deals with the theme of mendacity as well Maggie's concern of getting back her husband and for that she is ready to be all sneaky as a cat.
- *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* opened at the Morosco Theatre in New York on March 24, 1955.
- The setting of the play *Can on a Hot Tin Roof* is a plantation home of a large estate which is located in the Mississippi Delta. The setting is that of 1950s America. All the actions in the play happen in the big house of the Pollitt Family.
- The play deals with Brick Pollitt's retreat from life as he has engaged himself with his drinking bouts and seems to be fighting a battle within himself.
- In the play, Brick is the only character who seems not to be concerned about the big estate and has completely secluded himself from all by pouring himself into the world of liquor. Moreover, the whole family goes through some kind of existential turmoil as they hear the news of Big Daddy's cancer.
- It is evident in the play how the problem of mendacity (as against honesty) is something that perturbs Brick Pollitt which makes him take up liquor, as he himself states. He is of the opinion that the mendacity of the people around him has affected so much that he does not any more feel any urge towards life.
- Each member in the family is putting up a face of pretence to the other. This is what Big Daddy refers to as 'mendacity.' This mendacity is taking away from the Pollitt family its lack of warmth for each other as well as eating away its spiritual aspects.
- It can be said that Tennessee Williams uses the symbol of cat on a hot tin roof to convey the determination with which Maggie shows her ambitious

## NOTES

concern to go up the social ladder. She is hell bent on acquiring the estate from Big Daddy as an inheritance and for that she is ready to do anything.

- The crutch has been used as an important symbol in the play as Brick takes recourse to crutches. A crutch is symbolic as in order to cope up with the mendacity of others, Brick has taken to alcohol as a crutch.

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### 13.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Act:** It is one of the main divisions of a play. An act generally focuses on one major aspect of the plot or theme. Between acts, stagehands may change scenery, and the setting may shift to another locale.
- **Protagonist:** A protagonist is considered to be the main character or lead figure in a novel, play, story, or poem.
- **Mendacity:** It means untruthfulness.
- **Theme:** It refers to a common thread or repeated idea that is incorporated throughout a literary work.

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### 13.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short critical note on the plot construction of the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
2. Comment on the character of Big Daddy as being represented in the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
3. Write short notes on:
  - (a) Mendacity as a theme in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
  - (b) Maggie the Cat in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
  - (c) The symbol of crutch in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
4. Briefly discuss Tennessee Williams' life and career.
5. Comment on the title of the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

#### Long-Answer Questions

1. Do you think that the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams is an existential drama? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Do you think the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* presents the dilemmas of a generation of people? Give reasons for your answer.

3. Mendacity is the main theme of Tennessee Williams' play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Do you feel Brick is a man who has lost all interest in life? Comment on the character of Brick with reference to the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
5. Do you agree that the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams is all about family relationships? Give reasons for your answer.

*Tennessee Williams:  
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

## NOTES

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### 13.9 FURTHER READINGS

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## NOTES

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# UNIT 14 RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN: *THE SCHOOL OF SCANDAL*

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### Structure

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Objectives
- 14.2 A Short Note on the Dramatist Richard Brinsley Sheridan
- 14.3 *The School of Scandal*: Summary
  - 14.3.1 Critical Analysis
- 14.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 14.5 Summary
- 14.6 Key Words
- 14.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 14.8 Further Readings

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## 14.0 INTRODUCTION

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The final unit of the book discusses the 18th century Irish satirist, poet and playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan's play *The School of Scandal*. *The School of Scandal* seems to be a play about scandals, scandal-mongering, about reality and perception and about human follies. In other words, it seems to be a satiric, as well as comic play which is written in the manner of the type of comedy known as the 'comedy of manners'. Often it is said about the play that it is a great caricature of Sheridan's own time and society – the eighteenth century. In that it seems to be a just portrayal of the elite society of the eighteenth century, as well as its follies and foibles.

