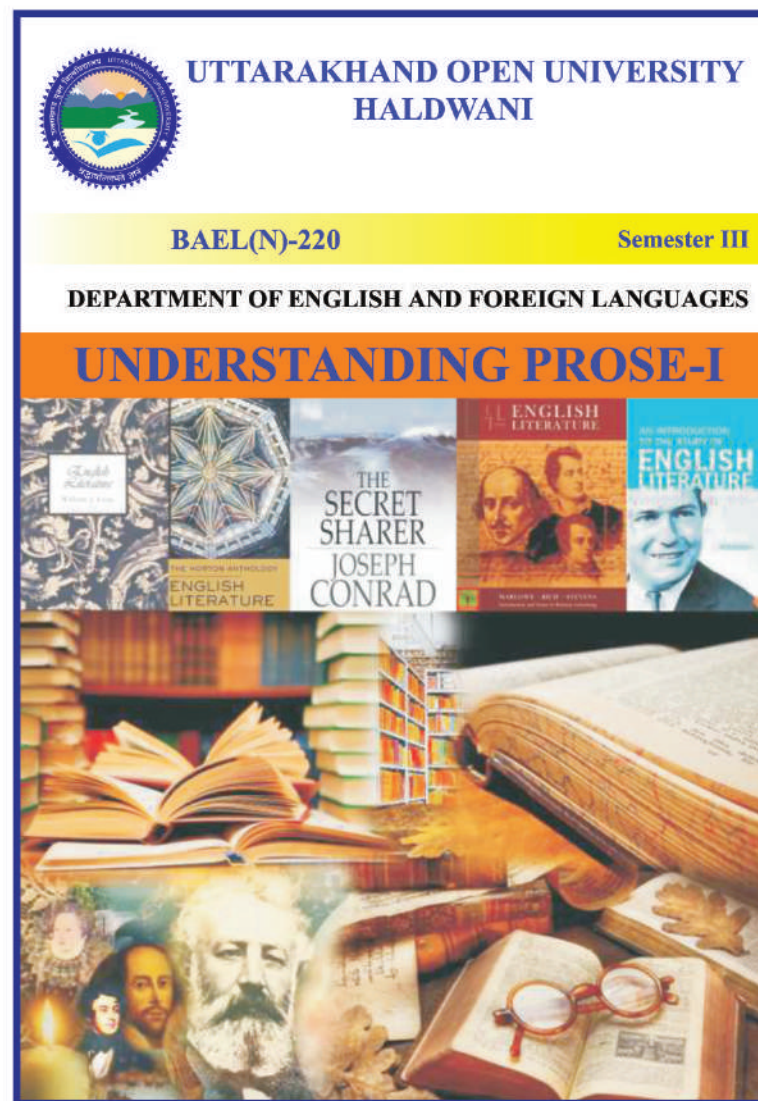




**Department of English and Foreign Languages**  
**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES**  
UTTARAKHAND OPEN UNIVERSITY  
Teenpani Bypass road, Behind Transport Nagar, Haldwani  
Haldwani - 263139, Nainital ( Uttarakhand)  
Phone : 05946-261122, 261123 Fax No. - 05946-264232  
www.uou.ac.in e-mail:- info@uou.ac.in  
Toll Free No. - 1800 180 4025  
ISBN :

BAEL(N)-220

UNDERSTANDING PROSE-I



**BAEL (N)-220**

**Semester III**

# **UNDERSTANDING PROSE I**



**UTTARAKHAND OPEN UNIVERSITY**

**Department of English and Foreign Languages  
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES**

**Vishwavidyalaya Marg, Behind Transport Nagar**

**Phone no. 05964-261122, 261123**

**Toll Free No. 18001804025**

**Fax No. 05946-264232, E-mail: [info@uou.ac.in](mailto:info@uou.ac.in)**

**<http://uou.ac.in>**

---

## Board of Studies

---

**Prof. Renu Prakash**

Director

School of Humanities

Uttarakhand Open University

**Prof. A. S. Adhikari**

Head of the Department

Department of English

Soban Singh Jeena University

**Prof. Malati Mathur**

Director

School of Foreign Languages

IGNOU

New Delhi

**Prof. D. R. Purohit**

Retired Professor

Dept. of English and ME &OFL

H. N. B. Garhwal University

Srinagar

**Dr. Suchitra Awasthi**

Associate Professor and Coordinator

Department of English

Uttarakhand Open University

**Dr. Nagendra Gangola**

Assistant Professor (AC)

Nominated Member, Dept. of English

Uttarakhand Open University

---

## Editors

---

**Dr. Suchitra Awasthi (Coordinator)**

Associate Professor

Dept. of English and Foreign Languages

Uttarakhand Open University

**Dr. Megha Pant**

Assistant Professor (AC)

Dept. of English and Foreign Languages

Uttarakhand Open University

---

## Unit Writers

---

**Dr. Suchitra Awasthi**

Units 1,2,3,4,9

**Prof. H. P. Shukla**

Units 5,6, 7,8

**Ms. Nitika Kannoja**

Unit 10

**Mr. Rohitash Thapliyal**

Units 11,12

**In case of any plagiarism found in the unit, the unit writers would be held accountable.**

---

## **Revised by**

---

**Dr. Megha Pant**

Assistant Professor (AC)

Dept. of English and Foreign Languages

Uttarakhand Open University

**Dr. Natasha Negi**

Assistant Professor (AC)

Dept. of English and Foreign Languages

Uttarakhand Open University

---

**Edition: 2024**

**ISBN No.**

---

Copyright : Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani

Published by : Registrar, Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani

Email : [books@uou.ac.in](mailto:books@uou.ac.in)

Printed at :

<b>BLOCK 1</b>		<b>Page No</b>
<b>Non-fictional Prose</b>		
Unit 1	Sir Francis Bacon 'Of Adversity' 'Of Death'	01-22
Unit 2	Charles Lamb 'Dream Children'	23-41
Unit 3	Mahatma Gandhi 'What is True Civilization' 'Education'	42-61
Unit 4	Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru 'Some Famous Writers' 'The Quest of Man'	62-77
<b>BLOCK 2</b>		
<b>Stories from India</b>		
Unit 5	Ruskin Bond <i>Time Stops at Shamli</i>	78-104
Unit 6	Rabindra Nath Tagore <i>The Runaway</i>	105-129
Unit 7	Premchand <i>Divided Hearths</i>	130-151
<b>BLOCK 3</b>		
<b>Stories From the West</b>		
Unit 8	D.H. Lawrence 'The Prussian Officer'	152-175
Unit 9	Leo Tolstoy 'How Much Land Does A Man Need?'	176-189
Unit 10	O. Henry 'The Retrieved Reformation' 'The Cop and the Anthem'	190-216
<b>BLOCK 4</b>		
<b>Novel</b>		
Unit 11	R.K. Narayan and The Indian Novel in English	217-226
Unit 12	R.K. Narayan: <i>The Painter of Signs</i>	227-237

## **UNIT 1 SIR FRANCIS BACON: 'OF DEATH', 'OF ADVERSITY'**

---

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Objectives

1.3 Introduction to Essay

1.4 Beginning and Development of Essay in England

1.5 Sir Francis Bacon -an Overview

1.6 Bacon's Major Works

1.7 Bacon as a thinker

1.8 Bacon's Style

1.9 'Of Adversity'

1.9.1 Summary of the Essay

1.9.2 Analysis of the Essay

1.9.3 Glossary

1.9.4 Check your Progress

1.10 'Of Death'

1.10.1 Summary of the Essay

1.10.2 Analysis of the Essay

1.10.3 Glossary

1.10.4 Check your Progress

1.11 Summing Up

1.12 References

1.13 Suggested Readings

1.14 Terminal and Model Questions

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

---

In this unit you will be briefly introduced to essay, a form of non fictional prose. Furthermore, this unit will trace the birth and development of essay in England. You will be acquainted with Sir Francis Bacon, who in the literary world is known to be ‘the Father of English Essays’. This unit will take up two of his philosophical essays, *Of Death* and *Of Adversity*, which will help you in understanding Bacon as an essayist better.

