UNIT-1

T. S. ELIOT : RELIGIOUS POEMS

Structure

1.0 Objectives

The present unit aims at acquainting you with some of T.S. Eliot's poems written after his confirmation into the Anglo-Catholic Church of England in 1927. With this end in view, this unit takes up a close reading of two of his 'Ariel Poems' and focuses on some traits of his religious poetry.

1.1 Introduction

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born on 26th September, 1888 at St. Louis, Missouri, an industrial city in the center of the U.S.A. He was the seventh and youngest child of Henry Ware Eliot and Charlotte Champe Stearns. He enjoyed a long life span of more than seventy-five years. His period of active literary production extended over a period of forty-five years.

Eliot's Calvinist (Puritan Christian) ancestors on father's side had migrated in 1667 from East Coker in Somersetshire, England to settle in a colony of New England on the eastern coast of North America. His grandfather, W.G. Eliot, moved in 1834 from Boston to St. Louis where he established the first Unitarian Church. His deep academic interest led him to found Washington University there. He left behind him a number of religious writings. Eliot's mother was an enthusiastic social worker as well as a writer of caliber. His family background shaped his poetic sensibility and contributed a lot to his development as a writer, especially as a religious poet.

Eliot completed his school education in 1905 from St. Louis day school where he was considered a brilliant student. He won a gold medal for Latin in 1900. At school, his favourite writers were Shelley, Byron, Edgar Allan Poe, Canon Doyle, R.L. Stevenson, Swinburne and D.G. Rossetti. He graduated from Harvard University where he spent four years in the study of philosophy. He was profoundly influenced there by two of his teachers—Irving Babbitt and George Santayana. Round the year 1908, he read Arthur Symon's book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* which stimulated his interest in the poetry of the French symbolists, specially Laforgue. It was from his reading of some of the works of Baudelaire there that he learnt how to reconcile in literature the real and imaginary worlds. Soon after getting his M.A. degree in 1910, Eliot went to France and spent a year at the Sorbonne University

to study French literature and philosophy. In 1911, from Paris Eliot went to Bavaria, Germany, where he came into contact with important German writers and read their works. On his return to Harvard later in the year he studied Sanskrit, Pali and Indian philosophy. He read the Bhagvad Gita with deep interest. He keenly learnt about Buddhism the influence of which remained with him for many years. In the concluding section of *The Waste Land* can be noticed the hovering shadows of Indian spiritual thought on Eliot's poetic sensibility

In 1914, Eliot undertook another trip to Germany to continue his philosophical studies there but with the outbreak of the first World War, he had to leave Germany for England where he did low-paid works as a teacher and a bank clerk while writing reviews of startling originality. His meeting with Ezra Pound in London in 1914, and his introduction through him to the lively literary circles of the London of the time, and finally his marriage to an English girl, Vivienne Haigh, in July 1915, strengthened his decision to make England his home. Around this time, his poems began to appear, first in magazines and journals, and later in small volumes. The first collection of his poems entitled *Prufrock and Other Observations* was published in 1917, and *The Sacred Wood*, a book of essays, in 1920, but it was with the publication of *The Waste Land*, in 1922, that Eliot came to be recognized as a leading light of English poetry in the period after the first World War. Eliot became the editor of *The Criterion* in 1923 and in 1925 he joined the new publishing firm, Faber and Faber, of which he soon became the director and worked in that capacity till the end of his life.

Eliot's poetical career has been divided into five phases:

(a) **Poetry:**

(i) **The first Period (1905-09):** The poems of this period, published in various school and college magazines, are immature and mere school-boy exercises.

(ii) **The Second Period:** *Prufrock and Other Observations, 1917.* The most significant poems of this phase are:

1. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*
2. *Portrait of a Lady*
3. *The Prelude*
4. *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*
5. *The Boston Evening Transcript*
6. *Mr. Apollinax*

(iii) **The Third Period (1918-1925):** The most important poems of this period are:

1. *Gerontion*
2. *Burbank with a Baedekar*
3. *Sweeney Erect*
4. *A Cooking Egg*
5. *Sweeny among the Nightingales*

6. *The Waste Land*

7. *The Hollow Men*

(iv) **The Fourth Period (1925-1935):** It is called the period of Eliot's Christian poetry. The most important poems of this period are:

1. *Ash Wednesday*

2. *Journey of the Magi*

3. *Animula*

4. *Marina*

5. *Choruses from* "The Rock"

6. *Coriolan*

7. A number of minor and unfinished poems

(v) **The Fifth Period:** The most important poems of this period are:

1. *Burnt Norton* 1936

2. *East Coker* 1940

3. *The Dry Salvages* 1941

4. *Little Gidding, 1942*

(b) **Drama:** Eliot revived English poetic dramas. His poetic dramas are:

1. *The Rock, a pageant Play,* 1934

2. *Murder in the Cathedral,* 1935

3. *The Family Reunion,* 1939

4. *The Cocktail Party,* 1950

5. *The Confidential Clerk,* 1954

6. *The Elder Statesman,* 1959

(c) **Prose:** Eliot's prose was published in the form of articles and essays in the various journals and periodicals of the day. Some of the highly admired essays are:

1. *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism,* 1933

2. *The idea of a Christian Society,* 1939

3. *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture,* 1948

4. *Selected Essays,* Third Edition, 1951

5. *On Poetry and Poets,* 1957

6. *To Criticise the Critic,* 1965

7. *Tradition and Individual Talent*

8. *Poetry and Drama*

9. *The Function of Criticism*

10. *The English Metaphysical Poets*

11. *The Frontier of Criticism,* etc.

The present unit deals with two religious poems of T. S. Eliot *A Song for Simeon* and *Marina*. Eliot's poem *Journey of the Magi, A Song for Simeon, Animula* and *Marina,* which were published between 1927 and 1930, came to be grouped together and known as "Ariel Poems". All these poems meditate on Eliot's spiritual growth. They are suffused with the poet's deepening involvement with Christian mysticism. These poems turn on the experience of a rebirth as well as the death of the old self. The new birth, however, is not apprehended in all clarity but is accompanied by pain, doubt and confusion. *A Song for Simeon* is based upon the 'Nunc dimittis' which follows the second lesson in the order of evening prayer. The prayer is taken from Chapter 2 of Luke, where it was revealed to Simeon 'that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ'. The prophetic mood of Simeon in the Bible story enables him to prophesy the ministry and suffering of Christ and the grief of Mary. By virtue of his pious old age, the biblical Simeon is an appealing figure. *Marina* sets the stage for a recognition scene, an extremely wished for moment of recovery of a lost loved one. It is taken to embody a doubting hesitation between appearance and reality. This certainty in doubt is the key motif of *Marina.* The child in the poem is the 'supreme created being', a link between spirit and matter.

1.2 *A Song For Simeon*

A Song for Simeon, published in 1928, is the second of the four "Ariel Poems". It first appeared in a series of Christmas booklets from Faber. Simeon, a biblical character, is an old and devout Jew of Jerusalem who is waiting for the incarnation because he has been told by the Holy Ghost that he is not to die until he has seen Christ, who would be the redeemer. He has been led to the temple where child Jesus had been taken by his parents. Taking the child Jesus in his arms, Simeon said: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation…" Eliot's *A Song for Simeon,* like the other 'Ariel Poems' is built on the event of a new birth, which is of momentous significance felt both by the immediate onlookers as well as all others who would come in time. However, in the poem, for Simeon there is no sense of triumph or 'rejoicing with great joy'. On the contrary, to Simeon there comes the knowledge of the suffering. But to Mary, mother of Christ, he prophesied suffering: "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Eliot, according to Robin Griffith Jones, "wrote *A Song for Simeon*, not of Simeon. The poem can be read as a song for Simeon to sing, or as a song to be sung for Simeon. Two possibilities are left open: we may imagine ourselves to be hearing either Simeon's prophetic voice, or the voice of a poet singing on Simeon's behalf or in his honour from a later age and with viewpoint and insights denied to Simeon himself." As the poem opens with the prayer addressed to Lord, we can see that it is Simeon's own voice and words that we hear in the poem. The plea repeated twice in the second and the third paragraph— 'grant us thy peace'— comes from Simeon himself. Towards the end of the poem the words 'not for me the ultimate vision' could be spoken by none other than Simeon. The poet, in this

poem, has sought to integrate private and public religious experience by assuming the identity of biblical figures.

The poem begins with the Roman hyacinths blooming in the bowls. Hyacinths were named after Hyacinthus, the beautiful youth accidentally killed by Apollo. The place where Christ was born was then under the Romans. Hence 'Roman hyacinths' is indicative of foreign domination blooming amidst the stubborn, that is, dead season. The winter sun creeps and the speaker waits for the death wind as if the wind will bear him away as it can bear away a light feather. The juxtaposition of the blooming hyacinths and the winter sun creates an uncertainty as to the seasons. Both winter and spring vie with one another. Life and death, dying and rebirth, together create a time of uncertainly and suspense but what is without uncertainty is the clear sense of weariness as Simeon's own life approaches its end:

Dust in sun light and memory in corners

Wait for the wind that chills towards the death land

"Grant us thy peace" is a form of prayer. The speaker 'kept faith and fast', did charity and gave and received honours. In Simeon's: 'kept faith and fast' can be noted the echo of Prufrock's "I have wept and fasted". Coming face to face with the new birth fills Simeon with the sense of worthlessness of his own past life, a life with which he has remained satisfied and at ease. His smugness 'there went never any rejected from my door' give way to the foreboding of the next line: *Who shall remember my house, where shall live my children's children / When the time of sorrow is come*? The time of sorrow hints at Christ's arrest and crucifixion. The speaker's fear: *where shall live my children's children/when the time of sorrow is come?* is the general fear that almost everyone has. Everyone has fear of dying and hopes something after death, but no one knows what will happen when one dies. One can only resign and accept that one cannot control death. We all have the doubt and fear as to what will happen after our death to the people whom we love, will they be happy? 'Foreign faces and foreign swords' suggest the invaders, war and foreign domination. The chant like lines of the third paragraph:

Before the time of cords and scourges and lamentation

Grant us thy peace.

Before the stations of the mountain of desolation,

Before the certain hour of maternal sorrow,

Now at this birth season of decease,

bring out Simeon's consciousness of coming sorrow. The 'cords' and 'scourges' in the first line refer to the punishment meted out to Christ and 'lamentation' refers to the lamentation of the crowd of women who followed Christ on the way to the crucifixion. The Stations of Cross hinted by 'stations' in the third line is a Roman Catholic devotion. 'Mountain of desolation' has a reference to the Calvary where Christ's crucifixion took place. Birth and death are fused in the phrase 'birth season of decease' to suggest that the new birth is accompanied by pain not joy, foretelling of a death which leads to a truer life. The birth of the new 'still unspeaking and unspoken Word' ensures the destruction of the pattern of life hitherto held.

Sure as Simeon is of the significance of a new birth, he is equally sure of his own inability to any intenser way of life on account of his new birth, for he is one 'who has eighty years and no tomorrow'. He knows that suffering is inevitable amidst glory and derision. Discipline of contemplation may serve as a ladder to spiritual joy but Simeon is afraid that he will not have that ultimate vision and that he will die before that. Contemplating the martyrdom of Christ, Simeon knows that sacrifice of the saints, the glory of martyrdom, cannot be his, though he can contemplate it. Simeon can see the pain and confusion of those who will truly be His disciples. The lines: *And a sword shall pierce thy heart/Thine also* forebodes suffering and sacrifice, the sorrow of Mary and the sharp pang of any encounter with the divine. We know that 'the sword' in biblical context means the message of God, therefore, it may suggest God's intimations of the right path of salvation.

The last lines extend Simeon's state of mind into the future. Embodying far more than himself, he carries in himself the life and the death of all his heirs. His fatigue as well as dying is like that of those who will come after him. Having already 'seen thy salvation' and realized that 'the saints' stair is not for him', he should be allowed as a faithful servant to depart with peace. Having seen incarnation and salvation, Simeon wishes only for death because he feels now that there is no time for him to make anything more significant of his own life.

The poem is a Christian expression of the paradoxical life that comes through death. The poet's experience is translated partially into traditional Christian symbols and partially into personal creations. The opening images are characterized by a skilful mingling of the abstract and the concrete. The impending death of Simeon 'who has seen the salvation' does not give him time enough to come face to face with 'the ultimate vision' but at least makes him aware of the 'glory and derision of those who will follow Christ.

1.3 *MARINA*

Marina, published in 1930, is the last of the 'Ariel Poems'. It is a poem not only about rediscovery and shedding of the old self, but also of a joyous experience. It begins with the thrill of the intimation of significance conveyed by the lines:

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands

What water lapping the bow

And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog

What images return

O my daughter.

These lines are substantially repeated in the end conveying the ecstatic joy of recognition and affirmation:

What seas what shores what granite islands towards my timbers

And woodthrush calling through the fog

My daughter.

The epigraph in this poem is taken from Seneca's tragedy *Hercules Furens:* 'What place is this, what country, what part of the world? Hercules, under the spell of madness cast upon him by

Juno, killed all his children. The above questions are on his lips when he regains sanity after this heinous crime. But the title is taken from Shakespeare's play *Pericles* in which Pericles believed that his daughter (Marina) was dead through the treachery of those in whose care and custody she had been left. Having lost all hopes of her recovery, he was living a meaningless and motiveless life. 'My daughter' in the poem therefore stands for a promise of reality. The sudden unexpected miracle of her restoration has the impact of a rebirth.

But the poem indicates, on the poet's part, a calculated disregard and deliberate negligence of logic and reason. This he does not for the sake of amusement or novelty but to convey the experience of what is ineffable, fluid and uncertain. Critics generally find *Marina* to be peculiarly equivocal, an exemplary enactment of doubt. The loss and recovery of a child, and the loss and recovery of a meaning, seem to coincide in the poem.

Opening lines of the poem echo Hercules' question about the identity of the geographical surroundings. But while Hercules' loss is irrecoverable, here from the beginning there is a sense of hope and recovery. The speaker seems to have been lost in the whirlpool of his own thoughts when suddenly he becomes conscious of the physical surroundings. His first question is about the identity of the sea and then of the shore, grey rocks and islands. 'Water lapping the bow', 'the scent of the pine' and 'the woodthrush singing through the fog' all make him aware of some sudden change that manifest some new hope. The dawn of the new realization seems to take a concrete shape in the form of his daughter.

There is a sudden startling change in the next paragraph. Through the incantation of various causes of death:

Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog, meaning Death

Those who glitter with the glory of the humming-bird, meaning Death

Those who sit in the sty of contentment, meaning Death

Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, meaning Death

the poet believes death to be the punishment for four deadly sins: pride, gluttony, sloth and lust which figure prominently in Dante's *Purgatorio*. The clause 'who sharpen the tooth of dog' indicates use of anger, violence and pride. The clause 'who glitter with the glory of the humming-bird' indicates the display of the worldly possessions, that is, pride and vanity. The clause 'who sit in the sty of contentment' indicates sluggishness, smugness and incomprehension. The clause 'who suffer the ecstasy of the animals' indicates lust, that is, animal passion.

That the poem is about a new life, a regeneration, is evident as we are told that all that was negative, violent, vain, blind and brutish has been 'reduced' by *a wind / A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog*. The term used here 'reduced' has a religious significance implying a power to diminish, to cancel or to rearrange so as to acquire new characteristics. This has happened 'by this grace dissolved' which hints at presence (divine) at the scene of rediscovery.

In the lines:

What is this face, less clear and clearer

The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger—

Given or lent?

More distant than stars and nearer than the eye

the poet tries to grasp the reality that is fluid and incompletely apprehended. He tries to concretize the vision through Pericles' experience of reunion with his daughter. The face of Marina appeared to him quite clear and still lost in haze; he felt his realization to be as authentic as the beatings of his pulse to him which still remained a feeble attempt. Such is the quality of this experience that language can deal with it only in paradoxes. It is beyond the grasp of logic and can be expressed only in a language of contradiction: *less clear and clearer/....less strong and stronger/... more distant...and nearer.* All this indicates that the awakening senses of Pericles are confused. He is still not certain whether this happiness is showered upon him by God's grace or lent to him only temporarily.

But in the next paragraph, the phrases 'small laughter between leaves' and 'hurrying feet' evoke the image of children or young persons happy in a garden. The clause 'where all the waters meet' also indicates the realization and fulfillment of their hopes. At this point in the poem the dream like quality of the experience comes to the fore. The happy memories of the past gather to flow as images in a dream and merge.

Images of water and underwater appear throughout his poetry. In *Prufrock*, for example, there are the lines:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea

By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown

Also imagery of garden and flower recurring suggest some ecstatic childhood experience. In *Marina* the garden imagery and the water imagery are merged together.

In the next paragraph

Bowsprit cracked with ice and paint cracked with heat.

I made this, I have forgotten

And remember.

The rigging weak and the canvas rotten

Between one June and another September.

Made this unknowing, half conscious, unknown, my own.

The garboard strake leaks, the seams need caulking.

This form, this face, this life

Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me

Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,

The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.

the poet uses the metaphor of a ship for his own unfocussed, undirected efforts to reach this moment of grace and awareness. The cracked bowsprit and paint, weak rigging, rotten canvas, leaking

garboard strake, seams needing caulking, etc. evoke the image of a rotten leaky almost un-sailable ship. Extremity of various experiences also leaves life almost not worth living. The poet attempts to explore beyond ordinary experience and temporal reality and to probe the very structure of the reality—a reality that has always been for him a 'dialectically mysterious' rocking between human and divine, matter and spirit, and time and eternity. The decayed boat sailing across the seas approaches the shore, but the perception of the speaker is confused and he has lost all sense of space. The truth and reality that seemed to dawn upon him seem to be wavering. The tension between appearance and reality compels the recognition that our senses simply do not grasp the whole of reality. *My speech…/ ….lips parted* also indicates that language remains powerless to articulate this reality.

Since the poem is about a quest, it employs the imagery of a ship on board which the seas are crossed. Ironically the voyage has been made in a vessel which was far from perfect, with leaky strakes and rotten canvas. The point which is being made here is that the voyager's whole life has been the making of the vessel, making it without any clear idea of its purpose, goal or destination: *Made this unknowing, half conscious, unknown, my own.*

But now the vessel can be discarded and a new life embraced: *let me/Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken.* The mist slowly clears and the speaker's sensations revive. The poem ends with an optimistic note. The last paragraph reechoes the opening paragraph but the 'grey rocks' are replaced by 'granite islands' a symbol of strength and stability. He can smell the fragrant pine and hear the 'woodthrush singing through the fog'. These attributions suggest a concluding moment unafflicted by the problems of perception, but even this claim is modestly tempered by its opposite. However, the poem ends with an 'assured voice', we are still left with a hovering doubt that the vision may be in the nature of a delusion.

The bird wood-thrush is known for its 'loud and clear song'. The poet puts the bird in a fog, but the bird's song is heard clearly, piercing through the confusing and disorienting fog. This may symbolize the clarity that the poet is having at that moment, in regards to death. The poem hints at the poet's confusion and lack of clarity in the past and how he wants to "resign my life for this life". Since the poet sits there, in that spot and time in the fog, he succeeds in having a moment of clear, calm thinking where his eyes are opened, which may be symbolized by the woodthrush's song through the misty fog.

The poem comprises thirty five lines which are divided into seven paragraphs varying from two to eleven lines, the rhythm being adapted to the sense of their context. Since the poem doesn't have any determinable metrical pattern, the paragraphs can hardly be called stanzas. There are sudden jumps and the paragraphs have no perceptible connection, however, grammatical syntax is used as a link between the second and the third paragraph. The poet has tried to bring organic unity of parts with the help of assonance, alliteration and rhetorical schemes of repetition. Wood-thrush song is mentioned both in the opening and at the closing of the poem which helps him "sandwich" the poem and give it a tidy closure.

1.4 Let Us Sum Up

Through this unit you have got a perception of T. S. Eliot's own pain and suffering as well as joyous experience and spiritual growth after his confirmation into the Anglo-Catholic Church of England. *A Song for Simeon* is built on the event of a new birth accompanied not by joy but by pain foretelling

of a death which leads to a truer life. *Marina* is about rediscovery, thrill of the intimation of significance and the ecstatic joy of recognition and affirmation.

1.5 Review Questions

1. Write a short note on Simeon.
2. What does the title suggest?
3. Explain the phrase 'Roman Hyacinths'.
4. What does the speaker hope for in the first stanza?
5. Explain the clause 'when the time of sorrow is come'.
6. What is meant by 'birth season of decease'?
7. Explain the phrase 'saints' stair'.
8. Explain the lines: *They shall praise Thee and suffer in every generation With glory and derision,*
9. Jot down below some important points for a critical appreciation of the poem.
10. Jot down the lines in which the poet has used alliteration.
11. Jot down the religious words used in the poem.
12. In what sense has the word 'sword' been used in the poem?
13. Explain the term 'martyrdom'.
14. Write a note on the significance of the title.
15. Explain the clause 'Who sharpen the tooth of the dog".
16. Explain the lines: *What is this face, less strong and stronger— The pulse in the, less strong and stronger*— What does the contrast in the above lines suggest?
17. Comment upon the metrical quality of the poem.
18. Explain the phrase 'garboard strake leaks'.
19. What the poet want to suggest by 'the new ships'?
20. Why does the poet want to "resign my life for this life"?
21. Explain the phrase 'grace dissolved in place'.
22. Why has the poet described the ship (carrying Pericles to his daughter) in realistic terms?
23. What gives us the sense that the poem is about reunion and fulfillment of the quest?
24. The poem does not use grammatical sentences towards the end of the poem. Do you think that the poet has made a deliberate use of this technique to serve some purpose?
25. What emotion is conveyed by the image 'whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet'?

1.5 Bibliography

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UNIT-2

W.B.YEATS : *TO A SHADE*

Structure

2.0 Objectives

Since Yeats continuously strove to create a literature that was purely Irish in tone and subject matter, the unit/section aims to make the students aware of his role as an Irish poet with specific reference to his poem '*To a Shade*.' Its purpose is to study how Yeats was always conscious of being Irish; and Ireland being a recurrent theme in Yeats's poetry, how he wrote self consciously autobiographical poetry.

2.1 Introduction

William Butler Yeats (13 June, 1865-28 January, 1939) was an Irish poet and dramatist, whose works stimulate Ireland's cultural and literary revival. The literary care of Yeats was influenced by his Irish origin and Irish influences were also working on him particularly the Irish national movement in Dublin and the popular folklore. Dublin introduced him to Irish nationalism and kept him in touch with purely political currents of thought.

To a Shade is published in the volume *Responsibilities (1914)* with a number of direct, personal or occasional poems and some satirical ones, too. With this volume, Yeats's poetry become less dreamy and more real, the ideas being nearer to contemporary life. Here, the poet is still in a transit phase, still playing a vehemently active political role, hurling epigrammatic abuse at his enemies with an economy of utterance. A number of Yeats's poems at this time were inspired by the so-called Lane picture controversy. It is not that Yeats shows himself more and more the enemy of the bourgeoisie, the Philistine materialists who ruled the commercial life of Dublin and put every obstacle in the way of the development of a true Irish art and literature. Yeats's position in all this was, of course, the aristocratic

one who contemptuously derided the mob.

To a Shade is addressed to the ghost of the Irish leader Parnell and deals with the same theme of the mob majority's dullness and vulgarity. It is one of Yeats's most effective political poems where the note of epigrammatic scorn is sounded strongly showing his disgust with the way the Irish people treated Parnell.

2.2 About the Poet

W.B.Yeats's, whom T.S.Eliot called 'the greatest poet of our time,' was one of the most important of modern poets who exerted a great influence of his active interest in Irish politics and Irish cultural revival. He discovered the 'In dream begins responsibility'- a quotation put at the beginning of *Responsibilities* published in 1914. Yeats's real hope for Ireland was not a politician's platform; it was a poet's dream; it was this land that contributed so much to the shaping of his poetic genius creating a national myth for Ireland.

Being one of the foremost figures of the twentieth century literature, Yeats was a pillar of both Irish and English establishments. He was a driving force behind the Irish literary Revival, and together with Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn, founded the hobby theatre and served as its chief during its early years. Being fascinated by Irish legends and occult, Yeats concentrated on an identifiably Irish content and this inclination was reiforced by his involvement with a new generation of younger and emerging Irish authors. In 1889, he met Maud Gonne and developed an obsessive infatuation with her beauty and outspoken manner, and she was to have a significant and lasting effect on Yeats's life and poetry. In 1923, Yeats was awarded a Nobel Prize in Literature for what the Nobel Committee described as "inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation," and he was the first Irishman so honored. Being aware of the symbolic value of an Irish winner Yeats used the occasion of his acceptance lecture at the Royal Academy of Sweden to present himself as standard bearer of Irish nationalism and Irish cultural independence.

Yeats's early poetry is mainly introspective expressing his nationalistic urge to revive the Celtic past and build a new Ire, and of heroic standards. His poetry is rooted in life, the life of the present, and through myths and symbols the life of the best. Yeats rose to become the leader of the school of the 'Celtic Revival'; his reading in Irish legend and folklore produced in him a poet with a combination of the mood of the decadents with the dreaminess and mystery of Celtic tradition and romance.

Yeats wrote intensely autobiographical poetry in which he examined his relation to the world around him. Again and again we find in his poetry Irish folklore and history, Irish heroic story and even Irish landscape working in his imagination to mitigate the excess of self-indulgent. He seeks to invest the Irish race with a deep rooted sense of the spiritual passion that permits men to live in harmony with the Nature's grand design." He wrote in 1888 "you can no more have the greatest poetry without a nation than religion without symbols."

As a poet and a visionary Yeats was always influenced by the symbols of Ireland's external beauty. The main themes of his poetry are Irish nationalism, Celtic mythology, love, ageing and mysticism. He wrote: "The mystic life is at the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write." His poetry is the poetry of love and death and old age and all the sorrows that have been since the world began and will be till the world ends. At the same time Yeats's poetry never fails to relate itself to

its age; if it is not with it, is against it; it is never merely indifferent. Infact, his theory of poetry consists in the aesthetic and emotive effect of using the ancient myths and symbols with pigmentation of modern association, thus, interweaving the present into the life of the past.

Yeats is generally considered to be one of the twentieth century's key English language poets. He can be considered a Symbolist Poet in that he used allusive imagery and symbolic structures throughout his career. Yeats chooses words and puts them together so that in addition to a particular meaning, they suggest something significant beyond the expressed meaning. He relies more on the evocative power of words rather than of explicit statement. "To intimate things rather than state" is one of the primary aims of the symbolists. Yeats's use of symbols is usually something physical which is used both to be itself and to suggest other, perhaps immaterial, timeless qualities.

Yeats reminded his age that poetry depends on symbolism. The special quality attributed to his symbols is its organic and autonomous nature. In his verse, symbols became means of conjuring moods instead of sensations. His method is not to call forth the significance of symbols through dim, shadowy hints, but to put them in definite visual forms. He emphasizes the concrete physical properties of the symbol. Most of his symbols have a firm background in legend and history.

David Daiches suggests that the imagery in Yeats's poetry is arranged in pairs of contrasts: man and Nature, the human word and the fairy world, the domestic and the adventurous, the transient and the eternal are paired against each other. He further comments that Yeats dealt with words magically, not in any vague romantic sense of the term, but literally; in his poetry words are made to act magically, transcending Their literal meaning to explore through the most precious symbolism, a whole world of reality behind to common world known by sensation. Yeats's poetry became increasingly intellectual, it knew how to raise with words the spell of a mysterious atmosphere.

Yeats experimented throughout his career with uses of the refrain with brilliant results. Other themes, satirical, autobiographical etc. show a controlled gaiety which is a mark of the last phase of his writing. Unlike most modernists who experimented with free verse, Yeats was also a master of the traditional verse forms. The impact of modernism on his work can be seen in the increasing abandonment of the more conventional poetic diction of his early work in favour of the more austere language and more direct approach to his themes. His later poetry is written with a more personal view which include meditations on the experience of growing old. While Yeats's early poetry drew heavily on Irish myth and folklore, his later work was engaged with more contemporary issues, and his style underwent a dramatic transpirations.

2.3 About the Age

W.B.Yeats was born in an age when he could not 'believe' whole heartedly as he was deeply moved by the European struggle and even more by the Irish disturbances. His writings were socially and culturally more relevant to his time because they reveal his active interest in Irish politics and the Irish cultural revival. Due to this preoccupation with his age, Yeats constantly urged upon Irishmen to return to native subjects. His literary career bears impact of various cultural and political nationalism. The circumstances of his early life and his unique temperament led him though all the movements and influences of his age. Ireland was the moulder of Yeats's mind as it eventually became the great stimulating impact on his life and the sounding-board for most of his verse.

Yeats may well stand as the representative of the Irish school. The influence of the young Ireland Movement upon him was very much evident. The 1880's saw the rise of Parnell and the Home Rule Movement, the 1890's the momentum of nationalism, while the Fenians became prominent around the turn of the century. These developments were to have a more profound effect on his poetry and his subsequent explanations of Irish identity had a significant influence on his entire literary career. Infact, he became a part of all he saw and felt.

Throughout that intense life two men were his aristocratic heroes: John O'Leary and Parnell. On them Yeats fashioned his heroic praise. For him one man typified the significant romanticism of Irish life; the other revealed its tragic realism. Yeats's thinking about the historical and legendry past of Ireland was shaped by John O'Leary the Irish patriot who suffered greatly for the Irish cause. Yeats met him in 1885 and was greatly influenced by his speeches for their considerable moral force and revolutionary record; his emphasis on a national culture for Ireland had impact on much that Yeats did as an aggressive nationalist that he later became. It was to O'Leary that Yeats owed his knowledge of Irish patriotic literature. His teachings and the patriotism of the young Ireland society both played their part in preparing Yeats for his role in the literary movement. Through O'Leary's inspiration Yeats founded in London the Irish Literary Society (1891) and in Dublin the Irish National Literary Society (1892) and proclaimed his belief in the value of Irish legend and Ireland's historical heritage.

In his personal myth of Irish nationalism 'holy' men like Parnell became the defenders of that holy cause. Yeats was the child of Parnell's race. The Ireland of his early method was to a great degree over-shadowed by the legacy of Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-91), whilst it was being transformed materially and socially by the effects of industrialization. It was fateful that Ireland's cultural renaissance should coincide with this fundamental change in her environment. It was particularly influential in the career of Ireland's greatest poet. Yeats himself wrote in 1914:

> In the thirty years or so during which I have been reading Irish newspapers, three public controversies have stirred my imagination. The first was the Parnell controversy..... another was the dispute over *The Playboy*..... the third prepared for the corporation's refusal of a building for Sir Hugh Lane's famous collection of pictures..... These controversies, political, literary and artistic, have showe that neither religion nor politics can of itself create minds with enough receptivity to become wise, or just and generous enough to make a nation..... political Ireland sees the good citizen but as a man who holds to certain opinions and not as a man of good will. Against all this we have but a few educated men and the remaining of an old traditional culture among the poor. Both were stronger forty years ago, before the rise of our new middle class which made its first public display during the nine years of the Parnellite split, showing how base at moments of excitement are minds without culture.

After the fall of Parnell, political energy had gone into the disputes between Parnellites and anti-Parnellites. Yeats rushed into the vacum caused by the death of Parnell and it seemed to him now that all romance had left Irish public life and that youthful national feelings would seek unpolitical channels of some years to come. But soon he became a prime mover and driving force of the Irish cultural revival in the years following Parnell and dedicated himself to the regeneration of his race and nation. He said that "a new class, which had begun to rise power under the shadow of Parnell, would

change the nature of Irish movement, which, needing no longer great sacrifices, nor bringing any great risk to individuals, could do without exceptional men and those activities of the mind that are founded on the exceptional moment." Infact, Yeats's attempt to create a living Irish culture through the literary movement saw him move away from a simple nationalism towards complexity and he forged out of his bitter experience a nationalism fitted to his personal myth.

2.4 *To a Shade* (Text)

If you have revisited the town, thin Shade,
Whether to look upon your monument
(I wonder if the builder had been paid)
Or happier-thoughted when the day is spent
To drink of that salt breath out of the sea
When grey gulls flit about instead of men,
And the gaunt houses put on majesty:
Let these content you and be gone again;
For they are at their old tricks yet.
A man
Of your own passionate serving kind who had brought
In his full hands what, had they only known,
Had given their children's children loftier thought,
Sweeter emotion, working in their vein
Like gentle blood, has been driven from the place,
And insult heaped upon him for his pains,
And for his open-handedness, disgrace;
Your enemy, an old foul mouth, had set
The pack upon him.
Go, unquiet wanderer,
And gather the Glasnevin coverlet
About your head till the dust stops your ear,
The time for you to taste of that salt breath
And listen at the corners has not come:
You had enough of sorrow before death-

Away, Away ! You are safer in the tomb.

2.5 Annotations

Stanza-I

1. the town: Dublin

2. thin Sahde: The ghost of Parnell; Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-91) was an ardent Irish patriot, revolutionary and a martyr of Irish nationalism; he entered parliament in 1875 as a Home Ruler; Parnell aimed to establish an independent parliament in Dublin.

3. monument: memorial erected in Parnell's honour; a monument was built to Parnell's memory at the end of O'Connel street.

4. salt breath: salt-laden breeze which blows from the sea.

5. gray gulls: a type of sea-bird which is grey in colour.

6. flit about: dart; pass lightly and rapidly; to make short flights.

7. gaunt: lean; haggard; the reference is to old and tottering (falling) houses.

8. they: the people of Dublin.

9. their old tricks: philistinism of Dubliners; a philistine is a person who is hostile to or not interested in culture and the arts.

Stanza-II

1. A man of your own passionate serving kind: the reference is to Hugh Lane who was Lady Gregory's nephew; Hugh Lane was an art dealer who had an excellent collection of modern French paintings; he insisted that a suitable gallery of modern art should be built in Dublin to house the pictures; he offered his collection as a gift to Dubliners if a permanent gallery were built; the Irish people were indignant at the idea and their attacks extended to lane and ultimately to paintings themselves; Yeats considered Hugh Lane a person full of passion for service similar to Parnell.

2. loftier thought: sublime thought.

3. driven from the place: forced to leave Dublin.

4. insult heaped upon him: a campaign of abuse against Hugh Lane.

5. his pains: his efforts to give shape to the idea of gallery.

6. your enemy: Parnell's enemy, William Murphy, proved to be Hugh Lane's enemy also.

7. an old foul mouth: William Murphy, a newspaper-owner; his newspapers had opposed Parnell violently; he also attacked Hugh Lane.

8. pack: Irish mob.

Stanza-III

1. unquiet wanderer: the ghost of Parnell.

2. Glasnevin coverlet: cemetery where Parnell was buried.

3. taste if that salt breath/ And listen at the corners: the lines are sarcastic in tone, attacks Irish people and reminds Parnell's ghost that things are still the same in Dublin as they were before his death.

2.6 Explanations

Stanza-I

"If you have revisited the town.....at their old tricks yet."

The opening stanza of the poem is addressed to the ghost of Parnell who is imagined as revisiting the town of Dublin with a yearning to look upon the monument that has been erected in Parnell's honour or to see the ghostly splendour of eighteenth century houses along the quays. Yeats urges the ghost of Parnell not to linger on in Dublin, even though the occasion of his visit be the fact that a monument has been erected in his honour because the people of the town who had betrayed him before his death are still 'at their old tricks.' The poet's bitterness against the Irish people is expressed very well as he wondered that the builder of Parnell's monument may not necessarily have been paid for his pains. Perhaps, the ghost has revisited the town, insists Yeats, because of its own charms. Infact, Parnell loved Dublin so well that his spirit was bound to visit the place and feel happier due to a desire to taste once again the beauty of a Dublin evening when the saltish breeze blows from the sea, grey-gulls keeps flying around, and houses, which are otherwise old and haggard, wear a majestic look for a while. Parnell's ghost is advised to leave the place and if it at all comes to pay another visit to Dublin, it should be satisfied with these tastes and sights and then go back to the grave because the people of the town have not yet given up 'their old tricks' which were responsible for causing frustration to Parnell.

Stanza-II

"A man of your own passionate serving kind..... pack upon him."

The second stanza pays a tribute to Hugh Lane who was a man of passionate revolutionary zeal and emotional fervour equivalent of Parnell. Here, Yeats, referring to Hugh Lane controversy, reserves the highest praise for Lane who proposed to bring for the people of Dublin a gift in the form of a collection of French paintings if a proper art gallery could be provided for them. Had the Dubliners acknowledged its worth and accepted it, it would have influenced their children with impressive thoughts and sublime emotions for generations. But instead of acknowledging the importance of such a gift and the artistic and aesthetic influence it would have exercised upon their children, insult was heaped upon Hugh Lane, 'for his pains' and disgrace 'for his openhandedness.' Rather than honouring him for his generous and genuine offer, abuses were hurled upon him by Dubliners. They came from a group of people who were incited by the newspaper-owner William Murphy, who was an enemy of Parnell earlier. The ideal of service is spurned by these men and a man who brings benefits is, like Parnell, 'driven from the place.' The stanza rises to passionate scorn and links Parnell and Lane; Yeats reminds Parnell's ghost that Ireland has learnt nothing from its mistakes in Parnell's case; things are as they have always been and thus quite unsuitable for a man of Parnell's kind is no time for Parnell's ghost to return.

Stanza-III

"Go, unquiet wanderer,..... safer in the tomb."

Having given the example of Hugh Lane to prove the ingratitude of Dubliners, the last stanza sounds off the opening image of Parnell's memory with an appeal to the ghost of Parnell to return to its grave in the Glasnevin cemetery in north Dublin where Parnell was buried. Yeats asks the ghost to gather the cover provided by the earth around its head 'till the dust stops your ear' so that it may not hear what the ungrateful Dubliners would be saying all this while. The ghost, indeed, need not stay on because Parnell had already suffered enough of sorrow before he dies. The most poignant part of the poem comes when the poet catches up the image of Dublin's beauty by saying that the time has not arrived for him 'to taste of that salt breath/ And listen at the corners.' The poem ends with a satiric thrust that Parnell is safer in the tomb than in Dublin which has heaped insult upon him as well as Lane. The stanza is remarkable for its ironic comment on the attitude of contemporary Irish society and becomes effective for its mixture of pathos and exhortation.

2.7 Critical Comments

"To a Shade" is a poem which intermixes formal with colloquial rhetoric with remark; its imagery is economical as well as evocative. The beauty of Dublin stands as a contrasting image against the ugliness of 'the pack,' it shows how Yeats came to regard mob force as a negative influence. At the same time, the 'old tricks' echo through the 'old foul mouth.' A critic says that, 'the aristocratic ideal of unselfish service is sketched in passionately yet entirely unsentimentally: its demands are passion, full hands, pains; it rewards may be disgrace and sorrow. The sorrow is, ultimately, the poet's as well as that of Lane and Parnell, but the real disgrace is Dublin's.' Yeats's discontent with Irish politicians was founded on the opinion that they espoused hollow reason and practised hypocrisy. The public controversies that stirred Yeats's imagination in his middle years roused him to wage a personal attack on the middle class in Ireland. They had destroyed Parnell and later Synge. Yeats's defence of Parnell, Synge and Hugh Lane- personally and through his voice as poet- contrasts his middle with his earlier period. In taking such a stand he sought to unify and strengthen his own personal ideal of Ireland that any national pride should be deep-rooted in the culture, tradition and history of the Irish nation itself.

2.8 Let Us Sum Up

"To a Shade" is a powerful poetic comment on the treatment given it its political and cultural leaders by the Irish people in general and by Dubliners in particular. It shows that Yeats is never dissociated from the social and political events of his day and his poetry is profoundly humanistic. It is the work of a growing, sensitive personality and this intense dynamism is the secret of its astonishing vitality and warmth.

2.9 Review Questions

1. Why does the poet ask the 'shade' to go away from the city and not to return?
2. Where was Parnell buried?
3. What was the attitude of the Dubliners towards Parnell and Hugh Lane?
4. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem.

5. Discuss Yeats involvement with Irish politics and cultural revival with reference to the present poem.

6. Comment on the satiric and ironic note in the poem giving apt illustrations from the text.

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UNIT-3

TED HUGHES : *HAWK ROOSTING*

Structure

3.0 Objectives

In this unit, you are going to study about Ted Hughes and his poem *Hawk Roosting* . After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- understand about the life and background of the Ted Hughes, who is a representative of contemporary British Poetry
- understand the background and critical aspects of the poem, which is discussed.

3.1 Introduction

This unit will tell about the biographical details of the poet, along with a background and critical insight of the poetry of Ted Hughes.

This unit will also take up the poem, *Hawk Roosting* in detail.

3.2 Ted Hughes: Biographical Details

Birth; Parentage and Early Influences

Edward James Hughes (or Ted Hughes for short) was born on 17th August 1930 in the little town in the West Riding region of Yorkshire (in England). His father, William Hughes, had been a

carpenter but had subsequently enlisted in the army in the course of World War I, and had fought on the Gallipoli Peninsula in April 1915. William Hughes was one of the only seventeen survivors of the battalion which participated in that campaign; and, on his return home, he used to tell his family the stories of the fighting in the war and his own participation in it. He had seriously been wounded in the fighting, and Ted Hughes has enshrined a memory of William Hughes' suffering in one of his poems, entitled *Out*. In fact, William Hughes' accounts of the fighting in World War I made a permanent impression on Ted Hughes who was in those days a mere child. As a consequence of his listening to those accounts, Ted Hughes became aware of war poems. If war was a profound influence on Ted Hughes as a child, the region, where he was born, was another profound influence. He was born in the Calder Valley; and his early impressions of this valley remained permanently engraved on his mind. One of his volumes of poems, which appeared in the late seventies of the twentieth century, and which is entitled *Remains of Elmet*, and another volume entitled *The River* (1980) contain graphic descriptions of the Calder Valley, of the river Calder and of the life of the rural people of that region.

Interest in Animals and Birds

When Edward James Hughes (or Ted Hughes as he subsequently came to be known) was just seven years old, the family moved from the town of his birth to Maxborough, a coal-mining town in South Yorkshire. This was a great change in the life of the boy who had begun to love his rural surroundings and who had now to adapt himself to urban life. In the rural surroundings of the town of his birth, he had begun to take great interest in animals and birds, and had wanted to capture them to enjoy their company, though he never succeeded in capturing any. This interest in animals, dating from his childhood, remained with him throughout his life, and it accounts for a large number of animal poems which he subsequently wrote.

At School; National Service; and at Cambridge University

Hughes attended Maxborough Grammar School and, after passing his final examination there, proceeded to the University of Cambridge on a scholarship which he had won though, before going u to the university, he did National Service for two years as a wireless mechanic in the Royal Air Force. At Cambridge University he first took up English literature as his chief subject of study, but two years later switched over to archaeology and anthropology. At Cambridge he also happened to meet an American girl, Sylvia Plath, who had gone there to study English language and literature. In 1956, two years after graduating from Cambridge University, he married her.

The Failure of His Marriage; and Another Marriage; More Publications

In 1957 Hughes published his first collection of poems, giving it the title of "The Hawk in the Rain" which was also the title of one of the poems in this collection. In the same year he went with Sylvia Plath to live in America where they stayed until 1959. In 1960, he and his wife returned to England, and published his second collection of poems, giving it the title of "Lupercal". He and his wife were now living in a small flat in London; and there they had their first child, Frieda Rebecca, in 1960. The second volume of his poems confirmed his reputation as a young poet of great promise. In fact, his very first publication, namely, "The Hawk in the Rain" had brought him recognition and much critical acclaim. Sylvia Plath too was an author, and she too now published some of her work. A second child, a boy named Nicholas Ferrer, was born to the couple in 1962 in their home in North Tawton, Devon, to which they had shifted from London in 1961. However, the marriage was already showing signs of

strain; and the couple separated. Sylvia and the two children moved to a flat in London. Hughes too moved to London, and began to stay there separately from his family. In 1963 Sylvia Plath committed suicide in her flat. It seems that Hughes had been having an affair with another woman, and that Sylvia took recourse to the extreme step because of her frustration. For three years after her suicide, Hughes did not write much except magazine articles and book reviews. After a trip to Ireland in 1966, he seemed to have recovered his creative vigour; and in 1967, he published his next volume of poems, entitled *Wodwo*. But tragedy struck him again when the woman, with whom he had formed a friendship, died in 1969. In 1970 Hughes married a woman by the name of Carol Orchard. She was the daughter of a Devon farmer whom Hughes celebrated in his volume entitled *Moortown*. Around the same time (in the year 1970) Hughes joined several other writers to form *The Arvon Foundation* to promote and sponsor budding poets, novelists, and playwrights. In the summer of 1971, he went to Iran with Peter Brook's international company to write a play for an Iranian theatrical organization. A volume of poems entitled *Crow* had been published by him in 1970; and now other volumes of poems by him followed: *Season Songs* in 1974; *Gaudete*, in 1977; *Cave Birds* in 1978; *Remains of Elmet* in 1979; and *The River* in 1983.

The Poet Laureated in 1984

By now Hughes had been recognized as one of the most oustanding English poets; and in 1984 he was appointed Poet Laureate of England in succession to Sir John Betheman at the latter's death.

His Poetry, Not Autobiographical to Any Appreciable Extent

Hughes's life has been very eventful, and even turbulent. However, the facts of his life did not have much of an impact on his poetry. In other words, his biography has not much affected his poetry, even though his volume of poems entitled "Wodwo", which appeared about four years after Sylvia Plath's suicide, contains some of the most pessimistic poems he ever wrote. The pessimism of these poems may be attributed to the personal disaster of his first wife's death but, on the whole, his poetry cannot be described as autobiographical to any appreciable degree. This statement again needs to be qualified because the two later volumes of his poems-"Remains of Elmet" and "The River"-contain realistic and authentic pictures of the natural scenery in the midst of which he had spent the earliest years of his life. In this connection a critic writes: "Of course the dark tones of "Wodwo" and the urge that gave rise to "Crow" have to do with autobiography. But, the closer one looks, the more one is struck by the near absence of the biographical." According to this critic, Hughes' poetry is not written in the "confessional" mode.

The Major works of Ted Hughes

Ted Hughes is a prolific writer. He has published several volumes of verse, each containing a substantial number of poems. Given below are the titles of the various volumes of verse published by him, and the titles of the more important of the poems in each volume.

The Hawk In The Rain (1957)

Lupercal (1970)

The Major Works Of Ted Hughes

Wodwo (1967)

Crow (1970)

Gaudete (1977)

Cave Birds (1978)

Remains Of Elmet (1979)

Moortown (1979)

The River (1983)

Summing up Ted Hughes's achievement, a critic writes: "Together these volumes constitute interesting examples of the renewed vogue for topographical poetry (with illustrations) that arose in the enviroment-concious second half of the twentieth century. Hughes' stress on the physical, animal, and subconscious is in marked contrast to the urbane tone of "the Movement "; and his poetry, hailed as vital and original, has also been described as excessively brutal and violent". (Topographical poetry means local poetry of which the fundamental object is some particular landscape, with the addition of historical retrospection or incidental meditation. This kind of poetry flourished mainly in the eighteenth century; but the genre had a renewed vogue in the late twentieth century when the emphasis was more on the vanishing rural scene than on country parks, estates, and gardens. Distinguished examples of twentieth-century topographical poetry are Ted Hughes', *Remains of Elmet* (1979) and *River* (1983), already mentioned in the catalogue above. "The Movement" is a term describing a group of poets who include Kingsley Aims, Philip Larkin, Donald Davie, Joseph Enright, John Wain, Elizabeth Jennings, Robert Conquest. Much of the work of these writers illustrates its anti-romantic, witty, rational, and sardonic tone).

3.3 Ted Hughes As A Poet

Hughes' Remarkable Development as a Poet

As Gifford and Roberts point out in their brilliant book on the subject, Ted Hughes is a prolific and a great poet. According to these critics, Hughes' characteristic virtues can be seen in a remarkably large proportion of his work, while his failures are usually matters of excess and seldom of paucity. Hughes is a poet who has developed from an early reliance on external Nature to a greater metaphysical assurance and the creation of a distinctive imaginative world. The passage of time has made such early poems as *Pike, Wind*, and *View of a Pig* seem greater achievements than they seemed at their first appearance. The poetic growth of Hughes from this early work to the best poems in his successive volumes of poetry has indeed been most remarkable. The volumes entitled *Wodwo*, *Crow*, and *Cave Birds* are particularly noteworthy in this connection.

As a Poet of Violence

Hughes has written a large number of poems which depict violence, violence chiefly of savage animals, but violence also in human nature. Indeed, violence is one of the dominant themes in Hughes's poetry; and for this reason he has often been regarded as a poet of violence. However, those who describe him primarily as "a poet of violence" do not intend this label as a tribute to him. They regard violence as a theme in his poetry as something abnormal and undesirable. But Hughes himself equated

the word "violence" with what he called "vehement activity" or with what he also called "energy". In an interview with a magazine editor, he is reported to have said:

Any form of violence-- any form of vehement activity invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power-circuit of the universe. Once the contact has been made, it becomes difficult to control. If you refuse the energy, you are living a kind of death. If you accept the energy, it destroys you. what is the alternative? To accept the energy, and find methods of turning it to good, of keeping it under control- rituals, the machinery of religon. The old method is the only one.

In another interview, he said: "My poems are not about violence but vitality. Animals are not violent, they're so much more completely controlled than men." But, without indulging in any kind of hair-splitting, we must acknowledge the fact that Hughes does depict violence in many of his poems, and he does so in its most brutal and naked shape. Poems like *The Jaguar, Tomcat, View of a Pig, Esther's The Bull Moses, An Otter, Thrushes, Pike* and *Second Glance at a Jaguar* depict animal violence; while poems like *Bayonet Charge, Six Young men* and *The martyrdom of Bishop Farrar* depict human violence. Nor is there any need to offer any apology on Hughes's behalf for the writing of such poems. Everything under the sky in this universe is fit material for poetry, if the poet has the required technical skill and if he can arouse the reader's curiosity and interest, or if he can thrill or delight or instruct or elevate the reader by his poems. These poems of violence by Hughes are certainly genuine poetry; and we certainly enjoy reading them. And it is not only the sadistic persons among us who would appreciate these poems. Even the normal reader can find a certain degree of pleasure in them, especially because they are perfectly realistic, and very vivid, in their depiction of brutality and cruelty.

A Poet of the Animal World

As may have become evident from the foregoing paragraph, Hughes shows great interest in the animal world. A number of poems named above are about animals and about the savagery and ferocity of those animals. But there is also a poem entiled *The Horses* which depicts the passivity and gentleness of a group of ten horses at a particular moment in their existence. Hughes' interest in the animal world dates back to the days of his boyhood which he spent in Yorkshire amid rural scenes. The company of his brother, who was a hunter of foxes and other animals, greatly encouraged his interest in animals. He has no prejudice against animals who are fierce and bloodthirsty by nature; and he often relates animals' cruelty to the life of human beings, though he does so in a disguised and symbolic manner rather than explicitly.

His Primitivism and His Use of Ancient Myths

Hughes also shows a deep interest in primitive beliefs and superstitions; and, in writing many of his poems, he draws upon ancient myths and legends. In his portrayal of the Crow in the poems of the volume which bears that title, Hughes gives us clear evidence of this interest. The protagonist in this volume of poems is the Crow; and this protagonist is a curious and intriguing blend of ancient myths and legends, apart from the significance with which Hughes himself has endowed this bird, Hughes took from Leonard Baskin's drawings the concept of Crow-Man, gave him features from Eskimo, Red Indian, and Celtic folklore, then launched him into our world, with the task of trying to understand it and his own place in it. But Hughes shows his interest in primitive beliefs and superstitions in the bulk of his other poetry also. One of the myths, which always inspired Hughes, relates to "the white goddess"

(or the Nature-goddess) in her three aspects of maiden, mother, and crone, (or Persephone, Demeter, and Hecate). This goddess is both beneficent and destructive; and the myth about her helps Hughes to widen Wordsworth's view of Nature so as to include all that is terrifying and predatory, in addition to what is comforting and consoling, in Nature. This dual approach to Nature is implicit in Hughes's poetry from the beginning, but it becomes increasingly prominent in the "mother" of several of the Crow poems, in the object of Reverend Lamb's devotion in Gaudete, and in the hero's victim and bride in the volume of poems entitled *Cave Birds*. The goddess not only represents all Nature but is also present in the human mind, in the unconscious layers of the human mind, accessible to individuals in a state of profound meditation, in a state of ecstasy, and in moods of extreme anguish. But Hughes's major poetry is primarily concerned with the relationship between the human mind and the forces which govern man's material existence. And this explains Hughes's interest in shamanism. The word "shaman" is a term used by anthropologists for a sorcerer or a witch-doctor. The shaman in older times was valued for his direct experience of "other" worlds which the ordinary man knows of only through myth and ritual. This experience was believed to enable him to cure the sick. The shaman's ritual involved singing, dancing, and recitation, often in a special poetic vocabulary. Now, it is impossible for a modern scientific individual to believe in shamanism. Nor does Hughes express any belief in shamanistic rituals. But Hughes' preoccuptations with the unconscious mind, with death, with the animal world, and with ancient myths do show his affinity with shamanism. What Hughes really shares with a shaman of the old times is a concern for mental or psychic equilibrium. Gifford and Roberts in this context affirm that Hughes' interest in the primitive beliefs is not a rejection of culture but a concern for culture. Hughes does, indeed reject much of the western dangerously narrow base; but he does not reject it in favour of an illusory ideal of man. He is interested in the sophistication of primitive cultures in areas where the modern western culture is barbaric, those areas being chiefly the inner life and the natural world. Hughes' interest in wodwo also shows his interest in primitive beliefs. The term "Wodwo" means a mythical satyr (half-man, half-animal). And some of Hughes' best poems are to be found in the volume which bears the title "Wodwo", there being also in this volume a poem which itself has the title "wodwo".

The Crow Poems

The poems in the volume entitled *Crow*, though seemingly about the bird known as the Crow, actually have a deeply philosophical significance. The poems in this volume cannot merely be classified as animal poems, though the bird Crow certainly belongs to the animal world. These poems are much more than animal poems; and they have much wider and deeper implications. Taken collectively, and in most cases even if considered individually, these poems are a satire on the prevailing religious beliefs of the people and more particularly on the Biblical doctrines regarding the Creation of man, and man's fall from grace. They are also a satire on Christianity and the Christian beliefs. In other words, these poems are anti-Biblical and anti-traditional. They show Hughes' satirical talent, and his ability to wield the weapons of irony and sarcasm. As Keith Sagar points out, these poems are mainly about Crow's mistakes, his mutually destructive encounters with the "Energies," his ego-death, his first Perceptions of conscience, his initial steps towards re-constituting himself while they are also profoundly instructive. However, the orthodox Christian and, in fact, an orthodox man belonging to any religion, would find these poems shocking because the traditional beliefs of religion have here been assailed and debunked. In any case, these poems are the most famous part of Hughes' work as a poet.

Meditations on War

It is impossible for any modern poet to remain unaffected by the destructiveness caused by the two World Wars which were the most conspicuous historical events of the twentieth century. World War I evoked considerable poetry which bemoaned the destruction caused by it; and World War second, likewise moved poets to write about its calamitous and disastrous effects. Ted Hughes had a personal reason to bemoan war, because his own father had fought in World War I and had barely survived it. In the poem entitled *Out*, Hughes meditates upon his father's terrible experience of war; but he has written other war poems too. Of these, the more important ones are *Bayonet Charge* and *Six Young Men*. These are all deeply moving and poignant poems. Indeed, war too may be regarded as a leading theme in Hughes' poetry.

3.4 The Writing Style of Ted Hughes

Ted Hughes, commenting upon the style of writing of a fellow-poet, had thus commented on it: "It is a language for the whole mind, at its most wakeful, and in all situations." In fact, this comment is perfectly valid in respect of Hughes's own style of writing poetry. Hughes' most characteristic style is a language for the whole mind, at its most wakeful. According to Gifford and Roberts, this style is not a symptom either of obsession or of intellectual surrender. This style combines, to a remarkable degree, receptiveness and control. Gifford and Roberts have devoted their whole book on Ted Huges to an analysis of Hughes' poetic style, illustrating each point with extensive examples from Hughes' work. Of course, Hughes' style of writing kept on changing as he wrote one volume of poems after another, as these critics have pointed out. There is a development in his style in the course of his writing of these successive volumes, as there was bound to be. No poet ever comes forward with a fully developed style. But taking a bird's eye-view of Hughes' entire poetic work, we can point out the most prominent qualities of his poetic style. A skilful use of words and rhythm, an abundant and bold use of metaphor, vivid imagery and factual description, the use of sound effects, condensation, colloquial words and phrases, the capacity to express elusive or shadowy thoughts, a frequent use of conceits and hyperbole, a narrative element, dramatic effects, a use of humour, especially of ironical humour-- these are some of the qualities of Hughes' style which is one of the most original in the whole range of modern poetry. Of course, there have been influences which moulded this style, but its originality, despite those influences and even some borrowings, is unquestionable.

Influences

Although at each stage in his poetic development, Hughes has provided ample evidence of his originality, yet there have also been certain influences some of which he has himself acknowledged. As Gifford and Roberts have pointed out, Hughes's poetry is steeped in tradition. His early work shows the influence of G. M. Hopkins, D. H. Lawrence, W. B. Yeats and Dylan Thomas. Deeper and more enduring influences were those of Greek tragedy, medieval alliterative poetry, Shakespeare, and the English Romantics, particularly Blake and Wordsworth. Then there was the mutual influence of Hughes and his wife, Sylvia; and this contributed greatly to the development of both of them. It seems likely that the greater rhythmical freedom, compression, and elliptical language of Hughes' poetry from *Wodwo* onwards owes something to the example of Sylvia's later work. His collaborations with artists in other fields, notably with Leonard Baskin, are a significant feature of his career. (Leonard Baskin was an American artist, whose drawings inspired many of Hughes' poems and who provided the illustrations

for much of Hughes' poetry). In the case of *Crow* and *Cave Birds*, his creative relationship with Leonard Baskin is almost symbiotic.

Conclusion

Hughes is a philosophical, metaphysical, and psychological poet, as well as a poet of Nature and of the animal world. He has interpreted modern life and modern man in terms of myth and symbol, and has indicated the paths along which mankind should strive to go forward in order to attain the mental tranquility and poise so woefully lacking in the present state of chaos and disequilibrium in the world. No wonder that his poetry, like the poetry of every modern poet, is a tough nut to crack, because the modern poet tends to be more subtle and more elusive in the expression of his ideas than the traditional poet (like Thomas Hardy). But otherwise too, poets are the seers, sages, philosophers, and Magi of the world, and their techniques of expression, like their modes of thought, are often complex, involved , intricate, and sometimes even baffling and bewildering. In any case, Hughes' work has considerably enriched English poetry and enlarged its scope and its bounds.

3.5 A Discussion Of "Hawk Roosting"

4.5.1 The Text: *Hawk Roosting*

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes close.

Inaction, no falsifying dream

Between my hooked head and hooked feet:

Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!

The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray

Are of advantage to me;

And the earth's face upward for my inspection.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.

It took the whole of Creation

To produce my foot, my each feather:

Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or ,fly up, and revolve it all slowly--

I kill where I please because it is all mine.

There is no sophistry in my body:

My manners are tearing off heads—

The allotment of death.

For the one path of my flight is direct

Through the bones of the living.

No arguments assert my right:

The sun is behind me.

Nothing has changed since I began.

My eye has permitted no change.

I am going to keep it like this.

(From the volume of poems entitled "Lupercal")

3.5.2 Summary

In this poem a hawk is imagined as speaking and expressing his own thoughts. The word "roosting" means "resting" or "lost in thought just before falling asleep". This hawk is comfortably perched in his nest on a high tree, and he is expressing his happy state and his perfect satisfaction with his existence. He says that he is sitting on the top of the wood, with his eyes closed. In his imagination he thinks of the many birds whom he had killed and eaten, and of the many birds whom he would kill and eat in the future. There is nothing false about this view of his activities, he says, because he actually does this sort of thing. He then thinks of the comfort of his nest which is situated on a high tree around which the air is light and on which the rays of the sun fall to warm him. The whole earth below lies open to his inspection, he further says.

The hawk then thinks of his feet and his feathers, and says that the moulding of his feet and the creation of his feathers were no easy matter. Great pains had to be taken to give him the shape which he possesses, particularly his feet and his feathers. And now he is so important that he holds all Creation in his foot, and that he can fly up from his nest and go round all Creation, killing any prey whom he likes to kill because the whole of Creation now belongs to him. There is nothing illusory or deceptive about his shape and his body, he says; and his only concern in life is to kill the birds whom he feels like killing. His only concern is to cause the death of the birds who attract his notice. He flies directly towards his prey, and pierces, with his beak or his claws, through the very body and bones of the living creature who is his prey. He does not have to argue his case or to assert his authority by means of any arguments. His authority has to be taken for granted. Finally, the hawk says that the sun is shining behind him, and that nothing has changed since he came into this universe because he never allowed any change to take place. In fact, he would permit no change in the universe even in the future because he would like to keep things as they are.

3.5.3 Critical Appreciation: An Animal Poem

This poem is written in the form of a monologue or a soliloquy. The speaker here is a hawk(which is a bird of prey, attacking smaller birds and eating them to feed himself). The hawk here is to be imagined as speaking and expressing his ideas about himself and the universe of which he is a denizen. The hawk speaks with a sense of authority, and with the fullest possible confidence in himself. Indeed, we feel amazed by his egoism and his self-centredness. His egoism is boundless and infinite. This egoism finds expression in the following lines:

(1) I kill where I please because it is all mine.

(2) No arguments assert my right.

(3) Nothing has changed since I began.

My eye has permitted no change.

am going to keep things like this.

The hawk belongs to the animal world; and this poem ,therefore, belongs to the category of Hughes's animal poems. (The word "animal" in this context includes birds).

A poem Depicting Violence and Brutality

Even more striking than the hawk's egoism and his sense of power, is the imagery of violence and brutality in this poem. The hawk is proud of his power to kill; and here he reminds us of the pike in another poem by Hughes. All the fierceness and the brutality of the hawk have been summed up in a few lines such as the following: "I kill where I please because it is all mine." The hawk's whole business in life is "to tear off heads." His whole concern is to distribute death; and he never wavers in carrying out this task because he knows only one path, and that is the path leading him directly through the bones of the living creatures. Thus *Hawk Roosting* is one of those poems which show Hughes' interest in the violence and the brutality which are the rule, not the exception, in the world of Nature. Some critics have called this interest in violence and brutality as an obsession; but that is a wrong way of looking at these poems. Violence and brutality are just one of the many themes in the poetry of Hughes, and there is nothing morbid or inhuman about Hughes' interest in this aspect of the universe.

An Amusing Poem Showing Hughes' Sense of Humour

Hawk Roosting is an amusing poem. Hughes here seems to be ridiculing the hawk's false sense of power. Indeed we feel greatly amused when we read the egoistical lines in which the hawk speaks of the comfort of his nest on the high trees,"the air's buoyancy and the sun's ray," and of his feet and feathers. "It took the whole of Creation/To produce my foot, my each feather," says the hawk. And yet it is possible that Hughes is not laughing at the hawk's sense of power but clarifying it. Hughes may be seriously expressing the hawk's exultation over his ferocity. In any case, Hughes has here contributed to the bird, hawk a capacity to think and to argue a case even though the hawk's arguments are fallacious because of his extremely narrow outlook. There may be "no sophistry in his body," as he says; but there certainly is sophistry in his reasoning.

An Extremely Simple Poem

Hawk Roosting is one of Hughes's simplest poems. Its thought-content is simple, and its language is simple too. Indeed, this is one poem which offers no difficulties at all even to the uninitiated reader. The words are simple, and they have simply been arranged. There is no complexity, and no intricacy, in the thought; in the arrangements of the words or in the syntax. Thus ,there is nothing at all to bewilder or to puzzle us in this poem.

Hughes's Own Comment on This Poem

Hughes's own remarks about this poem are very illuminating. He said that this poem had generally been regarded by critics as one dealing with the theme of violence. Critics thought that

Hughes had written this poem to denounce fascism or dictatorship in certain countries. The hawk, sitting in his nest on a tree and talking to himself was regarded as a symbol of some horrible totalitarian dictator bent upon destroying an enemy race of people. Hughes said that this approach to his poem about the hawk was entirely wrong. He further said that this poem only represented Nature as thinking. He meant the hawk in this poem to be a representative of Nature as a whole. The hawk in this poem is not Hitler, but just Nature talking to herself. In other words, Hughes merely wanted to depict the cruelty and the bloodthirstiness which prevail in Nature.

Some Comments By Critics

One of the critics regards *Hawk Roosting* as a very fine poem in which a bird's victorious moment of triumph is explored in vividly memorable phrases. The hawk represents might without mercy, conquest without effort, privilege without responsibility, and energy without consciousness of end. The poet himself makes no specific comment in the poem on the hawk's thinking; "I kill where I please because it is all mine." The memorable phrases in the poem, according to this critic, are the following: "There is no sophistry in my body"; "my manners are tearing off heads"; "the allotment of death." Another critic says that no poet of the past has quite managed to internalize the murderousness of Nature through such brilliantly objective means, and with such economy, as Hughes has done in poems like *Hawk Roosting*. In this poem we perceive Hughes' gift of presenting image and thought in a context of hurtling action; and there is a strong narrative and dramatic element in the presentation. Yet another critic tells us that the poem, which really established Hughes' reputation and got into all the anthologies, was *Hawk Roosting.* This critic agrees with the general view that *Hawk Roosting* is a brilliant *tour de force* in entering the consciousness of a hawk, and that the whole poem, which is in the first person, is a hawk's eye-view of the world. The hawk, taking himself to be the exact centre, assumes that trees, air, sun, and earth are there for his convenience, that the purpose of Creation has been solely to produce him, that the world revolves at his bidding, that all other creatures exist only as his prey, . But at a deeper level, says the same critic, the hawk becomes a spokesman for Nature herself, and speaks in accents close to those of Walt Whitman when that American poet permits Nature to speak through him. Nature speaks through Tennyson too, "Nature red in tooth and claw," a loveless, careless ravenous Nature. Tennyson had built Nature showed him her reality, he could only cry: "Are God and Nature then at strife?" In Hughes, we find neither the admiration of Whitman nor the anguish of Tennyson. All Hughes' animal and Nature poems get their characteristic tension from his attempt to fuse into a unified response both admiration and horror. Some critics say that, in *Hawk Roosting*, which is a memorable *tour de force*, Hughes attempted to speak with the voice of his animal subject. Hughes himself had said that the hawk in his poem had been accused of being a fascist, the symbol of dictatorship, but that actually he had meant the hawk to represent "Nature language quite different from the attempts, in his own voice, to perform an empathy with the animals. In place of the exravagant, energetic, fusing style of *The Jaguar* and *Thrushes*. Hughes in this poem writes in cool, self-possessed, distanced language. Many of the words which establish the tone in this poem are surprisingly abstract, but wittily and elegantly so: "rehearse"; "convenience"; "advantage"; "inspection"; "manners"; "allotment"; "permitted". Coming, as they tend to, in brief, elliptical phrases they actually contribute to the poem's effect of brutal hardness, as if each use were a robbery from some humane, rational context. The elegance and confidence with which they are used serve in place of any direct description of the hawk's physical splendour. The hawk's assurance of being at the centre of things, the focus of Creation, in the middle stanzas of the poem, is what most strongly supports the claim that this

is "Nature thinking". The hawk's poise and serenity, his contemplative ease, mean that it is not terrifyingly limited like the thrushes: it is not concentrated into "bounce" and "stab", though every line is tense with predatory ferocity. Nevertheless, the poem's prime device, say these critics, is the use of the first person singular which carries, in the present case, an inevitable irony, though the irony is not at the hawk's expense. The poem is essentially dramatic, enacting the author's engagement with the threatening and enticing non-human reality.

(We may use "he" or "it" for the hawk, just as it may suit our convenience; but whichever pronoun we choose, should be used consistently).

A Most Illuminating Comment By a Critic

Another critic tells us that *Hawk Roosting* is the most famous and the most anthologized of Hughes's animal poems; and he gives us an excellent synopsis of it. The poem begins with the hawk defining his nature. The hawk has his eyes closed; but his body is still alive to instinct. He has none of man's "falsifying dream", no vision of the world. The hawk is pure function: food is for consumption, not for thought, in his case:

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.

Inaction, no falsifying dream

Between my hooked head and hooked feet:

Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The hawk is a complete solipsist. (a believer in the theory that only the self exists or can be known) The world is the world he sees, and the creatures in it exist to assist his survival. He believes himself to be God's supreme creation and is himself a God-like arbiter of life and death: "Now I hold Creation in my foot." Hughes has achieved in this poem a remarkable feat of empathy. But the poem is written in his negative, misanthropic vein, because the motive behind this poem is not so much to praise the hawk as to denigrate man. with his purely functional purpose built into his blood and feathers, the hawk is seen in this poem as being vastly superior to man who is unable to accept Nature for what she is, and instead strives to tame it by giving it philosophical names. The hawk has none of man's devitalizing intellectuality, nor man's slavish obedience to rulers. The hawk says:

There is no sophistry in my body:

My manners are tearing off heads.

(The same antithesis between functional animal and reflective man is made in the poem *Thrushes*. The world eats to live, and they live to eat).

3.5.4 Glossory

Hawk: bird of prey

Roosting: resting

Sophistry: misleading element

3.6 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit you have studied,

— about Ted Hughes, a contemporary British poet.

— about the poet's life, works, and his writing style.

— Ted Hughes' Poem, *Hawk Roosting* in detail.

3.7 Review Questions

1. Give the biographical details of Ted Hughes
2. Discuss Ted Hughes as a poet.
3. Elaborate on the writing style of Ted Hughes.
4. Discuss the poem.*Hawk Roosting*.

3.8 Bibliography

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UNIT-4

PHILIP ARTHUR LARKIN : *TOADS*

Structure

4.0 Objectives

In this unit, you are going to study about the poem, *Toads*,along with the life and style of Philip Larkin. After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- understand about the life and background of Philip Larkin, who is a representative of contemporary British Poetry
- understand the background and critical aspects of the poem.

4.1 Introduction

Larkin has made out of a bitter and unalterable situation a poetry which is undoubtedly modern in its content and its cadences. In his poem *Toads* there in a balancing of the arguments in favour of a life of leisure and idleness and the arguments in favour of work and toil.

4.2 Philip Larkin: Biographical Details

Birth: Parentage; the Period of Childhood

Philip Arthur Larkin was born on 9 August, 1922 in Coventry. His father, Sydney Larkin, was the Treasurer of the City Corporation of Coventry, and his mother Eva was the daughter of a First Class Excise Officer. Larkin was the second child of Sydney and Eva, the first having been a daughter named Catherine (or Kitty) who was about ten years old at the time of Larkin's birth. Larkin was given

the name of Philip after the famous Renaissance poet Philip Sidney, and he was given the name Arthur after his mother's brother. Although his parents were very fond of Larkin and lavished all their love and affection on him, yet in later years he spoke about his childhood in very disparaging terms. For instance, on one occasion he remarked that his biography could begin when he was twenty one years old, meaning thereby that nothing remarkable had happened during the first twenty-one years of his existence. Then, in one of his poems he described his childhood as "a forgotten boredom". Actually he had an inborn tendency to speak about himself in depreciatory terms; and this tendency persisted throughout his life. As a child he suffered from a slight stammer, and this stammer also persisted throughout his life, though in a considerably diminished form.

At a Grammar School; and Later at Oxford University

Larkin studied at King Henry VIII Grammar School in Coventry. His school-days, according to him, were almost completely uneventful. However, he had a friend by the name of Jim Sutton, who subsequently became a distinguished painter. Larkin passed his final school examination with distinction in the subjects of history and English. Then in 1940 he proceeded to Oxford University from where he graduated in 1943, getting a first class. At Oxford he had attended St. John's College where he made friends with Kingsley Amis who later became famous as a poet just as Larkin himself did. . Besides, the social and political atmosphere of Oxford University encouraged him to develop a pragmatic approach to life and to literature.

Jobs Held; and then Librarianship at the University of Hull

After getting his degree from Oxford University, Larkin found himself at a loss about what career to adopt. World War II was at this time at its height; and, according to the laws of the land, he was required to enlist in the army. But having failed in the medical examination, he had to look for a job. He submitted applications for a number of jobs almost at random; and, late in 1943, he was appointed librarian at a public library in Wellington (in Shropshire) where he worked for the next three years. Then he took up a job in the library of the University College at Leicester. In 1950, he was appointed sub-librarian at Queen's University, Belfast (in Northern Ireland). Finally, in 1954, he was appointed librarian at the University of Hull, and there he remained till death.

Writings and Publications

Larkin started writing poems when he was just fifteen but it was after he had graduated from the university and taken up his first job that he began to write (both poetry and prose) in right earnest. A number of poems by him were published in anthologies. But he first came into the limelight as a novelist. His first novel had the title *Jill,* and it was published in 1946. His next novel was entitled A *Girl in Winter* which was published in 1947. Then he began to work on a third novel which, however, he could not complete and which was, therefore, abandoned. Giving up novel-writing altogether, he devoted himself to poetry and successively published four major volumes of poems. The first major volume of his poems, entitled "The North Ship" appeared in 1945; the second was entitled "The Less Deceived", and it appeared in 1955; the third appeared in 1964 under the title of "The Whitsun Weddings"; and the fourth and final volume appeared in 1974 under the title of "High Windows."

Reputation

With the publication of his second volume of poems, namely "The Less Deceived", Larkin

became well-known for his poetic gift. Then "The Whitsun Weddings" brought him greater renown. And with the publication of "High Windows", he was recognized as one of the leading British poets of the time. Many honours were conferred upon him in recognition of his poetic eminence. For instance, in 1965 he was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry; and he received honorary doctorates from several British universities. On the death of the existing poet laureate, he was offered the poet-laureateship which, however, he declined; and the honour then went to Kingsely Amis.

Personal Habits

Larkin was a man of retiring habits, and somewhat unsociable by temperament. He shunned publicity; and he even disliked travel because he wanted to preserve his privacy. He did not like holidays either, and is reported as having said: "As I get older I grow increasingly impatient of holidays; they seem a wholly feminine conception, based on an impotent dislike of everyday life." He certainly had a weakness for women and drinking, though it did not come into the open for a very long time. Anthony Thwaite brought out a book in which various persons paid their tributes to him. But one of the contributors, Alan Bennett, thus commented upon his gloomy outlook on life: "Apparently he is sixty, but when was he anything else? He has made a habit of being sixty;…."

Illness and Death

Larkin had a major breakdown in his health in the middle years of his life, and had to undergo extensive medical tests to find out what was wrong with him, He remained in hospital for a time, but subsequently recovered.. Then in the year 1984 he developed a serious ailment, most probably cancer, and died on the 2nd December, 1985.

The Principal Works Of Philip Larkin

Poetry

1. "The North Ship" (1945)
2. "The Less Deceived" (1955)
3. "The Whitsun Weddings" (1964)
4. "High Windows" (1974)

Note. In 1988, Anthony Thwaite brought out the "Collected Poems" of Philip Larkin, including in that book, all the poems which had been published in the above four volumes, and also some poems which had never been published before.

Novels

1. *Jill* (1946)
2. *A Girl in Winter* (1947)

Miscellaneous Prose

1. *All What Jazz: A Record Diary* (1970)
2. *Required Writing* (1983)

3. *A Lifted Study-Storehouse* (1987)

4. Edited (with Bonamy Dobree and Louis MacNeice), *New Poems: A Pen Anthology (1958)*

5. Edited *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse* (1973)

4.3 Philip Larkin As A Poet And His Writing Style

Conflicting Critical Views of Larkin's Poetry

There are conflicting opinions about Larkin as a poet. In fact, there is a wide diversity of critical opinion about his achievement as a poet. Larkin has won applause, some of it very warm and enthusiastic; and he has provoked criticism, some of it very harsh and severe. Some of the most renowned critics have found fault with his poetry; and some of the most renowned critics have defended him against that fault-finding. Among the severest critics of his poetry are Alfred Alvarez and Charles Tomlinson; and his defenders include Donald Davie and Andrew Motion. as "the reluctant poet of the drab and austere surface of post-war Britain", while his defenders have pointed out the social realism of his poetry and its clear-sighted acceptance of the way things were. Eventually it was this image of ordinariness and intelligibility which served to recommend him to contemporary readers and helped to sustain his popularity. The publication of his last volume of poems entitled "High Windows" in 1974 brought about a great change in the earlier critical appraisal of his work. It had become almost common to say that his poetry suffered from the faults of boredom and mediocrity, and that it relied too much on a narrow range of traditional forms and techniques. But, after 1974, he began to be seen by most readers as a provocative and disquieting poet whose work showed the impact of modernism and symbolism. The previous charges of "gentility" and "parochialism" against him were now almost dismissed. Although he was regarded as one of the poets of what came to be known as the "Movement", his poetry was subsequently placed within the established literary traditions such as romanticism, realism, modernism, and symbolism. Previously he had been regarded as belonging to the tradition of poetry represented by Wordsworth, Thomas Hardy, and Edward Thomas; later he began to be recognized as a follower of W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, and D.H. Lawrence, though he himself might not have been fully conscious of the influence of the second group of poets.

The Themes in Larkin's Poetry, and His Treatment of Them

Time, death, chance, and choice have been identified by critics as the leading themes in Larkin's poetry. In fact, according to many critics, these themes are the very stuff of which Larkin's poetry is made. While Larkin's critics have pointed to the narrowness of this range of themes, his admirers have expressed their praise for his distinctive treatment of them. One of the critics, who is among his admirers, defined Larkin's greatness as a writer in the light of his treatment of a traditional and lasting subject-matter. This critic wrote: "His themes-love, change, disenchantment, the mystery and inexplicableness of the poet's survival, and death's finality are unshakably major." Another critic has said that among Larkin's best poems are many which deal simply with universal themes of time, suffering, and death. This critic points out that Larkin's poem *Next, Please* expresses the view that illusion is interwoven with all human thinking, and that human beings can never escape from the inadequacy of the present. This critic also says that Larkin in this poem does not rebel because failure seems to him one of the unalterable facts of life. Another admirer speaks about Larkin's particular kind of compassionate despair

at the human condition; and this critic names the poem *Faith Healing* as an example. At the same time, this critic says that Larkin has made out of a bitter and unalterable situation a poetry which is undoubtedly modern in its content and its cadences. Yet another admirer of Larkin refers to the "perennial" themes of Larkin's poetry. According to this critic, death and old age are two of Larkin's most obsessive themes. But he also finds other themes in Larkin's poetry, and in this connection he makes the following significant comment on Larkin's poem *Vers de Societe* (written in 1971).

The poem shows how constant Larkin's themes have remained since 1946: disappointment in life, the pressures of society on the individual, the desire to escape those pressures together with the fear of the isolation such escape brings, the encroachment of time.

Yet another critic speaks of the contemporary circumstances of Larkin's poetry, and says that Larkin is intimately concerned with a world in which human beings have been caught up in time, desire, and disappointment; and he discusses the poem *Church Going*, distinguishing contemporary agnosticism from earlier forms of disbelief, and saying that the speaker of the poem is "skeptical of the fruits of skepticism", and seemingly "as dissatisfied with his disbelief as with conventional dogma."

Another Critic's Views About Larkin's Themes

These are not the only critics who have discussed the themes of Larkin's poetry. There are others too, One of them refers to Larkin's emphasis on the sadness of the human condition, and says that the poem *At Grass* is a poem about old age. This critic also finds such other themes in Larkin's poetry as failure, the fragility of human choices (between bachelorhood and marriage, for example), the importance of vocation in life, the horrifying reality of death, the struggles of the common people, and the universality of human misery and sadness. According to this critic, Larkin is not only an analyst of the human mind but also a romantic and deeply concerned with the spiritual health of human beings. This critic also finds rare moments of "experiential surprise" in the poems *Wedding Wind* and *The Explosion*. We may add that man's alienation from this world and his sense of isolation from his environment, from Nature, and from things in general are also a prominent theme in Larkin's poetry.

The Stylistic Qualities and Poetic Techniques of Larkin's Work

A number of critics have discussed Larkin's poetic style and his poetic techniques. Larkin's technical achievements in many of his poems, including the imagery in them and their meter, rhythm, and syntax have been commented upon in great detail. For instance, one of the critics has pointed to the syntactic inversion of the closing line of the poem *At Grass*, to the half-rhymes of "home" and "come", and to the subtle inner para-rhyme of "groom" in the final stanza. The effect of this, he says, is to feel the voice hush and the imagery become subdued. The inverted syntax, he further says, is part of the subdued and delaying echo of the verse. Both elements are part of an effect conveying the sense of evening and impending death. Another critic shows how aspects of meaning in poetry are indicated through metrical effects. This critic comments thus on the third stanza of the same poem, namely *At Grass:*

The lines describe the scene, but the change in metre makes us hear and see it. Where the other stanzas are written in iambic pentameters, reversals of feet in the third stanza turn the first halves of these three lines into rocking choriambics, enacting the horses' gallop.

Actually, however, this poem is written not in iambic pentameter but in iambic tetrameter.

Other Views About Larkin's Style and Techniques

Another critic says that the grammatical features of the poem Mr. Bleaney, Particularly its use of person, tense, and syntax, should be clearly understood if we are to appreciate fully how this poem functions. This poem describes two scenes: the speaker's conversation with the landlady, and the speaker's private reflections on his own existence. But, in the transition, there seems to be a fusion of person and tense; the first-person of the speaker merges with the third-person past of Mr. Bleaney. There is also a noticeable change in syntax, marked by the opening conjunction of the final two stanzas. What is unusual about these two stanzas is that they consist of a single complex sentence introduced by what appears to be a conditional clause. This critic then shows how the poem moves "from confident detachment to confused involvement", and how this progression is conveyed through specific linguistic devices. Another critic, speaking about the linguistic features of Larkin's poetry, namely metaphor and metonymy, asserts that the Movement poets including Larkin were essentially realistic and metonymic. He further says that Larkin pushed lyric poetry (which is an inherently metaphoric mode) towards the metonymic mode. He next points out that Larkin employs metonymic and synechdochic details to evoke the race-day scene in the third stanza of the poem *At Grass*. He also comments on the scarcity of metaphors in Larkin's work, and says that, while some of the early poems such as *Next Please* or *Toads* were extended metaphors, many poems have no metaphors at all. In the poem called *The Whitsun Weddings*, for example, the scenery of the train journey is described largely by the use of metonymy and synechdoche ("drifting breadth," "blinding windscreens," etc.) What is unusual about this poem is that the final stanza suddenly takes off into a more affirmative element suggested by the metaphor of the rain shower. This metaphor, with its mythical, magical, and archaic resonances, is powerful partly because it is so different from anything else in the poem. In this way Larkin is able to surprise us by allowing a current of metaphorical language into the poem. Something of the same kind happens in the poem Mr. Bleaney, though here the effect comes not so much from the introduction of the metaphor as from a subtle complication of metre, line-endings, and syntax.

The Metaphoric and Metonymic Modes

Another critic expresses the view that the dynamic relationship between metaphoric and metonymic principles often leads to a symbolic mode which reveals itself in the hidden structures of many of Larkin's poems. A typical example, says this critic, is the seemingly metonymical description of the horses in the poem *At Grass*. Here, the realistic description in each stanza is structured according to a pattern of standstill, incipient movement developing to a climax, subsequent rest, and final standstill. When taken on its own, this motif is metaphoric; it functions as a vehicle of time's progress in human life. Like *At Grass*, most of Larkin's symbolic poems remain realistic. This critic then goes on to analyze Larkin's poem entitled *Here* to demonstrate how the metonymic mode becomes symbolic. This critic's recognition of Larkin's symbolic mode of writing derives largely from the view of many critics that Larkin has been writing partly within a tradition of symbolist poetry going back to the work of W.B. Yeats and nineteenth-century French writers.

Larkin's Attitude to Modernism and Symbolism

From the very beginning, Larkin had been expressing a certain degree of hostility to the ideas and techniques of modernism. He expressed a deep dislike for the work of three modernists, the

musician Parker, the poet Ezra Pound, and the painter, Picasso. He regarded modernist experiments in the fields of music, poetry, and painting as irresponsible exploitations of technique in opposition to human life as we know it. However, in the nineteen-eighties, some critics began to perceive a distinct symbolist mode of writing in Larkin's poetry and ,therefore, a fairly strong inclination towards modernism (because the symbolist technique is one of the most conspicuous modernist techniques). This new critical attitude towards Larkin's poetry showed recognition of the strongly affirmative and transcendent element in his poetry. What brought about this change in the attitude of the critics towards Larkin's poetry was the publication in 1974 of Larkin's last volume of poems entitled "High Windows". The poems in this volume were characterized by unusual experiments with form and by a frequent obscurity and allusiveness. According to one critic, the total impression which this volume of poems produced was one of despair made beautiful, real despair and real beauty, with not a trace of posturing in either. Another critic noted that this volume contained fewer depressive poems, and Larkin's tendency in them was to affirm the value of human endeavour (in such poems as *To the Sea; Show Saturday*; and *The Explosion*) or to expose it to comic satire (as in poems like *Posterity*; *Homage to a Government*; and *This Be the Verse*). What surprised critics most, however, was the emergence of the symbolist vision which Larkin was believed to have abandoned soon after the publication in 1945 of "The North Ship," Larkin's first volume of poems.

Seamus Heaney's View of Larkin's Symbolist Potential

Larkin's symbolist potential received an impressive recognition from Seamus Heaney (who was appointed the poet-laureate of England in 1995). Heaney acknowledged Larkin's detailed social observation, but he also noted a simultaneous yearning for transcendence and revelation in Larkin's poetry. Heaney twice used the word "symbolist" to describe the linguistic structures of the poems in the volume entitled "High Windows". He noted the unusual diction of the poem *Sad Steps* and praised the poem *Solar* as a hymn to the sun. *In Solar*, he said, Larkin was very far from the hatless man who took off his cycle-clips "in awkward reverence" (in the poem *Church Going*). At the same time Heaney emphasized the peculiar Englishness of Larkin's poetry. Another critic also pointed out that the poem *High Windows* was characterized by some of the ideas and techniques of French symbolist poetry. The eminent critic and biographer Andrew Motion explored in detail the symbolist dimensions of Larkin's poetry He too agreed that Larkin had surely responded to the example of French symbolist poets at an early stage in his poetic career. However, Andrew Motion emphatically expressed the view that, subsequently Larkin wrote his poems under the persistent and combined influence of Thomas Hardy and W.B. Yeats. According to this critic, Larkin's best and most characteristic work represents a dialectic between the empirical mode of Hardy and the symbolist mode of Yeats, or between the language of sadness and isolation repeatedly competing with the language of aspiration and transcendence,in Andrew Motion's opinion, is an expression of Larkin's divided response to the world. In other words, Larkin's poetry is a continual debate between hopeful romantic yearning and disillusioned pragmatism. This critic also expresses the view that the volume of poems entitled *The Whitsun Weddings* is a book which conforms most exactly to the attitudes and styles of the Movement group of poets and therefore, the least symbolist in technique though he finds evidence of the symbolist method in the closing lines of the title poem in this volume and also in the closing lines of the poem *Water*. As Andrew Motion equates the words symbolism and transcendence, it is evident that he emphasizes the positive or affirmative aspects of the title poem of this volume somewhat more than other critics had done. Andrew Motion further says that the volume of poems entitled "High Windows"

contains more purely symbolist elements and successfully employs symbolist techniques in his title poem in the volume "High Windows". Andrew Motion rendered a great service to the cause of Larkin's poetry by challenging the common view that Larkin's poetry was severely limited in outlook and unadventurous in style and technique. However, one other eminent critic says that Andrew Motion has too neatly defined Hardy's and Yeats roles as opposing influences, one empirical and the other Symbolist, on Larkin.

A Writer of Dramatic Monologues

As one of the other critics says, Larkin's poems often take the form of dramatic monologues, which seem intended to reveal Larkin's own thoughts and feelings because he is speaking out of his own strong convictions. In other words, the speakers in these poems are Larkin himself. Although this emphasis on his own thoughts and feelings may seem to be egotistical, it is this which gives strength to Larkin's poems; and, as he himself has said, it reflects the example of his literary mentor, Thomas Hardy, Yet his own experience and his own way of commenting on that experience are markedly different from Hardy's. For instance, when Larkin indulges in self-pity, he often parodies it, as in the poem *Self's the Man*. Furthermore, when Larkin divides things into two opposing sides, he usually seems to be carefully weighing them against each other, measuring their relative merits, and coming to some sort of a logical conclusion.

His Obsession With Death and His Consequent Pessimism

Every critic has noted Larkin's obsession with death. According to one of the critics, Larkin emphasizes the omnipresence of death as in the poem *Ambulances.* The poem *Aubade represents* the climax of Larkin's preoccupation with death. The recurrence of this motif in his poems inevitably imparts a pessimistic quality to them. One critic says that Larkin has often been classified as a hopeless and inflexible pessimist. Another critic has described him as "the saddest heart in the post-war super-market". Larkin has also been classified as "a graveyard poet". We, on our part, recognize the undeniable reality of death and, therefore, the realism of those poems in which Larkin dwells upon the theme of death. They may be saddening, but they are perfectly realistic and convincing. Why should we always expect poetry to be exhilarating or pleasurable? Even the poetry of death can bring about an exhilaration in us through a catharsis of our feeling.

His Agnosticism; and His Love-Poems

In religion, Larkin was an agnostic as the poem, *Church Going* clearly shows that Larkin's dilemma was not whether to believe in God but what to put in God's place. The poem *Church Going* describes a strictly secular faith, as a critic puts it, Larkin, unlike the romantic poets, had little faith in Nature or in any relationship between man and Nature. Indeed, he often in his poems represents man as being isolated from Nature. One of the critics referred to Larkin's attitude of imperiousness towards the non-human world. It is, in fact, not an imperiousness but an acknowledgment that the natural world is vulnerable and transient despite its beauty. Larkin also wrote a number of love-poems. But he did not depict love as a very ardent or satisfying passion. None of his poems records the achievement of complete success in love; and even those, which come close to describing success, are heavily diluted. The poem *Wedding Wind*, in spite of its excitement and fulfillment, dilutes its happiness with a volley of questions and with an acknowledgment that the speaker is sad because other people and animals cannot share the speaker's contentment. The same kind of ambivalence exists in the poem *An Arundel Tomb*. Throughout, Larkin carefully weighs losses against gains in the sphere of love. On one hand,

love is merely a theoretical possibility; on the other hand, it might yet succeed.

Two Noteworthy Comments By Critics

The following two comments by critics deserve to be quoted here:

(1) "Regarded for much of his career as a minor poet with a narrow range of subject-matter, Larkin now seems to dominate the history of English poetry in the second half of the (twentieth) century much as T.S. Eliot dominated it in the first. Though detractors continue to speak of his gloom, philistinism insularity, and anti-modernism, the authority and grandiloquence of his long poems, and the grace, sharpness, or humour of his shorter ones now seen indisputable, as does his clear-eyed engagements with love, marriage, freedom, destiny, ageing, death, and other far from marginal subjects. The appearance of his *Collected Poem* in 1988, while turning up no new masterpieces added over eighty poems to the Larkin canon, considerably enlarging our sense of a poet who had published only four slim volumes in his life-time." (P.B.M.)

(2) "But he is far more than a social observer or commentator in verse, however acute and sensitive. Compared with the great poets of the recent past—the heroic generation of modernism—he is undeniably narrow; but he is also deep, in his own characteristic way. Each of his mature volumes contains one or two longish, finely wrought poems which touch on the major and perennial themes of existence: death in *Church Going* ("The Less Deceived"); love and marriage in the title poem of "The Whitsun Weddings", and love and death in *An Arundel Tomb* in the same collection; old age in *The Old Fools*, and death in *The Building* ("High Windows"). Each of his collections, too, contains a number of short lyrics, sometimes difficult, but of marked aesthetic intensity and at times hauntingly beautiful: *Coming, Going, Age, Absences, Water, Days, Afternoons*. Larkin's mood is, admittedly, often bleak of sad or autumnal, occasionally even despairing. But certain poems attain a note of celebration, like *The Trees or show Saturday*. Profoundly agnostic, Larkin still finds value and consolation in the recurring rituals that bring human beings together, like a funeral, a wedding, an annual horse-show. Reading Larkin one misses large gestures of affirmation or defiance—the kind of thing he found he could not accept in Yeats—and their absence can be a little lowering. But Larkin's poetry offers many satisfactions; like other good poets he has made positive poems out of negative feelings." (Bernard Bergonzi)

Philip Larkin and The movement

The Meaning of the Term "Movement"

The term "movement" refers to the work a group of poets of the nineteen-fifties. These poets were John Wain, Donald Davie, Kingsley Amis, Thom Gunn, and a few others too. Philip Larkin was also one of the poets believed to be intimately related to the Movement. These poets were believed to have rebelled against the inflated romanticism of the nineteen-thirties and nineteen-forties. The work of these poets was regarded as a victory of common sense and clarity over obscurity and mystification, and of verbal restraint over stylistic excess.

Not a Well-Organized Group of Poets with a Well-Defined Programme

It has been admitted by many critics that the poets of the Movement did not exist as a coherent literary group, but it has also been admitted that these poets operated as a significant cultural influence.

The Movement was the product of specific views about literature and society; and it, in its turn, helped to establish and to propagate those views. The Movement, says a critic ,was surely not a well-organized group of poets with a clear and consistent programme of ideas. But this group did have a shared set of values and assumptions closely related to the moods and conditions of post-war England. Many of Larkin's poems undoubtedly reflect some of those values and assumptions. The characteristic features of the work of this group of poets might roughly be described as dissenting and non-conformist, cool, scientific, and analytical. Stylistically, the poets of this group share an avoidance of rhetoric; and they employ an austere tone and a colloquial idiom. As for Larkin, the appearance of his poems in several anthologies of the nineteen-fifties encouraged the idea of his collaboration with the Movement. In course of time, critics began to point out several other common features in the poetry of this group. An honesty of thought and feeling was added to the clarity of expression among those features.

The Volume of Poems Entitled "New Lines"

In 1956 an anthology of poems was published under the title of "New Lines" by Robert Conquest who began generally to be regarded as the most representative poet of the Movement. It was Robert Conquest's introduction to the anthology which largely encouraged the belief that this new poetry represented a reaction against the excesses of the romanticism of the 1940s. In his introduction, Robert Conquest asserted that the poets of the nineteen-forties had produced poems marked by a diffuse and sentimental verbiage, while the new poets (of the nineteen-fifties) believed in a rational structure and intelligible language. He further asserted that the poetry of the nineteen-fifties represented a new and healthy general stand-point, and the restoration of a sound and fruitful attitude to poetry. The new poetry, he said, was free from both mystical and logical compulsions, and was empirical in its attitude to everything. According to Robert Conquest, the new poetry (that is, the poetry of the Movement) was also characterized by anti-dogmatic attitudes and by a kind of aesthetic purity and philosophical detachment. The chief target of Robert Conquest's criticism of the poetry of the nineteen-forties was Dylan Thomas even though he was not named.

Some Common Features of the Poetry of the Movement

A resemblance in attitudes and techniques is certainly evident in much of the poetry of the Movement that was anthologized in the 1950s and also in the nineteen-sixties, and it is useful to compare such poems as Larkin's *Deceptions* and Kingsley Amis's *Alternative*, or Donald Davie's A *Christening* and Larkin's *The Whitsun Weddings*. The use of wit and irony is a prominent feature, and this often produces a poetry which seems defensive and guarded. Much of this poetry surely strives for clarity and intelligibility; but there are poems which seem tame and trivial. The prevailing tone of the poetry of the Movement is urbane and academic; and many of the poems are too neatly prescriptive and look like pieces of versified literary criticism. Some of the titles provide an indication of "bookish" or "middle-brow" attitude: Kingsley Amis's A *Bookshop Idyll*, D.J. Enright's *The Verb to Think*, Donald Davie's *Rejoinder to a Critic* and *Too Late for Satire*, and John Wain's *Reason for Not Writing Nature Poetry* and *Poem without a Main Verb.* The cool, ironic aloofness or intellectual detachment in some of the poems of the Movement can be somewhat shocking, as in Amis's *Shitty*; but very often it leads to a denial of the human potential for change and development, as in Davie's *A Christening* with its deeply cynical line: "What we do best is breed."

Other Common Features

One other critic has summarized the main characteristic of the poets of the Movement in the following manner:

They all display a cautious skepticism and favour an empirical attitude. Aiming at colloquial ease, decorum, shapeliness, elegance, they are trying to bring back into the currency of the language the precision, the snap, the gravity, the decisive, clinching finality which have been lost since the late Augustan age.

The Movement poets are thus seen as representing a new classicism in English poetry. This critic further says that the work of these poets is characterized by a general retreat from direct comment on, involvement with, any political or social doctrine.

***The Whitsun Weddings* as a Movement Poem**

Yet another critic says that the poets of the Movement have a definite ideology or a specific line of thinking on sex, religion, and politics. This critic has offered some enlightening interpretations of Larkin's poetry. He regards *The Whitsun Weddings* as a poem belonging to the Movement, and he also says that Larkin continued to defend and develop the principles central to the Movement programme.

Another Comment on the Poets of the Movement

The same critic also says that the Movement poets were not actually rebellious but were, in many ways, meekly submissive and often tending to compromise and conservatism. In this context he writes:

As spokesmen for the new self-proclaimed lower-middle-class intelligentsia, the Movement was forced into an ambivalent position: on the one hand, opposed to the old order; and on the other hand, indebted to, and respectful towards, its institutions.

This critic believes that, in spite of its mood of dissent and its anti-establishment attitude, the Movement offered only a token rebellion and did not try to change the prevailing social structure. This critic also says that the Movement's social and political ambivalence extends into the formal and structural texture of the poetry in terms of hesitations, qualifications, and conversational asides.

Larkin and the Movement

This critic has shown how well the poem *Church Going* fits in the Movement programme by carefully balancing agnostic dissent with a leaning towards tradition and belief. This poem, according to him, appears to be both reverent and irreverent. The poem has a traditional iambic structure and a lucid, rational argument; its speaker is presented as an ordinary, fallible, and clumsy individual. It is a poem which testifies to the persistence of both the English Church and an English poetic tradition. These features of this poem are in keeping with the Movement's preferences. But there are important ways in which Larkin's poetry deviates from the Movement principles. Larkin's work is more expansive and more wide-ranging than that of the other Movements poets. Many critics believe that Larkin is a better poet than Amis, Wain, Enright, and Davie, though they have not specified why they think so. Actually, Larkin's poety, in contrast with the work of the other Movement poets, exemplifies a deeper imaginative understanding of social experience and its contradictions, and it shows, at the same time, a far greater range of formal and stylistic devices and a more profound sense of the linguistic and aesthetic

possibilities of modern colloquial English.

The Attacks on Larkin's Poetry

In 1963 a second anthology of contemporary poetry, "New Lines II" appeared. It too, was edited by Robert Conquest who once again paid a tribute to the poets of the Movement. While he admitted that the work of Philip Larkin was, in some respects, an essential continuation of the main tradition of English poetry, he emphasized Larkin's anti-modernism. Actually Robert Conquest was replying to Alfred Alvarez's strong criticism of the poets of the Movement, and in particular the work of Larkin, for failing to deal with the full range of human experience. Another critic had also criticized the Movement poets. He had done so on the ground that their work showed a lack of motivating impulse, and had little of particular urgency or importance to say. "Urgency" soon became a key-word in the critical vocabulary of Alvarez, and the index to what was especially lacking in Movement poetry. An even more powerful attack on Larkin and the Movement had been made by another critic even before Alvarez joined the fray. This critic had expressed a distate for what he called the "intense parochialism" of Larkin's poetry. This critic had said that the Movement represented not so much a creative re-direction as a total failure of nerve. Later, the same critic objected to what he called a wry and sometimes tenderly-nursed sense of defeat, and a melancholy introspection in Larkin's poetry. These features seemed to possess a peculiarly English appeal, wrote this critic:

Larkin's narrowness suits the English perfectly. They recognize their own abysmal urban landscapes, skillfully caught with just a whiff of English films (of the nineteen-fifties). The stepped-down version of human possibilities, and the joke that hesitates just on this side of nihilism are national vices.

This critic particularly mentioned Larkin's defeatism, narrowness, parochialism, and pessimism. Subsequent critics have, however, challenged this view and have tried to show that Larkin's poetry shows a more affirmative view of human existence.

Other Faults of Larkin's Poetry, as Alleged By Critics

While Tomlinson had condemned Larkin's alleged parochialism, Alvarez dismissed the "gentility" of the poetry of the Movement and demanded the quality of "urgency". With reference to the poetry of Larkin, this critic made an adverse comment on the following lines: "Hatless, I take off/My cycle-clips in awkward reverence." (from *Church Going*). This is how he commented on these lines:

This, in concentrated form, is the image of the post-war Welfare State Englishman; shabby, and not concerned with his appearance: poor-he has a bike, not a car; gauche full of agnostic piety; under-fed, under-paid, over-taxed, hopeless, bored, wry.

There is, nevertheless, a good deal of truth in Alvarez's over-all assessment of Movement poetry, especially in his definition of the "gentility" which he found in it, and which he wanted to be replaced by "urgency". According to Alvarez, gentility is a belief that life is always more or less orderly, people always more or less polite, their emotions and habits more or less decent and more or less controllable; that God, in short, is more or less good. What poetry, according to Alvarez, needed was a new seriousness, and a recognition of the forces of evil and disintegration which had emerged from the two World Wars, from the concentration camps, and from the threat of a future nuclear war. Commenting on Larkin's poem, *At Grass*, this critic said that, in spite of some of its merits, this poem

was not really about anything in particular.

No Epiphanies and No Points of Beauty or Truth in Larkin's Poetry

Subsequently, most of the hostile reactions to Larkin's poetry followed the line of criticism adopted by Tomlinson and Alvarez. The American critic, M.L. Rossenthal, asserted that Larkin's poetry was marred by a petty bitterness and by the sullenness of a man who found squalor in his own spirit and felt afraid of liberating himself form it. Another critic complained that there were no epiphanies in Larkin's poetry, and no high points of beauty or truth or love in it. This critic admitted that the ordinariness of Larkin's poetry imparted a certain kind of humanity to it; but he criticized this poetry for its failure to transform the ordinary world in order to provide an uplifting vision for his readers.

Larkin's Humanism and His Democratic Views

Donald Davie (himself one of the Movement poets) was one of those who defended Larkin's poetry, saying that Larkin tolerated the intolerable for the sake of human solidarity. Indeed, Donald Davie made a very important remark about the nature of Larkin's humanism and the democratic basis of Larkin's poetry. Davie saw Larkin as a very "Hardyesque" poet with a thoroughly English soul. "The England in Larkin's poems is the England we have lived in," Davie said. Yet another critic, defending Larkin, admitted that Larkin's subject-matter in his poems was limited but he praised the manner in which Larkin's poetry exemplified the decline of the ideal, the decline of romance, and the decline of possibility which characterized post-war thought.

Alleged Lack of Human Kindness and of Solidarity in Larkin's Poetry

Another adverse critic of Larkin's poetry pointed out that the numbness and caution in Larkin's poetry were not so much symptoms of post-war culture as facets of Larkin's individual psychology. This critic saw Larkin's poems as being deficient in human kindness, and lacking even the solidarity claimed for them by Donald Davie. In the final stanza of *The Whitsun Weddings*, one critic found Larkin trying to open his heart to others, or about others; but the heart, he said, was dead. According to him, this poem not only displayed the educated writer cut off from the people, but a man whose perceptions, curiosities, and versifications could not be creative. This critic saw the speaker in this poem simply as Larkin; and he accordingly, showed a deplorable inability to respond to the poem as structure and discourse.

A Strong Defence of Larkin's Poetry

One other critic wrote a very stimulating essay in defence of Larkin. This critic challenged the view that the outlook of Larkin's poetry suffered from a limiting and debilitating gentility. He asserted that in Larkin's poems there frequently was a progression from a poise or a pose to an exposure or an epiphany. Where one critic had lamented the want of epiphanies in Larkin's poetry, this critic asserted that Larkin's poetry celebrated the unexpressed, deeply-felt longings for sacred time and sacred space. He also said that Larkin's poetry embodied "forgotten patterns of belief and ritual", and he cited *The Whitsun Weddings* as a good illustration of it. According to this critic, the most important aspect of Larkin's poetry is its emphasis on the ways in which Christianity seeks to accommodate itself to a world in which the old patterns of belief have disappeared. While the adverse critics held that Larkin's poetry was rather dull and unexciting, Larkin's defenders have been emphasizing the transcendent element in his poetry.

4.4 A Discussion on The Poem, *Toads*

4.4.1 The Text

Why should I let the toad *work*
Squat on my life?
Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork
And drive the brute off?

Six days of the week it soils
With its sickening poison-
Just for paying a few bills!
That's out of proportion.

Lots of folk live on their wits:
Lecturers, lispers,
Losels, loblolly-men, louts—
They don't end as paupers;

Lots of folk live up lanes
With fires in a bucket,
Eat windfalls and tinned sardines—
They seem to like it.

Their nippers have got bare feet,
Their unspeakable wives
Are skinny as whippets—and yet
No one actually *starves*.

Ah, were I courageous enough
To shout *Stuff your pension!*

But I know, all too well, that's the stuff

That dreams are made on:

For something sufficiently toad-like

Squats in me, too;

Its hunkers are heavy as hard luck,

And cold as snow,

And will never allow me to blarney

My way to getting

The fame and the girl and the money

All at one sitting.

I don't say, one bodies the other

One's spiritual truth;

But I do say it's hard to lose either,

When you have both.

(From the volume of poems entitled "The Less Deceived")

4.4.2 Summary

The poet, describing his work as a toad, asks why he should allow this toad to become a burden on his life. He would like to use his wit or intelligence to fling this toad away in order to get rid of it. This toad makes the six working days of every week of his life miserable; and he has to endure this toad (or his work or his official duties) just to pay a few bills or to meet his routine expenses. And even the money, which he gets for enduring this toad, is too little for the amount of work which he has to do.

The poet then says that there are many people in this world who do not have to work, and who maintain themselves merely by using their wits. There are lecturers; there are persons who speak in an affected manner to impress others; there are the never-do-wells; there are the idlers, and others like them. All such persons manage to exist in this world without becoming paupers. There are many other people, like the gypsies, who have no homes and who therefore live in temporary structures or in tents in the town-lanes, lighting their fires in buckets (because they do not have any regular kitchens). Such people eat just what they get by sheer chance, or they eat tinned sardines, and they seem to like this way of living.Such people's children go about bare-foot because they cannot afford shoes. The men-folk among these people have wretched wives who are as thin as a race-dog. In spite of their poverty, these people manage to exist in the world without starving.

The poet wishes that he had enough courage to throw up his job and to tell his employers to keep with them the pension which he would earn if he continues to work till the age of retirement. But

he cannot leave his job because he knows that to lead a life without work is something which he can only dream about, and not actually adopt. He cannot spurn his job because there is something within him which also is a kind of toad, but which forces him to continue working. This toad-like creature, dwelling within him, has a heavy bottom, and is so demanding and stern that the poet cannot resist it. This inner toad, or this inner urge to work, would not even allow him to use persuasion or flattery in order to achieve his desire for fame, to marry the girl whom he loves, and to get the money which he needs for his food and other expenses. Of course, he cannot affirm that the toad outside him is an embodiment of the toad-like creature inside him. In other words, the toad outside does not personify his inner urge to work. The toad outside forces him to work; and his conscience within him also urges him to work. But the two compulsions are of different kinds. And it is difficult for him to get rid of either of these compelling forces. The two forces exist side by side, leaving him no choice except to work

Note: The toad is an amphibian animal like the frog, having a clumsy body.

4.4.3 Critical Appreciation

We have a well-argued poem about the external need to work and the inner urge to work. The external need to work arises from one's desire to preserve one's life; but one's conscience also urges one to work. The poet would like to lead an idle life and to enjoy his leisure; but he cannot adopt this course of life because work brings money, and because money is essential for living. Still he would like to follow the example of many people who do not perform any kind of labour, and who yet manage to preserve their lives. But then there is another consideration. Inside the poet dwells another urge: that is the urge to work. His conscience would not let him rest if he were not to do any work. Thus we have in this poem a balancing of the arguments in favour of a life of leisure and idleness and the arguments in favour of work and toil. This poem is autobiographical because Larkin had to work very hark as a university librarian, and he often used to experience moods of depression on account of the heavy burden of his official duties. At the same time, he knew that he could hot live as an idler or as a parasite. His conscience urged him to continue working.

Critics' Comments

One of the critics says that this poem is concerned with the relationship between the burden of work itself and the "something sufficiently toad - like" which lurks in the poet himself, both of which seem to join together to reduce him to passivity. Being unable to assign blame definitely to either source, the poet remains hemmed in by both inner compulsion and by outer necessity. (The outer necessity is to work in order to be able to pay the bills). The poem is a complaint against something which displeases the poet, but it does not attack the source of his difficulty. Although the poem begins by challenging the necessity of submitting to the immediate source of his displeasure, the poet never directly answers his own question: "Why should I let the toad work/Squat on my life?" Instead he launches into a series of comments on what other people seem to do. He appears reluctant, in fact, to articulate the advantage of unseating the toad —so much so that he counters every attempt to urge himself to rebellion against work. In spite of the strong case which can be made in favour of living on one's wits, the poet offers a number of reservations about the success of such a course of action. Although lots of folk seem to follow this course of action, the poet's characterization of these folk seems both vague and imprecise. Who does so, and where? The poet only says: "Up lanes with fires in a bucket." But this is the kind of generalization which the poet might make if he had no clear conception

of what living in such a situation would be like—or if he had no desire to find out. The poet cannot know exactly how these people *feel* about their lives. In his own opinion, these people do not end as paupers and, besides, they *seem* to like their way of living. Furthermore, the argument that, if other people do it, the poet would be able to do it also, does not have any relevance to his own problem. He seems to invite digressions which distract him from the main issue. Another strategy which prevents him from rebelling against the compulsions of the toad (work), is the poet's insistence that his possible choices consist entirely of two extremes: a man can either continue to work or give it up altogether. The poet does not recognize any middle ground; and so he feels compelled to remain where he is. Further, there is no way out of the dilemma because the inner and the outer toads balance each other equally. The last stanza sums up the poet's final attitude:

I don't say, one bodies the other

One's spiritual truth;

But I do say it's hard to lose either,

When you have both.

Through the course of this complex argument, what seems to be the answer to the poet's simple question becomes a complex discussion of an insolvable problem. Like the hero in Greek tragedy, the poet can blame neither fate nor his own free will for his predicament and his inabilityto find a way out of it. The poet only knows that the predicament is not his fault.

Another critic says that in the poem *Toads* Larkin resents the daily grind in the library, and yet he relies on it, saying that it is hard to lose either the toad outside or the toad-like creature within himself. In this poem, as in the poem *Poetry of Departures* and *Reasons for Attendance*, Larkin addresses the elements in his personality , which have allowed this sort of thing to happen, namely the passivity and the need for solitude, and he tries to persuade himself that they are inevitable and desirable, but, one critic feels that there is a lack of conviction in the argument. The questions remain open even while seeming to shut like doors; and the poet knows that he must continue to ask those questions. This critic also says that the poem *Toads* takes the form of a debate between two sides of Larkin's personality. The rebellious, free-booting, and anti-authoritarian aspect of the poet's personality speaks first; but by the end of the poem his more orthodox and self-critical instincts have asserted themselves. Furthermore, says this critic, the last stanza seems a terse and condensed one, coming after the first eight lucid stanzas. In fact, this poem is a statement to the effect that working and not working complement each other. The compression itself forms a crucial part of the poem's meaning. It conveys a sense of being trapped in an argument, and of a deliberate and difficult effort at self-persuasion.

Another critic says that several poems in the volume entitled *The Less Deceived* show an implied sense of resentment at the limitations of contemporary social experience, and some of the poems even initiate a spirited, though ultimately futile rebellion. "Toads" and *Poetry of Departures* belong to this category. In the poem "Toads", the element of fable conditions the kind of inquiry about freedom that takes place; and the immediate substitution of "toad" for "work" in the opening line invites us to consider the idea of work as something unappealing but nevertheless natural. Consequently, the poem never directly considers the idea of work as a socially constructed activity. Even so, it is a poem which emerged from a post-war context; and, in its anxiety about work, it shares a fundamental concern with a great deal of literature of the 1950s. In one of the plays of that period, for instance, a working-

class mother tells her daughter that they have either to work or to face want (that is, poverty). Both words (work and want) carry significance in Larkin's poetry; and the poem *Toads* is a good example of a familiar and recurring debate about individual rights and responsibilities in a modern democratic society. Although it seems to evade the ultimate question of how and why work or labour is organized, the poem *Toads* is extremely interesting and valuable in terms of the language and the form through which it records the changing and conflicting social attitudes. It is this relationship between textual structure and social structure that proves most revealing. This critic goes on to say that the poem *Toads* calls attention to itself as an *utterance* and, in doing so, demonstrates one of that most innovative and culturally significant aspects of Larkin's work, which is its sustained use of colloquial English within traditional lyric forms. The opening stanza of this poem consists of two abrupt questions, the first of which is a rush of monosyllables; and from the very beginning we are given a strong impression of a speaking voice. The language is vigorous and colloquial. Syntactically too, the poem takes the form of an argument, with conjunctions and exclamations providing the necessary cohesion and linkage. The poem is written in rhyming quatrains, but the lines are short and brisk, and the rhymes are approximate (soils/bills), so that the impression of actual speech is maintained throughout. All this goes to show how poetry might be regarded as *social discourse*. Another critic expresses the view that *Toads* is a poem ,which manages to subdue its own rebellious instincts.

The poem *Toads*, says another critic, is characterized by wit, humour, and the dramatization of the speaking voice, a unique tone, and an individual style, and also by a new insight into a commonplace existence, the desire to escape from the dull routine of work. Work in this poem is compared to a toad that squats on Larkin's life; and Larkin considers whether he can use his wit to "drive the brute off". Then follows a comic catalogue of characters who live on their wits: lecturers, lispers, losels, loblolly-men, louts. The heavy alliteration and the archaic words give the alternatives to a world of work, the unreality of fantasy. In fact the courage to" *shout stuff your pension!"* is seen as "the stuff that dreams are made on." This leads to the admission that there is an inner toad (cowardice) and that it is impossible to lose either toad "when you have both". Both the honesty and the humour make this self-depreciation acceptable because they free it from any suggestion of self-pity.

4.4 Glossary

Toad: resembles a frog, and has a clumsy body. Here it is used as a symbol for the poet's work.

Sardines: a kind of fish sold in tins.

Louts: idlers

Nippers: children

Hunkers: bottom

Blarney: persuasion or flattery

4.5 Let Us Sum Up

After going through this unit , you must have got an idea of modern British poetry, especially the poet, Philip Larkin , who is a representative of modern British poetry, along with his life, his works,

and his writing style.

You would also have got a good idea of Larkin's poem, *Toads*.

4.6 Review Questions

1. Give the biographical details of Philip Larkin.
2. Write about the writing style of Larkin
3. Give a critical appreciation of the poem, *Toads*.

4.7 Bibliography

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UNIT-5

E.E. CUMMINGS : *THY FINGERS MAKE EARLY FLOWERS*

Structure

5.0 Objectives

The purpose of this unit is to acquaint you with one of the famous American literature poets E.E. Cummings, whose first volume of poems, *Tulips and Climneys*, appeared in 1923. He has remained a controversial but prominent poet. In this unit we present an elaborate discussion of the poem *Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers*.

5.1 Introduction

The Poem *Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers* is one of the representative love poems by E.E. Cummings. The poem expresses an intense passion in the form of controlled beauty and propriety. The poem is remarkable for its delicate wit, melodic power, verbal precision and clarity.

5.2 About the Poet

Cummings, Edward Estin (14 Oct. 1894- 3 Sept. 1962), poet and painter, was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was the son of Edward Cummings, a Unitarian minister of the South Congregational Church in Boston, and Rebecca Haswell Clarke. Cummings's mother encouraged him from an early age to write verse and to keep a journal. He was educated at the Cambridge Latin School and at Harvard College, where in 1915 he received his B.A., graduating magna cum laude in Greek and English; he received his M.A. from Harvard in 1916. In his last year of college, he became intensely interested in the new movements in the arts through his association with John Dos Passos, S.

Foster Damon, and Scofield Thayer and began to experiment with free verse and to develop as a self-taught cubist painter. His poems were first published in Eight Harvard Poets (1917).

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Cummings volunteered for the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps, serving in France for five months before he and his friend William Slater Brown were arrested on suspicion of espionage because Brown's letter had expressed pacifist views. Cumming's experiences in the Depot de Triage, a concentration camp at La Ferte-Mace, became the subject of his first autobiographical work, *The Enormous Room* (1922). Released from prison after four months, he was sent back to the United States, where he was drafted into the army. He served in the 73d Infantry Division at Camp Devens, Massachusetts, until November 1918.

After the war Cummings moved to New York, entering his cubist paintings in yearly exhibitions and attaining celebrity for the unusual poems he published in *The Dial* and other avant-garde magazines in the 1920s. In college he had followed the Imagist principles for poetry laid down by Ezra Pound: to use the rhythms of common speech rather than metrical regularity, to strive for compression and precision in language, to avoid worn-out poetic diction, and to make poetic statement by means of images. But by 1918 Cummings had created his own poetic style. Because he was a painter as well as a poet, he had developed a unique form of literary cubism: he broke up his material on the page to present it in a new, visually directed way. Some of his poems had to be seen in their printed arrangement before they could be completely understood. "The day of the spoken lyric is past," he proclaimed, "The poem which has at last taken its place does not sing itself; it builds itself, three dimensionally, gradually, subtly, in the consciousness of the experiencer."

In addition, Cummings expressed ideas through new grammatical usage; he employed verbs as nouns, and other locutions as new linguistic creations (for example, "wherelings, whenlings / daughters of ifbut offspring of hopefear / sons of unless and children of almost / never shall guess"). He indulged in free play with punctuation and capitalization. Lowercase letters were the rule; capitals were used only for special emphasis; punctuation marks were omitted for ambiguous statement; others were introduced for jarring effects. His use of the lowercase letter 'T' not only became a well-known means of self-reference in his work, but also reflected a role that he created for himself: he was the underling, the unnoticed dreamer, the downtrodden one, the child in the man; yet by asserting his individuality in this way, he thrust-himself forward and established a memorable persona.

His first manuscript book of poems, "*Tulips & Chimneys*," was a gathering of work in traditional verse forms as well as in his newest unconventional forms of expressiveness. It included lush lyrics from his Harvard year, tender love poems, erotic epigrams, sonnets (some crammed with literary allusion, other merely attempting to depict ordinary scenes of life-on city streets, in cafes, in rooming houses), celebrations of the beauties of the natural world, and harsh satires directed at politicians, generals, professors, the clergy, and national leaders. The publishing world was not yet ready for some of Cummings's poems about drunks, prostitutes, Salvation Army workers, gangsters, or bums. Thus, the original version of Cumming's manuscript did not survive the forbidding selectivity of editors, and it eventually emerged as books.

In 1924 Cummings married Elaine Orr, the former wife of his mentor, Scofield Thayer, editor of *The Dial*; they had one child, Nancy, born while Elaine was still married to Thayer. Elaine divorced Cummings within a year, to marry an Irish banker and politician, taking Nancy with her to Ireland and

blocking Cummings from seeing his child. His second marriage, to Anne Barton in 1929, also ended in divorce, in 1932. These marital disasters affected Cummings's personality so much that by the 1930s he had changed from a vivacious young celebrant of life to a cynical, hard-hitting critic of American culture. These attitudes are increasingly evident in his volumes of poems is *5* (1926), *Viva* (1931), and *No Thanks* (1935).

Cummings's travels in Europe and extended stays in Paris in the 1920s brought him in touch with the Dada and Surrealist movements in the arts, influences that appear in his increasing experiment with language and ventures into irrational modes of expression in his poems. "The Symbol of all Art is the Prism," he declared. "The goal is destructive. To break up the white light of objective realism into the secret glories it contains." In a play, *Him* (1927), Cummings attempted to include the unconscious thoughts of its two principal characters, Him, a playwright, and Me, his girlfriend. The Plunge into the unconscious was represented by a series of vaudeville skits and circus acts, so that Cummings's jokes and verbal nonsense made for a highly entertaining but not very coherent work.

His six-week visit to Soviet Russia in 1931 led him to compose *Eimi* (1933), an autobiographical narrative based on his travel diary. He recorded his train travel, three weeks in Moscow, and two weeks in Kiev and Odessa in highly idiosyncratic prose as the travels of an American, Comrade Kemmin-kz. His disappointment with and hostility to the Communist world is organized into a structure based on Dante's descent into the Inferno. Comrade K eventually passes through the Purgatorio (Turkey) and at length reaches the Paradiso (Paris). The result, despite the difficulties it poses for a reader, is Cummings's most powerful achievement, concluding with a transcendental experience, a mystical union of the narrator, the artist, with the creative force in the universe.

Cummings's third wife, the fashion model Marion Morehouse, lived with him as his common-law wife from 1934 until the end of his life. A change of tone in his next three volumes of verse, *50 Poems* (1940), *1 X 1* (1944), and *Xaipe* (1950), reflects not only the happiness that this relationship brought, but also the fact that Cummings was spending more time at his summer home in Madison, New Hampshire, "Joy Farm," absorbing the natural landscape and the benevolence of the rural seasons. These books express more clearly the individualistic philosophy of life that Cummings had developed out of his dedication to art and his casting off the restraints of society. What emerges is his affirmation of life in all its essential forms, but especially in whatever is natural, unpretentious and unique. His philosophy entailed a rejection of social forces that hinder the expression of individualism, especially whatever encourages group behavior, conformity, imitation, or artificiality. It valued whatever is instinctively human and promoted feeling and imagination; it rejoiced in romantic and sexual love; and it thrust aside the products, both material and spiritual, of an overly organized, emotionally anesthetized, technologically quantified civilization. His painting changed too: he became representational in technique as he turned to still lifes, portraits, nude figures, and landscapes.

In 1946 Cummings was able to bring about a reunion with his daughter, Nancy, who was now living in the United States and married to Willard Roosevelt, a grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919). While painting her portrait, he revealed to her astonishment that he was her father, and as a consequence a fresh relationship between father, daughter, and grandchildren emerged. The mere reentry of Nancy into Cummings's world gave rise to his most successful play, *Santa Claus* (l946), a Christmas fantasy that represents his belief in the Joys of love and giving and his rejection of the materialism and false expectation that he associated with "Science." In the end, Santa Claus without his

mask is revealed to be a young man, who is then reunited with an adoring woman and a child whom he had lost.

In the 1950s Cummings undertook an additional career as a reader of his poetry to audience in New York and on college campuses, becoming, after Robert Frost, the most popular performer on the academic circuit. This venture led ultimately to his holding the Charles Eliot Norton lectureship at Harvard during 1952-1953. His lectures and readings at Harvard became the autobiographical work *i: six nonlectures* (1953), which recounts aspects of his early life and his development as a poet.

In these last years, honors came to Cummings in many forms: a Guggenheim fellowship in 1951; a collected edition of his poetical works, *Poems, 1923-1954* (1954); which earned a special citation from the National Book Award Committee in 1955; appointment as the festival poet for theBoston Arts Festival in 1957; the Bollingen Prize in 1958; and a two-year grant of $ 15,000 from the Ford Foundation in 1959. A serene volume of verse, *95 Poems* (1958), extolled the wonders of the natural world, honored a number of very ordinary individuals, recorded Cummings's outrage at the disastrous outcome of the Hungarian revolution, reflected memories of childhood, and meditated on birth, time, and death. It was a fitting close to the poet's career. Cummings died at a hospital in North Conway, New Hampshire, after suffering a stroke at Joy Farm.

E. E. Cummings was a combination of an unabashed Romantic in his view of life and an avant-garde modernist seeking to explore unusual means of expression. His poetry developed from boyhood imitations of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to the linguistic surprises he brought to the literary scene in the 1920s. He continued to write sonnets all his life, often traditional in theme—a tribute to love, an address to the moon, the praise of a church, a prayer of thanks for the ability to respond to life—but sometimes he chose "unpoetic" subjects—a nightclub dancer, the gurgle of water going down a sink, brothels and their customers, a denunciation of salesmen, a politician giving a hypocritical patriotic speech, a melange of play with advertising slogans.

His visually directed free verse shows an even greater variety of subject and mood. It ranges from children's songs and romantic lyrics through antiwar satires and epigrammatic attacks on his contemporaries to realistic vignettes of city life and delighted responses to the natural objects of earth and the heavens. Cummings produced a large body of work, and although he allowed himself to publish some trivia, he continued to produce poems of wit and ingenuity, of vigorous satire, and of beauty and delicacy well into his seventh decade. He is principally renowned for his linguistic exuberance, which delighted in continual innovation in form and technique. Cummings was a central figure in that remarkable generation of American writers, including Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, John Dos Passos, and William Faulkner, who carried out a revolution in literary expression in the twentieth century.

5.3 About the Age

There was an enormous amount of writing in America during the first century of settlement. The adventurers and settlers wrote descriptions of the country, like those by Captain John Smith of Virginia, the most famous of the scores of chroniclers; they wrote picturesquely of explorations and discoveries, of Indian wars and captivities; they made personal journals of their experiences. They created their instruments of government and law; they recorded the history of their colonies often for political or economic purposes, but also, in New England especially, to "justify the ways of God to

men" in the New Jerusalem. A large number of these works were printed, in England or on the Continent. Most of them were merely timely, although useful for future historians; but with a frequency quite amazing, in view of the physical conditions of life in the New World, there appeared the writer who was also a great person, who communicated the richness of his spirit or character in writings that time has not tarnished. Our colonial literature became a great reservoir of material and inspiration for that of the nine-teenth century; for readers today it still provides an understanding of those bedrock American experiences which developed the national character and peculiarly American institutions.

Although the people of the colonies derived their language and political institutions from Great Britain, they were to become increasingly indebted, as the British themselves had, to a variety of European cultures. The French, Germans, Swedes, and Dutch – and the Jews from Germany and Portugal, who appeared in the Middle Colonies especially during the eighteenth century – were merely following in the wake of European continentals as far back as Eric the Red and Lief Ericsson. Also before the British, the Spaniards, in the half century following the voyage of Columbus, had rimmed the Gulf of Mexico and pushed westward to the Pacific. For all their hardihood, the early settlers could only vaguely comprehend the natural immensity that confronted their efforts – an unimaginable empire, between the Isthmus of Panama and the Arctic, or nearly eight million square miles, more than half of it covered by ancient forests of fabulous density. The land stretched before them in majesty and mystery, while the Indians told of wonders yet unseen-vast peaks and mighty rivers, shifting sands and ancient golden cities overrun by ruin.

It is no wonder if the American imagination bears, to this day, the indelible mark of this immeasurable richness, and of those dark people who possessed the land before them. America was E1 Dorado, the golden western limit of Renaissance energies; and this great tide was still at flood when the Reformation flung out another restless hot for whom America became the Promised Land of the human spirit. At the same time that the New World invited the colonial ambitions of rival empires, or lured the adventurer for pelts and pelf, it was also holding out the promise of new freedom and new hope for men of some sober purpose or lofty idealism forbidden in the Old World. The majority of them, and predominantly those who came to rest in New England and the Middle Colonies, were products, in some sort of the Protestant Reformation, a fact which continues to influence the life and thought of the United States.

However, the first permanent English settlement was the result not of religious but of mercantile motives. The Virginia Company promoted the Jamestown colony (1607); expecting that its plantations would provide goods for the British trade and would attract the Englishmen who needed homes and land. Their conception of their new world was so unrealistic that they brought with them to Virginia a perfumer and several tailors. Epidemic fever and Indian raids during the first few years reduced the colony as fast as new recruits could be brought in on the infrequent supply ships. The Indians, who had been counted on for cheap labor, refused to be enslaved or even to work. Innocent of the European concept of property, they resented the settlers who fenced and cultivated their hunting grounds, and they retaliated with blood and fire. Still somehow the colony increased, first at Jamestown, then at Williamsburg, the handsome colonial capital where, in 1693, William and Mary was founded as the second college in North America.

During the seventeenth century the South was not a land of large plantations. However, the eventual shift from a yeoman to a slave-holding plantation economy was an inevitable result of British

mercantilism, an abusive colonial system to be sure, but one which, for a time, perhaps actually benefited the agricultural colonies of the South. The Navigation Acts of the late seventeenth century were intended to compel the colonists to sell the mother country all their raw materials and agricultural exports, for which they were to receive in exchange British manufactured products. Since British shipping was given a monopoly of the carriage, at rates fixed in England, the mother country was assured of a credit balance. In the northern colonies, where natural conditions favored manufactures and commerce, this exploitation in time became intolerable, and provided one of the deep-rooted reasons for the Revolution. Although the southern plantation colonies were restless at being confined to the British market, their crops were generally salable there. The southern plantation wealth grew steadily, supporting, in the eighteenth century, a tidewater aristocracy that produced some families of great culture, whose sons enjoyed the advantages of British and continental universities and built up fine private libraries. They ultimately produced such leaders and statesmen as the Byrds, Jefferson and Madison. Yet, before the period of the Revolution, they added but little to the creative literature of the colonies. This does not seem surprising. The urban centers were small and widely separated; and the population, much dispersed, was composed of a few privileged aristocrats, thousands of slaves, and a whiter middle class of generally unlettered frontiersmen and small yeoman farmers.

In the New England colonies, as has been implied the situation was quite different. At Plymouth (1620), Salem (1628), Massachusetss By (1630), and other nearby spots soon settled more than twenty thousand Englishmen found new homes. A considerable number were learned especially the Puritan clergymen and governors; and some of them were great men. Even in the seventeenth century they produced a considerable body of writing. Yet they were not literary people in the professional sense, and they were intent upon subduing a wilderness, making homes, and building a new civil society, on which they had staked their lives, and in some instances, their fortunes.

It was not long until the colony at Massachusetts Bay assumed the natural hegemony of New England. Here was the physical situation – a harbor and river – for expansion into a cluster of small towns in close association with each other. The governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company, John Winthrop, strong Puritan, moved the seat of his company from London to Boston Bay, thus making the chartered company into an overseas colony with limited, but then quite unprecedented, powers of self-government. The Puritans who followed Winthrop were thrifty, and they thrived. They initiated a town-meeting government, popular elections, a bicameral council, and other novelties that were to become parts of the machinery of democracy. They can justly be charged with intolerance, of course, for they soon achieved a consensus on matters of dogma, and they had no such problems of diversity as made toleration inevitable in the Middle Colonies. But in New England such outcasts as Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson soon founded colonies of their own, thus accelerating the outward flow of forces from Boston into New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. By 1643 there was the beginning of the New England Federation for mutual security and co-operative economic enterprise.

5.4 Reading the Poem (Text) : Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers

Thy fingers make early flowers of all things.

thy hair mostly the hours love:

a smoothness which

sings, saying

(though love be a day)

do not fear, we will go amaying.

the whitest feet crisply are straying.

Always.

the moist eyes are at kisses playing,

whose strangeness much says; singing

(though love be a day)

for which girl art thou flowers bringing?

To be thy lips is a sweet thing and small.

Death, Thee i call rich beyond wishing

if this thou catch, else missing.

(though love be day

and life be nothing, it shall not stop kissing).

5.5 Glossary

Amaying	:	enjoying
straying	:	wandering
crisply	:	quickly, precisely, decisive
Thee	:	you

5.6 Explanations

(i) Thy fingers make ……go amaying.

The lines given for explanation form the opening stanza of E.E. cummings' poem. *Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers*. This is a love poem expressing the poet's strong passion for beauty and propriety.

Addressing his love the poet says that everything that belongs to love is an emblem of smoothness, delicacy, beauty and joy. The fingers of the beloved change everything into an object that is fascinating, lovable and enchanting. The hair expresses the smoothness of love, and very explicitly conveys that physical love may be transistory but they will always go amaying.

(ii) To be thy lips…… stop kissing.

The lines have been extracted from E.E. Cumming's one of the representative love lyrics entitled *Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers*. The poem expresses the poet's strong passion for beauty.

The poet addressing the beloved says that her lips are small and sweet. Death although very powerful, may not be able to catch her even if it wishes to do so. The poet means to say that Death will wish to catch the beloved but will not succeed. Though physical love and life is momentary, the process of love is continuous and everlasting, and therefore the beloved is an immortal being.

5.7 Self Assessment Questions

Answer to the following questions should not exceed 15 words each:-

1. Name E.E. Cumming's first volume of poems.

   .....

2. What is it that makes E.E. Cummings poetry so specific?

   .....

3. What do you know about E.E. Cummings?

   .....

4. Name the first autobiographical work of E.E. Cummings.

   .....

5. Whose "moist eyes are at kisses playing?"

   .....

6. When was the poem *Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers* written?

   .....

7. Who others, besides E.E. Cummings, are included in the generation of American writers that carried out a revolution in literary expression in the twentieth century?

   .....

5.8 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit we have discussed.

- E.E. Cummings – a great American poet.
- The literature of the colonies and the Revolution with special reference to American literature.
- *Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers* one of the love poems by E.E. Cummings
- The discussion is followed by self assessment questions and their answers.

5.9 Answers

1. Tulips and Chimneys
2. Cummings expressed ideas through new grammatical usage

3. He was a poet- painter

4. The Enormous Room

5. The lady love or the beloved's

6. 1923

7. Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, John Dos Passos and William Faulkner

5.10 Review Questions

1. Write a note on the Theme of the poem '*Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers*'.

2. Comment on the new linguistic and stylistic usage employed by the poet.

3. How has the poet retained his expressiveness in the unconventional form?

4. What makes E.E.Cummings a perfect 'modernist'?

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UNIT-6

AMY LOWELL:
(I) *THE SISTERS* (II) *THE WEATHER-COCK POINTS SOUTH*

Structure

6.0 Objective

In this unit we shall study one of the modern American poetess of repute Amy Lowell and two of her well known poems *Sisters* and *The Weather-cock points South*

6.1 Introduction

Amy Lowell didn't become a poet until she was years into her adulthood; then, when she died early, her poetry and life were nearly forgotten — until gender studies as a discipline began to look at women like Lowell as illustrative of an earlier lesbianism. She lived her later years in a "Boston marriage" and wrote erotic love poems addressed to a woman.

T. S. Eliot called her the "demon saleswoman of poetry." Of herself, she said, "God made me a businesswoman and I made myself a poet."

6.2 About the Poet

Amy Lawrence Lowell (February 9, 1874—May 12, 1925) was an American poet of the imagist school from Brookline, Massachusetts who posthumously won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1926.

Lowell was born into Brookline's prominent Lowell family. One brother, Percival Lowell, was a famous astronomer who predicted the existence of the dwarf planet Pluto and believed the canals on Mars showed it hosted living intelligence; another brother, Abbott Lawrence Lowell, served as president of Harvard University.

She never attended college because her family did not consider it proper for a woman, but she compensated for this with avid reading and near-obsessive book-collecting. She lived as a socialite

and travelled widely, turning to poetry in 1902 after being inspired by a performance of Eleonora Duse in Europe.

Lowell was said to be lesbian, and in 1912 she and actress Ada Dwyer Russell were reputed to be lovers. Russell is reputed to be the subject of her more erotic work, most notably the love poems contained in 'Two Speak Together', a subsection of *Pictures of the Floating World*. The two women traveled to England together, where Lowell met Ezra Pound, who at once became a major influence and a major critic of her work. Lowell died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1925 at the age of 51. The following year, she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for *What's O'Clock*. That collection included the patriotic poem "Lilacs", which Untermeyer said was the poem of hers he liked best.

Her first published work appeared in 1910 in *Atlantic Monthly*. The first published collection of her poetry, *A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass*, appeared two years later in 1912. An additional group of uncollected poems was added to the volume *The Complete Poetical Works of Amy Lowell*, published in 1955 with an introduction by Louis Untermeyer, who considered himself her friend.

Though she sometimes wrote sonnets, Lowell was an early adherent to the "free verse" In many poems she dispenses with line breaks so that the work looks like prose on the page. This technique she labeled "polyphonic prose".[2]

Throughout her working life Lowell was a promoter of both contemporary and historical poets. When she died she was attempting to complete her two-volume biography of John Keats.

Lowell was a short but imposing figure who kept her hair in a bun .She smoked cigars constantly, claiming that they lasted longer than cigarettes. A glandular problem kept her perpetually overweight, so that poet Witter Bynner once said, in a cruel comment repeated by Ezra Pound and thereafter commonly misattributed to him, that she was a "hippopoetess."[4]

Lowell not only published her own work but also that of other writers. According to Untermyer, she "captured" the Imagist movement from Ezra Pound. Pound threatened to sue her for bringing out her three-volume series *Some Imagist Poets*, and thereafter called the American Imagists the "Amygist" movement. Pound criticized her as not an imagist but merely a rich woman who was able to financially assist the publication of imagist poetry.

In the post-World War II years, Lowell, like other women writers, was largely forgotten, but with the renascence of the women's movement in the 1970s, women's studies brought her back to light.

Amy Lowell's work explore two major issues: the imagist movement as it was imported into the United States and the treatment of lesbian material by a lesbian poet .While the subject of Lowell's imagism is easy to introduce, the subject of homosexuality in her life and writing has been more difficult because students are sometimes uncomfortable with the topic, and they are ignorant of the history of censorship and homophobia in the United States. The study of Lowell's life and work presents a good opportunity to open these important subjects to discussion.

6.3 *The Sisters*

Taking us by and large, we're a queer lot

We women who write poetry. And when you think

How few of us there've been, it's queerer still.

I wonder what it is that makes us do it.

Singles us out to scribble down, man-wise,

The fragments of ourselves.

Thus begins a fairly lengthy poem by Amy Lowell, called *The Sisters*, which discusses three women poets in particular while examining the nature of women poets. The female poets she "calls out" in *The Sisters* are Sappho, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Emily Dickinson, imagining conversations with each, linking to their poetic traditions and, ultimately, rejecting those traditions for her own, new course.

In *The Sisters* she certainly acknowledges the positive contribution each of these women made and she also revives them literally in her imagination, enjoying a romp with each, using the social energies that made her such a famous hostess. However, she also writes that they leave her "sad and self-distrustful." It must be said that Lowell, like H. D., was interested in superseding as well as giving acknowledgment to a feminine literary tradition. Furthermore, she associates such a feminine tradition with marginality, ascribing to men the primary authority for poetry.

Since Lowell's poem is such an important breakthrough, the first grand attempt by a woman poet in America to situate herself within a feminine literary tradition, *The Sisters* is worth pausing over. From the eighteenth century forward, women have acknowledged the importance of other women poets, but usually their focus has been on a single individual like Sappho, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, or Felicia Hemans.

Here Lowell brings together three strong poets instead of one. She also acknowledges the autobiographical focus of women's poetry when she says that these poets scribble down the fragments of themselves. Of the Lesbian Poet she writes:

Ah me! I wish I could have talked to Sapho,

Surprised her reticences by flinging mine

Into the wind. This tossing off of garments

Which cloud the soul is none too easy doing

With us to-day.

In addition to what may have been Lowell's sense of continuity with Sappho as a lesbian, she also sees both the freedom and the limitations inherent in a poetic mask. For Browning, Lowell has particular sympathy because "her heart was squeezed in stiff conventions," just as Lowell's was at times.

However, Browning's connection with a powerful male poet leads Amy Lowell into dangerous territory. She imagines Elizabeth deferring to her husband, "for Robert is a genius." This makes Amy uncomfortable and she adds that she doesn't much like "the turn this dream is taking." Yet this dream moment is significant. The daunting presence of male achievement continued to haunt Lowell's imagination throughout her career, rendering her deferential as well as defiant.

Leaving Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Lowell imagines an afternoon with Emily Dickinson, which seems to delight her more. Despite the fact that her assessment of Dickinson is skewed by the early twentieth-century vision of the Amherst poet as a frustrated spinster, Lowell intuitively grasps the complexity of the earlier poet's demanding psyche.

I think she'd be exacting,

Without intention, possibly, and ask

A thousand tight-rope tricks of understanding.

But, bless you, I would somersault all day

If by so doing I might stay with her.

Each of these poets excites Lowell's admiration and respect. However, at the end of *The Sisters,* Lowell insists that she will not be restricted by the heritage they represent. Her "answer," she says, will not be any one of theirs. Why did Amy Lowell summon these women poets only to reject the traditions they represent? In the last lines one can actually hear Lowell imperiously hurrying her guests to leave, as she might have done at the end of an evening at Sevenels. "Put on your cloaks, my dears, the motor's waiting." Then, shooing them out the door with assurances that they "have not seemed strange to me, but near, / Frightfully near, and rather terrifying," she breathes a sigh of relief as she wishes them "Good night!"

Clearly, her need to separate herself from these women was complicated. In addition to her ambition to compete with a masculine tradition to which, she perceived, they did not belong, she also found that they made her self-distrustful, wondering as she did after writing the Keats biography if her commitment to invading the masculine sphere was the right one.

However, her desire to distance herself from these women also derives in part from her discomfort with the female roles they represent. Sappho's is the least objectionable. Yet Lowell admits that she knows only "a single slender thing about her"—that she was a lover. The role of the lover, especially the lesbian lover, is one Amy held dear. And, in fact, she may be singling Sappho out for special intimacy: "we two were sisters / Of a strange, isolated family." Yet Lowell wanted to be more than a love poet. She wanted to compete in the intellectual realm, a territory traditionally belonging exclusively to men.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning she sees in the guise of the female invalid, a common figure in the nineteenth century. She pities Browning for being bound by Victorian conventions, yet she admires her "over-topping brain." Then, with typical Lowell perversity, she actually criticizes Browning for being overly intellectual, saying she needed to escape "to freedom and another motherhood / Than that of poems." The love sonnets are the first Browning poems Lowell finds "fertilized" for, she concludes, "A poet is flesh and blood as well as brain." In her demand for balance between heart and head, we can hear the androgynous Amy speaking. Yet she finds Browning in any case "vastly unlike" herself, for the earlier poet was "very, very woman." Did Lowell insist on seeing her this way in order to be able to dismiss an intellectual rival? Did she see herself as also potentially guilty of one-sidedness?

Dickinson, the great experimenter, is the closest to Lowell in many ways, and therefore, she comes in for the harshest reproach. Though Sappho "spent and gained," and Browning, after a miserly youth, "cut the strings / Which tied her money-bags and let them run," Emily

hoarded—hoarded—only giving

Herself to cold, white paper. Starved and tortured,

She cheated her despair with games of patience

And fooled herself by winning. Frail little elf,

The lonely brain-child of a gaunt maturity,

She hung her womanhood upon a bough

And played ball with the stars—too long—too long—

None of these women fully represents the poet that Lowell wished to be: intellectual but passionate, sensitive to self and others but able to capture, as she praised D. H. Lawrence for doing, "the real throb, and misery and gusto" of life. For Lowell this meant choosing an androgynous persona. The spinster self was a greater liability, despite her capacity to "play ball with the stars," than the tough, manly self whom Lowell had never yet seen represented in a woman poet

6.4 *The Weather-Cock Points South*

Amy Lowell's love poem *The Weather-Cock Points South* (1919), reorders the natural world in layers around a pursuit of intimacy we can see as heralding the deep image poetry of the 1960s.

As we can tell from its first stanza, *The Weather-Cock Points South* is remarkable for the way it fuses an eroticized spirituality with explicit physical references.

I put your leaves aside,

One by one:

The stiff, broad outer leaves;

The smaller ones,

Pleasant to touch, veined with purple;

The glazed inner leaves.

One by one

I parted you from your leaves,

Until you stood up like a white flower

Swaying slightly in the evening wind.

The leaves are put aside at once by a disrobing and by a probing embrace. The poem involves a pursuit of psychic intimacy—a drive to know and celebrate another's inwardness—and an explicit vaginal caress. The flower with its petals and bud is thus both body and spirit, but there is no severing the two. And the woman she describes seems both the object of her gaze and the flower of her own unfolding affection. The flower is both the center of the lover's body and the center of the self, for it becomes the site from which the subject seems to speak. It is also the center of the gardens coalescing

in the poem and, implicitly, of nature as a whole. Her unwavering concentration on it gives it the transience of wax and the permanence of stone—"of jade, of unstreaked agate; / Flower with surfaces of ice."

"The stars crowd through the lilac leaves / To look at you," Lowell writes, so it is clear she would have no patience with a criminalized notion of the gaze. There seems little reason, indeed, to impose a contemporary prudishness either on her or on other modern poets. An objectifying took or verbal representation does not preclude a variety of other perspectives; indeed it is both a form of celebratory play and a form of concentration that can be empathic.

Lowell's imagery is neither radical, nor shocking: in the nineteenth century, flower imagery, or the "Language of Flowers" constituted a "highly nuanced discourse of female erotic desire," and was a common, even ubiquitous, signifying system "through which woman's body and . . . women's genitals have been represented and inscribed". What makes Lowell's poem unique is the poem's sexual aggressiveness, as the speaker tells the beloved, in an active, dominating narrative voice "I *put your leaves aside,*" "I *parted* you."

Lowell's imagery is not, cannot be, *obvious*, the poem's power is in its refusal of a stable, codifiable representation of sexuality.

The poem's languorous peeling back of layers foregrounds the fact that flowers exist in multiplicity. That is, *a* flower consists of petals, sepals, filaments, anthers, and so on. There is no ultimate originary point to the flower. Lowell writes female pleasure through negation:

The bud is more than the calyx.

There is nothing to equal a white bud,

Of no colour, and of all,

Burnished by moonlight,

Thrust upon by a softly-swinging wind.

This stanza complicates the flower as cliched symbol of feminine beauty and revitalizes a tired metaphor. "A littleness that is paradoxically great," the bud is *more* than the calyx, the immediately visible outer whorl of petals, what we *see* and recognize as the flower. Lowell's phrasing deflects attention away from, even as it valorizes, the overscrutinized clitoris. Declaring that "there *is nothing* to equal a white bud," the speaker posits the allegedly *not* present as infinitely, even excessively, present in its "absence," or rather its refusal to confirm expectations, to satisfy curiosity. "Burnished by moonlight," the shining surface of the "white flower" becomes even shinier as it is acted on, whether by the narrator/lover, who rubs against it sexually, or by the observer who would rub it in order to wipe away opacity and gain a clearer view. It becomes a mirror of the looker's desire rather than a decipherable text.

The paradoxical imagery of the last line is remarkable where the flower is "*thrust* upon" by a "softly-swinging wind": Lowell immediately contrasts the potential violence of this verb with the sonorant phrase "by a softly-swinging wind" . She explains that this phrase "carries lesbian implications" because

Lowell, "by dint of authorship, associates herself with the speaker, who in turn is associated within the poem with the wind, as agent of erotic caresses" . The metaphor is even more suggestive: if this is a perfect flower, such as a rose or a lily, with both a pistil and a stamen at its center, then the wind serves as agent not only of "erotic caresses," but of pollination as well. The poem, then, imagines a stigmatized (because non-reproductive) sexuality, as in fact, reproductive and creative, although not as understood within a heterosexual context.

It is clear that the aesthetics and techniques of imagism provided a powerful vehicle for Amy Lowell's erotic vision. Like Pound, H.D., and others, Lowell was strongly influenced by oriental poetry.

The "word-painting" of a flower-bud is so erotically drawn that it can easily be seen to represent the female genitals, so that this descriptive exploration of the flower is transformed into a celebration of lesbian sexuality:

I put your leaves aside,

One by one:

The stiff, broad outer leaves;

The smaller ones,

Pleasant to touch, veined with purple;

The glazed inner leaves.

One by one

I parted you from your leaves,

Until you stood up like a white flower

Swaying softly in the evening wind.

Here is evidence of how the discipline of imagism taught Lowell to focus only on relevant detail and to use a nondiscursive language, one that relies on the sensory qualities of the experience. Through the precision of her word choice, Lowell achieves a vividness of expression that appeals to several senses: sight (broad, smaller, purple, etc.), touch (stiff, pleasant, glazed), and also an implication of sound (evening wind) and scent (white flower). Lowell is relying not only on the detail of image to convey a sensual experience, but also on the textured patterning of sound to suggest a deliberateness, but with delicacy, a tender caution. The alliteration and assonance, featuring soft consonants and short vowels (such as *s, z, p, w, n* and flat *a* of *part, small, pleasant*) add to this gentle tone. The repeated line "One by one" slows the pace considerably, as do the short but end-stopped lines. The repetition of "leaves" at or near the end of almost every other line indicates that while there is movement and action taking place here, it is slow and explorative, almost worshipful in tone.

The second stanza takes on a more overtly reverential tone:

White flower,

Flower of wax, of jade, of unstreaked agate;

Flower with surfaces of ice,

With shadows faintly crimson.

Where in all the garden is there such a flower?

The stars crowd through the lilac leaves

To look at you.

The low moon brightens you with silver.

Here, the litany of attributes serves as a kind of invocation, a reverential, ritualistic form of address, leading to the awe-stricken question, "Where in all the garden is there such a flower?" This question is an assertion of the "flower's" unchallenged beauty. In the last three lines, the "flower" gains a majesty and splendor that cause the stars and moon to gaze and even bow ("low moon") with wonder.

In the last stanza, Lowell gives the most definitive clue that this white flower may represent something else altogether by the assertion in the first line:

This bud is more than the calyx.

There is nothing to equal a white bud,

Of no color, and of all,

Burnished by moonlight,

Thrust upon by a softly-swinging wind.

The color white used to describe the flower also becomes associated with the moon here, carried over from the word "silver" at the end of the previous stanza. This association is developed further as the "white bud/ Of no color, and of all," is "Burnished by moonlight."

Many feminist critics today, learning to "read" women's poetry as encoded celebrations and explorations of female sexuality in non-patriarchal terms, have pointed out that some images predominate for this purpose: in addition to flowers, the moon and its cycles are used to signify female sexuality. These images are rich with erotic possibilities, but Lowell was not interested in encoding the sexual message too deeply. If anything, it seems Lowell wants to be sure that the reader gets the sexual connotations of the poem by using the already heavily connotated words "Thrust upon" at the beginning of the last line. Lest the reader think this is the familiar heterosexual "thrust," however, Lowell immediately contrasts the potential violence of this verb with the sonorant phrase "by a softly-swinging wind." This final phrase carries lesbian implications not only in its reversal of expectations, but also in that it echoes back to the first stanza, where the wind is the only agent of motion besides the speaker, "I." Thus, Amy Lowell, who often read her poetry in person, by dint of authorship, associates herself with the speaker, who in turn is associated within the poem with the wind, as agent of erotic caresses.

Like Dickinson's, much of Lowell's work draws on nature, and even more specifically, on garden imagery. On the surface, this approach can seem to fit safely within the confines of the cultural expectations of "female versifiers," and much of Lowell's poetry, like Dickinson's, can be misconstrued as pretty little nature poems. Paradoxically, nature images are the perfect vehicle of expression for both of these poets' visions. It is familiar and readily accessible for both poets, yet they see in it an expression of their "deviant" beliefs and loves.

Lowell's poetics of imagism, with its preponderance of garden imagery, combined with her love for Ada Russell, allowed her to write extremely erotic lesbian poetry. However, because of Lowell's physical size and demeanor and the cultural invisibility of her erotic sensibility, the power of her lesbianism as a creative force within her work in particular, and within modernism in general, has been largely disregarded. Being aware of this expectation of triviality, and the overlay of heterosexist assumptions placed on Lowell's erotic life, allows us to see how the vision of the "straight mind" can erase the significance of this lesbian work from its place in literary history.

There is further significance to the use of nature imagery in Lowell's overtly sexual lesbian poetics. Not unlike Dickinson's use of the hymn meter to offset her own cultural heresies, the juxtaposition of "natural" images with "unnatural" sexualities creates an ironic tension between these socially constructed polarities, which forces the distinctions to give way. By bringing these "oppositional" concepts together, not in conflict but in relation, the boundaries of this dichotomy begin to disintegrate. Thus, by thinking with a lesbian sensibility, she throws the logic of the heterosexist culture against itself, and creates a paradoxical legitimation for lesbian existence: if nature evidences these "unnatural" images of sexual expression, then the "unnatural" is perhaps more "natural" than we have been led to believe.

6.5 Let Us Sum Up

Recently in an attempt to reclaim Lowell primarily as a lesbian poet, feminist critics have argued that, far from being shallow and superficial, her love poems are, in fact, deeply self-revelatory, so much so that Lowell had to disguise their content in order to make them appropriate for the general public. These critics argue for a rereading of Lowell's lyrics as subversively-encoded lesbian love poetry, claiming that such things as the ambiguously-gendered narrative voice, and the use of elaborate flower symbolism, serve to hide the poems' true, homoerotic subtext. These poems reflect lesbian life in a way that could not be depicted in the post-World War I years unless it were somehow disguised.

6.6 Review Questions

1. Lowell's poetry is particularly notable for its rendering of sensuous images. Discuss.
2. Discuss how a writer who is homosexual can have anything significant to say to the heterosexual majority.
3. Explore the feminist message in Lowell's work
4. What is encodement in literature? Find out the ways in which Lowell, in particular, encodes.
5. With reference to the poem "*The Sisters*" discuss how women writers "think-back" through their fe-male predecessors.

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UNIT-7

WALLACE STEVENS :
(I) *SUNDAY MORNING* (II) *THE ANECDOTE OF A JAR*
(III) *EMPEROR OF ICE-CREAM*

Structure

7.0 Objective

In this unit we are going to acquaint ourselves with one of the twentieth century American poets Wallace Stevens and make a critical study of three of his poems:*Sunday Morning, The Anecdote of a Jar* and *The Emperor of Ice- Cream*

7.1 Introduction

T.S. Eliot has taught us to think that Shakespeare made poetic drama impossible after him and Milton a great epic difficult. Eliot himself seems to have made other poets difficult in his own lifetime. Nevertheless there is at least one American poet who deserves to be discussed, not because he is an great as Eliot, not even because he is a major poet in any sense of the term but only because he is one who by his sheer difficulty to understand seems to fascinate and challenge the best minds who are late in according the recognition due to him.

Like, Eliot, Stevens seems to have realized very actuely that it was not enough to a poet to look into the heart but had to look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system and the digestive tracts. What he did realize he was able to express in a way which marks him out as a poet of distinct originality.

7.2 About the Poet

Wallace Stevens was taciturn, yet deeply emotional, aloof, yet highly expressive; he was an American poet who embodied the union of the artistic and the practical.

He was born on October 2, 1879 in Reading, Pennsylvania . His father, Garrett Barcalow

Stevens, was a schoolteacher turned attorney; his family had been in Pennsylvania for several generations. His mother, Margaretha Catharine "Kate" Zeller was also a schoolteacher. Kate was an industrious, independent woman who went to work to support her family after her father died when she was only 15 . The Stevens had either six or eight children, depending on accounts. Five of those children survived past infancy and into productive adulthood. The first born was Garrett Barcalow, Jr., who was called "Buck" by the family. Next came Wallace who was nicknamed "Pat." John Bergen, Elizabeth, and Mary Katharine, followed in the birth order .

The Stevens clan was a well liked and politically involved family. Garrett's living as an attorney made it possible for the family to be "comfortably situated." Because of their closeness in age, the three Stevens boys were exceptionally tight knit. Wallace was especially close to his younger brother, John. The Stevens boys engaged in mischief which sometimes bordered on criminal behavior. They vandalized neighbors' property, spit tobacco on townsfolk from hidden perches, and played with guns, much to their family's dismay. One humorous story recounted by Holly Stevens has the boys cheekily screaming "God helps those who help themselves!" as they ran away from an orchard where they had been stealing a neighbor's fruit.

Wallace's relationship with his father was, at best, tentative. Though he would later claim to be a perfect amalgamation of both his parents' best traits, Stevens actually seems to have grown to be a carbon copy of his father . Garrett Stevens' self-discipline and ability to do many things at once was almost legendary. Wallace himself also possessed these traits. They allowed both men to succeed in both their professions and in their chosen avocations. Garrett Stevens was also known to be aloof and unaffectionate with his wife and children, a characteristic Holly Stevens claims her father also unfortunately perfected. Like his father, Wallace also was to become a powerful speaker and writer who received many awards and commendations in local oratory contests . Most importantly, the elder Stevens instilled in his children a love of reading. The entire family spent much of their indoor free time isolated from one another and buried in books. Stevens, in adult conversations with friends, would often describe his childhood home as a "library" rather than a safe haven.

The Stevens boys' school life is somewhat of a mystery. They initially attended a private kindergarten in Reading ran by a French woman. They then entered the grammar school attached to St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church. Next, they enrolled in Reading Boys High School. During high school, Wallace's grades fluctuated wildly. He would go from having the best marks in his class one semester to completely flunking his exams the next. He was forced to repeat his freshman year, which put him in the same class as his younger brother John. Wallace would later tell friends this retention was due to "too many nights out," but school records indicate that he missed almost a year of school due to an unnamed illness. This illness is mentioned frequently in biographical information on Stevens, yet the exact nature of the illness is never clarified. The roots of the poet's contradictory nature can be seen in these early days of education. In spite of being a miserable student, he was known to be incredibly intelligent and frequently entered and won local essay contests and competitive exams .

After barely graduating from Reading Boys High School, Stevens was accepted as a special student at Harvard University. It was here that several of his poems first appeared. In 1900, Stevens left Harvard without graduating. He went to New York to pursue a writing career, working briefly at the *New York Tribune*. In 1901, Stevens entered New York Law School. He completed his degree

there, and in 1904 was accepted in the New York Bar. It was also during this year that Stevens encountered Elsie Viola Kachel during a visit home. Elsie was a lifelong Reading girl, and in 1908 they became engaged. They married September 21, 1909. Their only child, Holly, was born in 1924.

Since his law school graduation in 1903, Stevens had been quietly and privately writing poetry in his spare time. Later in life, he claimed to get ideas for poems on his daily walks. He would walk about town in the morning or on lunch breaks, then return to his office and dictate to a secretary who would put his ideas down on paper. In 1923, Stevens' first collection of poetry, *Harmonium,* was published by Knopf. Early reviews of *Harmonium* were disappointing. Critics called Stevens' work "verbal stunts" and "unenduring." Although Stevens was, at times, discouraged by such harsh criticism, after brief periods of licking his literary wounds, he would resume his compositions.

In the late nineteen thirties and early nineteen forties, Stevens had begun to achieve new heights of public and literary popularity. During this decade, he was invited to lecture at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale Universities. *Parts of a World* was published in 1942, followed by *Transport to Summer* in 1947. In 1949, the awards began to pour in. That year, Stevens was awarded the prestigious Bollengen Prize in Poetry from Yale University. This was followed by two National Book Awards. Finally, Stevens received the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1955 for *The Collected Poems*.

Much of Stevens' poetry has been described as obscure. The meaning is not transparent; the reader has to think deeply, to make personal and literary connections in order to comprehend and find meaning in it. Like the man who composed it, the work is full of contradictions. He was an odd combination of attorney and artist; the officious businessman who found personal solace in the most superfluous of art forms, poetry. In spite of biographical details and even his own recollections in journals and correspondence, the man remains, like his poetry, enigmatic. Fortunately, he chose to share just a few of his innermost reflections through his work, leaving the most private and intimate to remain a mystery.

7.3 *Sunday Morning*

Sunday Morning, one of the collected pieces in Wallace Stevens's *Harmonium* (1923), has been singled out as one of his most eloquent and thematically resonant poems. *Sunday Morning* chronicles one woman's search for spiritual fulfillment in a philosophical dialogue between her and Stevens's poetic persona. Throughout the poem, the two examine two contrasting ideologies: that of Christianity and of paganism. The woman must decide which will help her find the spiritual satisfaction she is seeking. Stevens said about this poem that "the poem is simply an expression of paganism" and that the poem suggests "a naturalistic religion as a substitute for supernaturalism"

The poet presents compelling arguments through a series of eloquent images centering on the beauty of the natural world. When the woman notes that this beauty is transitory, the poet counters, "death is the mother of beauty," insisting that the fact of death enhances beauty. After careful consideration of the poet's line of reasoning, by the end of the poem, the woman determines that a devotion to earthly pleasures and not the dead religion of the past will provide her with divine bliss.

In the first stanza, a complacent woman lounges in her dressing gown late into a Sunday morning, eating a leisurely breakfast and enjoying the vivid, vibrant beauty of the natural world around her. She takes great pleasure in her coffee and oranges, her mood reflected by the "sunny" chair and

the cockatoo that has been released onto the rug. She is spending a morning at home instead of going to church.

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late

Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,

And the green freedom of a cockatoo

Upon a rug mingle to dissipate

The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.

The reference to the "holy hush of ancient sacrifice" suggests that the day is Easter Sunday. Initially, the pull of the natural world dissipates the traditional power this day has over the woman, as she has chosen not to take part in Christian rituals. However, as she dreams, the pleasure she experiences this morning is soon extinguished by "the dark encroachment of that old catastrophe," a reference to the crucifixion of Christ. She recognizes that the secular beauty she appreciates is not eternal, and so the colorful oranges and parrot, earlier appearing so full of life, now "seem things in some procession of the dead."

Winding across wide water, without sound.

The day is like wide water, without sound.

Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet

Over the seas, to silent Palestine,

Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.

She becomes caught up in Christian dogma as "her dreaming feet" transport her to the "dominion of the blood and sepulchre," symbolic of the ritualistic ceremony in celebration of the Last Supper and Christ's interment. The blood refers to the wine and the sepulchre to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre that contained the tomb where Christ's body was laid on Good Friday. Thus, the sensual pleasure of the late morning coffee and oranges has been replaced by the spiritual satisfaction of the bread and wine communion.

The voice of the poet questions the woman's decision to turn her back on the beauty of the natural world and devote herself to her religion. He insists that she could find divinity through a connection to the splendor of the earth. Her earthly pleasures, which he enumerates in this stanza through images of the seasons, should be as cherished as "the thought of heaven." The poet exhorts her to appreciate the very transience of her world since it encompasses the pleasures and pains of living.

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?

What is divinity if it can come

Only in silent shadows and in dreams?

Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,

In pungent fruit and bright green wings, or else

In any balm or beauty of the earth,

Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?

Divinity must live within herself:

Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;

Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued

Elations when the forest blooms; gusty

Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;

All pleasures and all pains, remembering

The bough of summer and the winter branch.

These are the measure destined for her soul.

The third section takes up the history of divinity, tracing godhead from the totally inhuman Jove through the partly human Jesus to the fully human god suggested by the poem. To invest the human with the divine would make earth into paradise, the sky becoming fully our own rather than a division between earth and heaven

Jove in the clouds had his inhuman birth.

No mother suckled him, no sweet land gave

Large-mannered motions to his mythy mind.

He moved among us, as a muttering king,

Magnificent, would move among his hinds,

Until our blood, commingling, virginal,

With heaven, brought such requital to desire

The very hinds discerned it, in a star.

Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be

The blood of paradise? And shall the earth

Seem all of paradise that we shall know?

The sky will be much friendlier then than now,

A part of labor and a part of pain,

And next in glory to enduring love,

Not this dividing and indifferent blue.

The fourth section returns to the woman's perspective. She is not entirely willing to accept the argument because she realizes that the paradise offered is not permanent. The other voice then assures her that there is a permanence, a permanence of the human, although not of the individual.

She says, "I am content when wakened birds,

Before they fly, test the reality

Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings;

But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields

Return no more, where, then, is paradise?"

To her claim in part 5 that she needs individual continuity, the other voice offers the consolation that "Death is the mother of beauty" : the cycle of ripening, fruition, and decay causes desire, which would not exist without the realization of transience.

She says, "But in contentment I still feel

The need of some imperishable bliss."

Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,

Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams

And our desires.

The sixth section hypothesizes a static heaven in which the ripe fruit never falls; such a place would be boring, not beautiful. Only change causes beauty, and change entails beginnings and endings; hence, "Death is the mother of beauty."

Is there no change of death in paradise?

Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs

Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,

Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,

With rivers like our own that seek for seas

They never find, the same receding shores

That never touch with inarticulate pang?

Why set pear upon those river-banks

Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?

Alas, that they should wear our colors there,

The silken weavings of our afternoons,

And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!

Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,

Within whose burning bosom we devise

Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly.

The alternative to Christianity is suggested in part 7—"a ring of men" chanting "their boisterous

devotion to the sun". Human energy should recognize the source of nature's energy as kin; this recognition would reestablish the participation of humans in nature, which is not so much mystical as actual.

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
Their boisterous devotion to the sun,
Not as a god, but as a god might be,
Naked among them, like a savage source.
Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
Out of their blood, returning to the sky;
And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
The windy lake wherein their lord delights,
The trees, like serafin, and echoing hills,
That choir among themselves long afterward.
They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
Of men that perish and of summer morn.
And whence they came and whither they shall go
The dew upon their feet shall manifest.

The argument is presented as a conclusive one, and the woman accepts it. Her recognition that Jesus is a historical figure and that she is alone, a part of "unsponsored" nature, frees her from the prison in which her traditional beliefs had locked her,

She hears, upon that water without sound,
A voice that cries, "The tomb in Palestine
Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay."
We live in an old chaos of the sun,
Or old dependency of day and night,
Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
Of that wide water, inescapable.
Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
And, in the isolation of the sky,

At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make

Ambiguous undulations as they sink,

Downward to darkness, on extended wings

With her disbelief in the possible existence of a god confirmed, the poem has virtually completed. here is a sphisticated woman who does not believe because she belongs to a world which has lost belief in everything. She cannot believe in gods because they are, to her, shadowy substances. Now she thinks she can find in Nature, but when the birds fly where then is paradise ? The conflict between Nature and religion is not resolved even in the end. Of course the birds return in the evening. But there is an ambiguity in their return.

"At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make

Ambiguous undulations as they sink,

Downward to darkness, on extended wings."

The word 'ambiguous' leaves us in no doubt about the ambiguity. 'Extended wings' may suggest either fatigue or fulfilment. Are they content or are they frustrated ? What have they achieved? The day has come to an end and tomrrow will be like today and many more tomorrows will roll by, without bringing in their wake any fulfilment.

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow."

So is life ultimately nothing but a walking shadow? Here is life without a glocal centre. Stevens has presented the predicament of a woman who has no anchor in life. The thoughts that pass through her mind are thoughts that any thinking person might entertain today and her predicament is the predicament of us all. It is a very troubled mind, a torn being that can come to terms with neither herself nor with life having no knowledge except of nothingness. Stevens himself has said that it is destructive force:

"That's what misery is,

Nothing to have at heart.

It is to have or nothing."

So rising of the present time and place , above the smugness of the rug, what has she realized? Only that the river always seeks for the sea that is never found. The shores recede and the river never joins the sea. The sea is the destiny of man. How does he fulfil his destiny? Like the river always striving in vain to join the sea, is man also simply striving without reaching the still point of the turning world? Is this the lot of modern man? If Stevenes wants us to believe that "loss of faith is growth" how has the intellect or he rational or empirical approach helped the lady to solve her problems? Has she found peace? Unless one has an inner direction to rely upon there can be no map of paradise. so it is not that Stevens is not aware of the plight of modern man.

In *Sunday Morning* the woman has wiped away the gods like shadows. It is ironical as well as pathetic that the day which started so complacently for the aristocratic lady should end in leaving her sceptical, agitated and longing. Physical world, nor the world beyond this world can sustain her. So where shall she live- in the here- and the now or, as the poet says, "in an old chaos of the Sun" or in the

hereafter?

"As the reason destroys, the poet must create" says Stevens. But has the created anything that the reason has destroyed here? Are we after all destined to live in an 'island solitude unsponsored", unable to find a way out unlike Dante who found it is a coherent system of thought, as Shakespeare did in his recognition of a moral order in the universe and as Eliot in our own times has done by clinging to "the notion of some infinitely gentle. Infinitely suffering thing"? But by stepping boldly into the internal world of the woman, Stevens has apprehended the complexity of life and perceived the intricacy of appearance and reality and made the poem attempt, the reader or Eliot would say a vain attempt, at satisfication in a thoroughly dissatisfied life. It is an irony that the poet who set out to write poetry to find out what will suffice seems to have ended with the realization that nothing that he knows or puts his faith in seems to suffice. At any rate the poem is a convincing proof that neither Nature nor the world will suffice. As to what will suffice we should perhaps turn to Eliot. It is in this sense that we can say poets like Stevens made Eliot the courage with which he undertakes a perilous journey in which he tried one possibility after another, rejects them all and leaves the reader troubled in mind and heart. The reader does not receive much help from the poet, not even a momentary stay against confusion which a lesser poet like Frost offers him in poem after poem, but leaves the door open for further enquiry and exploration without ending in despair or cynicism. That itself is a great value. It is true that the end of all his exploring is not to find an anchor but to leave us asking and asking even at the end. But in the course of the journey our awaresess is increased and consciousness deepened. Does he by so doing lend support to the stand of

Not fare well,

But fare forward voyagers?

7.4 *Anecdote of the Jar*

Anecdote of the Jar is a poem from Wallace Stevens's first book of poetry, *Harmonium*. It was first published in 1919.

I placed a jar in Tennessee,

And round it was, upon a hill.

It made the slovenly wilderness

Surround that hill.

So begins the poem. Whenever human beings interact with nature, they usually try to bend it to their will, often in selfish and destructive ways. Stevens describes a Tennessee long before human beings lived there. It is in this human free nature that Wallace sees as the stage against which man battles nature for supremacy.

The "I" of the first line symbolically represents all humanity. He enters, places a jar on a hill, and then departs the poem. The rest of the poem is told from the viewpoint of the jar, thus equating the jar with the human need to dominate nature. It is significant that the "I" did not place a flower or plant on that hill. Not only is the jar a man-made artifact, its roundness, a shape not often found in nature, emphasizes its human origins. Further, the "I" places the jar at the top of the hill, thereby giving it a

commanding view of the terrain. The jar's height advantage over raw nature gives it an initial power advantage over the disorganized wilderness. However, Stevens suggests that the power of man to gain a permanent advantage over nature is illusory. Man may think that he has the upper hand; he may further think the height is a symbol of that power. But the ability of human beings to control nature is the larger battle of the few to control the many. Usually the few lose.

The struggle for supremacy seems to go toward the jar's side at first: "It made the slovenly wilderness / Surround that hill." The wilderness that surrounds the hill is only that part which lies closest to it. The greater majority is far from the jar and thus unaffected. So if nature loses the first meeting between man and nature, that loss is the inconsequential loss of a skirmish rather than the ruinous defeat of a rout.

The seeming victory of the jar continues in the second stanza, as the viewpoint shifts subtly from the jar to that of the wilderness. The reader sees events from the non-human angle and nature first counterattacks, then submits meekly:

> The wilderness rose up to it,
>
> And sprawled around, no longer wild.

The victory of the jar is echoed in the poem's many repetitions of "round:" round, sur-round, a-round, and g-round. Each sound-alike reinforces what to humanity must be the victory of the artifice of human-directed roundness over the slovenliness of nature. Yet, the seeds of a stalemate are suggested in the often overlooked last two lines of the second stanza:

> The jar was round upon the ground
>
> And tall and of a port in air.

The roundness and tallness of the jar is undercut by the suggestion that it is "of a port in air." A rarely used definition of "port" is that of an escape or hatchway to safety. The victory of the jar, then, is seen as merely a prelude to a more traditional stalemate that emerges in the final stanza.

> It took dominion every where.
>
> The jar was gray and bare.
>
> It did not give of bird or bush,
>
> Like nothing else in Tennessee.

After the jar "took dominion everywhere," the jar itself is described in terms that do not indicate a fruitful victory: "The jar was gray and bare." Here the jar is lifeless, a quality further emphasized by the next line: "It did not give of bird or bush." The result of the battle for control leaves nature defeated, but only locally, and the man now as weakened and slovenly as nature was in the first stanza. The mention of "Tennessee" as both the starting point and the end point suggests its circularity. Man may try to overpower nature, may in fact win a few local skirmishes, but nature itself is too powerful for human beings to control. What is left is only the illusion on control. *Anecdote of the Jar* then implies that power is a game in which one must fool oneself about the rules and outcome of a game that was decided long before human beings ever walked on the face of the earth.

In the poem, *Anecdote of the Jar*, Stevens portrays the complex relationship of human to nature through confusion of who is greater than whom, how they depend on each other and the connection between the two. Stevens forces the reader to feel the confusion and chaos present between the jar (a symbol for humans) and nature. This relationship can be felt and read through the form the poem is written in.

The poem uses confusing wording to show the relationship of humans to nature. For example, line 9 says, "It took dominion everywhere." "It" referring to nature, means the power that nature has over the jar (humans). Nature's dominant overpowering weakens humans. Humans then become powerless and vulnerable to whatever nature has become. Another line proving this dominance states, "The jar was gray and bare." This line describes the jar of being plain and simple. This normalcy becomes ineffective and powerless. The ordinary doesn't have as much power as the objects that stick out from the crowd. Humans don't seem to stand out in the vastness of the wilderness.

The next line turns the control in an interesting way: "It did not give of bird or bush." Because the jar was in the previous line, it is natural to think "it" in this line refers to the jar. The plot begins to thicken as it was previously suggested that the wilderness had all the control in the relationship. The jar now becomes an authority because it will not give into the natural world. To the reader, the relationship just became undefined. The power was turned over from nature to man.

Stevens also shows the dominance issue in the beginning of the poem. He says, "It made the slovenly wilderness /Surround that hill." The authority is placed again in front of the jar. The wilderness is careless and aware of this new object placed in its environment. Then the poem states, "The wilderness rose up to it, / And sprawled around no longer wild." The roles are reversed once again. The wilderness is now in charge. The reversal of the roles contained the poem in an environment of utter confusion. Stevens showed the audience that this relationship really was chaotic, throughout the poem, to prove his point.

Stevens created this confusing state to allow the reader to really feel what the relationship is between the two. This relationship is hard to understand and is something that cannot be set. Using irregular rhymes and wording, Stevens is able to create this unsolvable relationship. Taking a step away from the poem to real life proves that Stevens is correct in his undertaking of ideas from human to nature. For example, this very paper is from a tree that man has cut down, showing that nature was defenseless in the act. On the other hand, there are certainly a number of hurricanes, tornadoes, avalanches, etc. happening in the world today. Humans can do nothing to prevent these disasters from happening. Neither human nor wilderness is the dominant source.

With all the confusion in the poem, Stevens reveals an underlying message to the reader. Line 7 in the poem reads, "The jar was round upon the ground. " This section of the poem shows the dependency of humans on nature. Through the rhymes of "round" and "ground", we can see the relationship. To achieve a rhyme such as this, the two words have to be consistent and dependent on each other. Stevens shows the dependent relationship of humans to nature through these two words. It is a very solid line that helps the reader not to be totally confused when reading the poem. This line also begins to show the base for the relationship.

The next line (8) also supports this hidden security of the relationship between human and the natural world. It says, "And tall and of a port in air." This line represents the unseen connection

between human and nature. The "port" refers to a connecting force that ties the relationship together. The jar, being "tall" in the air, represents the depth of the relationship. Above the initial confusion and chaos, there is a deeper meaning to the relationship. The "port" runs through the confusion to get above it and reveal the true relationship. Stevens used the word "air" to represent the unseen connection. We, as humans, depend on air to survive. Although we have never seen, touched, or heard air, we know that it is there and depend on it to live. Stevens refers to air to show the unseen connection between mankind and the natural world. This connection is very important and crucial to the relationship. In fact, the relationship depends on this connection.

Another way to look at the connection of humans to the natural world is through the first and last lines of the poem. These two lines embody the poem to start and finish in a calm way. Both end in the word Tennessee. This can show the relationship outline as being simple. Just as the port went above all the chaos, the outline of the poem goes around the chaos. The first line of the poem is the beginning of the relationship. This opens the reader in a confusing state to figure out what Stevens is really trying to get across. This mass confusion is the body of the relationship. Somewhere in the poem, Stevens shows in a deeper meaning of the relationship through a connection. As the poem nears the end, the same word is used to end the poem. That is the end of the relationship; there is no more to be added. It leaves the reader feeling satisfied, even if he or she didn't understand the content of the poem.

Stevens truly does a wonderful job of portraying the relationship of humans to nature. By using the jar to represent man, he was successful in creating an environment not only expressed in the poem, but also felt by the reader. He used irregular rhymes and role changes to express the complex relationship. The reader is left with confusion but an slight understanding of the relationship. Stevens expressed the relationship of humans to nature very well in this piece of work.

7.5 *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*

The Emperor of Ice-Cream is a celebrated poem from Wallace Stevens' first collection of poetry, *Harmonium*. It was first published in 1922.

Consider the second stanza first:

Take from the dresser of deal,

Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet

On which she embroidered fantails once

And spread it so as to cover her face.

If her horny feet protrude, they come

To show how cold she is, and dumb.

Let the lamp affix its beam.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

A woman is dead. Her corpse is still lying.

Move up the first stanza:

Call the roller of big cigars,

The muscular one, and bid him whip

In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.

Let the wenches dawdle in such dress

As they are used to wear, and let the boys

Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.

Let be be finale of seem.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

The moscular one is bidden to whip in kitchen cups concupiscent curds, the wenches are allowed to dawdle in such dress as they are used to wear and the boys bring flowers in last month's newspapers. The words whip concupiscent and big cigars all help to realize the bestial flow and wide-spread muscularity. But what is really intriguing is not so much the indifference and the bestial flow of man as what can be mistaken for the poet's own endorsement:

"Let be be finale of seem".

Let appearance be reality. What seems to be final be the finality. And the last line clinches the matter: "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream" Ice-cream perhaps stands for a state of flux. Whether he is endorsing the statement or is being ironic about it we are uncertain. But the stanza comes to a close immediately followed by another in which every little detail adds to the picture of the unfortunate woman. People talk of depicting social problems in art and when they do it they make it propaganda in trying to win pity for the poor, not knowing where art ends and where propaganda begins. But here is this poet who achieves the desired effect by subtlest means. The words do the task. The poor woman has nothing to call her own except a dresser not made of mahogany, not rose-wood, not even jungle-wood but of deal wood, lacking the three 'glass' knobs, and a sheet on which she herself had once embroidered pictures, the only luxury that she could afford to possess in her poverty. The sheet-not long enough would now serve to cover up her face but leaves the 'horny feet protruding to show how cold and dumb she is. The expression 'horny feet' evokes the poverty of this wretched woman more effectively than any treatise on the subject. In the midst of this depressing scene we are relieved to find the presence of the lamp. "Let the lamp affix its beam" says the poet. But pat comes the sting in the tail.

"The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream".

Steven has attempted here something which he had not attempted in his other poem, *The Death of a Soldier*, which is very similar to this poem in theme and situation. A soldier falls. He does not become a three-days' personage, imposing his separation and calling for pomp. The clouds nevertheless move in their direction. Death is absolute and without memorial, we realize. But nothing more is either said or suggested. so in Eliot's Aunt Helen. When the woman died there was silence in heaven and silence at her end of the street.

"The shutters were drawn and the undertaker wiped his feet-

He was aware that this sort of thing had occurred before".

The clock continued tiking on the mantlepiece, the footman made love to the housemaid and so life went on. Eliot himself does not come out with a comment anywhere. We think Stevens has gone further than Eliot since he stated so categorically "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-crem." But soon we discover that it not an assertion because the last two lines taken together make it very ambiguous. We do not know whether he is endorsing a popular, cynical attitude or is mocking at it. Life is passing. Life is flux. But is he affirming that the only reality is the flux? Time is of course not eternity, but it is for a great poet to see as a point in eternity and thus make it a part of eternity. But with Stevens, one asks, is flux the governing factor of life? Is there no still centre? Are we always caught up in endless whirlpool and is there no release from it? The flux of life about which the Buddha spoke so much- the cycle of birth and deaths- was in no way considered the ultimate reality by him. He could see a way out of the endless chain of births and deaths by seeking Nirvana. Yeats could find his way out of this hopelessness in the holy city of Byzantium. Eliot could conquer time through time. In Stevens too it is possible to find the still centre if we pause for a while on the line "Let the lamp affix its beam." In the midst of the mutability of the world this lamp is the only stablizing factor which symbolizes a certain steadfastness and dignity as suggested by the words "affix" and "beam". But why is this affirmation followed by a denial in the very next line thus teasing us out of thought not knowing where we stand with the poet? Is it man's perversity that he should disregard the beam of light which can guide his steps and consider the emperor of ice-cream as the only emperor? Is it out lot to despair and drift endlessly or find a stablizing factor and understand that life and death are inevitable and inexorable?

7.6 Let Us Sum Up

Stevens scores a victory over many others. For, one thing that distinguishes him is his sustained attempt to find what will suffice without ever telling us in so many words as to what really will suffice. If it is still true that we hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us we should find Stevens most attractive.

7.7 Review Questions

1. One of the most famous lines from Stevens, and one of the most enigmatic, appears in *Sunday Morning*: "Death is the mother of beauty." Summarize the major points in the argument by which the speaker in this poem transforms Sunday morning from a day of religious observance for the dead into a celebratory day of the sun.

2. Closely analyze the sun imagery in stanza VII of *Sunday Morning*.

3. *Anecdote of the Jar* takes as its central focus some inanimate object. Analyze the meaning of the poem and the syntactic and semantic techniques Stevens uses to create that meaning.

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UNIT-8

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS:

(I) *THE RED WHEELBARROW*

(II) *LANDSCAPE WITH THE FALL OF ICARUS*

Structure

8.0 Objectives

In this unit we shall introduce you to William Carlos Williams (September 17, 1883 – March 4, 1963), also known as WCW, an American poet closely associated with modernism and Imagism. He was also a pediatrician and general practitioner of medicine. Williams "worked harder at being a writer than he did at being a physician," wrote biographer Linda Wagner-Martin; but during his long lifetime, Williams excelled at both.

8.1 Introduction:

Among the poets of his own illustrious generation, William Carlos Williams has been the man on the margin. During the years when T.S.Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, and E.E.Cummings were departing from traditional English practice in ways that stamped the character of American poetry in the twentieth, Williams quite by himself was trying to impart to poetry a new substance and a violent new orientation.

In secret alliance with little known painters, he became famous along with his literary

contemporaries and still tends to be indiscriminately categorized with them in the annals of poetry. But as modern poetry consolidates its academic position and cease to challenge the young and adventurous, the singularity of Williams' contribution is being discovered, rediscovered, and put to uses that presage the most striking development in American poetry since J. Alfred Prufrock rolled the bottoms of his trousers and listened to the mermaids.

8.2 About the Poet

Williams was born in Rutherford, New Jersey, a community near the city of Paterson. His father was an English immigrant, and his mother was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He attended a public school in Rutherford until 1896, then was sent to study at Château de Lancy near Geneva, Switzerland, the Lycée Condorcet in Paris, France, for two years and Horace Mann School in New York City. Then, in 1902, he entered the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. During his time at Penn, Williams became friends with Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle (best known as H.D.) and the painter Charles Demuth. These friendships influenced his growth and passion for poetry. He received his M.D. in 1906 and spent the next four years in internships in New York City and in travel and postgraduate studies abroad.

He returned to Rutherford in 1910 and began his medical practice, which lasted until 1951. Most of his patients knew little if anything of his writings; instead they viewed him as a doctor who helped deliver their children into the world. It was estimated that Williams delivered 2,000 babies in the Rutherford area between 1910 and 1952. Today, Rutherford is home to a theater, "The Williams Center," named after the poet.

Although his primary occupation was as a doctor, Williams had a full literary career. His work consists of short stories, poems, plays, novels, critical essays, an autobiography, translations and correspondence. He wrote at night and spent weekends in New York City with friends - writers and artists like the avant-garde painters Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia and the poets Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore. He became involved in the Imagist movement but soon he began to develop opinions that differed from those of his poetic peers, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. Later in his life, Williams toured the United States giving poetry readings and lectures.

During the First World War, when a number of European artists established themselves in New York City, Williams became friends with members of the avant-garde such as Man Ray, Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp. In 1915 Williams began to be associated with a group of New York artists and writers known as "The Others." Founded by the poet Alfred Kreymborg and by Man Ray, this group included Walter Conrad Arensberg, Wallace Stevens, Mina Loy, Marianne Moore and Duchamp. Through these involvements Williams got to know the Dadaist movement, which may explain the influence on his earlier poems of Dadaist and Surrealist principles. His involvement with The Others made Williams a key member of the early modernist movement in America.

Williams disliked Ezra Pound's and especially T. S. Eliot's frequent use of allusions to foreign languages and Classical sources, as in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Williams preferred to draw his themes from what he called "the local." In his modernist epic collage of place, *Paterson* (published between 1946 and 1958), an account of the history, people, and essence of Paterson, New Jersey, he examined the role of the poet in American society. Williams most famously summarized his poetic method in the phrase "No ideas but in things" (found in his 1927 poem "Patterson," the forerunner to the book-length

work). He advocated that poets leave aside traditional poetic forms and unnecessary literary allusions, and try to see the world as it is. Marianne Moore, another skeptic of traditional poetic forms, wrote Williams had used "plain American which cats and dogs can read," with distinctly American idioms.

One of his most notable contributions to American literature was his willingness to be a mentor for younger poets. Though Pound and Eliot may have been more lauded in their time, a number of important poets in the generations that followed were either personally tutored by Williams or pointed to Williams as a major influence. He had an especially significant influence on many of the American literary movements of the 1950s

Williams' most anthologized poem is *The Red Wheelbarrow*, considered an example of the Imagist movement's style and principles. However, Williams, like his associate Ezra Pound, had long ago rejected the imagist movement by the time this poem was published as part of *Spring and All* in 1923. Williams is more strongly associated with the American Modernist movement in literature, and saw his poetic project as a distinctly American one; he sought to renew language through the fresh, raw idiom that grew out of America's cultural and social heterogeneity, at the same time freeing it from what he saw as the worn-out language of British and European culture.

Williams tried to invent an entirely fresh form, an American form of poetry whose subject matter was centered on everyday circumstances of life and the lives of common people. He then came up with the concept of the variable foot evolved from years of visual and auditory sampling of his world from the first person perspective as a part of the day in the life as a physician. The variable foot is rooted within the multi-faceted American Idiom.

Williams married Florence Herman (1891-1976) in 1912. They moved into a house in Rutherford which was their home for many years. Shortly afterwards, his first book of serious poems, *The Tempers*, was published. On a trip to Europe in 1924, Williams spent time with writers Ezra Pound and James Joyce.

After Williams suffered a heart attack in 1948, his health began to decline, and after 1949 a series of strokes followed. He also underwent treatment for clinical depression in a psychiatric hospital during 1953. Williams died on March 4, 1963 at the age of seventy-nine at his home in Rutherford, New Jersey. Two days later, a British publisher finally announced that he was going to print his poems – one of fate's ironies, since Williams had always protested against the English influence on American poetry. During his lifetime, he had not received as much recognition from Britain as he had from the United States. He was buried in Hillside Cemetery in Lyndhurst, New Jersey.

In May 1963 he was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1962) and the Gold Medal for Poetry of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. His major works are *Kora in Hell* (1920), *Spring and All* (1923), *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1962), *Paterson* (1963, repr. 1992), and *Imaginations* (1970). The Poetry Society of America continues to honor William Carlos Williams by presenting an annual award in his name for the best book of poetry published by a small, non-profit or university press.

8.3 WCW and Imagism

The reformist movement known as Imagism lay its emphasis on direct apprehension of natural things. Minor social phenomena was attractive to WCW who had already forseen that his best poetic

strategy would be simply the deft, uncalculated transcription of what he saw and felt. Williams later looked upon his Imagist phase as a passing and tangential involvement, yet no other American poet- with perhaps the exception of H.D.- has written so many poems that can serve as models illustrating the Imagist canon. Concretion, exactitude, observation without comment, vulgar subject matter, common speech homely details glittering with a mineral clarity- William exhibits them all and achieves over and over again that complexity of emotion within as instant of time that was the goal of the Imagist. The tenets of Imagism gave him a sanction, and the loosely constituted Imagist school afforded him his first association with a group of poets consciouly trying to find an idiom to oppose the stale metrics and mellifluous rhythms of the popular Georgian poets. But he soon became impatient with the limitations on structure that Imagism imposed. He believed that a focus on concrete imagery was a necessary step toward the rehabilitation of the poem, yet he felt that Imagism 'lost its place finally because as a form it completely lacked structural necessity. The image served for everything so that the structure, a weaker and weaker free verse, degenerated into a condition very nearly resembling that of the sonnet.'

Imagism was never for American poets quite the doctrinaire thing it was for a small group of English poets, notably those under the aegis of T.E.Hulme, its unofficial philosopher. Imagism nevertheless provided a healthy climate for a man of Williams' persuasions and a mode of expression in which his nervous sort of poetic shorthand seemed less idiosyncratic. He perhaps contributed to the movement as much as he learned from it, and helped to make it the crucible in which many talents far different from his own were refined. In any case, the spare hard smack of Imagist language is a not that echoes throughout his career. On poetry that had become muddy and stagnant, Imagism acted like an agent that clarifies a solution without seriously changing its chemical structure. While it undoubtedly helped Williams to define his own peculiar language, it did not serve his greater need for a broader and more viable sense of structure.

8.4 *The Red Wheelbarrow*

The Red Wheelbarrow is a poem by and often considered the masterwork of American 20th-century writer William Carlos Williams. The 1923 poem exemplifies the Imagist-influenced philosophy of "no ideas but in things". This provides another layer of meaning beneath the surface reading. The style of the poem forgoes traditional British stress patterns to create a typical "American" image.

The subject matter of *The Red Wheelbarrow* is what makes it the most distinctive and important. He lifts a brazier to an artistic level, exemplifying the importance of the ordinary; as he says, a poem "must be real, not 'realism', but reality itself."

8.4.1 Text

so much depends

upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white

chickens

8.4.2 Explanation

A wheelbarrow is a large open container with a wheel and two handles that you use outside to carry things.

Lines 1-2

The opening lines set the tone for the rest of the poem. Since the poem is composed of one sentence broken up at various intervals, it is truthful to say that "so much depends upon" each line of the poem. This is so because the form of the poem is also its meaning. This may seem confusing, but by the end of the poem the image of the wheelbarrow is seen as the actual poem, as in a painting when one sees an image of an apple, the apple represents an actual object in reality, but since it is part of a painting the apple also becomes the actual piece of art. These lines are also important because they introduce the idea that "so much depends upon" the wheelbarrow.

Lines 3-4

Here the image of the wheelbarrow is introduced starkly. The vivid word "red" lights up the scene. Notice that the monosyllable words in line 3 elongates the line, putting an unusual pause between the word "wheel" and "barrow." This has the effect of breaking the image down to its most basic parts. The reader feels as though he or she were scrutinizing each part of the scene. Using the sentence as a painter uses line and color, Williams breaks up the words in order to see the object more closely.

Lines 5-6

Again, the monosyllable words elongate the lines with the help of the literary device assonance. Here the word "glazed" evokes another painterly image. Just as the reader is beginning to notice the wheelbarrow through a closer perspective, the rain transforms it as well, giving it a newer, fresher look. This new vision of the image is what Williams is aiming for.

Lines 7-8

The last lines offer up the final brushstroke to this "still life" poem. Another color, "white" is used to contrast the earlier "red," and the unusual view of the ordinary wheelbarrow is complete. Williams, in dissecting the image of the wheelbarrow, has also transformed the common definition of a poem. With careful word choice, attention to language, and unusual stanza breaks Williams has turned an ordinary sentence into poetry.

Interpretation of *The Red Wheelbarrow* must rely heavily on its visual imagery. There is the vague, casual beginning, "so much depends," then the images of the wheelbarrow and the white chickens. The reader might be justified in considering the poem merely flippant, or perhaps he might think that the poet intends only to entertain through images, that he asks us to imagine, from these juxtaposed images of red and white, a pleasing photograph or painting as we read. Yet the tone does not invite a dismissal of the generalized introduction. We wish to know what these things matter, to whom they matter.

The answer may be suggested by the poem's one metaphor: the wheelbarrow is described as *glazed* with rainwater—that is, *shining*, with a suggestion of hardness. The speaker sees the

wheelbarrow immediately after the rain, when the bright sun has created the wheelbarrow's shiny surface and has made the chickens immaculately white. In nature, this scene occurs when dark clouds still cover a portion of the sky, often giving an eerie yellow—or blue—green tone to the landscape. In this short time after the rain has ceased, the chickens have emerged from whatever refuge they sought during the storm. They are reassured that they can begin normal living again and do so calmly (simply "beside" the wheelbarrow).

The metaphor "glazed" captures time in the poem. In a moment, the wheelbarrow will be dry, its sheen gone; yet the hardness suggested by the metaphor is not irrelevant. This moment is like others in life (of the chickens, the speaker, the reader). Periods of danger, terror, stress do not last. The glaze, like the rainbow, signals a return to normality or restoration. The poem creates a memorable picture of this recurring process; reflections upon its meaning may provide the reassurance that makes us more durable.

8.5 *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*

8.5.1 The Text

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near

the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

unsignificantly

off the coast

there was

a splash quite unnoticed

this was

Icarus drowning

8.5.2 Explanation

Landscape with the Fall of Icarus is an ecphrastic poem .Ekphrasis or *ecphrasis* is the graphic, often dramatic description of a visual work of art. In ancient times it referred to a description of any thing, person, or experience. The word comes from the Greek *ek* and *phrasis*, 'out' and 'speak' respectively, verb *ekphrazein*, to proclaim or call an inanimate object by name.

The 20th-century American poet William Carlos Williams wrote this poem upon seeing Pieter Bruegel's *Landscape With The Fall of Icarus*.

The poem, as indicated by the title, touches upon the Greek tragedy of Icarus, the story in which Icarus, the son of Daedalus, took flight from prison wearing wings made from wax and feathers. Icarus, disregarding his father's wishes that he not fly too close to the sun, did just that and melted his way to a feathery demise, drowning in the sea.

Landscape with the Fall of Icarus rings true to William Carlos Williams's style of poetry—a style that employs enjambment and meter to illustrate the message of the poem as much as—if not more so—than traditional plot and imagery.

Thus, Williams takes us along the journey of the mythical Icarus as he soared on wax wings. At least, at the very beginning of the poem, it seems as if it is just a flight. The enjambment pulls us steadily through the poem as if on an easy drifting through the sky. We explore the scenery along with Icarus, and yet, the poem seems not about Icarus. The poem is the journey, the scenery, the day rather than a story. However, it is at the final line of Williams's poem that we realize the true focus of the poem: "Icarus drowning". William reveals to us his initial deceit, showing us that the poem was a descent rather than a flight—each stanza pulling the reader from the sky, and bringing us quite literally to the ending: death. This little surprise at the end mirrors Icarus's own supposed surprise.

The death of Icarus, the poet tells us "According to Brueghel," took place in spring when the year was emerging in all its pageantry. The irony of the death of Icarus, who has always been an emblem for the poet's upward flight that ends in tragedy, is that his death goes unnoticed in the spring—a mere splash in the sea. The fear of all poets—that their passing will go "quite unnoticed"—is an old and pervasive theme. That Williams reiterates the theme is significant in the life of a poet who always felt the world had never fully recognized his accomplishments.

8.6 Let Us Sum Up

Thus we see that in the method WCW adopts, he is characteristically closer to the painters than he is to the poets, especially to those comparatively recent American artists known as 'action' painters. Williams' goal, like theirs, is the release of energy rather than the reassembling of familiar counters; he strives for a poem that will, in its own process, answer the question it continually poses. Like the abstractionist painter who gives up identifiable shapes and forms for visual rhythms, Williams dispenses with poetic modes that might unify his poem, hopeful that incursions of indiscriminate subject matter may find their place in his over all design. His aim is similar to that of the painter who expects that his rhythmic emphases will find their functional place in the over-all 'writing' that covers his canvas.

8.7 Review Questions

1. The success of any one of his poems came to depend on its movement, its line to line tensions, the tight rope walking progress of an idea. Discuss this statement about WCW's poems.
2. WCW's poem is a living document of experience rather than a delayed report of experience. Discuss.
3. Discuss *The Red Wheelbarrow* as a modern poem.

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UNIT-9

NISSIM EZEKIEL : *ENTERPRISE*

Structure

9.0 Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

1. know the background of Indian English Poetry,
2. know about the life and works of Nissim Ezekiel,
3. understand the background of his poetry,
4. assess Ezekiel as a poet,
5. get an introduction to *Enterprise*
6. get detailed explanation of *Enterprise*
7. get critical material on the poem *Enterprise*

9.1 Introduction

Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanujan, P. Lal and Mokashi-Punekar have all blazed the new trail in modern Indian poetry in English and made it Indian first and last. Their responses to tradition are diverse-ranging from love-hate to dispossession, and from revaluation to reaffirmation. But in essence they reflect the new spirit of creative openness and expressive positivism. They easily merge with the vernacular scene and are, in fact, indistinguishable from their counter-parts in Hindi, Marathi, Tamil or Telugu. Nissim Ezekiel's *Morning Prayer*, Kamala Das' *The Dance of Eunuchs* and A.K. Ramanujan's *The Striders*, illustrate the chief trends in New Indian English poetry.

These three poets wrote for themselves, in distinct aesthetic modes, not only with their individual sensibilities, but also with enough potentiality to offer significant frames for emerging talent. They show levels of definte, demonstrable achievement in a poetic *milieu* ridden with claims and counter-claims. Whether poets in the seventies were in any sense aware of the transcending significance of these poets is a moot point; yet as Parthasarthy has rightly noted, "each of them, by his own practice, set the pace for, and pointed the opportunities open to other poets...." and poems like "Night of the Scorpion" and "A River" by their visions of an everyday Indian reality expressed in an unobtrusive personal voice stood out in the reader's mind as signposts, indicating the directions poetry in English was likely to take in the future.

If this is kept in mind, it can be seen that Ezekiel, Ramanujan and Kamla Das have opened up poetic possibilities along three distinct avenues: the modes of affirmation, of myth and history and of the quest for the self in and through love and if this is frustrated the resultant longing for dissolution and death. In short, their poetry exhibits three concentric circles of self in relation to society, self in relation to itself, its own propelled emotions and feelings (V.A. Shahance). It is with reference to the achievement of this great trinity-comparable to R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand in fiction-that the performance of younger Indian poets writing in English is to be evaluated.

A large number of Indian poets-too many to be enumerated or even named-continue to write in English, and some of the Indian poetry in English is of the highest quality. This justifies our faith that the new Indian English poetry has a bright and glorious future, despite all the misguided and politically motivated tirade against English.

9.2 Life And Works Of Nissim Ezekiel

Nissim Ezekil is one of the foremost Indian poets writing in English, and he has attracted considerable critical attention from scholars both in India and abroad. Not only that but also by virute of his critical evaluation, he has brought fame and recognition to a number of Indian English poets.

This outstanding poet of post-independence India was born in Bombay in 1924. He is a Jew by birth, but he has made India his home. He was educated at Antonio D'Souza High School and Wilson College, Bombay, and Birbeck College, London. He lives in Bombay, where he is Reader in American Literature at the University. In 1964, he was a Visiting Professor at Leeds University. In 1974, an invitee of the U.S. Government under its International Visitors Program; and in 1975, a Cultural Award Visitor to Australia. For sometime he was Director of Theatre Unit, Bombay. His works include *A Time to Change* (1952), *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Third* (1959), *The Unifinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Three Plays* (1969) and *Hymns in Darkness and Poster Poems* (1976). He has had poems published in *Encounter; The Illustrated Weekly of India; London Magazine* and *The Spectator.*

Ezekiel was in England from 1948-52. He returned to India in 1952 and worked for some time as Professor and Head of the Dept., of English, Mittibhai College of Arts, Bombay. Today, he is settled at Bombay and works as Reader in American Literature in the University of Bombay. He has been abroad on a number of assignments. He was a visiting professor at the University of Leeds in 1964, and then in 1967 he went on a lecture tour of America and recited his own poems at a number of universities and colleges. Also, he has worked, and is still working, as the editor of a number of journals including, *The Quest; Illustrated Weekly of India; the Indian P.E.N.* and *Poetry in India*.

He is also a member of the Genral Council of the *Lalit Kala Akademi* and the *Sahitya Akademi.* He is also working as the General Editor of the *Indian Poetry Series* and the *Unviersity Text Book Series*.

In England, "philosophy, poverty and poetry" shared his basement room. But now in India he lives in comfortable circumstances. He is married and has three children, and is a man much sought after, and he wields great influence on Indian art and literature. *He has not only been a good poet himself, but also a cause of good poetry in others.* Through sheer sustained effort, spread over a period of over twenty-five years, he has come to occupy the foremost place among the Indian poets writing in English.

Though primarily a poet, his interests are not confined to poetry alone. He is also a great critic by virtue both of the quality and quantity of his criticism. He has flirted with politics in the garb of cultural freedom and has also been in advertising for some time. He has also tried his hand at drama and also been in advertising for some time. He has also tried his hand at drama and has some good plays to his credit. He has frequently changed his jobs and has played many roles, but primarily he has always been a poet. A glance at his published works is sufficient to give us an idea of the versatility of his genius.

9.3 Estimate Of Nissim Ezekiel As A Poet

A Versatile Genius

Ezekiel is the most outstanding Indian poet, writing in English today. He has published six anthologies of verse --*A Time to Change; Sixty Poems; The Third; The unfinished Man; The Exact Name; and The Hymns in Darkness and Poster Poems*--besides a large number of poems published in literary journals and magazines from time to time and not yet collected and brought together. He is a man of varied tastes and interests and pre-occupations. Besides teaching poetry and prosody at the University of Bombay, he also edits a number of literary journals, writes reviews, and has also a large body of literary and art criticism to his credit.

A Great Love-poet

A study of his poetry reveals a gradual evolution of his art and genius. A number of major themes run through his poetry gaining in depth and intensity with each successive volume that he has published. No theme recurs so frequently as the theme of love and sex. There are highly sensuous descriptions of the human body and of love-making in the bed. His treatment of the act of love, and of the charms of the female body, is characterised by extreme frankness. This has exposed him to the charge of being a poet of the body, of the female anatomy, of wallowing in sex, but such criticism is superficial and unjust. He is certainly neither a Platonist nor a romantic dreamer, nor does he reject the claims of the body. But constantly there is the urge to transcend, to rise, and to travel beyond the merely physical. Mere physical love is sinful, it is the "whore of love" and this, "consciousness of sin" renders him unfit for the "discovery of cities fresh as brides." The final view seems to be that charity, absorption of body and mind, a passion beyond sex, is the true commitent. The subsequent aspect of the poet's craving for "a bit of land, a women, and a child or two", remains, therefore, an unattainable aspiration, till one rises above the merely physical and 'great women beast of sex' is seen as a 'myth and a dream'. It is significant to note that nowhere is there any indication of the poet's falling a prey to

putrid love. On the contrary, he tries invariably to understand the nature of real love and passion through his own indulgence in the act. Love in its bare form, in and outside the marriage, has occupied the poet in many of his early poems.

In his love-poetry, Ezekiel deals with every possible facet and variety of love experience. There is a deeper and deeper exploration of the theme in each volume as in music. It is the tension between the opposite poles of physical and spiritual, the respective claims of the body and the soul, the love which corrupts and demoralises and that which brings elevation and fulfilment, which makes Ezekiel such a great love poet.

The Clash of Opposites

Indeed, the greatness of Ezekiel as a poet lies in the fact that in his poetry he is constantly bringing together opposite concepts and trying to reconcile and harmonise them. As M. Sivaramkrishna puts it, "the real source of creative tension in his poetry is between his pervasive philosophic pre-occupation and an insistent awareness of the ties stemming from the surrounding milieu. This awareness prevents the poet from drugging himself with the narcotic of philosophic abstractions The two polarities in his poetry, therefore, are life as pilgrimage, an enterprise--involving a movement away from home---and life in the actual milieu of the backward place, the home, in which he is implicated by ties of the community. Consequently the the personal level on which feelings of loss and deprivation are communicated is prevented from sliding into fatal self-preoccupation. In short, the quest for a possible metaphysical truth and the harsh empirical reality jostle with each other in his poetry and give his poetry its peculiar tang."

His poetry is a battleground for the clash of opposites. Contraries exist side by side, and the poet constantly tries to harmonise and resolve them. *In Enterprise* the poet frankly tells us that grace or redemption is possible not through a negation of life and its harsh reality, but through an acceptance of it with all its sin, dirt, squalor, quarrels and conflicts. Grace is to be found only at home. But in so far as "Home" is a metaphor for the self, redemption has to be won also through the private landscape of one's psyche or mind. Both these realms, the outer and the inner, are essential to human growth and fulfilment. Without commitment to life in the world and without journey into the abyss of one's being, the metaphoric pilgrimage of Ezekiel's aesthetic vision remains incomplete, though an ever-lasting possibility. The enterprise, the pilgrimage, is a metaphor for the movement from the outer to the inner, from the physical to the spiritual, from intellectual argumentation and discussion to inner illumination, from disintegration and chaos to order, discipline and self-control.

As a Poet of the City

Both Rajeev Taranath and Meena Beliappa agree, "that the urban theme forms an important strain in Ezekiel's poetry", and this theme runs through all the anthologies published by the poet. According to Linda Hess, "He is a poet of the city, Bombay. The poet is fully alive to the ugliness, dirt, squalor and wickedness of a city like Bombay. This is the theme of a number of his lyrics like, *A Morning walk*, where the city of Bombay is described as a living hell:

Barbaric city, sick with slums,

Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,

Its hawkers,beggars,iron-lunged,

Processions led by frantic drums,

A million purgatorial lanes,

Whose wages are in words and crumbs.

Such a city has a very harmful influence on the poet's perception. The trees look like ghosts and lose their personal identity: "The more he stared the less he saw/Among the individual trees". They look like 'petals on a wet, black bough.' This state of mind leads to an introspective, questioning attitutde: 'Has he done something sensible or just marked his time while half his life is over? This thought is hauntingly put in the following lines:

The middle of his journey nears.

Is he among the men of straw

Who think they go which way they please?

This 'paralysis of will' is clinically analysed in *Case Study*, The great harm that the city does is that it reduces every person, 'to a Procrustean bed'. The idea of all individuals getting suffocated in a narrow space is expressed through a fine image: "Constricting as his formal dress/The pain of his fragmented view." The poem explores the differences between dream and reality, and the wide gulf between what he wants and what he actually is. The artificial life of the city leaves a certain inexplicable spell on one who cannot get away from it. Hence this stilted atmosphere creates confusion in his own subconscious. It is characteristic of Ezekiel that he finds most Bombay-walahs rootless. That busy man, changing trains,belongs only to the city's vulgar turmoil, hence he seems to the poet like an active fool.

In a later poem called 'Island' he describes Bombay as a pleasure island of 'slums and sky-scrapers'. The same paradox is expressed when he says that the city has its bright and tempting breezes but it fails to provide him with a single-willed direction. The city dweller, unable to escape to his "Lake Isle of Innisfree', accepts the paradox:

How delight the soul with absolute

Sense of salvation, how

hold to a single willed direction?

I cannot leave the island:

I was born here and belong.

Even now a host of miracles

hurries me to daily business,

minding the ways of the island

as a good native should,

taking calm and clamour in my stride.

It seems that with the passage of years, Ezekiel has developed a spirit of resignation and

detachment towards, "the kindred clamour close at hand". He no longer feels romantically melancholic about his alienation. He takes calm and clamour in the same stride. He loves the city of Bombay despite its ugliness and wickedness and the neurosis and maladjustment that it causes. The same duality, the same bringing together of contraries and their harmonisation, which we noticed in his love-poems, is also to be seen in the poems on the urban theme. *The Unfinished Man* is a remarkable poem in this respect. It tells us of the city man, who is caught up in the phantasmagoria of sex and power and for whom there is no redemption; at his best, he has a dim recognition of that part of his being which dreams of higher levels of existence. The lyric delineates such a person and his predicament with mild sarcasm:

The hills are always far away,

He knows the broken roads, and moves

In cricles trackled within his head,

Before he wakes and has his say,

The river which he claims he loves

Is dry, and all the winds lie dead.

The city like a passion burns.

He dreams of morning walks, alone,

And floating on a wave of sand,

But still his mind its traffic turns

Away from beach and tree and stone

To kindred clamour close at hand

But while contemplating the city, and the horrors of life in it, the poet does not fail to perceive, as well as to communicate to the readers, the fact that even such a city as Bombay has its roots in the pastoral, and the primitive. The two contraries exist side by side, fuse and mingle and are harmonised by the alchemy of the poet's genius. The primordial and the urban are integrated. For example, in a poem like the *Love-Sonnet,* the hill on which the lovers meet is not very remote from the city lights. There exists a tangible relationship between the urban and the primitive, the worldly and the spiritual. In a state of perfect harmony, the lovers look down from the hill "at the distant sea" which they perceived as a "passionate and perpetual mystery". The sea symbolizes the flux between life and death. With this imaginative awareness the lovers descend the hill in the manner of floating on a cloud, and their mingling with humanity is achieved without any dissonance. Thus in Ezekiel's treatment of the urban theme contraries are brought together and harmonised. Ezkiel has added a new dimension to the treatment of the city.

Ordinary, Common Human Relations

Ezekiel is the poet of ordinary human situations and common human relationships and the human interest comes to the fore in a host of lyrics. *Night of the Scorpion* integrates the family with the community, the superstitious with the rational and the scientific, the concern of the father, the chil-

dren and the neighbours for the mother stung by the scorpion, and the solicitude of the mother for her near and dear ones.The same human concern and the ability to make poetry out of the ordinary is seen in *Poetry Reading* in *Art Lecture*, and in *The Visitor*. The poet shows that a poem need not deal with great and philosophical truths; a poem dealing with the ordinary human relationships, with the day to day situations of the common life, can be equally great and revealing. Even in a difficult poem like *Philosophy*, Ezekiel's love of the commonplace is obvious in the last stanza. He finally rejects the world of abstractions and cold lucidity.

Instead, he prefers the warmth of human-relationships and the social smile. The study of these common things is preferred to the study of cold abstractions. This Augustan trait- "The proper study of mankind is man"- appears in the work of Ezekiel again and again. Hence, logic and metaphysics are for the poet merely an occasional source of escape."

Religion-Philosophic Concerns

However it may be, in his recent verse-*Hymns of Darnkness* and *Poster Poems*, and in a large number of poems not yet brought together in any anthology-the poet's meditative religio-philosophic cocerns were there from the very beginning, but they acquire a new stress and significance in his later verse. Ezekiel was not committed to any particular system of thought or religion; but was always content to be a man of God. His religion is a religion of love and charity, ideals which every religion cherishes and preaches. 'I was brought up', Ezekiel once wrote "in a mildly orthodox Jewish home which gradually became liberal Jewish. I attended the liberal Jewish synagogue in Bombay until I abandoned religion altogether soon after leaving school". This decision to abandon religion shows a keen, analytic mind wedded to an individual system of beliefs. Since religion is "what the individual does with one's solitariness, it is fairly obvious that Ezekiel is of a contemplative turn of mind, and ponders frequently on the problems of sin and salvation". His poetry reveals that, "He is neither a saint negating the sensual pleasures nor a yogi wandering the thick jungle to attain light, but a man of parts, a being of the world-participating and belonging. He takes the unique stance of a modern quester: liberal in outlook yet strong in commitment". He is quite categorical about his attitude as he claims he does not "get a sense of religion, sustained from day to day, in my life. If I write a religious poem, the next poem is likely to be very secular, sceptical. I attach a great deal of importance to the worldlines of the world, its independence". This statement is indicative of the same synthesis of opposites which runs through all his poetry.

Indianness

Nissim Ezekiel is a very Indian poet writing in English. His commitment to India, and to Bombay which is his chosen home, is total as is shown by *Background, Casually*, and a host of other auto-biographical lyrics. He is entirely Indian in his sensibility. He has not only tried to describe Indian culture but he has made good use of 'Babu Angrezi' or Indian English. He has performed half a dozen interesting experiments in this *genre.* 'Very Indian Poem in Indian English' tries to depict the characteristic Indian attitudes in Swadeshi Angrezi. It is common Indian mistake to use the present continuous tense in place of the simple present. Ezekiel exploits this national trait throughout this poem and in *Goodby Party for Miss Pushpa.* As an illustration, consider the following from "Very Indian Poem in Indian English".

I am standing for peace and non-violence.

Why world is fighting, fighting

Why all people of world

Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,

I am simply not understanding.

Such a person naturally believes in the glory that was Ancient India and deplores the fact that the new generation is going after 'fashion and foreign things.'

He is also quietly hopeful that everything in India is coming slowly-'Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception'. The third stanza exults in the national policy of prohibition. It discusses the common Indian attitude towards drinking so that the speaker prefers a glass of *lassi* to a glass of wine. In the fourth stanza, he is sad as our neighbouring countries do not behave properly:

Pakistan behaving like this

China behaving like that It is making me very sad, I am telling you.

In the following lines, Ezekiel is able to evoke a grim picture of Indian poverty:

The villagers ran to them.

They slapped their bellies

and whined:

"I have not eaten for three days."

"My husband has been washed away."

"My parents have abandoned me,"

"My son is dying,"

"I cannot find my daughter."

But with all this poverty, there are only excuses and evasions. The entire blame is placed on Nature, thus bringing out the Indian fatalism.

Nissim Ezekiel is essentially Indian in his sensibility; he is a great Indian poet writing in English, without losing his national identity. *Background, Casually* gives expression to his love of the soil in quite unequivocal terms. He affirms that he is very much an Indian and that his roots lie deep in India. "I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider: circumstances and decisions relate me to India. In other countries I am a foreigner. In India I am an Indian." True, Ezekielhas not inherited the great classical tradition of India, of Vedas and Upanishadas, but the "extent he has availed himself of the composite culture of India to which he belongs, he must be said to be an important poet not merely in the Indian context, but in a consideration of those that are writing poetry anywhere in English."

9.4 Introduction to the Text: *Enterprise*

Enterprise is one of the finest lyrics by Nissim Ezekiel. It was written in 1959, and forms one

of the ten brilliant poems published the same year in *The Unfinished Man*, a collection of ten poems in which the poet's art achieves near perfection. It is a short poem in six stanzas of five lines each. Thus it has thirty lines in all with a well marked rhyme scheme and incantatory music all its own.

It is an allegory of the human condition on this sorry planet of ours and of the frequent efforts, failures and frustrations to which man is subject to by the very nature of his earthly life. An allegory is a technique of vision, a way of conveying abstract, moral and religious truths in an easy and simple manner, so that they may easily be comprehended by the people at large. Thus it is a piece of literary composition with a hidden moral lesson. The writer may simply narrate a story or describe commonplace episode, but the story and the episode have a hidden moral significance applicable to the human condition.

9.4.1 Detailed Explanation of the Text

In the *Enterprise* a group of people undertake a journey moved by noble aspirations, but it all ends in failure and frustrations as is usually the case with human attempts at some noble achievement. As Srinivasa Iyengar rightly points out, "In a sense, of course, it's man's destiny to be for ever evolving, and hence to be unfinished. There is a movement, a growth; something is gained, but something is lost also. If the intellect acquires a sharper edge, something else-perhaps imagination, perhaps hope or self-confidence-suffers in consequence. Between the motion and the act falls the shadow, and so poems like *Enterprise*, become images of frustration : The pilgrimage becomes a weary trek, by the time the goal is reached. It may be described as a miniature *Ababasis* : fancy-fed, the goal is alluring; but the process of reaching it empties the victory of its glamour and glory." Such is the human condition, the human predicament and man must learn to live with it as long as he is a denizen of this earth. The situation is ordinary and commonplace, but its very ordinariness makes it a metaphor for man's journey on this earth. A detailed analysis of the poem is necessary to bring home the point.

A number of people,including the poet, as is clear from the use of the first person pronoun 'we', decide to go on a pilgrimage. They are city-dwellers and the journey they undertake is to some romantic, primitive hinterland. They start with hope, courage and determination, with their minds full of noble ideas and ideals. They are out to make some heroic effort, which would lead, they hope, to some noble achievement. Their minds are exalted and they are not afraid of any dangers and difficulties. 'All burdens' seem to them to be light. This first stage of the journey is symbolic of the stage of Edenic innocence which man enjoys in his boyhood and early youth, when he is entirely unconscious of the human predicament, of the frustrations and failures which life brings at every stage.

But their paradisal felicity and innocence are soon lost. In the next stage of their journey which follows, the pilgrims are faced with dangers and difficulties. They continue on their onward journey of exploration, but they do not care to find out if the urge is sufficiently strong in them, whether the romantic call of the remote and the distant is powerful enough to enable them to face the dangers that lie before them. Theirs is an untested idealism, untested by the experience of practical day to day life. Their rage, their passion for some heroic endeavour, is as hot as the hot sun above their heads. It "beat down upon them', 'to match our rage.' It seems that the objects and forces of nature are out to frustrate human endeavour, the oppressive heat of the sun thus becomes symbolic of the hostility of nature to human idealism and heroic aspirations. The more hotly we humans aspire, the more hotly nature tries to beat us down.

The group of travellers is able to put up very well with dangers and difficulties for sometime. They continue to journey in hope. They take notes as they move along. They note down the goods being bought and sold by the peasants. They also observe the ways of serpents and goats and note them down. They pass through three cities where a sage had taught but do not care to find out what he had taught, and what his message was. Their idealism soon degenerates into the trivial and the commonplace. This is the human dilemma, man cannot remain true to his own self for any length of time. There are too many distractions and diversions, and steadfastness and singleness of purpose are needed and must be painstakingly cultivated.

The difficulties and dangers posed by man's physical environment are not so damaging as those that result from his own insufficiency. Soon there are differences of opinion among the travellers and they begin to quarrel over petty matters. They had to cross a piece of waste land, 'a desert patch', and they could not agree as to the best way of doing so. One of their friends-rather proud of his stylish prose-was so angry that he left their company. The shadow of discord fell on their enterprise, and it has continued to grow. Bickerings over petty matters, needless quarrels over trifles, hatred of, and hostility to, those who hold different opinions, is ingrained in human nature, and thus man carries the seed of his failure and frustration within his own self. So do these pilgrims who, despite their quarrel, continue their onward journey.

But now they are divided into groups, each group attacking the other. Engrossed in their internecine quarrel, they lose their ways, i.e. forget their noble aspirations which had motivated the enterprise. Their goal and their purpose are forgotten and their idealism is all gone. Some of them decide to leave the group. Frustration and difficulties overwhelm the human spirit and many do not have the courage to face the realities of life. They seek relief in escape and withdrawal. Many of us are such introverts. Some try to pray and seek divine assistance and blessings, forgetting that God helps those who help themselves. Their leader feels that he "smelt the sea", i.e. he feels that they have reached a dead end, and must go back. Their pilgrimage must end.

Still they persist, though their journey has lost all its significance. They have lost their idealism, their heroic aspiration, and they notice nothing as they move along. They are no longer a disciplined group of devoted idealists but only a struggling crowd of a few defeated, tired, and hopeless survivors who continue to trudge along and as such are symbolic of the essential truth of man's pilgrimage on this earth. They are dirty and shabby for they have been deprived of such common needs as soap, are broken in spirit and bent down physically.

Such is the ultimate end of all human enterprises; this is the essential truth of human life. Absorbed in their petty quarrels and tired and exhausted, frustrated and at bay, the travellers do not even hear the thunder, and even if they do so, they ignore its significance. The thunder is symbolic (as in T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land*) of spiritual regeneration and fertility, but they do not care for it. The extreme hoplessness of man at the end of life's journey is thus stressed. The urge and the enthusiasm for the inner meaning soon wear out, and disillusionment is so dark and deep that all hopes of inner illumination or spiritual regeneration are lost. Nothing, not even the thunder over the hills, can shake off human apathy.

The disillusionment of the pilgrims is total: and they even come to doubt the very worth and significance of their journey. It seems to them to have been meaningless and futile. All their noble aspirations are forgotten, there is sorrow and suffering on every face, and they are conscious of the fact

that their actions have neither been great nor rare. Human life is like a tale told by an idiot signifying nothing.

9.4.2 Critical Analysis of the Text

The last line, so characteristic of Ezekiel's condensed aphoristic style, contains the moral of the lyric. Efforts at escape from the realities of human existence are futile. We must accept the limitations of our lot, and do our best within those limitations. Heroism means the acceptance of our lot in life and the doing of our best in the service of God and humanity. Says Chetan Karnani :the redemption has to be sought either through the world or in one's own mind. By putting the statement in very generalised terms, Ezekiel manages to have it in many ways. In a way, *home* also refers to his city where life has to be lived with all it kindred clamour. If any grace is to be sought, it can only be within the city's confines and not outside. 'Home' is the reality principal which must be acceptecd, faced and made the best of. This is the only sane and balanced way of life possible for man."

Ezekiel himself said that the lyric was written for, "personal theurapatic purposes", to analyse, examine and explore his own feelings of loss and deprivation. He wanted to find relief from personal tensions and frustrations and so he has expressed them in the lyric. He thus sought the psychological relief which results from pouring out our troubles and frustrations to an intimate, sympathetic friend. But this analysis and exploration has been done in generalised terms, so that the lyric has also become a metaphor for, a symbol or an allegory of, the human condition. The personal frustrations and tensions of the poet are thus seen to be also those of humanity at large. The journey which is undertaken is symbolic of the poet's own quest for identity which is also the quest of most gifted and sensitive souls like him.

C.D. Narasimahah writes of the lyric, "but the way the poem develops is entirely original including possibly what he makes of the crowd and thunder in the last stanza but one; and *Home* in the last line of the poem is significantly reminiscent of the Four Quartets." The last stanza sums up the futility of much human enterprise: the word "gather" inherits all the poetic associations of the word from Herrick, Milton, W.B. Yeats and finds fulfilment in one who values his tradition and puts his own faith in the things of the spirit, both suggested by the words 'Home' and 'grace'.

The lyric also shows Ezekiel's mastery over poetic form. Right words have been used at the right place, there is almost Shakespearean felicity of expression, with hardly any false note or superfluity. Simplicity, economy and precision characterise the poet's diction. The mind is carried away in one sweep with a sense of musical delight. The rhyme-scheme is regular, the rhythm is accurate, and there is a fine fusion of subject amtter and poetic form. The slow incantatory music leaves a lasting impression on the mind. It is a great work of art from the pen of one of the greatest living Indan poets writing in English.

9.5 Self-assessment Questions

1. Discuss Nissim Ezekiel as a poet.

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2. Give critical appreciation of 'Enterprise'.

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3. Draw a life sketch of Nissim Ezekiel.

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4. What is the theme of the poem 'Enterprise'?

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9.6 Let Us Sum-up

'Enterprise' is one of the finest lyrics of Nissim Ezekiel. It was written in 1959, and forms one of the ten brilliant poems published the same year in *The Unfinished Man*, a collection of ten poems in which the poet's art achieves near perfection. It has thirty lines in all with a well marked rhyme scheme and incantatory music all its own.

It is a piece of literary composition with a hidden moral lesson. The writer may simply narrate the story or describe a commonplace episode, but the story and the episode have a hidden moral significance applicable to the human condition.

9.7 Review Questions

1. Give a brief biographical account of NissimEzekiel. Also discuss about his major works.
2. Discuss art and technique of Nissim Ezekiel.
3. Comment on the diction and versification of Nissim Ezekiel.
4. Assess Nissim Ezekiel's poem 'Enterprise'.

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UNIT-10

NISSIM EZEKIEL : *IN INDIA*

Structure

10.0 Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

1. know the background of Indian English Poetry,
2. have an account of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry,
3. know about the language and diction of Nissim Ezekiel,
4. get an introduction to *In India*,
5. get detailed explanation of *In India*,
6. get critical material on the poem *In India*.

10.1 Introduction

Ezekiel is the most outstanding Indian poet, writing in English today. He has published six anthologies of verse --*A Time to Change; Sixty Poems; The Third; The Unfinished Man; The Exact Name;* and *The Hyns in Darkness and Poster Poems*--besides a large number of poems published in literary journals and magazines from time to time and not yet collected and brought together. He is a man of varied tastes and interests and pre-occupations. Besides teaching poetry and

prosody at the University of Bombay, he also edits a number of literary journals, writes reviews, and has also a large body of literary and art criticism to his credit.

10.2 A Brief Survey Of Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry

During a long creative span covering over 28 years, Nissim Ezekiel has published six collections of his poems, besides a number of poems in different journals, periodicals and literary magazines. A brief survey of this large body of poetry is essential for a proper understanding of the poet's art, of his major themes, and of the evolution of his genius.

1. A Time to Change, 1952

A *Time to Change* is a remarkable collection of poems for a youngman in his twenties. The title is appropriate, the young poet had till then studied philosophy, but now he felt that poetry was his true vocation. He, therefore, felt an urge to change over to poetry, and the result was the collection under discussion.

The poems in this anthology reflect practically all the themes and interests that have engaged the attention of the poet upto that time.

It shows that the poet considered poetry to be a way of life, a continuous flow, something which is an integral part of life. Hence his pronouncement that, "*Poetry is elusive, to write a poem is comparatively easy*". All his six collections of poems, and poems published separately, are related to one another, and form one organic whole. An early poem throws light on a latter one because for him poetry is a constant flow like life itself. Secondly, even this early collection brings out his fine sense of structure, a logical evolution of theme step by step, a logical progression from start to finish. This is best seen in the title poem, *A Time to Change*. It is a long poem divided into five sections. It reveals the poet's frustration and his quest for identity and his faith that this identity is to be sought in life and not outside it. It can be achieved only through marital bliss and human relationships. But it also brings out his social concerns, his social ideal, his genuine sympathy for the tormented and suffering humanity. The poet constantly moves between two poles--quest for personal identity and concern for the people. These were always to remain the central themes of Ezekiel's poetry. From this point of view, *A Time to Change* is a very important poem.

Indeed like the Metaphysical poets of England of the 17th century, like T.S. Eliot and others in the modern age, Ezekiel also believes that, "all art is based on the conflict and contrast of opposites", and the poet should try to show how these opposites can be reconciled. This is clearly seen in poems like *An African Mask* in this collection. The collection also brings out his psychological interests, and his unusual gift of sketching the portraits of individual human beings. From sketching the portrait of others, he again and again returns to his own self, as is seen in the following extract from, *On Meeting a Pedant*:

Words, looks, gestures, everything betrays

The Urquiet mind, the emptiness within.

Sunlight swarms around him and the summer

Evenings melt in rich fatness on his tongue

But he is rigid .....

Give me touch of men and given me smell of

Fornication, pregnancy and spices,

But spare me words as cold as print, insidious

Words, dressed in evening clothes for drawng rooms.

This gift of portraiture is seen at his best in poems like *A Visitor* included in his collection of poems entitled *Sixty Poems*. But it is also to be noticed in many of the poems of this anthology. The lines quoted above also show his disgust for the futile conversation of polite society. He finds such genteel conversation dull and stupid, and feels bored in the company of such peopole. This disgust is still more clearly seen in *The Double Horror* where he denounces mass civilisation and regrets the loss of minority culture. This urban theme finds an ironic treatment in the following lines:

Posters selling health and happiness in bottles,

Larger returns for small investments, in football pools

Or self-control, six easy lessons for a pound,

Holidays in Rome for writing praise of toothpastes.

Time to Change is an early volume and it has its faults. There is much that is trivial and prosaic. But it also reveals the great poet of the future. *Ezekiel's* major themes are all present here, and there is remarkable structural skill, metrical ability and immense variety, creditable for a youngman in his twenties.

2. Sixty Poems, 1953

Time to Change was a precocious collection and it was expected that the next collection which followed a year later would show greater maturity and artistic control. Unfortunately in *Sixty Poems* there is a fall in standards; the promise held out by the earlier volume has not been kept. Much that is trivial and prosaic has been included. This may be accounted for by the fact that many of the poems were written at a much earlier date, and like Wordsworth, the poet did not have enough of artistic judgment to exclude them. All the same, the collection has immense variety, it shows a widening of the poet's interests, and organisation of material, the craftsmanship, is much superior.

A number of influences have gone into the shaping of these poems, the predominant being that of W.B. Yeats; the Metaphysical poets, like Herbert, William Blake, William Carlos Williams. Ezekiel has not yet found his authentic voice, echoes from other poets are too many, though they might have crept in unconsciously.

However, the collection begins with the brilliant *A Poem of Dedication* which may be regarded as the poet's poetic manifesto, his poetic programme for time to come.

The poet is not over-ambitious, his objectives are modest. He does not want God-like super-human powers, he does not care for the ascetic ideal, nor does he desire to be saint-like in his charity, nor the despotic power of a tyrant. He wants to be a poet of human relationships, and write poems which might be useful in 'the common hour'. He thus wants to serve humanity in his own humble way.

Human-relationship has remained his chief concern throughout his career.

There are a number of poems which deal with a situation in which the poet's protagonist involves himself in difficulties, and does not know how to extricate himself from them. *Situation* and *A Short Story* are examples. They deal with a romantic love situation, but end in failure in one way or the other. In the *Situation* there is much innocent conversation, but it all ends in seduction, and the 'protagonist is disillusioned'. *A Short Story* narrates the failure in love with a Spanish girl, an affair which seemed to be so promising in the beginning, and this is so because the protagonist does not know the art of coutship.

Ezekiel's high conception of his own vocation is voiced in a number of poems of this volums also. In *Creation* he compares the act of composing a poem to God's act of creating the universe. The dancing minute or the moment of inspiration is all important, for once the inspiration is there any experience can be translated into a poem *In The Stuffed Owl* he tells as that when the poets' write without inspiration they are stuffed as so many Indian poets writing in English are. The result is much inanity and triviality. *In The Company I Keep* such poetasters are exposed and ridiculed. However, all this does not mean that for Ezekiel poetry is all inspiration, it is also a difficult craft which has to be mastered with painstaking efforts.

3. The Third, 1959

After a gap of over five years Ezekiel came out with his third volume of verses, and called it simply *The Third*. It shows greater maturity than the previous collection, and foreshadows the mature poet of the next publication, *The Unfinished Man*. The singing line is used with great mastery and singleness of purpose, and the ease with which appropriate words come to him and fall in their place are a sufficient proof of his maturity.

The volume reveals Ezekiel to be a great poet of human relations. He is in favour of an integrated personality, a perfect fusion of body, mind and heart. This is clearly seen in one of the finest lyrics of this collection *Wisdom*. There is a fine incantatory refrain, which lingers long in the memory, as also a perfect integration of verse-movement and theme. In another fine lyric the *Declaration* he shows a Donne-like concern for the body, and stresses that our natural instincts and impulses must be gratified.

The observation of birds also reminds him of the awkwardness of the human male during his first love-encounter.

The plight of the weaker sections of society also engages the poet's attention and a number of poems reveal his sympathy for them as in *Episode*. Sex continues to be a predoiminant theme. However, he does not deal merely with the physical aspects of sex and the human anatomy, but sex is also spiritualised and sublimated as is seen to best advantage in a number of lyrics of the volume. He talks of sex and human desires without any inhibition but also without ever growing vulgar or coarse. The physical and the spiritual go hand in hand. The poet must see things as they are, even the ordinary and common-place, and realise their hidden significance, and also reveal it to others. Hence he treats women as things and grows ecstatic about them as about other beauties of nature.

There are also a number of fine lyrics on religion and God expressing his faith in meditation and solitude, as in *Prayer*. He believes in God and the consolation and comfort which religion brings. The

inner music of the soul seems to give him greatest solace.

Thus in the volume there is immense variety, a deepening of psychological insights and widening of interests, as well as a fuller comand on language and versification.

4. The Unfinished Man, 1960

This collection has only ten poems but all the ten are brilliant. They were all written during the year 1959. The volume was immediately popular, ran into a second edition, brought name and fame to the poet, and earned the following tribute from Adil Jussawala, *"the most perfect book of poems written by an Indian English..... Ezekiel at his most honest and lyrical best."* The poet has acquired perfect mastery over his craft, and there is much greater metrical skill and music and melody. The slow incantatory music leaves a permanent impression on the mind. The epigraph is taken from Yeats', *Dialogue of Self and Soul*, and like Yeats' poem, the volume is Ezekiel's affirmatin of life, his everlasting "Yea to life".

The Urban theme appears in a number of poems and the life of Bombay with its ugliness, neurosis, loneliness and frustration is realistically and intimately rendered in poems like *Urban': 'A Morning Walk*; *Case Study*: and *Love Sonnet*. The poet had himself experienced that life and so his rendering of it is characterised by authenticity and immediacy of appeal. Frequent use was made of symbols like 'marsh' to suggest the 'living hell' which Bombay seems to the poet. In these poems the city, "like a passion burns", but by the time of the 'Island' he seems to have developed greater tolerance towards, 'the kindred close at hand'. He seems to accept it in a spirit of calm resignation. In the "Case Study" Ezekiel seems to be nursing his own despair.

The last two stanzas of the poem, in particular, are auto-biographical and refer to Ezekiel's own too frequent change of jobs. *Events* and *Enterprise* are also auto-biographical in nature. They bring out fully his lyrical gift and his ability to use the right word in the right place.

Ezekiel's mastery of his craft is a rare thing in Indian poetry in English.

5. The Exact Name. 1965

The title of the volume is appropriate for in several of its twenty poems, the poet examines the nature and function of poetry, its defining process, the way in which by its images and symbols it gives exact names to things and to human emotions. It is only poetry which, through its images and symbols, can give exactness to our concepts.

Thus the volume shows a widening of the range and interest of Ezekiel's poetry. He now seeks poetry in "the ordinariness of most events", like Wordsworth, and also like Wordworth sometimes gets tedius and trivial. However, most of the poems reveal new insights and new capabilities. His interest in the human situation and human relationships continue, and he tries, *"to elevate the commonplace to the poetic and succeeds substantially."* This is clearly seen in *A Warning* which shows a keen interest in the human for whom the warning is intended.

The Visitor, *The Virginal* and *A Woman Observed* are other poems which Ezekiel's interest in the human situation, in the "oridnariness of most events", and the way in which Ezekiel idealises and universalises the commonplace by his controlled and disciplined treatment. The poet's human interests are uppermost in brilliant lyrics like *Night of the Scorpion*, and the situation continues to be ordinary

and commonplace. Telling details and conflicting incidents provide tensions, suspense, and a hectic drama, all showing the hand of a skilled master.

The same human concern and the same exaltation of the trivial is also seen in 'Poetry Reading' and in *Art Lecture*. Ezekiel's ability of making poetry out of the ordinary is indeed immense. Ezekiel has now attained his authentic voice, and this gives new strength to his poetry.

The voume also brings out the poet's love of simplicity. In *Simplicity* he appeals to simplicity to help him write of ordinary events and situations without affectation or artificiality. This is also the theme of *A Conjugation*, in which in the form of a classroom lesson stress is laid on the need to end all pretensions and affectations.

Poet, Lover, Bird-watcher, one of the finest lyrics in the collection, has a slightly different theme. Through a clever association of ideas, the poet shows that good poetry is also a process of long waiting like loving and bird-watching. The poet must also wait and watch for the right moment of inspiration and the right word, like the lover and the bird-watcher. "The best poets wait for words"; the best poet should speak only when his spirit moves, i.e. when he is really inspired.

10.3 Language And Diction

Nissim Ezekiel has high conception of his chosen calling and has thought long and deep over its various aspects, difficulties and problems. In his considered view, poetry is not a matter of inspiration alone; good poetry is the result of painstaking efforts on the part of the poet. The best poets wait patiently for words,and they write only at the right moment when the right words come to them. Coleridge defined poetry as the use of right words at the right place, and this definition clearly brings out Ezekiel's own practice. *He is a painstaking artist who tries to use the best possible words for his purposes.* Pursued with sincerity and devotion, art can be elevated to such remedial heights when, *dead can hear, the blind recover sight.* Words are carefully chosen both with reference to their sense and their sound. All superfluity is avoided and terseness and condensation achieved. The result is that many of his lines are aphoristic, epigrammatic, and are easily remembered. "The best poets wait for words," "Home is where we have to gather grace"; "cities fresh as brides", are only a few instances of such condensed statements chosen at random. *Ezeiel is economical in his use of language, but he is never obscure.* Clarity is the virtue which he prizes above all else, and condensation never is at the cost of clarity.

Simplicity in language and diction characterises Ezekiel's poetry. The use of archaic, obsolete, out of the way and grandiloquent words is carefully avoided. Even philosophical and theological subjects are dealt with simplicity and clarity. For him communicative efficacy is the test of great poetry. Ezekiel has criticised the heavy vo cabulary and eschewed the grandiloquence characteristic of the type of poetry Aurobindo wrote. Moreover, he never employs the poetic diction already grown outdated and is sharply aware of the blend of sense and sound in poetry.

Ezekiel has stressed the importance of the contemporary idiom. "You cannot write good poetry", he said, "in a language which is not alive." He is aware of the nature of words, their contemporaneity, their meaning, phonetic associations and inner potency. Various words put together in the scheme of a poem create a pattern of music and rehearse the rhythm of real exsperience. He strongly affirms that only the modern idiom can stand the tough, critical taste-an idiom which is the

product of the much talked about interaction between prose and verse. "Tone, vocabulary, diction, sound, all need precision in a poem," says Ezekiel, "if the form as a whole is to be strong and not an approximation of some casual sense of it in the poet." More and more he has tended to use a casual way of utterance and contemporary words, idioms and phrases.

Ezekiel is not an innovator or an experimenter with language. He does not coin or compound words. *He uses words from the common, everyday vocabulary but by his use imparts to them a new meaning and new emotive significance*. Simple words are turned into metaphors, images and symbols according to need. Even seemingly prosaic words acquire poetic, overtones from the context in which they are used, and thus there is artistic modification and recreation. Ezekiel stresses the right of the poet to impart new significance to words, to reform them poetically in the following words, 'I think it is true that a poet must have the right to change and recreate language, but it is not true that this cannot be done by foreigners. In my opinion, it is not essential that a good poet should change and recreate the language, but if he aspires to be a great poet, he is likely to attempt the task. A poet acquires the right to change and recreate language by arriving at the existing possibilities."

Ezekiel exploits to the full the music that is in words as well as imparts to them an added vitality and expressiveness. He has thus increased the expressive range of the language and modified the meaning of individual words, added new significance to them even though he writes in a foreign tongue.

English is foreign because it is not an Indian language, but Ezekiel uses it like a lord and master. It may also be noted that he could not have written in any other language, for his knowledge of Marathi was an indifferent one, and he had no knowledge of Hebrew at all. We have already noted above his use of 'Pidgin' or 'Babu English', and also that in his more recent verse he does not hestitate to use common vernacular words. He tends more and more to use converstional idiom and language and thus capture the flavour of day to day Indian speech; which is also indicative of the Indian thought processes. Of the countless Indian poets writing in English, he is the one who best represents the national identity, and who best expresses the national aspirations and culture. It is a rare achievement indeed, and it entitles him to the rank of the greatest Indian poet writing in English.

10.4 Imagery And Symbolism

Simplicity is the cardinal virtue of Ezekiel's poetry, and decoration is reduced to the minimum. He is not an imagist poet in any sense. But this does not mean that imagery is entirely absent from his poetry. *He uses imagery, but he does so only sparingly, and when used, his images are not decorative, but strictly functional.* Certain images are frequently repeated and thus they acquire symbolic overtones and enable the poet to make the abstract concrete and easy to understand. Thus in *Enterprise*, the journey is a metaphor for the journey of life, it is also symbolic of the voyage into one's inner self, the voyage of self-exploration. 'Home symbolises the place where one lives, as also one's inner self. In *Night of the Scropion*, "flash of diabolic tail in the dark room", is symbolic of the evil that pervades the world and against which all created things have to wage an ever-continuing struggle and which can be overcome only by an integrated approach.

The woman, the city, and nature are the ever-recurring images in Ezekiel's poetry, and by repetition they acquire symbolic overtones. They are the key-images but round these are usually woven a number of associative images, and in this way we get a cluster of images which enlarge

expressive range and vigour of the language. There is frequent recurrence of the image of the pagan woman who is a great beast of sex. She is symbolic of mean passion, earthly corruption, and defilement. The image of woman as a sexual beast appears again and again. The poet dwells heavily upon the various organs of the female body: the breasts and thighs, flesh and hair, belly and torso, bone and marrow, lung and liver and eyes--all enticing and repelling at one and the same time.

10.5 Versification

His poetry reveals a gradual evolution of his skill as a metrical artist. In the beginning,

In *Description* we get a unique state of mind in as much as the poet concentrates on a single image, that of hair, in its multiple associations:

> I will begin-but how should I begin?
>
> With hair, your hair,
>
> remembered hair,
>
> touched, smelt, lying silent there
>
> upon your head, beneath your arms
>
> and then between your thighs a wonder
>
> of hair, secret
>
> in light and in darkness
>
> bare, suffering with joy
>
> kisses light as air.

The image of hair is infinitely beautiful. It acquires a particular force in the specific context of the poem. He considers this image with a touch of wonder and recalls in turn, the other constitutents of the human anatomy--"head", "arms" and "thighs" where they sprout. The opposite image, the image of the virtuous woman, also appears in his poetry, but it remains thin and shadowy and fails to come to life.

His poetry reveals a gradual evolution of his skill as a metrical artist. In the beginning, he uses conventional meters and stanza-forms. Even in his first anthology, *A Time to Change*, Ezekiel not only made many experiments with prose rhythms, but also showed a fine sense of metrical ability. He showed a penchent for the singing line, of which he became the undisputed master by the time of *The Unfinished man*. All the poems in this collection, "carry the mind away in one sweep with a sense of musical delight". The musical, metrical line used in all the poems tends to create a somnolent effect. All the poems are written with rhythmical accuracy. Ezekiel also makes an effective use of rhyme as Eliot did in his Sweeney poems. In every poem, there is a different rhyme scheme used with great success, creating a fine fusion of subject matter and poetic form. It is because of this that we tend to agree with Dryden that the rhymes have suggested the thought, yet we are grateful for it. It is because of all the above factors that the slow, incantatory reading of the poems leaves a lasting impact on the mind

(Karnani):

In this anthology a poem like the *Island* does not use rhyme, but gives the effect of it, thus showing greater technical skill achieved by the poet. The poet shows a mastery of song which he was never to match again. David McCutchion compares him to Auden and writes, "Mr Ezekiel achieves a laconic precision in which every word drops casually into place, yet fits perfectly into a strict scheme of rhyme and metre. The virtuosity and technical brilliance strongly suggest Auden..... we find the same deft precision, the same mastery of a colloquial idiom, the personifications and generalised efforts, the stock phrases in new contexts, the juxtaposition of the common place and the erudite, the same compactness, startling appropriateness."

In his more recent verse Ezekiel has given up the traditional verseforms and the singing line, and has tended more and more to use free verse and has also written some prose-poems. Still a late poem like the 'Island' shows his predilection for rhyme, despite his use of free verse. The poem is divided into stanzas of five lines each without any rhyme scheme but has an obvious musical design. The mood of compromise could well have been expressed in singing lines but the poet is able to create a musical appeal without recourse to metrical pattern. It is true that Ezekiel is basically a poet with a strong sense of rhythm. "In rhythm", says Ezekiel, "I am at the flowing, the direct and the informal or conversatinal." Truly, he succeeds in creating a musical pattern in any type of poem he writes.

According to Paul Vergheese, "Ezekiel's use of free verse is not an escape from the restraints imposed by a fixed form. He is well versed in the handling of metrical verse. In his free verse we find a rhythm that suits the emotional mood of the poem; the poet seeks a stricter discipline and arrives at what according to Marjore Boulton is the third kind of free verse--verse with a more colloquial style, suitable for the expression of difficult thought or sometimes of cynicism, of the man-of-world attitude." In *Night of the Scorpion* the success of the poet lies in the careful variation of rhythm which helps him to achieve different effects. The rhythms of the speaking voice shift with the sense, in a manner usual in free verse. The change of rhythm in the following lines is intended to achieve an incantatory effect which it does:

May he sit still, they said,

May the sins of your previous birth

be burned away tonight, they said.

May your suffering decrease

the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.

May the sum of evil

Be balanced in this unreal world

against the sum of good.

Ezekiel writes in a foreign tongue but his technical perfection is amazing. He is, "perhaps the first Indian poet consistently to show that craftmanship is as important to a poem as its subject matter." He has left behind him a large corpus of poetry that is major by all standards.

10.6 Introduction to The Text

Ezekiel is essentially a poet with a well-marked Indian sensibility. He had first hand knowledge of the Indian scene and has feelingly rendered it in a number of poems. He was a city dweller, he was touched to the quick by the squalor, dirt and misery, the exploitation and corruption which he witnessed everywhere in a city like Bombay. Sarojni Naidu, too, understood the Indian scene, but she concentrated on its romantic, picturesque and affluent aspects. Ezekiel, on the other hand, gives us the other side of the picture, so to say. His treatment of Indian life is characterised by down to earth realism. This is clearly brought out by a number of poems, particularly: *In India* and a *Very Indian Poem in Indian English*.

10.6.1 Detailed Explanation of the Text

In India is rather a long poem in four parts or movements, each part containing a varied number of stanzas and lines. The rhyme-scheme differs from stanza to stanza. The language, though polished and dignified, is simplicity itself. In the first part the poverty, the squalor, the heat and ugliness of an Indian city is vivified and described through a few telling words following each other in quick succession. The unique relationship between literature and environment is clearly shown. Ezekiel minces no words as regards the misery, the squalor, the wretchedness, the poverty and other discomforts of life, at least for the poor, in an Indian city like Bombay:

Always in the sun's eye,

Here among the eggars,

Hawkers, pavement sleepers,

hutment dwellers, slums, etc.

Dead souls of men and gods,

Burnt out mothers, frightened

Virgins, wasted child

And tortured animals

All in noisy silence

Suffering the place and time.

I ride my elephant of thought

A Cezanne slung around my neck.

These lines have the same momentum of syntax as in 'Barbaric city, with slums'. But the lines present a fiely juxtaposed scene of the oppressed section of Indian society.

The last line 'A Cezanne slung around my neck' is important. Michael Garman has rightly said : "Ezekiel was once an art critic of the Times of India and his use of Cezanne should surely be interpreted to the hilt : for Cezanne, impressions were of first importance (both logically and in the development of his technique); then formalisation had to be achieved, but without the loss of distortion of any

of the impressionistic data. Thus Ezekiel is not out to fit the discordant facts of life into a distorting framework; he will take each on its own merits and delicately outline it in poetic form. Thus, there has been an obvious relationship between poetry and painting in the case of Ezekiel. In the above lines, he heaps up a collection of impressions to give the totality of the picture. It is the influence of the painter Cezanne that has led to the greater development of the pictorial quality in Ezekiel's verse."

The second part of this poem talks about the secular state and the way religions live in it:

The anglo-Indian gentlemen

Drinking whisky in some Jewish den

With Muslims slowly creeping in

Before or after prayers.

The third part is a characteristically blunt satire on the low status of women in India. They are treated as minor citizens, while the men, under western influence, do what they please. This discriminatory treatment of the sexes is clealy brought out in the following lines:

The wives of India sit apart,

They do not drink,

They do not talk,

Of course, they do not kiss.

The men are quite at home

among the foreign styles

(what fun the flirting is!)

I, myself, decorously,

press a thigh or two in sly innocence.

The party is a great success.

But flirtation is a luxury which is allowed ony to men, and not to women.

The last part provides an ironic contrast to the earlier remark of someone. "The atmosphere corrupt/And look at our wooden wives." The conflict of cultures is brilliantly and irronically depicted in the last movement where the English boss tries to seduce his Indian secretary and finds her blouse a happy hunting ground in contrast to the standards of Indian morality:

At the second meeting,

In the large apartment

After cold beer and the music on,

She sat in disarray.

The struggle had been hard

And not altogether successful.

Certainly the blouse

Would not be used again.

But with true British courtesy

He lent her a safety pin

Before she took the elevator down.

These lines show a gift for suggestive, as well as ironic perception. The women think the Englishman will offer her all the attraction of western culture. What she gets is his boorish lust which he tries to force on her. This is clearly shown by the words, "The struggle had been hard" and, "the blouse would not be used again."

10.6.2 Critical Analysis of the Text

The poem ranks very high and has received much critical attention. Thus Anisur Rehman commenting on its imagery writes, "*In India* the imagery is not only vivid and graphic but also kaleidoscopic. The images swarming in succession engage the attention of the reader till a complete image of an Indian city emerges before his eyes. The poet appears to be interested more in wholes than in parts and working with a series of images, succeeds here in creating an illusion of real city. The images do not vary widely from one another but represent a class by themselves. The poet's awareness of their interrelationship results ultimately in the composition of a complete scene, making explicit the pattern of life in one of the Indian cities."

In his earlier volumes, the poet has transmitted his awareness of the sprawling large city and its dark attributes, but later he developed a sardonic view of the city. Lately, he has come to accommodate with and own the urban scene with the new awareness of its reality. We may notice the feeble hints at it in *In India* but a clear testimony of his shift in attitude is to be found in his recent collection, entitled *Hymns in Darkness*.

In India the imagery is integral to the total design of the poem, and is in sharp contrast to the purity and tranquility of nature-imagery he has used elsewhere. Anisur Rehman also stresses the poet's use of irony to highlight the cultural contrasts which are such glaring facts of Indian life, particularly in the city. He writes, "what strikes most is the ironic portrayal of the various facts of life as lived in our country. There are four parts in the poem of which the first part presents the suffering mass of humanity. The second is conceived more bitterly:

The Anglo-Indian gentlemen

Drinking whisky in some Jewish den

With Muslims slowly creeping in

Before or after prayers.

The part of the poem presents the pseudo-modern Indians leading fashionable lives in the cities. In the concluding part of the poem, there is a frank delineation of artificial air and snobbery of

the English boss and the Indian lady. They keep talking of 'all the changes India needs' and finally indulge in sex, a suitable end to the whole affair. The poem is damagingly ironic and truly representative of a certain class in the country. It gives us a vivid sense of the Indian milieu, its traditions and cultures. The city scene has been perceived in all its tragic majesty and through the use of vivid pictorial imagery and ironic contrasts it is versified for the reader also. East-west tensions-the conflict of the two cultures-are also brought out by the episode in which the English boss tries to seduce his charming Indian secretary. The 'Wooden' Indian wives, who did not flirt, are well contrated with "women bosom semibare" belonging to other nations with different cultural norms, their "semi-bare bosoms" being suggestive of their lax morality.

10.7 Self Assessment Questions

1. Give a brief account of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry.

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2. Comment on the language and diction of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry.

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3. Comment on the Imagery and Symbolism in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry.

   .....

   .....

4. Comment on the versification in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry.

   .....

   .....

10.8 Let Us Sum Up

In India is rather a long poem in four parts or movement, each part containing a varied number of stanzas and lines. The rhyme-scheme differs from stanza to stanza. The language, though polished and dignified, is simplicity itself. In the first part the poverty the squalor, the heat and ugliness of an Indian city is vivified through a few telling words following each other in quick succession. The unique relationship between literature and environment is clearly shown.

10.9 Review Questions

1. Give critical analysis of the poem *In India.*
2. Give detailed explanation of *In India*.
3. What is the theme of the poem *In India*.
4. Write a note on 'versification' in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry.

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UNIT-11

K.N.DARUWALA:
(I) *CROSSING OF RIVERS* (II) *THE MISTRESS*

Structure

11.0 Objectives

In this unit we shall introduce you to another of an Indian poet K.N. Daruwala who has been praised for his bitter satiric tone which is rather exceptional in Indian verse in English.

11.1 Introduction

11.1.1 K.N.Daruwala: A Biographical Sketch

Born in 1937 in Lahore Keki Nasserwanji Daruwala attended the Government College in Ludhiana for his higher education. After obtaining a Master's degree in English literature, he joined the police department. He is believed to have settled down in New Delhi, though we are not certain about this. While serving in the police departmant, he had been writing English poetry in which he has really made a name. He has written poetry in the English language, and done so with conspicuous success. We regard him as one of the major Indo-Anglian poets. He is not only fertile in ideas but he is one of

the masters of the English language.

Daruwalla published the following volumes of poems in the course of his literary career:

1. *Uner Orion*
2. *Appariton in April*
3. *Crossing of Rivers*
4. *Winter Poems*
5. *The Keeper of the Dead* and
6. *Landscapes*

He may not be a prolific poet but to have published six volumes of poems in the span of seventeen years is no mean achievement. However, what needs particularly to be pointed out is the fact that, in recognition of his literary work, he was honoured with the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1984.

11.1.2 Daruwala's Contribution to Indo-Anglian Poetry

Daruwalla is one of the most substantial modern Indo-Anglian poets. He has equalled Nissim Ezekiel's achievement in the field of poetry even though his themes and his style are entirely different. Daruwalla's poetry covers a wide range. He stands out amongst Indian-English poets for bringing to poetry a range of experience generally outside the embit or scope of poets. Daruwalla's poetry has brought to life the world of riot and curfew, sirens, warrants, men nabbed at night, lathi blows on cowering bodies, "the starch on your khakhi back', soda bottles and acid bulbs waiting on the roof-tops, and press communiques. Daruwalla's favourite images are those of violence, disease, and fire. Thus the first contribution which Daruwalla has made to Indo-Anglian poetry is his enlargement of its themes and his widening of its range of subjects.

The Ghaghra in Spate brings before our minds the actute distress and misery of the villagers who have to starve for days because of the flood in the Ghaghra and whose mud-and-straw cottages are swept away by the rushing waters. When the flood-waters retreat, the damage caused is even greater. Then the Ghaghra becomes really bitchy. *Pestilene* depicts the misery and distress caused by an epidemic like cholera. Persons affected by this disease are carried to hospitals on string-beds. There are frail bodies, frozen bodies, delirious bodies, and bodies lying supine of these beds. And yet the authorities do not admit that cholera has broken out in the city. They would give euphemistic names to this epidemic in order to reduce the horror in the minds of the people and to cover their own inefficiency. The doctors would say that there is no cholera but only diarrhea; or they would call it gastroenterities. There is a piece among the poems entitled *Raminations* in which the poet feels that this violence is an indication of the mass hatreds which prevail in the country. The poet here employs some horrifying serpent-imagery to emphasize the dangerouness of these mass hatreds. The poem entitled *The Epileptic* also shows Daruwalla's social sympathy and his compassion for the victims of disease.

The poem entitled *Graft* is a masterpiece of irony and satire. Not only have bribe-giving and

bribe-talking have but also the adulteration of foodstuffs and certain other malpractices. "To legalize a bastard you've to bribe the priest," says Daruwalla. People indulge in all kinds of fishy deals; and even decent chaps indulge in adultery. But the stars, under which these people were born, indicate that they would have long lives and would flourish in every respect. The life-line of such persons extends to the elbow almost; and, as for children, each of the corrupt men would be blessed with nine ! Then there is the poem entitled *In the Tarai* in which the poet says that bandits are of course everywhere and that their occuption is to burn the homes of the villagers, to cut off the fingers of women in order to obtain the gold rings which they are wearing, and to snatch away the gold necklece from round their goitered necks. In describing these brutalities, Daruwalla uses his characteristic irony. The poem entitled *The People* is another of Daruwalla's trimphs in the field of irony and satire.

His imagery also covers a wide range. It is realistic and original, often strikingly original. And the imagery in his poetry is plentiful too. *The Ghaghra in Spate* is outstanding example of Daruwalla's realistic and original imagery. Here we are made to visualize the Ghaghra as looking like 'overstewed coffee' and then at night like 'a red weal across the spine of the land'. And the moon is red because she has menses. The poem entitled *In the Tarai* also contains original and yet realistic imegery. Apart from the imagery in the opening stanza, we have the vivid and perfectly realistic imegery of the bandits working havoc in the land. *Railroad Reveries* contains several vivid pictures, some of these unforgettable. There is sad-eyed bitch which, being tormented by the urchins on the platform, walks away with her head drooping and her eyes bored. There is a blind boy on the platform, walking from compartment to compartment of the train with his begging bowl to whom the poet would like to give a coin in charity but is unable to do so because of his indecision.

His poetry is the poetry of incident and event; and his mode is that of narration and description. The poem entitled *Routine* describes an incident (a confrontation between the police and a mob of agitators); but it concludes with a welcome piece of instruction. We here learn that much of the police action against a mob has been well rehearsed in the past, and that everything is done according to a plan. The poem entitled *Death by Burial* contains interesting events and yet it concludes with a valuable moral which is that a communal riot can break out over any issue even if there has been unanimity among both the Hindus and the Muslims in most matters. The poem *Evangelical Eva* contains interesting material, and yet it too contains a valuable piece of information about the essentials of human nature, namely that self-sacrifice and a life of renunciation may not always be appreciated. *Pestitence* contains ample action. Cholera has broken out and patients are being taken to a hospital in large numbers. But there is a point which the poet wishes to make that the authorities would bot admit that cholera had broken out. Even the doctors in a hospital would give to cholera another name, diarrhea or gastro-enteritis. All this is something special about Daruwalla's poetry.

11.1.3 Self Assessment Questions

1. By which epidemic do the masses in *Pestilene* actually suffer from ?

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2. What imagery does the poet employ in *Ruminations* to indicate mass hatred ?

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3. Which of Daruwalla's poems condemns bribe giving and bribe taking ?

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.....

4. What imagery of the river Ghaghra does the poet give in the *Ghaghra in Spate* ?

.....

.....

5. What is the moral of the poem *Death by Burial* ?

.....

.....

11.2 *Crossing of Rivers*

11.2.1 Glossary

ford it : cross it.

as the River coughs and eddies - As the current of the river produces sounds similar to the coughing sound of a human being. The word 'eddy' means the whirling of the water.

And converses with the mud: and the river holds a communications with the mud at its bottom.

Placid : calm

A water skin : a leather bag by holding on to which one can float on the surface of the water. The word 'skin' has here been used for a bag made of leather. If a leather bag is emptied of water and made air-tight at its mouth, it would float on the water and would be able even to carry the weight of a man.

Or the tail of a bloated buffalo:One can float on the surface of the water by holding on to the tail of a buffalo. A buffalo can swim through water, and one can support oneself by keeping a firm grip on a buffalo's tail. The word 'bloated' means swollen or inflated with air.

That stretch of silt: that portion of the river where the river has thrown up a lot of mud and other substances.

Bubbing : going up and down

clotting weed : weed clinging

Grit : stamina

Silhouettes : persons who are not clearly visible or perceptible

Oozing : coming out in tiny bits and drops

Fans your face: blows some air in order to refresh you

The ring of forth: the circle formed by the froth coming from your mouth

11.2.2 Critical Analysis

This poem describes a situation in which a drowing man is rescued by a fisher girl. There are times when the current of a river is very brisk and swift; and there are times when the flow of the water is so slow that one cannot even judge in which direction the river is flowing. But whatever the season, a river has always to be crossed. Sometimes a man may cross a river on foot because the water is hardly waist-deep or because the surface of the water is almost in contact with the mud at the bottom. Sometimes the current of water is so tranquil that it hardly seems to be moving and you have to ask the boatman which way the current is going.

In every season
Comes a crossing of rivers.
At times you just ford it
waist-wet
with a brown weed
clinging to your thighs
as the river coughs and eddies
and converses with the mud.
And something in your dreams-
the waters so placid,
glassed with green moss
that you have to ask the boatman
which way the current flows-

There are occasions when blood seeks excitement and adventure. On such an occasion a young man may jump into the river and, if he finds it difficult to swim, he may catch hold of the tail of a fat-bodied buffalo to keep himself afloat.

you take the plunge
and as slivers of glass
explode like flying fish
you close your eyes
clinging to a water skin

or the tail of a bloated buffalo

and lunge and toss along the

rolling spine of the river

Somewhere along that stretch of silt

a cry goes up as someone spots you,

your head bobbing along the waters

like a coconut.

If a fisher-girl happens to see this man struggling to keep himself afloat, she would scream in order to attract somebody else's attention to his predicament. She may see his head alternatively rising above the surface of the water and sinking below it like a coconut. The fisher-girl may then quickly swim towards him and give him a push towards the river-bank. By this time a group of people may have gathered on the river-bank in response to the alarm which had been raised by the fisher-girl. The fisher-girl would then ask the crowd to move back a few steps so as to let the rescued man breathe properly. She would fan his face in order to make some more oxygen available to him. She may even wipe off the froth from his mouth. and, when he opens his eyes and looks into the distance, he may not even be able to see the rock from which he had taken the plunge into the river. (He has, in any case, crossed the river all right even though he had been on the verge of drowing).

Then a fisher-girl propels you-

towards the bank

and clears your mouth of clotting weed and grit

and tells the crowd of silhouettes

pressing around you-

mud oozing thick

in the spaces between their toes-

to stand back;

and fans your face,

sends a shaft of cold oxygen through her gills

and wipes the ring of froth from your mouth

with her wet mouth.

And when you gaze across

you can't even see the rock

from where you took the plunge.

This short poem describes a situation in which a man faces a danger though the danger is ultimately averted by the initiative taken by a fisher-firl. The poetry of Daruwalla has been described as

the poetry of action and incident. In this poem we have both incident and action. The first one-third of this short poem is just as introduction to the main situation which forms the substance of the poem. Then the incident happens. A young fellow, seeking excitement, jumps into the river to prove his mettle. However, he finds himself in grave danger because he cannot cope with the fast current of the water. He would have been drowened if it had not been for the intiative taken by a fisher-girl who had, by a sheer chance, caught notice of his head bobbing up and down in the water like a coconut.

11.2.4 Self Assessment Questions

1. What is the situation described in the poem ?

   .....

   .....

2. Find out examples of alliteration in the poem.

   .....

   .....

3. Why do you have to ask the boatman which way the current flows ?

   .....

   .....

4. Explain 'water skin' and 'a bloated buffalo'.

   .....

   .....

5. What is the mental condition of the rescued man in the end ?

   .....

   .....

11.3 *The Mistress*

11.3.1 Glossary

My mistress is half-caste: she is descended from ancestors of different races

Genealogical tree : family tree

A Muslim midwife : a Muslim woman who attended upon the birth of a child in the family at some stage

The genetic lane : family history

Babus : clerks

No one believes me.....their one-night contributions: the poet is here speaking about the En-

glish language which he designates as his mistress. The English language began to be spoken in India long, long ago. There was a stage at which only such persons as Muslim mid-wives and Goan cooks used to speak this language in their own broken and imperfect manner. Then more and more people started speaking this language. Office clerks began to speak it in their characteristic ungrammatical way, mixing up the tenses and leaving their sentences incomplete. The language spoken by them came to be known as "Babu English". Then there were the highly educated men like the professors of English who made their own contribution to the development of this language in India.

Bludgeon : hit

Argot : slang; words which are frequently used in conversational English but not it standard English.

Rococo : highly ornamental

Which had ferented : which had been taking shape

Blister-bubble : a mixed kind of stuff

Flashes her bangles and her tinsel: makes a show of her cheap but gaudy ornaments

Vindaloo : an ordinary, common dish made from potatoes

Pomfret : a costly kind of fish eaten by rich people

Cashew-arrack : a kind of wine made from cashew-nut which are plentiful in the South

Bugger me : deal with me severely

If they got scent of this: if they came to know of it

11.3.2 Critical Analysis

It is an interesting poem about the English language as it has developed in India. English is now well-established in this country as a medium for the writing of poetry by the Indian; and this kind of poetry has come to be known as 'Indo-Anglian" poetry, with the writers of this kind of poetry being known as "Indo-Anglian" poets. Daruwalla is himself an Indo-Anglian poet; and he has here written a satirical poem with regard to the language which he himself employs in the writing of his poem. Daruwalla jokingly assigns to the English language as spoken and as written in this country the label "my mistress"; and he says that his mistress comes from a family in which the blood of several races and religions has mingled, and to which babus and professors of English have also made their contributions.

No one believes me when I say

my mistress is half-caste. Perched

on the genealigical tree somewhere

is a Muslim midwife and a Goan cook.

But she is more mixed than that.

Down the genetic lane, babus

and professors of English

have also made their onenight contributions.

His mitress can easily be recognized by the way in which she speaks her consonants. She speaks the consonants in such a manner that he feels as if she had given him a severe blow. Her jargon and her latest slang are available in dictionaries; and she speaks as if she had tried to sob but been prevented from doing so by some impediment in her throat.

You can make her out the way she speaks;

her consonants bludgeon you;

her argot is rococo, her latest slang

is available in classical dictionaries.

She sounds like a dry sob

stuck in the throat of darkness.

In the mornings her mouth feels sour because of the dreams which had been brewing in her head during the night. His love for her survives from night to night even though he has to toil hard to continue loving her.

In the mornings her mouth is sour

with dreams which had fermented during the night.

When I sleep by her side

I can almost hear the blister-bubble

grope for a mouth through which to snarl.

My love for her survives from night to night,

even though each time

I have to wrestle with her in bed.

People recognize her even in the streets; and they hiss at her in disapproval at the way she behaves.

In the streets she is known.

They hiss when she passes.

Despite all this, his mistress is a showy type of person who wears cheap but gaudy jewellery. She wears imitation jewellery, and she wears high heels even though her feet are covered with henna up to the ankles.

Despite this she is vain,

flashes her bangles and her tinsel;

wears heels even though her feet

are smeared up to the ankles with heena.

As for food, she does not stick to the ordinary, common dish which is made from potatoes. She is westernized in her tastes, and asks for roasted meat and grilled pomfrets. She makes no reference at all to the intoxicating drink which her father used to extract from cashew-nuts.

She will not stick to vindaloo, but talks

of roasts, pies, pomfrets grilled.

She speaks of contreau and not cashew

arrack which her father once distilled.

She is not Anglo-Indian. If the Demellos were to come to know about her, they would deal with him very, severely. She is not Goan, nor a Christian from Syria. She is Indian English, which is the language that Daruwalla himself makes use of.

No, she is not Anglo-Indian. The Demellos would

bugger me if they got scent of this,

and half body would turn into a bruise.

She is not goan, not Syrian Christian.

She is Indian English, the language that I use.

11.3.3 Self Assessment Questions

1. Who is the Mistress in the poem ?

.....

.....

2. What groups of poets does Daruwalla belong to ?

.....

.....

3. Why does the mistress belong to a mixed race ?

.....

.....

4. How does the poet describe the vanity of his 'mistress' ?

.....

.....

5. Suggest any other caption to this poem.

.....

.....

11.4 Let Us Sum Up

Thus we see that Daruwalla's concerns in his poetry are many. He has no pet themes. He has written poems on a wide range of subjects. He had a very broad outlook and, in his capacity as a police officer, has had many opportunities for observing life in India in almost all its manifestations. He has responded to almost everything that he has witnessed by writing a poem about it.

11.5 Review Questions

1. Make an assessment of K.N. Daruwalla's contribution to Indo-Anglian poetry.
2. What are the leading themes in Daruwalla's poetry and how does he deal with them ?
3. Comment on Daruwalla's depiction of Indian English as his '*Mistress*'.
4. Summarise in your own words the content of '*Crossing of Rivers*'.

11.6 Bibliography

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UNIT-12

KAMALA DAS :
(I) *AN INTRODUCTION* (II) *GHANSHYAM*

Structure

12.0 Objectives

We have selected two of Kamala Das representative poems *An Introduction* and *Ghanshyam*. We have given yoy 'glossary' and self assessment questions to make you understand the poems better.

12.1 Introduction

Women have been writing poetry in India since about 1000 B.C. on religious and secular

themes. Many examples of unconventionality are provided by bhakti women poets in different parts of the country. One such unconventional woman poet in our own times is Kamla Das who made her daring innovativeness at once felt in readers of Indian English leiterature with her poem. '*An Introduction*'. In this unit we shall introduce you to Kamla Das and her poetry.

12.2 About the Poet

12.2.1 Kamala Das: A Biographical Sketch

Kamala Das is her *non de plume* or pseudonym, and her real name is Madhavi Kutty. She was born on the 31st March, 1934 at Punnayarkulam in the coastal region of Malabar in the state of Kerala. She received her education largely at home and she came of a very orthodox and conservative family. Ironically her poetry is most unorthodox and almost revolutionary as compared to the environment and atmosphere in which she grew up.

She was married at the early age of fifteen, but her marriage proved an absolute failure. It was the failure of her marriage that compelled her to enter into extra-marital sexual relationship in search of the kind of love which her husband had failed to give her. She believed in marriage as an emotional and spiritual bond; and her husband's coldness in this respect led her to feel acutely dissatisfied and discontented in life. Her poetry is generally called confessional poetry because it is a record of her personal experiences, chiefly in the sphere of marriage and sex, though it certainly has a range and includes a few other aspects of her life too.

Kamala Das's poetic output is contained in four volumes of poems which include *Summer in Calcutta*, *The Descendants*, T*he Old Playhouse* and *Other poems*, and *Stranger Time*. She has written her autobiography to which she gave the title *My Story*. Although she has distinguished herself as an Indo-Anglian poet, showing an extraordinary command over the English language, she has also achieved eminence as a writer of short stories in her mother tongue (namely Malayalam) for which the Kerala Sahitya Akademi honoured her with an award in 1969.

Kamala Das has written a number of miscellaneous essays which, like her poems, have made her a controversial figure because of the views which she has expressed in them. Some of these essays bear the following titles: *I Studied All Men*; *What women Expect out of Marriage* and *What They Get*"; "*Why Not More than One Husband*"? and "*I Have Lived Beautifully*".

Kamala Das had long been settled in the city of Bombay. She had three grown-up children. She died on 31 May 2009 in Pune at the age of 75. In his condolence message Prime Minister Manmohan Singh paid glowing tributes to Das saying her poems focusing on womanhood and feminism, gained her recognition as one of the most noted of modern Indian poets.

12.2.2 A Feminist Poet

Kamala Das's poetry is essentially the poetry of a woman. This poetry centres round Kamala Das as a woman- as a wife, as a sexual partner for many men besides her husband, and as a mother. Her feminine sensibility is the motivating and governing force behind her poems; and it is this sensibility which has given to her poetry a disinctive character. Other women too have written poems showing their feminine sensibility; but Kamala Das is on of the pioneers in this respect and one of innovators.

Kamala Das's feminine sensibility appears most emphatically and forcefully in poems in which she has described the temperament and disposition of her husband. *The Old Playhouse* is one of the poems which are permeated by her feminine sensibility. Her feminine sensibility revolted against her husband's manner of making love of her. Only a bold woman would thus express her disgust with a husband who seeks only the gratification of his lust. In *The Sunshine Cat* Kamala Das's feminine sensibility compels her to describe her husband as a selfish and cowardly man who did not love her properly. Her husband, she says, had been treating her as a prisoner with only a yellow cat (or a streak of sunshine) to keep her company.

Kamala Das's feminine sensibility shows itself also in the two poems which she has written about the birth of a son to her. The poem entitled *Jaisurya* is an expression of a woman's most precious feelings when she is about to give birth to a child and subsequently when she has actually given birth to the expected child. The other poem is entitled *The White Flowers*.

The typical feminine themes, and even the images and symbols chosen by Kamala Das, make her poems distinctly feminine. She regards the human body, both male and female, as a rare possession, and a gift from God. Her poems are feminine in theme and feminine in tone. She is sensitive, sensuous, and sentimental. She is intensely emotional, sometimes emotional without restraint. For instance, her forgiving attitude in her poem entitled *Composition* is typical of the Indian feminine sensibility. In the poem she says that she has reached an age at which one forgives all and that she is ready to forgive friends and to forgive those who ruined friendship. Indeed, she has successfully blended fierce female protest and charming feminine sentiments in her poems.

Her poetry may be regarded as the poetry of protest. Her protest is directed against the injustices and the persecution to which women in India have always been subjected. In a poem entitled *The Conflagration*, she scolds the Indian women for thinking that their only function is to lie beneath a man in order to satisfy his lust. Here she tells the women that the world extends a lot beyond the six-foot frames of a husband. Thus her poetry serves a social purpose and a reformative function too. In this respect too her poetry differs from the poetry of most other women poets writing in English.

12.2.3 A Confessional Poet

Kamala Das is pre-eminently a confessional poet and, in this respect, she may be regarded as an outstanding Indo-Anglian poet comparable to the American Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. A confessional poet is one who takes the reader into confidence about his or her personal and private life, and reveals those facts of her life which an ordinary person, even if that person be a poet, would keep strictly to himself or herself because of the delicate nature of those facts. A confessional poet has to shed all of his or her inhibitions and restrictions and restraints which the social code and the conventions of society impose upon him or her.

Kamala Das has a lot to confess in her poetry, and she does so in the most candid manner conceivable. Indeed, her poetry has no precedent so far as her frankness and candour in revealing herself to the readers are concerned. She has expressed her intense desire to confess in a very graphic manner by saying that the she must 'striptease' her mind and that she must exude autobiography. Her confessions pertain to her role as a wife, as a mistress to relationship with her husband, and of her extra-marital sexual relationships. The themes of most of her poems are love or lust, and marriage. In dealing with these themes, she hides nothing, and in dealing with this subject-matter, she makes use of

language freely, without any scruples, and even unabashedly. The orthodox reader would even accuse her of being immodest, shameless, or brazen in her use of the language through which she lays bare the secrets of her private life. Her poetry is the poetry of introspection, of self-analysis, of self-explanation, and of self revelation.

Kamala Das as a confessional poet has rendered some valuable service to the female sex by making them conscious of their dormant sexual desires and their suppressed discontent with their husbands from the sexual point of view. She has thus given a sort of incentive to women to assert themselves or at least not to suppress themselves. In these confessional poems Kamala Das appears as a feminist, indirectly advocating the liberation of women from the conventional social restraints and taboos.

Two of Kamala Das's poems contain her feelings as a mother. The poem entitled *Jaisurya* expresses her feeling of exultation when she is going to give birth to a child and her feeling of pride when the child comes out of the darkness of her womb into this bright world lit by sunlight. During the child-birth, Kamala Das felt that to her at that time neither love was important nor lust, and that the man or men, who had been betraying her by gratifying their lust and then forsaking her, did not matter to her at all. She found child-birth to be a glorious phenomenon. The other poem about her motherhood has the title of *The White Flowers*.

Confessional poetry is written by a poet under an internal pressure in order to give vent to his or her grievances or feeling of resentment or a sense of the injustice experienced by him or her. Kamala Das's poetry is replete with a powerful force of catharsis and protest. This is so because of Kamala Das's intensely confessional quality and her ultra-subjective treatment. Kamala Das raises her cofessional tarts to the level of a specific universal appeal. The struggle of her self ultimately becomes the struggle of all mankind, and herein lies her *forte* because the best confessional poetry is that which rises above the subject-matter to achieve some sort of victory over pain and defeat.

Every poem of hers, whether it be *The Looking-Glass* or *Substitute*, has come directly from experience. She has not written propagandist poetry; she has not written any poem deliberately as a sponsor or advocate of any social cause. She went on writing poems because of an inner urge to reveal her personal life and its secrets; and it is just an accident that her poetry has turned out to be poetry in which the rights of women have emerged as an important theme.

12.2.4 Contribution to Indo-Anglian Poetry

Kamala Das is one of the most original Indo-Anglian poets, and she has certainly made a name for herself by virtue of her craftsmanship as much as by the novelty of the innovative quality of her treatment of her themes. Hers is the poetry of introspection and self-analysis; and in this respect she equals poets like Nissim Ezekiel while she surpasses them in her frankness and candour in expressing the thoughts, ideas, longings, yearnings, and disappointments which lay in the depths of her hearts by which she has most effectively been able to bring to the surface. Her unusual frankness in dealing with subject of sex and her sensitive awareness of her outward surroundings, their sordidness, their ugliness, their horror constitute the strength of her poetry which shows her complete and absolute alienation from those surroundings as well as from the social context in which she has always lived. Even in respect of the feeling of alienation from her social environment she seems to have gone far

beyond Nissim Ezekiel.

Kamala Das has helped the Indian women of her time to liberate themselves from domestic restriction and restraints and from social taboos. This may be regarded as her chief contribution to Indo-Anglian poetry. She has established herself as a leading feminist poet. Her protest against the way she has been treated by her husband and by her other sexual partners, are, by implication, strong arguments in support of the rights of women. But she has made a significant contribution to the art and technique of writing poetry as well. A part from her mastery of the English language and the wide range of the poetic effects which she is capable of producing in her poems, she also shows herself to be a master craftsman. It is true that much of her poetry is marred by her omission of punctuation marks, especially commas, thus making her poetry difficult for the average reader. Her poetry is also marred by the varying length of her lines and the omission of capital letters at the beginning of the lines. In the technical sense, her poems are extremely irregular and often bewildering because there may sometimes be only one word in a line or two words, thus making the reader wonder why this method of composing a poem has been preferred to the usual manner of writing. Of course she shares these faults and lapses with most of the other Indo-Anglian poets who take a special and perverse pleasure in violating the norms of poetic technique.

In the choice of words, Kamala Das exercises a special care; and her words and the combination of those words into phrases, clauses, and sentences, she shows a rare understanding of the meanings, the appropriateness, and the subtleties of words. Her words are neither splendid nor glittering, nor conceived on a gigantic scale. She is a poet in the confessional mode and her diction is therefore, most often colloquial. Diction is not a tool in her hands but a poetic medium pure and simple. The words come to her effortlessly, and become one with her emotions. This is evident in *My Grandmother's House* and *A Hot Noon in Malabar*. Every epithet in this poem is effective and glows with emotion; and there is also a perfect fusion of sense and sound here.

At the same time Kamala Das's poetry reveals a mastery of, and a control over, rhythm. Her best poems display a strong feeling of rhythm. The poem entitled *An Introduction* employs the rhythms of conversational speech, with the attempt of Kamala Das's family to define a role for her in life:

> Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or better
>
> Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
>
> Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.....

And then the poem moves suddenly into the urgent driving rhythm which is characteristic of some of Kamala Das's best work:

> Who are you, I ask each and every one
>
> The answer is, it is I, Anywhere and,
>
> Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself.....

Das emerges on the Indo-English poetic scene more as in anachronism and iconoclast, presenting through her writings in general and her poetry in particular, a critique of culture, worn-out values, customs and canons of poetry. As she advances in her poetic journey she disentangles herself from her gender identity and feels greater need to "look beyond the chilling flesh" until she "gatecrashes"

into the precincts of others' dreams":

My songs echoed in strangers' dreams, in unease
They stirred in their sleep and sighed. Yes, often, poets
Gatecrash into the precincts of others' dreams
As Gods and Goddesses do many a time
In unsolicited magnanimity.

(Annamalai Poems No. IV)

12.2.5 Check Your Progress: Self Assessment Questions

1. What was the real name of Kamala Das ?

.....

2. What did Prime Minister Manmohan singh say at the death of Kamala Das?

.....
.....

3. What is the chief quality of a confessional poet?

.....
.....
.....

4. Name two of the poems of Kamala Das that celebrate motherhood.

.....
.....

5. How does Kamala Das inspire women in India?

.....
.....
.....
.....

12.2.6 Answers

1. Madhavi Kutti
2. Her poems focusing an womanhood and feminism gained her recognitation as one of the most noted of modern Indian poets.
3. Reveals those facts of his life which an ordinary person would keep strictly to himself.
4. *Jaisurya* and *The White Flowers*
5. By making them conscious of their dormant sexual desires and their suppressed discontent with their husbands from the sexual point of view.

12.3 *An Introduction*

12.3.1 Glossary

incoherent: unitelligible, not clear and hard to understand

mutterings: complaints expressed privately

schizophania: a metal illness in which a person becomes unable to link thought emotion and behaviour, leading to withdrawal from reality ann personal relationship

nympho: a woman who wants to have sex very often

jilted in love: had a sudden and unkind end of romantic relationship

12.3.2 Critical Analysis

This poem first appeared in Kamala Das's very first volume of poem which was entitled *Summer in Calcutta* and which was published in 1965. This poem is wholly autobiographical and may also be labelled as a confessional poem. It is confessional in the sense that Kamala Das here takes the reader into her confidence with confessional poems, this one shows Kamala Das's candour in dealing with sex, with bodily functions, and the like. At the same time it shows Kamala Das's capacity for self-assertion. Furthermore, we have here a poem of revolt against conventionalism and the restraints which society has been imposing upon women. Kamala Das's feminism or her advocacy of the rights of women clearly appears here. Thus this poem reveals to us several aspects of Kamala Das as a poet.

Kamala Das begins this poem by telling us, that although she does not know much about politics, she knows the names of those persons, beginning with Nehru, who have wielded political power in this country. She then describes herself as an Indian, of a very brown complexion, born in Malabar, having the ability to speak three languages, writing actually in two languages, and dreaming in the third. Next, she speaks sarcastically about the many relatives and friends who used to advise her not to write in English because English was not her mother tongue. In fact, she takes such advisers to task for having given her this advise because she claims the right to speak and write in any language she likes.

I don't know politics but I know the names

Of those in power, and can repeat them like

Days of weak, or names of months, beginning with

Nehru, I am Indian, very brown, born in

Malabar, I speak three languages, write in

Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,

English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave

Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins

Every one of you? Why not let me speak in

Any language I like? The language I speak

Becomes mine, its distortions, its queenesses

All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half

Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,

It is as human as I am human don't

You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my

Hopes

Kamala Das goes on to tell us that, as she grew up form a child to an adult, her limbs swelled, and hair sprouted in one or two parts of her body. Then she asked for love, and what she got was a husband who performed the sexual act with her in the crudest possible manner. The husband's way of performing this act made her feel miserable.

Everybody wanted to give some of the other advice to her. Her advisers urged her to do some embroidery of cooking and also to keep quarrelling with the servants. They told her to call herself Amy or Kamala or better still Mahdavikutty. They urged her not to pretend to be a split personality suffering from a psychological discorder, and not to become a nyphomaniac or a sex-crazy woman.

Dress in sarees, be girl

Be wife, they said. Be embroidered, be cook,

Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,

Belong, cried the categorizser. Don't sit

On walls or deep in through open lace-draped windows.

Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better

Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to

Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.

Don't play at schizophrenia or be a

Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when

Jilted love.....I met a man, loved him. Call

Him not by any name, he is every man

Who wants a woman, just as I am every

Woman who seeks love. In him.....the hungry haste

Of rivers, in me.....the oceans tireless

Waiting.

Finally Kamala Das describes herself in the following words:

I am sinner

I am saint. I am the beloved and the

Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no

Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

What she here means to say is that she is no different from other human beings, that like every other human being she is sometimes sinful and sometimes pious, that she is sometimes loved and sometimes betrayed in love, that she has the same joys in life which others have, and that she suffers the same disappointment which others suffer.

In this short poem, Kamala Das has given us a self-portrait and the anatomy of her mind, recounting the major incidents of her life and the experience which had affected her most till the time of her writing this poem. The poem is remarkable for its compression and for the compactness of its structure even though it contains a diversity of facts and circumstances. The rules of punctuation have her been fully observed; all the lines are almost of the same length. The words used and the phraseology show Kamala Das's talent for choosing the right words and putting them in highly satisfactory combinations. Indeed, the poem contains many felicities of word and phrase. Her brief picture of her husband' rough treatment of her is an outstanding example:

He did not beat me

But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.

The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank

Pitifully. Then.....

These lines also show Kamala Das's uninhibited manner of speaking about sex and about her physical organs.

The poem is written in *vers libre* or free verse.

12.3.3 Check Your Progress: Self Assessment Questions

1. What are Kamala Das's views regarding one's language?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2 How does the poetess describe herself in the end?

.....
.....
.....
.....

12.3.4 Answers

1. She has right to speak and write in any language she likes.

2. She is and ordinary human being with all joys and sorrows.

12.4 *Ghanshyam*

11.4.1 Glossary

arbour	:	shelter
spectral	:	coloured
sauma	:	a period of time in which you sit lying in a small room which has been heated to a very high temperature by burning coal or wood
morgue	:	a building in which dead bodies are kept before they are buried or cremated raiment clothing
fervid	:	feeling too strongly
tote	:	carry

12.4.2 Critical Analysis

This poem appeared in Kamala Das's fourth volume of poems in 1977 under the heading of 'Stranger Time'. Ghanshyam, as every Hindu knows, is the other name of Lord Krishna of the Mahabharata fame. As a boy and as a young man Lord Krishna used to play with girls of whom abored him and who used to feel delighted and thrilled by the sweet strains of music which he could produce from his favourite musical instrument, the flute. In course of time stories became current that a girl by the name of Radha had fallen deeply in love with him; and centuries later, a woman by the name of Mira Bai fell in love with him though she could love him only in her imagination. Mira Bai composed a large number of poems and songs in celebration of her love for him. It is against this background that Kamala Das, after having felt frustrated by the failure of her marriage and then by the total unsatisfactoriness of her many sexual relationship with men, sublimated her sexual desire by visualizing herself as a seeker of Lord Krishna's love.

The poem is addressed to Ghansyam, and the person a is, of course, Kamala Das herself. She tells Ghanshyam that he has built a nest in the garden of her heart and the her life, which was till now a silent and sleeping jungle, is now stirring with the sounds of music.

> Ghanshyam,
>
> You have like a koel built your nest in the arbour of my heart.
>
> My life, until now a sleeping jungle is at last astir with music.
>
> You lead me along a route I have never known before

Ghanshyam, she says, has been leading her along a route which she had never known before,

and that every time, when she is about to come close to him, he simply disappears.

But at each turn when I near you

Like a spectral flame you vanish.

The flame of my prayer-lamp holds captive my future

I gaze into the red eye of death

The hot stars of truth unveiled.

She goes on to say that life is moisture, that life is water, that life is semen and blood, and that death is the want of moisture and water, that death is the hot sand bath, and that death is the last sob of the relative of the person who lies dead. She then says that she is using words to weave a garment for Ghanshyam and that she is composing songs to produce music which would have the power to make the oceans dance.

Life is moisture

Life is water, semen and blood.

Death is drought

Death is the hot sauna leading to cool rest-rooms

Death is the last, lost sob of the relative

Beside the red-walled morgue.

O Shyam, my Ghanshyam

With words I weave a raiment for you

With songs a sky

With such music I liberate in the oceans their fervid dances

Kamala Das described her married life which was a failure because her husband wanted merely to satisfy his lust and was unable to give her any love or affection in any real sense. She had found that the only way in which she could survive was to reconcile herself to her desolation and her loneliness. She has been trying to imagine that, whenever her husband indulged in the sexual act with her, it was Ghanshyam who was making love to her. She consoles herself with the thought that Ghanshyam appears to her in many shapes because he has many names. When any other man, beside her husband, makes love to her, she thinks that it is Ghanshyam making love to her.

Kamala Das next says that she seeks peace so that wisdom can come to her imperceptibly and silently. Ghanshyam has, like a fisherman, cast his net in the depths of her ,mind; and her thoughts are rushing towards him like a fish which briskly enters the fisherman's net under some mysterious urge.

Thus this poem reveals to us Kamala Das's spitirual longings which have been dormant in her and which have come to the surface as a consequence of her sexual frustrations. At first she kept thinking that every man with whom she performed the sexual act was Ghanshyam in disguise. Then she

began to feel confused as to the real identity of the men with whom she performed the sexual act next she felt disillusioned about those casual lovers of hers. Finally she feels cleansed of the desires of the flesh and wants only Ghanshyam as her lover. These are the stages by which Kamala Das sublimated her sensuality.

In this poem Kamala Das speaks not only of physical evolution but also of spiritual evolution. Kamala Das's poems on the Radha-Krishna myth, namely *Ghanshyam, Radha, the Maggots* etc., are specifically representative of her faith in the spiritual evolution of man. In the poem *Radha*, Kamala Das speaks of spiritual love and spiritual evolution by means of surrender. Radha in that poem represents the spirit of surrender which is the very first step towards spiritual evolution. For the consummation of spiritual love, Kamala Das mingles her complete self with the self of Lord Krishna. We feel inclined to regard this poem as one of Kamala Das's masterpieces because of its content and also because of the manner in which she had dealt with its theme. There are a number of excellent similes and metaphors in this poem; and it is characterized by a felicity of word and phrase which really evokes our admiration.

12.5 Let Us Sum Up

Thus we see that the most obvious and colourful feature of Kamala Das' poetry is the unanticipated frankness with which she talks about sex. However a closer reading proves that this is not a cheap exercise. She is not nymphomaniac. She is 'every woman who seeks love'. She is the 'beloved and the betrayed'. At heart she remains the eternal eve prouodly celebrating her essential femininity.

12.6 Review Questions

1. What does Kamala Das have to confess in her poetry, and in what manner does she perform this self-imposed task?
2. Write an essay on Kamala Das's concept of love as revealed in her poems.
3. Summarize the thoughts expressed in: *An Introduction*
4. Explain the use of metaphors in the following:

   (a) My life, until now a sleeping jungle

   (b) Death is the hot sauna

   (c) With words I weave a raiment for you

   (d) new traps arise

   (e) The blood of the eternal fire
5. Pick out examples of similes used in both the poems.
6. Comment on Kamala Das's belief in the spiritual evolution of man on the basis of the poem *Ghanshyam*.

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UNIT-13

AFRICAN POETRY: JAMES BERRY & WOLE SOYINKA

Structure

13.0 Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- understand the Age of the poets and their idea about the poem and its creativity.
- know about a literary meterical piece of study.
- develop a critical analysis about the theory and the poetic ideology.
- use the word as referred to in the context of the study.

13.1 Introduction

In this unit, you are going to study about the poems and the poets along with the 'Age' that they belong to. In a way, you will reinforce your study of poetic evaluation. Various theories and concepts of the poets have been made simple to enhance your knowledge and understanding. Also remember to make use of dictionary so as to understand the words and their meanings, with reference to the context.

13.2 African Poetry: Text of the Poems

13.2.1 James Berry's *White Child Meets Black Man*

She caught me outside a London
Suburban shop, I like a giraffe
And she a mouse. I tried to go
But felt she stood
Lovely as light on my back.
I turned with hello
And waited. Her eyes got
Wider but not her lips.
Hello. I smiled again and watched.
She stepped around me
Slowly, in a kind of dance
Her wide eyes searching
Inch by inch up and down;
No fur no scales no feathers
No shell. Just a live silhouette,
Wild and strange
And compulsive
Till mother came horrified.
'Mummy' is his tummy black?
Mother grasped her and swung
Toward the crowd she tangled
Mother's leg looking back at me.
As I watched them birds were singing

13.2.2 Wole Soyinka's *Telephone*

The price seemed reasonable, location.
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
Off premises. Nothing remained
But self-confession, 'Madam', I warned.

‘I hate a wasted journey- I warned.
Silence silenced transmission of
Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was foully,
‘HOW DARK?..... I had not misheard.....
“ARE YOU LIGHT OR VERY DARK?
Button B. Button A. Stench
of rancid breath of public hide and speak
Red tooth. Red pillar-Box. Red double-tired
Omnibus squelching tar. It was real! shamed
By ill mannered silence, surrender
Pushed dunbfoundment to beg simplification,
Considerate she was, varying the emphasis-
‘ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT? Revelation came
‘You mean- like plain or milk chocolate?
Ider assent was clinical, crushing in its light
Impersonality. Rapidly wave length adjusted,
I chose. “West-African sepia’- and as after thought,
‘Down in my passport.’ Silence for spectroscopic
I light of fancy, till truthfulness changed her accent
Hard on the mouthpiece. ‘WHAT’S THAT ? Conceding
‘DON’T KNOW WHAT THAT IS.’ ‘Like brunette: ‘
‘THAT’S DARK, ISN’T IT ? Not altogether
Facially, I am brunette, but, madam, you should see
The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
Are a peroxide blond. friction, caused-
Foolishly, madam- by sitting down, has turned
My bottom raven black- One moment, madam !’ sensing
Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap

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

See for yourself? 35

13.3 About the Text

13.3.1 About the Poems and the Poets

These two poems deal with the experience of young black intellectuals who had left their homes in tropical Africa or the Caribbean to study and immerse themselves in the cultural life of metropolitan London. What they all too found was culture shock and alienation, homesickness and racial insult. Both the poems communicate a feeling of loneliness and homesickness.

Telephone Conversation and *White Child meets Black man*, both offer an anecdote which illustrates racial prejudice. Soyinka imagines a black student in search of accommodation, planning a number in a 'room to let' advert. He makes the scene real by little details: pauses in the conversation, the unfamiliar buttons and coins, the red postbox and a red London bus seen through the window of the red public phone booth (in line 13 the speaker literally "sees red"- the kind of joke, which poet relish, and allows us to share the black man's nervousness, his confusion, anger and recovery. The Irony arises from the absurdity of a situation which places a highly cultured black man at the mercy of a barely literate and foolish white woman.

James Berry also stresses the absurdity of prejudice. His black narrator's tone is full of smiling tenderness for the inquisitive and self-possessed little girl. A silent relationship develops between them, expressed in charming similes. The mother's nervous embarrassment and fear breaks up the encounter. In a very light and positive little poem we are shown the adventure which becomes possible when differences of background, gender, race, and age are transformed by the simple pleasure of mutual discovery.

13.3.2 Literary Implications

White Child Meets Black Man

Line 15	silhouette:	an outline figure, black on white

Telephone conversation

Line 3	off premises:	in a separate house
Line 6-7	silenced..... good breeding:	the pause makes it clear that her good manners are under pressure
Line 12	rancid:	spoiled, like old butter
Line 16	dumbjoundment:	shock
Line 22	sepic:	an artist's colour-dark brown
Line 23	spectroscopic:	having to do with colour analysis
Line 30	peroxide blond:	chemically bleached blond

13.3.3. Glossary

Irony: a way of expressing that mocks by saying the opposite of the real or intended meaning.

Lyrical: expressive of subjective experience. A Lyric is a short, song-like poem, which gives the poet's thoughts and feelings.

Diction: The specific choice of vocabulary, tone and style in a poem, eg formal, colloquial, academic. Poets often deliberately startle us by using diction which is inappropriate to the context established in the poem.

Anecdote: A short narrative depicting an incident of private life.

13.4 Self Assessment Questions

1. In the above two poems colours are used as a code. How is this done in each poem?

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2. What do you think African poetry focuses on ?

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3. Comment on the diction of the poems.

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4. Pick out all words which refer to skin colour.

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5. In what contexts are the specific terms normally used for colour.

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6. In not more than two sentences state the point made by Soyinka.

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7. Contrast the language skills displayed by the two speakers.

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8. Find three adjectives to describe each poet and his poem.

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9. List the similes used in the poems.

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10. What kind of connotations do they introduce ?

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11. What are the implications of 'no fear no scales no feathers no shells ?

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12. Differentiate between the racial attitudes shown by the characters.

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13. Comment on the final lines of the poems.

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13.5 Let Us Sum Up

By now you must have understood the poems, their surface, meaning and the poet's intention of his creative impulse.

- written by black poets.
- poets themselves reflect on the creative process from which their poems emerge.
- deal with the experience of young black intellectuals who had left their homes in Africa and immerse themselves in the cultural life of London.
- depicts culture shock and alienation, homesickness and racial insult.
- In these poems, colours are used as a code.

13.6 Answers to SAQs

1. James Berry and Wole Soyinka both the poets offer an anecdote which illustrates racial prejudice. The irony arises from the absurdity of a situation which places a highly cultured black man at the mercy of a barely literate and foolish woman in Soyinka's poem. Whereas Berry stresses the tenderness of a relationship that develops between a white little girl and the black narrator inspite of the differences of background, gender, race and age.

2. African poetry often focuses on the experiences of young black intellectuals who had left their homes in tropical Africa or the Caribbean to study and immerse themselves in the cultural life of the metropolitan London. What they all too often found was culture shock and alienation, homesickness and racial insult.

3. The diction of the two poems is a specific choice of vocabulary, tone and style of the African poets. It is formal colloquial and academic wherein the poets use the strategy of code words for the colour of the skin depiction and at every stage the poems reflect the poet's context implying nervousness of the white and the clack concept.

4. Location indifferent, African, breeding. Clark, rancid breath, Red pillar box, Red double. Tired, chocolate, West African sepia, raven black, peroxide blond and giraffee, no fur no scales, no feathers no rhells, silhovettee tummy black etc.

5. The context is always the racial prejudice amongst the white and the black in their cultural life.

6. Soyinka offers an anecdote which illustrates racial prejudice. He leads we to share the black man's recovery. The irony arises from the absurdity of situation.

7. The language of the two poems depict the points raised by the black poets. There are reference to the code words used to depict the colour of the skin on the black man's idea of life amongst the white's.

8. Soyinka's poetry is a clear cut assertion of his concept of the white man's ego. He is coloured and his writings are full of cadence and colour. James Berry's poem illustrates a simple assertive diction and decorum in the expression and rhythm and the reader is forced to realize the deep intricated surface meaning.

9. Similes refer to verse which offers a comparison using the words 'as' or 'like' and 'the.....of'. The students should search for themselves.

10. Connotations are additional meaning carried by a word and arising from memories, perceptions, notions and emotions we associate with it. Students should search for themselves.

11. The terms no fur *no scales no feathers no shells*, refers to the stupid notion of racial prejudice that prevails amongst the white motives.

12. The small little girl and her surprised looks in Berry's poem and the colour red as symbol of harted for the blacks in reference to their unhealthy misunderstandings.

13. Both the poems end at the note of positive reins where the block remains as he is.

13.7 Review Questions

1. How does Soyinka successfully depict racial prejudice in *Telephone* ?

2. Comment on the diction of both the poems.

3. Compare and contrast the attitudes to life of the inquisitive little girl and the emparrassed mother in *White Child Meets Black Man*.

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UNIT-14

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA :
(I) *GENESIS* (II) *HER HAND*

Structure

14.0 Objective

The purpose of this unit is to acquaint you with the poetical works of Jayanta Mahapatra, a physicist, bilingual poet and essayist by presenting an elaborate discussion on his two poems '*Genesis*' and '*Her Hand*'.

14.1 Introduction

It is often debated whether the end of poetry reading is pleasure. Poetry, of course, must be read for pleasure; but it should not be forgotten that poetry and other genres of literature, as has been rightly said by Cleanth Brooks, has a definite therapeutic value, not only for the author, but possibly also for his reader. Mahapatra's poems, in this sense, are pieces of knowledge, which carry the problems of individual man and his society, and also the diagnosis, if not remedies.

Jayanata Mahapatra's poems are great exercises of the human spirit in the perilous times. He sings about common man's poverty, empty dreams, blasted hopes and tragedies in his poems.

14.2 About the Poet

Jayanta Mahapatra (1928), a physicist, bilingual poet and essayist, holds the distinction of being the first Indian English poet to have received the Sahitya Akademi Award (1981) for *Relationship*. He started writing poetry at the age of thirty–eight, quite late in normal standard. And immediately his poetry received accolades from knowledgeable quarters. Rooted in mythical-historical past of Orissa, and yet not unaware of the sociological changes in the contemporary society, he beautifully recreates in the mode of his poetic expression the landscape and people around him.

Jayanta Mahapatra needs no introduction. Perhaps any discussion on Indian Poetry in English is incomplete without reference to his poetical works. In his poetry, Mahapatra sings of the hearts and minds of many things of nature, on the basis of his sincere love for all creation. Poverty, deprivation, social injustice, the plight of the Indian woman and prostitution recur in his verses. He says, "All these things happen around me." He cannot ignore them and write about the 'better things' of life——about the lives of the upper classes. His belief in poetry as a social reality sets him off from other contemporary poets writing in English. At present, he is the author of seventeen volumes of verse (in English). His poetry is the "redolent of the Orissa scene...."He has often called himself "an Oriya poet writing in English." The epitome of simplicity and sincerity, Jayanta Mahapatra has been invited to Oriya seminars and gatherings. He has been engaged in translations from Oriya too. He has translated the works of fellow poets Soubhagya Mishra and Shakti Chattopadhyay.He has become "bilingual" these days. His Oriya works include *Bali (1993), Kahibi Gotie Katha (1995), Baya Raja (1997)* and Tikie *Chhayee* (2001). Jayanta Mahapatra's English short stories are different from the common run of stories in the sense that they focus not so much on the thematic content as on the form and expression. In his stories Mahapatra probes deep into the recess of the human mind. His influence on contemporary Oriya poets (writing in English) like Bibhu Padhi,Niranjan Mahanti, Prabhanjan Mishra and Rabindra K. Swain is worth mentioning. Jayanta Mahapatra has also inspired (directly/ indirectly) the diasporic Indian English poets like Meena Alexander and Shanta Acharya for their career in poetry.

14.3 *Genesis*

14.3.1 The Text

The apple sits on an old examination bed

in the world's foyer.

The stony silence of the men staring hard

crosses the line of sanity.

Why do I think of this,

drowning in the depth of lost time?

Maybe nothing came from anything,

a long drawn-out yawn from nowhere.

Maybe my mother's soul set the apple free,

making it roll down the road.

And I look for the same sense of stillness,

hoping it will heal me.

The myth has its head stuck in the fork of a tree.

And the spirits of knowledge won't let it pass.

14.3.2 Glossary

Foyer	:	large space in a theatre for the use of audience during intervals.
Stony	:	hard, cold and unsympathetic
Yawn	:	a deep breath with the mouth wide open
Fork	:	place where a tree trunk divides, or branches

14.3.3 Summary

The poem 'Genesis' is included in *Radom Descent*. The poet deftly weaves a structure around the Christian myth relating to the 'apple' or the forbidden fruit in the poem 'Genesis'.

The poet shows the difference between the nature of knowledge and the instinctive spontaneity of human being, inherited from Adam and Eve who by eating the forbidden fruit have set themselves free. In one hand the poet shows the sense of freedom, spontaneity and a sense of adventure and on the other hand a kind of closure that religious knowledge brings. The poet doesn't make any preference. Rather he makes the 'apple' a symbol both of freedom, from individual point of view and perversion from religious point of view. The poet's intention is not to point out what is right or what is wrong. The poem is rather a site for multilayers of meanings. The poet with deconstructive spirit sets stage ready in the text for the greater exploration of knowledge. In this process he only points out that there is a 'genesis' of each and every set of knowledge which might undergo a change in course of time. When things go on in an endless process the boundary line between sanity and insanity gets blurred. This binary concept of sanity and insanity is something which is constructed by human beings. As the poem moves towards the second stanza, one finds the attempt of the poet to go beyond this closed construct.

The spirit of exploration becomes intense in the fifth stanza because it is Eve, who represents the mother of mankind , takes the apple, the forbidden fruit. Mahapatra shows that taking the forbidden fruit is just a beginning of the Faustian adventure. Hence, mankind itself is a delicate articulation of Eve and Adam.

'Silence' in the second stanza and 'stillness' in the sixth stanza are the symbols of infinite time. It is the time which plays a great role in Mahapatra's poems. Time changes everything. Time glorifies everything. Ultimately it is the time which mortalizes or immortalizes everything. It is this sense of time which Mahapatra develops not only by himself but also inherits unconsciously from Orissa's rich cultural past. The construction of Orissa as well as Mahapatra is a coincidence: Orissa is constituted of its past, present and future in the form of a vision, so also Mahapatra, his poetic mind consists of an assimilation

of the past ethos of Orissa, its present self-expression and its dreams.

In the poem 'Genesis', the poet leads the readers , however, to a realm of myth, reality and vision and leaves upto them for analysis, even though it may not be final, which might be an 'and' without an 'end'.

14.3.4 Explanations

The apple sits …….. line of sanity.

The given lines have been extracted from Jayanta Mahapatra's poem 'Genesis' included in *Random Descent*. In this poem, the poet weaves a structure round the Christian myth relating to the 'apple' or the forbidden fruit.

The poet says that these is a difference between the nature of knowledge and instictive spontaneity of human being. It is believed that this spontaneity is inherited from Adam and Eve who by taking the forbidden fruit have set themselves free. The poet very successfully shows that religious knowledge brings both a sense of freedom, spontaneity and on the one hand, and a kind of closure on the other. The poet is of the view that the boundary line between sanity and insanity gets blurred when things go on in an endless process.

The remarkable point is that the poet does not make any preference. The 'apple' is a symbol of individual freedom as well as religious perversion.

14.4 *Her Hand*

14.4.1 The Text

The little girl's hand is made of

darkness

How will I hold it ?

The streetlamps hang like decapitated

heads

Blood opens that terrible door

between us

The wide mouth of the country is

clamped in pain

While its body writhes on its bed

of nails

This little girl has just her raped body

for me to reach her

The weight of my guilt is unable

to overcome my resistance to hug her.

14.4.2 Glossary

decapitated : beheaded

clamped : exerted pressure against

writhes : twist or roll about in pain

resistance : opposing force

hug : put the arms round tightly, especially to show love

14.4.3 Summary

The poem '*Her Hand*' appeared in *Body Politic* (Vol. III : issue 4). The poem was occasioned by Gujarat riots in 2002. The poem brings to our mind a host of gory crimes committed against women at the time of communal clashes. The poet is at a loss to understand why such atrocities are committed against women. His sadness is brought out in this poem.

14.4.4 Explanations

This little girl has …… hug her.

The lines given for explanation constitute the concluding stanza of Jayanta Mahapatra's small poem 'Her Hand' The poem was occasioned by Gujarat communal riots in 2002.

Poets are hyper sensitive people. The art pieces/poems that they produce invariably carry their impressions, experiences, pains, anxieties and restlessness. The reading of the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra prompts the reader to see how sadly the poet gasps in the darkness and looks for chinks to peep for light.

The poem brings to our mind the cruelties and the crimes committed against women during the communal clashes. They are raped and brutally assaulted. The poet is at a loss to understand why such atrocities are committed against women. The lines beautiful convey the idea by depicting the image of a raped girl. The poet, though, is filled with a sense of guilt at the site of such a gory crime but finds himself unable to hug her (perhaps owning to socio-cultural restrictions).

The poem proves that Jayanta Mahapatra is not a regional poet confined to the towns and cities of Orissa but a national poet who has a tremendous burden of understood things to share with his country men so that he may find some respite not only for his wounded heart but also for the sensitive readers of his poem.

14.5 Self Assessment Questions

1. Name the first Indian English poet to have received the Sahitya Akademi Award.

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2. Name the anthology in which the poem *Genesis* was included.

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3. How can a poet, according to Jayant Mahapatra fulfil his responsibility as a member of civil society?

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4. Who represents the Mother of Mankind in *Genesis* ?

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5. What do 'silence' and 'stillness' symbolize in the poem *Genesis* ? insanity?

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6. What was the poem *Her Hand* occasioned by ?

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7. What is the underlying idea of the poem *Her Hand* ?

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9. What according to Jayanta Mahapatra is the salient feature of the genesis of each and every knowledge?

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14.6 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit we have discussed :

- Jayanta Mahapatra, the first Indian English poet to have received the Salvitya Akademi Award.
- Jayanta Mahapatra's two poems – *Genesis* and *Her Hand*
- That the poem *Genesis* which was included in *Random Descent*, deals with the Christian myth relating to the apple or the 'forbidden fruit'
- That the poem *Her Hand* was occasioned by the Gujarat Communal clashes in 2002. The

poem describes the atrocities inflicted an women during the communal riots.

14.7 Answers to SAQs

1. Jayanta Mahapatra
2. *Random Descent*
3. through his sensitive portrayal of reality
4. Eve
5. Infinite Time
6. Human being
7. Gujarat Communal clashes in 2002.
8. The poem deals with the atrocities inflicted on women during the times of communal clashes.
9. Genesis of every knowledge undergoes a change in course of time.

14.8 Review Questions

1. How does the poet lead the readers to a realm of myth, reality and vision in the poem '*Genesis*'?
2. How far has the poet succeeded in portraying the atrocities committed against women during communal riots?

14.9 Bibliography

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UNIT - 15

T.S. ELIOT : THE POETIC DRAMA

Structure

15.0 Objectives

What is spectacular or visual appeals to the human eye. What is theatrical and audio - visual, being dramatic and dynamic in action, gives an aesthetic delight. It is high time the genre - the poetic drama - was studied meaningfully as it was quite distinct from the traditional forms of drama. The drama as a form of art has been coeval with human culture and civilization. The Greek drama was excellent and Europe was under its spell for several centuries. The Elizabethan drama in the sixteenth century England distinguished itself. The Elizabethan dramatists appealed to the world.

The poetic drama is a recent development. The very purpose of the study unit is to examine the poetic drama with special reference to T.S. Eliot.

15.1 Introduction

Thomas Stearn Eliot was born at St. Louis, Missouri U.S.A. He was a brilliant student who distinguished himself first at Harvard University and then at Oxford. He was well - versed in French, German, Latin and the classics and had a smattering of Sanskrit and Pali too. He was deeply

impressed by Shakespeare, John Donne and Dante, Arthur Symon's book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* was the greatest single influence on his mind. At the Sorbonne University, Paris, he studied many contemporary French writers. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the philosophy of F.H.Bradley. He settled in London. He married Vivienne Hough - wood and made friends with Ezra Pound whom he regarded as the greatest master - craftman of poetry. His English friends were Clive Bell, Leonard Woolf, Virginia Woolf, E.M.Forster, D.H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, Ford Madox ford, W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, etc. He took up a job in Lloyds Bank, London. The publication of *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) and *The Wasteland* (1922) were the credentials of his great poetic genius. He became a regular contributer to the *Criterion.* His reviews enlightened the contemporary poets and writers *The Wasteland* was certainly a formidable deviation from the normal standard of poetry. It was very much like a puzzle and a tough cerebral exercise. T.S. Eliot wrote several annotations to it but it remained rather impervious and incomprehensible. Many critics refused to recognise it as a poem. In 1948, Eliot was awarded the Novel prize for *The Wasteland*. It revolutionized the critical thinking on poerty in Europe. Eliot made his mark not only as a poet and critic but also as a playwright. He came out with five brilliant plays *The Murder in The Cathedral (1935), The Family Reunion (1939), The Cocktail Party (1949), The Confidential Clerk (1953), The Elder Statesman (1957)*. His was a brilliant poet's perception of the Drama.

Eliot's Literary Milieu: The dominant trend of his period was rationalism. Reason, and not authority, was the yardstick of approaching life and art. H.G. Wells, George Barnard Shaw and John Galsworthy had already established themselves as rationalist writers. D.H. Lawrence emphasized that sex dominated the very psyche of man and that Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis was genuinely meaningful. Sex was the fountain source of fire, vigour and energy of the human existence. D.H. Lawrence wrote copiously on what one calls "obscenity", "sensuality", "eroticism" in his novels - *The White Peacock (1911), Sons and Lovers (1913), The Rainbow (1915) and Women in Love (1921), Aaron's Rod (1922),* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928*). Lawrence probed deep into the human psyche and grasped Freudian psychology fairly deeply.

D.H. Lawrence and Sigmund Freud influenced a generation of English writers and there was a sort of flood of sex-oriented literature. Sex was subjected to rational analysis. Freud's theory of the *libido* (sexual impulse) and his method of psycho-analysis were unfailing tools of literary crticism. Freud had argued that the subconscious mind monitored the human conduct and that all intellectual convictions were the rationalizations of one's emotional urges. He impressed upon the scholars that the repression of sexual drives caused neurosis and morbidity. He traced abnormality of one's behaviour to repressed sex. His theories were further strengthened and authenticated by his learned followers - Cart Gustar Jung (Swiss) and Henri Bergson (French).

Freud's theory of *Oedipus Complex* did make sense to the psychologists. It emphasized that the son was attached to the mother. Freud's theories impressed T.S. Eliot fairly deeply. He regarded Shakespeare's Hamlet a morbid victim of *Oedipus Complex*.

15.2 Eliot's Scientific Attitude to Life and Literature

T.S. Eliot as a poet - critic relied heavily on scientific treatment of literary issues. Eliot was a rationalist, sceptic and existentialist in his approach. Eliot perceived his age as an age of ideological and political clashes. He realised how the forces of imperialism and nationalism had led to the First World

War. The victors had exploited Germany rather too much.

On the other hand the working classes stood united under the banners of Socialism and Marxism. The U.K. was disturbed by the Trade Union and Socialist movements. The Labour government came to power under the leadership of Ramsay Macdonald. The general strike in England toppled the government. The rise of Hitler in Germany and that of Mussolini in Italy shook the very balance of power in Europe. Eliot who was an American born scholar became a naturalised citizen of Britain in 1927 but he kept off politics, though he did describe himself a *royalist* in politics. Both Nazism and Fascism were fire-brand modes of governance characterized by extreme nationalism, regimentation, chequered individual freedom. The Nazis and the Fascists had a strong nexus to hold Europe under their grip. The writers like T. S. Eliot disapproved of the Nazi-Fascist attitude of curtailing individual freedom. T.S. Eliot turned to examine Christian theology if it could reestablish peace and harmony in war- torn Europe. Eliot was very sensitive to social, economic, political dovelopments which were taking place in western Europe in 1920s and 1930s. At the intellectual level he identified them as offshoots of rationalism, sexualism, Freudian psychology and scientism. His immediate milieu was marked by trade union movements, strikes, large-scale unemployment. There was bitter conservative reaction against socialism, Marxism, Communism,.....etc. Kierkegard's existentialism appealed to the learned and there was a fanfare of Christian theology and Roman Catholicism. T.S.Eliot championed Roman Catholicism. His play *Murder in the Cathedral* manifested his thinking of Christianity. *The Rock* was his first play to manifest his religious temper. Eliot was a profound Christian critic of his contemporary society.

15.3 Eliot's Classicism

During the period of Renaissance in England, the great works of Greek and Roman literature were given extra ordinary importance. To the Renaissance Englishmen of letters, classicism meant the revival of ancient forms and traditions. Scholars identified formal perfection, humanitarian spirit, universal appeal, good taste, discipline/ decorum and clarity as the salient features of classicism. Eliot was well-versed in the classics. Dante appealed to him. He evolved a theory of impersonality in poetry in his famous essay- *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. He appreciated the sense of history or tradition rather than impassioned personal experience. He tilted the balance of his critical thinking in favour of objectivity and rejected subjectivity. What he meant was that a competent poet transformed his personal emotion into universal, impersonal and objective expression. The poet, thus, generalized his emotion and stripped it off 'accidental historical impudence'. Eliot asserted his classicism in the subtle aesthetic way. He regarded the poet's mind as a catalytic agent which tranformed the personal/subjective experience into universal expression. His poetry as well as drama depicts ironically and epigrammatically the little anxieties, social embarassments and unacknowledged vacuity of polite society in Boston and London. He thundered in *Murder in the Cathedral*

"Man's life is a cheat and disappointment;

All things are unreal'

Unreal and disappointing;

The Catherine wheel, the pantomime cat."

He gave neat and clean expression to universal human spirit which is disillusioned.

15. 4 The Poetic Drama in the Historical Perspective

The poetic drama is verse drama. Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Macbeth, As You Like It, Twelfth Night* are examples of poetic drama. T.S.Eliot has the aesthetic notion that poetry cannot be alienated from the stage drama. Since poetry is the language of man in moments of strong emotional state, it is applicable to stage drama because it deals with situation charged with emotion to enhance moral conflict. The conflict may, or may not be resolved, but it must be there as an essential element of drama.

The Restoration playwright Thomas Otway wrote the verse play *Venice Preserved* (1662). Wordsworth tried his hand at drama and wrote *The Borderers* - a verse play. Byron's *Don Juan*, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* are more or less dramatic poems rather than plays. During the Victorian period Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne, Matthew Arnold wrote verse plays. But of all these plays one can observe that they were failures on the stage. A play may have *readability* but if it lacks *actability* it is bound to fail. Stephen Philips's *Herod* was a success on the stage. It came after the British drama had been sufficiently revived by George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde.

The Irish playwrights-W.B. Yeats, J.M.Synge, Sean O'Casey- wrote verse plays for the "*Little Theatre*". Yeats's play *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) and *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894) were successfully staged. The Poetic drama was revived in the twentieth century. Stephen Philips came out with *Paolo and Francesca* (1899), *The Sin of David* (1904) and *Nero* (1906). John Drinkwater wrote *Abraham Lincoln* (1918) *Mary Stuart* (1921), *Cromwell* (1923), John Masefield wrote *The Tragedy of Nan* (1908), *Mallony Hotspur* (1923), *Esther* (1921) and *Berenice* (1921).W.H.Auden wrote two poetic plays in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood- *Paid on Both Sides* (1933) and *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1933).

Eliot's poetic drama is imbued with the interpretation of the maladies of his time. It is animated by genuine moral passion. His poetry is also interpretative and it is inspired by the historical sense which forced him to write "not merely with his own generation in his bones" but also in harmony with the tradition running through the ages. T.S.Eliot is one of the best interpreters of his age maintaining literary excellence "purifying the dialect of the tribe." Eliot in his *Waste Land* blended traditional Europeon and Indian thought with a view to interpreting the contemporary state of faithlessness and unrest. His symbolism in taken form the Grail legend and he introduces the journey image in *The Waste Land*. He has borrowed much from mythology - Tiresias figures in *The Wasteland*. He employs the Christian mythology of Hell, The Lethe river, and refers to Charon, who ferries the souls of the dead to "Death's other kingdom". His poetry is saturated with classical allusions: In *Sweeny Among The Nightingales*, there is an explicit allusion to the murder of Agamemnon. The poet refers to the story of Orestes. He killed his own mother Clytemnestra. He was, therefore, pursued by the Furies. In Eliot's play - *The Family Reunion*, Harry is also pursued by them. There is modern imagery in Eliot:

(a) *The readers of Boston Evening Transcript*

Sway in the wind like a field of ripe corn.

(b) *He laughed like an irresponsible foetus*

His laughter was submarine and profound

Like the oldman of the seas.....

In *The Waste Land*, he describes:

At the violet hour when the eyes and back

Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits

Like a taxi throbbing. [1]

Eliot, in his drama, raised the poetic language to the classical standard of literary excellence. He introduced parallelisms, contrast, anti-thesis, paradox, metaphor, irony, metonymsy antonyms etc to make the content subtle. He rejected *verse libre* of flowing excess and introduced compact verse of his own.

His meter remains iambic characterized by various rhythms. He even came out with the light quatrains as a corrective measure to *verse libre. The Waste land, The Love-song of J.Alfred Prufrock, The Hollow Men* are imbued with new rhythms and word music.

As a play wright, T.S.Eliot revives the spirit of the Greek drama. He employed the Chorus in *The Rock, Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion*. He resorts to the ritual in *The Family Reunion*: Agatha and Mary perform a ritual at the end of the play so that "the curse be ended."

Agatha

A curse is slow in coming

to complete fruition

It cannot be hurried

And it cannot be delayed

Mary

It cannot be diverted

An attempt to divert it

Only implicates others

At the day of consummation

Agatha

A curse is a power

Not subject to reason

Each curse has its course

Its own way of expiation

Follow fallow

Mary

Not in the day time

And in the hither world

Where we know what we are doing

There is not its operation

Follow fallow

Agatha

But in the night time

And in the nether world

Where the meshes we have woven

Bind us to each other

Follow fallow

Mary

A curse is written

On the underside of things

Behind the smiling mirror

And behind the smiling moon

Follow fallow

This way the pilgrimage

of expiation,

Round and round the circle

Completing the charm

So the knot be unknotted

The crossed be uncrossed

The crooked be made straight

And the curse be ended

By intersession

By pilgrimage

By those who depart

In several directions

For their own redemption

And that of the departed.....

May they rest in peace [2]

(*The Family Reunion*)

Eliot introduced an unfailing element of esoterism in his poetic drama.

15.5 The Use of Myths in T.S.Eliot's Poetry and Drama

Ancient Greeks and Romans, like the Vedic Indians, believed that the world was ruled by a number of deities who discharged various functions of Nature assigned to them. The Greek gods and goddesses, it was believed, lived on Mt. Olympus: they were called as Olympians. The Romans believed in Jupiter/Jove just as the Greeks believed in Zeus and his spouse Hera. Myths are plainly speaking supernatural tales explaining certain functions of nature. There are hundreds of legends and myths. The legend of the Holy Grail is significant in Eliot's poetry particularly in *The Waste Land*. Eliot desired poetry to be subtle, allusive and symbolic. Myths served a wonderful purpose for metaphors and symbolism. Eliot largely dwells on the figure of Tiresias and the legend of the Holy Grail in *The Weste Land.* These myths go very well with the theme of famine ridden and barren land. The idea is that the barren land could restore fertility only by a ritual of sacrifice. Elios connects the concept of fertility with the myth of three Phoenician Greek gods - Adonis, Attis and Osiris. The Phoenicians sacrified Adonis and Osiris in spring time by drowning them. It was a ritual sacrifice. With the arrival of rains, it was presumed that the gods had come into being again and the famine-ridden land would be fertile. [3]

"Tiresais, though blind, throbbing between two lives,

Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see.

At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives

Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea" [4]

It is through the inner vision of Tiresias that the poet surveys the barren Land which has fallen under a terrible curse. The poet as prophet identifies himself with the spirit of Tiresias and therefore remarks "*I - Tiresias*" [5] in *The Waste Land. The Family Reunion* refers to the Orestes myth. To put it into nut shell, Orestes was the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. In her husband's long absence, Clytemnestra developed illicit relations with Aegisthus. When Agmemnon returned from the Trojan war, Clytemnestra murdered Agamemnon in league with her paramour Aegisthus. But the lives of her two children - Orestes and his sister Electra were saved by their uncle. When Orestes bacame young, he, with the help of his sister, murdered both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. But soon after the matricide, Orestes was prusued by the *Furies* [6] to seek revenge. They wanted him to expiate his sin. The oracle of Delphi directed Orestes to fetch a statue of Artemis from Tauric Chersonese to expiate his sin. He followed the direction of the Delphic oracle. In T.S. Eliot's play *The Family Reunion*, Harry is persued by the Eumenides ever since he murdered his mother. Harry thinks he has murdered his wife and he is morbidly possessed by the guilt complex.

T.S.Eliot had actually embarked upon the career of a playwright by writing a pageant play to encourage the collection of funds for the building of the new London Churches. The pageant play was

The Rock. It was successfully staged. He was offered to write a religious play for the Canterbury Festival of June 1935. The offer was made by George Bell, Bishop of Chickester. He wrote *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) commemorating the martyrdom of St. Thomas a Backet who had been murdered on 29th December 1170.

The Story of The Family Reunion

Eliot's play *The Family Reunion* is about a widow Lady Amy Monchensey who has three younger sisters - Ivy, Violet and Agatha. It happens to be her birthday. Her eldest son Lord Monchensey (Harry) is returning home after eight years. His mother wants to marry him off to a girl of her choice and pass on her estate to him. The coversation among the guests reveals that Harry had married a beautiful lady against his mother's wish. Unfortunately she had expired. When Harry arrives he discloses that he had pushed her off the railings of the ship and she was drowned to death. His heart, later on, was filled with grief and remorse.His aunt Agatha told him that his father had also attempted to kill his mother Lady Amy Monchensey. His sense of sin was related to his father's sense of sin and remorse. It was therefore advised by his aunt Agatha that he should proceed on a long journey to suffer for his sin. Aunt Agatha's advice clicked and he declared his intention to leave Wishwood. The shock and disappointment become the cause of Amy's death.

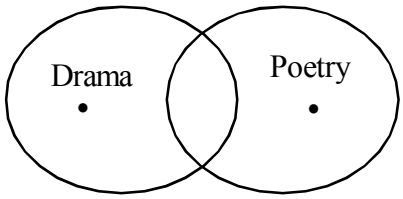
15.6 Eliot's Craftmanship in Poetic Drama

Another contemparary playwright of T.S.Eliot was Chritopher Fry . He distinguished himself with high flautin language saturated with quibbles and conceits. He took liberty with language and poetic expression. The poetic drama lost its charm after T. S. Eliot , Stephen Philips and Christopher Fry. Eliot who was a born critic and poet, turned to poetic drama and made his excellent contribution. His charisma as a playwright began with his debut *Murder in the Cathedral.* Since it was thematically based on the murder of Thomas a Backet, Archbishop of Canterbury, it appealed to the Christian audience. Eliot created the incantatory effect by repeating phrases and sentence patterns. *The Family Reunion* was far superior to *Murder in the Cathedral* from the point of view of craftmanship. There is no outward conflict as we see in Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. Harry is morbidly haunted by the sense if sin caused by his belief of having drowned his wife to death. Finally he leaves the ancestral home at Wishwood to expiate and attain spiritual salvation. The tragic notion of the impending disaster is dormant and it doesn't explode on the surface in the presence of dull-witted and mundane aunts and uncles of Harry. The Furies are like the witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. As Harry departs, Lady Amy Monchensey breathes her last. She cannot endure the shock of Harry's departure since he had come home after eight long years and Amy was going to transfer all her assets to him to settle down at Wishwood like King Lear's 'fast intent' to "shake all cares and business from our age conferring them on younger strengths, while we unburden'd crawl towards death".[7] The corpus of Poetic drama is a creation of a great genius that Eliot certainly is. Even if the plays have failed on account of stage actability, they are, to quote T.S.Pearce, "interesting and entralling literary failures". T.S.Eliot does not stoop down to cheap popular taste. There is no compromise with excellence and grandeur. His plays are for the elite of European society and the enlightened audience with literary sensibility.

15.7 Let Us Sum Up

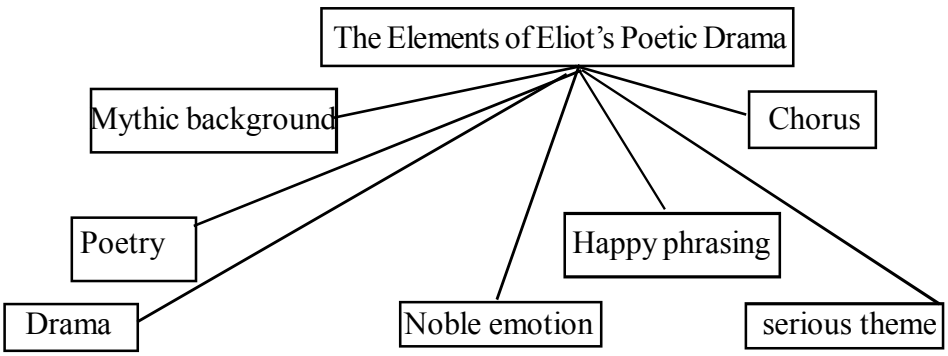
Eliot as a playwright had strong convictions. He believed that poetic drama could be more

moving and powerful than prose drama. He wrote his poetic plays as an alternative to witty prose plays of George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde. He stated his position as a critic in *A Dialogue of Dramatic Poetry* (1928). (which was prefaced to Dryden's discussion on Drama)' *Rhetoric and Poetic Drama* (1919) and *Poetry and Drama* (1950). He thought that the use of verse in drama was not a mere ornamental device but it enhanced the dramatic effect with an impact on the mind of the audience. What Eliot did with reference to poetic drama, Harold Pinter did with prose by attempting to create speech rhythms in prose charged with emotion. Eliot had a notion that all poetry tended to become drama and all drama tended to become poetry. They were overlapping and interpenetrating forms of imaginative writing. There is a thin line of demarcation between what is "poetic" and what is "dramatic".



Poetic drama could be made an adequate vehicle of noble human passions and emotions. Eliot's emphasis is on noble human emotions which should be universalized. Eliot rephrases Aristotle's idea as expressed in his *Poetics*. He wrote his plays closer to contemporary speech rhythm. Eliot has adopted commonplace experiences and raised them to nobler and finer human dignity: it may be a quarrel between a husband and his wife as in *The Cocktail Party*; it may be guilt complex as in *The Family Reunion*, it may be a gruesome murder of an Archbishop in the Cathedral as in *Murder in the Cathedral*. Eliot's poetic drama unfolds the meaning gradually, it is 'not with a bang but with a whimper'. His plays have a striking plot each, happy phrasing and sensitive rhythm. Myths, which are an integral part of the tradition, serve as a raw material to his plays. He visualises one single tradition and doesn't see it in the watertight compartments of Greek drama, Roman mythology.

T.S.Eliot was a profound poet-critic and culture- critic of Europe. He had studied the classics, Greek and Roman mythology. His faith was Roman Catholic. He wished to revive poetic drama with freshness and vigour as a finer substitute of prose drama. He employed chorus in the manner of Aeschylus. Chorus, in the Greek tragedy, served several functions. One of the functions was to express the foreboding of impending disaster. Chorus in Eliot's plays *The Family Reunion* and *Murder in the Cathedral* is therefore, strictly in Greek fashion.*The Family Reunion* is more or less a play of sin and expiation.



T.S.Eliot made the classical myths relevant and refined by associating them with everyday experiences of the urban life style. To ignite the ancient myths to yield relevant meaning is a child's play. He gives them modern context and makes them lively. Harry leaves Withwood in

his expensive car accompanied by his chauffeur Downing. Eliot's poetic drama is an enactment of action at two distinct planes- at the level of interpersonal relationships and secondly at the level of individual moral and spiritual experience.

The characters in Eliot's plays are aristocratic by birth or by connection or association. They are quite sophisticated. They enjoy cocktail parties, birthday parties.They represent various levels of consciousness and insights. His plays have a moral/spiritual dimension which creates high seriousness.

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2. T.S.Eliot: The Family Reunion (Faber & Faber Ltd.24 Russell Square. London. pp.124-126)
3. In India, Lord Indra is the deity of rainfall. There are folk songs to appease the angry deity if the monsoon rains are inordinately delayed. Children sing in unison : *Indra Raja Paani De ja.....*
4. T.S.Eliot : Selected Poems (Faber & Faber Ltd.24 Russell Square London.p.59)
5. Ibid,p.60.
6. The Furies are also called the Eumenides.
7. The Plays of Shakespeare ed. B.Hodek (Spring Books. London) See 'King Lear' Act I Sc.(i) p.861

Glossary

Oedipus Complex-It is a term which occurs in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. He holds that the son is more attached to his mother and the daughter is more attached to her father. Oedipus is a character in the trilogy of Sophocles.

Libido: It refers to the sex-impulse which motivates all human conduct.

Existentialism: It is a school of thought . It propunds the idea that Man is subjected to over whelming callous forces in the world. French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre is one of the greatest intellectuals to expond this philospphy.

Renaissance: Literally the term means "re birth". It is a historical term which refers to the period of European history following the Middle Ages. It is commonly said to have begun in Italy in the late fourteenth century and to have continued in western Europe through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It refers to all round excellent development in the field of art, sculpture, architecture, literature. It stands for the revival of humanistic values, new scientific discoveries of Galileo and Copernicus. In common parlance the word stands for progress and enlightenment.

The Grail: The holy grail is the bowl from which Jesus Christ and his disciples drank at the Last Supper.

Tiresias: Tiresias is the blind prophet who was neither male nor female.Though physically blind, he was endowed with great prophetic powers.He could see in past, present and future. He appears as a character in Sophocles's play *Oedipus Rex*. T.S. Eliot refers to him in *The Waste Land*.

Verse libre: It is a French term for free verse. It has irregular line strength and has no rhyme.Walt Whitman used free verse in his *Leaves of Grass*. Eliot is one of the masters of free verse. E.E. Cummings has earned a lot of notoriety with free verse.

Genre: It is a French term in literary criticism to refer to a literary form or species. For example, tragedy, comedy, epic, satire, novel, essay, biography are literary genres.

Chorus: Among the ancient Greeks the chorus was a group of singers who sang verses while performing dance like maneuvers at religious festivals.Chorus played its role in the plays of Sophocles and Aeschylus. The Chorus served the function of the commentator on the action which represented moral, religious and social ideas. Later on, Chorus assumed primarily the lyrical function. To mention only a few, Seneca, Milton in *Samson Agonistes* and T.S.Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral* employed the chorus. Christopher Marlowe in *Dr. Faustus*, Eugene O'Neill in *Mourning Becomes Electra* employed it, too.

Conceit: It means 'image' or 'concept'. It has become a sort of figure of speech which strikes a parallel between apparently dissimilar things or situations John Donne is the master of metaphysical conceits.

15.9 Review Questions

Part I Short Questions

1. Name some brilliant contemporary playwrights of T.S.Eliot's time.
2. Name T.S.Eliot's poetic plays.
3. What do you mean by the oedipus complex ?
4. Write in a paragraph each about the thematic content of :

   (a) *Murder in Cathedral*

   (b) *The Family Reunion*
5. Write short notes on:

   (a) D.H.Lawrence

   (b) Sigmunt Freud

   (c) Tiresias

   (d) The Waste Land

Part II Major Questions

1. How does T.S.Eliot utilize the myth of Orestes in *The Family Reunion*? (300 words)
2. Write a note on T.S.Eliot's contemporary milieu in European society and culture. Discuss.(300 words)
3. How do you justify T.S. Eliot's Poetic drama ? Elaborate your argument.(300 words)
4. Discuss T.S.Eliot's contibution to Poetic drama. (300 words)

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UNIT-16

T.S.ELIOT : *THE FAMILY REUNION*

Structure

16.0 Objectives

The poetic drama constitutes a significant genre in modern literature, When the English drama had exhausted its strength and ability to deal with the tensions, dissentions and complexities of contempory social life, the playwrights revived the poetic drama for a coterie of audience in the little theatres. It would be worthwhile to study T.S.Eliot's poetic play *The Family Reunion* with a view to grasping the meaning of the Poetic drama. It became an established tradition in the hands of W.B.Yeats, T.S.Eliot, W.H.Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Christopher Fry and other brilliant writers. This study is intended to discuss how Eliot incorporated irony, speech rhythms, genuine feeling etc with lofty poetry in the dramatic form, actability being one of the parameters of its success. After *The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) was staged to commemorate the martyrdom of Thomas a` Becket. The play was designed to be a classical tragedy like Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. The spiritual conflict in Thomas a Becket's heart is vocalised by the Tempters between the claims of God and the claims of Caesar.

16.1 Introduction

The Family Reunion (1939) has a modern setting highlighting a young nobleman Harry (Lord Monchensey) who is haunted by illusions and doubts that he has murdered his wife and the furies

pursue him. His mother wishes him assume the role of the head of the estate. One of his aunts Agatha discloses to him that his father had disliked his mother Amy. He had even attempted to kill her but he was dissuaded by her. The complexity is further deepened by Agath's explanation. It seems as though the guilt complex is inherited.

His father's desire to kill his mother Amy is in the sub-conscious self of Harry. Since Agatha and Harry's father loved each other, she knew Harry's father and his mentality. The verse in the play has contemporary speech rhythm. *The Family Reunion* is a drama of sin and expiation and has Christian overtones. After his love-marriage, the protagonist Harry proceeds on a world-tour in a British liner. One day he happened to push his wife on the deck. She fell off the rails into the stormy sea and was drowned to death. He was filled with remorse. After eight long years he returns to Wishwood to see his widow mother on her birthday. Harry would have stayed there but his aunt Agatha associates his guilt complex with his father's attempt to kill his mother Army and enhances Harry's anguish. He makes up his mind to set out on a journey to seek spiritual salvation.

16.1 Critical Summary

16.1.1 Contents and Plot

The story, in nutshell, is that it happens to be Amy's birthday at Wishwood. Her three sisters- Iry,Agatha and Violet- and her two brothers- Gerald and Charles- assemble. Amy's sons- Harry, Arthur and John- are awaited to join the company. It is one late afternoon tea in the month of March. Lady Monchensey (Amy) is shivering with cold. She is rather scared of darkness. The conversation of the guests discloses that she is going to marry off Harry to Mary- the daughter of her late cousin. She is very much present there. But Harry married a girl of his choice and went out on a world-tour eight years ago. About a year ago, his wife fell off the railing of the British liner into the stromy sea and was drowned to death. Therefore, Amy wanted Harry to re-marry and settle down at Wishwood. Harry arrives in the evening. Soon it becomes clear to the guests that Harry is rather tormented by his personal fears and anxieties. When asked by the sympathetic Aunt Agatha and his earlier flame Mary, Harry discloses that he had pushed his wife overboard off the British passenger liner on a dark night. Since then, he is pursued by three pairs of red eyes. The Furies (called the Eumenides) pursue him to punish him for his guilt. It was like Orestes being pursued by the Furies after the murder of his mother Clytemnestra. Having grasped that state of mind of Harry, his aunt Agath reveals that even his father, had attempted to kill his mother Amy. Agatha happened to advise Harry to go out on a long journey of suffering to get rid of remorse by way of spiritual salvation and redemption. It is through his faith in Christ that his sin may be forgiven. The advice of Agatha makes sense and Harry decides to leave Wishwood immediately. He goes in his expensive car accompanied by his chauffeur Downing. Amy dies of shock at his sudden departure. Harry has left and the other sons- Arthur and John- have not arrived yet. The birthday cake with lighted candles is on the table. Mary and Agatha blow out the candles and sing:

This way the pilgrimage

of expiation

Round and the circle

Completing the charm

So the knot be unknotted

The cross be uncrossed

The crooked be made straight

And the curse be ended

By intercession

By pilgrimage

By those who depart

In several directions

For their own redemption

And that of the departed

May they rest in peace. [1]

16.1.2 What *The Family Reunion* is about

Part I

Lady Amy Monchensey is a dowages. She lives in her country mansion at Wishwood in North England. Her three sons live in cities elsewhere. One day in the late month of March, she invites her relatives on the occasion of her birthday. Her three sisters- Iry, Violet and Agatha- have already arrived. Charles and Gerald- the younger brothers of her late husband have joined the company. Mary- daughter of a deceased cousin is there. Amy's sons- Harry, John and Arthur- are expected to arrive shortly. Harry, the eldest son, is coming after a long period of eight years. Denham, the maid, goes to draw the curtains because it is very windy . Amy tells her not do it because there is still daylight and loves to the sights of the world outside in broad daylight. When she was young, she enjoyed anything but now the freezing cold comes in the way. Spring and summer pass very quickly but the winter is rather long- Wishwood has nearly always been a cold place. The climate of the South is rather warm. Violet doesn't agree with Iry's idea of visiting the South because it is the place of "English circulating libraries", the military widows, and the English Chaplains. The South is not a suitable place for country-bred people. Charles says that he would like to be in the London club where one is warm in winter. Gerald likes to spend winter in the East where the servants look after their masters much better. He is a military man and has spent a lot of time in the East. Amy resents this comment as it reflects upon her servants. Violet disapproves of the South. There one finds many young people who have a lot of money and who spend extravagantly on cocktails and cigarettes. The guests agree that the younger generation has undergone moral and cultural decline: They have lost their stamina and the sense of responsibility. Gerald defends the young generation saying that they are passing through a difficult phase. Mary is Amy's choice for Harry. Amy does not wait for the clock of her genteel family 'to stop in that dark at Wishwood.'

Amy is waiting for her sons Arthur and John to drop in anytime. It will be a happy family

reunion after eight years. Amy was not pleased with Harry's wife who was not worthy of being married in her family: She cared little for the relations. It was given out that she, under the influence of wine, had jumped off the rails of the ship she was travelling along with her husband. Since Harry must be in grief, nothing in the country house was changed to offend him.

All other members of the family except Agatha believe tht the past should be forgotten. But Agatha regards the past as "irrevocable" and "irremediable" : The future can only be on the past. It does not exist in vacuum. She hopes Harry, who returns to Wishwood, would find it a new place. He would find it difficult to adapt himself to the changes which have taken place over the years "The man who returns will have to meet the boy who left". Everything would remind him of the past. The other members of the family think that Harry would find nothing new or changed at Wishwood. Agatha, unlike others, thinks that men are the helpless puppets in the hands of destiny.

The choral song by Ivy, Violet, Gerarld and Charles gives the impression that something sinister is going to happen: they are ill at ease feeling embarrassed, fretful and rather impatient for some unknown cause. They feel they would be at ease elsewhere.

When Harry arrives, every one welcomes him heartily. Harry is rather upset as he notices the Furies at the window. They have been pursuing him since his wife's death. He sees the very eyes of his pursuers. The invitees wonder at Harry's distraction. His mother thinks it is due to his fatigue. What he needs is a hot bath, dinner, and sound sleep. Harry seems to have changed a lot. They find it difficult to understand the man. When questioned about his restlessness, he discloses a shocking incident. He tells them that while he was traveling in the ship over the Atlantic, on a cloudless night, he pushed his wife angrily. She just fell off the rails into the ocean. He is haunted by the revengeful apparitions since then. Even in the company of guests and relatives, he is now drowned in grief. The sense of guilt has morbid possession on his soul. The newspapers had reported that he did not kill his wife. She had either committed suicide or had fallen into the ocean accidentally. But the guilt complex eats into his cheerfulness. Harry's mother Amy thinks that Harry's state of mind is a dangerous fancy. It has no real base. He would be all right after a hot bath, good dinner and sound sleep. It is only Agatha who understands his remorse fairly deeply.

When Harry has left the room to have bath, the members think of the family doctor Mr. Warburton: He must be sent for to examine Harry. It would look natural that the family doctor should be invited at Lady Amy's party. The proposal is very well-received and Dr. Warburton is invited to the party.

Downing, Harry's chauffeur, is questioned by the guests regarding the drowing of Harry's wife. He knows Harry's life inside out. Charles asks many questions and Downing responds to them willingly. Others listen to the conversation aptly to see what truth will come out of it. Downing impresses upon Charles that her ladyship's is a case of accident rather than suicide: She did speak of suicide but she never had the pluck to do it. She got easily excited under the influence of wine. Harry was rather depressed and a psychic case of worrying about his health was rather too much. When the weather was inclement, he didn't come out of his cabin. That day he was nervous and had a notion that some evilsome or sinister event could take place. In the evening, he noticed his Lordship leaning over the railings of the liner looking at the waters. Downing revealed nothing sensational or horrible.

Mary and Agatha talk in the business like manner about the dinner, calculating about the num-

ber of guests. Arthur and John may be late to attend the dinner. Dr. Warburton is also an invitee. He is a sincere family friend. Mary doesn't think of becoming Lady Amy's daughter-in-law. She would like a job elsewhere. Harry and Mary happen to talk. Harry experiences "sweetness and light" in Mary's company. But as he looks at the windows, he notices the eyes of the Furies staring at him. Mary doesn't see any Furies. When the special invitee Dr.Warburton arrives, he speaks to Harry. As they move in to dinner, Agatha wishes.

"And the eye of the night time

be diverted from this house

Till the knot is unknotted

The cross is uncrossed

And the crooked is made straight"[2]

Part II

Harry and Dr.Warburton talk to each other in the library after dinner. Dr.Warburton tells Harry that he is worried about Lady Amy's ill health. Harry gives an intelligent twist to the topic asking the doctor whether he knew his father also. The doctor says that he knew very well and adds that the couple was never happy together. They lived separately by mutual consent and he went to live abroad. Harry was a little boy when his father died. Harry says he still remembers that day in hot summer. The doctor, then, tells him that his mother Lady Amy is very weak in her physical constitution. She has survived so far because of her strong will power and domineering personality. Any shock can kill her any day. It is his duty, the Doctor tells Harry, to keep his mother happy since all her hopes are centred upon him, his brothers John and Arthur being irresponsible.

The maid Denham informs that Sergeant Winchell has come to see Dr. Warturton and Harry on some urgent business. He tells Harry that his brother John has met with an accident while driving. His rash driving caused it weather being foggy and dark. He is in the Arms Hospital for treatment.

Lady Amy intends to see John but Dr.Warburton requests her to stay at home. Harry looks unruffled to hear the Sergeant's information. There is also a trunk call for lady Iry. It is most probably from Arthur.

Agatha talks to Harry rather philosophically that each individual's life is part of a larger universal design. Nobody suffers in isolation. He should therefore comprehend other "private worlds of make believe and fear." She observes "We cannot rest in being the impatient spectators of malice or stupidity."

We must try to penetrate the other private worlds of make believe and fear. To rest in our own suffering.

Is evasion of suffering. We must learn to suffer more.[3]

16.1.3 Harry and Agatha

Thus, Agatha assumes the role of Harry's spiritual mentor rather unawares. Harry's state of mind is more or less a "private puzzle." Though he is physically quite fit and healthy but he is sick at

heart. Ivy tells them that Arthur, too, has an accident. While driving in the drunken state, his car smashed into a shop-window. But he was lucky that he didn't receive any serious injuries. The news is not disclosed to Lady Amy for reasons apparent.

Harry is busy to discuss his inner anguish with Agatha and he tells her that the Eumenides have been chasing him. They make him realise that the origin of his trauma and wretchedness lies in his childhood. He wishes to know someting more about his father from Agatha. She is rather disturbed at Harry's questions regarding his father. She tells him that his mother and father didn't love each other. His father wanted to murder his mother. Therefore, Harry's guilt complex is subtlely linked with his father's sinister design. He must expiate not only for his guilt but also for his father's evil design. The family is under a curse. It is he who can redeem his family from the curse. He must suffer and through suffering alone, redemption can be sought, and salvation be achieved. The advice that Agatha gives clicks: Harry realises that everyman has to perform his predestined role in his life. A man has limited choice of action. He must make use of his freedom to make right choice. Agatha speakes to him,

"It is possible that you have not known what sin

you shall expiate, or whose or why. It is certain

That the knowledge of it must precede the expiation.

It is possible that sin may strain and struggle.

In its dark instinctive birth, to come to consciousness.

And to find expurgation. It is possible

You are the consciousness of your unhappy family

.....flying through the purgatorial flame.[4]

Harry is psychologically prepared to proceed on a long journey. It is going to be his mode of expiation. So far the Eumenides had been chasing him but now he would willingly follow them feeling as if they were transformed into bright angels. He calmly tells his mother that he is going to leave Wishwood. His younger brother John would prove a better landlord than he.

Amy is shoked beyond measure. She accuses Agatha, who took her husband from her thirty five years ago, and now she has taken her eldest son Harry. She had pinned all her hopes on Harry to become Lard Monchensey of Wishwood. She tells Mary that Agatha has cast her spell on Harry- 'she has some spell /That works from generation to generation.' [5]

Mary is much worried about Harry's safety as she has a soft corner for him. But Agatha remarks in philosophical tone:

"Here the danger, here the death, not elsewhere;

Elsewhere no doubt is agony, renunciation,

But birth and life. Harry has crossed the frontier

Beyond which safety and danger have a different meaning

And he cannot return."[6]

Lady Amy says with unendurable anguish "Harry is going away- to become a missionary....[7]

The Eumenides have got him on right lines now: He is safe with them. Mary is spellbound by Agatha's subtle metaphysics. Lady Amy wishes to be left 'alone in a damned house'[8] She feels very much like King Lear in the storm.[9]

"I will let the walls crumble. Why should I worry

To keep the tiles on the roof, combat the endless weather

Resist the wind?.....Why should I ?

It is no concern of the body in the tomb

to bother about the upkeep. Let the wind and rain do that."[10]

She has struggled very hard for several years to keep the house of Wishwood going. She realises the futility and meaninglessness of it all. Lady Amy feels like taking some rest. She is taken to her bedroom where she dies heart broken in a shortwhile. The clock of her heart has stopped for good in the dark.

Thereafter Agatha and Mary perform the birthday ritual by going round the table several times. There are on the table the birthday cake and few lighted candles. It is an ironical situation as Lady Amy has breathed her last. Mary and Agatha blow off the candles and sing a chorus by way of incantation and perform the ritual to neutralise the family curse. The play ends with Agatha's incantation:

This way the pilgrimage

of expiation

Round and round the circle

Completing the charm

So the knot be unknotted

The crossed be uncrossed

The crooked be made straight

And the curse be ended

By intercession

By pilgrimage

By those who depart

In several directions

For their own redemption

And that of the departed.[11]

16.2 Irony in *The Family Reunion*

T.S.Eliot's verse play *The Family Reunion* is different from the religious setting of *The Rock*

(1934) and *Murder in the Cathedral* (1934). The setting of this play is an English country house life. The plot is about the return of a young nobleman Harry to his acestral home after eight years. The occasion happens to be the birthday of his widowed mother Lady Amy. The dowager is keenly waiting for the return of her son at Wishwood in North England. Her sister, Iry, Violet and Agatha- have already assembled. Her deceased husband's brothers- Charles and Gerald- have also arrived. The three sons are likely to arrive by the evening. Thus, all the members of Lady Amy's family are supposed to assemble at Wishwood in the evening. It is going to be her family reunion. But what happens is bitterly ironical.

Harry does arrives but he is apparently disturbed. He has an inner anguish which is getting rather unendurable. He tells the company that his wife was drowned to death into the ocean as he had pushed her off the railings of the liner. Since then the sense of guilt has been chasing him. Agatha tells him that his sin is associated with his father also. He had tried to kill his mother-Lady Amy. Only expiation and remorse can help him attain spiritual salvation. Harry is convinced of Agatha's argument and makes up his mind to undertake a long journey of remorse and expiation. On hearing the news, Lady Amy dies of shock. What kind of family reunion is this ! Harry doesn't stay to attend the birthday celebration of his mother who dies the same evening. The birthday celebration coincides with the funeral rites. Lady Amy's sons- Gerarld and Arthur- are injured while driving to reach Wishwood. Amy's sister and her deceased husband's brothers are to leave shortly. The day of family reunion turns out to be the days of family disunion and split. The title, thus, has the implication of subtle irony.

Irony means communication of meaning but the words mean just the opposite looking to what really happens. It has sharply dramatic element which makes the characters mocked or scandalised by fate. Lady Amy regards her birthday to be an auspicious occasion for the family reunion but it proves to be otherwise. The very title is ironical.

16.3 Critical Analysis

The word 'theme' refers to the content/subject- matter: it is central to the fabric of a work of art. The theme of *The Family Reunion* has apparently two levels: It is concerned with the return of Harry, a young nobleman to his ancestral home after eight years. But he embarks on the long journey for suffering the very evening he happens to arrive at home. At the superficial level, it is about the death of a doting mother who fails to transfer the responsibility of maintaining the estate to her son and dies of shock. At the inner levels, it is the drama of sin and expiation. Eliot has woven several minor themes in the very texture of dialogues. These themes refer to time, isolation, loneliness and existential despair of man etc.

Harry comes back home and startles everybody as he is upset. He discloses how and why he is undergoing remorse and he is being chased by the Eumenides. They are staring at him from behind the window over there. The members of the the family wish him to be examined by the family doctor. Agatha observes that the family is under a curse. Even when Harry was in his mother's womb, his father had tried to murder Lady Amy. Since then the curse has cast its spell. It is responsible for Harry's guilt complex and, therefore, he must set out on a journey to expiate his and his father's sin. Lady Amy, hearing the news that Harry is leaving, dies of shock. The clock of her heart stops in the dark.

Lady Amy believes that man can forget his past and build his future on the present through his

endeavour. What she means is that Harry would forget the event of death of his wife after his marriage with Mary and live happily ever after. But Agatha expresses the belief that one's future is built on the real past: Man is predestined. Harry's suffering is rather incomprehensible to other members of the family. They regard him a psychic case and have little notion, except Agatha, that his unendurable anguish is caused by isolation and existential despair in the materialistic world.

16.4 Eliot's Mythopoeic Approach and Christian Overtones

In the Greek legend, the Oracle at Delphi advises Orestes to expiate his sin by bringing to Greece a statue of Artemis from the Taurie Chersonese. Likewise, Agatha advises Harry to expiate his sin by consuming his soul in the fire of remorse and repentence on a long journey, as a missionary.

The Furies which had been chasing him all along appear to him as the benevolent angels and seem to motivate him to seek purification and salvation as the advice of Agatha is accepted by Harry who would redeem the family from the curse which had befallen the family: He would suffer vicariously for the sins of others also. The Christian background underlines four christian theological doctrines.

(i) **The doctrine of the Original Sin:** It is suggested in the play that a person must make amends for the sin of his father/mother or both. Harry chooses to expiate his father's sin.

(ii) **The doctrine of Sin and Expiation:** It is suggested in the play that the sinner's soul shall be condemned and cast into hell. Therefore,a sinner ought to repent through suffering to attain salvation. A sinner would be forgiven as God is kind and merciful.

(iii) **The doctrine of Choice:** The sinner must choose the path of suffering through his free will without any pressure or sorrow.

(iv) **Christ as redeemer:** Christ redeems a sinner from his sin and hellish fires. Faith in Christ must be genuine and deep.

After Harry's departure, the death of Lady Amy overshadows the spiritual moral of the play.

The Myth of Orestes-a Greek legend- is very subtle. Agamemnon was the king of Argos. On his return from The Trojan war, he was murdered by his wife Clytemnestra and her paramour, Agesthus. Agmemnon's son Orestes was a little child at that time. When he grew up, the goddesses of revenge-the Furies- began to pursue him. They made him miserable for his mother had murdered his father. The story goes that he murdered his mother and her paramour by way of revenge for his father's murder. Harry was chased by the Furies as Orestes was chased. The myth of Orestes is the inner plot of *The Family Reunion*.

In the Greek mythology the sin of an ancestor descends upon the heads of the children.

16.5 The Role of Chorus

In Greek drama chorus was a company of singers. They acted as participants in the action of the play or worked as commentators on the action.

In the Elizabethan drama, the chorus become a single character. He spoke the *prologue* and the *epilogue*. In Christopher Marlowe's play *Dr. Faustus* the chorus as a single character speaks not only the prologue and the epilogue, but comments upon the action of the play. The function of the

chorus, thus, became to entertain, to inform and to comment.

T.S.Eliot borrowed the idea of the chorus for his plays from the ancient Greek drama. He tried it in his pageant play *The Rock* (1934) and later on in his *Murder in the Cathedral.* The chorus is a pevy of poor women of Canterbury in *Murder in the Cathedral.* They tell us what they think of the universe ruled by fate, death and time.

The Chorus in *The Family Reunion* is a modern form of the Greek chorus. It is sung by Ivy, Violet, Charles and Gerald- The first two are Harry's aunts and the other two are his uncles. It is to be noted that they are all wordly-minded materialistic people. They are not spiritually inclined: They are not capable of comprehending Harry's anguish. The world is too much with them.

"And now it is nearly time for the news

We must listen to the weather report

And the international catastrophes."[12]

The fourth speech of the Chorus occurs after Amy's death at the end of the play.

We understand the ordinary business of living

We know how to work the machine,

We can usually avoid accidents,

We are insured against fire,

Against larceny and illness,

Against defective plumbing

But not against the act of God.....

.....The circle of our understanding

Is a very restricted area.

Except for a limited number

Of strictly practical purposes

We do not know what we are doing;

We do not know much about thinking

What is happening outside the circle ? [13]

The function of the Chorus in *The Family Reunion* consists of the following:

(a) They represent the view point of the worldly-minded people. They feel embarrassed and ill at ease at the mention of what we call spiritualism.

(b) They admit that there are certain universal laws of *Nature* and that *Time* is progression of events.

(c) Man is not insured against the act of God.

(d) Human knowledge is limited.

(e) Yet the people listen to the daily news, the weather reports and, thus, learn the laws of Nature, but not those of God.

The Function of the Chorus in *The Family Reunion* is to document Christian Existential philosophy and to satirize the mundane attitude of the people.

16.6 Let Us Sum Up

The Family Reunion is a serious play in classical form. It is a remarkable adaptation of the serious Greek drama to the contemporary setting of English aristocratic country-house life. The playwright does not describe the inner conflict of Harry. His progress of spiritual enlightenment is sudden. His decision is momentous. The very essence of drama is moral and spiritual conflict but it is missing in *The Family Reunion* . The spiritual conversion of Harry is not dramatically realised: The climax is as sudden as *denouement*. The Furies,[14] the Eumenides are supernatural beings in Greek mythology: they are visible to the sinner. But in *The Family Reunion* they are shown on the stage.

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14. The names of the Greek goddesses of Vengeance are Tisiphone Alecto and Megeara.

16.8 Glossary

1. **dowager:** A rich lady who is a widow and looks after the estate in the event of her husband'a death Lady Amy Monechensey is a dowager who manages the estate at Wishwood Country

House in North England.

2. **Irony:** Irony is a subtle figure of speech. The meaning conveyed by words in just the opposite of what really happens. There are ironical circumstances in T.S.Eliot's verse play *The Family Reunion.*

3. **Classicism**: Classicism is a blanket term for the principle of the beauty of form, good taste, restraint, clarity in a work of art. As a literary/artistic attitude, it insists upon a sublime theme, a disciplined play of imagination, chaste language. It goes in favour of elegance, refinement, decency and decorum. Classicism is the product of the ancient Greek and Roman artists.

4. **Symbolism**: The term 'symbolism' means the practice of representing ideas or things by attributing symbolic meanings to words, signs and objects. Generally a symbol represents an abstraction. For example the lion is the symbol of courage; the lamb is the symbol of innocence. The olive branch is the symbol of peace. The cross is the symbol of Christianity. A symbol is employed to present to the mind an image or idea of an abstraction. In *The Family Reunion*, the Furies or the Eumenides are symbolic projections of Harry'a guilt complex.

5. **Aristocratic**: The adjective 'aristocratic' refers to the life-style of nobility. The royal families had rich estate to manage and lived apparently luxuriously. Lady Amy Monchensey belongs to an aristocratic family.

6. **Mundane**: It means 'worldly' or materialistic.

7. **Expiation**: It means repentence or remorse to neutralize one's sin(s)

8. **Prologue**: It is the opening speech in the play. It may be spoken by the Chorus, too.

9. **Catastrophe**: It means disaster or destruction on a massive scale. Earthquakes, floods, epidemics, wars etc. are catastrophes.

10. **Genre**: It is French term. It is used in literary criticism to mean a literary species or literary form.

11. **Curse**: It is a sinister spell which causes unfortunate episodes.

12. **Mythopoeic approach:** It means incorporating myths and legends into poetry. T.S.Eliot makes use of the Greek myths of Orestes and the Eumenides in *The Family Reunion*.

13. **Psychic case**: The word 'psyche' refers to 'the mind'. In the pathological context, 'a psychic case' would mean a patient who is mentally perturbed and upset. Harry appears a *psychic* case to the members of his family.

14. **Choral**: It is the adjective of chorus.

15. **Subtle**: It means 'complex' or 'complicated' or mysterious. For example, the ways of God are subtle and incomprehensible.

16.9 Review Qustions

(I)Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss the morbid state of the mind of Harry. What causes it and why ?

2. Do you think the title '*The Family Reunion*' is ironical ? Discuss.
3. What kind of woman is Agatha ? What are her ideas ? Elaborate.
4. Describe the circumstances in which Lady Amy dies.
5. Comment upon the Chorus in *The Family Reunion*
6. Discuss T.S.Eliot's *The Family Reunion* as a drama of sin and expiation.
7. What are the themes of *The Family Reunion* ?
8. How does T.S.Eliot incorporate the myth of Orestes in *The Family Reunion* ? Discuss.

(II) Short Answer Questions

1. Who are the goddesses of revenge?
2. What were Lady Amy's aspirations ?
3. Who are Lady Amy's sisters ?
4. Who is Downing and what does he disclose ?
5. What do you know about Dr.Warburton ?
6. "There are three together
   May the three be reparated"
   Who are 'the three' as referred to by Agatha?
7. What does Dr. Warburtion speak to Harry ?
8. Who remarks and when, "Agatha ! Mary ! Come ! The clock has stopped in the dark."
9. What are the views of the Chorus on the modern man ?
10. 'He's taken his medicine, I've no doubt.
    Let him marry again and carry on at Wishwood."
    Who says these words ?
11. "She has some charm
    That works from generation to generation."
    Who is "she" in these lines ?

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UNIT-17

GIRISH KARNAD : *HAYAVADAN* (I)

Structure

17.0 Objectives

i) To familiarize you with the text.

ii) To introduce you to the author.

iii) To know the characters, their mythical importance.

iv) To know the development of Indian English Drama and Karnad's literary background.

17.1 Introduction

Until very recently playwriting in Kannada was a mere literary exercise, with no contact whatever with the living stage. The professional theatre was, as it continues to be, so naïve and rudimentary that both Kailasam and Adya Rangacharya, the two major playwrights in Kannada, rejected it out of hand. But they could not create an enduring substitute for it and were forced to work in isolation.

Fortunately the situation has changed now and a group of young directors and actors have been able to create a theatre which, though entirely dependent on non-professionals, has proved congenial to the growth of new drama. With this new theatre growing around them, new playwrights like Girish Karnad have been able to bring to drama first-hand knowledge of the practical demands of the stage and a better understanding of dramatic style and technique.

In his works, Karnad has moved away from the regionalist tradition that had given Kannada literature its identity in the early years of the century. *Yayati,* his first play, reinterprets an ancient myth. *Tughlaq,* his second play, is based on history. And both the plays are thoroughly modern in outlook and spirit.

The plot of *Hayavadana* comes from Kathasaritsagara, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. But Karanad has borrowed it through Thomas Mann's retelling of the story in *The Transposes Heads*. The Sanskrit tale, told by a ghost to an adventurous king, gains a further mock-heroic dimension in Mann's version. The original poses a moral problem while Mann uses it to ridicule the mechanical conception of life which differentiates between body and soul. He ridicules the philosophy which holds the head superior to the body. The human body, Mann argues, is a fit instrument for the fulfilment of human destiny. Even the transportation of heads will not liberate the protagonists from the psychological limits imposed by nature.

Karnad's play poses a different problem, that of human identity in a world of tangled relationship.

17.2 About the Author

17.2.1 Life and Personality

Born on May 19, 1938, in Matheran, a town near Bombay, Girish Karnad spent his childhood in a small village called 'Sirsi' in Karnatka. His father named Shri Raghunath was a doctor. His mother Kasibai was a kind lady. He had first hand experience of the indigenous folk theatre. This maiden experience with the Natak companies in the childhood had a lasting impression on his mind. Karnad recollects his deep impression in these words: "It may have something to do with the fact that in the small town of Siris, where I grew up, strolling groups of players called Natak mandalis or Natak companies would come, set up a stage, present a few plays over a couple of months and move on. My parents were addicted to these plays. That was in the late 1940s. By the early 1950s, films had more or less finished off this kind of theatre, though some mandalis still survive in North Karnataka in a very degenerate state. But in those days they were good or at least I was young and thought so. I loved going to see them and the magic has stayed with me."

Like Shakespeare, Girish Karnad carried deep impressions of childhood experiences in his mind. His tender mind and heart accumulated the impressions of the indigenous plays staged before his eyes. Karnad was influenced by both the traditions- western and native. It was the post-independence period, when he happened to study the western authors. He studied Aristole, Shakespeare, and John Dryden etc. He was also attracted towards Dryden's critical work, *Essay on Dramatic Poesy.* Comparative study of the western and the eastern literatures helped him understand that though there was immense possibilities of learning from the west, yet Indian/Native traditions were more valuable and acceptable.

Meanwhile,Girish Karnad completed his graduation from Karnataka University, Dharwad, in 1958 and shifted to Bombay for further studies. Once again, he came in touch with the theatre in Mumbai. The first play he witnessed in Mumbai was Strinbery's, *Miss Juli,* directed by Ebrahim Alkazi. It was one of Alkazi's less successful performances. But he was deeply moved due to the power of violence in the play. He was equally attracted by the way lights faded in and out on the stage. As he was a bright student, he obtained the prestigious Rhodes scholarship and reached England to

obtain his post-graduation degree. While studying at Magdalene College, Oxford-Karnad experienced and realized his love for art and culture. Having returned to India, he joined Oxford University Press, Madras in 1963.

Due to his assignment, he came in contact with various kinds of literature in India and abroad. These influenced his creative talent. Gradually he got name and fame. As a result of this, he was appointed Director of the film and television Institute of India, Pune, 1974. In 1987, he visited USA as Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at the department of South Asian Languages and civilizations-university of Chicago. He was appointed Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akadmi (National Academy of Performing Arts), New Delhi, from 1988 to 1933. In 1994 Karnad was honoured with Doctor of Letters Degree by Karnataka university for his contribution to art and theatre. This is followed by Girish Karnad's adornment of two prestigious awards , Padmshri in 1974 and Padmbhusan in 1992 by the President of India. A feather in his cap was added when he achieved prestigious Jnanpith Award in 1999. He resides in Bangalore with his medico wife and two children, a daughter, and a son.

17.2.2 Literary Background

Being one of the leading Indian playwrights of our time, Karnad has written ten plays; out of which, he has translated five into English. Almost all the plays are rooted in Indian mythology and history. As a modern dramatist his plays report a strong and un-mistaken western philosophical sensibility. Girish Karnad has a deep study of existentialism through the literary works of Sartre and Camus. The playwright projects existentialist crisis of modern men. It is conveyed through strong individual who seemed to be caught in intense psychological and philosophical conflicts. Lakshmi Chandrasekhar 's opines:

"Karnad has been accused of escaping into the past, but the use of mythology in most modern literature validates individual experience and universalizes it. And I think Karnad has been able to do that" Karnad started writing plays accidentally. Once he was about to go to England. He was reading *The Mahabharata*, one of the great epics of ancient Indian civilization. He came across the story of *Yayati* and was inspired to write a play. All of a sudden he found in himself a playwright. He wrote his play is Kannad. The original root of the play *Yayati* was borrowed from the ancient Indian Mythology. The theme of the play has a native essence, but the form and structure are decorated in the western style.

This accidental incidence of writing plays motivated him to be a playwright. Actually, Karnad had fancy to be a poet and not a playwright. During his teenage, he composed poetry and trained himself to be a poet, keeping in mind the great Indian poets like Tagore and Sir Aurbindo. Girish Karnad admits, that "The greatest ambition of his life was to be a poet". When he entered college, he thought of writing in English and become a novelist with his inner ambition to become globally famous. But ultimately he turned out to be playwright. Karand's opinion about a playwright is:

"The subject that interests most writers is of course is themselves and it is easy subject to talk about. But you know it is always easier if you are a poet or a novelist because you are used to talking in your voice. You spend your whole life talking as a writer directly to the audience. The problem in being a playwright is that everything that you write is for someone else to say".

The playwright is divided into various characters. He writes dialogues for them. A kind of

conflict has to be created to make the play interesting. In the beginning of his career, Karnad could see that very little attention was paid to plays in India. There is no doubt that the Natak Companies in India had made a major contribution to the theatrical activities. The two questions emerged before Girish Karnad as a playwright;

1. Where does the playwright look for the source of his plays?

2. Why does one write plays at all?

Karnard always kept these questions in his mind before beginning his career as a playwright and was able to contribute wonderful creations to the world. His source for dramas had been history and mythology with the target to bring the truth of society under some guise, as bitter truth cannot be appreciated in literary field- besides literature becomes boring or a subject of social science.

17.2.3 His Works

Yayati

We have already noted that Girish Karnad began his career as a playwright accidentally. His first play *Yayati* came in 1961. It is an existential drama conceived with the theme of responsibility. The theme is taken from The *Mahabharata.* It is the story of Yayti, the king and Puru his son. The playwright was honoured with *Mysore State Award* for its literary height and the matical treatment.

Tughlaq

The next play, *Tughlaq* (1964), was a historical play. "Mr. Kurtakuti suggested him that Indian history has not been handled by any Indian writer as it had been done by Shakespeare and Bretch." Both the playwrights' utilized historical themes and characters giving them touch of genius.

The play is a remarkable example of very rich and complex symbolism. It has subtle weaving of different motifs. Tughlaq also reflects the political mood of disillusionment. In present times, it can be compared to the period following the Nehru era in India.

The play Tughlaq projects the transformation of the character of the medieval ruler Mohammad bin- Tughlaq. It is journey of a sensitive and intelligent ruler who really intends to do the welfare for his people. He is misunderstood and maligned, and suffers a sense of self-alienation. He is forced to give up his earlier idealism and end up as a tyrant-ruler.

Unlike Indian mythology, Karnad discovered the immense possibilities of themes of plays in history too. He has also depicted the role of religion and politics in the play. It is a worth enjoying work of art.

Hayavadan

Hayavadan, a mythological play published in 1971 deals with many modern problems. The main plot of *Hayavadan* is taken from 'Kathasaritsagara' and Thomas Mann's retelling of the story in The *Transposed Heads*. But presented it in folk-theatre style full of stock-character masks, chorus etc.

Karnad won the *Kamaladevi* Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh in 1972 for the play '*Hayavadan'*.

Bali (sacrifice)

The next play *Bali* (sacrifice) appeared in 1985 which was first staged at the Prithvi Theatre, Bombay. Satyadev Dubey directed the play. Apparently it seems the story of a royal family and the conflict of violence and non-violence. But the intended objective of the playwright is different. Girish Karnad opens up ideological conflicts of cruelty and power politics in the simple plot of the play. The conflict is between Jain ideologies and Shaktapati, the Kali worshippers.

The play has a great literary value. The great artists like Nassrudin Shah and Ratna Pathak played the leading roles in this play. This is a different kind of play in which Girish Karnad intends to reach out its complex structure from the physical action to the metaphysical realm of intention. The playwright with a keen interest composed the play. He revised his original draft twenty times before it was performed on the stage.

Naga-Mandala

Naga-Mandala is another interesting play written by Girish Karnad in 1988. The play possesses multiple modern perspectives, based on two oral tales from Karnataka. In the introductory note to the play, the playwright comments:"

"*Naga-Mandala* is based on two oral tales from Karnataka which I first heard several years ago from professor A.K.Ramanujan. It is only least of the reasons for dedicating this play to him. I wrote Nagamandala during the year I spent at the university of Chicago as visiting professor and Fulbright scholar in residence." The source of the play is based on the oral tales. They are assimilated and transformed into a beautiful literary art. Generally these tales are narrated by women—normally the older women in the family at the time when children are being fed in the evening in the kitchen or being put to bed. The elder women members also remain present at that time. These tales are usually meant for the children but they also serve deeper meanings among the women of the family. It is a story of life's fidelity and fantasy with reality.

Tale-Danda

In 1990 came *Tale-Danda,* a play exposing caste-system in India. The play depicts the twelfth century communal struggle in the city of Kalyana in north Karnataka. The play has its source from the historical incident that took place in twelfth century in Indian history. The movement of sharanas is recorded as a past history but it has modern relevance too.

In '*Tale-Danda'* Karnad projects power-politics of social and political level through religion. Tha dramatist interrogates about the social, secular and democratic values of the spectators. He also questions on the caste-system and religious fundamental notions. He also enforces us to brood over "History repeats in new form". *Tale-Danda* fetched for the Karnad the "Writer of The Year" award instiued by Granthaloka, in 1990,followed by Karnataka Nataka Academy for the best play of 1990. In addition to that, he received the Karnataka Nataka Shaitya Academy Award for the play in 1993 and the Sahitya Academy (National Academy of the letters) Award in 1994.

The Fire and the Rain

The Fire and the Rain takes us into the world of the Mahabharata age. The playwright treats the subject of the play in a chain of murder, revenge, and jealousy. This series of crimes is committed

in the learned families of Raibhaya and Bharadwaja. Nittilai, an inhabitant of forest, tries to break the chain of crime. Girish Karnad makes an effort to focus on the mystery of evils hidden within human beings. The playwright does not bother about external evils but the real ones are within human beings. As we know that the human mind is very much complex, it is very difficult to fathom it. The playwright depicts the evil present in the human heart. Karnad exposes the nature of evils in this play. The myth is depicted with new dimensions, and touches the problem of our times.

The Dreams of Tipu Sultan

The latest play of Girish Karnad is *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* dealing with the world of dreams secretly recorded by one of India's most famous warrior-Tipu Sultan.

Like Tughlaq, Tipu Sultan has been a very fascinating character in Indian history. He has dominated Indian and British imagination for the last two centuries. For the first time the playwright has included British characters with Indian characters in this play. The play represents cultural and political interaction. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* is remarkable contribution to Indian English drama.

17.3 About the Text

17.3.1 Detailed Analysis of the play

Hayavadan, the play, runs in Two Acts.

The I Act starts with the worship of Lord Ganesha who stands for destroying obstacles and providing success. His physical description is given which embodies imperfectness but he bestows perfectness and success to the world, indicating that God's completeness cannot be comprehended by mortals.

After this invocation of Ganesha by Bhagwata , the chief commentator, the sutradhar of the play prays, for the success of the play and, the story starts. He narrates that in the city of Dharmapura two youths known as Devdatta and Kapila lived in the city.

Devdatta is fair , comely, intelligent and the only son of the revered Brahmin, Vidyasagar. He is expert in logic, poetry and wit etc.

The other youth Kapila is a very close friend of Devdatta. He is the son of Lohita who is an ironsmith in king's armoury. He is dark and simple but very daring, full of strength and physical skills, also a very good dancer.

People consider these friends as two brothers-Ram Lakshman, Krishan-Balrama , like one mind, one heart. Bhagwata is interrupted by an actor who enters yelling, horrified and painting. He informs that while he was travelling he attempted to get relieved by the side of the road but was stopped by a voice from committing that nuisance. When he wanted to confirm who the person was, he saw a horse. Bhagwata considers all this as nonsense and asks him to go and re-confirm the truth.

After sending him away he continues the story but again the actor rushes in informing that the horse is coming. Bhagwata notices a head behind the curtain and is shocked to see it. It is incredible but he thinks that it is a mask on his face and he is scaring the people. The actor holds his waist and Bhagwata tries to pull off the mask, but finally realizes that it is the real head. Bhagwata asks if he has been cursed due to defiling some holy place or insulting some 'pativrata' lady .Hayavadan, the horses

head ,gets annoyed and claims that he has done no wrong to anybody. He narrates his story that he was born with a horse's head and very earnestly wants to get rid of it. He tells that his mother was the princess of Karnataka. She was a very beautiful girl. When she came of age, her father decided that she should choose her own husband. So princes of every kingdom in the world were invited-and they all came, from China, from Persia from Africa. But she didn't like any of them. The last one to come was the prince of Araby. His mother took one look at the- handsome prince on his great white stallion-and she fainted.

Her father at once decided that this was the man. All arrangements for the wedding were made. But when his mother woke up she said she would marry the horse. The prince of Araby broke down. She did not listen to any one.

No one could dissuade her. So ultimately she was married off to the white stallion. She lived with him for fifteen years. One morning she wakes up-and no horse! In its place stood a beautiful Celestial Being, a *gandharva*. Apparently this Celestial Being had been cursed by god Kuvra to be born for some act of misbehaviour. After fifteen years of human love he had become his original self again.

Released from his curse, he asked his mother to accompany him to his Heavenly Abode. But she wouldn't. She said she would come only if he became a horse again.

So he cursed her to become a horse herself. His mother became a horse and ran away happily. His father went back to his Heavenly Abode. Only the child of their marriage –was left behind.

He slaps his unfortunate forehead. Finally he accepted his fate and leads a pure life taking part in social life of the nation-but finds it is not his society as he is not the complete man. Bhagwata advises him to go to Bananas, Rameshwaram, Haridwar, Gaya, Kedarnath for blessings. Hayavadan informs that he has already visited all these places but without any positive result. Finally Bhagwata tells him to try the Kali of Mount Chitrakoot, the goddess famous for being ever-awake to the call of the devotees. Hayavadan happily agrees to go there. Bhagwata asks the actor to accompany him.

The play begins. Kapila asks Devdatta why he did not come to gymnasium to watch him wrestling with Nanda. But the way Kapila responds Kapila gusses that he is thinking about some girl as usual.

KAPILA: "And have you understood me? No, you haven't.

or you wouldn't get angry like this. Don't you know I would

do any thing for you? Jump into well-or walk into fire? Even

my parents aren't as close to as you are. I would leave them

this minute if you asked me to.

Devdatta gets angry as this time he is seriously in love. He tells about her;

DEVADATTA: (slowly). How can I describe

her Kapila?her forelocks rival the bees,her face is….

(all this is familiar to Kapila and he joins in, with great enjoyment.)

DEVADATTA: The Shyama Nayika-born of Kalidasa's magic description-as Vatsyayana had dreamt her. Kapila, in one appearance, she becomes my guru in the poetry of love. Do you think she would ever assent to becoming my disciple in love itself?

DEVADATTA: (His eyes shining.) if only she would consent to be my Muse, I could outshine Kalidasa. I'd always wanted to do that-but I thought it was impossible…. But now I see it is within my reach.

DEVADATTA: Don't! Please. I know this girl is beyond my wildest dreams. But still-I can't help wanting her- I can't help it. I swear, Kapila, with you as my witness I swear, if I ever get her as my wife, I'll sacrifice my two arms to the goddess Kali, I'll sacrifice my head to Lord Rudra…

Noticing his keenness Kapila wants to know her name and parantage. Devdatta informs that she lives in Pavanveethi street as he had followed her to the house but doesn't know her name. Kapila willingly becomes his messenger to find out all her details. Devdatta praises him for his true friendship.

After a great search Kapila is able to find out the house with two headed bird engraved on the top of the front door. When he knocks the door, Padmini opens it. He is stunned to see her beauty and gapes wide-apart.

KAPILA: "(Grapes at her, Aside) I give up, Devadatta. I surrender to your judgment. I hadn't thought anyone could be more beautiful than the wench Ragini who acts Rambha in our village troupe. But this one! You're right-she is Yakshini, Shakuntala, Urvashi, Indumati-all rolled into one."

Padmini had noticed him peering at different doors and enquires whom he wants to meet and why. She is very intelligent and confuses him by asking whether he wants to meet the master of the

house or her father as they can be different persons. The master can be her cousin, her grand father, uncle and her father can be the servant of the house.

As Kapila is ontwitted by her cleverness, he surrenders and finally gives all the deatails of Devadatta as a poet, A pundit, young and the only son of the Revered Brahmin Vidya Sagar Kapila rightly. Comments when is alone;

KAPILA: Devadatta, my friend, I confess to you I'm feeling uneasy. You are a gentle soul. You can't bear a bitter word or an evil thought. But this one is fast as lightning-and as sharp. She is not for the likes of you? What he needs is man of steel. But what can one do? You'll never listen to me. And I can't withdraw now. I'll have to talk to her family.

Bhagwata sums up that Padmini, the daughter of the leading merchant of Dharampura and Devdatta get married and everyone in the town knows the threee as Ram-Sita-Lakshmana.

The scene shifts. Padmini is packing for travelling and Devdatta is persuading her to cancel to trip as she is pregnant. Whenever Padmini talks of Kapila the husband gets jealous as she wants himto accompany for the trip, to listen to his poetry and he wants to be alone with her. When Padmini reminds him of their friendship as well as his jealously, he doesn't agree to it. Padmini comments:Look now. You got annoyed about Kapila , but why? You are my saffron, my marriage-thread, my deity. Why should you feel upset? I like making fun of Kapila he is such an innocent. Looks a proper devil, but the way he blushes and giggles and turns red, he might have been a bride.

Ultimately she agrees to postpone the trip and go to Vjjian fair later and that too, they two alone. Devadatta is happy and wants to spend the day with her but Kapila enters and feels sorry for being late and informs the reason that oxen were not up to the mark and he had to get new pair. Devadatta informs him about the calling off of the trip due to Padmini's illness. Kapila wants to return the cart to save the charges. Suddenly Padmini comes and expresses her wish to go for the journey as it was only a headache and now she is feeling fine. She instructs Kapila to put the baggage in the cart. Finally Devadatta agrees to travel with the box of his books, but complains that he is bothered about Kapila's disappointment and not his. The scene shifts, travelling has started. The road is very rough but Padmini appreciates the gentle cart driving of Kapila and reminds them of Devadatta's rough driving. One the way when she enquires about a flower-tree Kapila climbs like an ape to get flowers for her. She admires his body and muscles etc. speechlessly Devadatta realizes that no woman can resist him.

PADMINI: (Watching him, to herself.) How he climbs-like an ape. Before I could even say 'yes', he had taken off his shirt, pulled his dhoti up and swung up the branch. And what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back-like an ocean with muscles rippling across it-and then that small, feminine waist which looks so helpless.

DEVADATTA: (Aside) No woman could resist him-and what
does it matter that she's married? What a fool I've been. All
these days I only saw that pleading in his eyes stretching out
its arms, begging for a favour. But never looked in her eyes.
And when I did- took the whites for their real depth. Only now-I
see the depths-now I see these flames leaping up from those depths.
Now! So late! Don't turn away now, Devadatta , look at her. Look at
those yellow, purple flames. Look how she's pouring her soul in his
mould. Look! Let your guts burn out-let your lungs turn to ash- but
don't turn away. Look-these eyes-looks until those peacock flames
burn out the blindness in you. Don't be a coward now.

She appreciates the enchanting route appearing like garden. Kapila points out the river Bhargavi and the hermitage of Vyasa, a temple of Rudra and and beyond the hill temple of Kali.

"Rudra Temple" reminds Devadatta of his promise made before marriage and he proposes to visits to Kali temple but Kapila suggests that Rudra temple is nearer and in better state and be visited first. Kapila makes his best efforts to convince Devadatta but fails. Padmini agrees to accompany him and they leave the unwilling Devadatta.

Devadatta decides to climb for the temple of Kali and confesses that he had forgotten the oath to make sacrifice if he got married with Padmini. He finds a sword in the temple, offers his head after a struggle, groaning and writhing.

When Padmini and Kapila return they find Devadatta missing. Kapila goes to Kali's temple to search him and finds his body. Kapila is afraid that he has died due to hatred and anger towards him. He cries ;

No Devdatta I can't live without you. I can't breathe
without you. Devdatta,my brother, my father, my
friend…..
(Picks up the sword)

You spurned me in this world. Accept me as your brother
at least in the next. Here, friend, here I come. As always,
I follow in your path.
He also cuts off his head and dies.

After a long wait Padmini also goes to the Kali temple. As it is dark she is not able to see the

bodies and stumbles over them. She is terrified to find them dead and finds difficult to return home;

Home? And what shall I say when I get there? What
shall I say happened? And who'll believe me? They'll
all say the two fought and died for this whore. They're
bound to say it. Then what'll happen to me? No, Mother
Kali, no,- it's too horrible to think of. No! Kapila's gone
– Devadatta's gone. Let me go with them.
(Picks up the sword)

She also tries to offer herself to the goddess by piercing the sword in her breast but a voice stops her. "Put it down". A loud voice of drums stupefies her- then the goddess appears- a terrifying figure, arms stretched out, mouth wide open with tongue lolling out. Then she yawns and asks Padmini to open her eyes. Padmini asks to save her as she cannot show her face to the world. The goddess tells her to put the heads on the bodies;

Put these bodies' heads back properly. Attach them to
their bodies and then press that sword on their necks. They'll
come up alive. Is that enough?

She asks the goddess why didn't she stop both of them from beheading themselves. Even if one of them was alive it could have saved her from trouble and agony. The goddess knows her weakness but says;

The rascals! They were lying to their last breaths. That
fellow Devadtta- he had once promised his head to
Rudra and his arms to me! Then because you insisted
on going to Rudra temple, he comes here and offers his
head. Nobly too- wants to keep his word, he says-no
other reason!
Then this Kapila, died right in front of -but 'for his friend.'
Mind you! Didn't even have courtesy to refer to me. And
what lies! Says he is dying for friendship. He must have
known perfectly well he would be accused of killing
Devadtta for you. Do you think. wouldn't have grabbed
you if it hadn't been for that fear? But till his last breath-

'Oh my friend! My dear brother.'

Only you spoke the truth.

She says that Padmini spoke truth because of selfishness. In hurry Padmini puts Devatta head on Kapila 's body and vice-versa and presses the sword on their necks and stands closed-eyed. Again the drums sound and the dead bodies move and touch their arms, head mechanically.

Devadtta (with Kapila's body) asks Padmini what happened as he finds his body very Heavy. While Kapila finds his head very heavy (as it on the delicate body of Devadtta). Padmini confess the mistake committed by her due to darkness.

Devadtta : How fantastic! All these years we were only friends….

KAPILA: Now we are blood-relation! Body-relation! (Laughing)

What a gift!

The three decide to hide the truth of exchanged heads from the world. Devadtta assures that parents etc., who see them daily, take it for granted and do not notice things minutely. The problem arises with whom Padmini will go as one has head of Devadtta and the other has body.

KAPILA: (Angry now.) That may be. But the question now

is simply this: Whose wife is she? (Raising his right hand.)

This is the hand that accepted her at the wedding. This the

body she's lived with all these months. And the child

she's carrying is the seed of this body.

PADMINI: (Frightened by the logic.) no, no, no. it's not

possible. It's not. (running to Devadatta). It's not, Devadatta.

DEVADATTA: Of course, it isn't, my dear. He is ignorant….

(To Kapila.) When one accepts a patner in marriage, with

the holy fire as one's witness, one accepts a person, not a body.

She didn't marry Devadtta's body, she married Devadtta-the person.

Devadtta says that according to shastras, the head is the sign of a man. When Kaplia refuses to accept the text , Devadtta tells Padmini that the real Devadtta could never speak low of the texts. They go on discussing as to how this disastrous problem will be solved. With this dialogue the I Act come to an end.

Act II

Bhagwata relates the story of Vikram and Vetala in which the riddle was solved by giving

importance to head. The three characters of the play go to a 'Rishi' who confirms that head is the supreme among all human limbs. Padmini and Devadtta are full of joy and they dance. Padmini goes with Devadtta but before leaving she tells Kapila that she is going with his body and they would meet soon.

Bhagwata consoles Kapila but he is not prepared to consider himself Kapila and decides to go to the forest and never return to Dharmpura.

The scene shifts and we witness the happy married life of Padmini and Devadtta. Devadtta with Kapila's body participates in wrestling etc. and people are amazed to note the change. He says that his body doesn't wait for thought, it acts.

DEVADATTA: How could I – in your condition? I went only because you insisted you wanted to keep your word. But I 'm glad I went. A funny thing happened-there was a wrestling pit and wrestler from Gandhara was challenging people to fight him. I don't know what got into me-Before I'd even realized it; I had stripped, put on the pants given by his assistant and jumped into the pit.

Padmini is overjoyed to find a perfect husband. Fabulous body-fabulous-brain-fabulous-Devadtta.

Padmini wants to the "male" smell from Devadtta, but Devadtta puts sandal oil which she doesn't like .

The two dolls are brought by Devadtta for their son but these dolls talk, comment on the activities of the family. They are very proud and dream to be in some palace instead of in the rough hands of Devadtta (Kapila's body.)

Padmini wants to take the child for outing which the husband doesn't like. Suddenly the body of Devadtta starts feeling weak, and he wants to give importance to his original work of the poet, thinker etc.The dolls comment on their behaviour. They notice 'some one' in the dreams of Padmini , Padmini ponders if Devadtta's body is losing muscles how would be Kapila with fair body and dark face. The dolls notice that now the other man is in her mind in the day time too.

Doll I: A man…..

Doll II: But not her husband.

Doll I: No, someone else.

Doll II: Is this the one who came last night?

Doll I: Yes-the same. But I couldn't see his face then.

Doll II: You can now. Not very nice-rough. Like a

labourer's.

But he's got a nice body-look soft.

Doll I: Who do you think it is?

Doll II: It's fading.(Urgently) Remember the face!

Doll I: It's fading-Oh! it's gone.

Doll II: And she won't even remember it tomorrow.

Padmini informs Devadtta about Kapila's mother's death to which he remains indifferent. Padmini notices that dolls are in quite a bad state and wants new dolls for the child. Devadtta leaves for the Vjjain Mela and Padmini takes the child in arms and starts for the forest.

The scene is of forest. Bhagwata meets Kapila and inquires if he has got the news from the city that his father and mother are no more and Padmini is blessed with a son. Kapila shows his indifference. Padmini enters with the child. Both of them are shocked to see her there. Padmini says that she has brought her son to be near nature. Then she says that the child is of Kapila too as Devadtta had the body of Kapila. Kapila asks her to take rest in the hut. She leaves the child inside the hut and tells Kapila that the child has got a mole on his shoulder like Kapila.

KAPILA: Is that your son?

PADMINI: Yes. And yours.

KAPILA: Mine?

PADMINI: Your body gave him to me.

KAPILA: Mine? (Erupting.) Not mine. I'm Kapila, Padmini .

I didn't accept it that day, but I accept it now, I am Kapila

PADMINI: (Softly) And how's Kapila?

When Padmini wants to know about the changes in him he informs that in the beginning the soft body of Devadtta gave lot of trouble as it was unfit for the jungle life but ultimately it became strong and got adjusted to the rough and tough life. As the head ultimately wins, he feels that he is perfect Kapila now.

Padmini comments; Nothing . I often remember it.

It's almost my autobiography now, Kapila! Devadtta!

Kapila with Devadtta's body!

Bhagwata comments on the mental state of Padmini who is not satisfied with the condition she is in. If the 'Rishi' would have sent her with Kapila, she might have returned to Devadtta in the same manner.

Kapila asks her why she has come to him when he has won the battle after a long struggle and has accepted his fate. He asks her to return back to Devadatta.

KAPILA: Why? (No reply) Why? Why did you have to come

just when I thought I'd won this long and weary battle? Why

did you have to pursue me just when I had succeeded in uprooting

these memories? I am Kapila now. The rough and violent Kapila.

Kapila with crack between his head and his shoulders. What do

you want now? Another head? Another suicide? - listen to me.

Do me a favour. Go back. Back to Devadtta. He is your husband-

father of this child. Devadttta and Padmini! Devadtta and Padmini!

A pair coupled with the holy fire as the witness. I have no place there,

no peace, no salvation-so go. I beg of you. Go.

(A long silence)

Padmini says that the child is tired and sleeping. When he is awake she would go back. Padmini allows him to touch her body and Kapila's body knows the body. Padmini confesses is that she is the better half of the two bodies as by mistake she had mixed up the two bodies and heads. She surrenders herself to Kapila. Bhagwata and female chorus comment on their relationship.

Devadtta enters the scene and enquires Bhagwata about Kapila's where abouts and Padmini's arrival. Finally he reaches the hut, full of anger but suddenly he become calm and still. When Kapila comes out and greets him they complement each other for looking fine. Kapila tells how his body gave trouble in the beginning but it also taught him to appreciate poetry, language etc. Devadtta confesses that Kapila lived in hate and he in fear.

Both of them confess their love for Padmini. Kapila proposes" Devadtta, couldn't we all three live together- like the Pandavs and Draupadi?"

Both of them draw swords and agree that "we must both die."

KAPILA: With what confidence we chopped off our heads

in that temple! Now whose head –whose head –whose body

suicide or murder-nothing's clear.

DEVADATTA: No grounds for friendship now. No question of

mercy. We must fight like loins and kill like cobras.

KAPILA: Let our heads roll to the very hands which cut

them in the temple of Kali!

Both of them die fighting.

PADMINI SPEAKS: They burned, lived, fought, embraced

and died. I stood silent. If I'd said, yes I'll live with you

both', perhaps they would have been alive yet. But I

couldn't say it. I couldn't say,' yes'. No, Kapila, no,

Devadtta- I know it in my blood you couldn't have

lived together. You would've had to share not only

me but your bodies as well. Because you knew death

you died in each other's arms. You could only have

lived ripping each other to pieces. I had to drive you

to death. You forgave each other, but again-left me out.

Padmini tells Bhagwata to take care of her child as she is going to commit 'sati' and requests to hand over the child to the hunters as it is Kapila's son and bring him up near nature. At the age of five the child be taken to the Revered Brahmin Vidyasagar as Devadtta's son for education and better life. She prays to mother Kali for the joke of her life as she is commiting'sati'not for one husband but for the two. Bhagwata and the female chorus comment in her being 'pativrara'.

Enters Nata, frightened and informs that he heard someone singing" Jhanda Ooncha Rahe Hamara" 'Vende Matram'- but when he wanted to know who the person was, he saw a horse.

Bhagwata doesn't believe him. Actor I comes with a boy and reminds Bhagwata of Hayavadan. When he asks about Hayvadan he informs that Hayvadan had kicked him out. Bhagwata wants to know about the child's parentage etc. but the child remains silent. The Actor informs:

In tribal village of hunters. On my way back I had to stay

and a tribal woman bought him to me. Said, 'This is not our

child. It's from the city? Take it back.' Thus he found the child.

Bhagwata checks the mole on the shoulder of the child and knows

it is Padmini's son.

The horse enters and Bhagwata recognizes him and all start laughing. The child cannot resist laughing on seeing a horse laugh and speaks and his dolls fall down.

BHAGWATA: You don't know her. But this poor child-he

hadn't laughed, or cried, or talked in all these years.

Now you have made him laugh….

Hayavadan tells his story how goddess Kali appeared and when he requested her to make him complete, she blessed 'so be it'. before he completed his sentence, "make me a complete man"

He is not sorry for being a complete horse but he is sorry for the human voice;

" I have become a complete horse- but not a complete being!

This human voice- this cursed human voice-it's still there!how

can I call myself complete? IfI only could. What should I do,

Bhagwata sir? How can I get rid of this human voice?

The boy sympathieses with Hayavadan. Hayavadan proposes the boy to sing the National Anthem but the boy doesn't know it. He sings a tragic folk song. Hayvadan requests him to sing the song again and the boy asks him to laugh. Hayvadan tries to laugh and finds that his laughter has turned into a neigh. He loses his human voice and is happy.

He carries the child, prances around, both are enjoying.

BHAGWATA: so at last Hayvadan has become complete.

(To the Actors) You two go and tell the Revered Brahmin

Vidyasagar that his grandson is returning home in triumph

,riding a big white charger…

Unfathomable indeed is the mercy of the elephant- headed

Ganesha. He fulfils the desires of all of all- a grandson to a

grandfather, a smile to a child, a neigh to a horse. How

indeed can one describe his glory in our poor, disabled words?

Come, Hayvadan, come. Enough of this dancing. Our play is

over and it's time we all prayed and thanked the Lord for

having ensured the completion and success of our play.

And the play ends.

17.3.2 Characterization

Bhagwata- He is the main link character, 'sutradhar' who gives his comments on the incidents, behaviour of the characters and is present from the very first scene to the last scene of the play. He is narrator-commentator.

Hayavadan- The play is named after him. He is a symbolic, mythological character and the whole story rotates round his change-his search for identity and completeness.

Devdatta- He is one of the heroes of the story. He is very handsome, delicate, educated and gets married to Padmini, the heroine. He is son of a great scholar. He is very jealous and possessive.

Kapila- He is the other hero of the story, a very imitate friend of Devdatta, the son of an-iron smith, very strong, tough and devoted to Devdatta and can sacrifice anything for his

friend.

Padmini- She is the heroine who becomes the cause of the tragedy as she is divided into two personalities. She weds Devdatta for his status, academics and is attracted towards Kapila for manliness etc. Finally she commits Sati-not for one man but for two in an ironic manner.

Actor I +II – Are the minor characters but they link the story in between wherever necessary. Doll I +II – are the talking two dolls bought by Devdatta and they comment and reveal the inner life of Padmini and Devadtta to the readers.

Child- He is the son of Padmini, Devdatta and Kapila and appears at the end of the play. He is a very serious child, only Hayavadan makes him laugh as the child has never seen a horse laughing like a human being. Finally the child is taken to his grandfather by the same while stallion.

17.3.3 Glossary

Ganesha- Vighenswara, the destroyer of obstacles, physically deformed yet the symbol of perfectness, completeness. Whatever new work, marriage, business takes place he is worshipped first of all. He is being invoked at the beginning of the play for its success and being paid homage to get on with the play without any hindrances.

Mask- They are used in folk-teles as the horse's head cannot be put on man's head and the exchange of heads of Devadtta and Kapila is not literally possible on the stage the mask is used to give the effect.

Bhagwata- He plays the role of chorus who is present from the beginning to the end. Scenes change with his comments and such background is described which cannot be shown on the stage. He is the advisor, commentator, the voice of the author at many places.

17.4 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit you have been introduced-

i) to the author girish karnad and his literary background.

ii) to the main characters and their mythological importance.

iii) to the detailed story of the play.

iv) to the other works of the playwright.

v) to the important questions and literary references.

17.5 Review Questions

1. In which year did the play *Hayavadan* appear ?

2. Comment on the main characters of the play?

3. What impression do you from of Devdatta-before marriage and after marriage?

4. Comment on Kapila as a friend of Devdatta?

5. Padmini is the destroyer of the friendship of Devdatta and Kapila for her selfishness. It is true?

6. Bhagwata has multi-purpose roles to play in the drama. Comment?

7. Hayavdan is the hero of the play. Is it true?

8. Give the mythological story of *Hayavdan*?

9. How and why does the incidence of "Exchanged heads" take place?

10. Comment on 'Sati' committed by Padmini?

11. Comment on the importance of the boy- the son of Devdatta and Kapila in the play?

12. What is the importance of the minor characters like Actor I ,II , dolls I +II in the play?

13. What is the role of Mother Kali in the play?

14. What kind of play is Hayavadan?

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UNIT-18

GIRISH KARNAD : *HAYAVADAN* (II)

Structure

18.0 Objectives

The objectives of this unit are to:

1) establish the context and justification of the title, Hayavadan.

2) to understand the play with the folk background.

3) to study the social, psychological interpretation of the play.

4) to witness the critical interpretations of various scholars about the play.

5) to study the feministic approach of the playwright.

6) study the development of theatre as Karnad saw it.

18.1 Introduction

Hayavdan is based on a folk tale- a man with horse's head and his search for identity which he fulfils in turning into a complete horse, losing human voice into neighing. The use of masks unlike western theatre mask is not to contrast between face and the masks but it presents the essential moral nature of the archetype character.

The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head. The various conventions-the chorus, the masks, the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human and non-human worlds-permit simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view, of alternative attitude to the central problem.

18.2 More About The Text

18.2.1 Relevance of the Title

Hayavdan is the horse-headed man who gives the play its title. He lacks any kind of divinity and appears painfully suspended between the animal and human worlds. But as in the human world, the head determines identity, even if that means the triumph of the animal over the human: Hayvadan achieves wholeness by relinquishing his human characteristics and turning completely into a horse. He is happy being a complete horse and gets full satisfaction when he loses man's voice and starts neighing as this makes him complete.

The story is about completeness. Devdatta possess mind, delicacy, wealth and status. Kapila is strong and possesses muscular body. Padmini craves for both and is happy to get Devdatta's head and Kapila's body when by mistake she exchanges the head in Kali's temple. Ultimately when their bodies get adjusted according to their heads, she goes to Kaplia. Both the friends fight to death and she commits 'sati' in an ironic manner as the pyre contains three bodies instead of two. Thus the whole story moves to achieve completeness which is the sole aim of *Hayavadan*.

18.2.2 Various Interpretations Of The Theme

Feministic Approach In The Play:

There are three women characters: Hayavadan's mother, the princess of Karnataka, Padmini and mother Goddess Kali. Hayavadan's mother is off the stage but through the story narrated by Hayavadan we come to know that she got opportunity of selecting her life partner through Swayambara" indicating liberty and power of women. No doubt her marriage with he white stallion is a strange case but the mytholical touch makes it an impossible probability.

He is a cursed soul as God Kuresva had punished him for his misbehaviour. After fifteen years he is again turned into a celestial being. When he offers the princess to accompany him she refuses to go with him maintaining her freedom and individuality.

Padmini is a very dominating personality. When Kapila meets her to propose for Devdatta, he is stunned to see her beauty, stupefied by her sharpness, logical questioning, and her confidence.

After marriage with Devdatta when he takes too much care in her pregnancy she says that she is not the first woman who will stumble and everything is finished.

When due to her own fault she exchanges the heads of Devdatta and Kapila she prefers Devdatta's head to Kapila's body, cunningly fulfilling her dream to attain the company of both- the intelligence and status of Devdatta, but the strong, manly body of Kapila. Her post-marital relationship with Kapila is the search for completeness. Padmini is bold, revolutionary like any other modern woman. Despite her being a mythological character she is at par with any feminist facing challenges, fighting the circumstances boldly. Even when she commits 'sati' she realizes the irony as she is not praying and dying for one husband-they are always two. She leaves her son for five years with the forest people so that he becomes a child of nature and then goes to his grand father rev Vidyasagar for education, status and prosperous life.

Goddess Kali knows the innermost intention of Padmini when she comes to her temple, but rewards her for her frankness and "truth". Thus all women characters and the theme of the play leave the impression of feministic approach of the playwright.

Psychoanalytical approach:

Devdatta loves his wife deeply but whenever Padmini and Kapila are together he feels jealous. On the one hand he trust Kapila but feels that no woman can resist the physical attraction, the muscular body of Kapila. Devdatta does'nt want Kapila to accompany them for the tripor be with the time. But he doesn't accept the truth translated is on of them.

Gradually Girish Karnad's plays discloses the literary merits as his play deal with multifacets aspects. The play *Hayavadan* surpasses the expectation of readers/spectators because Karnad seems to have employed Freudian theory of psychology, which helps us in microscoping the unknown forces and ideas taking place in the mental structure of Devadatta. Devadatta has a fatal attraction towards his wife and deep love for his best friend Kapila. Devadatta is simple but feels himself insecured whenever he finds Padmini and Kapila looking at each other, he seems suspicious, jealous and possessive. He dislikes Kapila's arrival at his residence. The dramatist has interwoven psychological approach in the conversation of the husband and wife:

Padmini : [back at the window] Where is Kapila?
Devadatta , drool over
Kapila all day.

Padmini: [taken a back] What do you mean?

Devadatta: What else should say? The other
day I wanted to read out a play
Of Bhasa's to you and sure enough
Kapila drops in.

Padmini: Oh! That's biting you still is it?
But why are you blaming me? He
was your friend even before you
married me, wasn't he? He used
To drop in every day even then….

Devadatta: But shouldn't he realize I'm married
now? He just cannot go on as before….

Padmini: Don't blame him. It is my fault. He learnt
A bit about poetry from you and I thought
he might enjoy Bhasa, so I asked him to come…

He didn't want to-but I insisted"

Through such dialogues, the playwright discloses the inner psychology of the characters. Devadatta dislikes Kapila's arrival while Padmini enjoys his company. Devadatta is also irritated by Padmini insistence of inviting Kapila. Padmini peeps into the inner working mind of Devadatta, she asks him, directly:

Padmini : "You aren't jealous of him, are you?

Devadatta : Me? Jealous of Kapila? Why do you have to twist

everything I say…?

Devadatta does not accept it. The psychologists call this kind of feelings as pathological jealously. Padmini is frank enough to hit on the psychology of her husband.

Devadatta is timid and shy. He also suffers from fear-Psychie. He like a Greek protagonist, has god-fearing personality. In the other words he represents an average Indian man. Like Greek protagonist he takes vow that if his inner most desire is fulfilled he would sacrifice his head to Rudra and hands to Kali. He believes that his marriage with Padmini is a miracle as he did not deserve. It is an outside powerful agency, which plays an important role in his destiny. The whole play *Hayavadan,* is an attempt of searching for completeness. Craving for perfection is a natural urge. To be mad after it creates problems. The playwright points out this central idea through characters, symbols, and images. The image of Lord Ganesh the harsh reality of life that something always lacks in human life. Nobody, including God, is perfect. Acceptance of imperfection is the secret of life.

Devadatta's dialogues help us to explore psychoanalytic properties of the play. During the jungle-trip, Kapila is over-enthusiastic. He all the time moves around Padmini. Kapila's behaviour is to be analyzed. He rushes to get the fortunate lady's flower. He brings handful of flowers for her. Witnessing his behaviour, Devadatta suspects Kapila and talks to himself:

Devadatta : [aside] Does she really not see? Or is she

deliberately playing this game with him?

Kapila was never the sort to blush but now

he only has to see her and he begins to wag

his tail. Sits up on his hind legs as though he

were afraid to let her words fall to the ground.

And that pleading in his eyes- can't she really

see that?

Devadatta's 'aside' helps us in understanding human psychic-process. Suspicion and insecurity give rise to sexual jealousy in men- women relationship. In the beginning the conflict does not develop between Devadatta and Padmini. In a persuasive tone, Devadatta speaks (Aloud):

"Padmini, Kapila isn't used to women. The only

woman in his life is his mother"

Padmini knows quite well the way in which she is playing her feminine power politics. She is smart enough to deal with the situation. She spreads a web of her feminine techniques. She questions in scolding tone:

"You mean it is dangerous to be with him?

The way you talk one would never imagine

he was your best friend".

Through this dialogue she exposes her husband's mental block; she hides her attraction for physically strong body of Kapila. This dual attraction leads the story end in a tragedy.

Social Problems In The Play:

The most remarkable problem dealt with is of marriage, extra-marital relationship and search for identity in the world of sensuous relationships. The intimale friendship of Devdatta and Kapila becomes tense when Padmini marries Devdatta but feels attracted towards Kapila as well .Jyoti Rane opines:

" The picture that emerges through Karnard's plays in that compability between man and women is well high impossible . Since most of Karnard's plays have origin in Indian myths we encounter situations and Indian cultural norms in his plays. In India, the bride and groom rarely meet before marriage and elders play an active and decisive role in fixing marriage. In *Hayvadan* Kapila goes to Padmini's house with a marriage proposal for Devdatta. At the gate he is stopped and questioned by Padmini. However, he seeks some elder of the house, preferably Padmini father. He also realizes that the marriage between Padmini and Devdatta will do disaster.

Karnard brings out the evil of "sati pratha". It could have brought fame to the family in the traditional manner, but the playwright projects the scene as a mockery. After instructing Bhagwata that her son should be brought up as a son of Kapila for five years and then he handed over to great sire Vidyasagar, Devdatta's father Padmini pronounces.

"Make me a large funeral pyre. We are three". Then she prays to goddess Kali:

"You must have your joke even now. Other women can die praying that they should get the same husband in all lives to come. You haven't left me even that little consolation".

Thus the playwright hits at the social hypocracy. He wants to convey that more or less these futile exercises have no sense or logic.

Power Politics:

The heroine of the play searches for her own satisfaction playing the game of sexual politics-exchanging the heads of the two men and enjoying both the personalities and becoming the cause of their deaths at the end.

At another level the play deals with caste- hierarchy. Devdatta the son of a learned Brahmin and Padmini the daughter of a wealthy man get married. Kapila's friendship with Devdatta is granted approval by the society but marital relationship between their castes is impossible. When their heads an exchanged, Padmini goes with Devdatta's head as the " scared text" gives importance of the haed as the most important organ. Kapila is well aware of this upperclass shrewdness and is not satisfied.

Finally they go to a Rishi who declares:

'As the heavenly Kapila-Vriksha is supreme among the trees, so is the head among human limbs. Therefore the man with Devdatta's head is indeed Devdatta and he is the right ful husband of Padmini".

Padmini asks Bhagwata to hand over the child after five years to his grandfather for prosperous life. Thus the class and caste problems have been raised by Karnard through the play.

Source Of The Play:

Hayavadan is an "urban folk" play and it joins the conventions of YakShagna folk performance (stock characters, music, dance, mask, talking dolls etc) with a core narrative that poses philosophical riddles about the nature of identity and reality. The idea of "the heads that got switched" came from *Katha Saritasagra.*

Thomas Mann's philosophical elaboration of this story in *The Transport Heads* is fully developed parable about conjugality, proscribed desire and that can be resolved only by death. The story of Devdatta, Kapila and Padmini in Karnard's *Hayavadan* follows elements of characterization and the order of events in Mann's novella closely enough to be considered, in some respects a 'de- orientalized' contemporary Indian theatrical version of it.

Karnard tackles the problem of incongruity, the disjunction between head and body. The problem is temporarily solved when their heads are exchanged but soon the bodies revert to their original qualities and the problem of dualism returns and the human condition appears as essentially one of disunity and imperfection culminating in death. Thus the theme is to reach perfection, completeness which when not realized ends in tragedy.

Urban Folk Drama

Hayavadan involves the author's self-conscious manipulation of the structure of folk performance. While the action of folk theatre moves between a frame and the inner play, in *Hayavadan* there are two outer frames, both belonging to the historical present, which intersect unpredictably with each other and with the action of the inner play. The first frame consists of Bhagavata, the female chorus, and the two male actors who are not merely characters in a folk performance but perform in a provincial troupe preparing to enact the story of Padmini and her two husbands for a contemporary audience. Just as the action of the inner play is about to begin, the performance is disrupted by the appearance of Hayavadan, the talking horse who wants a solution to his own predicament. His disruption forces the characters of folk drama to revert to their 'real' persona as actors, and the performance of Padmini's story begins only after the *Bhagavata* has persuaded *Hayavadan* to leave and seek divine intervention for the solution of his problem. Similarly, the end of Padmini's story is not the end of the play: the two framing narratives continue until Hayavadan, who now reappears as a horse with a human voice, has lost-as he wants to-this last human attribute. The conventional folk structure of a play-within-a-play is therefore yoked in Hayavadn to a reflexive rehearsal format, whose function is to subject the defining convections of folk performance to ironic scrutiny.

Beyond its philosophical reflection on identity and its self-reflexive structure, Hayavdan also resonates in present dramatic and cultural contexts because it gives primacy to women in the psychosexual relations of marriage, and creates a space for the expression, even the fulfillment, of

amoral female desire within the constraints of patriarchy. In this respect, the genre of 'urban folk' theatre to which both Hayavadan and Naga-Mandala belong offers a radical contrast to the representation of women in the 'urban realist' drama of such playwrights as Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, the early Badal Sircar, Mahesh Elkunchwar,Jayawant Dalvi, and Mahesh Dattani. The essential basis of difference here is not he gender of the author, which continues to be exclusively male (Karnad, Chandrashekhar Kambar, Tanvir, K.N. Panikkar, Ratan Thiyam), but the qualitatively different attitudes to gender that emerge within the plays when male authors move out of the urban social-realist mode into the anti-modern, anti-realistic, charismatic realm of folk culture. Plays such as Hayavadan and Naga-Mandala (as well as Kambar's *Jokumaraswami* and Tanvir's *Charandas Chor*) are important for the discourse of gender because they embody several principles largely absent in realist drama. The ideology of urban folk drama thus manifests itself most conspicuously in the treatment of femininity, sexuality, desire, and power: although the challenge to patriarchy is not absolute, women in folk drama find the means of exercising an ambivalent freedom within its constraints, unlike their urban counterparts in such plays as Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure* or Vijay Tendulkar's *Shantata*! Court Chalu Ahe.

18.3 Critical Comments On The Play

Professor Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker, University of Wisconsin-Madison comments: Girish Karnard belongs to the formative generation of Indian playwrights who come to maternity generation in the two decades following independence, and collectively reshaped Indian theatre as a major national institution in the latter twentieth century .

Karnard is typical among contemporary playwrights in being the principal translator of his own plays and an important commentator on the nature and contexts of his drama.

The majority of his plays employ the narratives of myth history and folk lore to evoke an ancient or pre modern world that resonates in contemporary contexts because of his uncanny ability to remake the past in the image of the present.

Lakshmi Chandrashekhar opines:

Karnand has been accused of escaping into the past, but the use of mythology in the most modern Literature validates individual experience and universalizes it. And I think Kranand has been able to do that"

India Today:

Had rightly comments "playwright, poet, critic, translator and cultural administrator all rolled into one- Karnad is a renaissance man. Karnnad's celebrity is based on decades of prolific and combines a twelfth-century folk tale about 'transport heads' with indigenous performance traditions to offer a path-breaking model force quintessentially "Indian" theatre in post colonial times.

The Hindu :

Hayavdan is full of humour, sly comments on politics, and comic hyperbole….a richly layered play, interspersed [with] typical Indian elements like the folk tale… A notable achievement.

The Tribune:

There have been a galaxy of literatures in Indian languages whose works can be classified as the world's best and translated not only in English but other language. Girish Karnad is one of them.

Sunday Times:

'A multi-faceted personality, a man with many identities-Karnad has been described in so many ways, Tughlaq is…. An irreverent look at men who ruled the destiny of people… offer[ing] paralles with contemporary times- India after Nehru. Hayavadan… floored theatre buffs in Germany, England, Australia and America. Nagamandala…. Has not stopped being performed on stage round the world since it appeared in 1988'?

18.4 Development of English Drama: In the words of the Author Himself

In my child hood, in a small town in Karnataka, I was exposed to two theatre forms that seemed to represent irreconcilably different worlds. Father took the entire family to see plays staged by troupes of professional actors called natak companies which toured the countryside throughout the year. The plays were staged in semipermanent structures on proscenium stages, with wings and drop curtains, and were illuminated by petromax lamps.

I saw theatre again only when I went to Bombay for my postgraduate studies. One of the first things I did in Bombay was to go and see a play, which happened to be Strindberg's *Miss Julie* directed by brilliant young Ebrahim Alkazi.

What impressed me as much as the psychological cannibalism of the play was the way lights faded in and out on stage. Until we moved to the city, we had lived in house lit by hurricane lamps. Even in the city, electricity was something we switched on and off. The realization that there were instruments called dimmers that could gently fade the light in or out opened up a whole new world of magical possibilities.

Most of my contemporaries went through some similar experience at some point in their lives. We stepped out of mythological plays lit by torches or petromax lamps straight into Strindberg and dimmers. The new technology could not be divorced from the new psychology. The two together defined a stage that was like nothing we had known or suspected. I a have often wondered whether it wasn't that evening that, being actually aware of it, I decided I wanted to be a playwright.

While still preparing for the trip abroad amidst the intense emotional turmoil, I found myself writing a play. This took me by surprise, for I had fancied myself a poet, had written poetry through my teens, and had trained myself to write in English, in preparation for conquest of the West. But here I was writing a play and in Kannada, too, the language spoken by a few million in South India, the language of my childhood. A greater surprise was the theme of the play, for it was from ancient Indian mythology from which I had believed myself alienated.

One of the first plays of post-independence India to use myth to make a contemporary statement was Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug* ('The Blind Age'). The play is about the aftermath of the Kurukshetra war, which forms the climax of the epic *Mahabharata*. The entire epic is in fact a build-up to this great confrontation between Good AND Evil, in which God himself participated in the form of Lord Krishna…….

Although later Satyadev Dubey's production proved that it was genuine theatre, *Andha Yug* was actually written for the radio, as a play for voice. It was as if, at the time of conceiving the play, the playwright could imagine no stage on which to place it.

Until the nineteenth century, the audience had never been expected to pay to see a show. Theatre had depended upon patronage- of kings, ministers, local feudatories, or temples. With the myth-based story line already familiar to the audience, the shape and success of a performance depended on how the actors improvised with the given narrative material each time they came on stage. Actors did not rehearse a play so much as train for traditional kinds of roles, a system still followed today in folk and traditional theatre forms.

With the new theatre, in conformity with the prevailing laissez-faire philosophy, risk became the producer's responsibility, the factor determining the company's investment policy. The audience paid in cash to see a show guaranteed as a ' success' and in return received as much entertainment as could be competitively fitted within the price of a ticket. A performance became a carefully packaged commodity, to be sold in endless identical replications.

The proscenium and the box office proclaimed a new philosophy of theatre: secularism- but a commercially viable secularism.

The secularism was partly necessitated by the ethnic heterogeneity of the new entrepreneurial class. In Bombay, for instance, the enterprises were financed by the Paris, who spoke Gujarati. But the commonly understood language was Urdu, popularized by the Muslim chieftains who had ruled over most if India since the sixteenth century. Naturally many of the writers employed by the Parsi theatre were Muslim. And the audience was largely Hindu!

The consequences of this secularism were that every character on stage, whether a Hindu deity or a Muslim legendary hero, was alienated from his true religious or cultural moorings; and myths and legends, emptied of meaning, were reshaped into tightly constructred melodramas with thundering curtain lines and a searing climax. Unlike traditional performances, which spread out in a slow, leisurely fashion, these plays demanded total attention, but only at the level of plot. Incident was all. Even in natak companies run entirely by Hindus, the basic attitude was dictated by this Parsi model.

Another school of drama had arisen in the 1930s, at the height of the struggle for national independence. When social reform was acknowledged as a goal next only to independence in importance, a group of 'realistic' playwright had challenged the emptiness and vapidity of Parsi drama. The contemporary concerns of these playwright gave their work and immediacy and a sharp edge lacking in the earlier theatre, and a few plays of great power were written. While trying to awaken their audience to the humiliation of political enslavement, many of these new playwrights made a coruscating analysis of the ills that had eaten into society. This was essentially the playwright's theatre; the plays were presented by amateur or semi professional group and were mostly directed by the playwright themselves. Unlike in the Parsi theatre, where a hardheaded financial logic was the guide, here the writers, the actors, and the audience were all united by a genuine idealism. They created a movement, if not a theatre, for the times.

The most obvious starting point should have been the Sanskrit theatre, *Sakuntala* and *Mrcchakaitka,* two Sanskrit masterpieces, had been presented successfully on the Marathi stage in

the early part of this century. Recently, Ratan Thiyam, K.N. Panicker, and Vijaya Mehta have bought Sanskrit plays alive again for today's audience. But no modern playwright has claimed, or shown in his work, any allegiance to Sanskrit sensibility. Sanskrit drama assumed a specific social setting, a steady, well-ordered universe in which everyone from the gods to the meanest mortals was in his or her allotted slot. Even in its heyday it was elitist phenomenon, confined to a restricted group of wealthy and educated courtiers, remote from general populace.

For the first two decades after independence, how traditional forms could be utilized to revitalize our own work in the urban context was a ceaseless topic of argument among theatre people. The poet Vallathol had given a new identity to Kathakali, Shivaram Karanth a new lease on life to Yakshagna. Habib Tanvir has gone to areas in which the traditional troupes operate, taking with him his urban discipline. He has taught, lived, worked, and toured with the local troupes and evolved through them a work that is rich, vital, and meaningful.

I remember that the idea of my play *Hayavadan* started crystallizing in my head right in the middle of an argument with B.V. Karanth (who ultimately produced the play) about the meaning of masks in Indian theatre and theatre's relationship to music.

The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to upload traditional values, of making them literally stand on their head. The various convection- the chorus, the masks, the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human and nonhuman worlds-permit the simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view, of alternative to the central problem.

The basic concern of the Indian theatre in the post-independence period has been to try to define its 'Indian ness'. The distressing fact is that most of these experiments have been carried out by enthusiastic amateurs or part-timers, who have been unable to devote themselves entirely to theatre. I see myself as a playwright but make a living in film and television. There is a high elasticity of substitution between the different performing media in India; the participation well as the audiences-get tossed about.

The question therefore of what lies in store for the Indian theatre should be rephrased to include other media as well- radio, cinema, audio cassettes, television and video. Their features are inextricably intertwined and in this shifting landscape, the next electronic gadget could easily turn a mass medium into a traditional art form.

Perhaps quite unrealistically, I dream of the day when a similar ripple will reestablish theatre-flesh-and-blood actors enacting a well-written text to a gathering of people who have come to witness the performance-where it belongs, at the centre of the daily life of the people.

18.5 Lets Sum Up

We have witnessed how through a folk-tale Karnad has conveyed his views towards women who are strong, independent and recognize their identity.

He also throws light on class/caste system and the upper hand of the strong elite over the low people. He critically comments on 'Sati Pratha'. He has the Fruedian eye in analyzing his character's inner most emotions. He very successfully mixes up folk and mythological tales to give a realistic touch to his theme of perfection and completeness. This urge for perfection is so strong that Hayavadan is

happy to lose his human body as being animal will lead him to completeness. The play is great success on stage as well as reading it as a text.

18.6 Review Questions

1. Do you find the title ' *Hayavdan'* fully justified?
2. Is the play a mere folk-tale or more than it?
3. Comment on the feministic approach of the play?
4. The play has different layers of themes. Comment.
5. Trace the origin of the play and comment on the presentation of the theme of the "transposed heads" by Karnard in a different manner.
6. What social evils/problems have been raised by Karnard in the play *Hayavadan*?
7. What opinion do you form about Karnard as a playwright on the basis of *Hayavadan*?
8. Comment on the merits of the play, *Hayavadan*, which make it a great success.
9. How does the playwright analyse the inner psychology of the three characters?
10. Trace the history of Indian English Drama as Karnard saw it.

18.7 Bibliography

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