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## 14.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss Richard Brinsley Sheridan as an astounding dramatist of eighteenth century England
- Describe eighteenth century literature, especially drama, as well as the comedy of manners
- Summarize the play *The School of Scandal*
- Critically examine the themes in the play *The School of Scandal*
- Discuss sentimentalism in the play *The School of Scandal*

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## 14.2 A SHORT NOTE ON THE DRAMATIST

### RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN

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Richard Brinsley  
Sheridan: *The School  
of Scandal*

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (30 October 1751 – 7 July 1816) was an Irish satirist, a playwright and poet of eighteenth century England, as well as a long-term owner of the London Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. He is well-known for his plays such as *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal*, *The Duenna*, and *A Trip to Scarborough*. He was also a Whig Member of the British Parliament for thirty two years in the British House of Commons. In 1775, Sheridan's first play, *The Rivals*, was produced at London's Covent Garden Theatre. His most famous play *The School for Scandal* (Drury Lane, 8 May 1777) is considered one of the greatest comedies of manners in English of the Eighteenth Century. In December 1815, he became ill and was largely confined to bed. Sheridan died in extreme poverty, and was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey. His funeral was attended by dukes, earls, lords, viscounts, the Lord Mayor of London, and other notables.

#### Historical Background

After the Renaissance in England, the Puritan experiment in British Government did not long survive. After Oliver Cromwell's death in 1658, less than two years later in May 1660, Charles II returned from exile amid popular acclamation. The shouting and joy expressed by all is past imagination. The reaction against Puritan manners and morals was inevitable. It was all the more violent because many of the returned Cavaliers had spent their exile in France and become expert in French wit and French gallantry and because the King himself, an indolent sensual possessed both wit and cunning, encouraged an atmosphere of wit, and the court wit set the tone for if not of all the literature of the period, then at least for a certain segment of it, notably dramatic comedy. The Restoration period takes its name from the restoration of the Stuart line to the throne in 1660 at the end of the Commonwealth of England. The period is considered to have lasted until 1700.

The urbanity, wit and licentiousness of the life centring on the court in sharp contrast to the high seriousness and sobriety of the earlier puritan regime, is reflected in much of the literature of this age. The theatres came back to vigorous life after the revocation of the ban placed on them by the puritans in 1642. John Dryden, Congreve and Wycherley developed the distinctive comedy of manners called the restoration comedy and Dryden, Otway and other playwrights developed the even more distinctive form of tragedy called the heroic drama. Dryden was the major poet and critic as well as one of the major dramatists of the age. Other poets were the satirists Samuel Butler and the Earl of the Rochester, other notable writers in prose were Samuel Pepys, Sir William Temple. This age was followed by a notable distinct phase in the history of English plays which we know to be comedy of manners and Richard Brinsley Sheridan is of course one of the better dramatists writing comedy of manners in the eighteenth century.

#### NOTES

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. List some of the famous plays of Richard Sheridan.
2. Why was the period after the Commonwealth of England known as the restoration period?

## 14.3 THE SCHOOL OF SCANDAL: SUMMARY

In the play, the middle-aged and wealthy man, Sir Peter Teazle, is married to the young and comely daughter of a country squire. The fashionable society of which Lady Teazle through her marriage becomes a part, occupies itself mainly with malicious gossip whose arrows no one, however chaste, can completely escape. By far the most dangerous of these backbiting cliques is the one led by Lady Sneerwell, in whose house the play starts.

Lady Sneerwell is attempting through lies and letters written by the forger, Snake, to break up the supposed love affair between Charles Surface and Sir Peter's ward, Maria, hoping that she would get Charles for herself. To achieve this end, Lady Sneerwell has joined forces with Charles' brother, Joseph, a hypocritical youth, who enjoys an excellent reputation in contrast to his brother's wild and extravagant habits. Joseph has his eye on the fortune that will one day come to Maria and is backed in his suit by Sir Peter who has been utterly fooled by the young man's righteous exterior. Maria sees through Joseph Surface, however, and turns a cold ear in spite of her guardian's expressed wishes.