---

## 1.2 OBJECTIVES

---

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Understand the history development of essay in England
- Familiarize yourself with the life, works and style of Sir Francis Bacon
- Understand Bacon as a writer with special reference to two of his essays, namely, *Of Death* and *Of Adversity*

---

## 1.3 INTRODUCTION TO ESSAY

---

The word essay has already been introduced to you in the first paper. By now you must have understood that an essay is a composition of moderate length, usually in prose, on any particular subject, which is elaborate in style, though limited in range. However, Alexander Pope’s essays, *Essays on Criticism*, *Essays on Man* and *Moral Essay*, in verse, are an exception. The English word ‘essay’ has been derived from the French ‘essai’ which means ‘attempt’ or ‘to try’. Although this form of writing was known to the ancient Greek and Roman classical writers like Theophrastus, Marcus Aurelius and Seneca, but it was Montaigne, a French writer of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who perfected this form of writing and thus, is credited as being the Father of Essays. From France, essay reached the English shores during the Elizabethan Age, which was the most creative period in English literature. One of the great English Renaissance scholars, Sir Francis Bacon, experimented with this form of writing and scaled new heights in it and thus is known as the Father of

---

English Essays. We will read about Bacon and his style later in this unit. Let us now briefly glance at how essay developed in England over a period of time.

---

## **1.4 DEVELOPMENT OF ESSAY IN ENGLAND**

---

The beginning of the English essay took place in the Elizabethan age, an age brimming forth with creative energies. A lot of miscellaneous prose including pamphlets and translations of all kinds was written by prose writers of the age. Some of the most distinguished prose writers of the Elizabethan age were Thomas Maroley, Thomas More and Sir Francis Bacon. As mentioned earlier, since Bacon, the essay, as a literary prose, has developed considerably. The 17<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of various forms of prose which included short story, essays, autobiography and treaties of all kinds. The essay too was exploited by famous essayists like Alexander Pope, John Dryden and Daniel Defoe for a variety of purposes. John Dryden, one of the greatest 17<sup>th</sup> century essayists, too wrote formal essays like Bacon, and is best known for his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), which was, in fact, in dialogue form. In the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was Daniel Defoe's journalistic essays and pamphlets, and especially his *Review* (1704-13), which influenced the evolution of the essay, but an even more important milestone was achieved with the establishment of the **Periodical Essay** by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele which you read in detail in the first paper. Both Addison and Steele published their essays in their periodicals or magazines, *The Tatler* (published by Steele) and *The Spectator* published by Addison. The essays of Addison and Steele hold a mirror to the eighteenth century social and political life of England.

The English essay saw new light in the Romantic age. Oliver Goldsmith, a precursor to the Romantics, perfected the graceful and witty manner of essay writing in *The Citizen of the World*. Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt and De Quincey were important Romantic essayists who wrote **personal essays** in which they combined the social aspect of life with a confessional, autobiographical



---

element which had never been so prominent in the English essay before. The later 19<sup>th</sup> saw more specialized sort of essayists like Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill and G. K. Chesterton, who wrote prolifically on a wide variety of topics like philosophy, aesthetics and history. Twentieth century essayists like A.G. Gardiner, Robert Lynd, Hillaire Bellock, Lytton Strachey, E.M. Foster, to name a few, have contributed immensely in the extensive growth essay by giving it a highly organised and systematic form.

---

### **1.5 SIR FRANCIS BACON –AN OVERVIEW**

---

One of the most distinguished writers who wrote during the Elizabethan age was the Father of English Essays, Sir Francis Bacon. Let us now learn something about his life, works and style, so that we are able to understand Bacon as a writer and appreciate his works better.

Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1625) was born in London to Sir Nicholas Bacon, one of Queen Elizabeth's favourite ministers, who was also Lord Keeper of the Great Seal. In April 1573, when Bacon was only twelve years old, he, along with his brother, attended the Trinity College, Cambridge. After completing education at Cambridge, he began to study law at Gray's Inn in London. The same year he was sent to join the English Embassy in Paris but after his father's death in February 1579, Bacon was compelled to return home and take seriously to law as a profession. On returning to England, Bacon devoted himself to the study of law and later took it up as his profession. Bacon was an exceptionally talented man. He was lawyer, a philosopher, a scientist, all rolled into one. In the year 1584, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1, when he was just twenty-three years of age, Bacon entered Parliament and served there till 1593. Bacon also held various important positions under James I. He was knighted in 1603, became Attorney General in 1613, Lord Chancellor (the highest judicial position) Baron Verulam in 1618 and Viscount St. Albans in 1621. The same year brought his downfall too as he was convicted of grave charges like pronouncing wrong judgement when he was a

judge and accepting bribes as a Member of Parliament. He was sentenced in April 1621 and fined £ 40,000 but after a month he was released, thereafter, he retired to his family estate. But by then bad days had befallen Bacon and as his friend, John Aubrey states, Bacon passed away in 1626 after catching a fatal cold while experimenting with ice as a medium of preservation. He was buried in St. Michael's Church, St. Albans.

---

## 1.6 BACON'S WORKS

---

Bacon wrote most of his works in Latin for he firmly believed that classical languages had a more enduring value and that Latin would continue to flourish as a language of learning. His chief Latin works are *Novum Organum* and *De Augmentis Scientiarum*. (*Advancement of Learning*) Both these works were to form parts of the *Instauratio Magna*, a great project that was never completed.

His *Essays* can roughly be divided into four groups. According to *The Norton Anthology*, the ten short essays of the first edition of essays (1597) are little more than collection of maxims placed in sequence; the thirty-eight of the second edition (1612) are longer and looser; fifty eight of the final edition (1625) are smoother in texture, use more figurative language, and are more unified.

Apart from the above mentioned works, his *History of Henry VII* (1622) stands out as the first notable modern history for his excellent character study of the king. His *The New Atlantis* (1627) is a fragmentary sketch of a Baconian Utopia.

---

## 1.7 BACON AS A THINKER

---

Bacon was a very practical man and is considered to be a Machiavellian thinker. His views on personal and social life may be analysed as below:

- **A Utilitarian:** Bacon was a Utilitarian who based all values on utility. (To understand Utilitarianism in detail, refer to the glossary) In his essay on *Parents and Children*, he admits that children afford secret joys to their

parents and that they sweeten labours but the very next moment he laments the fact that children are objects of distraction. He further proves his point by stating that great deeds are mostly accomplished by childless persons. As Bacon was a Utilitarian, he considered both the advantages and disadvantages of having children. Being a Utilitarian, he never indulged in things for the sake of pleasure or beauty as he believed in deriving utility out of things. Besides this it is said of him that he wrote in order to get popular and to influence the people in power. He has often been dubbed as a cold, calculating and selfish Utilitarian.

- **His Statesmanship:** Bacon was a skilled statesman. Although many thinkers do not agree with his political views, still there is no denying the fact that he was a prudent thinker and statesman. His essay *Of Plantations* contains sound political principles whose validity cannot be called into question. Furthermore, in this essay, Bacon also advocates that the natives should be treated fairly and justly. In this essay he says, “If you plant where savages are, do not only entertain them with trifles and giggles but use them justly and graciously with sufficient guard nevertheless; and do not win their favour by helping enemies to invade their enemies; but for their defence it is not amiss. And send oft of them over the country that plants, that they may see a better condition than their own and commend it when they return.” In the above lines, human feelings are mingled with caution. Furthermore, this statement reflects political wisdom and proves Bacon’s worth as a wise statesman.
- **His Code of Public Morality:** Bacon, as stated earlier was a Machiavellian thinker. He, like Machiavelli, established a double code of conduct, one for the ruling class and other for the subjects. This double code of conduct states that a thing which may prove to be a virtuous in the former case may be dubbed as evil in the case of the latter. Machiavelli, in his book *The Prince* said that the prince himself may be self-centred but he should “choose such

servants as have not the mark.” Bacon took this idea a bit further and said that the king is the state and so the ministers and public servants should be true more to the king than to the public.

- **His Political Wisdom:** In several of his essays, Bacon has given practical advice to the kings and rulers. Prominent among such essays are: *Envy, Of Sedations and Troubles, Of Empire, Of Counsel, Of Seeming Wise, Of Ambition, Of followers and Friends* and *Of Faction*. In the essay, *Of Ambition* he advises kings and princes as how to deal with ambitious persons in the state.
- **His Machiavellian Attitude:** Bacon, like the Italian writer and statesman, Machiavelli, was a crafty man and like him was of the opinion that the common code of conduct did not apply to the ruling class. Almost half a dozen essays of Bacon are written to give wise counsel to kings on various aspects of statecraft. Bacon’s “King” is virtually the “Prince” of Machiavelli. In many of his essays he advises the king to rule by craft and cunning. He was of the view that the king ought to be selfish and self-centred but not the common people who should recognise the claim of the state and society on the individual. In his personal life too, Bacon was shrewd like Machiavellian. He betrayed his friend the Earl of Essex when he was tried for his failure for putting down the Irish rebellion.

---

## 1.8 BACON’S STYLE

---

Bacon wrote in no systematic discussion of rhetoric or essay writing but scattered throughout his own essays are comments on his own approach and for this reason, his essays are known as dispersed meditations. He himself calls his essays counsels as his essays are writings with some good piece of advice for the readers. As Bacon was a Utilitarian, his essays are full of practical wisdom also. The chief characteristics of his essays are as under:

1. **Aphoristic style:** Bacon is known for his use of aphorisms. An aphorism is a terse statement of a truth and dogma; a pithy generalization, which may or may not be witty. Expressions such as ‘Men fear death, as children fear to go in the dark’, ‘Whosoever delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or god’, ‘Revenge is a kind if wild justice’ are some excellent examples of aphorisms Bacon uses in his essays.
2. **Epigrammatic style:** An epigram is a short, witty statement in verse or prose which may be complimentary, satiric or aphoristic. Bacon was a master of epigrams. Some of his well known epigrams are: ‘He that hath wife and children hath given hostage to fortune,’ ‘Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested’ ‘There is a superstition in avoiding superstition, when men think to do best if they go farthest from the superstition formally received.’
3. **Brevity and Precision:** Bacon’s forte lies in his conciseness. His essays are brief, pithy observations on a variety of subjects like death, marriage and single life, gardens, revenge, studies, friendship, adversity and many more. Bacon’s essays seldom exceed a paragraph or two but what other writers say in two or three paragraphs, Bacon is able to convey the same idea in a sentence or two. His essays are terse and we get an impression of ideas rapidly jotted down, for this reason his essays are called ‘dispersed meditation’. Bacon describes his essays as ‘grains of salt which will rather give an appetite than offend with satiety’.
4. **Lucidity:** Bacon’s essays are written in Elizabethan English; moreover, they are loaded with Latin expressions and make innumerable references to the Bible. Hence, the modern day reader finds it difficult to comprehend Bacon at places, but once the reader gets accustomed to reading him, he has no difficulty comprehending the essays. The secret of his lucidity lies in the clarity of his thoughts as a result he has no difficulty in putting his thoughts into paper.

5. **Pragmatism:** Bacon was an astute observer of life. All the observations he makes, he translates them into practical precepts, and offers to his readers. The wisdom that is reflected in his essays comes from the immense knowledge he possessed. He himself declared that he considered all knowledge to be his province. Furthermore, his knowledge is “perfected by experience.” On careful reading, we see that each sentence of Bacon is worth being “chewed and digested.”

The above discussion shows that although Bacon was endowed with a sparkling intellect and great wisdom, he lacked moral principles and for this reason Alexander Pope called him ‘the wisest, the brightest and the meanest in mankind.’

---

## EXERCISE 1

---

- Q1. Write a note on the beginning and development of essay in England.
- Q2. Why are Bacon’s essays known as ‘dispersed meditations’?
- Q3. Alexander Pope called Bacon “the wisest, brightest and the meanest of mankind.” Do you agree with this statement of Pope. Give reasons for your answers.
- Q4. Analyse Bacon as a thinker.

In the first part of this unit, you read about Bacon’s life, his major works, analysed him as a thinker and examined style as a writer. Two of his essays, ‘Of adversity’ and ‘Of Death’ are prescribed in your syllabus. While reading these essays keep in mind the points you read about Bacon as a thinker and also the characteristic features of his style. This will help you to understand his essays in a better manner and you will be able to appreciate him as an essayist.

**1.9 OF ADVERSITY**

---

**1.9.1. SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY**

The essay 'Of Adversity' is a very inspiring essay and shows Bacon's philosophical bent of mind. In this essay, he discusses the comparative value and importance of prosperity and Adversity. It is human nature to wish for Prosperity but in this essay Bacon reveals to us the hidden virtues of Adversity.

Bacon begins the essay by quoting the great Roman philosopher, Seneca. Seneca was of the view that although prosperity is to be wished for, Adversity, a nobler virtue, needs to be admired. However, Bacon feels sorry that the ordinary man who being a slave to material wants, fails to understand the scope and value of this lesser cherished virtue. Bacon affirms that adversity has many hidden virtues and teaches us important lessons in life. To further illustrate this point he quotes from the New Testament which focuses on the significance of "Bearing One's Cross" in life just like Jesus Christ. This profound message of the New Testament is treasured by a devout Christian who look up to Adversity and embrace it willingly like their savior Jesus Christ did centuries back at Calvary when without complaining and for the sake of the entire human race, he bore the Cross and laid down his life to redeem the faltering humankind. Bacon too endorses Adversity and sees Adversity like the silver lining in the dark of cloud which makes miracles happen.

Bacon advises his readers to be wary of prosperity as it often fills man with hollow pride. He further opines that as a mortal being man, on the one hand, needs to accept his frailty humbly, however, at the same time also needs to have firm faith in God's benevolence.

Bacon holds poets and philosophers in high esteem and states that the constitution of both the poets and the philosophers is such that they are capable of rising above the matters that perplex ordinary minds, and in so doing, transcend the

---

mundane and reach a state of mind where they are able to understand and appreciate the importance of adversity.

Bacon next moves to the ancient epics which are loaded with examples of heroism which blossoms under adversity. He argues that it is adversity that makes heroes out of ordinary men. Such men, Bacon believes, display a true Christian spirit. Bacon gives the examples of Hercules, who acted against heavy odds to liberate Prometheus, showcasing that man is capable of undertaking noble endeavours under adverse circumstances. (Refer to the glossary to know the mythological tale.)

Bacon further analyses both adversity and prosperity and concludes that prosperity brings temperance, whereas, adversity brings out the hero inside a man. Moreover, fortitude, Bacon states, is morally a heroic virtue. He further declares that prosperity is a blessing of the Old Testament whereas, adversity, a blessing of the New Testament; which carries a greater blessing and clearly reveals where God's favour. To further demonstrate his point, Bacon further gives two examples from the Bible. The first example he gives is of the songs and psalms of David in the Old Testament, where adversity is also celebrated alongside prosperity. The second example he gives of is of Job, who suffered for fourteen long years without complaining and in the end God duly rewarded him with prosperity. Not just this, the Old Testament has an entire section called The Book of Job devoted to Job whereas, the portion allotted to the wise and just king Solomon, who faced little hardships in life, is relatively slender.

In the last section of this essay Bacon analyses the comparative value and importance of prosperity and adversity. He exhorts man to be optimistic under the most adverse circumstances too as he says that unpleasant thoughts and fear is always mingled with prosperity. Whereas, adversity brings with it hopes and comforts. Prosperity sows the seeds of vice whereas adversity brings out hidden virtues in man. To further illustrate his point, he makes use of comparisons based



on everyday experiences. He first gives the example of needle works and embroideries, in which, he says, it is more pleasing to have a lively work upon a solemn ground than to have a dark and melancholy work upon a lightsome ground. Thereby suggesting that no matter how bad the circumstances are, we should always put our best foot forward. Bacon further compares man's hidden virtues with sweet odours when he says that the hero inside an ordinary mortal emerges only when one has to undergo the 'Baptism of Fire' just as sweet odours smell sweeter when crushed and incense emit out fragrance when burnt. In making this comparison, Bacon wants us to understand that the hero inside us all emerges only in adversity and for this reason adversity should be welcomed.

### **1.9.2. ANALYSIS OF THE ESSAY**

#### **Theme:**

Theme is the matter of content of a literary work. It is the foundation on which the writer builds his work. However, this does not hold true for Bacon essays which seldom take a concrete shape, and scattered throughout his essays are comments and counsels for the reader, and for this reasons his essays are called **"dispersed meditations."** In his essays Bacon deals with universal topics like truth, revenge, envy, and love, to name a few. His essays are a storehouse of knowledge, wisdom and advice which delight, enlighten and at times even puzzle the readers.

The essay, 'Of Adversity' is a philosophical essay by Bacon in which he analyses the comparative value of adversity and prosperity. The theme is profound as in this essay Bacon dives deep in the abyss of misfortune and emerges out with many precious jewels for the reader to treasure. This essay, like other essays of Bacon, is a testimony to the fact that Bacon was an erudite scholar, who had a sound knowledge of Greek Latin and the Bible.

---

**Exercise 2**

---

Q1. Go through the essay 'Of Adversity' and explain in your own words why the essay can be called a philosophical one?

Q2. Pick out two Latin expressions from the text and explain their meaning in English.

**Prose Style:**

Every writer has his or her own style of writing. For example, A.G. Gardiner was known for his anecdotal style, which means that he built his stories by narrating incidents from everyday life. R.K. Narayan employed humour and irony to get across his point. Similarly, Bacon has his own unique way of presenting his themes. His style has already been discussed in the earlier section. In this section we will briefly touch upon the language and the various literary devices used by Bacon in this essay.

The very first thing that the reader notices in Bacon's essays is their length. Although his essays are short but they are weighty. Bacon's forte lies in his ability to compress abundant thought in extremely short space. This quality is called terseness. All of Bacon's essays are terse and are full of epigrams and aphorisms. (Refer to Bacon's prose style to understand these terms.)

Bacon's language is figurative. In the essay 'Of Adversity', he makes two interesting comparisons. In one he compares virtues to precious odours and says, "Certainly virtues are like precious odours, most fragrant when they are incensed or crushed".

---

**Exercise 3**

---

Q1. Can you tell which figure of speech has Bacon used in the above comparison?

(Refer to your B.A. I course book to understand Figures of Speech.)

Q2. Can you spot out the other one?

Q3. Go through the essay carefully and pick out two aphorisms from the text.

### **1.9.3. GLOSSARY**

1. Seneca: A famous Roman philosopher and writer of tragedies.
2. Stoics: Followers of Zeno, they were a school of philosophers who exaggerated the importance of death. They were opposed to the Epicureans who believed in the life of pleasures
3. Prosperity: State of affluence
4. Adversity: Condition marked by misfortune
5. Bona...mirabilia (Latin): The good things of prosperity are to be wished for, but those of adversity to be admired.
6. Heathen: a non-Christian
7. Security of a god: absolute faith in God and complete dependence on him
8. Magnum...dei: have the frailty of man and security of God
9. Poesy: Poetry
10. In effect: in fact
11. Transcendence: going beyond ordinary limits
12. Strange fictions: epics
13. State of a Christian: virtues of a Christian
14. Hercules: the renowned Greek hero who liberated Prometheus
15. Prometheus: the Titan who stole fire from heaven and gave it to man for the welfare of mankind. For this act against God's command, Jupiter bound him and kept him in chains on Mount Caucasus. He was liberated from there by Hercules. Here, Hercules symbolizes Christian fortitude and Prometheus human nature.

16. Earthen pot: pitcher, here it suggests the fortitude in crossing an unknown sea on an earthen pot
17. Resolution: determination
18. Speak in a mean: speak plainly
19. Temperance: moderation
20. Fortitude: courage
21. Benedictions: blessings
22. David's harp: songs of David in *Psalms*
23. Hearse-like: mournful
24. Carols: merry songs
25. The Holy Ghost: God
26. Job: a virtuous man in the Bible. He suffered for fourteen years, finally God was pleased with him and rewarded him prosperity. In the *Old Testament* of the *Bible*, a separate section is named as 'The Book of Job'
27. Felicity: state of being happy, especially in a high degree
28. Solomon: a very wise king of Israel mentioned in the Bible. He was the son of David.
29. Distastes: unpleasantness
30. Solemn ground: dark background
31. Lightsome: bright
32. Odours: smell

33. Utilitarianism: a nineteenth century political, economic and social doctrine which based all values on utility.

34. Machiavellian: relating to Niccolò Machiavelli, an Italian writer, statesman and a political thinker. He is famous for his political treatise *The Prince* (1513)

### **1.9.4. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q1. What are the views expressed by Seneca on adversity?

Q2. Why are the heathens not able to understand the high speech delivered by Seneca?

Q3. Who was Prometheus? How was he liberated from Mount Caucasus?

Q4. Give two reasons why Bacon places adversity above prosperity.

Q5. Explain the following lines:

(a) We see in needle works ... pleasures of the eye

(b) Certainly virtue...Adversity doth best discover virtue

Q6. Why does Bacon say that prosperity is not without many fears and distates?

Q7. How does adversity make us a virtuous being?

Q8. Write the summary of this essay in your own words.

Q9. Why is Job placed above Solomon in the Old Testament?

---

## **1.10 OF DEATH**

---

### **1.10.1 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY**

As the name of the essay suggests, it deals with the subject of death. The word “death” brings with it myriads of negative emotions like fear, pain, shock, terror and insecurity. It is a subject we would not like to discuss in our daily life. However,

Bacon in this essay, deals with the topic of death objectively, making minute observations on the subject of death and through his many arguments tries to dispel the fear of death that grips the human mind. He begins the essay interestingly by comparing men's fear of death like children's fear of going into the dark. He further says that just as the fear of darkness increases in children with tales, similarly, the fear of death in adults increases with the reading religious books and legendary stories as they give fearful accounts of the hellish tortures that the human soul is subjected to after death; Bacon feels that the fear of death that perplexes the human mind is as a result of man's ignorance as to what happens after death. Bacon says that death certainly is the end to the worldly life, but what happens to the human soul after death is a mystery. Some of the friars' books of mortification give a very frightful and blood-curdling account of the process and accompaniments of death, which make death, look ghastly. This could be another reason as to why men fear death. It seems that Bacon, unlike other human beings, did not fear death and was of the opinion that death is a homage we mortals have to pay nature.

Bacon finds it surprising that the most vital parts of our body (For e.g. heart, which correspond to life) are least sensitive to pain and many times death passes with less pain than the torture of a limb. Bacon quotes from a Latin phrase which makes an interesting observation about death. It states that the things that we associate with death like, the pale face of the deceased, people dressed in moaning garments -weeping, groaning and convulsing over the dead body and the performance of the last rites, make death look more frightful than it really is. If we ponder over it, it these scenes that scare us and we shudder from the very thought of death.

Through this essay, Bacon wants to dispel the fear of death from the minds of the reader. He wants the reader to realise that man by nature is a strong being and that the hidden passions inside a man are so powerful that they can overcome the fear of death. For instance, emotions like revenge, love, honour, grief and fear

are so powerful that they can easily conquer the fear of death. To prove his point, he gives examples of various Roman emperors and generals like Otho, Seneca, Augustus Caesar, Tiberius, Galba, Septimius Severus Vespasian, who willingly embraced death in the heat of the aforementioned passions.

Bacon derides the Stoics who gave too much importance to death and spent their entire life in ritualistic and elaborate treatment of death. Bacon says that the rituals practiced by the Stoics made death look far more fearful than it actually is. Bacon appreciates Juvenal, the famous Roman satirist, who rightly declared death to be one of the boons of nature and says that death is just a natural phenomenon like birth. Furthermore, both birth and death involve transformation and thus are creative processes as a result of which the element of pain is necessary in both the cases.

Bacon advises us to face death with a brave heart and says that a person who dies for a good cause hardly feels the pangs of death, thus, belittling it. Bacon concludes the essay by saying that the sweetest advice that can be given to a mortal is that when he has accomplished the mission of his life he should let the servant of the body, that is, the soul, depart from it. Death, Bacon says, has one more advantage, and that is, it opens the gate to good reputation and ends envy. For a man is loved and admired more after death than in life.

### **1.10.2. ANALYSIS OF THE ESSAY**

#### **Theme:**

Like ‘Of Adversity’, ‘Of Death’ is also a philosophical essay by Bacon. In this essay Bacon analyses death in an objective manner, telling us little or nothing of his personal views on the subject. The theme is profound, and as the essay builds we see how Bacon, exposing many misconceptions about death, clears the fog that mystifies death, which is but a natural phenomenon. The essay further has a universal appeal and people of all times and places can identify with the theme. In this essay Bacon makes a brilliant study of human nature and captures the pangs of

death faced by man brilliantly. The beauty of the essay lies in the fact that as the essay progresses we understand death in new light.

### **Prose Style:**

‘Of Death’ is a philosophical essay in which the subject of death is treated in a lofty manner. He presents his arguments in a simple, clear and straightforward manner. Brevity, precision and the intellectual appeal of his essay(s) is his greatest strength. The essay makes rich use of figurative language. He draws an interesting parallel when he makes a comparison between men’s fear for death with children’s fear of going into the dark. Bacon makes full use of his scholarship and shows his knowledge of Christian philosophy, mythology and Roman history in this thought provoking essay.

### **1.10.3. GLOSSARY**

1. Men fear death: the unknown mystery of death makes it appear fearful. Men fear death because no one knows what happens through the process of death and thereafter
2. As the wages of sin: death is believed to be the punishment inflicted on men for the sin of their original parents, Adam and Eve
3. Passage to another world: death takes us to some unknown and mysterious world
4. Tribute due unto nature: debt to be repaid to nature
5. The friar’s book of mortification: the books written by friars and monks describing sins and tortures of death
6. Corrupted: destroyed
7. The quickest to senses: most sensitive
8. Spake: spoke
9. Pompa...ipsa (Latin): the accompaniments of death frighten more than death itself
10. Convulsions: agony before death



11. Blacks: mourning garments
12. Obsequies: last rites at the time of funeral
13. Worthy the observing: worth noticing
14. Mates: overpowers
15. Slights: insults
16. Pre-occupateth: anticipates
17. Otho the Emperor: M. Salvius Otho, the Emperor of Rome only for three months in 69AD. On being defeated by Vitellius, he committed suicide
18. Seneca: the famous Roman philosopher and writer of tragedies.
19. Tenderest: weakest
20. Provoked: inspired
21. Compassion: pity
22. Satiety: over-satisfaction
23. Cogita quamdiu...fastidiosus potest (Latin): these words have been adapted from Seneca meaning, "Think how long you have done the same thing; not only the brave or the unhappy, but also the fastidious man, may wish to die
24. Weariness: fatigue or boredom
25. Good spirits: worthy men
26. Augustus Caesar: the grandson of Julius Caesar's sister, his heir. He became the first Emperor of Rome
27. Compliment: praise
28. Livia,...et vale(Latin): "Remember our married life, Livia, and farewell."  
Livia was the wife of Augustus Caesar. She poisoned him
29. Tacitus: a Roman historian, born 54 A.D.
30. Jam Tiberium...deserebant( Latin): "Now his body and powers were deserting Tiberius, but not his hypocrisy."
31. Tiberius: The Roman emperor from 14 to 37 A.D.

32. Vespasian: Flavius Vespasian, the Roman emperor (69-70 A.D.) and philosopher, who died thinking: 'ut puto Deus fio' (I think I am becoming a god)
33. Galba: Roman emperor (68-69 A.D.)
34. Feri...Romani(Latin): these words were uttered by Galba when he was being killed in a rebellion. These words mean, "Strike if it be for the good of Roman people"
35. Septimius Severus: Roman emperor(193 – 211 A.D.)
36. Dispatch: hurried action
37. Adeste,...agendum(Latin): These words were spoken by Septimus Severus, meaning "Hurry up, if anything remains for me to do"
38. Stoics: a school of Greek philosophers who believed in torturing the body as a process of spiritual purification. They were the followers of Zeno who advocated virtue for its own sake
39. Qui Finem...Naturae (Latin): who accounts the end of life among the gifts of nature. This reference is taken from the famous Roman satirist Juvinal.
40. In hot blood: in excitement
41. Avert: avoid
42. Dolours: agonies
43. Canticle: advice
44. Nunc dimittis: now dismiss
45. Extinctus amabitur idem (Latin): "The same man, who was envied when alive, shall be loved when dead"

#### 1.10.4 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q1. What do men fear? Why?
- Q2. Why does Bacon say that the accompaniments of death are more frightful than death itself?
- Q3. Name the passions which are stronger than the fear of death.
- Q4. Explain the following lines:

---

“It is no less worthy to observe...Come quickly, if there remains something for me to do.”

“It is as natural to die...somewhat that is good doth avert the dolours of death”

Q5. Explain the term *Nunc dimittis*. In which context does Bacon use this expression.

---

### 1.11. SUMMING UP

---

- In this unit you read about essay, its beginning and development in England
- Read about the life and important works of Bacon
- Read about his style and analysed him as a thinker
- Examined two of his essays titled ‘Of Adversity’ and ‘Of Death’

---

### 1.12. REFERENCES

---

1. Selby, F.G. ed. *Bacon’s Essays*. New Delhi: Macmillan, 1989. Print.
2. *The English Tradition*. Massachusetts: Prentice Hall Literature, 1999. Print.
3. Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature Vol 1*, 1960. Print.

---

### 1.13. SUGGESTED READING

---

1. Selby, F.G. ed. *Bacon’s Essays*. New Delhi: Macmillan, 1989. Print.
2. *The English Tradition*. Massachusetts: Prentice Hall Literature, 1999. Print.
3. Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature Vol 1*, 1960. Print

---

### 1.14. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

---

1. Write a note on Bacon’s style.
2. Alexander Pope once called Bacon “the wisest, brightest and the meanest of mankind.’ Do you agree with this statement?
3. Why Bacon’s essays are called dispersed meditations?
4. Critically analyse the essay ‘Of Adversity.’
5. Summarize the essay ‘Of Death’ in your own words.

## **UNIT 2 CHARLES LAMB:**

### **‘DREAM CHILDREN: A REVERIE’**

---

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Objectives

2.3 What is Prose Poetry?

2.4 Charles Lamb- An Overview

2.5 Major Works of Charles Lamb

2.6 Prose Style of Charles Lamb

2.7 *Essays of Elia*- An Introduction

2.8 *Dream Children: A Reverie*

2.8.1 Summary

2.8.2 Glossary

2.8.3 Analysing the Story

2.9 Check your Progress

2.10 Let us sum up

2.11 References

2.12 Suggested Reading

2.13 Terminal and Model Questions

---

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

---

In the first unit you read about the ‘Father of English Essays’, Sir Francis Bacon. You saw how Bacon in his essays analysed things in an objective manner, how his essays were loaded with epigrams and aphorisms and how he was able to express the most complex of ideas in a pithy, lucid and direct manner. In this unit you will be introduced to the ‘Prince of English Essayists’, Charles Lamb, whose style stands in stark contrast to that of Bacon’s whose essays bear essentially the imprints of his personality.

---

## 2.2 OBJECTIVES

---

- In this unit you will be introduced to one more form of writing- prose poem
- You will read about the life of Charles Lamb, the ‘Prince of English Essays’, his prose style and some of his important works
- In this unit one of Lamb’s famous essay, *Dream Children, A Reverie*, will be explained in terms of its theme which will be helpful in relating the essay to Lamb’s personality and temperament.
- The unit will also identify the devices used by Lamb in this essay which will be helpful to you in discovering his prose style

---

## 2.3. WHAT IS PROSE POETRY?

---

Prose Poetry is poetry written in prose in other words it is a hybrid form combining prose and poetry. It has all the essential elements of traditional poetry written in verse. It makes use of various figures of speech like consonance, assonance, imagery, rhyme and rhythm. Prose poetry can be considered either primarily poetry or prose or a separate genre altogether. Prose poetry dates back to the ancient writings of Hebrew scholars. It was used in the King James Version of the Bible in the Book of Psalms. It later came into prominence in 19<sup>th</sup> century France and continued to be written in France into the twentieth century by writers such as Max Jacob, Henri Michaux and Francis Ponge. Other writers of prose

---

poetry outside France include Freidrich Holderlin, Rainer Maria Rilke, Edgar allen Poe, Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson and Oscar Wilde. Beat poets like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac and other American writers such as William S. Burroughs, James Wright and Bob Dylan also experimented with this form of writing.

---

#### 2.4 CHARLES LAMB-AN OVERVIEW

---

Charles Lamb (1775 – 1834) was one of the leading prose writers of the Romantic Age. Besides being a prose writer, he also wrote for children and was also an acclaimed critic. Charles Lamb was born to Elizabeth Field and John Lamb on February, 10 1777, in London at the Inner Temple, where his father was a clerk and assistant to a lawyer. Charles was the youngest of the three siblings, His elder sister Mary being ten years his senior and brother John being even older. His sole childhood companion was his sister Mary, who was extremely fond of him. She was not just his playmate but also taught him how to read and write at a tender age and developed his interest in literature. As a child, Lamb spent much of his time in the household of his maternal grandmother, Mrs. Fields and some of his fondest childhood memories were of the days he spent with her. He gives an account of those days in the essay *Blakesmoor in the H\_\_\_\_\_shire*. At the age of seven he entered Christ Hospital (a charity school for children from poor families) where he developed a life long friendship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Lamb's memories of the school are brought to life in the essay *Christ Church Five Years and Thirty*.

The young Lamb had always been a promising student at Christ Church, but as his origins were humble, he had to take up various clerical jobs to meet his ends. For a short time he worked in the office of Joseph Paice, a London merchant, thereafter, in a London trading company called the South Sea House. After working in the South Sea House for about seven months, he joined the East India Company, where he worked for thirty three long years of his life.

Lamb's life was quite an uneventful one as most of his time was consumed in carrying out mundane official chores and taking care of his invalid parents but as the Walter Pater says, "Under its calm surface lay something of the fateful domestic horror" and as when he was twenty two, his beloved sister, Mary, under the grip of insanity, stabbed their mother. Thereafter, she spent some time in a psychiatric hospital. Later, Charles Lamb brought her home and devoted his life taking care of her. He collaborated with her and brought out a book for children, *Tales from Shakespeare*. It was not just Mary but Charles too who suffered from bouts of insanity and perhaps he was haunted by the fear of insanity as a result of which he could never allow his personality to blossom fully. Being a devoted brother, Charles never married. He died of an infection, erysipelas, from a cut on his face. He was buried in All Saints' Churchyard, Edmonton, Greater London.

---

## **2.5 MAJOR WORKS OF CHARLES LAMB**

---

Charles Lamb was a writer of exceptional talent but because of personal reasons, could never take up writing as a career. Throughout his life he wrote to supplement his regular income. Although Lamb was primarily an essayist, he experimented writing in a variety of literary forms including minor verse, a sentimental novel, a blank-verse tragedy, a farce, *Mr. H\_\_\_\_\_*, a book for children, *Tales from Shakespeare*, which he co-wrote with his sister, Mary. His *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Who Lived About the Time of Shakespeare* brings to limelight Shakespeare's contemporaries who had been rather neglected in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His *Tale of Rosamund Gray* a melodramatic story of a girl ruined by a villain, came out in 1798. From the year 1820, Lamb began contributing for the *London Magazine*, for which he wrote *Essays of Elia*. Apart from prose works, Lamb has authored poems which are less known, but two of his poems, *The Old Familiar Faces* (1798) and the prose-poem *Dream Children*, often recur in anthologies.

---

## 2.6 PROSE STYLE OF CHARLES LAMB

---

It is said of Lamb style that it was not entirely his own. In the introduction we saw that Lamb did not receive university education as he did not have the means for it. But as he had deep love for literature, he read voraciously and soaked himself in it. He was especially interested in the prose writings of the seventeenth century literature. Burton, Browne and Fuller were some of his favourite writers hence, their reflection is visible in the essays of Lamb. However, it would be unfair to say that Lamb imitated their style. On a careful reading of his essays, one will notice that they have their own characteristics, which often reflected his own idiosyncrasies. Some of the major characteristics of Lamb's essays are as follows:

**1. Familiar Style:** Charles Lamb wrote familiar essays. A familiar essay is a short prose composition that focuses on a single subject. It is a loosely constructed essay that uses conversational English to communicate a writer's thoughts in a manner that will interest or entertain the reader. Since familiar essays frequently include details from the author's own life they are sometimes referred to as "personal" essays. As Lamb's essays reflect his whimsicality, idiosyncrasies, life and are written in a conversational tone, they fall under this category.

**2. Autobiographical element:** Lamb's essays are characterised by self-revelation and have a personal note. His life to quite an extent, is reflected through his essays. In 'Christ Hospital' we learn of Charles Lamb as a boy. We are introduced to his family in 'Old Benchers of the Inner Temple' and 'Poor Relations'. In 'The South Sea House' we get a glimpse of Lamb's official life. 'Dream Children', 'Mackery End, in Hertfordshire' and 'Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist' present an account of his youthful experiences. Essays like 'Imperfect Sympathies' and 'A Bachelor's Complaint of the Behaviour of Married People' acquaint us with his prejudices. Walter Pater observes, "In each and every essay, we feel the vein of his subjectivity."



**3. Humour and Pathos:** Another important feature of Lamb's essays is his harmonious blending of humour and pathos. Humour and pathos are inseparable in Lamb's essays. As you have already seen in the life sketch of Charles Lamb that his life was a tragic one but instead of complaining, he looked at life as a humorist. It is rightly said by Compton Rickett,

Humour with Lamb is never far from tragedy; through his tears you may see the rainbow in the sky; for him humour and pathos are really inseparable from one another, they are different facets of the same gem; or to change the simile, one may say that Lamb's moods, whether grave or gay, are equally the natural effervescence of an exquisitely mobile imagination; whether you call it humour or pathos, depends entirely upon where the light may strike the bubbles.

It is said of Lamb's that he gives humorous touches only in order to provide his readers with pleasure and "to save him from weeping." In his essays, he laughs through his tears. He can laugh at his own self and lets others, especially the low-bred, poke fun at him too. An example of this can be seen in his essay, 'The Praise of Chimney Sweepers' in which he says that "he can endure the jocularity of a young sweep with something more than forgiveness." In the words of Anthony Burgess, "He is the father of that kind of humour which derives its effects from self-mockery-the author has no ear for music, he slips on an icy sheet, his clothes need mending, the urchins laugh at him, he has no success with women, he makes a fool of himself in society and so on." Many of his essays like 'Dream Children', 'On Praise of Chimney Sweepers' and 'Poor Relations' are remarkable for the blend of humour and pathos.

**4. Love for the archaic:** Lamb says that he wrote "for antiquity." Hence, his essays are rather old fashioned. He revived many obsolete words, words that were found only in the works of Elizabethans. Words like agnise, arride, reluct, indivertible,

recognitory find a place in Lamb's essays. The beauty of Lamb lies in the fact that although he makes use of obsolete words, he gives them a new freshness. Lamb makes use of the old –fashioned words with dexterity which give his essays a quaint look.

**5. Nostalgia:** Lamb lived mostly in the world of memories. He is often transported back in time by the means of his essays. In essays like 'My Relations', 'Dream Children: A Reverie' and 'The South Sea House', Lamb skillfully presents scenes from the past, giving the readers a slice of his life to taste. Writers of the past find an echo in his works. His works are reminiscent of the works of older writers like Sir Thomas Browne and Thomas Fuller, but Lamb's forte lies in his ability to transform every he touches, as it is rightly remarked by Compton Rickett, "The blossoms are called from other men's gardens but their blending is all Lamb's own. Pass through Lamb's imagination, they become something fresh and individual."

**6. A blend of fact and fiction:** In the essays of Lamb, one can see an excellent blending of fact and fiction. Although, most of his essays have references to his personal life, yet it is difficult to say when Lamb switches from the gears of the real to that of the imaginary world. For instance, in his essay, 'Dream Children' what he says of his brother John's health is a fact but the impression he gives of his children, Alice and John, is a result of his mingling of fact with imagination.

**7. Simplicity and lucidity of style:** Lamb's style, undoubtedly, is clear and simple. This is a result of the clarity in his thoughts which flow out easily and naturally in the form of his essays.

To conclude, Lamb's style is characterized by immensity of variety. It changes according to moods and sentiments. Fancy, didacticism, loftiness, all can be witnessed in his writings. Hugh Walker suitably pays tribute to him when he says, "There are essayists like Bacon of more massive greatness, and others like Sir Thomas Browne, who can attain loftier heights of eloquence, but there is no other

---

than Lamb who has the power to charm.” In Lamb’s essays we see a beautiful blending of facts with fiction and humour with pathos. His innermost feelings, which were never allowed to blossom fully, finding a subtle yet charming expression in his works and for this reason he is rightly called “the Prince of English Essayists.”

---

## **2.7 ESSAYS OF ELIA- AN INTRODUCTION**

---

The essays published in 1823 under the title of *Elia* bore the subtitle, *Essays which have appeared under that Signature in the London Magazine*, for these essays first appeared in *The London Magazine*. The essays follow the pattern of Addison and Steele in the *Spectator* and *Tatler* of a century before, but as far as the content is concerned, it is purely Lamb’s own, full of whimsicality and self-consciousness. His essays also owe much to the style of Robert Burton and Sir Thomas Browne and other Elizabethan poets and dramatists. As for the name Elia, Lamb borrowed it from an Italian clerk in the South Sea House. Lamb adopted this pseudonym, as he told John Taylor, the publisher of the *London*, to avoid giving any offence to his elder brother John, who, when ‘Recollections of the South Sea House’ appeared was still working in the South Sea House. Elia, a clerk at South Sea House, who, as Lamb says, was also an author, had died in 1820, before Lamb’s essays first appeared in *The London Magazine*. This collection of essays, though limited in number, have a vast range. They range from personal to professional, imaginary to factual and humorous to pathetic themes. Thus, *Essays of Elia* are marked with an interesting variety. They are primarily a work of imagination. In January, 1823, Lamb determined to kill Elia, wrote the essay, ‘A Character of the late Elia’, and later printed in part as the preface to *The Last Essays of Elia*. His essays appeared regularly in *The London Magazine* from March to December 1823 but only two were printed in 1824; however, in January 1825, Elia again became a regular contributor, until the magazine passed into new hands in August of the same year.

---

## 2.8 DREAM CHILDREN: A REVERIE

---

### 2.8.1 SUMMARY

‘Dream Children; A Reverie’ is an essay which is also referred to as a prose-poem, which occurs in *Essays of Elia*. It is one of Lamb’s popular works and finds a place in most of his anthologies. It was first published in *The London Magazine* for January 1822. Charles Lamb, like Wordsworth is like a true Romantic. He searches for beauty in the commonplace and finds it in the streets of London, a city he never left in his lifetime, and in his imagination. Lamb was a dreamer and his dreams often found an expression in his essays, as a result of which his essays are rich in imagination. In his essay, ‘Oxford in the Vacation’, he says,

I confess that it is my humour, my fancy- in the forepart of the day, when the mind of your man of letters requires some relaxation-(and none better than such as at first sight seems most abhorrent from his beloved studies)-to while away some good hours of my time in the contemplation of indigoes, cottons, raw silks, piece- goods, flowered or otherwise. In the first place \*\*\*\*\* and then it sends you home with such increased appetite to your books \*\*\*\*\* ...

Another such essay, in which Lamb brilliantly develops his dream vision is ‘Dream Children; A Reverie’. In this essay, Lamb gives expression to his unfulfilled longings and desires, entering into a world of fantasy and narrating some of the cherished moments of his life to his “dream children” Alice and John. Lamb has a deep understanding of child psychology and knows that children like to listen to stories about their elders when they were young. It is quite evident from Lamb’s biographical account that he spent his entire life taking care of his insane sister Mary, hence, he never married. However, he fell in love twice, once when he was seventeen, with Anne Simmons, who appears under the name of “Alice W-n” in his essays like ‘Dream Children’ and ‘New Year’s Eve’ and again at forty four with

---

Fanny Kelly of Covent Garden, whom he once had proposed marriage, but she refused his proposal and he remained single for the rest of his life. Lamb must have longed to raise a family of his own and this desire to have children finds way through Alice and John in the essay *Dream children-A Reverie*.

The essay begins with Alice and John asking Lamb to tell them about their great grandmother, who lived in a large mansion in Norfolk. This transports Lamb back to his childhood days at his grandmother's house. Lamb's maternal grandmother, Mary Field, a good natured and religious lady, who was a servant to the Plummer family, who owned a large country house called Blakesware, near Widford, Hertfordshire. After the death of Mrs. Plummer, Lamb's grandmother acted as the in charge of the mansion and during his visits, the young Charles had a free rein of the place. In the essay, Lamb also brings into light the fateful story of the Children in the Wood from Percy's *Reliques*, which Alice and John had heard earlier. The tragic incident of the two children and their cruel uncle had taken place in the house where Grandmother Field lived. At times she used to see the spirit of those two innocent children. On seeing the apparition of the children, grandma would not be shaken as she believed that the spirit of those children would not harm her. The story of the children was carved in wood upon the chimney piece earlier but a foolish rich person later pulled down the wooden chimney and put a chimney of marble in place of it. The new chimney had no story in it. On hearing that the rich man had pulled down the wooden chimney with the story of the children, Alice gets very unhappy.

Lamb gives an account of the fun he and his siblings had at the great house and orchards in grandma field's house.

'Dream Children; A Reverie' is semi autobiographical as Lamb presents the story of his own life in it, mingling it at places with the fantastic. His maternal grandmother, brother, sister, his love interest Ann Simmons, all find place in it.

---

However, Lamb's forte lies in mingling fact with fiction and thus the account he gives of people and events is an exquisite blending of fact and fiction.

One of the striking features of this essay is his remarkable blend of pathos and humour. The essay begins with a happy note as we are introduced to Alice and John, Lamb's "dream children", who listen to Lamb's account of his childhood days when his brother and he would enjoy rambling in and around the great country house in Norfolk (Hertfordshire) but as the essay builds up the unhappy phases of Lamb's life like grandmother Field's passing away after a long and painful struggle with cancer, the death of his brother, which created an immeasurable void in his life, are also exposed. Alice and John listen to the stories told by their "father" attentively. Their expressions change according to the change in thoughts of the stories. The portrait of the children that Lamb paints shows his understanding of child psychology. Lamb tells the children about their Uncle John, who was handsome and courageous and a darling of one and all. Lamb narrates some of the intimate moments he and his brother shared, of how his brother cared for him and how after his death, Lamb missed him for his kindness and wished him to be alive again. When Lamb told the children the sad story of their uncle John, they began to cry and begged him not to go any further with his accounts as it made them sad. Nevertheless, to tell them some stories about their charming mother who was no more. On this, Lamb tells them of the times he had courted their fair mother and as he was telling them about their courtship, he turned to little Alice and saw the image of his beloved in her. Nevertheless, the essay ends on a sad note as Lamb wakes up from his reverie only to realize that he was dreaming and the faces of Alice and John, who in reality were just an apparition, gradually fade away. On waking up he finds Bridget (his sister Mary) standing beside him but John L- (or James Elia), his brother gone forever.

**2.8.2 GLOSSARY**

Grandmother Field: Mary Field, nee Bruton, housekeeper at Blakesware, in Widford parish.

Norfolk: Lamb thinly distinguishes his description. Blakesware is in Hertfordshire; its owners were the Plumers, where Lamb's maternal grandmother was the housekeeper.

Percy's Reliques: It is a collection of ballads and popular songs by Thomas Paine which was published in the year 1765.

Conception: (here) notion

Spirit: will; strength of mind

Crept: (past tense of creep) crawl

Papa: here Lamb refers to himself as the father of the children, Alice and John

Familiar: well known

Ballad: a ballad is a long song or a poem which tells a story in simple language.

Children of the Wood: It is a traditional children's tale as well as a popular pantomime subject. It tells of two children who after the death of their parents were left in the care of their uncle, but the uncle gives the children to ruffians to be killed. The ruffians fall out and the "milder" of the two kills the other. He tells the children that he will return with provision but the children do not see him again. The children, wandering alone in the woods die, and are covered by Robin Red breast.

Robin redbreast: At the end of the story, the robin buries the bodies of the children with leaves

Foolish young person: William Plummer: At one time M.P. for Higham Ferrers but had represented Hertfordshire from 1768 to 1807.

Pull down: demolish

Upbraid: scold

Mistress: owner

Committed to her: under her charge and care

Purchase: buy

Adjoining: neighbouring

Country: rural area

A newer and more fashionable mansion: New Place, Gilston, also in Hertfordshire, although Lamb transfers it into an adjoining country. It was also bought by colonel Plumer in 1701. His grandson, William Plummer, lived at Gilston, which after his death became the residence of his widow.

Awkward: odd

Abbey: a building occupied by monks under an abbot, or nuns under an abbess, especially the church building.

Lady C: an imaginary female character

Tawdry: worthless and showy

Gilt: covered with a thin layer of gold or a substance that looks like gold

Psalter: an ancient musical instrument with numerous strings, plucked with fingers or with a pick; The Psalms of David

Fir apples: Fir cones

Testament: either of the two major divisions of the Christian Bible, known as the Old Testament and the New Testament



Apparition: ghost, spirit

Concourse: gathering

Twelve Caesars: *De vita Caesarum* (Latin) literally translated as *On the life of the Caesars*, commonly known as *The Twelve Caesars*, is a set of twelve biographies of Julius Caesar and the first eleven emperors of the Roman empire written by Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus.

Solitary: lonely

Nectarines: a fruit similar to a peach with a smooth skin

Busy-idle: busy without business

Mettlesome: spirited

Forbidden fruit: Lamb's love for Biblical references, Adam and Eve were denied to pluck the fruit of evil by God. Lamb makes use of the expression to refer to the fruits of the garden of the great house at Norfolk.

Relinquish: give up

Yew: an evergreen tree or bush that has flat dark green needles

Bask: lie around, relax

Mount: climb

Imp: naughty child

Spirited: enthusiastic

Fancy: imagine

Sulky: morose, sullen

Impertinence: in an impolite and disrespectful manner

Frisk: skip or dance around in a carefree way

Though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago, such a distance there is between life and death: Charles Lamb's brother John Lamb had died just a few months before this essay was published but it seemed to Lamb that he had died a great while ago.

Pent up: repressed or stifled rather than being released or freely expressed

Cross: feeling or indicating anger

Alice W\_\_\_\_\_n: Alice Winterton, name used to describe Ann Simmons, Charles Lamb's beloved

Coyness: bashfulness

Denial: rejection

The soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes: Lamb's beloved Alice seemed to see with the eyes of little Alice

Re-presentment: real copy

Lethe: in Greek mythology, a river in Hades whose water made those who drank it forget their past

Tedious: boring, tiresome

Bartrum: Ann Simmon's husband

Bachelor: unmarried man

Bridget: the name used for Lamb's sister, Mary

**2.8.3 ANALYSING THE STORY****(a) Understanding *Dream Children: A Reverie* as a Familiar Essay**

As we have already seen that a familiar or an informal essay is a loosely constructed piece of prose that deals with a single topic and uses conversational English. Although a familiar essay may contain some short elements such as plot and character, it is, nevertheless, considered to be nonfiction, since its chief purpose is to communicate its author's thoughts and feelings, not those of imaginary characters. Read the essay again keeping this point in mind and find out which of Lamb's essays are real and which are imaginary.

**(b) Theme: Why is it called *Dream Children: A Reverie***

You just read a biographical account of Lamb and thereafter his prose-poem 'Dream Children: a Reverie'. On the basis of the two, can you bring to light why Lamb has called his prose-poem so? Do you think Lamb's desire to marry and have children got something to do with it? Why is the essay called a reverie? A reverie is a day dream or a fantasy and lasts for a short while. Now, on the basis of these guidelines, interpret the title for yourself and write a paragraph or two on it.

**(c) Critical thinking and reading**

- **Inferring Tone**

The tone of a story, poem or an essay is the attitude the writer talks with his audience, or describes a character or a situation. As mentioned earlier, Lamb wrote in familiar style which means that his essays were personal. His tone he adopts is conversational. As we know that his essays are a blend of humour and pathos, his tone too is bittersweet, which indeed is the hallmark of his style.

---

Just as a person's tone of voice affects the listener, the tone of a literary piece helps shape the reader's reaction towards it. Determine the tone Lamb takes with respect to each of the following and describe its effect on you

1. Great-grandmother Field
2. Young Alice and John
3. The Great House
4. Alice W-n

- **Understanding Language:**

- (a) **Using Multiple Meanings of Words**

Charles Lamb's art lies in using words with a layer of meanings which enriches a thought or a sentiment. For instance, a writer might describe a character's state of mind as "cloudy", with the intention of conveying both meanings "confused" and "bleak and unhappy". In *Dream Children- a Reverie*, Lamb uses several words in this fashion. Read the essay carefully and list five such words and describe their impact on you.

- (b) **Prose Style:**

You read about the style Lamb adopts in his prose in section 2.6 of this unit. You saw how he wrote in a familiar style, and his essays are revelations of his own thoughts, and emotions. Nostalgia also forms an integral part of Lamb's writings. Old acquaintances, childhood memories and later life, all find a place and in his works. His style is highly anecdotal, which means that he narrates his stories by the means of incidents. Now re-read the sections on Lamb's life and his prose style once again and on the basis of your reading try and find out how the above mentioned characteristics of his prose style are reflected in his essay 'Dream Children: A Reverie'.

---

**2.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

---

- Q1. Give an account of Charles Lamb's life in your own words.
- Q2. Explain the following lines with reference to the context:
- (i) "We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartrum father"
  - (ii) "... and how the nectarines and the peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them, because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then, - and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew trees..."
- Q3. Was Lamb married? To whom is he narrating the story in the essay?
- Q4. What kind of a woman was Grandmother Field?
- Q5. Give an account of the days Lamb and his brother spent at their grandmother's house.
- Q6. Is there any autobiographical element in the essay 'Dream Children'? Give references.
- Q7. Trace the element of humour and pathos in 'