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Directorate of Distance Education

B.A. (English)

VI - Semester

112 63

WOMEN'S WRITING IN ENGLISH

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INTRODUCTION

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Roughly half of the world's population are considered to be women. And yet until a couple of centuries ago, their voice in literature was almost absent. This is not to say that they were entirely absent from the narratives, but that their stories were told by men. This was a problematic situation representative of women's position as inferior citizens of the society. Many female writers would write under a male pseudonym or never publish their works at all. With progress in feminist movements, and the landmark work by Mary Wollstonecraft and her *A Vindication on the Rights of Women* (1792), there has been a sea of changes in the literature scene.

Women's writing in English, as a field of study has been defined in various ways. It has been defined as the area of literatures written by women as well as category of literature dealing with writings by women about their experiences in society based on their gender. Their experiences have been varied depending on the region and socio-political conditions they were residing in, their social class, their race as well as their sexual orientation. It is crucial to study about these gender experiences across different genres of literature and this is the subject of this book.

This book, *Women's Writing in English*, has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with the Introduction followed by the Objectives for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner and is interspersed with Check Your Progress questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit. The Summary and Key Words further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

BLOCK - I

PROSE

Virginia Woolf:
'A Room of One's Own'

UNIT 1 VIRGINIA WOOLF: 'A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN'

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Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 About the Author
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf's 'A Room of One's Own' (1929) is considered to be one of the most prominent feminist texts ever composed in the history of women's literature. The essay analyses the social, financial and educational disadvantages that the women have experienced throughout the male dominated history. 'A Room of One's Own' contains the famous line - 'A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction'.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the distinctive features of the society highlighted in the essay
- Describe the view of critical thinkers about 'A Room of One's Own'
- State the use of imagery in her essay 'A Room of One's Own'

1.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Virginia Woolf was born on 25 January 1882 at 22 Hyde Park Gate in London. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen was a founding editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. He was also a renowned historian, author, critic and biographer. Her mother, Julia Prinsep Duckworth (née Jackson) was a renowned beauty and

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modeled for the pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones. It was a second marriage for both her parents. Consequently, Virginia Woolf was surrounded by three sets of siblings: those from her parents' first marriages, respectively, and her own biological siblings. Her father's professional commitments meant that the influences of Victorian literary society surrounded the children in their impressionable years. They had interactions with Henry James, George Henry Lewes, and James Russell Lowes among others.

She was home schooled as a child. Along with her sister Vanessa she was taught the classics and English literature from the extensive Stephens' library at home. Her brothers, however, went to Cambridge, a fact that she resented later in her life. Her childhood memories find expression in her work. The Godrevy Lighthouse near the family's summer home, Talland House plays a central role in the novel *To the Lighthouse*.

Her mother's death in 1895, followed by her sister Stella's demise in 1897, catapulted Virginia Woolf into a nervous breakdown. Despite this trauma, she successfully completed courses, some at degree level, in Greek, Latin, German and history at the Ladies' Department of King's College London. Her second nervous breakdown was occasioned by her father's demise in 1904. This was so severe that she had to be institutionalized briefly. Many biographers attribute the sexual abuse Virginia Woolf suffered at the hands of her half brothers George and Gerald Duckworth as the cause of these recurring bouts of depression. She mentions these incidents even in her works, *A Sketch of the Past* and *22 Hyde Park Gate*. Their father's death and the subsequent depression caused the sisters to sell their house and move to a new residence; 46 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury. Here they came into contact with many intellectuals like Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Rupert Brooke, Saxon Sydney-Turner, Duncan Grant, Leonard Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, David Garnett, and Roger Fry. Together they came to be known as the Bloomsbury Group. The group's ethos encouraged a liberal approach to sexuality. Woolf indulged in this with Vita Sackville-West. Her experiences are recorded in the novel *Orlando*. In fact, Sackville-West's son called the novels as the 'most charming love letter in literature.'

In 1906, Virginia lost her brother Thoby and this incident broke her mentally. This was just the beginning of a series of mental problem that plagued Woolf's life. The following year, Woolf's sister Vanessa Stephen married Clive Bell. In 1912, Virginia married Leonard Woolf. She called this a 'complete' marriage. Around this time she completed her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, which was published in 1918. The same year Hogarth Press published Katherine Mansfield's *Prelude* (1918) followed by T. S. Eliot's *Poems* in 1919 and *The Waste Land* in 1923. Virginia's next work, *Night and Day*, was published in 1919. Based in London, the novel sounds rather realistic and juxtaposes the lives of two friends, Mary and Katherine. In 1922, she wrote *Jacob's Room*, which was based on the life and death of her brother Thoby. With the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To*

the Lighthouse (1927) and *The Waves* (1931), Virginia Woolf consolidated her position as a modernist writer. Woolf wrote two biographies *Orlando* (1928) and *Flush* (1933). The former was dedicated to a close androgynous friend, V. Sakville-West and the latter narrates the romance between Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning as seen from the point of view of Elizabeth's pet dog (Cannine). The experimental work, *Between the Acts* (1941) was published posthumously.

The world of literature considers Woolf a major proponent of the 'stream-of-consciousness' technique. Her contribution to the feminist critics has been rather significant. Her famous essay, 'A Room of One's Own' (1929) and its sequel 'Three Guineas' (1938) are now acknowledged as one of the most important creations in this area. Virginia Woolf drowned herself during one of her nervous attacks. This was brought upon by many things; she was depressed by the lukewarm reception of her biography of *Roger Fry*. The destruction of her home during the Blitz and the onset of the Second World War only worsened her malady. On completing the manuscript of her last novel she realized that she could not write anymore; hence there was no incentive left to live anymore and she committed suicide.

Major Works

Woolf's first professional piece was a journalistic piece on Haworth, the home of the Bronte family, published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1900. Most of her work was published by her own publication house, the Hogarth. In 1925 she published *Mrs. Dalloway* and followed it with *To the Lighthouse* (1927). The latter novel deals among other things with the theme of the creative process. It also explores the passage of time, and how women are forced by society to allow men to take emotional strength from them. She was invited to Newham College and Girton College, the only women's colleges at the time to deliver a series of lectures on women and fiction in 1928. These lectures were published in book form in 1929 and were called 'A Room of One's Own'. Since their publication, they have become synonymous with feminist criticism. In 1931 she published *The Waves*, a novel whose narrative technique is akin to a prose poem.

She wrote *Flush: A Biography* (1933) from the viewpoint of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel. *Between the Acts* (1941) is written in verse and is her last work. It encompasses almost all the themes she spent her life writing about: the transformation of life through art and sexual ambivalence. 'A Room of One's Own' (1929) and 'Three Guineas' (1938) delineate the difficulties which the female writers face because the reins of legal and economic power are in the hands of men. This power implies that they are in the position to make decision for women concerning all areas of their welfare without consulting them. She argues that such a position further weakens the female sex. The situation can only be altered when women challenge the status quo and work actively to thwart and change it.

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Check Your Progress

1. Name the publication house of Virginia Woolf.
2. What were the two biographies written by Virginia Woolf?

1.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Virginia Woolf, in her essay, introduces a fictional character called Mary, who decides to visit the British Museum and find out all the texts that have ever been written about women. As expected, Mary's research leads her towards a disappointing conclusion, as she discovers that not much has ever been written about women. This leads, Virginia Woolf to argue that both literature and history have always been constructed from a male perspective and women have been silenced in this creative process. Traditionally, women have been relegated to the margins of the society because they were considered to be inferior to men in the social hierarchy.

Of course, the author herself insists that this is only a minor opinion in the larger scheme of things. She goes on to argue that there is a strong relation between room and money which also leads to the unsolved problems that women as writers experience. Virginia Woolf strongly condemns the popular belief that women are not intellectually as sharp as men. She refuses to accept that women produce inferior literature. Virginia Woolf points out that the society has always denied women the access to basic rights. Girls were not allowed to attend schools and universities. Girls were expected to marry early and spend all their time looking after the household and children. As if, these were not enough, they were excluded from the inheritance of family wealth and property as well. In her essay, Woolf points out that the act of representation is also an issue wrapped around the values of gender. She rightly points out that it is without fail that the masculine value always precedes the worldly perspectives. The essay highlights the war within a woman who is talented enough but is unable to express. Establishing her point, Woolf introduces the readers to Judith Shakespeare¹. She wonders what Judith might have felt to be continuously told to suppress her brilliance and lead a mundane life. Unable to express herself, and feeling tormented with the societal restrictions, she must have succumbed to not so stable physical and mental imbalance which led her to kill herself.

The female narrator and the primary character in 'A Room of One's Own' is referred to as 'I'. During the course of the essay, she asks the readers address her as anything: 'Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or any other name you please . . .'. This announcement is particularly problematic because each of these fictional identities appear at various junctures in the course of the essay. This

shifting nature of the narrator's identity complicates the narrative even further; since the reader must make a special effort to figure out who the 'I' is at any given point of time. Yet these overlapping identities also add a more universal and inclusive approach to the text. By adopting different names and identities, the 'I' signifies that her words and experiences resonate with women across the globe and the text is not an individual memoir. 'A Room of One's Own' relies on a dramatic setting to convey its ideas but we must bear in mind that the fictionalized narrator is not the author herself. Being a great storyteller, Mary incorporates fact within fiction to highlight her point on inequality meted out to women. Interestingly, Mary takes enough liberty with her material to reiterate that truth is never absolute; rather it is relative and subjective.

In 'A Room of One's Own' Virginia Woolf intentionally introduces the plurality of voices. This helps her establish the link between women and literature. Through Mary, Woolf makes conscious efforts to reconstruct the self so that she can create a narrative context for women who are suppressed by patriarchy. In this context, we must add that one of the salient features of feminism is the acknowledgement and celebration of the plurality of voices. The feminist philosophical works primarily focused on three broad areas: re-establishing female identities, examining the western ideas of the self, reanalysing the idea of self (both in social context as well as a multi-layered consciousness). This change of perspective naturally led to a dynamic shift in the study of self.

The dramatization of the mental progression of the fictional Mary and her investigations point towards the lack of prominent presence of women in academia and history, and make Mary feel grateful and inspired by the women novelists of nineteenth century — Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Anne, Charlotte, and Emily, George Eliot, and others.

Mary, the narrator of the essay, figures out that financial well-being is at the locus of female empowerment. Without money, women are unable to demand for their own rights, in this case a room of their own. There is no power without money; and devoid of power, women have never been able to register their creativity. After all, freedom is based on the material prosperity. And since the beginning of civilization, women have never been prosperous. The essay argues that women find it easier to write novel than poetry because a novel can accommodate innumerable interruptions but poetry demands an undisturbed attention. The frequent interruptions in writing process can be attributed to the fact that a woman is never allowed to have a room of her own. Thus, in absence of a space that a woman would actually call her own, a woman had to get used to regular disturbances. But owning a room was possible only and only if, women had access to money.

Woolf points that, coupled with lack of opportunity, the massive pay parity between men and women writers made people believe that women writers were inferior to their male counterparts. The narrator in the essay, underlines that it is not

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literature which is only biased towards men, but even history is also male dominated. In her investigation to find only the essential elements of truth, Mary discovers that truth is very much missing in the context of history. With these facts to follow with Virginia Woolf, explains her reasons to rely on fictional mode of essay writing. She understands that when the subject is controversial there is no specific truth available hence; one has to rely only on one's own opinion. And it is easier to incorporate truth in fiction than in a non-fiction.

At no point of time does the author shy from revealing how she intends to approach her argument. Fiction is the only way to impart truth. Her claim that she is describing her own personal journey and not stating the truth brings her closer to the reader as they are as ignorant or knowledgeable on the subject as the author. And this unwittingly helps in building a collective narrative on the female life.

Woolf, through Mary, introduces an interesting imagery to describe the process of thinking – the fish. A fish, as we all know, is both tangible as well as slippery making it both attainable yet difficult to grasp. Throughout the essay, the readers get a glimpse of the way she treasures her thoughts, holds them with excitement and keeps them safe until she can document it. This act of documentation highlights how Mary valued thoughts. But the narrator's efforts are interrupted by the beadle. The beadle is the guard of the university who is a man; thus, signifying that the university is safeguarded by men for the men of academia. And this men for men, the idea of brotherhood, excludes women in the process and stops them from being able to pursue and synthesize their thoughts as men do without being judged.

The readers are told how men's colleges² are superior than the educational opportunities provided to women. While pondering over the evils of such social practices the narrator realizes that their own college has no authentic foundation or tradition for the women to look up to and decide on a course of life. In fact, the colleges are struggling to survive and are more focused on fundraising than imparting actual education. Thus, while women's colleges are neither abundantly available nor qualitatively great, men's college boast of a rich intellectual history. While women are entrapped in bearing and caring for children and are simply denied an intellectual and financial tradition as men; and in the process men march forward independently building legacy and fortune.

The central premise of the essay is the need of a room for a woman where she can engage her creative talents in an interrupted manner. Interestingly, a man does not have to ask for a space of his own because it is socially accepted and acknowledged that he is supposed to have a work space. The room, in the essay, is a symbolic representation of numerous other concerns like personal time, privacy and financial independence that highlighted various inequalities between men and women. During the time of Virginia Woolf, women barely had access to any of these luxuries. Concept of privacy and independence were elusive to women, and in the process their art suffered. Virginia Woolf points out that as long as the social

inequalities are not addressed women will continue to remain as second class citizens which will have implications on their art and creativity.

Over the years, 'A Room of One's Own' has gained itself a reputation of being a seminal work in feminist studies. Yet it was not always the same and there were many prominent voices who were not very impressed with the work. For example, Arnold Bennet³ argued that Woolf's essay was definitely not a feminist work. He believed that Woolf's discussion has hardly any political implications and it promotes an apolitical ideology. Rather he insists that the essay is nothing but a collection that comprises of ideas related to women and fiction. He had claimed that 'It is a book a little about men and a great deal about women. But it is not "feminist." It is non-partisan.'

On the other hand David Daiches⁴ considered the essay as a feminist work and insisted that Woolf's feminism sets the tone for a claim for inclusivity where she is not only emphasizing about women who have not been allowed to participate in socio-political exercises but also throw light on all those genius who have not had an opportunity to utilize their talent due lack of resources.

Mary is an engaging storyteller and a great narrator. Her insistence on using books to explore the problematic and complicated history of women achievers leads her to a series of provocative inquiries. These inturn asks the readers to question the widely held assumptions that dearth of qualitative literary output by women is a result of women writers being inferior in talent. Mary intertwines her insights in the library with the principle of 'incandescence.'⁵ Incandescence is an ideal state where the truth of one's art prevails over everything else.

During the course of the essay, we come across the tailless Manx cat. The cat is a symbol of how society has evolved itself in all aspects since the era of the First World War. The narrator despite being in an august party seems to feel that there is a major lack of enthusiasm in the conversation around her. Mary associates this mechanical conversation as an indicator of being cut out off from poetic and idyllic life. The war had not only taken many lives but had also ruptured the continuum that connected the vibrant past with the lacklustre present.

The narrator feels that bringing up Tennyson was so futile that she does not feel like introducing him in the conversation despite her appreciation for a good discussion. But a close reading will suggest that Mary preferred to hum and think in verse as if she longed to connect with the melodious past that existed before the war.

This nostalgic effect induced by the poetry of the past acts as a barrier and challenge for the narrator because the modern form of poetry makes her feel disillusioned and detached. This takes her further away from the art form that she looked up to. But Mary soon realizes and understands that poetry, like any other art form is a direct product of the contemporary times. Even though, this disconnect with poetry indicates the sufferings of the war and its long-term effects on the mental health (impacting society's ability to produce poetry) it is equally surprising

*Virginia Woolf:
'A Room of One's Own'*

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that the 'inferior' women have created poetry which are multi-layered and more complicated.

To elucidate her point, the images of the library shelves are introduced into the narrative. The book shelves highlight how women authors have been neglected since forever. Moreover, male authors have taken it upon themselves to chronicle about women than about their male counterpart. Mary longs to investigate this difference by undertaking a scientific research. In doing so, she realizes that lack of education offered to women lies at the crux of their inability to compete with the male researcher. For the narrator, library is equivalent to the lamps that eliminate the darkness of the London streets. For Mary, knowledge and thought is like the dawn of light. From her point of view, the buildings are masculine in appearance; in fact, she explains how the dome resembles the bald head of an intellectual!

The narrator had been fairly honest about her privileges. She confesses that unlike most women she does not suffer from the pains of economic depravity. She insists that not just men, her own example can be used as a lesson on how money has allowed her to gain access to power. She was capable of paying her own bills and had the ability to travel which has led her to explore the unexplored. She makes a strong statement when the narrator says having money is as powerful as having the right to vote⁶. Mary reiterates that financially underprivileged can never wield power and their act of choosing is only an illusion because only those who have money ultimately have power. Mary insists that her financial security makes her perceive the mundane and established ideas from a different light. This also makes the act of writing much easier. This also helped her sympathise with the men. Mary figures out that the worldview of other women would be less constricted if they had financial freedom and this would impact the contents of their literary outputs. The narrator insists that the entire history of womanhood can be considered as black hole that exists right next to the well-documented history of manhood. Mary from her extensive reading realizes that anyone who has read history book by Trevalyan⁷ understands that women are nothing but existences that swing between marriage and divorce. It is interesting to see how legal descriptions of men's rights are available while there are barely any rights mentioned with respect to women themselves. Yet, in fictional realm, women appear to have a more vibrant and strong existence. But the actual woman always oscillates between these two extremities.

Woolf in her essay praises Mrs Aphra Behn. Mrs Behn was a commendable figure who had proved that women could write and have a comfortable bank balance to lead a good life. Through Mary's research the readers are reminded that literature is open for anyone. Irrespective of their birth or location they are free to exercise the power of their mind. Even if the door of libraries can be closed, one cannot close the faculty of reason, intellect and creativity that a women possesses. It is the hallmark of a patriarchal society that considers women as inferior to men to feed their egos.

In the course of the discussion, the narrator argues that since the society had always perpetuated the myth that women are inferior to men, women too have internalized this belief. Due to this self-imposed inferiority complex women have never considered themselves that they are good enough to produce great literature. This understanding clearly indicates that the idea of inferiority acts two-fold: firstly, most women use it as defensive mechanism to explain why they are not good and secondly, such detachment helps boost men's morale and feeds their superiority complex. That is why the narrator warns the women to watch out their own actions. She highlights how women have always undermined their own cause by voluntarily submitting to men and never questioning this idea of subjugation; that women themselves are responsible for their own inferior situation because they have never valued their own opinions.

Virginia Woolf was composing this essay at a time⁸ when she was already working on *Orlando and The Moths*. The Great Depression that impacted the 1930s and 1940s played a significant role in lessening the cultural impact of the essay as the new world wide crisis was engulfing the old world nostalgia. The feminist movement⁹ that followed the First World War and preceded the depression era barely caused a stir and Virginia Woolf was aware of it. It was only in the 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of the second wave of feminism that the idea women, fiction and female writing became a major concern¹⁰.

'A Room of One's Own' is a compilation of two lectures that the author had delivered at Newnham College and Girton College¹¹ in 1928. Concluding her essay, Woolf insists that everyone must come together and share their stories – irrespective of whether the narratives are trivial or magnanimous - because each story is worthy of being told and recorded in the history of time. And this humble effort will ultimately empower the future generation of females to fight for an equal world.

Check Your Progress

3. Name the prominent women novelists of the nineteenth century.
4. What is the central premise of the essay 'A Room of One's Own?'
5. When and where was the essay 'A Room of One's Own' delivered by Virginia Woolf?

1.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Virginia Woolf's publication house was the Hogarth Press.
2. The two biographies written by Virginia Woolf were *Orlando* (1928) and *Flush* (1933).

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3. Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Anne, Charlotte, and Emily, George Eliot are the prominent women novelists of the nineteenth century.
4. The central premise of the essay is the need of a room for a woman where she can engage her creative talents in an interrupted manner. Interestingly, a man does not have to ask for a space of his own because it is socially accepted and acknowledged that he is supposed to have a work space. The room, in the essay, is a symbolic representation of numerous other concerns like personal time, privacy and financial independence that highlighted various inequalities between men and women.
5. 'A Room of One's Own' is a compilation of two lectures that the author had delivered at Newnham College and Girton College in 1928.

1.5 SUMMARY

- 'A Room of One's Own' contains the famous line - 'A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction'. Virginia Woolf, in her essay, introduces a fictional character called Mary, who decides to visit the British Museum and find out all the texts that have ever been written about women.
- Virginia Woolf strongly condemns the popular belief that women are not intellectually as sharp as men. She refuses to accept that women produce inferior literature. Virginia Woolf points out that the society has always denied women the access to basic rights.
- The female narrator and the primary character in 'A Room of One's Own' is referred to as 'I'.
- In 'A Room of One's Own' Virginia Woolf intentionally introduces the plurality of voices. This helps her establish the link between women and literature. Through Mary, Woolf makes conscious efforts to reconstruct the self so that she can create a narrative context for women who are suppressed by patriarchy.
- The dramatization of the mental progression of the fictional Mary and her investigations point towards the lack of prominent presence of women in academia and history, and make Mary feel grateful and inspired by the women novelists of nineteenth century — Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Anne, Charlotte, and Emily, George Eliot, and others.
- Mary, the narrator of the essay, figures out that financial well-being is at the locus of female empowerment. Without money, women are unable to demand for their own rights, in this case a room of their own.

- Woolf points that, coupled with lack of opportunity, the massive pay parity between men and women writers made people believe that women writers were inferior to their male counterparts.
- At no point of time does the author shy from revealing how she intends to approach her argument. Fiction is the only way to impart truth. Her claim that she is describing her own personal journey and not stating the truth brings her closer to the reader as they are as ignorant or knowledgeable on the subject as the author. And this unwittingly helps in building a collective narrative on the female life.
- While women are entrapped in bearing and caring for children and are simply denied an intellectual and financial tradition as men; and in the process men march forward independently building legacy and fortune.
- The central premise of the essay is the need of a room for a woman where she can engage her creative talents in an interrupted manner. Interestingly, a man does not have to ask for a space of his own because it is socially accepted and acknowledged that he is supposed to have a work space.
- Over the years, 'A Room of One's Own' has gained itself a reputation of being a seminal work in feminist studies. Yet it was not always the same and there were many prominent voices who were not very impressed with the work.
- Mary is an engaging storyteller and a great narrator. Her insistence on using books to explore the problematic and complicated history of women achievers leads her to a series of provocative inquiries.
- The narrator feels that bringing up Tennyson was so futile that she does not feel like introducing him in the conversation despite her appreciation for a good discussion. But a close reading will suggest that Mary preferred to hum and think in verse as if she longed to connect with the melodious past that existed before the war.
- The narrator had been fairly honest about her privileges. She confesses that unlike most women she does not suffer from the pains of economic depravity. She insists that not just men, her own example can be used as a lesson on how money has allowed her to gain access to power.
- Woolf in her essay praises Mrs Aphra Behn. Mrs Behn was a commendable figure who had proved that women could write and have a comfortable bank balance to lead a good life. Through Mary's research the readers are reminded that literature is open for anyone.
- In the course of the discussion, the narrator argues that since the society had always perpetuated the myth that women are inferior to men, women too have internalized this belief. Due to this self-imposed inferiority complex women have never considered themselves that they are good enough to produce great literature.

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1.6 KEY WORDS

- **Second wave of feminism:** This feminist movement began in the United States in the 1960s in retaliation to the renewed domestication of women after the Second World War. This period witnessed the emergence of various literary works which questioned the stereotypical gender roles and highlighted the social problems faced especially by women.
- **Feminist work:** This term refers to any literary work which attempts to achieve change that helps to achieve equality for women in all spheres of life.
- **Apolitical ideology:** This refers to an ideology which has no interest or association with politics.
- **Idyllic:** This term refers to something beautiful, serene, simple and rustic.
- **Great Depression:** This was the longest period of economic recession faced by the modernized Western world. It began with the crash of stock markets in 1929 and continued till 1939.

1.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Virginia Woolf.
2. Who is the narrator in the essay 'A Room of One's Own'?
3. How does Woolf establish the link between women and literature in the essay 'A Room of One's Own'?
4. What is the position of men and women in the social hierarchy discussed by Woolf in her essay?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the opinion of various critical thinkers about Woolf's essay 'A Room of One's Own'.
2. Critically analyse the views of Woolf expressed in essay 'A Room of One's Own'.
3. Why does Woolf praise Mrs Aphra Behn in her essay?

1.8 FURTHER READINGS

Blain, Virginia, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements, (Eds). 1990. *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Todd, Janet (Ed.). 1989. *British Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide*. London: Rutledge.

Lonsdale, Roger (Ed.). 1989. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Black, Helen C. 1893. *Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches*. Glasgow: David Bryce & Sons.

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Endnotes

1. The fictional sister of writer, William Shakespeare whom Woolf invents to establish her point.
2. Especially, specialised institutions related to engineering and finance
3. The early twentieth century novelist
4. The literary critic
5. The state of existence in which everything that is identified as personal is lost and one is left with the purest truth in the form of art.
6. A socially accepted symbol of freedom and power
7. George Macaulay Trevelyan (1876 – 1962). British historian and an academician
8. 1928–29
9. Towards the end of the 1920s.
10. But by 1928 women's right to vote and access to higher education had been implemented.
11. The earliest two colleges established for women at Cambridge.

UNIT 2 ELAINE SHOWALTER: 'TOWARDS A FEMINIST POETICS'

Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 About the Author
- 2.3 Critical Analysis
- 2.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 2.5 Summary
- 2.6 Key Words
- 2.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 2.8 Further Readings

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Elaine Showalter and her 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' (1979) is an invaluable contribution to the body of feminist literary theory. The significance of her work relies on its unique approach to launch a separate and independent model of literary theory that catered to the feminist approach and was not dependent on classification and theories perpetuated by patriarchy.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Identify the main premise of the essay, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics'
- Define gynocriticism list the significant features of gynocritics
- Analyse the title of the essay, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics'

2.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elaine Showalter (born 21 January 1941) is a major American feminist literary theorist and critic on cultural and social issues.

Showalter was born as Elaine Cottler in Boston, Massachusetts. Against the wishes of her parents, she undertook an academic career. She earned a bachelor's degree at Bryn Mawr College, a master's degree at Brandeis University and a Ph.D. in 1970 at the University of California, Davis. Her first academic appointment was at Douglass College at Rutgers University. In 1984, she joined Princeton University's faculty, and took early retirement in 2003.

At age twenty-one, Showalter's parents had disowned her for marrying outside the Jewish faith. Her husband, English Showalter, is a Yale-educated professor of 18th century French literature. The Showalters have two children, Michael Showalter, an actor and comedian, and Vinca Showalter LaFleur, a professional speechwriter.

Showalter is an expert in Victorian literature and the Fin-de-Siecle (turn hysteria in literature, particularly in women's writing and in the representation of female characters).

Her academic honours comprise of a Guggenheim Fellowship (1977–78) and a Rockefeller Humanities fellowship (1981–82). She is also the past-president of the Modern Language Association (MLA). In 2007, Showalter was chair of the judges for the prestigious British literary award, the Man Booker International Prize.

Showalter's book *Inventing Herself* (2001), a survey of feminist icons, appears to be the result of a long-time interest in communicating the significance of understanding feminist tradition. Showalter's early essays and editorial work in the late 1970s and the 1980s review the history of the feminist tradition within the 'wilderness' of literary theory and criticism. She worked in the field of feminist literary theory and criticism, which was just coming up as a serious scholarly pursuit in universities in the 1970s. Showalter's writing reveals a conscious effort to express the significance of mapping her discipline's past in order to both ground it in substantive theory, and accumulate a knowledge base that will be able to inform a path for future feminist academic pursuit.

Showalter supports imminent feminist criticism from a cultural perspective in the current Female phase, rather than from perspectives that traditionally come from an andocentric perspective such as psychoanalytic and biological theories. In the past, feminists have worked within these traditions by revising and criticizing female representations, or lack thereof, in the male traditions (that is, in the Feminine and Feminist phases). In her essay 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' (1981), Showalter says, 'A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers: class, race nationality, and history are literary determinants as significant as gender. Nonetheless, women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space' (New, 260).

Showalter does not support replacing psychoanalysis, for example, with cultural anthropology; preferably, she proposes that approaching women's writing from a cultural perspective is one among many suitable perspectives that will expose female traditions. However, cultural anthropology and social history are especially productive because they 'can perhaps offer us a terminology and a diagram of women's cultural situation' (New, 266). Showalter warns that feminist critics must use cultural analysis as ways to understand what women write, rather than to dictate what they ought to write (New, 266).

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Showalter does not support a separation of the female tradition from the male tradition. She claims that women must work both inside and outside the male tradition simultaneously. According to her, the most constructive approach to future feminist theory and criticism lies in a focus on fostering a new feminine cultural perspective within a feminist tradition that at the same time exists within the male tradition, but on which it is not dependent and to which it is not answerable.

Her book *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) is a significant study of women's fiction. Her articles 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' and 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' are significant attempts at theorizing Feminist Critical practice. Showalter proposed a separate and independent model of feminist literary theory by rejecting the inevitability of male models and theories, and by recalling the history of women's writing. The major writings of Elaine Showalter are as follows:

- *Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977)
- *Toward a Feminist Poetics, Women's Writing and Writing about Women* (1979)
- *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness* (1981)
- *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–198*. (1985)
- *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de siècle* (1990)
- *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (1997)
- *Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage* (2001)
- *Teaching Literature* (2003)
- *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents* (2005)

Check Your Progress

1. Why was Showalter disowned by her parents?
2. Name the articles by Showalter that attempt at theorizing Feminist Critical practice.

2.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

According to Showalter, the female literary tradition can be segmented into three different phases. She categorizes them as the following:

- i. The first phase – **Feminine phase**: This spanned from 1840 – 1880. This is a period identified by imitation. We have female writers like George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, Anne Brontë and others who wrote under male pseudonyms.

- ii. The second phase - **Feminist phase**: This spanned from 1880-1920. This period is marked by protests; an era that gave women the right to vote.
- iii. The third phase - **Female phase**: This spanned from 1920 – 1960. This period is marked by self-awareness that was visible in women's writing.

Showalter in her work mentions that women writers have always extended solidarity with their fellow women writers. This solidarity is also extended to their female readers as well. But this self-awareness related to women's writings did not exist before the 1840s. Even women writers themselves did not consider their creativity as superlative expressions of their life experiences. The prevalence of such repressive approach and parochial social norms led to the rise of innovative and symbolic literary works. The inner life found itself expressed in the form of mad woman who was locked up in the attic or as the crippled artist or as the murderous wife. If we take into account the numerous limitations in which the women writers functioned, whether reading Jane Austen or George Eliot, we understand their need to repeatedly focus on everyday lives of women, as it was reflected within the familial space or within the community.

By the time, we reach the feminist phase we witness a strong political involvement of the women. Women groups questioned and challenged the established norms. They revolted against being stereotyped. The women's movement countered the restrictions imposed on language and irrational codes of conduct. They refused to be used as symbols of self-sacrifice and continued sending stronger messages through their writings that brought about social and political changes. These women were responsible for laying the foundation of an independent female tradition that debunked the male establishment. In fact, this new found tradition left an indelible mark in the feminist history by breaking into the male dominated world of press and journalism. In fact, women like Virginia Woolf ran their own press. But Showalter points out that Feministic criticism struggled to form an identity as it was considered to be an offshoot of socialism or Marxism because of its political overtones. Moreover, largely men occupied the leadership positions in Feminist Movement. That is why the cause of women somehow failed to reach its expected potential and true justice could not be extended.

Finally, in the female phase, we come across a period of unbridled self-exploration. In this phase, the literature produced by women witnessed more realistic approach towards story telling. The era of 1960s saw powerful writers like Doris Lessing¹, Iris Murdoch², Margaret Drabble³, Muriel Spark⁴ et al utilizing anger and sexuality to give shape to their creative powers, while channelizing their anger to create dreadful figures who were their dark alter-egos. The female characters and the women writers found themselves being reflected in these diseased representations. Through these characters, the authors were rewriting the stereotypes imposed by the patriarchal culture. Both the nineteenth and twentieth century literature witnessed the emergence of female monsters. And the female readers resonated with these characters because the monster figures resembled the suppressed and marginalized aspects of their existence.

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It must be borne in mind that during the 1970s structuralism was creating a storm in the literary theory world. Structuralism as we saw it in literature relied on systematic examination of given texts. The theoretical premise was proposed by the linguists Ferdinand de Saussure⁵ and Roman Jakobson⁶. Analyzed from this point of view, the word 'poetics' in the title of the essay implies a certain quasi-scientific yet systematic understanding of the functioning of literature. This theoretical framework investigates the formal qualities as well as the structures on which a text is based. Though many schools of thought insist that the word 'poetics' is related to poetry, yet in a very general context, poetics refers to a comprehensive theory related to literature. The term is usually traced back to the Platonic school⁷ of thought. A standard definition tells that the study of rhetors was classified as rhetorike. While the study of poetry was called poetike. That is why Aristotle's treatise on dramatics is titled as Poetics. Even though Showalter's essay calls itself 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' she does not talk of female poetics. Rather, she highlights and explains how women are silenced in poetics and their contributions have been neglected. To negotiate this dilemma she introduces 'gynocritics' who are significant markers of Showalter's feminist literary studies.

According to Showalter, feminist criticism can be categorized into two segments:

1. ***Feminist critique Or Woman as a reader:*** This kind of reading involves the female readers engaging in the sexual codes provided in the text. They question the historically grounded ideological differences which led to the recreation of the new literary phenomena. The texts in question were marked by fictional women characters that are steeped in stereotypes. Even the criticisms produced were filled with convenient myths, supported misconceptions and silenced obvious realities related to the female population. The literary history constructed by men continuously exploited and manipulated female existence especially in popular culture. Moreover, the study of women from the point of view of semiotics made it clear that the whole approach of understanding women was simply misplaced. The biggest problem of the feminist critique was that it was male-centric in its approach. An analysis of the stereotyped women who appeared in literary history through the sexist gaze of male critics only highlighted the limited range in which women were portrayed and how men perceived them. These narratives did not chronicle the actual experiences and feelings of the real women. Interestingly, these writings also made it appear that the unfortunate state of women's life was a natural phenomenon, and hence, women's representation as victims was inevitable.
2. ***Gynocritics Or Women as a writer:*** Breaking the norm and creating a feminist narrative, Showalter introduced 'gynocritics'. Showalter coined the term 'gynocritics' to describe a literary criticism that was

based on a feminine perspective. The actual role and significance of gynocritics is most lucidly explained by the author in her essay. She has written:

‘In contrast to [an] angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories.’

Showalter suggests that gynocritics are those who free themselves from the existing extremities of literary history documented by men. Gynocritics do not make an effort to fit themselves into the existing male tradition rather they participate in promoting and nurturing a new female culture.

But one must not confuse the role of gynocritics. They do not intend to eliminate the differences that exist between male and female writing. Rather gynocritics engage themselves in understanding the needs of women’s writing which is not a product of sexism. In fact, gynocritics rely on highlighting the female reality. As Showalter writes gynocritics are not, ‘...on a pilgrimage to the promised land in which gender would lose its power, in which all texts would be sexless and equal, like angels’. Gynocriticism tries to explore women who are producers of textual meaning and the psychodynamics related to female creativity. This theory investigates the use of language and the feminine aspects of it in a given text. It explores the collective literary career of women writers. The theory proposes to create a female perspective that analyses women’s literature and develops new parameters which will rely on women’s experiences. This approach focuses on strengthening the newly created female sub-culture. Gynocriticism focuses on feminine values and penetrates the masculine systems within which it had contained itself for so long.

Showalter justifies the need for a new model of reading by reminding the readers that women are not a homogenous group. They differ in race, culture, nature and geography. And no women can be considered similar to other and thus, a universally generic narrative cannot be built around them. In this context, we must reiterate that in general, the male critics have been less supportive of women’s writing. They have intentionally undervalued and neglected the work of women. Thus, the author insists on recreating a past that renegotiates the literary history of women in the general tradition of writing. In her effort to lay the foundation of a new literary tradition, Showalter is actually destabilizing the established traditions and freeing women in an ideological space. She rejects the heliocentric language and calls for a more inclusive cultural model that is competent to interpret women’s experiences.

While reading ‘Towards a Feminist Poetics’ we must keep in mind that feminist literary criticism only offers few strategies to analyse texts available in popular culture. The criticism intends to study representation of gender and sexuality in literature produced by both men and women. This theoretical premise is

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interdisciplinary in nature and adopts a pluralist approach to examination of written materials.

Feminist criticism focuses primarily on the following areas:

- Representation of women and their experiences in fiction composed by both men and women
- Women writers and their contribution to the female tradition.
- Role of gender in the literary texts and the rise of female readership
- The usage of feminine language
- Relationship between gender and literary tradition
- Women as consumers of printed materials

Prior to Showalter, people like Annette Kolodny⁸ had spoken about moving away from a phallogocentric model and focus on the feminine plurality. And dissenting voices like these found resounding support in many. Yet, as Showalter points out these voices are problematic because despite their endorsement of playful pluralism they suggest that feminist criticism cannot put forward a 'basic conceptual model'. And on the other hand, there were people like Cheri Register⁹ who considered feminist critics as wild creatures who were spreading everywhere untamed and are longing to dominate through the 'tracking device' of theory. Showalter is a reasonable presence amidst this cacophony. She argues for a conceptual framework that can be used to study women writers as well as women readers. After all, the differences whether biological, psychological or linguistic or cultural they operate in the same fashion for both the reader and writer.

The author takes a moment to explain and acknowledge the difficulties involved in creating a definition that highlights the unique difference that is the hallmark of text composed by women. She insists that women's writing is both slippery and extremely demanding, to say the least. In fact, so new is the discourse that Showalter has written: 'No term exists in English for such a specialized discourse, and so I have adapted the French term "la gynocritique: gynocritics.'

She also feels concerned that gynocritics might not be able to truly represent the special differences that are significant to understanding women's writing and creating a distinct female literary tradition. Yet, at the same time, Showalter realizes that with its base in theory and historical research, gynocriticism has the potential to lead the way towards establishing a 'relation of women to literary culture'.

Showalter insists that gynocritics must work towards developing a literature of their own. While the feminist critique are the consumers of the male texts that did not make an effort to individualize women or see them as independent entities who are beyond stereotypes, gynocritics focused on creating literature by women. This literature was written by women and the textual meaning was also formed by women. This new literary tradition relied on women to script its genres, themes, history and structures and create a female model that did not subscribe to the values and norms established by their male counterparts. This model highlights the

position and significance of women and writing in literary history. Showalter's insistence on a parallel discourse comes from her understanding that feminist critics are both obsessed with phallus and with the idea of destroying the artist with the phallus. And, this made her realize that probably such stereotypes are the natural outcomes of absence of a properly articulated theory.

Gynocritics do not develop an angry or romantic fixation over androcentric literature. Rather they focus on women's writing as a fundamental and basic aspect of female reality. To express themselves, women do not have to rely on either imitation or protest because each one will make them dependent in some form or other. Rather, they must turn female experience as an art form and technique of the literary tradition. Showalter is keener on positioning feminist criticism from cultural point of view and rejects the idea of adopting traditional perspectives of psychoanalysis or biological theories.

Showalter requests women not to get embroiled in the usual studying and deconstructing stereotypes available in literary space. She asks them to move beyond the usual so that they are not subjected to the secondary status and turn victims of male perception. The proposed shift focuses on exploring women's autonomous experience that is independent from male system of understanding.

Gynocritics explored the distinctly feminine subjects like domesticity and childbirth in their writing. Thus, helping uncover a female literary tradition where the subjectivity and the thought process of the women were highlighted. The feminine mode of experience was celebrated while a unique feminine trait and women's language was introduced into literary works. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Patricia Meyer Spacks' *The Female Imagination* (1975), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own*, Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976) etc., are some of the popular gynocritical texts. These texts bring to light the anxiety of authorship that is a result of breaking into the male dominated cannon. It is also this anxiety which is responsible for creating a counter narrative to 'the angel in the house' in form of mad woman (Bertha Rochester in *Jane Eyre*).

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the bluestocking circle gained prominence where women presided over literary salons of France and England. They were identified as judges of literary excellence. But as literary criticism established itself women's contributions appeared more structured. And, as we entered into the nineteenth century, we witness the first wave of feminism. This phase was marked by a rise in demands for equal education and access to professional spaces. The socio-political ideas highlighted the need to have gender neutral approach towards reading.

To shape her female-centric theory, which was radical in all possible ways, Showalter relied heavily on feminist historians and sociologists. She engages in an interesting discussion on Elizabeth Barrett Browning while commenting on the idea of completeness. She also analyses the works of other female authors and figures out that at times the works are so heavily influenced by other conditions that one is

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left to wonder if art has any role to play at all. According to Showalter, the common features of women's writings were an unhappy state of mind, awakening of consciousness, suffering, matrophobia etc.

Showalter insists that the role of feminist criticism is to ensure that the female experience is rediscovered and articulated well. But she gives a note of warning that gynocritics might not be able to create an impact if they are divided in their opinion which will have an impact on social engagement. She insists that female self-division can be avoided if a new language is popularized which will integrate reason, intelligence, suffering and experience. And, this new language, if adopted by both feminist critique and gynocritics will help strengthen the feminist vision.

Elaine Showalter in her seminal work, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977), talks about the misrepresentation of the women characters by the androcentric scholarship. She gloriously counters the 'singular anomaly' approach which was the image that women writers were saddled with. She reminds us to connect the dots that bind one generation with the other. Most importantly, she calls for a collective engagement that provides opportunities and educates women to take disadvantages in their stride and become part of the culture industry. She reminds everyone to achieve economic independence which will help them write their own stories; thus, making women subjects and authors of literary creations than being mere passive consumers and objects of literature.

Feminist criticism had received immense support from works like Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968) and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970). Having said that, we cannot ignore the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s which paved the way for a new emergent form of thinking. The early feminist critics focused on revising male's literary history while exposing sexual stereotypes. But people like Showalter gave an impetus to think radically and liberally where new cannons are created and women writers are reinvented. Showalter's thesis is devoid of clichés and rhetorical extremities and definitely intelligent. Its ideology is original and provocative. Her work reflects her authority in the field and she adopts an urgent diplomacy of style that neither offends nor appears irrational and gives enough room for wisdom and truth to flourish.

Check Your Progress

3. Name the different phases of the female literary tradition as categorized by Elaine Showalter.
4. What is the main role of gynocritics?
5. What are the main areas of focus of feminist criticism?
6. Name some of the popular gynocritical texts.
7. Mention the common features of women's writings as mentioned by Showalter.

2.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Showalter's parents had disowned her for marrying outside the Jewish faith.
2. Showalter's articles 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' and 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' are significant attempts at theorizing Feminist Critical practice.
3. According to Showalter, the female literary tradition can be segmented into three different phases. She categorizes them as the following:
 - i. The first phase – Feminine phase: This spanned from 1840 – 1880. This is a period identified by imitation. We have female writers like George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Anne Bronte and others who wrote under male pseudonyms.
 - ii. The second phase - Feminist phase: This spanned from 1880-1920. This period is marked by protests; an era that gave women the right to vote.
 - iii. The third phase - Female phase: This spanned from 1920 – 1960. This period is marked by self-awareness that was visible in women's writing.
4. Gynocritics do not intend to eliminate the differences that exist between male and female writing. Rather gynocritics engage themselves in understanding the needs of women's writing which is not a product of sexism. In fact, gynocritics rely on highlighting the female reality.
5. Feminist criticism focuses primarily on the following areas:
 - Representation of women and their experiences in fiction composed by both men and women
 - Women writers and their contribution to the female tradition.
 - Role of gender in the literary texts and the rise of female readership
 - The usage of feminine language
 - Relationship between gender and literary tradition
 - Women as consumers of printed materials
6. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Patricia Meyer Spacks' *The Female Imagination* (1975), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own*, Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976) etc., are some of the popular gynocritical texts.
7. According to Showalter, the common features of women's writings were an unhappy state of mind, awakening of consciousness, suffering, matrophobia etc.

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2.5 SUMMARY

- Showalter in her work mentions that women writers have always extended solidarity with their fellow women writers. This solidarity is also extended to their female readers as well. But this self-awareness related to women's writings did not exist before the 1840s.
- Both the nineteenth and twentieth century literature witnessed the emergence of female monsters. And the female readers resonated with these characters because the monster figures resembled the suppressed and marginalized aspects of their existence.
- It must be borne in mind that during the 1970s structuralism was creating a storm in the literary theory world. Structuralism as we saw it in literature relied on systematic examination of given texts. The theoretical premise was proposed by the linguists Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson.
- The literary history constructed by men continuously exploited and manipulated female existence especially in popular culture. Moreover, the study of women from the point of view of semiotics made it clear that the whole approach of understanding women was simply misplaced.
- Showalter coined the term 'gynocritics' to describe a literary criticism that was based on a feminine perspective. The actual role and significance of gynocritics is most lucidly explained by the author in her essay.
- But one must not confuse the role of gynocritics. They do not intend to eliminate the differences that exist between male and female writing. Rather gynocritics engage themselves in understanding the needs of women's writing which is not a product of sexism.
- Showalter justifies the need for a new model of reading by reminding the readers that women are not a homogenous group. They differ in race, culture, nature and geography. And no women can be considered similar to other and thus, a universally generic narrative cannot be built around them.
- While reading 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' we must keep in mind that feminist literary criticism only offers few strategies to analyse texts available in popular culture. The criticism intends to study representation of gender and sexuality in literature produced by both men and women.
- Showalter insists that gynocritics must work towards developing a literature of their own. While the feminist critique are the consumers of the male texts that did not make an effort to individualize women or see them as independent entities who are beyond stereotypes, gynocritics focused on creating literature by women.
- Gynocritics do not develop an angry or romantic fixation over androcentric literature. Rather they focus on women's writing as a fundamental and basic aspect of female reality. To express themselves, women do not have to rely on either imitation or protest because each one will make them dependent in some form or other.

- Gynocritics explored the distinctly feminine subjects like domesticity and childbirth in their writing. Thus, helping uncover a female literary tradition where the subjectivity and the thought process of the women were highlighted.
- Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Patricia Meyer Spacks' *The Female Imagination* (1975), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own*, Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976) etc., are some of the popular gynocritical texts.
- To shape her female-centric theory, which was radical in all possible ways, Showalter relied heavily on feminist historians and sociologists. She engages in an interesting discussion on Elizabeth Barrett Browning while commenting on the idea of completeness.
- Elaine Showalter in her seminal work, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977), talks about the misrepresentation of the women characters by the androcentric scholarship. She gloriously counters the 'singular anomaly' approach which was the image that women writers were saddled with.

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2.6 KEY WORDS

- **Marxism:** It was a theory created by Marx and Engels to establish a classless society where workers were appreciated and worked to benefit the common good.
- **Structuralism:** It is a method of interpreting and analysing such things as language, literature, and society, which focuses on contrasting ideas or elements of structure and attempts to show how they relate to the whole structure.
- **Semiotics:** It is the study of the use of symbolic communication. Semiotics can include signs, logos, gestures and other linguistic and non-linguistic communication methods.
- **Psychodynamics:** It is also known as dynamic psychology. It is the study of the interrelationship of various parts of the mind, personality, or psyche as they relate to mental, emotional, or motivational forces especially at the unconscious level.
- **Androcentric literature:** This literature places the masculine perspective at the centre of one's worldview, culture, history, thus, marginalizing femininity.

2.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the 'Feminist phase' of the female literary tradition.
2. What do you understand by the term 'feminist criticism'?

Elaine Showalter:
'Towards a Feminist
Poetics'

3. Briefly mention the significant features of 'feminist critique or woman as reader'.

4. Who coined the term 'gynocritics'? What does it denote?

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Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyse the significance of the title of the essay, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics'.
2. 'Gynocritics do not develop an angry or romantic fixation over androcentric literature.' Elucidate the statement.
3. Examine the significant features of the essay, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics'.

2.8 FURTHER READINGS

Blain, Virginia, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements, (Eds.). 1990. *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Todd, Janet, (Ed.). 1989. *British Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide*. London: Rutledge.

Lonsdale, Roger (Ed.). 1989. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Black, Helen C. 1893. *Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches*. Glasgow: David Bryce & Sons.

Endnotes

1. 1919-2013. British-Zimbabwean novelist. Won Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007
2. 1919-1999. Irish-British novelist and philosopher
3. 1939– present. British novelist & critic
4. 1918-2006. British story writer, novelist, poet and essayist
5. 1857-1913. Swiss linguist, semiotician and philosopher
6. 1896-1982. American linguist and literary theorist. Pioneered structural linguistics
7. Established by Plato, the philosopher from ancient Greece
8. 1941-2019. American Feminist literary critic and activist
9. 1945-2018. American author and teacher

BLOCK - II POETRY

*Kamala Das - A Hot
Noon in Malabar*

UNIT 3 KAMALA DAS - *A HOT NOON IN MALABAR*

NOTES

Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 About the Poet
- 3.3 Critical Analysis
- 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

3.0 INTRODUCTION

*A Hot Noon in Malabar*¹ by Kamala Das chronicles her experiences at her grandmother's home in Malabar. The poet draws a word picture and describes a typical mundane summer noon where she encounters various individuals with various interests walking down the street. Like most of other poems written by Kamala Das, this poem also delves into the poet-narrator's personal space. *A Hot Noon in Malabar* is a celebration of the weather, the landscape and the general life of Malabar. This poem takes one through the road of memories and nostalgia. Through the poem, the poet-narrator remembers her childhood days that had a deep impact on her. And, the readers get to witness this during the course of the poem.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the use of imagery and language in *A Hot Noon in Malabar*
- Analyse the feelings expressed by the poet-narrator in the poem
- Explain the structure of the poem

3.2 ABOUT THE POET

Kamala Das, also known as Kamala Suraiyya, was born on 31 March 1934. A sophisticated Indian poetess, she is a distinguished Indian writer who composes in

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English as well as Malayalam, her native language. Much of Kamala Das's writing in Malayalam are published in the pen name 'Madhavikkutty'. Her mother was a Malayalam short story writer. She also embarked on her literary career as writer by writing Malayalam short stories. But after the publication of her Indian English verse collection *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), she gained a wider recognition as an author and creative writer. The success of this collection paved her way to the publication of two other poem collections: *The Descendants* (1967) and *The Old Play House and Other Poems* (1973).

Kamala Das's work celebrates the spirit of the Indian women of contemporary times and chronicles their agony of being bereft of love and longing for emotional fulfilment. The nature of her poetry is confessional. Her poems express her inner-most desires in their existing sentiments stripped of any superfluous veil of emotions. Her poetry reflects the desires of the physical body and a quest for the beautiful and the serene that is not within her reach. This Indian poetess was also fond of writing about memories of childhood, family relations, and the family's great house.

Love and marriage are ever-permeating themes in Das's poetry. These themes are mostly always rooted in her Nair heritage, her own home situated in Kerala and her grandmother's place. Her poems like '*Summer in Calcutta*', '*In Love*', '*Composition*', '*The Suicide*', '*An Intensity*' reflects the intensity of her feelings with an underlined feeling of protest.

Das released six volumes of verse between 1965 and 1985. Drawing upon devout and household symbolisms to investigate a sense of individuality, Das notifies of intensely individual knowledge, encompassing her development into womanhood, her failed quest for love within and outside the ceremony of wedding, and her existence in a matriarchal dominated world within the rural confines of southern India especially after inheriting the home that belonged to her forefathers.

After the publication of *Summer in Calcutta*, Das has been courted with controversy. She soon became renowned for her use of odd imagery and outspokenness in her poems. For example in her poems '*The Dance of the Eunuchs*' and '*The Freaks*', Das sketches the exotic to talk about her sexuality and her journey to fulfil her need. In '*An Introduction*', Das takes the problems of women to a universal level and address openly those topics which were hitherto conventionally considered as personal knowledge, proposing that women's individual sentiments of yearning and parting are part of the collective know-how of woman's life. In next collection of poems *The Descendants* (1967), "*The Maggots*" interlinks the agony of lost love with existing Hindu myths, while "*The Looking-Glass*" explains the idea that women are expected to carry out in love and passion, those very things that humanity usually marks as unclean. Yet, these are things the women are presumed to deliver when in love. The verse suggests that an unexpressed love is equal to no love experience; only a total engrossment in the emotion of love can provide fairness to this experience. In *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1975), poems like "*Substitute*", "*Gino*", and "*The Suicide*"

analyse the malfunction of corporal love to achieve fulfillment, to help oneself release from his/her ownself, or to invoke the past, while in works like “*The Inheritance*” looks into the integrity of the creative self in the light of devout fanaticism. In *Tonight, This Savage Rite: The Love Poems of Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy* (1979), Das remembers Krishna in her investigation of the stress between personal love and religious transcendence. *The Anamalai Poems* (1985), is a sequence of short verses which was written after Das lost the parliamentary elections in the year 1984. Some poems like “*Delhi 1984*” and “*Smoke in Colombo*” remind the readers the massacre of the Sikhs in India and the civil war that rocked Sri Lanka. Under the pseudonym Madhavikutty, Das has released numerous publications in the Malayalam language.

Das’s autobiography *My Story* was published in 1976. She wrote two novels, *Manas* (1975) and *Alphabet of Lust* (1976). She was honored with Sahitya Akademi Award in 1985 for her literary contributions.

The Canadian writer Merrily Weisbord was good friend of Das who knew each other for a long time. Their friendship is celebrated in Merrily Weisbord’s memoir, *The Love Queen of Malabar*, published in 2010.

Check Your Progress

1. How do Kamala Das’s work celebrate the spirit of the Indian women?
2. List Kamala Das’ work in novel and autobiography.

3.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

A Hot Noon in Malabar is a semi-autobiographical composition that draws inspiration from the memories of the childhood of the narrator when she used to stay with her grandparents in Malabar. The poet-persona recalls the usual routine of regular insignificant people like the Kurava girls, fortune-tellers, beggars, bangle sellers at that place. Each of these folks invariably stopped by her home in order to sell the goods or services which they carried with them and thought of earning something by selling them at a reasonable price. Critics agree that this intense connection with the past could be a result of narrator’s longing for her home. Having married off at an early age, Das longed for her native home and this yearning is reflected in the poet-narrator’s experiences as well. She probably was lonely in her new home and pictured a romantic rural life in her imagination that she had long left behind. The old life was what she was most comfortable with while her new life in city only made her feel more alienated. The modern life does not seem to appeal to her as much the life gone by.

The poet narrates about the pleading voices of the beggars whom she had heard complaining and crying over their wretched life. The beggars and their appeal in the hot noon as they pass by the poet’s lane still haunt her. Then of course there

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are those fancy fortune tellers who walk through the lanes announcing their magical abilities to predict the future. According to the poet, those fortune tellers who visited Malabar were from a different place, invariably the dwellers of hilly regions. They carried with them the parrots who were put in a cage and some fortune cards. Yet, as she fondly recalls the fortune teller episode, the poet does mention that this profession has now lost its sheen.

With the advancement of science and technology and rapid urbanization, the people in general have stopped believing in these methods. The line is a clear indication that despite her homesick state the poet has not overlooked the way the times have changed. The way life has moved from being vibrant and idyllic to being lonesome and urbanized. After fondly recalling the beggars and fortune tellers the poet focuses on the episode of brown Kurava girls. They too predicted the future. Their old eyes were skilled to read the palm lines and explain what lies in future through their singing voice. The eyes are described as old because they are ripe with experience and victims of poverty. This line is eloquent in highlighting the socio-economic position of the ladies. They are representation from the margins of the society without access to numerous basic amenities and they move around from place to place to earn themselves a basic livelihood. The singsong voice of the Kurava girls adds to the idyllic world that the poet is constructing. Moreover, the phrase can also suggest that from a child's perspective their voice is genuinely pleasing to the ear or maybe they were so skilled in the art of prediction that they had developed a distinct oratory style of their own that was attractive.

Following the Kurava girls, we have the bangle seller's episode. According to the narrator, the bangle-sellers who visited them carried with them various colourful bangles with them. The poet makes an interesting observation as to how the bangles were covered with dust, highlighting long distances the bangle sellers travel to reach these homes. The poet-narrator mentions how the hardships of the bangle-sellers were evident in their cracked heels. The heels indicated that the bangle-sellers walked miles together on foot to earn their livelihood by selling bangles. In fact, as the poet-narrator recalls because of the cracks the heels made strange noises while climbing on the hills. A poem creates a beautiful juxtaposition by bringing together the colorlessness of poverty and colourfulness of the bangles. The narrator in this section plays around with colours and describes how the green, blue, red bangles look striking against the black floor on which it is placed for display and selection.

After discussing about the regular passersby in the street, the poet-narrator shifts her focus to those strangers who were unfamiliar with the way and were invariably confused about directions while climbing up the hill. Since these people were new to the location, they would invariably peep through the glass windows of the house of the poet-narrator to figure out if any one stayed there. Eventually, they would walk in to the house and look around to get some water to drink. The narrator says that since these strangers would have walked into the house from scorching sun, for few moments they feel blinded on entering the house of the

poet, which was naturally less bright than the summery noon outside. The narrator suggests that most of these strangers preferred to not talk with the family as they did not know the narrator's family and also they were unsure whether to trust the family or not. The narrator claims that most of the time these people did not speak, and if they ever spoke their voice felt curious and wild as if they were voices from the jungle. This is another interesting simile which is in contrast to the sing song voice of the Kurava girls. It is interesting to note that while the familiar voices sound pleasant to the poet the unfamiliar ones are cacophonous and troublesome. Even though strangers stopping by to have water on summer noon is a familiar experience for most of the Indian households, the poet gives this practice a different tone with the usage of the word 'wild'. The noon was not just piercing, it was wild too and wildness brings with it a sense of untamed passion.

From her nostalgic past, the poet persona moves to her present life. She is not happy with her present life. The marital life for unsaid reasons is not a delightful experience. The poet-narrator insists that if she was at her home in Malabar then life would have been different as she would be in the company of the strangers and dusty feet, which are rather unimaginable in her new life and it is this old life that she yearns for.

The poem consists of 23 lines in total. It is composed in one single long stanza yet the progression of thoughts can be divided into three different segments: lines 1-11 first part, lines 11-21 second part and lines 21-23 third part. The first segment talks about the people who are seen moving around the house of the poet in Malabar town. The second segment narrates the visits of strangers who would stop by the poet's place to ask for water as the scorching sun parched them. The third part narrates how the poet is acutely longing for her home and the busy surroundings of summer noons. All this fun and activities are missing in her modern life and she feels too detached from everything around her. The poem is filled with imageries and employs a lucid language. *A Hot Noon in Malabar* is not an independent standalone memory of a single day. Rather the poem is a collection of memories that spans over many summers. The poet manages to create a strong realistic setting that enhances the reading experience. There is a consistent sad and somber appeal to the poem. Das employs a style that accommodates the autobiographical tone and creates a rhythmic flow by incorporating internal rhymes and not end rhymes. The word 'noon' is used repeatedly and is the major rhyming word in the poem. Interestingly, many critics opine that the structure of the poem resembles a prose than that of poetry. The poem relies heavily on punctuations like comma and semi-colon to provide clarity of thoughts and a musicality to the work. *A Hot Noon in Malabar* will always remain significant for its economical use of language.

The narrator manages to create a world of words that enlivens the bygone years. The hot noon resonates with wild love, wild men and wild thoughts. The poem takes the readers back to the days of youth and childhood which fills one with a sense of relief especially in those moments of crisis when life takes a wrong

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turn. The poem is a eulogy on noon time. As we witness, the poet-narrator is fascinated by the noon hour. The sun and its mighty power symbolizes an intense passion. The blazing sun represents the carnal desires consumed by the narrator. The poem despite its introductory lines about strangers and life in general eventually move towards a noon for 'wild men, wild thought and wild love' that echoed in wild jungle-voice. It must be borne in mind that the atmosphere of noon in the poem is reproduced by repeated use of the word 'noon'. We have lines like 'a noon for men...', 'a noon for strangers...' etc. The memories are created and pictured through noon. Finally, we see that noon is associated with its heat and the poet regrets that she cannot have access to it anymore: "this hot noon, at my home in Malabar and I so far away...". While these lines trigger the senses the 'jungle voices' introduce the much needed drama and appeals to the auditory organs just like the 'singsong' and 'whining'. The effectiveness of the epithets enhances the nostalgic tone of the poem.

The authenticity imparted to the poem can be experienced from the lines that talks about dust covered feet of the bangle-sellers or visible cracks on the heels or strangers returning without asking for help because they are unable to see anyone in not so well lit rooms. Das introduces interesting linguistic phrases and similes in her poem that makes her poem so enticing. We get to see usages like 'brimming with the sun', 'devouring rough miles' etc. And then, jungle-voices aptly summarize her experience of being lonely that takes her back to the summers of Malabar. The intensity of her desire to return is expressed in the lines 'to be here, far away, is torture'. The use of the article 'a' in the title *A Hot Noon in Malabar* makes the narrative a reflection of a typical summer in Malabar and not a very specific one. N. V. Raveendran² comments, the 'time - the noon - at which the speaker reflects her past experiences when at her home in Malabar in similar afternoons and what might be happening there presently is given emphasis by the repetition of "this"'. The binaries of past and present, 'far away' and 'my home', 'Brimming sun' and 'window-drapes', 'outside' and 'my home' etc., adds to the urgency of action and creativity of imagination.

While narrating her own sense of being displaced from her place of comfort to a new lonely place, the poet-narrator universalizes her plight by recalling the beggars, Kurava girls, fortune tellers, bangles-sellers and so forth. Each one is struggling under the fierceness of the sun. These cultural markers are the regular folks typical to any village in Kerala. The narrator's plight and the lives of the socially and economically deprived people merge into a shared pain as described in the poem. In this context, S. Murali suggests that the poem is, 'a poignant gesture of affection and sympathy' that takes a look at the life of other people and their sorrows 'under the bright sun of imagination'³.

The pedestrian –observer equation takes an interesting turn when the obvious signs of economic disparity make the narrator conscious of her own vantage position. We get to know that the fortune-tellers as well as the beggars are 'stained with time'. The passersby are covered with the 'dust' because of the long walks

and dusty roads they have travelled. Each one has travelled ‘devouring rough miles’ leading to cracks on the heels’. But that is how life is, and there is no alternative to it. They have to travel from far flung areas (hills) and visit door to door either to sell a product (bangles) or a service (predicting future). And, if they having nothing to offer they will just beg. This observation further exposes the social evils of the society where the poor have to rely on the mercy of the rich or well-established people (like the narrator’s family) to earn alms or livelihood. And it is not the poor who long for the support of the good people, we also see sensitive souls like the narrator herself longing for the comfort of her good days. Irrespective of their specific social status, the poor and the stranger in the rural areas seems to have access to shelter (the house of poet- narrator) and water (the well) which is a powerful signifier of a progressive culture. And the poet decides to put forth this experience while being away from her home. It is interesting to note that usually while someone composes a piece on rural life the description usually meanders around the lush fields, the rain soaked earth, the golden mornings or the breezy evenings or the beauty of the natural habitat; whereas here in this poem, the poet decides to speak about noon that too one that is experienced in the peak of summer. The poet’s romanticization of noon only highlights her feeling of isolation which is so intense that even the hot noon appears charming from her point of view.

Kamala Das was celebrated for her confessional style of writing. In fact, critics have identified her style with the likes of Sylvia Plath⁴ who too relied on confessional ⁵style to express herself. She voiced the pains and sufferings of women through her words. Her female characters were real women of flesh and blood who spoke about love, intimacy, lust, infidelity without hesitation. They were not stock characters from nowhere land. Having suffered through her life, she wrote how women hardly existed in a society where man dominated all aspects of life and living. She explains this feeling in the following words:

This has always been
Someone else’s world not mine
My man my sons forming the axis
While I, wife and mother
Climbed the glass panes of their eyes⁶

In fact, many a times, Das has written how she longed to break free from the burdens of being a women. There was a strong sense of honesty in her work, which was devoid of any guilt, something that the world surrounding her was not experienced to. This led to numerous setbacks, yet she did not yield to them. Das’ poems are marked by aesthetic repetitions, like the word ‘wild’ in ‘*A Hot Noon in Malabar*’. Her concerns about patriarchy wielding power to control the lives of women, finds a resonance in ‘*A Hot Noon in Malabar*’ too. After all the narrator is put in a location that is far away from her place of love leaving the narrator remorseful and lonely. It appears her relocation is a result of her marriage which

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has distanced herself from the surroundings and people whom she found solace in. It has been usually pointed out by critics that Das' poems usually oscillate between the idea of fulfilled and unfulfilled love. In the poem, 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' the readers are exposed to the familiar sights that one encounters in a village in India. While the memory of the experiences takes shape, the readers are informed about the soulless life that the narrator is living.

While she desires for a life of the familiar, she is left to deal with one that is eponymous with unfulfilment and loneliness. In the given poem, the poet is also on a quest of identity. The characters she describes in her poem are devoid of any individual identity. Each of the characters are identified by their profession (beggars) or their ethnicity (Kurava girls) their uniqueness (fortuneteller with parrot and cards); while others remain more generalized as 'strangers'. This actually reminds one how integration into society is a daunting task. Even though people like the narrator's granny might be generous to accommodate one and all yet that is not the case. Not everyone is lucky to have the means of establishing oneself within the given parameters of the society. While the narrator herself is fairly well-off, yet she too is caged within the *diktats* of the society, and hence, even her own identity is under threat. And this threat to identity or freedom to express oneself as one desire makes the narrator's experience more universal. Time and again the critics of Kamala Das have insisted that most of her writings were written only with the purpose of seeking attention and her work has not managed to create an impression in the literary world. Yet, despite the naysayers criticizing her quality of work, it is generally agreed that Das was an influential presence in strengthening the feminist movement in India and through her powerful writings, she introduced a new discourse in women's writing.

Check Your Progress

3. What are the common sites or people visible in a village in Malabar as mentioned by the narrator of the poem?
4. Do you think that the narrator is looking for an identity in this poem? Give reasons.
5. What does the 'Sun' denote in the poem?

3.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Kamala Das's work celebrates the spirit of the Indian women of contemporary times and chronicles their agony of being bereft of love and longing for emotional fulfillment. The nature of her poetry is confessional. Her poems express her inner-most desires in their existing sentiments stripped

of any superfluous veil of emotions. Her poetry reflects the desires of the physical body and a quest for the beautiful and the serene that is not within her reach. This Indian poetess was also fond of writing about memories of childhood, family relations, and the family's great house.

2. Das's autobiography *My Story* was published in 1976. She wrote two novels, *Manas* (1975) and *Alphabet of Lust* (1976). She was honoured with Sahitya Akademi Award in 1985 for her literary contributions.
3. *A Hot Noon in Malabar* is a semi-autobiographical composition that draws inspiration from the memories of the childhood of the narrator when she used to stay with her grandparents in Malabar. The poet-persona recalls the usual routine of regular insignificant people like the Kurava girls, fortune-tellers, beggars, bangle sellers at that place.
4. The poet-narrator in this poem appears to be in the quest for an identity. The narrator is narrating the tale without any specific name. In addition, the narrator has given generic names to the kinds of people talked about in this poem such as beggars or Kurava girls. Each of the characters are identified by their profession (beggars) or their ethnicity (Kurava girls) their uniqueness (fortuneteller with parrot and cards); while others remain more generalized as 'strangers'.
5. The sun and its mighty power symbolizes an intense passion. The blazing sun represents the carnal desires consumed by the narrator. The narrator also mentions about the experiences of the strangers in the poem. These strangers used to visit Malabar during the noon time and the scorching heat of the sun would make them look for water from unknown people in the village.

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3.5 SUMMARY

- *A Hot Noon in Malabar* is a semi-autobiographical composition that draws inspiration from the memories of the childhood of the narrator when she used to stay with her grandparents in Malabar.
- The poet narrates about the pleading voices of the beggars whom she had heard complaining and crying over their wretched life. The beggars and their appeal in the hot noon as they pass by the poet's lane still haunt her.
- With the advancement of science and technology and rapid urbanization, the people in general have stopped believing in these methods. The line is a clear indication that despite her homesick state the poet has not overlooked the way the times have changed. The way life has moved from being vibrant and idyllic to being lonesome and urbanized.
- Following the Kurava girls, we have the bangle seller's episode. According to the narrator, the bangle-sellers who visited them carried with them various

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- colourful bangles with them. The poet makes an interesting observation as to how the bangles were covered with dust, highlighting long distances the bangle sellers travel to reach these homes.
- After discussing about the regular passersby in the street the poet-narrator shifts her focus to those strangers who were unfamiliar with the way and were invariably confused about directions while climbing up the hill.
 - From her nostalgic past, the poet persona moves to her present life. She is not happy with her present life. The marital life for unsaid reasons is not a delightful experience. The poet-narrator insists that if she was at her home in Malabar then life would have been different as she would be in the company of the strangers and dusty feet, which are rather unimaginable in her new life and it is this old life that she yearns for.
 - The narrator manages to create a world of words that enlivens the bygone years. The hot noon resonates with wild love, wild men and wild thoughts. The poem takes the readers back to the days of youth and childhood which fills one with a sense of relief especially in those moments of crisis when life takes a wrong turn.
 - The authenticity imparted to the poem can be experienced from the lines that talks about dust covered feet of the bangle-sellers or visible cracks on the heels or strangers returning without asking for help because they are unable to see anyone in not so well lit rooms.
 - While narrating her own sense of being displaced from her place of comfort to a new lonely place, the poet-narrator universalizes her plight by recalling the beggars, Kurava girls, fortune tellers, bangle-sellers and so forth.
 - While she desires for a life of the familiar, she is left to deal with one that is eponymous with unfulfilment and loneliness. In the given poem, the poet is also on a quest of identity. The characters she describes in her poem are devoid of any individual identity.

3.6 KEY WORDS

- **Prose**: It refers to a written form other than poetry.
- **Eulogy**: This term refers to a piece of writing, especially a speech or a poem praising someone who has died or retired from work.
- **Epithet**: It is an adjective or phrase expressing a quality or attribute regarded as characteristic of the person or thing mentioned.
- **Eponymous**: An eponym is a person, place, or thing after whom or which someone or something is, or is believed to be, named.

3.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Briefly discuss the writings of Kamala Das.
2. Write a short note on the linguistic phrases and similes used in the poem.
3. Briefly mention the confessional style of writing adopted in the poem.
4. What is the narrator nostalgic about in the poem?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically comment on the title of the poem, '*A Hot Noon in Malabar*.'
2. Discuss the views of critical thinkers expressed about the poem, '*A Hot Noon in Malabar*.'
3. Explain the autobiographical aspects delineated in the poem.

3.8 FURTHER READINGS

Blain, Virginia, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements, (Eds.) 1990. *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Todd, Janet, (Ed.). 1989. *British Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide*. London: Routledge.

Lonsdale, Roger (Ed). 1989. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Black, Helen C. 1893. *Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches*. Glasgow: David Bryce & Sons.

Endnotes

1. Originally, published in an anthology called 'Summer in Calcutta' (1965)
2. *The Aesthetics of Sensuality: A Stylistic Study of the Poetry of Kamala Das*, 2000, Atlantic Publishers.
3. Kaur, Iqbal. *Untying and Retying The Text: An Analysis of Kamala Das' My Story*. New Delhi: Bahri Publications 1990.
4. 1932–1963. Poet, novelist, and short-story writer from America. She took her own life at the age of 30.

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*Kamala Das - A Hot
Noon in Malabar*

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5. Confessional Poetry: “A term principally applied to the self revealing style of writing and use of intimate subject matter adopted and pioneered in America” (<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095631501#:~:text=A%20term%20principally%20applied%20to,Berryman%2C%20Sexton%2C%20and%20Plath.>)
6. ‘A Widow’s Lament’

UNIT 4 SAROJINI NAIDU: *THE SOUL'S PRAYER*

Sarojini Naidu:
The Soul's Prayer

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Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 About the Poet
- 4.3 Critical Analysis
- 4.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.5 Summary
- 4.6 Key Words
- 4.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 4.8 Further Readings

4.0 INTRODUCTION

The poem, *The Soul's Prayer* by Sarojini Naidu¹, talks about the problems of life and death. It is an effort by a thirteen year old girl to communicate with the almighty. The poem starts on an innocent note when the young girl, asks God to reveal to her the various laws that govern the cycle of life and death. The poem is a metaphysical musing to understand the life beyond death. The girl acknowledges that she is aware of the existence of both life and death and that is why she would like to know this twin mystery. She is of the firm opinion that she definitely is blessed by God and as she owns her life to His breath.

4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Critically analyse the poem, *The Soul's Prayer*
- Comment on the title of the poem, *The Soul's Prayer*
- Explore the basic themes of the poem, *The Soul's Prayer*

4.2 ABOUT THE POET

She was a child prodigy and began writing at the age of 12. *Maher Muneer*, her first play impressed the Nawab of Hyderabad. It was written in Persian and is indicative of the wide influences that can be seen in her work. She was given the sobriquet 'The Nightingale of India' for her poetic work. In recognition of her work on women's issues her birthday is celebrated as Women's Day in India. Her contribution to the field of Indian poetry cannot be doubted. This reputation was

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cemented when *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905 and earned her the title 'Bul Bule Hind.'

She was a virtuoso of English metrical forms and her poetry is replete with romantic imagery. A look at her work reveals her growth as a poetess. She began writing poetry influenced by the British models. In her early work she used English metrical forms and Western themes and images. It was Edmund Gosse who read her work, realized her potential and advised her to incorporate Indian subjects and themes into her work. *The Golden Threshold*, her first collection of poems was published in 1905. The book combines traditional poetic forms with images of Indian life. This book was extremely successful and readers adored her deft handling of English as well as her representation of Indian life. Her second volume *The Bird of Time* (1912), deals with the issues of death and grief. Some poems in this volume also give voice to her patriotic and religious beliefs. Gosse, in the foreword of the volume praised Naidu for her skill in exploring complex issues in a delicate romantic language. The dominant note in *The Broken Wing* (1917) is patriotic and she focuses exclusively on the description of Indian culture. This volume contains some of her best poems and was the last volume published in her lifetime. These three volumes occupy a place of eminence in the history of Indo-Anglian poetry. In 1918 *Feast of Youth* was published. Later, *The Magic Tree*, *The Wizard Mask* and *A Treasury of Poems* also came out. *The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India* (1937) was a collection of the first three volumes of her poetry. *The Feather of the Dawn* (1961) published posthumously, contained poems written in 1927 by Naidu.

Works

- *The Golden Threshold*, 1905
- *The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death & the Spring*, 1912
- *The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and the Spring*, 1917
- *Muhammad Jinnah: An Ambassador of Unity*, 1916
- *The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India*, 1943
- *The Feather of the Dawn*, 1961
- *The Indian Weavers*, 1971

Famous Poems

- *Damayante to Nala in the Hour of Exile*
- *Ecstasy*
- *Indian Dancers*
- *The Indian*
- *Indian Love-Song*
- *Indian Weavers*

- *In Salutation to the Eternal Peace*
- *In the Forest*
- *In the Bazaars of Hyderabad*
- *Leili*
- *Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad*
- *Palanquin Bearers*
- *The Pardah Nashin*
- *Past and Future*
- *The Queen's Rival*
- *The Royal Tombs of Golconda*
- *The Snake-Charmer*
- *Song of a Dream*
- *Song of Radha, the milkmaid*
- *The Soul's Prayer*
- *Suttee*
- *To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus*
- *To the God of Pain*
- *Wandering Singers*
- *Street Cries*
- *Alabaster*
- *Autumn Song*
- *Bangle Sellers*
- *The Coromandel Fishers*
- *To youth*
- *The Festival of Memory*

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While Sarojini Naidu worked for the overall uplift of Indian women, her approach was not confrontational. She was not working along the lines of Western feminists when they campaigned for 'emancipation.' Instead her aim was to generate a sense of harmony between the two sexes so that they would co-operate and work together for freedom and progress. She worked on the need for education for women and also protested against social practices that led to discrimination against women. She argued that it was imperative to equip women with skills and to free them from the burden of outmoded thoughts. In the Calcutta Session of the Indian, National Congress in 1917, she declared: 'Womanhood of India stands by you today. When your hour strikes, when you need torchbearers in the darkness, standard bearers to uphold your honour... the womanhood of India will be with

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you as holders of your banner, sustainers of your strength.' She linked the woman's movement with the national struggle.

It was under her initiative that the Patna session of the Women's Conference campaigned against *pardah*. Gandhi inaugurated the campaign and exhorted the women of India to discard the veil. Her poem '*Pardah Nashin*' can be seen in this light. While critics have seen the poem as a glorification of the sheltered life led by women of the royal family in Hyderabad, this is a misreading of the poem. The poem is, in fact, an indictment of the *pardah* system.

Sarojini Naidu gave a systematic and organized form to the women's movement in India. She also helped Indian women realize the intimate connection between their own progress and the nation's progress towards political and economic freedom. She stressed that women had an important role in the national life through their patient service and their aptitude for reconciling divergent interests and attitudes. She also encouraged women of the higher classes to go out of their comfort zones and take the women's movement to the villages and the masses. She dealt with various issues concerning women's issues: franchise, seclusion, economic security, political representation, right to divorces, and the importance of women in the country's cultural progress. She was convinced that instead of looking to the West for inspiration Indian women should look at their own heritage for inspiration. She praised the ancient Indian concept of ideal woman in the Asian Relations Conference in 1947. *The Statesman* took her to task for it in an editorial. It charged the poetess for ignoring the ugly side of the picture and presenting a highly idealized and romantic image of women in ancient India. However, this is a misreading since through the poem she is trying to suggest the detrimental effect of preventing women from interacting with the world around them.

Before we make assessment of her poetry, especially with regard to the representation of women it is important to remember that her images are steeped in Indian ethos. Therefore, the women in her poetry are quintessentially Indian in their beliefs and behaviour. This does not mean that Sarojini Naidu thinks that there is no room for improvement. Instead even as she shows the 'Indian' experience she steadfastly refuses to romanticize it. She looks at the experiences of women across class and religious lines and realizes that all of them suffer from the same limitations and constrictions. Her poetry can, therefore, be seen as the manifesto of the direction she wants the women's movement in India to take. She wants it to address specific Indian problems in a very Indian way. The fact that such an approach is necessary is evident from the women represented through the poems '*Song of Radha*' and '*Pardha Nashin*.' In the former women can find a place of their own only in the throes of a religious ecstasy. And even then this has to be forced from a begrudging society. The argument coming from patriarchal society is that women's actions and roles are controlled in all spheres. This idea is repeated again in the second poem. Women's minds need to be freed. The comfort their physical bodies are in becomes irrelevant in the face of mental slavery. Considering

the fact that at the time these poems were written the nation was involved in the freedom struggle her agenda becomes even more important. It will be impossible to create a truly free and independent India if its women continue to be enslaved by outdated ideologies. Therefore, we can see these poems as her clarion call for the intellectual and spiritual freedom for Indian women.

*Sarojini Naidu:
The Soul's Prayer*

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Check Your Progress

1. Which was the first play written by Sarojini Naidu?
2. Which was her first collection of poems and when was it published?

4.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The young girl announces that she intends to consume 'life to the lees' because she is preparing herself to meet two extremely different emotions; pain and joy. It is important to understand that even though the poem is written by a thirteen year old girl; her thoughts are rather extremely mature and philosophical for her age. Even at this tender age, she is well-versed with the tribulations and plights that life has to offer. She insists that her longing to experience the difficult and the different only lead to draining of the best and the worst of the planet Earth.

The girl is very sure that she does not want to miss out on any celebrations or joy ('Spare me no bliss'). And, at the same time, she does not want to run away from any unfortunate situation either. She is ready to accept both the good and the bad that life offers with open arms ('Withhold no gift or grief I crave'). It will be a blessing for her to experience both and not be denied any one. She definitely is keener on the 'mystic knowledge of the grave'. She is ready to attain the wisdom of death and intricate understanding of love and life. She wants to explore the unexplored so that she can gain insight which she still has not been able to access to.

The girl tells us that God always does answers her prayers. And that is why she is sure that this time too, the almighty will pay attention to her words. God has been kind and he will definitely help her soul be blessed with the power of passion as well as desires while taking her on a journey of spiritual enlightenment. She then tells the readers that God has been strict with her. Of course, she is quick to mention, that his strictness was not too harsh ('Lord, Thou didst answer stern and low'). He calls her as 'child' which is indicative of a sense of protection that the almighty's presence has brought to the girl. Yet, on the other hand, the use of the word 'child' could indicate towards a situation where one was not worldly wise or lacked experience. Either way, the address establishes a sense of intimacy and a strong bond that the girl and the almighty shared. The almighty informed the girl that she has his blessings and she will definitely encounter fame and happiness

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(‘Thou shalt drink deep of joy and fame’). The use of the word ‘drink’ indicates that the experience of bliss and prosperity will bring a sense of joy and it will help her quench her thirst of knowledge that she had been longing for. She informs that love will consume her, just the way fire consumes all (‘And love shall burn thee like a fire’). It is believed that fire is the only element which has the power of cleansing without causing any harm to it. The young girl, like the flame of purgation, will be purified with flames of pain. The pain of cleansing will turn her pure and vibrant all over again, thus, not corrupting her soul (‘To purge the dross from thy desire’). We are told that this soul which is now cleansed with the fire of pain is a pure spirit. This spirit is an elevated one and will aspire for salvation. It is told to us that as the soul will be beyond the extremities of happiness and sorrow, it will be able to move towards the path of peace. While longing for peace, the soul will definitely look forward to release itself from the powers of the unconditional prayer. It is believed that focusing only on prayers makes one start believing in God without actually feeling his presence. This experience is rather a limited understanding of the power of Almighty. It is not good being that blind. But to have faith in God, one must also develop a sense of realization and experience God while exchanging prayers. In a situation like this, it will be easier for someone to master the art of being in peace. Peace can be attained only after experiencing the enigma and the aura that brings one close to spiritual realization.

In the religious scriptures, number seven has great significance. We find the inclusion of the word ‘seven’ in various everyday common coinages like ‘in seventh heaven’. We also know from our reading of Bible that God created this universe in seven days. And, that is why, we have the use of the word seven-fold height (‘bending from my sevenfold height to give the statement a more divine feel’). It is explained that the Almighty will bless her with his ‘quickenning grace’. The adjective quickenning is used in the poem because God is omnipresent. His Grace is accessible to all and he does not hesitate to help his devotees. We are told that the life nothing more than a prism which is filled with the light of God (‘Life is a prism of My light’). The speaker says that the white light stands for the purity of soul and spirit. And once this light enters the Earth through the prism of life, the world around us is filled with vibrant colours of divinity that makes us feel blissful and happy. But like all things good, even the celebration of life is punctured by the existence of death and destruction. Death is the shadow (‘And Death the shadow of My face’), like life was the prism. But, the speaker agrees that this process of annihilation is of utmost significance otherwise change and procreation cannot be shaped.

The central idea of the poem revolves around the child’s efforts to speak with God. The child is a devotee and she is asking questions related to existential issues. The poem is all about the discussion that takes place between the God and the speaker that chronicles ideas about life and the experience of consciousness. The poem primarily focuses on the various facets of existence. The last line with its philosophical tone, insists that both life and death are part of the same experience. Each one of this connects the individual with the higher level of consciousness. Life

functions in a dualistic manner, where one encounters both birth and death, creation and destruction in a simultaneous manner and each one moves in its own course creating a balance in the universe. *The Soul's Prayer* underlines the mystic vision that is expressed by the young speaker and is shared by the poet as well. The poem, needless to say, is an imaginary conversation where the soul or the conscience requests the almighty to guide her through the existential crisis and find meaning of life.

The poet lucidly brings into focus the problems of life and death. She reminds the readers that life is not a linear journey of only happiness and only sorrows. Rather, it is a combination of all emotions. One will encounter sorrows, problems, confusions, death, celebrations and everything in between during this lifetime. By making the poem an experience of a thirteen year old girl, the poet introduces a pure soul. This is an interesting element in the poem, because it is always easy for a pure soul to connect with God than a corrupt one; and in this context, who better than a child. A child's curiosity, her inexperience, her persistence and her faith makes her the right person to strike a conversation with the God. The speaker despite her age, due to her clarity and vision is able to ask questions pertaining to insightful aspects of living. Through this philosophical discussion, God makes the young girl ready to face the world for all its sweet-bitter experiences. She is ready to give up both gift and grief. Critics have pointed out that the poem has obvious autobiographical references when the speaker says that she is ready to accept all kinds of pain and dangers. Naidu had struggled for long with her poor health and a chronic heart-weakness. And even with that she successfully fought her personal struggle related to health and continued with India's freedom struggle.

Sarojini Naidu is considered to be one of the most prolific Indian English poets. Her poems have a lyrical quality to them, and hence, they were widely popular among the general masses. The beauty and grace of her writing style got her the sobriquet of the 'Nightingale of India'. Critics have pointed out that despite the fact that even though Naidu's poems were in English language, her poetic sensibility was rooted in India. Her poems spoke about India in all its flavours – patriotism, nature, love, religion, women's emancipation, etc. Her poems invariably explored philosophy and spiritualism. Critics seem to agree that Naidu's poetic style was inspired by the Decadents². Despite the influence, there is no denial that as a poet she displayed a strong sense of artistic individuality. She experimented with meter and rhyme. Her poems are usually marked by a strong presence of emotional intensity. It must be mentioned that Naidu's remarkable command over the queen's language made her an unparalleled representative of the Indian English poetry.

Through her religious poetry, Sarojini Naidu reiterated about two fundamental elements of Indian culture. First, the Indian tradition and culture is actually a byproduct of customs and beliefs that have been around for centuries. Second, the spirit of unity is the basis of the Indian diversity. According to Naidu, real religion lies in one faith related to the existing systems of worship. Pure religion

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always unites the soul and the spirit. As a spiritual philosopher who had immense faith in religion, Naidu respected all the systems of worship and people of all religion. Being a practicing Hindu, Naidu showed remarkable respect towards diverse race and creeds. With an unorthodox approach to life and almighty she speaks about the existence of divine qualities in man and that death is a reality that one must not ignore. She relies on the power of the almighty to guide her through the troubled times. Sarojini Naidu had a first-hand experience of the cultural colonization. As a result, she was deeply interested in the revival of religion and spirituality of India. This phase was identified as Indian renaissance. Speaking about her poetry, Naidu in a letter to Arthur Symons³ had written: 'I am not a poet really. I have the vision and the desire, but not the voice. If I could write just one poem full of beauty and the spirit of greatness, I should be exultantly silent forever; but I sing just as the birds do, and my songs are as ephemeral⁴.'

Check Your Progress

3. Who is the narrator of the poem?
4. What is the central idea of the poem?
5. What is the epithet given to Sarojini Naidu?

4.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The first play written by Sarojini Naidu was *Maher Muneer*.
2. *The Golden Threshold* was her first collection of poems and it was published in 1905.
3. The narrator of the poem is a thirteen year old girl who seeks to interact with God in order to understand the existential issues of life and death.
4. The central idea of the poem revolves around the child's efforts to speak with God. The child is a devotee and she is asking questions related to existential issues. The poem is all about the discussion that takes place between the God and the speaker that chronicles ideas about life and the experience of consciousness. The poem primarily focuses on the various facets of existence.
5. Sarojini Naidu has been given the epithet of 'Nightingale of India'. The beauty and grace of her writing style got her the sobriquet of the 'Nightingale of India'.

4.5 SUMMARY

- The young girl announces that she intends to consume 'life to the lees' because she is preparing herself to meet two extremely different emotions; pain and joy.
- The girl tells us that God always does answers her prayers. And that is why she is sure that this time too, the almighty will pay attention to her words. God has been kind and he will definitely help her soul be blessed with the power of passion as well as desires while taking her on a journey of spiritual enlightenment.
- We are told that this soul which is now cleansed with the fire of pain is a pure spirit. This spirit is an elevated one and will aspire for salvation. It is told to us that as the soul will be beyond the extremities of happiness and sorrow, it will be able to move towards the path of peace.
- In the religious scriptures, number seven has great significance. We find the inclusion of the word 7 in various everyday common coinages like 'in seventh heaven'. We also know from our reading of Bible that God created this universe in seven days.
- The central idea of the poem revolves around the child's efforts to speak with God. The child is a devotee and she is asking questions related to existential issues. The poem is all about the discussion that takes place between the God and the speaker that chronicles ideas about life and the experience of consciousness.
- The poet lucidly brings into focus the problems of life and death. She reminds the readers that life is not a linear journey of only happiness and only sorrows. Rather, it is a combination of all emotions. One will encounter sorrows, problems, confusions, death, celebrations and everything in between during this lifetime.
- Sarojini Naidu is considered to be one of the most prolific Indian English poets. Her poems have a lyrical quality to them, and hence, they were widely popular among the general masses. The beauty and grace of her writing style got her the sobriquet of the 'Nightingale of India'.
- Through her religious poetry, Sarojini Naidu reiterated about two fundamental elements of Indian culture. First, the Indian tradition and culture is actually a byproduct of customs and beliefs that have been around for centuries. Second, the spirit of unity is the basis of the Indian diversity.
- Sarojini Naidu had a first-hand experience of the cultural colonization. As a result, she was deeply interested in the revival of religion and spirituality of India. This phase was identified as Indian renaissance.

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4.6 KEYWORDS

- **Metaphysical:** It refers to speculative or abstract reasoning.
- **Tribulation:** It is the state of being in agony or suffering.
- **Colonization:** It is the act of taking control of an area or a country that is not your own, especially using force, and sending people from your own country to live there.

4.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Briefly discuss the life and works of Sarojini Naidu.
2. What is the significance of numerical seven in the religious scriptures?
3. Briefly mention the existential issues which the narrator wants to comprehend in the poem.
4. What are the basic ideas highlighted by Sarojini Naidu in her poems?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the autobiographical elements which abound in the poem, 'The Soul's Prayer.'
2. 'The poem primarily focuses on the various facets of existence.' Elucidate this statement with reference to the poem, 'The Soul's Prayer.'
3. Why was Naidu deeply interested in the revival of religion and spirituality of India?

4.8 FURTHER READINGS

Blain, Virginia, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements, (Eds.). 1990. *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Todd, Janet, (Ed.). 1989. *British Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide*. London: Rutledge.

Lonsdale, Roger (Ed). 1989. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Black, Helen C. 1893. *Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches*. Glasgow: David Bryce & Sons.

Endnotes

1. 1879-1949. India. Poet , political activist, Engaged in freedom movement, Advocated for emancipation of women and civil rights, She was educated at King’s College London and Girton College, Cambridge. She was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and his ideas on Swaraj. She has more than 7 published poetry collections to her credit. She was known as the ‘Nightingale of India’, or ‘Bharat Kokila’.
2. The literary and artistic movement of the nineteenth century.
3. 1865-1945. British critic, poet, magazine editor. He has more than 20 published anthologies of drama, poetry and essays to his credit.
4. *The Golden Threshold* by Sarojini Naidu

*Sarojini Naidu:
The Soul’s Prayer*

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UNIT 5 E.B. BROWNING: *HOW DO I LOVE THEE? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS*

Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 About the Poet
- 5.3 Critical Analysis
- 5.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 5.5 Summary
- 5.6 Key Words
- 5.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 5.8 Further Readings

5.0 INTRODUCTION

How Do I Love Thee? is Sonnet number 43 from the series of sonnets that was written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning¹. In the poem, *How Do I Love Thee?*, E.B. Browning talks about the meaning of real love. According to the poet-speaker, true love is pure passion which is all-consuming. True love is special because it is spiritual in nature. It revolves around the element of faith. The poet-speaker ends the poem by suggesting that true love is eternal and that is why it has the power to survive even death.

5.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Identify the speaker of the poem *How Do I Love Thee?*
- Comment on the structure of the poem
- Discuss the nature of love in the poem *How Do I Love Thee?*

5.2 ABOUT THE POET

Elizabeth Barrett Browning is one of the most talented and famous poets of the Victorian Age. During her times, she was more well-read poet than her husband Robert Browning. She is known for her sonnets dealing with the theme of love and the poem *How Do I Love Thee* is no different, where the poet presents her notions of love. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (6 March 1806–29 June 1861), one

of the most prominent poets of the Victorian era was born in Coxhoe Hall, in County Durham, England to Edward Barrett Moulton Barrett and Mary Graham Clarke. She was an intensely studious and talented child. By 1821, she had read Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and became a passionate supporter of Wollstonecraft's ideas. Her first collection of poems, *An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*, was published in 1826. At the age of 15, Barrett Browning began to battle with a lifelong illness—an intense head and spinal pain resulting in loss of mobility.

During 1837-38, the poet was struck with severe lung problem But illness and personal tragedies (death of two brothers) did not deter her from writing poetry, prose, and even translations. Her 1844 volume, *Poems* made her very popular, leading Robert Browning to write to her, telling her how much he loved her work, and so began one of the most famous courtships in literature. Two of Barrett's most famous pieces were produced after she met Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) and *Aurora Leigh* (1856). Originally, she had no intention to publish the former sonnets as they were extremely personal, but Browning's insistence made her change mind. The sonnets are famous love poems of the Victorian Age or for that matter, any age.

The courtship and marriage between Robert Browning and Elizabeth were carried out secretly as her father would have disapprove of it. After a private marriage at St. Marylebone Parish Church, they honeymooned in Paris and from there went to Italy in September 1846, which became her home almost continuously until her death in 1861. Other major works of Elizabeth are: *The Battle of Marathon: A Poem* (1820); *Miscellaneous Poems* (1833); *The Seraphim and Other Poems* (1838); *A Drama of Exile and Other Poems* (1845); *Poems: New Edition* (1850); *The Poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1850); *Casa Guidi windows: a Poem* (1851); *Two Poems* (1854); *Napoleon III in Italy and other Poems* (1860); *Poems Before Congress* (1860); and *Last Poems* (1862).

Check Your Progress

1. Which age of literature does Elizabeth Browning belong to?
2. When was Browning's first collection of poems published?

5.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning got married in 1846. During their courtship period (May 1845 – September 1846), Elizabeth composed a series of sonnets. These sonnets expressed her feelings of hope, fear, excitement and other emotions of being in love. After marriage, when Robert Browning read the poems he asked her to publish them. But they both were not sure if the orthodox Victorian² readers

*E.B. Browning: How Do
I Love Thee? Let Me
Count the Ways*

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would accept her work. Hence, they decided to published the sonnets under the title *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. This helped them create the illusion that the poems were not original English sonnets but are actually translations from far off land. Eventually, the truth was discovered and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's literary genius was established.

At the beginning of the poem, the poet speaker wonders *How Do I Love Thee?* And immediately responds to her own query by saying 'Let me count the ways'. The sonnet is in the form of a conversation where we do not hear the other speaker or the listener. The other person who could be the lover is addressed as 'thee' in the poem. It must be borne in mid that Elizabeth Barrett Browning had dedicated this sonnet to her husband. And that is why it is believed that the poet-speaker must be saying these words to her husband. The poet-speaker highlights the number of ways in which she loves her beloved. Her love is not one-dimensional. Her love reflects all the aspects of life. It is informed to the readers that the love that is being spoken about is a powerful force. And this force can probably be measured in three-dimensional ways. Then we get to know about a more silent way of love that is more apparent in the daily life of the poet-speaker. She compares this experience with the light of the sun which fills the earth with life and joy. The mundane love paves way to a more humane love. The poet-speaker talks about a love which resonates the love of mankind as a whole. This statement makes her love more encompassing which is gentle, liberated and pure. After this, we are told about a love of intense passion. This passionate love has had helped her overcome her sorrows of the past. Finally, we see the poet-speaker comparing her love for those whom she once revered but unfortunately has fallen out of their favour for numerous reasons. As the poem concludes, the speaker states that each tear and breath that she has is for her husband; she also suggests that if god has His grace on her then she will keep loving him even long after she is no more.

It must be mentioned here that the gender of the speaker is not mentioned in the poem. But given its publication background, some scholars are of the opinion that the 'I' is the poet herself, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. In terms of setting, no specific indication has been given. We can assume it is in the same physical location or takes place inside the mind of the speaker. The two major themes that appear in *How Do I Love Thee?* are love and faith. It speaks about the love of the speaker and her faith in the almighty and eternal quality of love.

The speaker's gender is never specified in the poem. However, one might consider Elizabeth Barrett Browning to be the speaker, as she dedicated this poem to her husband. The speaker muses out loud about her love for someone and then, throughout the sonnet, lists the ways in which she loves him. She addresses this person directly.

How Do I Love Thee? is written in a sonnet³ form. Adhering to its original structure, the poem is written in iambic pentameter with five unstressed and one unstressed syllable. The poem follows a regular rhyme scheme that helps in building the idea of faith through references to God, grace, soul, etc. But the form is slightly

teased in the first and thirteenth lines by altering the rhythm that provides beauty to the poem and emphasis to the thoughts. *How Do I Love Thee?* follows the rhyme scheme of abbaabba (octave) cdcdcd (sestet). There are some half rhymes⁴ in the poem too like faith - breath and ways- grace. To get her point conveyed the poet relies on hyperboles⁵. We have a line that reads: 'With my lost saints-I love thee with the breath / Smiles, tears, of all my life.' This is an extremely exaggerated statement as it is nearly not possible to love someone with breath or smile. There is the use of phrase 'Depth and breadth and height'. Here love is identified as an emotion which has a physical presence and can be measured. In terms of physical measurement, love is larger than life. Finally, we are told, 'I shall but love thee better after death'. This is interesting because the speaker is of the opinion that she is capable of loving her husband more after death. This line is philosophical in its appeal where it seems to convey that the body perishes but the emotions and passion continue beyond the physical realms. Just like hyperboles, the sonnet is marked by a distinct and impressive use of similes. The speaker insists that she loves her man as truly as '...as men strive for Right' and as honestly as a man holy man who is engrossed in prayers. The word 'as' is introduced to establish the simile⁶. The speaker explains that she loves her husband in the same fashion as people who work towards making a more beautiful world. Her spontaneous and generous love can be compared to those good men who work for the betterment of humanity. Next, the speaker says, 'I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.' In this line, the speaker compares the pious and humble aspect of her love to those respectable people who exhibit graciousness. These good men do not expect praise when they help someone; and in the same way, the speaker loves the lover without expecting anything in return. Almost each line of the sonnet says 'I love thee' which when repeated feels like a prayer and establishes a spiritual bond. Also, the soul is personified⁷ in the line: 'My soul can reach'. It is assumed that the soul, like a human being will reach out, just the way the speaker tries to measure the vastness of her love. One can find an enjambment in the poem: 'I love thee with the passion put to use /In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith'. The flow of thoughts does not end with the end of the line; rather it moves to the next line.

The poem makes several references to the idea of life and death. In line 6, we see the poet-speaker mentioning about love reflecting in her everyday life. In the next couple of lines, we hear the speaker saying that her love is present in her breath and smile. And then, she tells how her love will continue to survive beyond the reality of mortality. Interestingly, as the speaker seems to be acutely aware of her limited life she is convinced about the eternal glory of love and insists that if she has the blessings of the almighty she will be able to continue loving her husband even after her death.

In the sonnet, the speaker mentions about two sources of light—one that is emitted from the candle and the other one that is generated by the sun. While the presence of the sun signifies presence of natural light (and hence daytime) the

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reference to the candle light signifies night-time. Just as light is a powerful source of life and energy so is the speaker's husband who is the source of love and a reason for her being in a state of bliss. Light also indicates energy and vitality. By invoking symbols of light, the speaker is trying to suggest that her love is pure and divine and is filled with energy and joy. 'By sun and candle-light' is also a metaphor⁸. The sun and the candlelight both stand for the duration of time. They also indicate the phases of one's life. Love in the life of the speaker keeps her going through her life.

There are numerous references to spirituality and religion in the poem. In the very beginning of the sonnet, the speaker indicates that her love has a transcendental quality and hence she might actually continue being in love with her husband even after death. She suggests that her love and her soul are intertwined, and hence, it is not limited to the powers of the life on Earth. The use of the word grace and faith introduces a divine element in the emotion of love. These words make the passion more spiritual. Finally, she confesses that she trusts God for making her continue to be in love long after her mortal remains have perished.

On the first reading, the sonnet appears to be romantic. The speaker is happy with her love and intends to talk about its multi-dimensional existence. But then a close reading will suggest that the poem takes a sombre and humble approach as it recalls the problems of her past. We are not told about the exact nature of this disappointment; yet, it is told that her faith is now restored. And with the presence of love for her husband life is a better place, thus, making the tone more optimistic and joyful, just as the way it had started. As the poem progresses, the tone of the sonnet shifts to a religious one. Here, the speaker delves deeper into her soul revealing various ways through which love overpowers the pain of her past. The love for the sun reaches a religious adoration. The last two lines are philosophical. The lines draw attention to the eventual death of the speaker. She understands that someday she will be no more, and yet, she longs to love her husband even more as she moves on to the other world.

In the sonnet *How Do I Love Thee?* we are told that true love is beyond death. It is eternal and exists beyond the physical realms. But that does not mean that the poet is ignorant of the powers of the earthly life. And this knowledge creates an interesting tension between life on Earth and a possibility of love beyond death. By referring to her religious faith time and again, the poet manages to make her passionate love elevate itself to a religious stature. She gives the impression that love for her is as powerful as the almighty she has her faith instilled in. Even though many critics suggest that this poem is biographical in nature, yet others propose that such depiction of eternal love could indicate towards a more universal love because both the speaker and addressee are devoid of an identity. Finally, we are informed that the speaker does not nurture similar love for her lover and God. In fact, her romantic love has turned into a religious experience where she has regained her faith that she had lost in her childhood. This has helped her get closer to God.

The poem has one of the most famous opening lines, asking how does she love her husband and goes on to count the ways in which she loves him. Even though romantic in tone, the sonnet relies on rational judgement to explain the power of her love. The speaker makes an attempt to justify love (whether physical or spiritual). She actually decides to ‘count the ways’. The speaker suggests that love can be calculated and measured in mathematical proportions. Of course, she does say that love is dictated by fate, and hence, it carries with it certain qualities that cannot be dictated purely on physical terms. Love for her is more profound and spiritual. Of course, the counting ways soon paves way for a realization that believes that love cannot be explained. The poet-speaker talks about seven ways through which she would like to love her husband. These declarations of her love are fairly unusual which relied on reasoned approach to understand the intensity of the emotion. Eventually, she states that love is pure and relies on self-sacrifice. Love blooms only in simplistic efforts and in the care that one person showers on other.

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Check Your Progress

3. What are the two major themes of *How Do I Love Thee*?
4. Who is the speaker in this poem?
5. What is the form of the poem *How Do I Love Thee*?
6. What are the two sources of light mentioned in the poem? What do they denote?

5.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Elizabeth Barrett Browning is one of the most talented and famous poets of the Victorian Age.
2. Browning’s first collection of poems, *An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*, was published in 1826.
3. The two major themes that appear in *How Do I Love Thee* are love and faith. It speaks about the love of the speaker and her faith in the almighty and eternal quality of love.
4. It must be mentioned here that the gender of the speaker is not mentioned in the poem. But given its publication background, some scholars are of the opinion that the ‘I’ is the poet herself, Elizabeth Barrett Browning.
5. *How Do I Love Thee* has been written in a sonnet form. Adhering to its original structure, the poem is written in iambic pentameter with five unstressed and one unstressed syllable.

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6. In the sonnet, the speaker mentions about two sources of light-- one that is emitted from the candle and the other one that is generated by the sun. While the presence of the sun signifies presence of natural light (and hence daytime) the reference to the candle light signifies night-time. Just as light is a powerful source of life and energy so is the speaker's husband who is the source of love and a reason for her being in a state of bliss. Light also indicates energy and vitality.

5.5 SUMMARY

- Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning got married in 1846. During their courtship period (May 1845 – September 1846), Elizabeth composed a series of sonnets. These sonnets expressed her feelings of hope, fear, excitement and other emotions of being in love.
- At the beginning of the poem, the poet speaker wonders *How Do I Love Thee?* And immediately responds to her own query by saying ‘Let me count the ways’. The sonnet is in the form of a conversation where we do not hear the other speaker or the listener.
- It must be mentioned here that the gender of the speaker is not mentioned in the poem. But given its publication background, some scholars are of the opinion that the ‘I’ is the poet herself, Elizabeth Barrett Browning.
- In the sonnet, the speaker mentions about two sources of light— one that is emitted from the candle and the other one that is generated by the sun.
- There are numerous references to spirituality and religion in the poem. In the very beginning of the sonnet, the speaker indicates that her love has a transcendental quality and hence she might actually continue being in love with her husband even after death.
- On the first reading, the sonnet appears to be romantic. The speaker is happy with her love and intends to talk about its multi-dimensional existence. But then a close reading will suggest that the poem takes a sombre and humble approach as it recalls the problems of her past.
- In the sonnet *How Do I Love Thee?* we are told that true love is beyond death. It is eternal and exists beyond the physical realms. But that does not mean that the poet is ignorant of the powers of the earthly life.
- The speaker suggests that love can be calculated and measured in mathematical proportions. Of course, she does say that love is dictated by fate, and hence, it carries with it certain qualities that cannot be dictated purely on physical terms.

5.6 KEY WORDS

- **Hyperbole:** It is the deliberate use of exaggeration in order to create an effect.
- **Enjambment:** It is a literary device in which a line of poetry carries its idea or thought over to the next line without a grammatical pause.
- **Transcendental:** It is supernatural or beyond the human experience. An example of something transcendental is the ability to communicate with the dead.

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5.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Who is the speaker of this poem?
2. What is the central idea of the poem, *How Do I Love Thee?*
3. Write a short note on the use of similes and hyperboles in the poem.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the references made to life and death in the poem, *How Do I Love Thee*.
2. Do you think that the speaker's love has a transcendental quality to it? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Explain the nature of 'true love' with examples from the poem.

5.8 FURTHER READINGS

Blain, Virginia, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements, (Eds.). 1990. *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Todd, Janet, (Ed.). 1989. *British Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide*. London: Rutledge.

Lonsdale, Roger (Ed.). 1989. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Black, Helen C. 1893. *Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches*. Glasgow: David Bryce & Sons.

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Endnotes

1. 1806-1861. Born, England; died, Italy. By 1850 she had acquired great reputation. In the same year Wordsworth passed away and many claimed she would be the worthy literary successor the great poet. Since her teenage years she succumbed to various illnesses and was on medication for her whole life. It is believed that her frail frame was a result of her poor health and continuous medications. She hailed from a rich family which owned various business and sugarcane plantations. She was the eldest of the 12 siblings. Her work had a liberal point of view. She focused on numerous social causes like slave trade in America, women empowerment, Austrian oppression of the Italians, use of child labour in the mines and the mills etc. Her work had serious religious themes. She took interest in theological debates and had read Hebrew Bible.
2. Victorian Age in British history continued from 1820 -1914. The era owes its name to the reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1901). This was a period that saw Britain acquiring the status of the most powerful empire in the world.
3. A short poem of fourteen lines; usually sonnets have a defined meter and a structured rhyme scheme. It came into existence in thirteenth century Italy. Two major forms of sonnets are Italian or Petrarchan sonnet and English or Shakespearean sonnet.
4. Half rhyme or, slant rhyme or near rhyme or oblique rhyme. Only the final consonant sounds are common. The preceding vowel or consonant sounds are dissimilar.
5. Figure of speech. ‘...creates heightened effect through deliberate exaggeration’ (<https://literarydevices.net/hyperbole/>)
6. Figure of speech; Two objects of dissimilar variety are compared with one another by using ‘as’ or ‘like’.
7. Attributing an inanimate object or non-human thing with human character
8. Figure of speech; the comparison is implied not clearly stated

UNIT 6 SYLVIA PLATH: *DADDY*

Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 About the Poet
- 6.3 Critical Analysis
- 6.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 6.5 Summary
- 6.6 Key Words
- 6.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 6.8 Further Readings

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6.0 INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Plath's¹ *Daddy* is one of her numerous poems that deals with the father symbol. The poem unfolds with a reference that talks about father's black shoe which has seen daughters living under it like a foot. The opening lines sets tone for a repressive mood that indicates entrapment and eventual submission to the situation. The poem soon exposes the readers to a ridiculous imagery of father in the form of words like 'marble heavy' and someone who is 'bag full of God'. And, after that we are given a context to his behaviour. After all, he was a man living in a German-speaking segment of Poland which was ravaged by wars. All these have led the daughter to be extremely scared of her father. Plath has mentioned in one of her notes that the poem is narrated by a girl whose father was a Nazi while her mother in all probability was part Jewish. The daughter becomes the vehicle and carrier of these two antagonistic strains and balances it too. It must be mentioned here that Plath's biological father was neither a Nazi nor her mother was of Jewish origin. Yet, her historical context does help the poet-narrator to create a fictional account of her rebellion against an oppressive father figure.

6.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Explain the daughter-father relationship delineated in the poem
- Discuss the imageries associated with Daddy in the poem
- Identify the autobiographical elements

6.2 ABOUT THE POET

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Sylvia Plath, an American poet, novelist and short story writer, was born on 27 October 1932 to middle class parents in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. Her talent in writing was evident at an early age. She published her first poem when she was eight. She was a sensitive and intelligent girl who aimed at perfection in all that she did. Popular in school, she was a brilliant student receiving straight A's and winning prizes. At the time of joining Smith College on a scholarship in 1950, Plath had an impressive list of publications. During her student days, she wrote over four hundred poems.

Though overtly Sylvia was a perfectionist, she was troubled by personal sorrows which probably surfaced after the death of her father (a college professor) when she was only eight years old. During the summer following her junior year at Smith, having returned from a stay in New York City where she had been a student "guest editor" at *Mademoiselle Magazine*, Sylvia nearly succeeded in killing herself by swallowing sleeping pills. In her autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia wrote about this experience. Her recovery from this involved electroshock and psychotherapy after which she continued her academics and literary pursuits. She graduated from Smith summa cum laude in 1955 and won a Fulbright scholarship to pursue her studies at Cambridge, England.

It was at Cambridge that she met the English poet, Ted Hughes with whom she fell in love. They were married in 1956. In 1960, at the age of twenty-eight, Plath published her first book *The Colossus* in England. The poems in this book were formally precise and well wrought yet they only give an indication to the kind of poems she wrote in early 1961. Plath settled with her husband, Ted Hughes, in an English country village in Devon. The life of marital bliss did not last long and less than two years after the birth of their first child the marriage broke apart. Sylvia's life after that was filled with difficulties. She now lived in a small London flat with her two small children and struggled to survive in spite of ill health and a meagre income. This prompted her to write more than before and she often wrote between four and eight in the morning while her children were still asleep. At times, she managed to write a poem a day pushed by some unseen force that drove her on relentlessly. Her last poems reflected her state of mind; it seemed as if she was controlled by some deeper, powerful force. Death was considered cruelly attractive and psychic pain was something that could physically be felt.

Sylvia killed herself with cooking gas on 11 February 1963, at the young age of thirty. It was the tragic end of a troubled life. Two years later *Ariel*, a collection of some of her last poems, was published; this was followed by *Crossing the Water* and *Winter Trees* in 1971, and, in 1981, *The Collected Poems* appeared, edited by Ted Hughes.

Poetry collections

The Colossus and Other Poems (1960)
Ariel (1961–1965)
Three Women: A Monologue for Three Voices (1968)
Crossing the Water (1971)
Winter Trees (1971)
The Collected Poems (1981)
Selected Poems (1985)
Plath: Poems (1998)

Collected prose and novels

The Bell Jar: A Novel (1963), under the pseudonym ‘Victoria Lucas’
Letters Home: Correspondence 1950–1963 (1975)
Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams: Short Stories, Prose, and Diary Excerpts (1977)
The Journals of Sylvia Plath (1982)
The Magic Mirror (published 1989), Plath’s Smith College senior thesis
The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath, edited by Karen V. Kukil (2000)

Children’s books

The Bed Book (1976)
The It-Doesn’t-Matter-Suit (1996)
Collected Children’s Stories (UK, 2001)
Mrs. Cherry’s Kitchen (2001)

Check Your Progress

1. Mention the autobiographical novel written by Sylvia Plath.
2. Name the English poet who married Sylvia Plath.

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6.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Daddy as a poem is filled with imageries and allusion. These surreal figures of speech are interwoven with the memories of childhood that the speaker has experienced. The dark experiences are narrated through a language that is fluid

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and resembles a nursery rhyme which is interspersed with German language to present a sense of confusion and disillusionment. The poem consists of sixteen stanzas, each one consisting of five lines. But each one has a different rhyme scheme. There is a spontaneous honesty about the feelings expressed and the intersection of personal story with the larger political scenario (Nazi Germany, World War II) elevates the status of the poem.

Plath herself calls *Daddy* a 'light verse'. As a poem, the verse constantly meanders between grotesque, allusions, serious rage and childish flights for the father (the Nazi²). The intertwining of German and English³ creates an interesting confluence that is expressed in the form of nursery rhymes. For example, readers witness like that read:

I never could talk to you.
The tongue stuck in my jaw.
It stuck in a barb wire snare.
Ich, ich, ich, ich.

Of course, Plath gives us an insight into a more shocking statement when the narrator says, every woman falls for a Fascist⁴. Yet, this idea is subsequently explained through the lines that the boot hits the face and the heart is as savage as the violent personality. Offering a twist at the end establishes the Nazi allegory through vampire folklore. According to the narrator, the vampire-husband has managed to impersonate the dead Nazi-father. This impersonation process continues for seven years of marriage and during the period he consumed the wife's blood. Finally, the entire phase of abuse comes to an end when the wife puts a stake⁵ through the vampire's heart and brings an end to the existence of vampire.

We must bear in mind that Sylvia Plath was aware of the Final Solution of the Nazis that was a significant event in World War II⁶. Adolf Eichmann's⁷ trial which lasted for more than 6 months in 1961 was widely published to show the impact of holocaust. As a great supporter of killing people in the gas chamber, he had earned himself the notorious sobriquet of 'desk-murderer'. He was found guilty of all the murders and was hanged finally. Plath had written *Daddy* in the very next year.

Daddy steers clear of the usual idea of the father as an ideal figure to look up to and emulate. Yet, it is an exceptionally difficult a task to erase the idea of that ideal presence. In the poem, the father returns in forms of all negative images. We have vampire, shoe, Nazi, devil, etc. The narrator's father appears initially in the form of a heroic white patriarch and by the time the poem ends he is the black vampire. The father in the poem is painted as a man who is authoritarian, cruel and dominant. Unlike the earlier poems, the father has been transformed into an agent of death than being at the receiving end of external forces which were no lesser than death. Plath seems to be rewriting the entire narrative that she had woven in

'Electra on Azalea Path'. *Daddy* is more of a new poem, with new emotions and new plot and fresh characters. The plot has come a long way from a daughter trying to reunite with the dead father to the daughter's desire of overthrowing her dominant father and killing him. In fact, the narrator wishes to get rid of all the other men who replace her father - the vampire⁸, the husband⁹ Purdah and the Nazi¹⁰. It is obvious that the earlier sense of grief and depression had given way to rebellion and anger in the present poem.

The poem starts by highlighting the circumstances in which the narrator lives. She insists that these circumstances are no longer sufficient to carry on with life. The narrator insists that her life is like a foot which is surviving inside a black shoe. This life is so suffocating that it does not have the power to breathe or sneeze by itself. Soon the speaker addresses her words to her father. She informs him that she is planning to kill him. Yet, immediately she informs the readers that he died much before she actually had the chance to kill him. She informs the readers that her father resembled a horrifying statue that had one toe and he was both huge and gray. Describing the statue like figure, she says her father's head was located in the blue-green waters of the Atlantic Ocean. The narrator informs her father that without fail she used to pray for his return from the dead. The narrator extends her prayers in the German language and informs that the town in Poland where she lives has such a commonplace name that people insist that there are numerous places with the same name. This was the reason why the speaker finds it difficult to tell where her father was or from where he had originally travelled to this place. Any reference to her father made her feel as if her tongue was trapped in her jaw that felt like it was made of barbed wire. She had a feeling that the language she was using was both offensive and disgusting. As per the speaker, she had a problematic association with the German language. For her, German language was the engine of a train which despite her unwillingness carried her to the concentration camp¹¹ like it would to a Jew. At this point, the speaker feels that she was probably a Jew herself. Still trapped in the train journey, she recalls the Austrian state of Tyrol. She tries to figure out a few traits that might connect her to a Jew- she had a Romani ancestry, her tarot cards and her luck was terrible.

Next, we are informed how the speaker is scared of her father. Her father served the German Air Force. He spoke in a manner that seemed impressive but was actually a bundle of nonsense. He possessed blue Aryan eyes and a carefully groomed mustache and his military connection is re-established through armoured vehicles of WWII. The father is no God but he is just a swastika¹² that did not allow light to penetrate it. Then she recalls about a photograph of her father where he is seen standing in front of a blackboard. In this photograph, it is obvious that he had a cleft chin. But the speaker insists that her father not only had a cleft chin but also had a cleft feet¹³ too. She announced that her father was a man of wicked intentions who left no stone unturned to hurt her feelings. When the speaker was about 10-year old, her father had lost his life. And when she was around 20 years old, she unsuccessfully attempted to commit suicide so that she could be buried

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with her father. After the failed attempt, she created a model like figure of her father. This person was like her father. He had a striking resemblance to the Nazi members. But this man had a special fondness for tormenting others and the poet marries him. By killing him, the poet insists that she is also killing another man (her husband). According to the speaker, with the death of the father, the villages which hated him danced and rejoiced at his death and stomped on his body because of his despicable ways.

As the speaker grows, she realizes the father she had idolized all her life was actually a man who promoted violence and oppression. The poem highlights her desire to break free from his captivity. But the poem is not only about the father-daughter relationship. Through the memory of the father we get to witness the general power imbalance that exists between men and women. This imbalance is especially more prominent in a patriarchal society that usually hands over the socio-political and moral authority to men and women are relegated to the secondary status meant to bear the repressive environment. This men-centric world creates a system that relies on the violence of men to curb the freedom and autonomy of women to serve their purpose.

The title of the poem *Daddy* itself is suggestive of a patriarchal dominance. The authoritarian masculine presence is felt at the beginning of the poem while the female speaker is only a child in comparison to the male who is being described. Despite her age, she still seems to be engaged in using a vocabulary meant for a child that has a sing-song quality and structure of a nursery rhyme. The oppressive existence of her father's memory makes her feel like a foot trapped in a shoe for decades. Her identity has been completely annihilated under the draconian presence of her father. The reference to size and dimension only adds to the weight of the speaker's father's memory which is still powerful even after years of his death. The fear of father or male-figure is so intense that women in a male-dominated society barely manage to articulate or communicate to the world. They are left so powerless that they can hardly stand up to their own cause. The intense violence meted out to the speaker is expressed in her inability to breathe or speak¹⁴. Plath seems to highlight that the inability to communicate properly is a direct result of oppression which is the hallmark of patriarchy.

Throughout the poem, the readers are reminded how daddy is a representative of the Nazis. In direct comparison with the father, the oppressed daughter figure resembles a Jew¹⁵. This equation is eloquent enough to show how powerless she was against her father's violence. The Nazis' were known to adhere to violent means to eliminate any form of dissent. This unexpected comparison naturally highlights the brutality of her father's manners. When the narrator says women love Fascist, she is not only reiterating the imbalanced power equation but also the normalization of violence in both domestic and public space. The violence is so interwoven in the lives in every aspect that women accept and appreciate their oppressors without any question. The oppression is so naturalized that the victims barely recognize it and without knowledge of victimization they have no

way to fight back either. The model father that the speaker marries apparently has a 'Meinkampflook'. We are told he is fond of rack and screw. Both the images only reaffirm his violent and oppressive manners. The husband is the vampire sucking blood out of the speaker. This imagery tells us how a woman in a marital relationship is robbed of any life of her own. Her moving away from her father and being under the shelter of husband has done no good to the speaker. She is still not free and survives within an oppressive world where it is no more than a subservient existence to the men who are part of her life. To her credit, the speaker has finally managed to understand that she is a victim of her circumstances and she must break free from the dominance and violence. The speaker brings an end to her miseries by driving a stake through the heart of her father. This 'death' is symbolic of a power equation being questioned and now resisted. The poem ends with the idea that patriarchal oppression can be easily countered only after it is recognized and finally its evil has been exposed.

The speaker's metaphoric association with Jewish people suggests her own struggle and has strong political connotation that power and authority functions in the most unexpected fashion, making the general mass vulnerable to it. The speaker speaks how her father's association with air force only reaffirmed real physical force while the propaganda system taking place through the broadcast was nothing but gobbledygoo¹⁶. Her father's eyes are indicative of watchful, authoritarian presences which are more like literal pair of eyes. It is common knowledge that during WWII people maintained exceptional low profile in order to refrain from being caught by the watchful eyes of the Nazi domination. The speaker actually invokes the swastika which was a symbol of authority and yet an empty symbol which had the power to take away all hope, and truth. As one gets to move over the illusion and understand the truth behind it the swastika loses its power. As soon as the speaker manages to remove her father from the pedestal of godlike authority she is able to free herself from him as well as other men. She finally says, 'she is through' which means she is no longer willing to accept the myth of her father that has been perpetuated for long.

It is obvious that the speaker being traumatized by violence in general and the death of her father in particular developed an obsession with death and mortality. She makes efforts to bring her father back to life yet when that does not work out, the narrator tries to join her father in death. That is why she tries to commit suicide. But that did not work out too. Then she gets married and brings her father back to life in the form of husband. This was because she thought her husband resembled her father. *Daddy* does not meander directly into the territory of death but instead talks about some kind of obsession (like the one speaker has). The poem talks about toxic parenting and its impact on the young minds. And beyond that it talks about making an effort to release oneself from oppression and cruelty of the patriarchal set-up. The memories of her father's death had lingered in the speaker's mind unexpectedly. *Daddy* is a poem which is littered with images of death and decay. The magnanimous size of the father described in the poem has reflection of

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Plath's real-life father. It is understood that Plath's own father had developed gangrene in the foot which eventually led to his death and his condition was further complicated by diabetes. Surely, this image of death stayed with the poet and its repercussions were visible in the later stage of her life; and her fixation with death. The poem highlights a sense of fragility that has been revoked by her inability to reunite with her father.

Critics have their reservations about the quality of the poem; some insisted that the various elements related to the role of father are not coherently established in the course of the poem. Some even consider this to be one of the weakest poems in series that deals with the father symbol as the analogy of oppressive father figure seems to be extended beyond its welcome phase. Yet, it cannot be denied that the idea of female protest as portrayed in the poem is unexpectedly eloquent and strong. The poem highlights the ravages that the war brings with itself and the effects it has on people in general. Plath talks about victims – of war, abuse, trauma, oppression, violence and of normalization of unjust treatment. Despite its autobiographical nature, the poem manages to reach out to a larger audience through its explicit expression of the evils of the society, and how it has a negative impact on the society and its people.

Check Your Progress

3. What is the structure of the poem, *Daddy*?
4. How has the figure of the father been presented in the poem, *Daddy*?
5. What does 'swastika' in the poem allude to?

6.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The Bell Jar was the autobiographical novel written by Sylvia Plath.
2. Sylvia Plath married the English poet, Ted Hughes in 1956.
3. The poem consists of sixteen stanzas, each one consisting of five lines. But each one has a different rhyme scheme.
4. In the poem, the father returns in forms of all negative images. We have vampire, shoe, Nazi, devil, etc .The narrator's father appears initially in the form of a heroic white patriarch and by the time the poem ends he is the black vampire. The father in the poem is painted as a man who is authoritarian, cruel and dominant.
5. During the Second World War, swastika was the symbol of the German Nazi regime. The speaker actually invokes the swastika which was a symbol

of authority and yet an empty symbol which had the power to take away all hope, and truth. As one gets to move over the illusion and understand the truth behind it the swastika loses its power.

Sylvia Plath: *Daddy*

6.5 SUMMARY

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- *Daddy* as a poem is filled with imageries and allusion. These surreal figures of speech are interwoven with the memories of childhood that the speaker has experienced. The dark experiences are narrated through a language that is fluid and resembles a nursery rhyme which is interspersed with German language to present a sense of confusion and disillusionment.
- We must bear in mind that Sylvia Plath was aware of the Final Solution of the Nazis that was a significant event in World War II. Adolf Eichmann's trial which lasted for more than 6 months in 1961 was widely published to show the impact of holocaust.
- *Daddy* steers clear of the usual idea of the father as an ideal figure to look up to and emulate. Yet, it is an exceptionally difficult a task to erase the idea of that ideal presence. In the poem, the father returns in forms of all negative images.
- The poem starts by highlighting the circumstances in which the narrator lives. She insists that these circumstances are no longer sufficient to carry on with life. The narrator insists that her life is like a foot which is surviving inside a black shoe.
- Next, we are informed how the speaker is scared of her father. Her father served the German Air Force. He spoke in a manner that seemed impressive but was actually a bundle of nonsense. He possessed blue Aryan eyes and a carefully groomed mustache and his military connection is re-established through armoured vehicles of WWII.
- The poem highlights her desire to break free from his captivity. But the poem is not only about the father-daughter relationship. Through the memory of the father we get to witness the general power imbalance that exists between men and women.
- The title of the poem *Daddy* itself is suggestive of a patriarchal dominance. The authoritarian masculine presence is felt at the beginning of the poem while the female speaker is only a child in comparison to the male who is being described.
- The speaker's metaphoric association with Jewish people suggests her own struggle and has strong political connotation that power and authority functions in the most unexpected fashion, making the general mass vulnerable to it.

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- It is obvious that the speaker being traumatized by violence in general and the death of her father in particular developed an obsession with death and mortality. She makes efforts to bring her father back to life yet when that does not work out, the narrator tries to join her father in death.
- Critics have their reservations about the quality of the poem; some insisted that the various elements related to the role of father are not coherently established in the course of the poem. Some even consider this to be one of the weakest poems in series that deals with the father symbol as the analogy of oppressive father figure seems to be extended beyond its welcome phase.

6.6 KEY WORDS

- **Fascist:** This term refers to an individual who follows fascism. Fascism is a political ideology as well as a mass movement that was the predominate ideology in many parts of the world between 1919 and 1945. Benito Mussolini is considered to be the first fascist leader of Europe.
- **Allegory:** It is a literary device used by writers in which a character, place, or event is used to deliver a broader message about real-world issues and situations.
- **Nazis:** They were members of the Nazi party. Nazism was started by Adolf Hitler in 1920s and lasted till the end of the World War II in 1945.

6.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Briefly discuss the life and works of Sylvia Plath.
2. Who is the speaker of the poem?
3. Write a short note on the views of literary critics about the poem, *Daddy*.
4. Briefly mention the autobiographical features which are evident in the poem.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Comment on the title of the poem, *Daddy*.
2. 'The imagery of "death" resonates in the entire poem.' Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Critically analyse the poem, *Daddy* written in the backdrop of the Second World War.

6.8 FURTHER READINGS

- Blain, Virginia, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements, (Eds). 1990. *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Todd, Janet, (Ed.). 1989. *British Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide*. London: Rutledge.
- Lonsdale, Roger (Ed.). 1989. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Black, Helen C. 1893. *Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches*. Glasgow: David Bryce & Sons.

Endnotes

1. 1932-1963.novelist, poet, short story writer from America. She received Pulitzer Prize in Poetry in 1982.
2. Nazi Party...political party of the mass movement known as National Socialism... Under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, the party came to power in Germany in 1933 and governed by totalitarian methods until 1945 (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nazi-Party>)
3. Appearing in combinations like Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen or gobbledygoo
4. One who follows fascism. Fascism is a political ideology as well as a mass movement that was the predominate ideology in many parts of the world between 1919 and 1945 . Benito Mussolini, is considered to be the first fascist leader of Europe.
5. A traditionally accepted means of bringing an end to vampire's presence
6. 1939 to 1945.
7. 1906-1962; Germany
8. *Daddy* in the Poem
9. *Purdah* in the Poem
10. *Lady Lazarus* in the Poem
11. "camp in which people are detained or confined, usually under harsh conditions and without regard to legal norms of arrest and imprisonment" (<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-camps#:~:text=The%20term%20concentration%20camp%20refers,acceptable%20in%20a%20constitutional%20democracy.>)

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12. the symbol of the German Nazi regime. Also used as a sign of prosperity and good fortune in Hindu religion since ancient time.
13. It is believed that the devil possess the cleft feet.
14. stuck in ... jaw ... in a barb wire snare.”
15. Or Yehudi , following Judaism. Descendants of Hebrews of Old Testament. It is believed that more than 30,000 Jews were killed in Nazi concentration camp.
16. wordy and generally unintelligible jargon (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gobbledygook>)

UNIT 7 MAYA ANGELOU: *STILL I RISE*

Maya Angelou:
Still I Rise

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Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 About the Poet
- 7.3 Critical Analysis
- 7.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 7.5 Summary
- 7.6 Key Words
- 7.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 7.8 Further Readings

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Maya Angelou's¹ *Still I Rise* was first published in 1978 in an anthology collection with the same name. The poem highlights the power of perseverance and persistence. The poem is an autobiographical fiction that talks about the way the narrator is perceived by the people in general and talks about the adversities in her life. Yet, she mentions that how with each resistance she has managed to overcome with sheer determination and positive attitude. How she does not let the problems belittle her and continues to rise.

7.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Analyse the implications of the title, *Still I Rise*
- Discuss the major theme of the poem
- Comment on the significant traits of the speaker of the poem
- Give examples of the use of imagery, symbols and motifs in the poem

7.2 ABOUT THE POET

Maya Angelou was a renowned American poet, auto biographer, activist and a teller of stories who was born Marguerite Johnson on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri. She had a diversified career spanning the fields of singing, dancing, acting, composing and also having the distinction of being Hollywood's first female director. She is, however, more famous for being a writer, editor, essayist, playwright and

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above all, a poet. Besides serving as a Reynolds professor of American Studies at the Wake Forest University, Angelou had the fortune of working with Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. as a civil rights activist. So accomplished was Angelou, that she was touted as not only a spokesperson for black women in America but also all those people of America who wanted to increase the level of living. Angelou served on the presidential committees of Gerald Ford in 1975 and Jimmy Carter in 1977. She was awarded by Bill Clinton with the National Medal of Arts in the year 2000. Ten years later, she was awarded the highest civilian honour in USA, the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama. In all Angelou was awarded over 50 honorary degrees in her lifetime.

Angelou received her early formative education in California at the George Washington High School in San Francisco and received a scholarship to study dance and drama at the California Labor School. Angelou became a teenage mother at 17, graduated high school and took up the job as the first female and black street car conductor in San Francisco. Besides this, she had taken up various other jobs too as she explained in her third autobiography *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry like Christmas* (1976), she also “worked as a shake dancer in night clubs, fry cook in hamburger joints, dinner cook in a Creole restaurant and once had a job in a mechanic’s shop, taking the paint off cars with my hands.”

In the year 1950, Maya Angelou dated interracially and married a white former sailor Tosh Angelos. After they separated, Angelou continued studying dance in New York City but later returned to sing at the Purple Onion cabaret in San Francisco, only to be spotted by talent hunters. From working with Porgy and Bess, to singing at the West Coast and Hawaiian nightclubs throughout the 1950s, Maya eventually returned to New York City to pursue her career on stage.

During the late 1950s Angelou associated with the Harlem Writers Guild and met many important writers of her time including James Baldwin. This was also the time when she heard Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and got so inspired by his fiery speech that she became involved in the struggle for civil rights. She was offered the position of the northern coordinator for Dr. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Subsequent to working for Dr King, Angelou relocated to Cairo accompanied by her son and later on to Ghana in West Africa in 1962 where she freelanced as a writer and feature reviewer for the African Review. In the mid-1960s when Angelou returned to USA, an editor at the Random House, Robert Looms, along with James Baldwin encouraged her to pen an autobiography. Angelou promptly declined the offer but ultimately agreed to write the first of her autobiographies which she entitled wrote *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. This book is an account of the author’s childhood and concludes with the birth of her son. This book was an overnight success and was nominated for the prestigious National Book Award.

Angelou wrote a total of seven autobiographies and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* was the very first one. Despite touching upon controversial topics such as race, sexual abuse and violence, this book is widely taught in schools. The use

of dialogues and plot, which are primarily fiction writing techniques, in autobiographies was Angelou's innovation which augured well to complicate the genre's relationship with truth and memory. Much emphasis is given to themes in Angelou's books which are episodic and tightly-crafted where events are rarely chronological. Critics have adjudged Angelou's following autobiographies in light of the first one and as such *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* still remains the most highly praised of all.

Angelou's other autobiographical volumes include *Gather Together in My Name* (1974), which begins when Angelou is seventeen and a new mother; *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry like Christmas*, an account of her tour in Europe and Africa with *Porgy and Bess*; *The Heart of a Woman* (1981), a description of Angelou's acting and writing career in New York and her work for the civil rights movement; and *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986), which recounts Angelou's travels in West Africa and her decision to return, without her son, to America.

Fifteen years had passed since Angelou's *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, when in 2002 she wrote her seventh and final autobiography, *A Song Flung up to Heaven*. This book covers a span of only four years and starts in 1964 when she returned from her stint in Ghana and ends in 1968 at the mother's table and began to write her first autobiography – *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. In an interview to Sherryl Connelly of the Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service, Angelou had confessed that she was hesitant to write the last of her autobiographies which she took a long time to start and finish as well. This was because during those four years several painful events had happened in her life and in the lives of the entire Black community in the United States. 'I didn't know how to write it,' she said. 'I didn't see how the assassination of Malcolm [X], the Watts riot, the breakup of a love affair, then [the assassination of Dr.] Martin [Luther] King [Jr.], how I could get all that loose with something uplifting in it.' Her book - *A Song Flung up to Heaven*, deals straightforwardly with these events, and 'the poignant beauty of Angelou's writing enhances rather than masks the sincerity with which she addresses the racial crisis through which America was passing,' Wayne A. Holst wrote in *Christian Century*.

Besides being a widely read autobiographer, Angelou was also a widely read and appreciated poet as well. Her poetry has frequently been praised for the depictions of dusky beauties and the strengths of womanhood and human spirit, the criticism of the Vietnam War and demanding social justice for all, than other poetic virtues.

Yet Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiie, which was published in 1971, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1972. This volume contains 38 poems, some of which were published in *The Poetry of Maya Angelou* (1969). According to Carol Neubauer in *Southern Women Writers*, 'the first twenty poems describe the whole gamut of love, from the first moment of passionate discovery to the first suspicion of painful loss.' In other poems, 'Angelou turns her attention

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to the lives of black people in America from the time of slavery to the rebellious 1960s. Her themes deal broadly with the painful anguish suffered by blacks forced into submission, with guilt over accepting too much, and with protest and basic survival.'

Angelou aced several career at a time. As she wrote her poems and autobiographies, she also excelled in films and television as well. She was the first African American woman to have a screenplay (Georgia, Georgia) which was produced in 1972. In 1977, her performance in *Roots* won her a nomination for an Emmy award. Two years later in 1979, Angelou's first autobiography was adapted by the same name for a TV movie. Pursuing her acting career she played the character of Aunt June in the 1993 movie *Poetic Justice* for which she also wrote the poetry. In the same year, she also played Lelia Mae in a TV film *There Are No Children Here* and appeared as Anna in the feature film *How to Make an American Quilt* in 1995.

One of many claims to fame for Angelou was President Bill Clinton's invitation in the early 1990s to write and read the first inaugural poem as Americans watched from all across the country. She read, 'On the Pulse of Morning,' which begins 'A Rock, a River, a Tree' and calls for peace, racial and religious harmony, and social justice for people of different origins, incomes, genders, and sexual orientations. It recalls the civil rights movement and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous 'I have a dream' speech as it urges America to 'Give birth again / To the Dream' of equality. Angelou challenged the new administration and all Americans to work together for progress: 'Here, on the pulse of this new day, / You may have the grace to look up and out / And into your sister's eyes, and into / Your brother's face, your country / And say simply / Very simply / With hope - Good morning.'

During the early 1990s Angelou wrote several pieces of poetry and also collaborated with other writers to produce several children's books as well. These books include *Life Doesn't Frighten Me* (1993), which also featured the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat; *My Painted House*, *My Friendly Chicken*, and *Me* (1994), and *Kofi and His Magic* (1996), both collaborations with the photographer Margaret Courtney-Clark. Her poetry collections comprised of - *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* (1994) and *Phenomenal Woman* (1995), which is a collection of four poems that takes its title from a poem which originally appeared in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1978. Besides these, Angelou wrote *A Brave Startling Truth* (1995), commemorating the foundation day of the United Nations, and another poem called *Amazing Peace* (2005), which she wrote for the White House Christmas Tree lighting ceremony.

Maya Angelou also wrote and published several collections of her essays. The most notable ones include *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now* (1993), *Genevieve Stuttaford*, *Even the Stars Look Lonesome* (1997) and *Letter to my Daughter* was published in 2008.

Angelou has a unique style of writing poetry and also reciting it, from which she especially benefits as her audiences are left spellbound. Her poetry can be traced back to black oral traditions like work and slave songs. Also intriguing is her style of personal narration emphasizing the individual's response to hardship, oppression and loss.

In addition to examining individual experience, Angelou's poems often respond to matters like race and sex on a larger social and psychological scale. Describing her work to George Plimpton, Angelou has said, 'Once I got into it I realized I was following a tradition established by Frederick Douglass—the slave narrative—speaking in the first-person singular talking about the first-person plural, always saying I meaning 'we.' And what a responsibility. Trying to work with that form, the autobiographical mode, to change it, to make it bigger, richer, finer, and more inclusive in the twentieth century has been a great challenge for me.'

In 2013, she was the recipient of the Literarian Award, an honorary National Book Award for contributions to the literary community. She died in 2014 at the age of 86.

Check Your Progress

1. What were the diversified careers of Maya Angelou?
2. What was Angelou's innovation to the autobiographical writings?

7.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Still I Rise is powerful composition that is inspired from numerous experiences including the poet's own struggles of being an African American living in the United States. Maya Angelou's work invariably revolved around the ideas of liberation and survival. Even though published in 1970s, the poem still manages to impress the readers because of its relevance and its ability to transcend beyond boundaries and resonate among the margins. The poem is both motivational and emotional in tone. It talks about the hardships faced by Black woman living in America. The narrator in the poem directly addresses her oppressors and tells them how she has overcome her difficulties. The words 'I rise' are repeated to highlight the power of her determination and how each blow has only made her stronger and more powerful.

The opening stanza of the poem tells us how words do not impact the narrator, while the second stanza informs the readers about the narrator's positive attitude. The third stanza celebrates her resilient powers and ability to rise against challenges, while the fourth stanza insists that the society would like to believe that she is broken because of her struggles. The fifth stanza mentions about her never say never attitude and the indomitable confidence she has nurtured within herself.

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The sixth stanza witnesses her confronting her opposition. The narrator insists that she is unstoppable and no one can stop her from rising. The seventh stanza speaks of the power and confidence that a woman carries within herself. The eighth stanza is about the struggles of the narrator as an African American individual and her means of overcoming it. The ninth and final stanza recounts what the narrator has learned through her struggles and what she is leaving behind as a legacy. The poem honours the idea of being unabashedly 'you'. It talks about the significance of self-acceptance.

The poem exposes the readers to various statements the speaker makes about herself that gives them (the readers) an insight into the physical and mental prowess that the narrator possesses. She chose to put her historical as well as personal past behind her and 'rise' above expectations and beyond the limitations. She is sure of moving past anything and everything that seeks to control her and does not let anyone or any incident to hold her back. Angelou's personal experience of living through a period of oppression and inequality made her sensitive to the contemporary socio-political mayhem. One can find reflections of her acute observations being chronicled in *Still I Rise* which is a declaration that announces that no matter what the narrator will not allow the hatred of society to ruin her path to success. *Still I Rise* is not just a personal proclamation; it is also an appeal to the people around her to live a life that is not dictated by the norms of the society.

Still I Rise is composed of nine stanzas in all, each of varying length. The first seven stanzas are composed of four lines. But the eighth stanza contains six lines while stanza line has nine lines. The four line stanzas follow a rhyme scheme of ABCB whereas the six line stanza has a rhyme scheme of ABABCC and the ninth stanza is composed of ABABCCBBB.

In the poem *Still I Rise* the readers meet a determined voice which is strong and articulate. The poem throws light on the cultural heritage and strength of the individual as well as the marginalized community that she is representative of. Despite the abolition of slavery² the coloured people in America are still considered to be inferior to the white population because of the difference in the skin colour. The poem is filled with hope and reinstalls the power of courage and strength.

The poet incorporates numerous motifs from nature to highlight her determined nature. We come across examples of sun and moon to suggest that as these celestial objects rise and set without break, her courage will persistently return to her in a strong repetitive cycle. The third stanza also talks about tides. Following their own course and natural ebb and flow, the tides never fail to rise again and again. Thus, the speaker too intends to bounce back every time someone tries to break her. She intends to remain powerful as a deep ocean so that she can resist and knock over her oppressors. The poem's repeated use of the word 'rise' refers to the idea of overcoming difficulties and challenges. Even though the word is use metaphorically many a times in the poem, the central motif still talks about fighting against oppressors and creating your own identity. The process of

establishing oneself against social norms is definitely a painful one, but the narrator is determined to take the challenge on her stride and win the adversity. In the poem, 'Black Ocean' is not just a literal presence it is also metaphorical. The narrator is black and she represents her community, which automatically draws our attention to the problems of discrimination which is a bleak and sad reality. And the impact of the injustice is powerful and infinite as the ocean.

Maya Angelou includes a number of wealth symbols in her poem to make it more effective and impactful. In the second stanza of the poem, we come across the mention of oil wells. The narrator says that anyone who would see her walking as confidently and gracefully as she does one would be reminded of the walks of those who possess oil wells. Oil wells in this context stands as a symbol for wealth and prosperity. It is common knowledge that people with power and riches exude their confidence through their body language, and walking is one of them. But this richness that the speaker is mentioning about is not material wealth; she is mentioning the indomitable spirit. The speaker's wealth is her courage and determination. This wealth makes her status socially elevated and makes her independent and takes charge of her own life. Due to this, she has authority to live her life as she pleases to. Then in the fifth stanza the readers are informed about the narrator's attitude (some might even call it her arrogance). This pride is a result of her carefree laugh which exudes confidence. The laugh is so powerful that it gives the impression of the narrator owning gold mines in her own backyard. Gold mines unlike oil wells are not just indicators of wealth but also source of unending prosperity, aristocracy and sophistication. Her courage and determination is limitless like the oil and gold wells. By the time, we reach the seventh stanza, we have the poem's final reference to wealth symbol. Her liberated spirits are associated with diamonds. While diamonds are traditionally associated with wealth and power they are also signs of beauty and royalty. But with the speaker insisting that she carries diamonds within her things there is a clear indication that the speaker is not just beautiful from within, but is one who possesses a strong sexual and sensual appeal.

In this short but impactful poem, Maya Angelo talks about the intertwining effect of injustice and individual growth. Throughout the poem, the narrator is heard addressing someone as 'you'. This 'you' is none other than the oppressor who emerges in various forms of injustice that has been around for many centuries and has been experienced by people of colour, women and other marginal communities. The speaker addresses herself in a manner which is much more powerful and elevated than the oppressor that she is refereeing to. The narrator is a proud and intelligent lady who is empowered with determination and perseverance. During the course of the poem, she mentions that she would like to inform all her distractors about her strength, abilities and beauty. These emotions are explicit in lines that talk about how she will rise like the dust even if she is relegated to the margins like dirt. The poem talks about the injustice that has been handed out to the socially deprived poor people of colour by the rich and the powerful. The narrator says how their skin colour has been used to their

*Maya Angelou:
Still I Rise*

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disadvantage and their popular image has been manipulated by the oppressors. The narrator insists that one day discrimination and slavery³ will lead to a revolution that will call for liberty and freedom from the clutches of the social norms. The downtrodden will defy all the established notions and emerge as winners rewriting history once again.

Though in the United States, slave trade was abolished in pen and paper on 1 January 1808, in actuality, slavery continued for nearly next fifty years. This practice was obviously carried on in an illegal manner. William Garrison's 'The Liberator' was a prominent anti-slavery mouthpiece and hundreds of group came together to make this movement a success. The power of Blacks was slowly getting powerful with the Civil War of 1861 – 1865 witnessing the formation of separate Black units. Slavery coming to an end did not end the miseries of the Black Americans. They were discriminated on the basis of their colour and past. They were still denied access to mainstream activities that were in possession of and under control of the Whites. This continued for the next century. People like Martin Luther King Jr. worked towards establishing equality through law. Despite their achievements, skills and expertise, the Black people in America are still discriminated against⁴. They have a disadvantage over others because of their lineage and origin.

By the time, the readers reach the second stanza, the voice of the speaker is all defiant. She is shown to be filled with the energy of rebellion which will open path for new and more hopeful future that will be devoid of injustice and oppression. Even in the face of adversity, the speaker always puts up a brave smile and loves to believe that she is richer than the rich. She points out at poverty that is experienced by the people of colour in a white skin obsessed country like America. But more than poverty, the narrator is troubled by the exploitation that the poor people undergo by those who are in the positions of authority. The narrator reminds us that as everything will change one day, this narrative of exploitation and hatred will come to an end. She says that with every spring, hope returns to planet Earth, and just like hope she will ensure that the dream of having a world of equality remains eternally etched in her heart. And, with this indomitable spirit, she will continue her battle against oppression. The narrator in the poem reminds the readers how people of colour have been enslaved by their White masters since time immemorial. She also informs that the coloured people have never questioned their masters and have executed all their demands without any questions. Yet despite all this, the White people will make their best efforts to keep the soul of the coloured people chained so that they can never rise and demand for dignity of life. These passionate ideas reiterate the fact that the coloured people of America can fight any form of violence and suppression to defend their honour and life. The speaker wonders if her liberated life makes her oppressors uneasy. After all, she does not give them the scope to see her pain. She smiles through all the adverse conditions because she has learnt to hide her wounds that have been caused by years of exploitation. These painful memories keep her going and makes her more determined to fight

against all the wrongdoings that she and her people have faced. Moving ahead with her concerns, the narrator asks a few interesting questions. She says the oppressors are obviously jealous of her skin and her dance moves. Her dance is full of energy and this energy weakens the spirit of the White masters. The question-answer format that is adopted by the poet in these lines makes the poem interesting by introducing a sarcastic tone to the rebellious mood that she has put forth through her writing. The universal appeal of *Still I Rise* lies in its ability to speak for everyone who has been a victim of abuse and dominance. It transcends beyond colour oppression and speaks for every man and woman who has faced resistance and discrimination. The poem is also meant to inspire people of the new generation who have taken their freedom for granted and have forgotten their inglorious and struggled past that has worked hard to offer them some privileges that they did not have. The history of humiliation and sorrow is responsible for creating a today and future that is much better than the life they have lived. The narrator is positive that irrespective of the vengeful methods the oppressors might implement there is no way that the Black people can be stopped from rising. The years of slavery were no less than the dark nights of fear and terror. The past has slowly but steadily created a world that is glorious and stands on the threshold of freedom. This is a gift that the narrator has received from her ancestors. She insists that the new generation will definitely ensure that the struggle is taken to newer heights and the rising is finally real.

Still I Rise is a poignant and powerful verse that questions the existing norms. The poem is a reaffirmation to live life without fear. Angelou had once said, 'All my work, my life, everything I do is about survival, not just bare, awful, plodding survival, but survival with grace and faith. While one may encounter many defeats, one must not be defeated⁵.'

Still I Rise is a glorious example of the above stated lines where hope and dignity are of pivotal aspect to human life. And, it is this dignity of life that she is struggling for and wishes to gift everyone who is in dire need of it. The Afro-Americans⁶ believed in a tradition that catered to the singing spirituals. The singing spirituals is a religious song that is meant to fill one with optimism and belief. *Still I Rise* is more like a religious lyric which works towards instilling faith and hope, but unlike the religious song, this is secular in its approach. The stanzas ending with 'still I rise' give the poem a lyrical appeal and gets wrapped in the mind of the readers, psychologically strengthening the readers to start believing in their own self. The poet herself had undergone severe discrimination because of her origin. Yet, each time, with her steadfastness and an insatiable desire to triumph made her reprise herself like the phoenix and soon she became a commendable voice for Black lives and Black spirit. When the poet asks if her sassiness upsets the authority, she actually wants to know from the oppressors if the loud, coloured and vivacious lives of the coloured people actually threaten them. Do they feel that the coloured world of the Black people has the power to overturn the sophisticated and subdued world of the White aristocracy. The haughtiness and sassiness are not just attitudes

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but they are markers of social non-conformity. And any kind of non-conformity only makes the authority feel threatened and scared. The poet, like a true philosopher speaks of truth and freedom that appeal to humanity across borders. The poem is a confluence of history, culture, nature and an appeal for a better future. The call to the future generation through the powerful words of ‘still I rise’ indicates of something great awaiting us all. A universal truth and a never realized fact that loving a human is the greatest wonder of all and hatred is of no use, is lucidly explained in the poem. Angelou’s keen observation and her concern for her fellow beings makes her writings appear lively. Despite her sufferings, Angelou turns into a blazing icon of humanity and human kindness.

Check Your Progress

3. Mention the numerous motifs which highlight the determined nature of the speaker of the poem.
4. What does ‘Black Ocean’ denote in the poem?
5. Who is the ‘you’ addressed by the speaker in the poem?
6. When was slavery abolished in the United States?

7.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Maya Angelou was a renowned American poet, auto biographer, activist and a teller of stories who was born Marguerite Johnson on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri. She had a diversified career spanning the fields of singing, dancing, acting, composing and also having the distinction of being Hollywood’s first female director. She is, however, more famous for being a writer, editor, essayist, playwright and above all, a poet.
2. The use of dialogues and plot, which are primarily fiction writing techniques, in autobiographies was Angelou’s innovation which augured well to complicate the genre’s relationship with truth and memory.
3. The poet incorporates numerous motifs from nature to highlight her determined nature. We come across examples of sun and moon to suggest that as these celestial objects rise and set without break, her courage will persistently return to her in a strong repetitive cycle. The third stanza also talks about tides. Following their own course and natural ebb and flow, the tides never fail to rise again and again. Thus, the speaker too intends to bounce back every time someone tries to break her. She intends to remain powerful as a deep ocean so that she can resist and knock over her oppressors. The poem’s repeated use of the word ‘rise’ refers to the idea of overcoming difficulties and challenges.

4. In the poem, 'Black Ocean' is not just a literal presence it is also metaphorical. The narrator is black and she represents her community, which automatically draws our attention to the problems of discrimination which is a bleak and sad reality. And the impact of the injustice is powerful and infinite as the ocean.
5. Throughout the poem, the narrator is heard addressing someone as 'you'. This 'you' is none other than the oppressor who emerges in various forms of injustice that has been around for many centuries and has been experienced by people of colour, women and other marginal communities.
6. Though in the United States, slave trade was abolished in pen and paper on 1 January 1808, in actuality, slavery continued for nearly next fifty years.

Maya Angelou:
Still I Rise

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7.5 SUMMARY

- *Still I Rise* is powerful composition that is inspired from numerous experiences including the poet's own struggles of being an African American living in the United States. Maya Angelou's work invariably revolved around the ideas of liberation and survival.
- The opening stanza of the poem tells us how words do not impact the narrator, while the second stanza informs the readers about the narrator's positive attitude. The third stanza celebrates her resilient powers and ability to rise against challenges, while the fourth stanza insists that the society would like to believe that she is broken because of her struggles.
- The poem exposes the readers to various statements the speaker makes about herself that gives them (the readers) an insight into the physical and mental prowess that the narrator possesses. She chose to put her historical as well as personal past behind her and 'rise' above expectations and beyond the limitations.
- In the poem *Still I Rise* the readers meet a determined voice which is strong and articulate. The poem throws light on the cultural heritage and strength of the individual as well as the marginalized community that she is representative of.
- Maya Angelou includes a number of wealth symbols in her poem to make it more effective and impactful. In the second stanza of the poem, we come across the mention of oil wells. The narrator says that anyone who would see her walking as confidently and gracefully as she does one would be reminded of the walks of those who possess oil wells.
- In this short but impactful poem, Maya Angelou talks about the intertwining effect of injustice and individual growth. Throughout the poem, the narrator is heard addressing someone as 'you'. This 'you' is none other than the oppressor who emerges in various forms of injustice that has been around

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for many centuries and has been experienced by people of colour, women and other marginal communities.

- Though in the United States, slave trade was abolished in pen and paper on 1 January 1808, in actuality, slaving continued for nearly next fifty years. This practice was obviously carried on in an illegal manner.
- The narrator in the poem reminds the readers how people of colour have been enslaved by their White masters since time immemorial. She also informs that the coloured people have never questioned their masters and have executed all their demands without any questions.
- The history of humiliation and sorrow is responsible for creating a today and future that is much better than the life they have lived. The narrator is positive that irrespective of the vengeful methods the oppressors might implement there is no way that the Black people can be stopped from rising.
- *Still I Rise* is a poignant and powerful verse that questions the existing norms. The poem is a reaffirmation to live life without fear.
- Angelou's keen observation and her concern for her fellow beings makes her writings appear lively. Despite her sufferings, Angelou turns into a blazing icon of humanity and human kindness.

7.6 KEY WORDS

- **Phoenix:** It refers to a bird to ancient classical mythology. It is believed that this bird has supernatural powers to come back to life. It dies in the funeral pyre and then rises from the ashes.
- **Motif:** It refers to the dominant idea or the central theme in a literary piece of writing.
- **Sassiness:** It implies audacity and liveliness.
- **Aristocracy:** It is a form of government where a few selected individuals belonging to high social class are presumed to be qualified to rule.

7.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Briefly trace the life and work of Maya Angelou.
2. What is the main theme of the poem, *Still I Rise*?
3. Write a short note on the structure of the poem.

4. Briefly mention the writing style adopted by Maya Angelou in the poem, *Still I Rise*.

Maya Angelou:
Still I Rise

Long-Answer Questions

1. Summarize the poem, *Still I Rise*.
2. Give examples of the usage of symbols and motifs in the poem, *Still I Rise*.
3. Discuss about the injustice and oppression alluded to in the poem.

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7.8 FURTHER READINGS

Blain, Virginia, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements, (Eds.). 1990. *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Todd, Janet, (Ed.). 1989. *British Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide*. London: Rutledge.

Lonsdale, Roger (Ed.). 1989. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Black, Helen C. 1893. *Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches*. Glasgow: David Bryce & Sons.

Endnotes

1. (1928–2014). American poet and civil rights activist; apart from seven autobiographies and three essay books, she has a number of poetry collection to her credit. Her writings reflect about the roles and problems of Black people and their culture. Her 1969 memoir (of seven parts) ‘I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings’ is a remarkable work highlighting her early years and her experience of being subjected to trauma and discrimination.
2. Slavery is a social condition where one human being owns another like he would own a property. The slaves were devoid of any rights. They were meant to work and die without any dignity of life; slavery existed in various parts of the world.
3. Slave trade and slavery was finally abolished in nineteenth century as rebellion and resistance, especially from the Africans, shook the world. This coupled with numerous economic changes and campaigns and support from rights activists and humanitarian groups helped people sensitize themselves against this inhuman and degrading form of human treatment.
4. Even as late as the year 2020, we have instances of hatred being subjected to people of coloured origin. The death of George Floyd and others opened the Pandora box and spoke highlighted the uncomfortable skewed equation shared by the coloured and White population that stays in the United States.

*Maya Angelou:
Still I Rise*

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5. Transcending Black Aesthetics: A Panoramic Perception of Select Poems of Maya Angelou (<http://www.cdes.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Dr.Subthra-Devi.pdf>)
6. Black people who are residing in the United States. They are descendants of those families that originally hailed from Africa and came to US through slave trade or migration.

**BLOCK - III
DRAMA**

*Manjula Padmanabhan:
Harvest*

**UNIT 8 MANJULA
PADMANABHAN: *HARVEST***

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Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 About the Playwright
- 8.3 Critical Analysis
- 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

8.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to the life and works of one of the most vibrant and multi-skilled women writer's of contemporary times—Manjula Padmanabhan. She is an established dystopian writer, author, Delhi based playwright, children's book author, artist and cartoonist. Her creativity, originality and unique style of representing the themes of a futuristic society earned her the prestigious Onassis Award for Theatre, in Greece, in 1997, for her play *Harvest*. Sukiya, her creation—comic strip appears regularly in Chennai's *Business Line* magazine. Some of her famous books include *The Island of Lost Girls* and two collections of plays, *Blood And Laughter* and *Laughter And Blood*.

8.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Prepare a brief introduction on the life and works of the playwright
- Interpret interesting lines/ dialogues from the play
- Analyse the writing style of the playwright

8.2 ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Manjula Padmanabhan was born on 23rd June 1953 in India. Manjula was born in a diplomat's family which provided her the opportunity to explore the world while

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growing up in Europe and Southeast Asia (Thailand and Pakistan) before coming to India. She was a teenager when she returned to India in 1960s. She received her education in a boarding school. After completing her graduation, she pursued her career in the field of writing and other print media. She joined the staff of a small magazine called *Parsiana* which was ‘a little community magazine, sparky and sweet’ exhibiting high standards set by its editor. Here, she had to perform multiple functions that of an illustrator, writer and proof reader. Owing to the nature of profession of her parents, she had to travel frequently, which created a different feeling altogether for her: ‘I didn’t belong back in India, but I didn’t belong anywhere else either, and that’s a strange place to be, a sad place to be... I am not rooted in any tradition. I write about things that don’t require a special tradition ... they tend to be fundamental. They deal with the body ... everyone has one ... or very basic emotions, basic motivations. I take what everyone already knows, and then I push it a little bit further.’¹

She created the popular cartoon character ‘Suki’ for giving an outlet to her thoughts and creativity on issues of contemporary relevance, which appeared in print for the first time in 1980s and has been revived as well in *The Hindu Business Line*.



Fig. 8.1 Cartoon Suki by Padmanabhan Published on 13 March 2020

Source: Retrieved from <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/cartoons/sukiyaki/sukiyaki/article31062207.ece>

She is known as India’s first woman cartoonist. Her creation—Suki, began appearing in the *Sunday Observer* in Bombay in 1982. Later, it appeared in

the *Pioneer* in New Delhi. Post 1997, there was a long break of this cartoon character which was revived in *Suki Yaki*, cartoon strip in *The Hindu Business Line* after 19 years. It is a strong character, who is frank in her opinions and expresses herself freely on themes and issues of contemporary relevance— be it environment, social concerns, women’s rights and so on. In fact, before her play *Harvest* received the international prestigious award, Padmanabhan was known as a cartoonist with a daily cartoon strip in *The Pioneer*. Apart from her comic strip, she writes a weekly column as well set in a fictional town in the US titled ‘Elsewhere’.

In 1997, her play *Harvest* won the Onassis Prize for Theatre in Greece. The play, was selected from over 1470 entries in 76 countries for the prestigious \$250,000 Onassis trust award in the year 1997. It brought her name and fame and established her as a playwright par excellence, identifying her as more than a cartoonist and an artist. It provided her some financial relief as well. Suddenly, the literary and media people recognized her worth and Govind Nihalani adapted this play for his film *Deham* – which also received critical acclaim.

Deham (The Body) is a 2001 film directed by Govind Nihalani based on playwright Manjula Padmanabhan’s play *Harvest*. It has Kitu Gidwani, Joy Sengupta, Ayy Khan, Surekha Sikri and Julie Ames in lead roles. One of the few English language films made in India, it is a futuristic story depicting the organ sale from relatively poorer countries to the rich. Nihalani himself called it a “serious social sci-fi film”. *Deham* won the prestigious Netpac (Network for Promotion of Asian Cinema) award for the Best Asian Film at the 25th Goteborg Film Festival, 2002, in Sweden.^[5]

Source:<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deham>

Major Works of Manjula Padmanabhan

As a playwright

- 1984 – ‘Lights Out’
- 2003 – *Harvest*

As an author

- 2013– *Three Virgins and Other Stories*
- 2015–*Island of Lost Girls*. Hachette.
- 2011–*I am different! Can you find me?*
- 2008–*Escape*
- 2005–*Unprincess!*
- 1986–*A Visit to the City Market*
- 2003– *Mouse Attack*

Manjula Padmanabhan:
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As an Illustrator

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- Baig, Tara Ali, and Manjula Padmanabhan. 1979. *Indrani and the Enchanted Jungle*. New Delhi: Thomson Press (India) Limited
- Maithily Jagannathan and Manjula Padmanabhan. 1984. *Droopy Dragon*. New Delhi: Thomson Press

She has been a regular illustrator of children's books including *Pooni, Pooni, Where are you?* This book published in 2019 is an interesting book for toddlers, where Minnie is unable to find her cat. *A Visit to the City Market* (National Book Trust, 2019); *Shrinking Vanita* (2018); *Mama-What is the Night?* (2017); *Pooni at the Taj Mahal*(2017); *The World Tour Mystery* (2010); *We are Different* (2013), *Where's That Cat?/Bilaadi Kyan Chhe?* (Gujarati) (2011).

Over 20 children books have been authored and illustrated by her. She is also the author of book series for children, which includes *Mouse Attack* (Macmillan Children's Books, UK, 2003; Picador India, 2004) and a series of picture puzzle books. She has illustrated over twenty-two books for children.

Comic Strips

2005— *Double Talk*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

'Hot Death, Cold Soup' (Kali for Women, 1996)— is another collections of short stories by her.

Her two-volume collection of plays, 'Blood and Laughter' and 'Laughter and Blood', published by Hachette, brings together her full-length plays and short performance pieces.

She has also composed a travel memoir 'Getting There' (Picador UK, 1999).

This is Suki! (Duckfoot Press, 2000), is a collection of her New Delhi strip SUKI, adding on another feather in her cap. In the Eighties, (Bombay, 1982-86) her comic strips appeared weekly in *The Sunday Observer*. Later, she crafted comic strips for *The Pioneer* (New Delhi, 1991-97) which appeared daily. Her artistic work frequently gets exhibited which includes etchings and lithographs (London, December 2003).

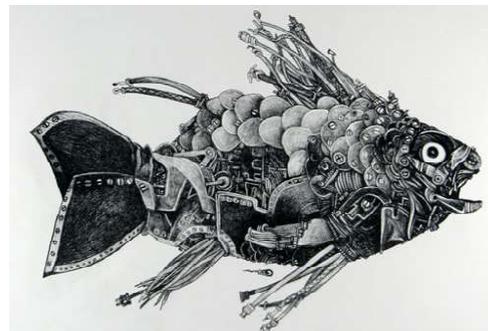


Fig. 8.2 An Artwork by Padmanabhan

She has written one more powerful play, ‘Lights Out!’ (1984). ‘Hidden Fires’ is a series of monologues. ‘The Artist’s Model’ (1995) and ‘Sextet’ are her other works.(1996).

Manjula Padmanabhan:
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She has also authored a collection of short stories, called *Kleptomania* (Penguin 2005), which surpasses the limits of time and place providing the readers a rich collection to reflect, introspect and define a new definition of morality in the contemporary age.

‘An Upbeat Story’, Penguin Publications, Jan 2018 is another touching story about a man with Down Syndrome and a woman who is confined to a wheelchair. It is narrated as an imagined conversation between a ‘writer’ and an ‘editor’. It has the unique style of Padmanabhan’s witty comments, decorated with dark humour and delicate— stirring the soul of the reader.

‘The Girl Who Could Make People Naked’ (Penguin,2018) was originally composed for publication in a magazine – based in Delhi’s socio-cultural context; it is a witty story opening up different layers of interpretation.

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Check Your Progress

1. When and where was Manjula Padmanabhan born?
2. Mention some of the significant works of Manjula Padmanabhan.

8.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The play depicts a hideous compact between the First world sick people and Third World marginalized, impoverished people, who trade the organs of their body for basic living essentials such as meals and riches. It is a play imagining the gruesome reality of the future with neo-cannibalism practiced by the First world denizens who have no regret / apprehension/ ethical reminiscences behind the devouring of a live human being in ‘bits and pieces’. The playwright has soft corner for none as both are an equal party in this heinous crime, tearing away from the world—its humanity. She treats both of them with criticism. The First World misuses its powers while the Third World is misguided and too greedy for material comforts and short-term gains. Human body is a natural gift of God to man—selling its organs for a price is likened to harvesting a land without having to put sweat and hard work in its production. It is readily available—a person has a right over his/ her body. Probably, that is why Om does not care before committing himself to the gross act. It has come easy to him and so he does not realize its worth.

It is a play written on the contemporary issue of ‘organ trading’. The colonizers earlier visited India for gold, minerals and other natural resources. This time they are in India for mining the ‘organs’ of its poor population—which is struggling to carve a decent living for itself. The writer makes use of dark humour

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to drive her point and her pain at seeing the futuristic world. The main protagonist of this play, Om, has been kicked out from his company and is left in a very tricky situation, where he has to find ways to sustain his family and himself. He is married to Jaya, and lives with his mother, an old lady and a young brother in a small room apartment in Bombay. In a striking resolution to this critical problem, he decides to sell his organs to an International company 'Interplanta' in a bid to put everything on a reverse gear. With this setting, the play goes on to reveal the price he and his family had to pay for this act.

Now, suddenly, his family comes under direct surveillance round the clock by a third party. Frequent inquiries and directives are issued to them – demonstrating the control the third party has acquired over their personal life. The client Ginnie, fascinates Om with her deceptively sweet voice, appearing on screen as a young, impressive girl – his buyer from 'across the seven sea'. The company casts a technological spell over the house incumbents- Om's mother gets almost addicted to the TV programmes provided by Interplanta. She is shown as another disoriented soul who cares for nothing except her material comforts— TV, fridge, microwave and so forth. She does not get fettered on hearing about the organ trade contract signed by Om. Om's younger brother, Jeetu, is depicted as working during night time—as a bisexual sex worker. Jaya, the wife of Om, appears to be the only sensible person in this deranged and disillusioned world. She is the only one who is able to retain her control over her mind, body and soul towards the end of the play.

The technological advancement and the contract brings tremendous change to the lacklustre life of this family. As a part of this contract, a device is installed in the centre of the room, called the contact module to maintain interaction between the client and the donor. This device was initiated as the ultimate tool to bring order the life of the family—but it also becomes a ploy to gain access to the privacy of the donor and to control their lives in a better way. The biggest impact of this installation is evident in the personal relationships of the family members. The module is programmed to rotate around to face all the corners of the room and can go live instantly, at any given point of time. The house is labelled as 'human goldfish bowl' by the client– indicating the sadistic pleasure being drawn by the powerful people in the suffering and helplessness of those not powerful.

In fact, this surveillance system, envisioned by Padmanabhan in her play in 1997 is a reality in the present times. It is likened to a panoptic system:

The **panopticon** is a type of institutional building and a system of control designed by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century. The concept of the design is to allow all prisoners of an institution to be observed by a single security guard, without the inmates being able to decipher whether they are being watched.

Although it is physically impossible for the single guard to observe all the inmates' cells at one go, the fact that the inmates cannot know when they are being watched means that they are motivated to act as

though they are being watched at all times. Thus, the inmates are effectively compelled to regulate their own behaviour. The architecture consists of a rotunda with an inspection house at its centre. From the centre, the manager or staff of the institution are able to watch the inmates. Bentham conceived the basic plan as being equally applicable to hospitals, schools, sanatoriums, and asylums, but he devoted most of his efforts to developing a design for a panopticon prison. It is his prison that is now most widely meant by the term 'panopticon'.

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panopticon>

The behaviour of Om's mother's reveals a view of this panoptic system, she is totally engulfed by the fantasy world. She does not mind her son, Jeetu, being mistakenly taken away for organ transplant by the guards. After Om, she is the second person in the play to give up all control over her life and soul to the machine. She prefers to drown herself in the comforting false world so as not to be a part of the struggle or fight – towards this she orders a Super Deluxe Video Couch for herself—similar to the crow who turns blind to the imminent danger by closing its eyes and wishing the danger away. She goes for 'electronic annihilation' voluntarily. As the life of family members becomes more convenient and comfortable, the relationships get stressed and estranged. The family is heading towards a different level of impoverishment – they lose their control over their identity, their body parts, their privacy and soul. The dubious corporation is personified as 'anonymous' guards, wearing white dress with a mask. The element of distrust is evident in the play as the receiver is afraid that the donor might backout /withdraw in the last minute. As the play progresses, we find the arrival of guards for creating a 'a germ-free zone' in their house and taking away of Jeetu- mistaking him to be the donor. Om, goes into hiding, as he is shocked to face the reality—the blonde girl is definitely not sweet and young as was portrayed to him on screen. Only Jaya, his wife is left, the company makes her the offer as well. She is asked to get pregnant, using technology without any physical interaction. Jaya, being a sensible person, with her feet firmly grounded in reality — resists. The play ends on an open note where she threatens to kill herself before being exploited by the agency / client.

Critical Appreciation

Let us begin by analysing the characters of the play, *Harvest*.

Ma: Mother of Om and Jeetu is revealed as a simple traditional old woman, more emotional rather than rational. She is not foresighted enough to see the danger looming over the life of her son, Om who has agreed to be a donor. She is shown purely as a materialism driven personality revelling in her new life of luxury. When Jeetu is taken away by the guards, her reactions demonstrate her submission to the technologically driven world.

Jaya: He's gone! They've taken him – and I could do nothing to prevent it!

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Ma: Can I switch on my TV?

Jaya: Your son goes off to the slaughterhouse and you're just worried about your TV!

She is jealous of Jaya and keeps instigating her son Om to abuse her. She seems to draw a sadistic pleasure. It is a harsh reality that in our country, many a times, the victims of household violence grow up to victimising others later in their lives. Apart from her material comforts, she is not concerned with anything.

Jeetu, a gigolo and brother of Om, having fascination for Jaya is also unable to resist the lure of the 'computer animated dream'.

Jaya: Wife of Om is the only person in this play who is able to resist the allurements of the third party. She decides to exercise her right over her thoughts and body. She refuses to accept control of Virgil. She chooses to dictate her own terms for meeting and finally takes a decision to be the master of her mind, body and soul. She is a strong and rational female.

- *I've discovered a new definition for winning, winning by losing. I win if you lose.* (Harvest 100)
- *If you want to play games with people, you should be careful not to push them off the board. You pushed me too far. Now there's nothing left for me to lose.* (Harvest 101)
- *I am not willing to caretake my body for your sake! The only thing I have left which is still mine is death. My death and my pride.* (Harvest 101)

Om, the main protagonist is shown as an ideal male member of the society who takes his responsibility as a breadwinning member of the family seriously. He puts his family and responsibility before himself. Like an obedient son, he first shares information to his new job to his mother. However, he is shown as a weak-willed person who gives up too easily under stress. This seems to be an offshoot of the over-indulgent manner in which boys are raised in our traditional male-dominated society. Later, in the play, he realizes his short-sightedness has landed his family in big trouble: 'How could I have done this to myself? What sort of fool am I?' (1997, p.234)

In tune with many feminist playwrights of her time, she uses techniques of Brechtian drama for depicting reality. The theme selected by Padmanabhan is one of contemporary relevance – organ trade. There were reports and documentaries to trace its growth and development (Oliver Decker). It has been pointed out that 'organ trade has now become a worldwide business in which not only the sellers and buyers of organs but also a middlemen, hospitals, and physicians are also involved'. So commodification of human body had already begun, when the play was written. It was written, initially for the First world countries, owing to its theme and its treatment.

The other techniques, typical of Brechtian play used in this play include social gest and alienation effect. Social gest is used to draw the attention of the reader to the prevalent norms and behaviour in the society and its validity. The play reveals the challenges faced by females in the existing Indian society. The scene where Jaya wipes away Kumkum from her forehead – an identity of her marital status – indicates the turmoil a female undergoes. In Indian setting, a married women’s identity is derived from her husband and the Kumkum is a symbol of her being blessed and happy and living a fulfilling life. But, the change of circumstances in their lives, forces her to take away this symbol— for the commitment her husband made to the company to earn a decent living for the family.

Towards the end of the play when Virgil makes his indecent proposal to Jaya. She is shown to go through a lot of struggle and resistance. Finally, she says, ‘This game is over! Either you have to erase me and start again or You must accept a new set of rules’.

With this declaration she sits down to indulge herself—watching TV , listening to joyous music. The audience also feels relieved waiting to see what her actions will lead to. She mentions she would now eat for three, take bath three times a day. This social gest enables the reader to get into the shoes of the character and experience her struggle to maintain control over her mind, body and soul. She sees the true meaning of life— in loosing she would win. This thought and decision empowers her, liberates her and makes her happy and relaxed in all the state of confusion and chaos.

The other strategy used by the playwright is alienation effect. It is a Brechtian technique to keep the audience aware that the action is going on stage and it is being ‘acted’ not real. It makes the audience a passive observer. It is a technique to keep the audience critically engaged in the play—the use of props, stage direction or direct interaction of the actor with the audience, include some of the ways for achieving the alienation effect. The movement of the white faceted globe in the play creates this alienation effect.

Besides, the realistic style of the playwrights is noticed in the crafting of characters, their dialogues, mannerisms, setting of the play, stage direction and other elements. The first scene of *Harvest* shows Jaya waiting anxiously for her husband Om.

Another instance is the way, Om describes the selection process, it is akin to a visit to a technology driven private hospital—where the steps and equipment impress the poor people to believe its heaven, safe and secured. This scene also shows the commercialization of the medical industry. How the company deceives poor people by luring them in the organ trade as a donor. The sophistication is too much for the simple man to digest; hence, Om is awestruck.

Om: I don’t know for how long we moved. Then there was a door. Inside it was dark like being in heaven! So cool so fresh! I too fainted then with pleasure, I don’t know. I wake up to find how the ground is moving under me.

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Ma: what? How is that?

Om: I don't know. But the floor is moving.

Then there's a sign. **REMOVE CLOTHING**

Ma: Naked!

Om: So we do that. Still moving. Then each man gets a bag. To put the clothes inside. (219)

Jaya: But why?

Om: Then a sort of rain burst. I wonder if I am dreaming! The water is hot scented. Then cold. Then hot air. Then again the water. It stings a little; this second water smells like some medicine. Then air again. Then we pass through another place. — I don't know what is happening. Ahead of me a man screams and cries but we are in separate little cages now, can't move. At one place, something comes to cover the eyes. There's no time to think, just do. Put your arm here, get one prick, put your arm there, get another. Prick-pissshhh! Pissshhh! Here, stand here, take your head this side, look at a light that side. On and on. Finally, at the end, there's another tunnel with pretty pictures and some music. And the sign comes, **RESUME CLOTHING**. I just do what I have to do. All the time, the ground keeps moving. Then at the end, the ground stops we are back on our feet, there are steps. It must be the other side of the building. And as we come down, guards are standing there, waiting for us. And to me they say 'you, come – and that was it!

Ma: I can't believe this –

Jaya: Are they mad?

Om: Some other men were also with me, all looking like me, I suppose blank. They told us we had been selected. They wrote down our names, addresses...and... this-that. All details. Then they gave us these packets. Told us not to open they and we must go home, the guards would come with us for final instruction. (2001: 220 -01)

This scene vividly describes the emotions and feelings of Om – he felt he was in heaven! The scene also indicates what lies in future for him – the locus of control would move to the machine and the company, the human being will be altogether neglected.

Further, the language and style of the play is also unique. The naming process hints the ideological underpinnings of the play. The emphasis of Jaya on her name being pronounced correctly by the client – reveals that she holds her 'identity' very close to her heart. The literal meaning of this word is triumph and victory, so symbolically, we can understand that the human has power to control his life and events around. The essential requirement for this victory and freedom is self belief, confidence in one's roots, and a critical awareness of things going around. To understand the reality of things one needs to question, examine things that appear with a critical lens. This way human will regain the power and control over the machine. It will also empower the marginalized people to resist people who try to control. Virgil, the client buying Om's organs, pronounces her name as 'zhaya' –

not trying to improve upon it. This shows that he is exercising his power and superiority over the family as they are financially poor. But Jaya resists this imposition of his 'power'. Towards the end of the play, she forces him to pronounce her name correctly and follow her instructions. This is her victory – giving a message to the First world that the Third world may be poverty stricken; still the people are dignified and they have an identity which must be respected at any cost by others. Here, the message of the playwright is clear that 'resistance' can be a solution to many problems of this world. The role of women as an empowered soul bringing hope to this otherwise tragic play – needs to be noted as well. After all, being a women writer of her times, Padmanabhan calls for the 'strong women' to be active agents of the Indian society. They need not remain passive. The other female character in the play Ma appears to be rough, dominant and rude, yet on a close analysis, she emerges as a victim of a traditional male dominated society where female voices are not heard and given emphasis. She resorts to the route of silence and distancing from the people (physically and mentally) and the environment by taking recluse in the convenient technology gadgets. But her choice is shown to be a weak one leading to suicide. The playwright exercises a perfect balance between the tragic and humour aspect of the play. The disturbing business of organ trade, intrusion of one's privacy by the powerful – creates a stressful and serious tone in the mind of the reader, however, the use of irony and witty dialogues by the characters brings the tone lighter and easy to bear the serious themes of the play. The scene where Om finds a neighbour using their newly installed toilet is one such instance.

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Harvest

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Check Your Progress

3. Who is the main protagonist of the play?
4. What is the name of the company to whom Om decides to sell the organs of his body?
5. What is a panopticon?
6. What is the main theme of the play?
7. Name the two Brechtian techniques adopted by Padmanabhan in this play.

8.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Manjula Padmanabhan was born on 23rd June 1953 in India.
2. She is known as India's first woman cartoonist. Her creation—Suki, began appearing in the *Sunday Observer* in Bombay in 1982. Later, it appeared in the *Pioneer* in New Delhi. In 1997, her play *Harvest* won the Onassis Prize for Theatre in Greece. She is also the author of book series for children,

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- which includes *Mouse Attack*. She has written one more powerful play, 'Lights Out!' (1984). 'Hidden Fires' is a series of monologues. 'The Artist's Model' (1995) and 'Sextet' are her other works.(1996).
3. Om is the main protagonist of the play.
 4. Om decides to sell his organs to an International company 'Interplanta' with the idea of solving his financial problem due to his loss of job.
 5. The panopticon is a type of institutional building and a system of control designed by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century. The concept of the design is to allow all prisoners of an institution to be observed by a single security guard, without the inmates being able to decipher whether they are being watched.
 6. The theme selected by Padmanabhan is one of contemporary relevance – organ trade.
 7. The two Brechtian techniques adopted by Padmanabhan in this play are social gest and alienation effect.

8.5 SUMMARY

- Manjula was born in a diplomat's family which provided her the opportunity to explore the world while growing up in Europe and Southeast Asia (Thailand and Pakistan) before coming to India.
- She created the popular cartoon character 'Suki' for giving an outlet to her thoughts and creativity on issues of contemporary relevance, which appeared in print for the first time in 1980s and has been revived as well in *The Hindu Business Line*.
- In 1997, her play *Harvest* won the Onassis Prize for Theatre in Greece. The play, was selected from over 1470 entries in 76 countries for the prestigious \$250,000 Onassis trust award in the year 1997.
- Over 20 children books have been authored and illustrated by her. Her two-volume collection of plays, 'Blood and Laughter' and 'Laughter and Blood', published by Hachette, brings together her full-length plays and short performance pieces.
- She has also authored a collection of short stories, called *Kleptomania* (Penguin 2005), which surpasses the limits of time and place providing the readers a rich collection to reflect, introspect and define a new definition of morality in the contemporary age.
- The play depicts a hideous compact between the First world sick people and third world marginalized, impoverished people, who trade the organs of their body for basic living essentials such as meals and riches.

- It is a play written on the contemporary issue of ‘organ trading’. The colonizers earlier visited India for gold, minerals and other natural resources. This time they are in India for mining the ‘organs’ of its poor population— which is struggling to carve a decent living for itself.
- The client Ginnie, fascinates Om with her deceptively sweet voice, appearing on screen as a young, impressive girl – his buyer from ‘across the seven sea’. The company casts a technological spell over the house incumbents- Om’s mother gets almost addicted to the TV programmes provided by Interplanta.
- The technological advancement and the contract brings tremendous change to the lacklustre life of this family. As a part of this contract, a device is installed in the centre of the room, called the contact module to maintain interaction between the client and the donor.
- The behaviour of Om’s mother’s reveals a view of this panoptic system, she is totally engulfed by the fantasy world. She does not mind her son, Jeetu, being mistakenly taken away for organ transplant by the guards.
- Om, the main protagonist is shown as an ideal male member of the society who takes his responsibility as a breadwinning member of the family seriously. He puts his family and responsibility before himself.
- In tune with many feminist playwrights of her time, she uses techniques of Brechtian drama for depicting reality. The theme selected by Padmanabhan is one of contemporary relevance – organ trade.
- The other techniques, typical of Brechtian play used in this play include social gest and alienation effect. Social gest is used to draw the attention of the reader to the prevalent norms and behaviour in the society and its validity.
- Besides, the realistic style of the playwrights is noticed in the crafting of characters, their dialogues, mannerisms, setting of the play, stage direction and other elements. The first scene of *Harvest* shows Jaya waiting anxiously for her husband Om.
- Further, the language and style of the play is also unique. The naming process hints the ideological underpinnings of the play. The emphasis of Jaya on her name being pronounced correctly by the client – reveals that she holds her ‘identity’ very close to her heart.
- After all, being a women writer of her times, Padmanabhan calls for the ‘strong women’ to be active agents of the Indian society. They need not remain passive.

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8.6 KEY WORDS

- **Dystopian:** It implies relating to or denoting an imagined state or society where there is great suffering or injustice. It is the antithesis of ‘utopian’.

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- **Neo-colonialism:** It is the practice of using economics, globalization, cultural imperialism and conditional aid to influence a country instead of the previous colonial methods of direct military control (imperialism) or indirect political control (hegemony).
- **Globalization:** It is the process of interaction and integration among people, companies, and governments worldwide. Globalization has accelerated since the 18th century due to advances in transportation and communication technology. This increase in global interactions has caused a growth in international trade and the exchange of ideas and culture. Globalization is primarily an economic process of interaction and integration that is associated with social and cultural aspects.

8.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What is the main theme of the play *Harvest*?
2. How is the theme of globalization exposed in the play?
3. Write in your own words about the presentation of Jaya's characters as an empowered female in the contemporary world.
4. Briefly mention the language and style used in the play.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Do you think that the title of the play, *Harvest* is apt? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Critically analyse the play from a feminist perspective.
3. Discuss the dystopian nature of the play.

8.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 9 LORRAINE HANSBERRY: *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*

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Structure

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 About the Playwright
- 9.3 Critical Analysis
- 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

9.0 INTRODUCTION

A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry¹ was first produced in 1959. This is a three-act play which takes us through the life of Youngers' family. They are settled in Chicago and stay in a tiny apartment. The play is set somewhere after the end of World War II² and beginning of 1950s. The location is an urban ghetto where a poor black family resides. At the very outset, the play informs the audience about the poverty and oppression that is faced by an African American family. The apartment in which the Youngers have lived for all these years is clean but is filled with numerous domestic artifacts. We see Travis sleeping on a couch that is placed in the living room. The bathroom that the Youngers use is shared by other tenants who stay in the same building.

9.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the influence of autobiographical elements in the play
- Explain the distinct female characters of the play
- Analyse the title of the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*

9.2 ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

African American playwright Lorraine Hansberry was born in Chicago in May 1930 and died early in January 1965 due to pancreatic cancer. Her grandfather was a freed enslaved person, her father was a successful real estate agent and her

mother was a school teacher. Her family had decided to move to a white neighbourhood in the year 1938 and sadly they were attacked violently. The family remained defiant and refused to relocate. The case made it to the Supreme Court and they were ordered to move.

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Hansberry bent towards writing started from a very young age and she was also interested in theatre when she was in high school. Her educational background has been varied given that she first attended University of Wisconsin between 1948 and 1950 and then briefly attended the School of Art Institute of Chicago as well as the Roosevelt University. She was the first in family to not enrol at a Southern Black college. She later dropped out to move to New York and was a student at the New School for Social Research all the while working many small jobs as well as working on her writings. She worked at the black progressive newspaper *Freedom* and later contributed to the magazine *The Ladder*. In the latter place, she wrote using her initials L.H. as the subject of her discussions spanned from feminism to homophobia and she was concerned she might get discriminated.

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One of the remarkable credits under her name is writing the first ever Broadway production by an African American woman *A Raisin in the Sun* in 1959 for which she raised the funds herself. The play was a beautiful depiction of the emotional conflicts and a psychological study of personalities of a working-class black family set in Chicago. Interestingly, the Broadway production was also special since it was the first time since 1907, that an African American was directing a Broadway play. Consequently, the play won accolades like the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award (of which she was the youngest recipients) along with the film version receiving a special award at the Cannes Film festival.

Her other production *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* met with not such a great reception in 1964 and later on in 1969, her ex-husband Robert Nemiroff adapted her writings to produce the play *To be Young, Gifted and Black*. This was also published in book form in 1970.

Check Your Progress

1. When was *A Raisin in the Sun* performed at Broadway for the first time?
2. Which work of Hansberry was posthumously adapted from her writings and produced as a Broadway play and a book?

9.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The play revolves around the problems encountered by this African American family (the Youngers') and the devastating effects it has on them. The very existence of the Youngers' is marked by the struggle for survival on a daily basis. They never, despite their best efforts have enough, to live a stable life.

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A Raisin in the Sun is noteworthy for not only highlighting the tension outside (white vs coloured people) but also for bringing into light the tension within (the fractured familial and community space). The play puts forward a very interesting dilemma that is faced by the Black community – how to deal with situations of oppression. Having been subjected to years of suppression and violence, the Black community found it difficult to react to the disgraceful treatment that the White community meted out to them. There is an insistence on the revival and celebration of African heritage. The work is influential in reiterating the role and significance of anti-colonial struggle in African countries and the need to fight for rights. Hansberry through her work suggests the need to have a more integrated world that is inclusive and accepting.

The play opens to inform that Walter Younger, Sr (Big Walter) has passed away and he has left his wife Lena, along with other things, a life insurance policy of \$10,000. The drama unfolds as each member of the family insists on using the money for different purposes. Lena wants to buy a new house in a better location, son Walter wants to start his own business, daughter Beneatha wants to pay fees for her medical school and Ruth (Walter's pregnant wife) supports Lena to buy a house. The continuous disagreement over the insurance money brings takes a toll on the Youngers' family.

The brother does not want his sister to go to the medical school, the mother is not convinced about the investment plan of her son, and the daughter in law decides to undergo an abortion as she does not want to bring in another life into this chaotic family. Unable to get the money, Walter decides to quit his job as a chauffeur and takes up drinking heavily. Trying to build a balance between the family's needs and stop it from falling apart, Lena invests certain amount in a single-family home which was in the middle of an all-White neighbourhood, she deposits a certain sum of money for the daughter's medical school and daughter in law's future expenses and hands over the rest of the money to her son for his investment.

At the initial phase, this arrangement appeared to be the best way out, but in a couple of weeks the family is hit by another misfortune. Bobo, a friend of Walter, informed the family that the money invested by Walter in the liquor business has been swindled by his partner; along with Walter's money he has also taken away the tuition money saved for sister's medical school and has left the town.

Walter shocked by the current developments finds a way to recover some of the money. He informs the family that he has been discussing with Mr Linder, representative of the same all-White society where they have bought their new house, on selling the property. Mr Linder has offered to buy the house from the Youngers at a profitable price so that the neighbourhood is not populated by any Black family. This decision disappoints everyone. The family once again reaches a stage where it is on the verge of disintegration. Soon the meeting with Mr Linder is set amidst discontent, anger and guilt. But at the nick of the time, Walter has a

change of heart. He informs Mr Linder that they will move to the new house, recalls his father's legacy, addresses his sister as a future doctor and introduces his son as the sixth generation of Youngers to be born in the United States.

The playwright, through *A Raisin in the Sun* takes the audience into the world of poverty and abuse and shows how frustration and hostility born out of lack of opportunities has the potentiality to ruin the structure of a family. The wear and tear in the family is highlighted early in the play - first symbolically, in the form of worn out walls and ragged furniture and next, in the form of verbal disagreement that takes place between Walter and his wife on how to use the insurance money.

Walter, as the man of the family (with the father being dead) , feels it is important to invest money in something substantial from which he can earn a great deal and support his family. But both his mother and wife think that his investment idea is not good and his wife decides to take the extreme step of aborting the child as she did not want the child to languish in poverty as they are languishing right now. Lena³ eventually compromises the situation as she realizes the impact of damaging her son's feelings and manhood. The events come to full circle when Walter realizes the need to be mature and responsible to carry forward the respect and dignity that the Younger family has carved out for itself in the last five generations. His judicious behaviour will not only strengthen the present circumstances of his family but will also set a dignified example for the future generation (Travis). The entry into the White dominated location is the indication of a new life of opportunity and equality.

It must be mentioned that Lorraine Hansberry's decision to set his story in Chicago's Southside is of great significance. Chicago as city has the ill reputation of being divided into strictly Black and White neighbourhoods. Despite law being equal for everyone and both coloured and White citizens having access to opportunities alike, yet the unwritten rule always segregated the population on racial and economic lines. Hansberry herself grew in Chicago and her portrayal of the city and its environment was extremely authentic that earned her work praise from all quarters. Being the change makers , Hansberry's family, just like the Younger family, became one of the first coloured families to move into a White dominated neighbourhood.

Hansberry brings into focus a few questions related to female emancipation. Through the character of Beneatha, the playwright suggests that marriage is not by all an end to a woman's life. She must have a career goal and consider having a professional life along with the family life. Beneatha is firm in her resolution to become a doctor. She had dreamt of becoming a doctor since her teenage years. She is ready to go ahead with her decision even without financial support from her mother, unlike her brother who wants to invest a portion of his mother's money in liquor business). Beneatha has no intentions of marrying just for financial or social security and is unwilling to compromise on her progressive thoughts because of anyone. In fact, she affirms her faith in god only on the insistence of her mother (as

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she did not want to hurt her mother) and not because she really cares for what the world says.

It is interesting to note how the abortion narrative has been intercepted into the play. It was extremely brave of Hansberry to talk of abortion as an option especially in an era when abortion was illegal. But along with all these radical elements present in the play, one cannot deny that a young woman from a coloured family growing up in the fifties managing to write and get this play produced is a path breaking moment in every way. While discussing the ideas of racial discrimination and gender politics, the playwright draws our attention towards one crucial element — the ability to dream. She insists that without dreams it is difficult to grow beyond the means; after all dreams give us wings to fulfill the impossible and create a better, prosperous and alternative universe. But, of course, dreams without vision can lead to terrible results because in that case it will be laced with greed which will lead to dissatisfaction and displeasure. Dreams with negative elements always focus on the material growth and possessions. Whereas dreams with value aspire to achieve happiness, change and peace. The play is considered to be one of the most powerful cultural documents available to us from the tumultuous fifties that is authentic and shares a unique point of view.

While Hansberry offers the audience some progressive ideas, she ensures that she does not make the audience too uncomfortable by introducing several new elements. And that is why she relies on the usual methods of the domestic drama. The emotional confrontations are invariably loud and the location remains consistent (the apartment of the Youngers'). The audience witness Walter as someone who is both emotional and unreasonable. Whereas, on the other hand, we have Ruth (Walter's wife) who is wise and reasonable. Interestingly, Lena is just the opposite of both her children who are self-willed as well as high-strung. Lena manages to think right and come up with appropriate solutions during the time of crisis. Of course, like all mothers, she too is a bit lenient towards both Walter and Beneatha. While discussing her, we cannot ignore the ubiquitous presence of her plant. It was a fragile houseplant that stood as the lone symbol for the impending prosperity once they enter the new neighbourhood. Towards the end of the play, we are told that the houseplant was almost forgotten, but the mother ensures that she takes it with her. It is interesting to see how language plays a great role in giving a context to the characters. We see, Joseph Asagai using a language that had the power to impress and attract people that was full of promise and hope that helps him gather the confidence of the people and fool them. Walter oscillates between speaking the language of the ghetto as well as the language of the master based on the roles he is playing.

The timing of this play has been of utmost significance. It was written at a time when the Civil Rights movement had just started gathering momentum. The play, with its real life portrayal and radical ideas managed to capture the sentiments of the ideas and eventually became a benchmark work that addressed the plights and concerns of the Black community. Being a member of the African American

family, Lorraine Hansberry had a first-hand experience of the discrimination and held strong opinions on the need to support the cause of Black women in American society.

As a three-act play, *A Raisin in the Sun* quickly sets the stage for the drama to unfold. In the first act itself, all the major characters are introduced and their intentions are established. We are also told about the reason for the conflict. By the second act, situation had further intensified and we are introduced to some minor characters like George Murchison and Joseph Asagai who are suitors of Beneatha. But the problems find temporary respite when everyone gets a share of the insurance policy. But the happiness is short-lived as a proposal to buy the new house arrives. The third act finally resolves the entire crisis and culminates with the need to have Black life and identity celebrated and supported. The play also brings out the dichotomy of the age. Even though the 1950s is usually identified as an era of prosperity a large number of Americans still lived in abject poverty. The period is marked by technological discoveries which made everyday life easy. Advanced cars and computers were being developed while television became part of the household. Supermarkets were status symbols and frozen food gained popularity. The University of Michigan had published a study that stated that as many as 30 per cent of population lived in poverty and as many as 5.2 million people were without employment while a good number of wealthy Americans did not pay taxes.

In the world of theatre, Hansberry's influence is magnanimous. For the first time, the Black performers as well as Black audiences saw themselves being represented authentically in *A Raisin in the Sun*. To Hansberry's credit her contribution was widely recognized when her literary work was awarded as the Best Play of the Year (1959) making her the youngest American and the only Black dramatist. As a play, *A Raisin in the Sun* has been produced in more than thirty countries and has run for more than 530 performances. The themes of racism, segregation, problems within the domesticity of Afro-American communities, cruelty meted by the White Americans and emancipation of the Black women echoed among millions of Africans and Afro-Americans. It must be borne in mind that even though 1950s was difficult for coloured people, it was no easy for artists in general. After all D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*⁴ was redistributed again in 1959 as perspectives and point of views were changing along with the changes in the decade. 1959 saw the release of many other culturally significant plays in 'The Zoo Story' by Edward Albee, 'Sweet Bird of Youth' by Tennessee Williams etc., and collections like Gunter Grass' 'The Tin Drum'. Cult classics like 'The Sound of Music', 'Once upon a Mattress', 'Ben Hur', Alfred Hitchcock's 'North by Northwest' too reached the theatres this year.

A Raisin in the Sun makes a strong point on by bringing into light the issue of segregated neighbourhoods. Sadly this segregation was a result of legal enforcement that was implemented in 1950s. As a result of protests several Constitutional Amendments were made yet none of them mattered as the

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discrimination continued almost until a hundred years after the Civil War. The Brown vs. Board of Education finally saw the Supreme Court of United States acknowledging that segregated education meant unequal education. And finally separate but equal system of education came to an end. In 1955, the incident of Montgomery bus boycott led people, both coloured and White, to refuse buses that insisted Blacks to sit in the back. Further in 1958, some public schools were closed by the government for not complying with Supreme Court's ruling of non-segregated learning.

A Raisin in the Sun documents the playwright's personal philosophy. It is chronicled in the following lines:

What I write is not based on the assumption of idyllic possibilities or innocent assessments of the true nature of life, but, rather, on my own personal view that the human race does command its own destiny and that that destiny can eventually embrace the stars.

Two prominent allusions are incorporated in the play. The first one is literary and the other one is historical. The play owes its title to the poem 'Harlem' composed by the great African American poet Langston Hughes⁵ during the period of Harlem Renaissance. The other one was to the nineteenth century African American, Booker T. Washington⁶, who insisted that Black people should not aim for academic prominence or agitate for political rights. They must live separated from the mainstream population. The play makes it adequately clear that Washington is not the example the African American community is looking up to.

Apart from stage performances, *A Raisin in the Sun* was also produced as a movie. Columbia Pictures in 1961 released a film by the same name starring Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee, Claudia McNeil, Diana Sands et al in the lead roles. A television series directed by Bill Duke was released in 1989. An official cassette containing sound recording of the play was produced in 1972.

Check Your Progress

3. What are the different uses to which the Youngers' family members decide to put to use the insurance policy?
4. What offer does Mr Linder make to the Youngers' family?
5. Why does Ruth decide to abort her child?
6. What is Beneatha's desire in the play?

9.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. *A Raisin in the Sun* was performed at the Broadway for the first time in 1959.

2. In 1969, her ex-husband Robert Nemiroff adapted her writings to produce the play *To be Young, Gifted and Black*. This was also published in book form in 1970.
3. After the death of Walter Younger, Sr (Big Walter), the family gets to avail a life insurance policy of \$10,000. The family insists on using the money for different purposes. Lena wants to buy a new house in a better location, son Walter wants to start his own business, daughter Beneatha wants to pay fees for her medical school and Ruth (Walter's pregnant wife) supports Lena to buy a house.
4. Mr Linder offers to buy the house from the Youngers at a profitable price so that the neighbourhood is not populated by any Black family.
5. Ruth decides to abort her child as she did not want the child to languish in poverty as they are languishing right now.
6. Beneatha is firm in her resolution to become a doctor. She had dreamt of becoming a doctor since her teenage years.

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9.5 SUMMARY

- The play revolves around the problems encountered by this African American family (the Youngers') and the devastating effects it has on them. The very existence of the Youngers' is marked by the struggle for survival on a daily basis. They never, despite their best efforts have enough, to live a stable life.
- *A Raisin in the Sun* is noteworthy for not only highlighting the tension outside (white vs coloured people) but also for bringing into light the tension within (the fractured familial and community space).
- The play opens to inform that Walter Younger, Sr (Big Walter) has passed away and he has left his wife Lena, along with other things, a life insurance policy of \$10,000. The drama unfolds as each member of the family insists on using the money for different purposes.
- At the initial phase, this arrangement appeared to be the best way out, but in a couple of weeks the family is hit by another misfortune. Bobo, a friend of Walter, informed the family that the money invested by Walter in the liquor business has been swindled by his partner; along with Walter's money he has also taken away the tuition money saved for sister's medical school and has left the town.
- The playwright, through *A Raisin in the Sun* takes the audience into the world of poverty and abuse and shows how frustration and hostility born out of lack of opportunities has the potentiality to ruin the structure of a family.

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- It must be mentioned that Lorraine Hansberry's decision to set his story in Chicago's Southside
- is of great significance. Chicago as city has the ill reputation of being divided into strictly Black and White neighbourhoods.
- Hansberry brings into focus a few questions related to female emancipation. Through the character of Beneatha, the playwright suggests that marriage is not by all an end to a woman's life. She must have a career goal and consider having a professional life along with the family life.
- While Hansberry offers the audience some progressive ideas, she ensures that she does not make the audience too uncomfortable by introducing several new elements. And that is why she relies on the usual methods of the domestic drama.
- The timing of this play has been of utmost significance. It was written at a time when the Civil Rights movement had just started gathering momentum. The play, with its real life portrayal and radical ideas managed to capture the sentiments of the ideas and eventually became a benchmark work that addressed the plights and concerns of the Black community.
- In the world of theatre, Hansberry's influence is magnanimous. For the first time, the Black performers as well as Black audiences saw themselves being represented authentically in *A Raisin in the Sun*.
- *A Raisin in the Sun* makes a strong point on by bringing into light the issue of segregated neighbourhoods. Sadly this segregation was a result of legal enforcement that was implemented in 1950s.
- Apart from stage performances, *A Raisin in the Sun* was also produced as a movie. Columbia Pictures in 1961 released a film by the same name starring Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee, Claudia McNeil, Diana Sands et al in the lead roles. A television series directed by Bill Duke was released in 1989. An official cassette containing sound recording of the play was produced in 1972.

9.6 KEY WORDS

- **Artifact:** It refers to any object made by human beings, especially with the objective of using it in the future.
- **Ghetto:** This term often refers to a part of the city where the minority group lives due to social and economic pressure.
- **Civil rights movement:** This movement began in the United States in the late 1940s with the objective of attaining equal rights for the African Americans.

9.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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Short-Answer Questions

1. What are the major issues highlighted in the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*?
2. Write a short note on the autobiographical elements present in the play.
3. Mention some of the prominent plays that have depicted the issues faced by the African American community.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Do you think Hansberry has been successful in highlighting the issue of female emancipation in the play? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Discuss the significance of the title of the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*.
3. Critically comment on the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*.

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9.8 FURTHER READINGS

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Black, Helen C. 1893. *Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches*. Glasgow: David Bryce & Sons.

Endnotes

1. 1930-1965. She is the first female author of African American origin who had a being performed in Broadway. She was born to middle class family and her parents had consciously moved into an all-White neighbourhood when she was seven, and this marked her first-hand experience of being a victim of discrimination. She attended the University of Wisconsin. She also studied visual arts pursuing painting. *A Raisin in the Sun* has earned itself a great reputation, sometimes being considered to be at par with Tennessee Williams's 'The Glass Menagerie' or Arthur Miller's 'Death of a Salesman'. Her work primarily revolved around equality and liberation of Africa community. She also so discussed a great deal about homosexuality and questioned why the society was so aversive towards homosexuals.

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2. 1939- 1945
3. Her disapproval for investment in a liquor store stems from her being very religious. Moreover, being a controlling matriarch she is unable to believe that her children will be able to take right decision in terms of their life and career.
4. First published privately in 1928 and 1929 in Italy and France respectively. Penguin Books published the book in Britain in 1960. The publishers were booked under Obscene Publications Act 1959. The trial gained huge publicity and eventually the publishers own the case.
5. 1901-1967 America, Novelist, Playwright , columnist, social activist; earlier proponent of jazz poetry One of his famous quotes said , “the Negro was in vogue”
6. 1856-1915. American author, orator, educator , adviser to US presidents. He was born slave and became an intellectual of African American origin in 19th century.

**BLOCK - IV
FICTION**

Margaret Atwood:
Surfacing

**UNIT 10 MARGARET ATWOOD:
*SURFACING***

NOTES

Structure

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 About the Author
- 10.3 Critical Analysis
- 10.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 10.5 Summary
- 10.6 Key Words
- 10.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 10.8 Further Readings

10.0 INTRODUCTION

Surfacing is Margaret Atwood¹'s second novel. It was first published in the year 1972. The novel earned both critical and commercial appreciation immediately after its publication. The novel is about a young woman who is in search for her missing father. *Surfacing* reads like a part detective and part psychological thriller novel. Through this compelling psychological mystery, we witness how a woman rediscovers herself.

10.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Examine *Surfacing* as a detective fiction
- Identify the narrator of the novel
- Discuss the significant themes of the novel

10.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margaret Atwood was a Canadian who was born in 1939 in Ottawa. She completed her education from the Victoria College and the Radcliffe College from University of Toronto. She is known for her work as a poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist and environmental activist. Her work in these areas has managed to get many

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acclaims. She has won the Arthur C. Clarke Award and Prince of Asturias Award for Literature. Atwood has won the Booker Prize and twice she has won the Governor General Award. In the year 2001 she was included in Canada's Walk of Fame. In order to encourage young talent, Atwood has founded a non-profit organization, the Writer's Trust of Canada. Due to her immense contribution towards literature in Canada she has been nominated as the founding trustee of the Griffin Poetry Prize. Atwood is credited for developing and promoting robotic writing of documents, for this she has initiated the technology of Long-Pen in 2004 which help in such writings. She is the director of Syngrafii Inc, this is the company which manufactures and distributes the Long-Pen technology all over the world.

Although she is prominently known as a novel writer she has made significant contribution in literature because of her poetry work as well. Atwood has fifteen books on poems which are mainly based on fantasy and mythologies. She has written many short stories for numerous magazines and publishers like Tamarack Review, Alphabet, Harper's, CBC Anthology, Ms., Saturday Night. She has written four collections of stories and three collections of unclassifiable short prose works as well. Atwood's first novel was *The Edible English Woman* which was published in 1969. The books by Atwood have been published in more than thirty languages.

Her second novel, *Surfacing* is often categorized as a postcolonial writing. This categorization is based on most work which is done by authors who have witnessed the colonization in their country and have very clear idea of the struggles the people have gone through during that period. The novel is not completely embedded with the features of postcolonial tradition but at the same time it does have the influence of the feeling of Canadian nationalism which was prevalent at that time. The author has mentioned about the Canadian national flag in a passage in the story even though the flag was declared in 1965. The second reason as to why the novel is categorized as a postcolonial novel is due to the way the author has mentioned the American influence in trying to impact the culture of Canada. This forceful penetration into the culture is viewed as a form of colonization.

The author has tried to touch upon many social issues related to women and their sexuality in the society. *Surfacing* has in a way challenged a woman's conservative, social and sexual role. *Surfacing* addresses the health hazards connected with hormonal contraception, the notion of contraception as a male discovery, the impact of pregnancy, the society's outlook towards the use of makeup, the false concept of a perfect marriage, the impression of an innate woman, and the emotional techniques that men create to have an upper hand over the female population. The author has addressed all these issues by creating a narrator and how the narrator is trying to cope with these issues. The author has tried to convey the general feelings of women in society when they are treated as a sex object in the society by the male population. Due to these aspects *Surfacing* can be termed as a proto-feminist book.

Surfacing tries to promote ideology of secularism and points out how religion is used to control the people in the society which results in bringing discord among people. The novel tries to address the growing gap between the younger generation with the older people of the society and how it is affecting the society. The narrator of the book considers the older age group people to be at the mercy of false sense of integrity. The author projects the generation gap present in the society and the repercussions of such split.

A slight indication is made in the novel through the narrator about the impact the World War II has added in terms of establishing superiority of men in the society. The narrator also mentions that since America is restless after the war that is why it tries to impose on the culture of the country. *Surfacing* explores the vague moral scene left after the World War II. The narrator has her childhood memories of Hitler being the personification of all malevolence during the World War II period. The narrator realizes that after the war the morals of the society have become even vaguer and there is an urgent need to fight the existing evils in the society. *Surfacing* emphasizes the need for an environmentalist movement as the narrator is a person who believes in the upkeep of the natural resources and strongly condemns the American tourist for their crude treatment of the natural resources. The issues mentioned in the novel are a part of every society even in the present day and there is a need to safeguard the natural resources.

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Check Your Progress

1. Mention Margaret Atwood's major contribution towards encouraging the young writers.
2. Name Margaret Atwood's first novel.

10.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The premise of the novel revolves around an unnamed narrator and protagonist who visits an island on a lake in Northern Quebec². She is accompanied in her journey by her boyfriend and two married friends. Upon her arrival on the island, where she had spent a significant time during her childhood, she is left to re-evaluate her past and ponder over her future. The new and different setting helps the unnamed narrator witness the life from a different point of view. She gets to experience from the close quarters how a marriage based on love is on the verge of falling apart. She meets death and violence and understands that sex can be a great manipulator.

It is interesting to note that the setting of the novel is Quebec. Margaret Atwood talks about the political unrest and change that took place in Quebec in her novel *Surfacing*. The province of Canada is known for homing descents of French and British origin. *Surfacing* was written at a period when Quebec

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nationalism was on the rise. Quebec and rest of the provinces of Canada were at loggerheads over various cultural differences. By the 1960s the Quiet Revolution shook Quebec. The revolution witnessed a series of educational as well as economic reforms being introduced in the place. Political historians have underlined how this revolution laid the foundation for a more secular society, this also paved way for more autonomy in the political and economic space. The citizens of French origin were filled with a sense of nationalism and expressed their desire to separate themselves from the territory of Canada.

Critics usually identify *Surfacing* as a postcolonial novel. We must understand here that the word postcolonial is being used here in a more liberal sense. This is because Canada got its independence from Britain very slowly over a prolonged period of time. And that is why, it cannot be said that *Surfacing* is actually a postcolonial text. Yet, on the other hand, since the author explores the idea of Canadian national identity in the novel and includes various subtle messages with respect to Canada's political situation (for example, the discussion about the national flag of Canada) the novel is usually identified as a postcolonial text. But most importantly, Margaret Atwood incorporates into her novel the powerfully invisible ways in which America exercised its influence over Canada, which according to the author is distinctly a troubling form of colonization, thus, elevating the status of the novel to a strong and commendable work of postcolonial literature. As we already know, most postcolonial texts are written by authors who were from countries that were once ruled by either France or America or Britain. And most of these countries have struggled really hard to gain their political independence and independent identity. It is needless to say that, all these revolutions for independence have witnessed blood violence and death. These postcolonial works are usually marked by a journey in historical oppression and explains how imperialism invariably leaves behind a major political scar.

Some critics have pointed out that *Surfacing* can be read as a post World War II novel. The narrator tells us how she had experienced World War II during her childhood. The memories that stay with her of the War days are neither many nor significant. Yet, she had vivid memories of certain episodes that highlighted the impact of the War. According to the narrator, War was an excuse for the men to indulge in violence and express their pent up emotions. The author scientifically explained that it is during this War scenario that American infiltration of Canada came into existence. She talks about the ambiguous moral social set-up that was created as a result of the Second World War. The narrator recalls her memories of Hitler as a powerhouse of all things Evil, and this in turn shows the readers how we had accepted a very straight forward and simplistic point of view about the complex event in the world history. Now with the death of Hitler and things having changed, the narrator insists on understanding the multi-dimensional effects of violence, cruelty and evilness as there is no single individual to place the blame on.

In the novel, Margaret Atwood creates a narrator who is not named or whose actual identity is never revealed. But it is told to us that despite being a lady

she does not succumb to the social pressures of having to adhere to the gender specified roles. In fact, to avoid this situation she decides to withdraw herself from the general social human interactions. This is a radical feminist text where Margaret Atwood questions about the existing social as well as sexual roles that have been delegated to women. Margaret Atwood makes great use of the alienation of her protagonist to highlight the alienation of all women in the society. The narrator had developed this sense of alienation way back in her childhood when her father mysteriously disappeared and her mother developed a strange sense of detachment due to the unfortunate events unfolding in her life. To add to this, the girl grows up to feel detached and alienated from men because of the way they control women. The narrator realizes that men find different ways, means and reason to control women. She points out how this control is permeated in all aspects of life like sex, religion, birth control, language, etc. She points out how men see relationships as war where women are manipulators and winners of the situation. The narrator confesses that her alienation is systematic because young children are taught early in life about the gender roles. As a result of this self-imposed withdrawal the narrator soon loses her mental balance. The insistence on keeping the narrator unnamed helps the author create a universal figure who is representative of all women and stands as a symbol for their secondary marginal status.

In the relationship of Anna and David, we see that David tells Anna to wear makeup. He insists that she should not give up on her makeup at any point of time. This unnecessary forceful imposition of some behaviour is a clear indication of subjugation of women. Every time, the narrator sees Anna putting on makeup she feels as if Anna is not a human being but a doll. After all, she keeps dressing herself up so that she can sexually please David. It must be noted here that makeup has a dual role. It is simultaneously a means to exercise dominance while at the same time, it can be used for deception. Anna uses makeup to highlight her beauty and act as virtuous and happy lady. Whereas the narrator figures out that Anna sleeps with other men apart from her husband and pretends to be happy whereas she was definitely unhappy in her present circumstances. The narrator considers makeup as an opposing force which does not go well with the characteristics of an ideal woman. After going insane, the protagonist sees herself in the mirror, and calls herself as natural as she stands there wearing nothing and looking completely dishevelled. Margaret Atwood intelligently intertwines the problems of hormonal contraception and associated health risk in her work. The novel puts forth the idea that contraception is primarily a male invention through which the notion of natural woman is challenged. They use psychological mechanisms to extend their control over women. The novel talks about the power of pregnancy and delves into the premise of false marriage while focusing on the social implications of putting on makeup. The ring possessed by the narrator in the novel is a symbol of marriage and its imprisoning impact. The protagonist talks about her experience of wearing her boyfriend's ring as well as her fake husband's ring around her neck. The rings, according to her are nothing more than military decoration. At times, she considers

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it to be a crucifix as well. Introduction of the idea of crucifix implies that marriage is not only limited to being a reason for sacrifice, but becomes a reason for sacrificing for false ideals. The military decoration suggests that marriage is nothing but an occasion to turn women into spoils of War. In the course of the narrative, the ring of the narrator is used to escape the marriage proposal given by Joe.

Many critics have read Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* as a text that documents the generational gap and highlights the rising secular behaviour. The author explores how the older generation are limited by their orthodox understanding of morality that plays a significant role in creating a rift between the conservative ideas (represented by the old population) and liberal ideas (represented by the younger minds). From the author's point of view, religion has ceased to be the primary source of truth. Rather, it is used more as a regulatory force to gain personal and political advantages. There is an episode in the novel that says how the town priest imposed an unnecessary strict dress code to be followed by women, which was clear abuse of his religious authority. Atwood insists that religion (Christianity) is actually a social control mechanism. Since it is taught to one from childhood, its impressions linger on with the person from childhood to adulthood and at times not for good. Time and again, religion is equated with false ideal in *Surfacing*. This obvious condemnation results in sowing the seeds of a larger secular society.

Another interesting theme that appears in the novel is the narrator's fondness for the wilderness that she encounters in Canada. This perception of the narrator has been interpreted as her love for environment, making her one of the earliest ecocritics. The narrator without the name is absolutely critical of the tourists from America who visit this tiny island and kill water animals for fun, litter all around without any concern for the cleanliness of the place. *Surfacing* talks about the negative impact of longing for urbanization and technological development. The novel shows how our closeness to technology takes us away from the powers of the pristine pure nature. Though the novel was written way back in 1970s, its warning about not to over utilize natural resources is still a very valid concern in the 21st century where we are struggling to accommodate the overutilization of technology that has resulted in severe depletion of our natural resources.

Surfacing as a novel makes some strong political statements. It is filled with images of America attacking and destroying Canada. It is told to us that the Americans irresponsibly fill the village with tourist cabins and litter the village with trash everywhere. We are also told how David proposes to conquer Canada so that they can access the Canadian freshwater. Apart from cultural infiltration, the author is sure that American expansion was also possible because of the psychological impact they had on the colonizers. The narrator sums up an American as a man who loves overconsumption and cannot live without technology. Even though David insists that he hates Americans we get to know that he love baseball and likes to imitate Woody Woodpecker.

Across the novel, we see that the powerlessness of the narrator is even more eloquent because she is unable to use the language. When she is angry she is unable to follow the words of David. Due to this, she is not able to stop his inappropriate advances. In another episode, we are told that when the narrator comes across the search party she is unable to understand their words, and hence, as a defensive mechanism she runs away from them. The readers are informed that the young woman is unable to convey anything through the proper utilization of language; and it is only through her yelling that the search party is able to discover her. The narrator lives under the wrong assumption that she can at some point of time leave behind the human language, just the same way, as she thinks that she can stay away from human society. She is inspired by the life of the animals that, according to her, can identify plants without having names for them. Once she develops mental instability she promises never to teach her child the language of human beings. Yet, ironically, she finally manages to overcome isolation and alienation by accepting to use a language.

In the novel, we are told that Paul possesses a barometer which is made of wood. This barometer had a wooden man and woman inside it. Unfortunately for the narrator, this barometer becomes the symbol of marriage. Each time the narrator visualizes the barometer differently and each time she discovers a new perspective of life and marriage. At the initial stage, the narrator considered the couple inside the barometer being caught up in a marriage that was simple and empty. This reminded her of Paul and Madame. Then she also realizes that apart from having a meaningless marriage, Paul and Madame at times even looked wooden in their appearance. Soon she discovered that the happiness of the wooden couple inside the barometer is unreal as the fake happiness of Anna and David. The happiness is only staged and they are not real. The protagonist also uses the barometer as a parameter to understand the relationship that existed between her parents. Seeing the figures in the barometer, she visualizes her father and mother sawing a piece of birch. The birch is important because the narrator connects her parents to the nature. This shows that the wooden couple are neither real nor are they a couple that one will look up to. On the other hand, the parents of the protagonists are the ideal and realistic representation of love.

Like the barometer symbol one comes across the symbol of hanged heron. This hanging heron which is placed at the portage highlights the destruction of nature that is caused by the people of America. The protagonist cannot fathom the need to slaughter a life especially to hang it just for fun. She also feels guilty that the heron is not buried after its death. The death of the bird also highlights the narrator's association of all things wrong with the Americans. Anyone who hurts nature is American from her standpoint. She does not appreciate the use of unnecessary violence and observes the bird after being killed with a bullet is hanged using a nylon rope. This description only further confirms her concerns over nature being enslaved to technology. She feels that the dead bird is sacrificed just like Christ

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(referring to her life-long association with Christian ideology). By intercepting Christian ideas in context to the nature the protagonist underscores her reverence for nature which is as pious for her as religion. This image of hanging heron appears again when the protagonist thinks that the search party will hang her by her feet if they find her. It is to Atwood's credit that she connects to seemingly unlikely ideas of Americans destroying nature with men control women in the most appropriate fashion.

The concept of power and powerlessness appear simultaneously in the novel. We hear the protagonist talking about power several times before she completely loses her mental balance. In the initial part of the novel, we are told how she recalls having seeds from a certain plant will give her unlimited power through which she can do anything that she pleases to. Soon after, we are told that doctors unnecessarily pretend as if childbirth is something that is possible because of them and erasing the role of the mother completely, thus, changing the power dynamics. As the narrative progresses, we see that the unnamed narrator oscillates between being a helpless animal to being an animal with extreme power. She says that since her childhood she has been isolated and emotionally unresponsive which was a result of her being exposed to ill-suited ideas promoted by religion and unnecessary gender roles specified by the society. This eventually left an indelible mark on the mind of the narrator making her get involved into a quest for power. The narrator attains a clinical condition in her psychotic search. She was guided by false hopes and isolated herself from the society so that she could regain her humanity and in the process attain power.

It is interesting to read *Surfacing* as a detective fiction. After all the story originally starts as the narrator's quest to look for her missing father. Even though the novel relies on a few tropes of detective fictions – missing individuals, visiting unexplored location, strangers in the surroundings – soon we are exposed to the minds of the individual and their unexplained intentions that at times became the sole reason for the twists and turns that the world of the novel takes us into. The relationships and their complications (be it between nations or between individuals) soon takes us into a game of psychological manipulations and reservations. In fact, the narrator's own search for her self-knowledge as she is faced with truths of various kinds makes this narrative more of a psychological detective work than just a plain text about a missing person.

Check Your Progress

3. Where is the main setting of the novel, *Surfacing*?
4. What was the main objective of the Quiet Revolution which took place in Quebec in the 1960s?
5. Who is the narrator of the novel?

10.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. In order to encourage young talent Atwood has founded a non-profit organization, the Writer's Trust of Canada.
2. Atwood's first novel was *The Edible English Woman* which was published in 1969.
3. The premise of the novel revolves around an unnamed narrator and protagonist who visits an island on a lake in Northern Quebec.
4. By the 1960s the Quiet Revolution shook Quebec. The revolution witnessed a series of educational as well as economic reforms being introduced in the place. Political historians have underlined how this revolution laid the foundation for a more secular society, this also paved way for more autonomy in the political and economic space. The citizens of French origin were filled with a sense of nationalism and expressed their desire to separate themselves from the territory of Canada.
5. The narrator of the novel is not named or whose actual identity is never revealed. But it is told to us that despite being a lady she does not succumb to the social pressures of having to adhere to the gender specified roles.

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10.5 SUMMARY

- It is interesting to note that the setting of the novel is Quebec. Margaret Atwood talks about the political unrest and change that took place in Quebec in her novel *Surfacing*. The province of Canada is known for homing descents of French and British origin.
- Critics usually identify *Surfacing* as a postcolonial novel. We must understand here that the word postcolonial is being used here in a more liberal sense. This is because Canada got its independence from Britain very slowly over a prolonged period of time.
- Canada's political situation (for example, the discussion about the national flag of Canada) the novel is usually identified as a postcolonial text.
- Some critics have pointed out that *Surfacing* can be read as a post World War II novel. The narrator tells us how she had experienced World War II during her childhood. The memories that stay with her of the War days are neither many nor significant.
- In the novel, Margaret Atwood creates a narrator who is not named or whose actual identity is never revealed. But it is told to us that despite being a lady she does not succumb to the social pressures of having to adhere to the gender specified roles.

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- In the relationship of Anna and David, we see that David tells Anna to wear makeup. He insists that she should not give up on her makeup at any point of time. This unnecessary forceful imposition of some behaviour is a clear indication of subjugation of women.
- The novel talks about the power of pregnancy and delves into the premise of false marriage while focusing on the social implications of putting on makeup. The ring possessed by the narrator in the novel is a symbol of marriage and its imprisoning impact.
- Many critics have read Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* as a text that documents the generational gap and highlights the rising secular behaviour. The author explores how the older generation are limited by their orthodox understanding of morality that plays a significant role in creating a rift between the conservative ideas (represented by the old population) and liberal ideas (represented by the younger minds).
- Another interesting theme that appears in the novel is the narrator's fondness for the wilderness that she encounters in Canada. This perception of the narrator has been interpreted as her love for environment, making her one of the earliest ecocritics.
- *Surfacing* as a novel makes some strong political statements. It is filled with images of America attacking and destroying Canada. It is told to us that the Americans irresponsibly fill the village with tourist cabins and litter the village with trash everywhere.
- Across the novel, we see that the powerlessness of the narrator is even more eloquent because she is unable to use the language. When she is angry she is unable to follow the words of David. Due to this, she is not able to stop his inappropriate advances.
- In the novel, we are told that Paul possesses a barometer which is made of wood. This barometer had a wooden man and woman inside it. Unfortunately for the narrator, this barometer becomes the symbol of marriage.
- Like the barometer symbol one comes across the symbol of hanged heron. This hanging heron which is placed at the portage highlights the destruction of nature that is caused by the people of America. The protagonist cannot fathom the need to slaughter a life especially to hang it just for fun.
- The concept of power and powerlessness appear simultaneously in the novel. We hear the protagonist talking about power several times before she completely loses her mental balance.
- It is interesting to read *Surfacing* as a detective fiction. After all the story originally starts as the narrator's quest to look for her missing father. Even though the novel relies on a few tropes of detective fictions – missing individuals, visiting unexplored location, strangers in the surroundings – soon

we are exposed to the minds of the individual and their unexplained intentions that at times became the sole reason for the twists and turns that the world of the novel takes us into.

Margaret Atwood:
Surfacing

10.6 KEY WORDS

- **Crucifix:** It refers to the a representation of Christ on the cross.
- **Pristine:** It implies clean, fresh, unpolluted.
- **Ecocritic:** This term refers to a literary critic who analyses how the natural environment is portrayed in literature.

10.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the relationship of Anna and David.
2. What is the significance of the barometer in the novel?
3. Identify the elements of detective fiction present in the novel, *Surfacing*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Examine *Surfacing* as a postcolonial novel.
2. Discuss the views of critics on *Surfacing*.
3. '*Surfacing* as a novel makes some strong political statements. It is filled with images of America attacking and destroying Canada.' Elucidate the statement.

10.8 FURTHER READINGS

Blain, Virginia, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements, (Eds.). 1990. *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Todd, Janet, (Ed.). 1989. *British Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide*. London: Rutledge.

Lonsdale, Roger (Ed.). 1989. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Black, Helen C. 1893. *Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches*. Glasgow: David Bryce & Sons.

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Endnotes

1. 1939 – present Canada. She is a novelist, critic, poet, essayist, environmental activist, teacher, and inventor. She has completed her education at University of Toronto and at Harvard University. She has more than 8 collection for children, 18 books of poetry, 2 graphics novel, 18 novels, 11 books of non-fiction and many more to her credit. In 2004, she came with the concept creating of a remote robotic writing technology. This was called as LongPen which let anyone write in ink from any location through internet without being physically present.
2. 'is one of the thirteen provinces and territories of Canada.'

UNIT 11 ALICE WALKER: *THE COLOR PURPLE*

Alice Walker:
The Color Purple

NOTES

Structure

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 About the Author
- 11.3 Critical Analysis
- 11.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 11.5 Summary
- 11.6 Key Words
- 11.7 Self Assessment Questions And Exercises
- 11.8 Further Readings

11.0 INTRODUCTION

Alice Walker attempts to focus on reality instead of fiction in writing her prominent work, *The Color Purple*. Walker is famously known for writing essays, poetry and novels and simultaneously has been acknowledged as an activist as well. *The Color Purple* is replete with facts and highlights the plight, agony, cruelty of the Afro-Americans especially the women. Celie, the narrator of the novel, is raped and treated disgracefully her father and later by her husband. The novel is replete with themes which abound in the contemporary scenario and therefore, her work has found abundant recognition and acknowledgement by the readers of all times.

11.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the epistolary form of the novel
- Explain the theme of female bonding and sisterhood celebrated in the novel
- Identify the traits of the male characters of the novel
- Analyse the contemporary relevance of the novel

11.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alice Walker was born on 9 February 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia. Her parents were poor sharecroppers and the family was a victim of violent racism during that time. Alice became blind in the right eye and underwent some facial disfigurement

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in her childhood days. After graduating in 1961 she joined Spelman college. She became a civil right activist in college and even received invitation for the youth world peace festival in Helsinki, Finland. Because of these activities, she was also invited by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1962. In 1963 she attended King's 'I have dream' speech and participated in 'the march on Washington for jobs and freedom'. She received the prestigious scholarship for Sarah Lawrence College. She wrote her first volume of poetry '*Once*' in 1968 inspired by her mentors Muriel Ruykeyser and Jane Cooper.

Alice married Mel Leventhal, a Jewish civil rights law student and settled in Mississippi. They were the first interracial couple in Mississippi and as a result they received constant threats from Klu-Klux-Klan. Her pregnancy pushed her into deep depression and she thought of committing suicide but on the eve of her recovery when she wrote a short story '*To Hell With Dying*' she received lot of praise from Langston Hughes.

As a civil right activist, she went door to door for voters' registration. She finally took up a teaching job at Jackson State University. She continued writing and published her first novel '*The Third Life of Grange Copeland*'. It received literary praise for taking up the issue of oppression of women but received criticism for its insensitive portrayal of black male characters. In 1972 while teaching at Wellesley College, she introduced a course on women literature. In 1976 she wrote her second novel '*Meridian*' dealing with struggles of women as civil right activist. She divorced and married Robert Allen, editor of 'Black Scholar' in California. Her second book of short stories '*You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*' was also critically acclaimed. In 1982 she completed her famous novel '*The Colour Purple*' which is a epistolary account of poor black women named Celie. In 1983, this novel won the Pulitzer Prize and was adapted into motion picture directed by Steven Spielberg. Her sister even opened a charitable organization named Color Purple Foundation for imparting education to the needy.

Walker published her third volume of poetry, *Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful* in 1984. Her second book of essays, *Living By the Word*, was published in 1988, and she published her epic novel *The Temple of My Familiar* in 1989.

Her account of being a bisexual is depicted in *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult* (1996). In a 2006 interview with *The Guardian*, Walker described her affair with Tracy Chapman as 'delicious and lovely and wonderful...but [it was] not anybody's business but ours.'

Her nonfiction book *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism* (1997) defines her political activism, civil rights movement, the anti-nuclear movement, the environmental movement, the women's movement, and the movement to protect indigenous peoples.

Walker published *By the Light of My Father's Smile*, in 1998 which discusses relationship between a father and daughter. Her novel *Now Is The Time To Open Your Heart*, received the infamous review in 2004 from *New York Times* critic Michiko Kakutani: 'If this novel did not boast the name of Alice Walker, who won acclaim some two decades ago with *The Color Purple*, it's hard to imagine how it could have been published...[it is] a remarkably awful compendium of inanities.'

Her writings dealt with issues of gender and race in the US. There is openness in her writing and prominent autobiographical element.

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Check Your Progress

1. Why did Alice Walker and her husband receive constant threats from Klu-Klux-Klan?
2. What did Walker's writing deal with?

11.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The Color Purple is a novel written by Alice Walker in which she portrays a poor and uneducated poor black girl of fourteen years old as the protagonist and the narrator living in rural Georgia. She is beaten and raped by her father, Alphonso which makes her write letters to God. She was impregnated by her father and gave birth to a girl whom her father stole and killed in the forest. Her second child is a boy who was also stolen by her father. Her mother falls sick seriously and dies and after her death her father brought a new wife to home but continued abusing Celie. Her bright younger sister's name was Nettie who had a lover, but her father refused to get her married to that man and offered Celie as a bride to him. After accepting this offer, Celie was put into a joyless and difficult married life. Nettie ran away from her father, Alphonso and took shelter at Celie's house. Her husband still desired her and advanced on her from which Nettie again ran away from.

After this incident, Celie did not hear about her and thought that she was dead. Celie's husband's sister Kate felt sorry for her condition and advised her to fight back against the torments of her husband rather than bearing it. Their son, Harpo fell in love with a girl named Sofia. The singer, Shug Avery, the ex-girlfriend of Celie's husband came to the town to sing at a local bar but Celie was not allowed to go and see her. After getting pregnant, Sofia married to Harpo. Sofia with her radical attitude defied in the face of Harpo which amazed Celie who was very docile and meek. Sofia was also treated badly by Celie's husband who attempted to beat her into submission, but he failed as Sophia was physically stronger and larger than both of them. Shug fell ill and came to the house of Celie and her husband where she initially was very rude to her but later, both of them

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became friends and Shug was nursed by Celie who grew sexually infatuated and attracted towards Shug. Due to the maltreatment given by Harpo, Sofia ran away with her children. After some months, Harpo opened a juke joint where Shug started singing every night. Celie was confused about her feelings towards Shug. Shug decided to stay back with Celie when she learnt that Celie was beaten brutally by her husband when she was not around.

The relationship between Shug and Celie became intimate and Shug began to ask Celie questions about sex. Sofia returned for a visit and got into fight with her husband Harpo about his new girlfriend, Squeak. One day, the mayor's wife, Miss Millie asked Sophia to work as her maid to which she replied, 'Hell no.' She was slapped by the mayor as she refused to the subordination perpetrated towards her. As a reaction, she blew him down. As a result, Sophia was sent to jail and the attempts of Squeak to get her free were futile. Sofia was sentenced to work for twelve years as a maid to the Mayor.

Shug continued her sexual relationship with Celie though she got a new husband, Grady. One night, Shug asked Celie about her sister, but Celie assumed that she was dead otherwise she would write letters to her as she promised. At this Shug informed her that her husband was hiding many mails in his custody. Shug managed to get one of these letters and found that it was written by Nettie. After searching the trunk of her husband, Celie found dozens of letters from Nettie, Celie got emotional and started reading letters in reverse order. She wondered how to keep herself from killing her husband. Through letters, she got the fact that Nettie befriended a missionary couple, Samuel and Corrine and travelled with them to Africa to do ministry work. The couple adopted two children, Olivia and Adam. Nettie and Corrine became close friends but on seeing the resemblance of Nettie to her adopted children, she suspected a secret past between Nettie and Samuel. After growing suspicious, she tried to limit Nettie's role with her family.

In Africa, Nettie discovered the self-centred attitude of Africans which made her disillusioned with her missionary experience. On asking Samuel about how he adopted Olivia and Adam, Nettie discovered that these children were actually the biological children of Celie by Alphonso who was not their real father but only their step-father which she also discovered. She also learnt that their real father was a store-owner who was lynched by the White men as they could not tolerate his success. They were told by Alphonso that he was their real father as he wanted to inherit the property and the house which belonged to their mother. After discovering this fact, Nettie informed Samuel and Corrine that she was their children's biological aunt, but she was not believed by Corrine. Only on her death bed she trusted her story and reconciled with Nettie just before her death. Alphonso also confirmed the story of Nettie with the acceptance that he was their stepfather. Celie lost her faith in God, but Shug made her try to reimagine in God in her own way rather than in the traditional image of old, bearded White man. Sofia was released six years earlier by the Mayor. At dinner, one night, Celie released her

anger and aggression against years' long suppression and oppression by her husband. Shug announced that she and Celie were moving to Tennessee and Squeak also decided to go with them. In Tennessee, Celie spent her time in tailoring and sewing pairs of pants and eventually she turned her hobby into a business venture. On return to Georgia, Celie found that Alphonso had died and Mr... reformed his ways. After death of Alphonso, the house and lands belonged to her, so she moved there.

Meanwhile, Nettie and Samuel married and prepared to return to America. Before their leave, Samuel's son, Adam married Tashi, a native African girl. As per the African tradition, Tashi underwent a painful circumcision and facial scarring. Adam also went through the same facial scarring following the solidarity. Celie and Mr... reconciled and genuinely started enjoying each other's company. Celie felt emotionally, spiritually and financially secured. She was no longer bothered by temporary flings of Shug with younger men. In Celie's clothing store, Sophia started working after marrying to Harpo again. Netty finally returned to America and reunited with her sister, Celie who was emotionally drained but noted that she and Nettie were now old though in her life, she never felt younger in her life.

Themes in *The Color Purple*

Let us study about the significant themes of the novel.

- **Suffering and Distress**

The novel begins with an unnamed character who writes her first letter to God and asks him about her wonder what was happening to her fourteen-year-old body. She was expecting a child. The novel is written in epistolary form- in all complete ninety letters which give a deep insight and psyche of the protagonist which she herself is not aware of. Her mother was on her death bed thinking that perhaps her daughter was impregnated by a local boy. On asking who the father of Celie's child was, she responded that God was the father of her child. Her whole life, she spent in suffering and pain as her father was the father of both her children, Olivia and Adam whom she thought that they were stolen and murdered by her father.

- **Separation and Self-Discovery**

The novel stresses upon the idea of expressing one's thoughts and feelings. Expression is very imperative to develop a sense of self. Celie is unable to resist the torture and oppression she goes by. She cannot raise her voice against those who abuse her. Alphonso warns her 'better not never tell nobody but God' about his abusing her which leads her to remain silent and invisible. She has no assertion for herself. Only her letters to God is the outlet she gets accustomed to. She has no articulation for her experience to share with anyone. She discovers herself and her power of voice finally in the company of Shug. She finds sympathetic ears and finds her voice and realizes that she can also create her narrative, her voice, her

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articulation. Gradually, she shares her story with Shug and finally through the letters of Nettie, the whole missing past was discovered. She gets the knowledge of her past through the letters of Nettie and discovers herself and the biological relationship with Olivia and Adam. In the climax, she releases her anger and aggression against her husband for the torment and torture he perpetrated towards her.

- **Selfhood and Resistance**

The novel emphasizes the power of selfhood and resistance. One should not be a calm and quiet recipient of wrong done to her as we find in the case of Celie. Her non-articulate demeanour makes her a passive object of oppression. On the other hand, Nettie finds herself in her will. She is not as subordinated as her sister was in the whole narrative. She discovers her new self in Africa living with Samuel and his adopted children. Her self-discovery also helps other characters to discover themselves. Only through her letters, Celie got to know that Alphonso was not their biological father rather he was their step-father. We also learn that sometimes resistance can also be risky. Sofia's outburst in response to Miss Millie's invitation to be her maid cost her twelve years of her life. Though she regained her freedom after six years, but she had to pay a high price for her selfhood.

- **Sisterhood and Strong Female Relationship**

The novel explores and strengthens strong female bond which gives power to their voice and narrative. All women in the novel, Celie, Shug, Nettie, Sofia have strong relationships with each other which gives them power to fight against the patriarchal structures and male dominance. Celie and Shug share a strong bond like a couple which diminish the need of a male in their life. They become more reciprocal in their love in a world which is filled with male sovereignty.

Most of the women share motherly, sisterly or simple friendship as a strong relationship. In few cases, their relationships are sexual. Celie and Nettie's relationship helped them discover their 'self'. Her bond with her sister could help her survive in the alien culture of Africa. Sofia also expresses her strong bond with her sisters which made her able to fight against male dominance. The redemption of Celie is possible through her strong relationship with Shug. Thus, women play very important role in the novel against their male counterparts.

- **Racism and Sexism**

The novel represents gender biased and racist society. The gender and racist abusers are stereotyped characters in Alice Walker's novels. She represents the one-dimensional monsters in her novel with realistic picture. Women are dominated and sexually oppressed in this novel. Celie is raped and impregnated by her father, Alphonso. Harpo also beats Sofia on the provocations of his father. Mr..... is also violent and ill-treats Celie like a tyrant as Alphonso was. We see a very racist image of America in this novel. The Black women are doubly marginalized in comparison to White women as in the case of Miss Miller who tortures Sofia.

Style in *The Color Purple*

Alice Walker:
The Color Purple

The novel is written in the form of letters which is known as epistolary novel. Through the letters, readers delve deeper into the past of the characters and also about his or her experiences. There is limitation of this form also as we have to depend on the letters of the character hence the viewpoint is limited. But Alice Walker introduces two narrators not one to overcome this limitation. This widens the range of the narrative. We read the letters of Celie and of Nettie- giving two different world's narrative, one is American and the other is African. This device supplies information to the characters belonging to different world. Through the letters of Nettie, Celie learnt that her children were not incestuously conceived as Alphonso was not their biological father. The story is told from the point of view or 'narrative focalization'. There is a coherent relationship of the narrator to the story. Celie being the principal narrator in the novel whose letters give her outlook and perception of her rural life in the South of America whereas Nettie being the secondary narrator, sharing her experiences in Africa. But finally, both the stories collaborate and are interwoven with each other. The novel is written with internal focalization with two different points of view.

Celie's story is more personal and dynamic, and she writes fifty-six letters to God, and fourteen to Nettie which are greater in number of twenty-one letters of Nettie written from Africa to her sister, Celie which were hidden in private custody of Mr..... The epistolary form is not realistic rather it is contrived. Both the sisters in the novel are apart from each other for thirty years who take to writing letters to remove their loneliness. In Celie's case, she is not expressive and vocal about her pain and sufferings hence writing letters help her to give an outlet. Celie continues to write letters to her sister without having any concrete information about her being alive and Nettie also was writing letters consistently to Celie on Christmas and Easter. Use of letters has an impact on the structure of the novel. Some of Celie's letters record events over a small number of days and many years remain unrecorded. Walker uses elliptical method in leaving out specific reference of the time from the narrative. The novel has only seventy thousand words, on such a small-scale novel, every detail cannot be recorded. The novel is not written in a very simple style and technique like many novels are written rather the author does not tell us about characters and the setting. Only through careful reading through clueless social attitudes and clothes, the readers derive details about the setting and the time. In the beginning of the letters, people seem to be moving in wagons and when the letters end, they are driving in the cars hence the span of the novel covers forty years. Walker does not introduce an omniscient narrator so many years are not even recorded in the novel which Walker does not explain to the readers. Celie's letters are not written in Standard English. She uses dialect or folk language which also seems to be clumsy to many readers, but we can hear her voice through her letters as they are written in immediacy. She is uneducated and writes as she thinks thus Walker tries to bring originality in her writing style as there is spontaneity and naturalness in the expression of the thoughts in Celie's letters

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which cover the major part of the novel. We can hear the honest voice of Celie while reading her letters as most of her letters are addressed to God as her mentor, guide and best friend. In the beginning of the novel, she sounds low confident due to her terrible pain and suffering. She feels devalued in her life. She has no self-esteem to sign her name with a sense of pride so most of her letters are unsigned. Her life is lived as a virtual slave in this male dominated society. She has no other role to perform except her sexual role. She is vulnerable to social injustice but towards the end of the novel, she grows into a confident, mature, twentieth century woman who is independent in her life. The novel explores and strengthens strong female bond which gives power to their voice and narrative.

All women in the novel, Celie, Shug, Nettie, Sofia have strong relationships with each other which gives them power to fight against the patriarchal structures and male dominance. Celie and Shug share a strong bond like a couple which diminish the need of a male in their life. They become more reciprocal in their love in a world which is filled with male sovereignty. Most of the women share motherly, sisterly or simple friendship as a strong relationship. In few cases, their relationships are sexual. Celie and Nettie's relationship helped them discover their 'self'. Her bond with her sister could help her survive in the alien culture of Africa. Sofia also expresses her strong bond with her sisters which made her able to fight against male dominance. The redemption of Celie is possible through her strong relationship with Shug. Thus, women play very important role in the novel against their male counterparts. Celie's love for Nettie and Shug helps her forgive Albert for all torments and pain he has given to her. Her unflagging love for other women in the novel heals her heartaches and love leads her to forgiveness and reconciliation.

At the end of the novel, we find her 'solid' as she has endured and learnt to fight through her resistance and assertion though later in her life. Celie's letters are filled with love, pain, humour and finally faith which sustain her life. Walker uses black vernacular English and poor spelling and grammar throughout the letters to bring originality and authenticity of the epistolary form. Celie's naive use of language created a bond between the writer of the letters and the readers as they seem to be written with direct confessionary tone to God- the honest expression of a young child of fourteen who gets pregnant. Her sentences are short and blunt giving the complex images in the narrative though Nettie's letters give broader perspective to the book. The writer maintains fluidity in the self-expression by the narrators by giving an authentic framework to the novel. We also see duality and ambiguity at times in the narrator's self-identity.

Check Your Progress

3. Who is the protagonist of *The Color Purple*?
4. Why is Sophia sent to jail in *The Color Purple*?
5. Who is the real mother of Olivia and Adam in the novel?
6. Who are the two narrators of *The Color Purple*?

11.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Alice married Mel Leventhal, a Jewish civil rights law student and settled in Mississippi. They were the first interracial couple in Mississippi and as a result they received constant threats from Klu-Klux-Klan.
2. Alice Walker's writings dealt with issues of gender and race in the US. There is openness in her writing and prominent autobiographical element.
3. The protagonist of *The Color Purple* is a poor and uneducated poor black girl of fourteen years old.
4. Sophia sent to jail in *The Color Purple* because she refuses to work as a maid at the Mayor's office. She gets slapped by the mayor as she refused to the subordination perpetrated towards her. As a reaction, she blew him down. As a result, Sophia was sent to jail. Sofia was sentenced to work for twelve years as a maid to the Mayor.
5. Celie is the real mother of Olivia and Adam in the novel.
6. Alice Walker introduces two narrators in the novel. Celie being the principal narrator in the novel whose letters give her outlook and perception of her rural life in the South of America whereas Nettie being the secondary narrator, sharing her experiences in Africa. But finally, both the stories collaborate and are interwoven with each other. The novel is written with internal focalization with two different points of view.

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11.5 SUMMARY

- *The Color Purple* is a novel written by Alice Walker in which she portrays a poor and uneducated poor black girl of fourteen years old as the protagonist and the narrator living in rural Georgia.
- Celie's husband's sister Kate felt sorry for her condition and advised her to fight back against the torments of her husband rather than bearing it.
- Shug fell ill and came to the house of Celie and her husband where she initially was very rude to her but later, both of them became friends and Shug was nursed by Celie who grew sexually infatuated and attracted towards Shug.
- The relationship between Shug and Celie became intimate and Shug began to ask Celie questions about sex. Sofia returned for a visit and got into fight with her husband Harpo about his new girlfriend, Squeak. One day, the mayor's wife, Miss Millie asked Sophia to work as her maid to which she replied, 'Hell no.'

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- Shug continued her sexual relationship with Celie though she got a new husband, Grady. One night, Shug asked Celie about her sister, but Celie assumed that she was dead otherwise she would write letters to her as she promised.
- In Africa, Nettie discovered the self-centred attitude of Africans which made her disillusioned with her missionary experience. On asking Samuel about how he adopted Olivia and Adam, Nettie discovered that these children were actually the biological children of Celie by Alphonso who was not their real father but only their step-father which she also discovered.
- Meanwhile, Nettie and Samuel married and prepared to return to America. Before their leave, Samuel's son, Adam married Tashi, a native African girl. As per the African tradition, Tashi underwent a painful circumcision and facial scarring.
- The novel begins with an unnamed character who writes her first letter to God and asks him about her wonder what was happening to her fourteen-year-old body. She was expecting a child. The novel is written in epistolary form- in all complete ninety letters which give a deep insight and psyche of the protagonist which she herself is not aware of.
- The novel emphasizes the power of selfhood and resistance. One should not be a calm and quiet recipient of wrong done to her as we find in the case of Celie. Her non-articulate demeanour makes her a passive object of oppression.
- The novel explores and strengthens strong female bond which gives power to their voice and narrative. All women in the novel, Celie, Shug, Nettie, Sofia have strong relationships with each other which gives them power to fight against the patriarchal structures and male dominance.
- The novel represents gender biased and racist society. The gender and racist abusers are stereotyped characters in Alice Walker's novels. She represents the one-dimensional monsters in her novel with realistic picture.
- The novel is written in the form of letters which is known as epistolary novel. Through the letters, readers delve deeper into the past of the characters and also about his or her experiences.
- Celie's story is more personal and dynamic, and she writes fifty-six letters to God, and fourteen to Nettie which are greater in number of twenty-one letters of Nettie written from Africa to her sister, Celie which were hidden in private custody of Mr.... The epistolary form is not realistic rather it is contrived.
- All women in the novel, Celie, Shug, Nettie, Sofia have strong relationships with each other which gives them power to fight against the patriarchal structures and male dominance. Celie and Shug share a strong bond like a couple which diminish the need of a male in their life.

- At the end of the novel, we find her ‘solid’ as she has endured and learnt to fight through her resistance and assertion though later in her life. Celie’s letters are filled with love, pain, humour and finally faith which sustain her life.

Alice Walker:
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11.6 KEY WORDS

- **Epistolary form:** This term generally refers to the writing of a poem, novel or short story in the form of letters.
- **Dialect:** It is a particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group.
- **Vernacular English:** It is associated with varieties of English that are normally spoken, not written. There are no prescribed conventions for vernacular English.

11.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Briefly discuss the life and works of Alice Walker.
2. Write a short note on the presentation of male characters in the novel, *The Color Purple*.
3. Briefly mention the writing style of Alice Walker adopted in *The Color Purple*.
4. Explain the significant themes highlighted in the novel.

Long-Answer Questions

1. ‘The novel explores and strengthens strong female bond which gives power to their voice and narrative.’ Elucidate the statement.
2. Prepare a summary of the novel, *The Color Purple*.
3. Critically comment on the title of the novel.

11.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 12 KATHERINE MANSFIELD: *A CUP OF TEA*

*Katherine Mansfield:
A Cup of Tea*

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Structure

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 About the Author
- 12.3 Critical Analysis
- 12.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 12.5 Summary
- 12.6 Key Words
- 12.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 12.8 Further Readings

12.0 INTRODUCTION

*A Cup of Tea*¹ is written by Katherine Mansfield². This short story was composed in 1922. The story is set in London city of the 1920s. Mansfield creates a story which is both subtle and sensitive. It helps one access the inner corners of the mind. The cup of tea is a symbolic representation of class hierarchy and the wide gap that exists between the affluent and the under privileged. The cup of tea represents the privileges of social status and a means to disrespect the poverty of the poor; as the rich mindlessly invest their money in buying the best of the product available in the world, they also buy their goodness by generously helping the poor. The act of welfare is not undertaken to elevate the status of the poor but to use the act as an excuse to flaunt individual achievements and create social adulation.

12.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the distinct traits of the character of Rosemary Fell
- Explain the major theme of the short story
- Analyse the writing style of Katherine Mansfield
- Critically comment on the title of the short story, *A Cup of Tea*

12.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katherine Mansfield Beauchamp was born on 14 October 1888 in New South Wales, New Zealand where she lived until she turned 19 years old. It was a colonial era, when the British Empire ruled much of the world. She wrote under

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the name Katherine Mansfield, and is internationally acclaimed as an English writer of short stories, of New Zealand origin.

At the age of 19 years, Katherine Mansfield migrated to the United Kingdom, where she became friends with other British writers such as Virginia Woolf and D H Lawrence. She was first married to George Bowden in the year 1908 and later in 1918; she married John Middleton Murry. She is considered today as an acclaimed New Zealand short story writer of the modernist period.

She was diagnosed with extra pulmonary tuberculosis in the year 1917, and as the disease had as yet not been found cures for, died of the disease in 1923. Her family was well-known and well-to-do settled in Wellington, New South Wales, New Zealand. Her grandfather, Arthur Beauchamp, had been a prominent politician of his times. Her family had also descended from renowned Victorian artist Charles Robert Leslie, and author Countess Elizabeth von Armin. Mansfield's father Harold Beauchamp had been the chairman of the Bank of New Zealand, and would be knighted in the year 1923.

In the year 1893, the Mansfield family shifted from the suburbs of Thorndon to the countryside, Karori, for health reasons. The open countryside offered beautiful open fields where Katherine Mansfield spent the happiest years of her life. Her short story, *Prelude* was inspired by her memories and experiences of those years.

The Mansfield family returned to Wellington in the year 1898. Katherine Mansfield's first published short stories appeared in the *High School Reporter*, and later the Wellington Girls *High School magazine*. Later, the *New Zealand Graphic* and *Ladies Journal*, a renowned high society magazine in Wellington, would publish her work. This was probably the first formal publication of Mansfield's short stories.

In the year 1903, Mansfield shifted to London to attend Queen's College along with her older sisters. She had by then become disillusioned and frustrated by the way the Maori people were being repressed and ill-treated. Mansfield portrayed Maori characters in a positive and sympathetic light in many of her writings, such as *How Pearl Button was Kidnapped*.

Although Mansfield was an accomplished cello player, and though of playing professionally, she soon became editor of the college newspaper. This was obviously where her heart was. She became a fan of the writings of Oscar Wilde, and met another writer, South African Ida Baker, at college, forming a lifelong friendship with her. Mansfield travelled across Germany and Belgium between the years 1903 and 1906, returning to New Zealand after completing her education. It was only after this that she began to write short stories seriously and professionally.

Mansfield was romantically involved with two women, that she gave much importance in her diaries. But she also tried to repress these relationships, and married to men. The repressive environment of New Zealand forced her to return to England in the year 1908. Her first collection of short stories was *In a German*

Pension in the year 1911. Mansfield met her second husband John Middleton Murry at the *Rhythm* magazine where he was editor. He encouraged her to write dark stories, and she thus, wrote murder and mental illness tale, titled *The Woman at the Store*.

*Katherine Mansfield:
A Cup of Tea*

On being diagnosed with tuberculosis in the year 1917, Mansfield went to stay at a remote hotel in Bandol, France, where she continued to write short stories. She did not want to go to a sanatorium, because she thought it would prevent her from writing.

Mansfield published two collections of short stories, titled *Bliss* in the year 1920 and the second titled, *The Garden Party* in the year 1922. Her marriage to Murry experienced many ups and downs primarily because of her bisexual liaisons. In January 1923, Katherine Mansfield suffered a final and fatal haemorrhage while running up a flight of stairs and died on January 9 1923. Mansfield is buried at Cimethered' Avon in France.

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Check Your Progress

1. Which disease was the cause of death of Katherine Mansfield?
2. Name one book by Mansfield which portrayed Maori characters in a positive and sympathetic light.

12.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The story time and again questions the idea of appearance and reality. Mansfield highlights the hypocrisy of the British affluent class where Rosemary Fell is the typical representative of her world. While Rosemary appears to be kind and caring as she takes Miss. Smith along with her for a cup of tea. Her actual intentions lie on her vested interest. Her generous help is her way of creating a philanthropic act which she can boast about in her elite circle. Her actions are neither motivated by kindness nor care. Rather her philanthropic act is meant to serve to her advantage where she can project herself as a generous individual with a heart of gold. Mansfield points out that it is not out of goodwill but out of selfish needs that upper class society praise and shower the poor with material benefits. As the third person narrator explains Rosemary intended to prove to the pauper girl that life is full of wonderful things and it was possible to meet fairy godmothers and that rich people were good people and women, irrespective of their social status, can empathise with each other.

The short story revolves around Rosemary Fell who is a young privileged socialite from an affluent household. The story unfolds as she visits the town to buy a few items. A chance encounter with an expensive jewellery box brings her to an antique shop. She falls for the box, yet the price of the dainty product makes her reconsider her decision. She decides to come back later for the box.

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Being a little disappointed that she could not buy the jewellery box she walks into the street where she meets a poor young woman³ who had a dishevelled appearance and appeared to be of the same age as Rosemary Fell. She begs for some money which could only buy her a cup of tea. The request surprises Rosemary Fell as it was unimaginable for her to believe that one might not possess any money.

Inspired by a tale that she has recently read, Rosemary decides to invite this poor lady to her house as a mark of charity⁴. Soon we see Miss Smith reaching Rosemary Fell's house and enjoying not just tea but other gastronomical delights. Just as the tea session was continuing Mr. Phillip Fell⁵ enters into the room and he instantly expressed his displeasure over the arrival of this unexpected yet invited guest. In the next instance, he is drawn towards the beauty of the visitor and informs his wife of the same.

Such words of praise from Philip for Miss Smith make Rosemary extremely uncomfortable and insecure. She gives some cash to Miss Smith and asks her to leave. Being anxious about her own beauty (which did not find approval from her husband yet the poor lady did) she takes special care to dress her best for dinner and seeks affirmation and approval of her beauty from Phillip.

Rosemary Fell occupies a curious position in the story. As the author writes, Rosemary Fell was not 'exactly beautiful'. Yet, she was blessed with admirable features, had an elegant fashion sense and was a voracious reader. Yet, despite her wealth, her life by and large revolves around the approval and disapproval of her husband. He was the one who owned the money and if Rosemary had to lead a comfortable life she had to rely on her appearance to keep her husband charmed. Thus, a compliment from the husband for a ragged lady makes her jealous and insecure making her pay extra attention to her appearance highlighting her vulnerable position in the society despite appearing to be privileged and powerful.

Rosemary's social position and her wealth are represented through her shopping interests. The text is replete with information related to her material obsession. We are told she went shopping to Paris from London. She is shown buying flowers from one of the most expensive florists of London, and of course, she loves visiting the antique shops. She travels by cars and she has the luxury of buying 'those and those and those' at any shop she feels like. Her social superiority is established through her purchasing capacity. Yet her association with her surroundings was far from real. The reality that she lived in was dictated through the books she read. Her Samaritan act is one such bright example where she realizes that she needs to help because that is how things are in fictional world and also it will help her gain fame. This disassociation with the actual life is rather alarming as it exposes the absence of knowledge of class privileges and underlines the plague of materialism ruling Britain in the early 1900s. In the story, the hopeless condition of the poor young girl is apparent in her skinny and weak appearance. She is described as someone who is frail and possesses light eyes, dishevelled hairs and dark lips. This is in sharp contrast to Rosemary's looks where even her

hat resembles the petals of a germanium flower and the green ribbon hanging from it makes it appear as if the hat-petal is hanging from a branch.

The significance of the class hypocrisy is introduced in the text very subtly. On one hand, we have Rosemary Fell could not believe that one could be so poor that she cannot buy herself even one cup of tea and quench her hunger and cold; on the other hand; we have Miss Smith who did not have the means by herself to eat a basic meal, forget about laying her hands on anything luxurious. Yet, when these two women meet each other unexpectedly, the readers are exposed to the mental journey of each of the characters. While Miss Smith is fed not only for the sake of her hunger but also to fuel Rosemary's ego, her departure only makes us realize that Rosemary herself had been a victim of the situation by being left defenceless.

The story is set on two different locations. The first time we meet Rosemary she is in the antique shop on Curzon Street. Later, we see her with Miss Smith at her luxurious house.

Had Rosemary managed to buy the little box from the antique shop, the box would have been one of the decorative pieces (out of the numerous ones) that would have found a place in the regal house of Rosemary. This is interesting because as Rosemary offers to doff Miss Smith's hat and coat she does not put the pieces of clothing in their designated place; instead, she leaves them off on the floor. This itself is eloquent enough to suggest how Rosemary did not consider a beggar's wretched clothes to be worthy of being placed anywhere in the visible quarters of her household, which was furnished with amenities that were designed with 'gold cushions and the primrose and blue rugs'; undermining Miss Smith's entire human existence and showing her (Rosemary) detachment to her (Smith) miserable life. Miss Smith's life and appearance is also communicated to the readers through the use of metaphors and similes that was absolutely different from the luxurious creamy house that Rosemary possessed. Her grim condition reflected in her voice which is 'like a sigh, almost like a sob'. The fragile appearance of the poor lady is described as 'bird-like shoulders' and her hungry and cold and vulnerable condition made her 'stagger like a child'.

Without a doubt, the act of help was devoid of genuineness or intimacy. Yet, it was not as if Rosemary was someone who was devoid of emotions, one could definitely see her being filled with misery when unable to procure an antique item. As the narrator points out that Rosemary's disappointment reflected in the weather too. There was a 'cold bitter taste in the air'. Even though there was rain, but due to the doleful mood of Rosemary, it felt as if ashes were spinning down to the ground. Even the lights in the rain appeared remorseful and appeared 'regretting something'.

Mansfield has introduced various literary devices into her short story to elevate the writing style. She uses phrases like 'sounds like one's grandparents', 'as you and I would go to Bond Street'. When Rosemary feels insecure and

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jealous of Miss Smith as Philip appreciates her beauty the readers here are told that Rosemary's 'heart beats like a heavy bell'. The use of simile⁶ helps the readers identify the mental state of Rosemary. The author beautifully introduces personification⁷ ('cold bitter taste in the air') to highlight the gloomy state of Rosemary's mind. In fact, so deep was Rosemary's sadness that even the inanimate objects like the houses seemed to echo her feelings when they too 'looked sad' and appeared to be 'regretting something'. But, as she brings Miss Smith into the picture, Mansfield uses a different set of language and metaphors⁸ to paint her world. The poor lady has a 'thin figure'. She is a 'little battered creature' and a 'new being, a light, frail creature with tangled hair'. She is nothing more than a 'poor little thing' and 'listless figure'. These metaphoric descriptions also add to the way, Rosemary perceived the world that did not belong to her. Moreover, this idea is further accentuated by the use of combination of words like 'quaint creatures' and 'presentable and amusing'. The usage of combinations like 'discoveries of hers' or 'delicious mixture' highlights about the delicate extraordinariness present in each society. Mansfield alludes to the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky⁹ into the short story to unravel the selfishness and hypocrisy of the upper class aristocracy. The allusion¹⁰ to the Great Russian novelist is no coincidence. Dostoevsky was a master story teller who knew the art of interpreting minds of his characters. By alluding to him, Mansfield simultaneously acknowledges his influence as writer and gives a context to Rosemary's mental progression.

The narrative voice that appears in the story is both skilful and fluid which has the power to simultaneously give insight to the characters in *A Cup of Tea*, the readers and the narrator. Though the story starts in a third person narrative voice yet soon it paves way for a more conversational style that provided a solid base to understanding the characters. In the process, the narrator strikes conversation with herself ('No, not Peter—Michael') and does not shy away from using a bit of informal language ('a duck of a boy') and even goes on to have a discussion with an non-existent individual ('she would go to Paris as you and I would go to Bond Street').

A Cup of Tea starts off with a cheerful and optimistic tone in the initial phase and gradually adopts a more sombre tone. This shift in tone was necessary to highlight the philanthropic impulses that the wealthy elite carry within themselves. A trivial polite gesture of offering tea is actually a propaganda effort to highlight oneself as a holier than thou virtuous human being. This insignificant act will not impact Rosemary's life in anyway, nothing substantial to be sure. And obviously will not impact Miss Smith's either in anyway because the one time act of generosity can never bring significant changes in the lives of the poor and underprivileged. It needs to be brought to mind that when for the first time, Miss Smith had requested Rosemary Fell to help her with a cup of tea; Rosemary's instant reaction was to take her home for the sake of adventure. It was like a doll play for her. She wanted to do '...one of those things she was always reading about or seeing on the stage...'. She is thrilled to know what might happen, like reading a detective

fiction and figuring out what has the future got to unfold. Without a doubt, the poor lady is nothing more than an amusing evening for Rosemary. The young woman is the compensation for the box that she left in the shop, an object for entertainment and not an individual to associate with. Rosemary Fell is so sure of the other person's demeaning status that she does not even bother to ask her name and considers her as a dim person who is walking beside her. Offering tea Rosemary also offers her every delicacy she can. The narrator describes the moment saying:

‘She plied the poor little creature with everything, all the sandwiches, all the bread and butter, and every time her cup was empty she filled it with tea, cream and sugar.’

But with the entry of Philip Fell, the beggar lady assumes a more human appearance who is not supposed to be objectified for mere amusement. It is the first time that Rosemary asks for the lady's name so that she can introduce her to her husband. Mr Philip Fell has his reservations about a person of the lady's position visiting them and soon he remarks that Miss Smith is ‘astonishingly pretty’—these trivial inputs make her much more than just a poor pauper. She takes a more three dimensional appearance. But with these references, Rosemary's view of Miss Smith changes unexpectedly. Rosemary refuses to accommodate her anymore as Miss Smith turns into her competitor. The price that Rosemary paid for inviting a poor stranger to the house was unexpectedly much higher than the price of the cup of tea that was asked for in the beginning of the story.

Mansfield's remarkable story telling ability is set to motion through the creation of analogous narrative between and the box incident. Both objects draw her attention and tickles her imagination. Mansfield's *A Cup of Tea* tells how an individual when devoid of real insights into life can blur the distinction between an object (jewel box) and an individual (Miss Smith). She can shop both of them, given she can pay for them, twenty-eight guineas and a cup of tea respectively. The problem is that while the jewel box's arrival to her house is no threat to her; yet the arrival of Miss Smith (and her beauty) will move her to the margins of the narrative. Of course, this movement from the centre will be authorized by none other than the man of the house, Philip. He permits her to buy the box while Rosemary makes efforts to win back Philip's attention by dressing for the dinner and pleading him to declare her beautiful. As mentioned earlier, Rosemary's vulnerable position in her given context reemphasises the hollowness of the affluent class. They are projected as existences without much of a power to bring about a change, their position can be easily challenged, even if it means coming from someone as insignificant as Miss Smith or a cup of tea. Rosemary's confidence and her self-assurance are always on the brink of threat.

What makes Mansfield's work both relatable and popular even a (nearly) hundred years after its first publication is its ability to strike a chord with the contemporary readers. We have usage of sentences like ‘...her husband absolutely adored her...’ is something we still hear and finds echo in almost all the urbane rich milieu. *A Cup of Tea* raises one pertinent point about the self-confidence of

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Rosemary. Her dependency on the bank balance of her husband and her uncertainty regarding her appearance made her extremely insecure as a person. The sarcastic tone in the voice of the narrator with respect to physical attractiveness is evident in the line ‘Rosemary Fell ... Pretty? Well, if you took her to pieces....’ The story time and again talks about this insecurity sometimes in terms of financial insecurity (Miss Smith), sometimes in terms of physical appearance (Rosemary Fell) or a dent to the social stature (Philip’s reaction to Miss Smith’s appearance in his house). The story despite its brevity actually throws light on numerous issues from – lives of the rich to the pitiable conditions of the poor; a woman’s continuous dependency on her man for all her needs and her existence; the concept of good and bad; how society as a whole fails to address the needs of the socially deprived and a gradual economic disparity only leads to us to question the efforts put in actual welfare programmes.

Check Your Progress

3. In which year was ‘A Cup of Tea’ written by Katherine Mansfield published?
4. Name the protagonist of the short story, ‘A Cup of Tea’.
5. What does Miss Smith beg in front of Rosemary Fell?

12.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Mansfield was diagnosed with extra pulmonary tuberculosis in the year 1917, and as the disease had as yet not been found cures for, died of the disease in 1923.
2. Mansfield portrayed Maori characters in a positive and sympathetic light in many of her writings, such as *How Pearl Button was Kidnapped*.
3. *A Cup of Tea* has been written by Katherine Mansfield. This short story was composed in 1922.
4. Rosemary Fell is the protagonist of the short story, ‘A Cup of Tea’.
5. Miss Smith begged for some money from Rosemary Fell to buy a cup of tea.

12.5 SUMMARY

- *A Cup of Tea* is written by Katherine Mansfield. This short story was composed in 1922. The story is set in London city of the 1920s. Mansfield creates a story which is both subtle and sensitive.

- The story time and again questions the idea of appearance and reality. Mansfield highlights the hypocrisy of the British affluent class where Rosemary Fell is the typical representative of her world.
- The short story revolves around Rosemary Fell who is a young privileged socialite from an affluent household. The story unfolds as she visits the town to buy a few items. A chance encounter with an expensive jewellery box brings her to an antique shop.
- Being a little disappointed that she could not buy the jewellery box she walks into the street where she meets a poor young woman who had a dishevelled appearance and appeared to be of the same age as Rosemary Fell.
- Such words of praise from Philip for Miss Smith make Rosemary extremely uncomfortable and insecure. She gives some cash to Miss Smith and asks her to leave.
- Rosemary's social position and her wealth are represented through her shopping interests. The text is replete with information related to her material obsession. We are told she went shopping to Paris from London.
- The significance of the class hypocrisy is introduced in the text very subtly. On one hand, we have Rosemary Fell could not believe that one could be so poor that she cannot buy herself even one cup of tea and quench her hunger and cold; on the other hand; we have Miss Smith who did not have the means by herself to eat a basic meal, forget about laying her hands on anything luxurious.
- The story is set on two different locations. The first time we meet Rosemary she is in the antique shop on Curzon Street. Later, we see her with Miss Smith at her luxurious house.
- As the narrator points out that Rosemary's disappointment reflected in the weather too. There was a 'cold bitter taste in the air'. Even though there was rain, but due to the doleful mood of Rosemary, it felt as if ashes were spinning down to the ground. Even the lights in the rain appeared remorseful and appeared 'regretting something'.
- The narrative voice that appears in the story is both skilful and fluid which has the power to simultaneously give insight to the characters in *A Cup of Tea*, the readers and the narrator. Though the story starts in a third person narrative voice yet soon it paves way for a more conversational style that provided a solid base to understanding the characters.
- *A Cup of Tea* starts off with a cheerful and optimistic tone in the initial phase and gradually adopts a more sombre tone. This shift in tone was necessary to highlight the philanthropic impulses that the wealthy elite carry within themselves.

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- But with the entry of Philip Fell the beggar lady assumes a more human appearance who is not supposed to be objectified for mere amusement. It is the first time that Rosemary asks for the lady's name so that she can introduce her to her husband.

12.6 KEY WORDS

- **Hypocrisy:** It refers to an act or instance of pretending.
- **Personification:** It is a figure of speech in which a thing an idea or an animal is given human attributes.
- **Demeaning:** It describes something that lowers a person's reputation or dignity.

12.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life and works of Katherine Mansfield.
2. How has the theme of class hypocrisy been depicted in 'A Cup of Tea'?
3. Write a short note on the meeting between Rosemary Fell and Miss Smith.
4. Briefly mention the significant traits of Mansfield's writing style.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the theme of appearance versus reality in 'A Cup of Tea'.
2. Critically analyse the character of Rosemary Fell.
3. Do you think *A Cup of Tea* is still relevant in the contemporary times? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Analyse the significance of the title of the short story, 'A Cup of Tea'.

12.8 FURTHER READINGS

Blain, Virginia, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements, (Eds.). 1990. *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Todd, Janet, (Ed.). 1989. *British Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide*. London: Routledge.

Lonsdale, Roger (Ed.). 1989. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Black, Helen C. 1893. *Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches*. Glasgow: David Bryce & Sons.

Endnotes

1. The short story was first published in Story-Teller magazine. It was republished in Mansfield's collection *The Dove's Nest*.
2. It is the pseudonym of the author. Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp (1888–1923) is the original name of the author. She is a short story writer and poet from New Zealand. She was highly influential in shaping short story as a literary form. Her contemporaries were luminaries like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, D H Lawrence et al.
3. Miss Smith
4. This action instantly informs the readers about the impulsive nature of the protagonist and her lack of connection with reality where even the act of charity was "...was like something out of a novel by Dostoevsky..." She seems to be consumed by the notion of philanthropy than the actuality of it.
5. Rosemary's husband
6. A figure of speech in which one thing is compared with another thing which is different in kind.
7. Human characteristics are attributed to non-human or inanimate objects
8. "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them" (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphor>)
9. 1821-1881. Russian novelist, essayist, journalist, short story writer. Explored human psyche, existential crisis and philosophical themes in the disturbed socio-political scenario.
10. "...an implied or indirect reference to a person, event, or thing or to a part of another text." (<https://www.britannica.com/art/allusion>)

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UNIT 13 ALICE MUNRO: *SILENCE*

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Structure

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 About the Author
- 13.3 Critical Analysis
- 13.4 Answers To Check Your Progress Questions
- 13.5 Summary
- 13.6 Key Words
- 13.7 Self Assessment Questions And Exercises
- 13.8 Further Readings

13.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be introduced to the charming Canadian writer who rose to literary fame owing to her excellent art of telling short stories narrating the life of common people in the contemporary times. She started writing at a young age, managed her interest as a writer along with her household responsibilities, and rose to fame at a later age with her unique narrative technique of storytelling. She astonished the world with the simple, amusing, mysterious way she penned the stories of her characters. Alice Munro – a notable Canadian writer exploring themes of contemporary relevance, embedding her work with historic and gothic work; is an internationally acclaimed writer who has been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013. One of her short story *Silence* has been discussed in this unit to introduce you to the writer and her work.

13.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the themes explored by the writer in *Silence*
- Identify the humorous elements of the short story
- Summarize the plot in their own words
- Critically appreciate the writing style of the writer

13.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Her maiden name is Alice Ann Laidlaw. She was born in Wingham, Ontario on 10th July 1931. It is a community located in the municipality of North Huron, Ontario, Canada. Wingham became a part of North Huron in 2001. Munro is an internationally acclaimed short story writer. In the contemporary times, she is often counted as a notable writer of the Southern Ontario Gothic – a subgenre of Gothic novel genre.

Similar to the works of Southern Gothic writers of America, the writers of Southern Ontario Gothic explore and examine social issues such as gender, caste, politics and religion. The context of small towns of Southern Ontario, where the story and its characters are situated lends the text a touch of stereotypical morality of the region. The theme of moral hypocrisy is evident in works of this genre. One of the critic of Munro, James Grainger, who reviewed her work for a well-known magazine expressed that:

Violence, illness, and reputations ruined by a single indiscretion are accepted in Munro's secretive, repressed communities as a kind of levelling mechanism, rough justice for those who dare to strive for something finer.

The Gothic novel has traditionally examined the role of evil in the human soul, and has incorporated dark or horrific imagery to create the desired setting.

Her mother was a teacher and her father managed a fox and mink farm. Her literary career has been extremely rewarding and flourishing. She is the recipient of the following awards:

- Canada's Governor General Award for English language fiction three times
- Giller Prize – two times
- US National Arts Club Medal of Honor for Literature
- W. H. Smith Literary Award in the UK
- National Book Critics Circle Award
- O. Henry Award for Continuing Achievement in Short Fiction in the US
- Man Booker International Prize for her life-long body of work in 2009
- Munro was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013

Munro is the 13th woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, and the first Canadian to win the prize since Saul Bellow in 1976. The award is a special one because for the first time it was awarded for the first time for a literary form – 'the short story'. She popularized this literary art form as nothing less than a novel.

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Thus, proving ‘small is big’ – claiming that the literary creative skill displayed in short stories is not every one’s cup of tea and it required tremendous insights, thinking, experiencing and sensibility to weave a short story, crafting real life characters with precision, using apt dialogues, describing the setting and underpinning it with themes of contemporary relevance.

Her skill as a master story teller, immersed in realism and gothic, with a pinch of uncertainty and mystery contemplating on things of here and now, projecting the emotions, feelings of women, exploring the sensitivity of human relationships—has earned her the title of master story teller such as ‘Canada’s Chekhov’ ‘master of the contemporary short story’ by her readers and critics. Her writing style is unique replete with vivid imagery, precision in expression, depth in sensibility, economical in word usage yet intense and inspiring to the core, filled with intertextuality. The element of uncertainty, open to multiple interpretations, makes her a befitting writer in the post-modernist tradition. The short stories told by her are beautifully narrated complexities faced by human beings in their daily life set in a simple small town of her county.

She studied Journalism and English in University of Western Ontario where she received two years scholarship. Later, she married James Munro in 1951, moved to Vancouver, and raised two daughters. During this phase of her life, she juggled responsibility between the role of a suburban housewife, mother and a writer, and at the same time, taking care of their ‘Munro Book store’, in Victoria, British Columbia. In an address, she once said about this experience:

To want to be a fiction writer, in the community where I grew up, and in the suburbs where I lived later, as a young housewife and mother, was such an outlandish notion that it never occurred to me to try to justify or explain it. I tried as much as I could to keep it secret. And at the same time, it never occurred to me to give it up. (O Henry Awards, 2005)

The couple got divorced in 1972 and she returned to Eastern Canada. Here, she worked as a Writer-in-Residence at the University of Western Ontario. In 1976, she remarried and lived in Ontario. Her writings have been said to be somewhere between the modern and post modern tradition.

The post-modern literature is known for the multiple perspectives and multiple interpretations a text opens for the reader. The post-modernist writers reject any one sided interpretation of events. The characters and plot of Munro’s works are also not easy to interpret. In order to appreciate the characters and the story, the writer throws hints here and there, the reader has to unveil those dots and try to find the hidden meaning. The element of uncertainty, scepticism is evident in literature of this canon. As she observed:

A story is not like a road to follow ... it’s more like a house. You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like and discovering how the room and corridors relate to each other, how the world outside is altered by being viewed from

these windows. And you, the visitor, the reader, are altered as well by being in this enclosed space, whether it is ample and easy or full of crooked turns, or sparsely or opulently furnished. You can go back again and again, and the house, the story, always contains more than you saw the last time. It also has a sturdy sense of itself of being built out of its own necessity, not just to shelter or beguile you.

– Alice Munro, *Selected Stories*

Her work is often cited as representative of ‘literary realism’ owing to the real places that she describes in the setting of her stories, the real characters she describes at length – including the fine details, the real life based themes on which her stories are based. Yet, there is a pervading uncertainty in her stories about the time, place and people. This indicates that probably her work can be studied as a piece of post-modern literary tradition. Her narratives are said to be more ‘blurred’ rather than ‘distinct’.

Another feature of post-modernism evidenced in her work includes the use of language for mediation, the structure of her stories and delineation of her characters do not follow a linear progression. Her narrative is constantly open for additions and deletions; it moves one step forward and two steps backwards, engaging the reader brilliantly. Ajay Heble defines her work as a ‘discourse of potential and absent meanings’. Her use of language is appreciated by readers – for its effective use in creating an element of mystery and curiosity in the mind of the reader – leaving the reader with more than one interpretation of the story. It is a puzzle created for keeping the reader always on toes to pick up a clue and try to join with the previously mentioned facts—affirmation and reaffirmation of its meaning. It is always an evasive longing for the reader.

Major Works of Alice Munro

Some of her major work includes the following:

Dance of the Happy Shades: Stories (1968)

Lives of Girls and Women (1971)

Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You: Stories (1974)

Who Do You Think You Are: Stories (1978)

The Beggar Maid: Stories of Flo and Rose (1978)

The Moons of Jupiter (1982)

The Progress of Love (1987)

Friend of my Youth: Stories (1990)

The Moons of Jupiter: Stories (1991)

Open Secrets: Stories (1995)

Selected Stories (1996)

The Love of a Good Woman (1999)

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Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage: Stories (2001)

No Love Lost (2003)

Runaway: Stories (2005)

The View from Castle Rock: Stories (2006)

Carried Away: a Selection of Stories (2006)

Too Much Happiness (2009)

Dear Life (2012)

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Check Your Progress

1. What is Alice Munro's maiden name?
2. Mention the prestigious awards won by Alice Munro.
3. List the significant literary works of Munro.

13.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In the beginning, this story opens up as a story of a mother, middle aged woman, yearning to reunite with her young daughter. For this, Juliet, the mother travels from Buckley Bay to Denman Island. The daughter is named Penelope and the reader is told that she had 'been on a retreat' for six months at some spiritual balance centre. From the pieces of dialogues that transpire between Juliet and Joan, we get to know that the mother and daughter had been staying apart for quite some time. The mother was not happy and comfortable about the complete chain of events but she tried to rationalize that Penelope wanted it for some spiritual solace.

The reader is told that Juliet works for the Provincial Television Channel.

'She appears regularly on the provincial television channel, interviewing people who lead notable lives, and deftly directing panel discussions, for a program called "Issues of the Day.'

She is described as a 'striking woman' who would not get unnoticed.

'Her hair is cut short now, as short as possible, and has taken on a very dark auburn color, which matches the frames of her glasses. She often wears black pants, as she does today, and an ivory silk shirt, and sometimes a black jacket. She is what her mother would have called a striking woman.'

Following the dialogue that transpires between Juliet and Joan, the reader gets to know that Penelope, her daughter has gone to a place called 'Spiritual Balance Centre'. Juliet had received a message from Penelope stating in a cryptic manner 'Hope to see you Sunday afternoon. It's time.' As a mother, Juliet was

excited about this reunion with her daughter, after a gap of six months, but restrains her emotions in front of others. She said: 'I'm spoiled,' she says. 'She's twenty years old, my daughter—she'll be twenty-one this month, actually—and we haven't been apart much.'

When she enquired Joan about the centre and Penelope, she is shocked to find that her daughter is not there and this lady had no idea of her whereabouts. 'I know. But I'm sorry to have to tell you, Juliet, I'm very sorry and I don't want you to be too disappointed—Penelope is not here.'

The reader is informed that Penelope had sent this message and a rudimentary map of this place as a guide for Juliet to find her. Juliet followed the directions and reached this place and is surprised to find that Penelope is no longer staying there.

'She said she hoped—'(Juliet)

'I know. I know,' Joan says. 'She did intend to be here, but the fact was she could not—'

The whole thing seems so mysterious. The girl 'intended' to be there but could not. What could be the reason for it? Where has she gone? Why is she doing this to her mother? What will Juliet do now?

All these questions and thoughts engage the reader to read the story further to see how the writer sends some more clues for the reader to guess what might have happened?

Further Joan says:

'I can't. I don't know. But I can tell you one thing that may put your mind at rest. Wherever she has gone, whatever she has decided, it will be the right thing for her. It will be the right thing for her spirituality and growth.'

Later it is mentioned: 'What I mean by growth is our inward growth, of course,' Joan says.

All these dots when joined together indicate that perhaps Penelope was involved in some sort of spiritual a journey to find meaning of life and a reflection within her. For this serious business, she took the decision of going for this camp and staying away from her mother and family for reflections, meditations and much more.

As indicated in the story, Penelope felt lonely and unhappy about something, there were questions for which one does not get answers and she must have felt that Juliet would not be able to help her in this quest:

'The spiritual dimension—I have to say this—was it not altogether lacking in Penelope's life? I take it she did not grow up in a faith-based home.'

'Religion was not a banned subject. We could talk about it.'

'But perhaps it was the way you talked about it. Your intellectual way. If you know what I mean. You are so clever,' she adds kindly.

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‘So you say.’ Juliet is aware that any control she had over the interview, and over herself, is faltering, and may be lost.

‘Not so I say, Juliet. So Penelope says. Penelope is a dear fine girl, but she came to us here in great hunger. Hunger for the things that were not available to her in her home. There you were, with your wonderful, busy, successful life. But, Juliet, do you not know that your daughter has known loneliness? That she has known unhappiness?’

A hint is thrown once again thrown for the reader and Juliet: ‘Ah, well. Perhaps she’ll get in touch with you. After all.’

So, the reader along with Juliet set on a long wait for the appearance or news of Penelope.

Juliet did get a message and a birthday card on her birthday in a strange way.

‘A birthday card arrived on her—Penelope’s—birthday, the nineteenth of June. Her twenty first birthday... There was no inscription and no signature. At first, Juliet thought that someone had sent this card to Penelope, and forgotten to sign it, and that she, Juliet, had opened it by mistake. Someone who had Penelope’s name and birth date on le. Her dentist, maybe, or her driving teacher. But when she checked the writing on the envelope she saw that there had been no mistake: there was her own name, indeed, in Penelope’s handwriting. ‘Postmarks gave you no clue anymore. They all said Canada Post.’

So again, we get no solid clue to guess the whereabouts of this girl.

Juliet sets out to meet and discuss her trip to Denman Island and events before and after the visit with her old friend Christa. She discussed her emotional reaction to the whole thing with her. It is here, once again, how the absence of Penelope had made her sad, lost and uneasy. The mother’s umbilical chord connect with the daughter—the pain of this chord being broken is unbearable for Juliet.

‘Juliet didn’t tell Christa that in the end she had not been able to walk away from the Spiritual Balance Centre with dignity. She had turned and cried out beseechingly, furiously, “What did she tell you?”

Mother Shipton had stood there watching her, as if she had expected this. A fat pitying smile had stretched her closed lips as she shook her head.’

The writer takes a journey in the past when Penelope was 13-years old and had gone to stay with her fiend and family from Torrance House. It is mentioned that Penelope went on a camping trip to the Kootney mountains of British Columbia during this visit. This reveals Juliet as a mother who intends to give the best experiences to her growing up daughter.

‘When Penelope was barely thirteen years old, she had gone away on a camping trip to the Kootenay Mountains of British Columbia, with a friend from Torrance House and the friend’s family. Juliet was in

favor of this trip. Penelope had been at Torrance House for only one year, and it pleased Juliet that she had already made so many friends and been readily accepted by her family. Also that she was going camping—something that regular children did and that Juliet, as a child, had never had the chance to do. Not that she would have wanted to—at Penelope’s age, she had already been buried in books—but she welcomed signs that Penelope was turning out to be a more normal sort of girl than she herself had been.’

It is during this section, that the reader comes to know about the marital discord between Juliet and her husband Eric.

‘Eric was apprehensive about the whole idea. He thought that Penelope was too young. He didn’t like her going on a holiday with people he knew almost nothing about. And now that she went to boarding school they saw too little of her as it was—so why should that time be shortened?’

The writer throws hints of how Eric had indulged in an immoral act of having an illicit relationship with Christa while Juliet was away on a visit to her ‘dying mother’. Juliet could never accept this breach of trust by Eric and just for Penelope the couple tried to pretend that all was well and lived as happy couple during her stay. We are told that Penelope has been put in a boarding school.

‘The reason for their quarrel was an old and ordinary one. In the spring, through some trivial disclosure—and the frankness or possibly the malice of their longtime neighbour Ailo, who had always had some reservations about Juliet—Juliet had discovered that Eric had slept with Christa again...

It had happened when Penelope was a year old and Juliet had taken her back to Ontario to visit her parents. To visit—as she emphasized now—her dying mother. While she was away, and loving and missing Eric with every shred of her being (she now believed this), Eric had simply returned to his old habits.’

A brief reconciliation between the two is shown followed by the tragic death of Eric. It is mentioned in the story that Eric goes as usual in his fishing boat and is caught in rough weather. His body is discovered after three days, it is mutilated by some animal. It is later decided to burn the body on beach.

It was perhaps because of this—because there was no question of viewing the body and no need for an undertaker—that the idea caught hold among his old friends and fellow-fishermen of burning Eric on the beach. Juliet did not object to this.

There is allusion to Shelley’s death and Sati practice in India. The relationship of man and wife is open for interpretation. Juliet also appears to be disturbed and deranged and indicates if should throw herself into the fire to be one with her love.

‘The question arose of who would speak and who would light the pyre. The men who headed the preparations asked Juliet if she would do it. And Juliet, brittle and busy, handing out mugs of coffee, told

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them that they had it wrong—as the widow, she was supposed to throw herself into the flames. She actually laughed as she said this, and those who had asked her backed off, afraid that she was getting hysterical. ‘

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The element of gothic stories is evident in this description of pagan ritual. Perhaps, the writer intends to draw the readers mind to an act of immorality leading to a punishment – it is the law of nature. The experience lends the story the mystic element and a spiritual angle – life, existence of humans, temporal nature of worldly things— ‘possession’. The episode and its similarity to Shelley’s death also reveals the blend of history and fiction, intertwining the element of inter-textuality. As per the words of a critic, this short story is an instance of ‘postmodern pastiche’ .

‘Juliet stayed, wide-eyed, rocking on her haunches, face pressed against the heat. She was not quite there. She thought of whoever it was—Trelawny?—snatching Shelley’s heart out of the flames. The heart, with its long history of significance. Strange to think how even at that time, not so long ago, one fleshly organ had been thought so precious, the site of courage and love. It was just flesh burning. Not Eric.

The event was reported in local newspapers but Penelope is not informed about it. Later, when she breaks the news to her, Penelope’s reaction is not described to the reader.

‘Penelope was waiting in the sunroom. She received the news with an expression of fright, then—when Juliet put her arms around her—of something like embarrassment. Perhaps in Heather’s house, in the white-and-green-and-orange sunroom, with Heather’s brothers shooting baskets in the back yard, news so dire could hardly penetrate. The burning was not mentioned—in this house and neighbourhood it would have seemed uncivilized, grotesque. In this house, also, Juliet’s manner was more sprightly than she intended.’

It is gradually revealed that mother and daughter try to move ahead in their lives forgetting about Eric. As is mentioned in the story:

‘By chance, Juliet heard Penelope say to one of the visiting girls, “Well, I hardly knew him really.”

She was speaking about her father.

How strange.

She had never been afraid to go out in the boat, as Juliet was, when there was a chop on the water. She had pestered Eric to take her and was often successful.’

It is a revelation for Juliet to see Penelope dismiss her father and his memories so swiftly in face of new events and the engagements in new surroundings. Perhaps, Penelope was feigning this detachment, and psychologically and emotionally she was torn, but did not want Juliet to know about it. May be she wanted to emerge as a strong person. May be she was doing it for the sake of her mother to cope

with the tragic loss. After all, Juliet could not forget Eric easily. The story has sufficient material for contemplation. This is where the beauty of the text lies, open to multiple meanings and interpretations. It shows that one can no longer rest assured with one theory of reality. There may be multiple layers of interpretations possible for a single act and event. That is where the reader gets engrossed, digging further in the story to find some more clues to support their interpretations, to get some information to string together all events in a logical sequence. Penelope serves to console Juliet during her emotional moments. Mother and daughter move ahead in their lives and the reader gets to see the difference between city life and small town life:

‘Juliet had applied for a job in the reference department of the university library and a job at the public library, and she had a feeling that she would get one or the other. She began to look for an apartment. The cleanness, tidiness, and manageability of city life kept surprising her... The life she had been leading at Whale Bay, such a short time ago, seemed haphazard, cluttered, exhausting, by comparison. And she herself was cleansed of the moods of the last months—she was lively and capable, and better-looking.’

So, a change of place brings a positive change in her personality and mood. But will this happiness and satisfaction be a long lasting one? The reader is forced to think. Just as we find things are getting in order and organized, there is a disruption reported by the narrator.

This sign of lengthening days, the promise of a change of season, had an effect on her that was unexpected and crushing.

She realized that Eric was dead.

It was as if all this time, while she was in Vancouver, he had been waiting for her somewhere else, waiting to see if she would resume her life with him. As if being with him were an option that had stayed open. Her life since she came to Vancouver had been lived against a backdrop of Eric, without her having quite understood that Eric did not exist. That nothing of him existed. That even the memory of him, in the daily and ordinary world, was in retreat...

So this was grief. She felt as if a sack of cement had been poured into her and quickly hardened.

It is revealed that Juliet tells Penelope about everything that happened between her parents. We, as readers get no hint of Penelope’s reaction. How did she feel about the whole things? What was her reaction? Except one reaction, which shows probably she took it in amatured manner.

‘ Penelope said, “Yeah, well, maybe not.” But added staunchly, “I forgive you. I guess I’m not a baby.”

During those days, Juliet told Penelope everything. About Christa, the fight, the burning on the beach (which she had so far managed, almost miraculously, to conceal from her). Everything.’

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In a series of dialogues with Christa, we get to know that after Eric's death, when Penelope was in the age group of fourteen and twenty-one she had two affairs. Juliet herself was not happy about it. The remaining story informs her journey as a single individual, forgetting her daughter, doing things she always wanted to do – read Greek novelists, work on her thesis.

'It was no wonder. She lived a life now that was as different as possible from the life of the public, vivacious, concerned, endlessly well-informed woman she had been. She lived among books, reading through most of her waking hours, often being compelled to deepen, to alter whatever premise she had started with.'

The story once again hints at the inconclusive nature of reality, and the quest for it as an unending one. Juliet also 'alters' her premise based on her deeper reading. The story involving gymnosophist probes the reader to know more about this group of philosophers who believed in renouncing all worldly possessions for finding a true meaning of life.

The gymnosophists were wanderers, far spread, attracting and repelling those they lived among, with their ironclad devotion to purity of life and thought, their contempt for possessions, even for clothing and food.

Somewhere, in between the lines, the readers can still note the longing of Juliet to reunite with Penelope. It is mentioned that Juliet saw Mother Shipton at some point of time.

'If she was in fact Mother Shipton, she had come down in the world.'

In the remaining part of the story, we find information on some of her boyfriends during her journey from a vibrant life to a quiet one. It is in the middle of her discussion about her relationship with Gary, that the reader gets to see a bit of Heather, and the news of Penelope.

'Juliet asked her where she was living now and she said, "Connecticut. And just about three weeks ago I was visiting Josh—you remember my brother Josh?—I was visiting Josh and his family in Edmonton, and I ran into Penelope. Just like this, on the street. No—actually, it was in the mall, that humongous mall they have. She had a couple of her kids with her—she'd brought them down to get uniforms for that school they go to. The boys. We were both flabbergasted. I didn't know her right away, but she recognized me. She'd flown down, of course. From that place way up north. But she says it's quite civilized, really. And she said that you were still living here. But I'm with these friends—they're my husband's friends—and I really haven't had time to ring you up.'

Juliet is stunned and so is the reader.

What follows this twist is a series of contemplative thoughts on Penelope and her life – her kids, where she lives. All are speculations done by Juliet with no

concrete fact. It is all assumptions based on any single clue given by Heather in their brief conversation.

‘Not at all. She was living the life of a prosperous practical matron. Married to a doctor, maybe, or to one of those civil servants who were managing the northern parts of the country just as their control was being gradually, but with some fanfare, relinquished to the native people. If she ever met Penelope again they would laugh about how wrong she had been.’

This information clears certain things in Juliet’s mind and life gets easier:

‘At dinner, she realized that the news she had just absorbed had put her into a better situation for marrying Gary, or living with him—whatever it was that he wanted. There was nothing to worry about, or wait for, concerning Penelope. Penelope was not a phantom. She was safe, as far as anybody is safe, and she was probably as happy as anybody is happy. She had detached herself from Juliet and very likely from the memory of Juliet, and Juliet could not do anything but detach herself in turn.’

The final twist in the story enables Juliet for final detachment with Penelope.

‘Nor did Penelope exist. The Penelope that Juliet sought was gone. The woman Heather had spotted in Edmonton, the mother who had own down with her sons to get school uniforms, who had changed in face and body so that Heather did not recognize her, was nobody Juliet knew.’

The reader is informed that the marriage of Gary and Juliet didn’t happen.

‘But it was probably on this evening that they both understood that they would not be together. If it had been possible for them to be together she might have said to him that night: My daughter went away without telling me goodbye, and in fact she probably did not know then that she was going. She did not know that it was for good. Then gradually I believe it dawned on her how much she wanted to stay away. It was just the way that she found to manage her life.

It’s maybe the explaining to me she can’t face. Or has no time for, really. You know, we always have the idea that there is this reason or that reason. And I could tell you plenty about what I did wrong. But I think the reason may not be something so easily dug out. More like some kind of purity in her nature. Yes. Some fineness and strictness and purity, some rock-hard honesty in her.

My father used to say of someone he disliked that he had no use for that person. Couldn’t those words mean simply what they say?

Penelope does not have a use for me. Or can’t stand me.’

The story ends inconclusively, with open ends for readers to think and imagine:

‘Juliet has friends—not so many now, but friends. Larry continues to visit and to make jokes. She keeps on with her studies. The word

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“studies” does not seem to describe very well what she does—”investigations” would be better. And, being short of money, she works some hours a week at the café where she used to spend so much time at the sidewalk table. She finds this job a good balance for her involvement with the old Greeks—so much so that she believes she wouldn’t quit even if she could afford to. She keeps on hoping for a word from Penelope, but not in any strenuous way. She hopes, as people who know better hope for undeserved blessings, spontaneous remissions, or things of that sort.’

In brief, the story, deals with the relationship of a mother and daughter, a husband and a wife. It can also be said to be search of a female for her identity, apart from her role as a mother, lover, daughter, wife and professional. The mother, Juliet is looking for her daughter Penelope, who had gone for a six month spiritual recluse in a spiritual centre. The meeting does not happen in the first instance, as Penelope does not turn up in spite of sending a message to her mother that it is time to meet. For several years, atleast a minimal touch between mother and daughter was there by means of a birthday card and cryptic message. But this association also stops abruptly. In between, we get to see as a subplot the breach of love by Eric, Juliet’s husband, breaking the sanctity of love, and trust in marital life. Eric dies a tragic death, a natural death, caught in rough weather. Juliet gets to see the burning of Eric’s body. Penelope is not informed about the grotesque details. The mother-daughter duo move to Vancouver to begin life a fresh. The city life seems more organized, and civilized. In an epiphanic moment – Juliet realizes that Eric is no more, she shares all details of their marital discord, his tragic death and the burning on beach with Penelope. The daughter does not say much at this, only comments that she is no longer a baby, and that she can understand. For many years, there is no news of Penelope and Juliet distances herself from all memories and belongings of Penelope. She starts shrinking her connection with outside world, keeps limited physical assets, social life and becomes minimalist in her lifestyle. She is no longer the vibrant mediaperson whom everyone knew and admired. She delved deep into reading, writing and retrospection. Suddenly, one day, she gets news of Penelope being married with kids. As a mother, she is curious to know how Penelope felt about her mother, does she remember her? Does she remember her fondly? The story ends with a lot of questions and open ending. Juliet limits her thinking for Penelope and gets busy with her introspection and contemplation, building perspectives, altering them as per her new insights received from diverse reading.

Critical Appreciation

After going through the preceding section, you must have acquired a fair understanding of the setting, plot, characters , themes and conflict of this short story. Let us critically appreciate some aspects of this story.

Silence is Alice Munro's one of three stories contained in a *Collection of Short Stories Runaway* (2005). It features a common female protagonist, called Juliet. The three stories trace this protagonist's life as a young girl ('Chance') young mother ('Soon') and middle aged woman (*Silence*). The stories first appeared in the *New Yorker* in June 2004 as a three panelled narrative. The stories revolve around Juliet, a female character born in 1943 in a small rural town of East Canada. The last part of this series *Silence* covers approximately thirteen years (from 1989 to approximately 2002). It shows Juliet's gradual withdrawal from all pleasures, worldly things and longings. A story that begins with an anxious mother searching and waiting for her daughter to return, the protagonist becomes a self-contained individual, detached from any bond and relationships. There is a remarkable twist of the plot in the story when after thirteen years of disappearance of her daughter, she comes to know that Penelope is married to a wealthy husband and is now, in fact, a mother of five school going children. While each of these stories, stands alone, but together the series unfolds on a diachronic line and evoke the form and function of the 'Entwicklungsroman'.

Themes: One can discern that the main theme is that of the mother child bond / relationship. It also explores briefly other relationships as well such as that of husband-wife relationship. One can also discern the contrast depicted in the life and work style of a small town and city. While the small town life is said to be disorganized, the life of city is said to be systematic and planned. The burning of body on beach reveals the impact of wilderness on the civilized life. The moral dictum of gothic stories is also indicated — the presence of evil in humans and how if one is not careful and makes a trespass, nature punishes humans in its own way. The theme of females position in the society is also a subject of this story. What is expected from Juliet as a mother, as one of the characters in the story points out to her that perhaps she did not fulfil her role of a mother judiciously. She did not give the spiritual orientation to her child.

The short story adopts the techniques of a post-modernist narrative style. The conversational tone is used, with lots of repetitions, pauses, uncertainty and incompleteness. We find the use of present tense verbs, contractions, private verbs and deletion of the 'that'.

“Should I have talked to her about a noble life?” she said. “Sacrifice? Opening your heart to the needs of strangers? I never thought of it. I must have acted as if it would be good enough if she turned out like me.”

We can observe the use of features of spoken discourse in this short story. Lot of indefiniteness is used by the writer compelling the reader to draw into the conversation and add their own points. The use of imprecision can also be linked to the act of real life dialogue. As conversation, when they take place in real time, the speaker does not always plan their utterances in advance. This leads to the

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occurrence of hesitations in the writing. In her writing, adjectives follow the noun as if the writer is in a retrospective mood, reviewing on her previous observation and making an attempt to redefine them.

Look at this description of Larry:

He was what used to be called an old-fashioned bachelor, asexual as far as she could tell (but probably she could not tell far enough), squeamish about any personal revelations, endlessly entertaining.

It has been said that Munro's marvellous style as a storyteller lies in the fact that the message has no end, it gets always woven into another message.

The story can be interpreted in multiple layers – relationships, spirituality, feminism, soul's search for the ultimate reality of this world, searching for the 'reality'.

Another characteristic style of Munro is how she creates the conversational effect with the use of italics, punctuation and syntax.

'She gives me delight, Juliet could have said. Not that she is one of those song-and-dance purveyors of sunshine and cheer and looking-on-the-bright-side. But she has grace and compassion and she is as wise as if she'd been on this earth for eighty years. Her nature is reactive—not all over the map, like mine. Somewhat reticent, like her father's. She is also angelically pretty—blond like my mother but not so frail. Strong and noble. Molded, I should say, like a caryatid. And, contrary to popular notions, I am not even faintly jealous. All this time without her—and no word from her, because *Spiritual Balance* does not allow letters or phone calls—all this time I've been in a sort of desert, and when her message came I was like an old patch of cracked earth getting a full drink of rain.'

In this paragraph, you can see how Munro has used punctuation to add the effect of a 'speaking voice'. It gives its characteristic narrative pace to her work. This oscillation between the unique event and the iterative continues all over the story. The digressions and additions of details makes the text rich. This style of Munro reminds one of Virginia Woolf, writing in *A Room of One's Own*. Who said that text is 'not made of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built, if an image helps, into arcades and domes' (1929, 79). It calls for a greater reader participation and adds multi-layered perspective to the story. It makes the stories sound more authentic. This fluctuating expressions of viewpoints in her stories is a feature of post modernist fiction as well.

While explaining her view on reading a text, Munro has said:

I go into it and move back and forth and settle here and there, and stay in it for a while. It's more like a house. Everybody knows what a house does, how it encloses space and makes connections between one enclosed space and another and presents what is outside in a new way. This is the nearest I can come to explaining what a story does for me, and what I want stories to do for other people. (1982, 224)

Another notable aspect of her work is the non-linear fashion in which the story is revealed to the reader. There is a lot of oscillation happening in terms of time, setting, characters and events – the reader is left to uncover the reasons for these shifts, why and how they are made.

The element of stream of consciousness makes the story realistic and convincing for the readers. The reader is involved in the process of building the story and its characters.

The reader is constantly engaged in the process of constructing and reconstructing the reality in the light of new meanings that arise out of new points of view. The story creates demands on the reader to remain open to inconclusive endings:

‘She lived amongst books, reading through most of her waking hours and being compelled to deepen, to alter, whatever premise she had started with.’

This journey of self-exploration requires her to move away from her self-centred fantasies and embark on finding the ‘reality’ that is so evasive.

Famous Quotes By Alice Munro

- ‘In many ways, I’ve been writing personal stories all my life.’
- ‘I was a grade B housewife, maybe a B minus. But when I got time to write, I would be unable to finish a sentence. I had anxiety attacks. Partly it was a way of personifying the situation because I couldn’t breathe. I was surrounded by people and by duties. I was a housewife and the children’s mother, and I was judged on how I performed those roles.’
- ‘Naturally, my stories are about women - I’m a woman. I don’t know what the term is for men who write mostly about men. I’m not always sure what is meant by “feminist.” In the beginning, I used to say, “Well, of course I’m a feminist.” But if it means that I follow a kind of feminist theory, or know anything about it, then I’m not.’
- ‘Housework never really bothered me... what bothered me about it later was that it was expected to be your life... when you’re a housewife, you are constantly interrupted. You have no space in your life. It isn’t the fact that you do the laundry.’
- ‘I want the reader to feel something is astonishing - not the ‘what happens’ but the way everything happens. These long short story fictions do that best, for me.’
- ‘Sometimes I get the start of a story from a memory, an anecdote, but that gets lost and is usually unrecognizable in the final story.’

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- ‘I think, when you are growing up, you have to pull apart from what your mother wants or needs. You’ve got to go your own way, and that’s what I did.’
- ‘Some of the stories I admire seem to zero in on one particular time and place. There isn’t a rule about this. But there’s a tidy sense about many stories I read. In my own work, I tend to cover a lot of time and to jump back and forward in time, and sometimes the way I do this is not very straightforward.’
- ‘Memory is the way we keep telling ourselves our stories —and telling other people a somewhat different version of our stories.’

Check Your Progress

4. What was the reason for the marital discord between Juliet and her husband Eric?
5. How does Eric die in the short story, *Silence*?
6. Mention one significant feature of the writing style adopted by Munro in *Silence*?
7. State any one prominent theme explored in the short story.

13.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Alice Munro’s maiden name is Alice Ann Laidlaw.
2. Alice Munro has recipient the following awards:
 - Canada’s Governor General Award for English language fiction three times
 - Giller Prize – two times
 - US National Arts Club Medal of Honor for Literature
 - W. H. Smith Literary Award in the UK
 - National Book Critics Circle Award
 - O. Henry Award for Continuing Achievement in Short Fiction in the US
 - Man Booker International Prize for her life-long body of work in 2009
 - Munro was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013
3. The significant literary works of Munro are the following:
 - *Dance of the Happy Shades: Stories* (1968)
 - *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971)

- *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You: Stories* (1974)
 - *Who Do You Think You Are: Stories* (1978)
 - *The Beggar Maid: Stories of Flo and Rose* (1978)
 - *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982)
 - *The Progress of Love* (1987)
4. The readers are informed that marital discord existed between Juliet and her husband Eric. Eric had indulged in an immoral act of having an illicit relationship with Christa while Juliet was away on a visit to her 'dying mother'. Juliet could never accept this breach of trust by Eric and just for Penelope the couple tried to pretend that all was well and lived as happy couple during her stay.
 5. It is mentioned in the story that Erich goes as usual in his fishing boat and is caught in rough weather. His body is discovered after three days, it is mutilated by some animal. It is later decided to burn the body on beach. Hence, Eric meets a tragic death in the short story.
 6. One significant feature of the writing style adopted by Munro in *Silence* is the non-linear fashion in which the story is revealed to the reader. There is lot of oscillation happening in terms of time, setting, characters and events – the reader is left to uncover the reasons for these shifts, why and how they are made.
 7. One can discern that the prominent theme is that of the mother child bond / relationship in the short story, *Silence*.

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13.5 SUMMARY

- Alice Munro – a notable Canadian writer exploring themes of contemporary relevance, embedding her work with historic and gothic work; is an internationally acclaimed writer who has been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013.
- Similar to the works of Southern Gothic writers of America, the writers of Southern Ontario Gothic explore and examine social issues such as gender, caste, politics and religion. The context of small towns of Southern Ontario, where the story and its characters are situated lends the text a touch of stereotypical morality of the region.
- The Gothic novel has traditionally examined the role of evil in the human soul, and has incorporated dark or horrific imagery to create the desired setting.
- Her skill as a master story teller, immersed in realism and gothic, with a pinch of uncertainty and mystery contemplating on things of here and now,

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projecting the emotions, feelings of women, exploring the sensitivity of human relationships— has earned her the title of master story teller such as ‘Canada’s Chekhov’ ‘master of the contemporary short story’ by her readers and critics.

- She studied Journalism and English in University of Western Ontario where she received two years scholarship. Later, she married James Munro in 1951, moved to Vancouver, and raised two daughters.
- Another feature of post-modernism evidenced in her work includes the use of language for mediation, the structure of her stories and delineation of her characters do not follow a linear progression.
- In the beginning, this story opens up as a story of a mother, middle aged woman, yearning to reunite with her young daughter. For this, Juliet, the mother travels from Buckley Bay to Denman Island.
- Juliet sets out to meet and discuss her trip to Denman Island and events before and after the visit with her old friend Christa. She discussed her emotional reaction to the whole thing with her.
- The writer throws hints of how Eric had indulged in an immoral act of having an illicit relationship with Christa while Juliet was away on a visit to her ‘dying mother’.
- It is a revelation for Juliet to see Penelope dismiss her father and his memories so swiftly in face of new events and the engagements in new surroundings.
- In a series of dialogues with Christa, we get to know that after Eric’s death, when Penelope was in the age group of fourteen and twenty-one she had two affairs. Juliet herself was not happy about it.
- In brief, the story, deals with the relationship of a mother and daughter, a husband and a wife. It can also be said to be search of a female for her identity, apart from her role as a mother, lover, daughter, wife and professional.
- *Silence* is Alice Munro’s one of three stories contained in a *Collection of Short Stories Runaway* (2005). It features a common female protagonist, called Juliet. The three stories trace this protagonist’s life as a young girl (‘Chance’) young mother (‘Soon’) and middle aged woman (*Silence*).
- One can discern that the main theme is that of the mother child bond / relationship. It also explores briefly other relationships as well such as that of husband-wife relationship.
- Another notable aspect of her work is the non-linear fashion in which the story is revealed to the reader. There is lot of oscillation happening in terms of time, setting, characters and events – the reader is left to uncover the reasons for these shifts, why and how they are made.

13.6 KEY WORDS

- **Literary realism:** It was part of the broader realist movement that started in the nineteenth century, in France, as a reaction to Romanticism. It lasted until the early twentieth century and completely focussed on the real world.
- **Pagan:** It is a term which refers to a variety of different religions ranging from Wicca, to that of ancient Egypt and even Hinduism, among many others. Some Pagans are of no specific religion, but rather are eclectic.
- **Gymnosophist:** This term refers to one of an ancient sect of Hindu ascetics who wore little or no clothing and were devoted to mystical contemplation.
- **Negative Capability:** It refers to the predicament of human beings in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without reaching after fact and reason.
- **Gothic writing:** It is a branch of Romanticism in the late eighteenth century as a response to the cultivation of reason in the Enlightenment, addresses metaphysical and preternatural aspects of life. It relates to the darker side of human existence, encompassing insanity, fear, cruelty, violence and sexuality.

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13.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. How does Juliet handle the suffering inflicted upon her by Penelope and the diminishment of her life as she ages?
2. What are your views about the revelation of Penelope's married life as revealed in the story by Heather?
3. Identify the post-modernist traits which are evident in the short story, *Silence*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain the character of Juliet in the short story, *Silence*.
2. Discuss the techniques employed by Munro to accomplish the illusion of space and time in her stories.
3. Do you think the title of the short story *Silence* is an apt one? Give reasons for your answer.

13.8 FURTHER READINGS

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