Meanwhile, Sir Oliver Surface arrives unexpectedly from Australia. He hears conflicting reports about his two nephews and supposedly his prospective heirs and decides to look them up before he makes his arrival known so that he can judge their true qualities and values. He approaches Charles in the guise of a money lender and in the famous 'auction' scene buys the family portraits. Throughout the transaction, Sir Oliver Surface is impressed with Charles Surface's high sense of honour and obligation to those who are less fortunate. When Sir Oliver Surface approaches Joseph, the hypocritical youth, as a poor relation begging some help, Joseph Surface is revealed in his true colours.

Now gossip has linked Lady Teazle's name with that of Charles Surface, but in actuality she has been indulging for fashion's sake in an affair with Joseph. The rumours about Lady Teazle and Charles come at last to Sir Peter's ears and, much distressed, he goes to Joseph's apartment to consult with him. Lady Teazle, who is enjoying a tryst with Joseph, sees Sir Peter's arrival and hastily hides behind a screen. Sir Peter, in turn, hides in a closet, when Charles unexpectedly arrives. The latter inadvertently reveals Lady Teazle behind the screen and Sir Peter, coming out of his closet, revises his estimate of Joseph.

Lady Teazle throws herself on Sir Peter's mercy with the frank confession that she was pretending to an affair because it was the fashion, but admits that her only real interest is in her own husband. Sir Oliver Surface, meanwhile, has rounded up Snake, the forger. His confession brings about reconciliation between Charles and Maria, and Sir Peter gladly withdraws his objections to this match.

### 14.3.1 Critical Analysis

During the times of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the fashionable rich circle of the elites indulged themselves in great extravagance so as to prove to the others that they belonged. Moreover, in their extravagance, they used to do many things which is beyond what was accepted by society at the time and therefore often they used to indulge in scandal mongering which seems to be a trait of the age. It is this aspect of the age that Richard Brinsley Sheridan had a strong objection against which made him mock it in his play *The School of Scandal* so that the audience can have a fair idea about what constitutes the true inner worth of an individual.

Thus a comedy like *The School of Scandal* has dual aims –

- (a) It aims to entertain the audience by typically portraying characters who have a particular trait in their character in an enhanced way so that it can be mocked at. The wit of the characters is entertaining to the audience who obviously go to see a comic play to get some relief from their otherwise dull life. But it is to be remembered here that a dull life should not be a basis for scandal mongering as the play portrays.
- (b) While entertaining the audience, Sheridan also has in his mind the objective of educating the audience about the ways of the world. One needs to understand that in this world, there are very few people those who have the inner worth which make them present to the world what they are. Everyone tries to put up a façade to the world so as to make the world believe in something about them while they are something else. This often leads people living dichotomous lives – which is the object of ridicule in the play *The School of Scandal*. In the process of ridiculing and mocking this aspect of the eighteenth century society, Sheridan objective is also to educate his audience.

Thus, the play serves the dual purpose of both entertainment and education and probably it is the reason why the play is still famous and read today. Sheridan is trying to show how the world needs to get out of scandal mongering and come to understand the real person that lies beneath each of us. While Shakespearean comedies had the only objective of entertaining the audience, the Jonsonian (Ben Jonson) comedies were also meant to educate the audience. Richard Brinsley Sheridan probably has both the entertainment and education of his audience in his mind when he is writing his plays, whether it is *The Rivals* or *The School of Scandal*. So from this point of view when we look at the play *The School of Scandal*, it seems that it is a sentimental comedy as well as it is a revolt against the

Richard Brinsley  
Sheridan: *The School  
of Scandal*

## NOTES

## NOTES

sentimental comedy – an attack on sentimentalism. As a comic dramatist, Sheridan has created all the necessary comic devices – amusing characters, funny intrigues, witty conversations, ridiculous situations, incisive social satire, commentary of human follies and foibles, etc.

Some critics also suggest that there are two plays in *The School for Scandal*–

- (a) The Slanderers; and
- (b) The Teazles

Some even suggest that the slanderers has two parts:

- (i) The testing of Charles and Joseph by their uncle Sir Oliver Surface
- (ii) The events surrounding the Scandalous School

The parts of ‘The Slanderers’ and ‘The Teazles’ are amalgamated to produce the play. Some scholars think that these are two distinct plots, while many find that Sheridan have been able to mingle the two plots together. On the one hand, the play seems to be Sir Oliver’s appraisal of the two Surface brothers and their pursuit of Maria, and then the scenes involving the Teazles seem redundant. Although critics are also of the opinion that Sheridan has been able to skilfully merge the two plots into one, illustrating a single theme – the theme of appearance and reality.

The opening scene of the play sets the theme and tone of the play when we are introduced to the school of scandal. The prologue of the play states that

A school for scandal! Tell me, I beseech you  
Needs there a school this modish art to teach you?  
No need of lessons now, the knowing think;  
We might as well be taught to eat and drink. (Prologue, 6.)

The Prologue sets the tone of the play by the concerns of reputation, gossip as well as selecting and projecting a chosen self-image which is basically a part of human nature. In the play we see that it is by making the members of the scandal school that Joseph is able to ruin Charles’ reputation and thus is able to elevate himself as a favoured suitor for Maria in Sir Peter’s eyes. If this is one aspect of the play, on the other hand, we see that Maria stands in firm rejection of whatever the school of scandal represents. And it is the rejection of the school of scandal which leads the play to a happy resolution. The school seems to be the centre of the plot of the play and therefore it seems that the title is an apt one.

Sir Peter remarks, ‘A character dead at every word, I suppose’ and states the theme of the play – that a word or a scandal can be deadly for a character. In such a society, things seem to be very artificial as everyone is playing a role, putting up a façade of virtue so as to impress others. Sheridan makes a satiric attack on this kind of society, probably because he believes that a society which is concerned only with scandals, with the façade, will not be truly able to achieve great heights.

The appearance of things are not what they truly are – seems to be the theme of the play.

In the beginning of the play, Lady Sneerwell's confidence in Snake's professionalism is shown to be very high which allows the audience the true nature of the scandals and the basic plot of the play. This confidence of Lady Sneerwell on Snake is misplaced as by the end of the play her confidence is betrayed.

Joseph in the play is shown to be a master at role plays who is 'artful, selfish and malicious' and therefore resorts to games and intrigue to win Maria's hands as well as her fortune. In this way, the play brings out the qualification of scandal mongering of some characters in the play. The three scandal school scenes (in Acts I, II, and V) present all that is worst in upper class urban life. The elites of the cities, living luxurious lives, have nothing to do but rumour monger scandals about each other. This seems to be the favourite past time of the elites of the eighteenth century and Sheridan had a strong objection to it. So he chooses to satirize the same in the play so as to point out to the people where they have gone wrong and to what extent. The object of the satire is to make people feel that somehow they are the object of attack on stage.

Thus, Sheridan instead of portraying proper fully developed characters on stage merely presents some character types that are easily identifiable by the audience. It is interesting that in a satire, primarily a social satire, the character types become more significant than fully developed characters as one aspect of a character is developed to the fullest extent to emphasize on that particular aspect of his or her character – which will typify that particular trait. So when the audience or the readers see or read the play, they come to know whether that particular trait of the character is present in him or her. Thus, the play *The School for Scandal* seems to be a commentary on the conscience of the age which gave so much significance to the outward show than inner worth. It is because of this that Sir Oliver had to role play to figure out which of his two nephews is the one fit to be his heir. Charles Surface seems to be the hero of the play as he is in contrast to his hypocritical brother Joseph. Although Charles does not appear until almost half of the play is over, yet he seems to be the pivotal character as his information is manipulated by the dramatist in such a way from the beginning of the play that he seems to be the centre of attraction. But, at the same time, it is also true that Charles also has his own folly – if Joseph Surface is hypocritical and manipulative, then Charles Surface is extravagant. Each one has a flaw – though Joseph's flaw is harmful and therefore being mocked at and satirized to a greater extent in the play.

### Check Your Progress

3. How does Sir Oliver Surface approach Charles at the beginning of the play?
4. Differentiate between Shakespearean and Jonsonian Comedies.

Richard Brinsley  
Sheridan: *The School  
of Scandal*

## NOTES

## NOTES

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### 14.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Sheridan is well-known for his plays such as *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal*, *The Duenna*, and *A Trip to Scarborough*.
2. The Restoration period takes its name from the restoration of the Stuart line to the throne in 1660 at the end of the Commonwealth of England. The period is considered to have lasted until 1700.
3. Sir Oliver Surface approaches Charles in the guise of a money lender and in the famous 'auction' scene buys the family portraits.
4. While Shakespearean comedies had the only objective of entertaining the audience, the Jonsonian (Ben Jonson) comedies were also meant to educate the audience.

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### 14.5 SUMMARY

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- Richard Brinsley Sheridan was an Irish satirist, a playwright and poet, as well as a long-term owner of the London Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. He is well-known for his plays such as *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal*, *The Duenna*, and *A Trip to Scarborough*.
- Sheridan's *The School of Scandal* seems to be a play about scandals, scandal-mongering, about reality and perception and about human follies. In other words, it seems to be a satiric play which is written in the type of the comedy of manners.
- The play *The School of Scandal* is a great caricature of Sheridan's own time and society – the eighteenth century.
- The play *The School of Scandal* has dual aims –
  - (i) It aims to entertain the audience by typically portraying characters who have a particular trait in their character in an enhanced way so that it can be mocked.
  - (ii) While entertaining the audience, Sheridan also has in his mind the objective of educating the audience about the ways of the world.
- As a comic dramatist, Sheridan has created all the necessary comic devices in the play – amusing characters, funny intrigues, witty conversations, ridiculous situations, incisive social satire, commentary of human follies and foibles, etc.
- It is the rejection of the 'school of scandal' which leads the play to a happy resolution. The school seems to be the centre of the plot of the play and therefore it seems that the title is an apt one.

- Sheridan instead of portraying proper fully developed characters on stage merely presents some character types so as to make them easily identifiable to the audience. It is interesting that in a satire, primarily a social satire, the character types becomes more significant than fully developed characters as one aspect of a character is developed to the fullest extent to emphasize on that particular aspect – which will typify that particular trait.

Richard Brinsley  
Sheridan: *The School  
of Scandal*

## NOTES

### 14.6 KEY WORDS

- **Restoration Age:** It is the phase of English literature written during the historical period of 1660–1689, which corresponds to the last years of the direct Stuart reign in England. The age got its name from the restoration of Charles II to the British Throne in 1660. In general, the term is used to denote homogeneous styles of neoclassicism and French influence on literature.
- **Satire:** It can be described as the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation.
- **Commonwealth of England:** It was the period from 1649 to 1660 when England and Wales, later along with Ireland and Scotland, was ruled as a republic following the end of the Second English Civil War and the trial and execution of Charles I.
- **Wit:** It means the capacity for inventive thought and quick understanding; keen intelligence.

### 14.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

#### Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short-note on the life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan.
2. Write a brief plot summary of Sheridan's play *The School of Scandal*.
3. Differentiate between a satire and a comedy.
4. What was the Restoration Period?

#### Long-Answer Questions

1. Examine Sheridan's play *The School of Scandal* as a Comedy of Manner.
2. Do you agree to the statement that Sheridan's characters in *The School of Scandal* are r types rather than fully developed individuals? Discuss with reference to the play.

## NOTES

3. In what ways, does the play *The School of Scandal* fits into the scheme of eighteenth century plays? Write your answer with a close analysis of the play.
4. Who do you consider to be the main protagonist of the play *The School of Scandal*? Give reasons in support of your answer.
5. Write an essay on the element of 'satire' in the play *The School of Scandal*.

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## 14.8 FURTHER READINGS

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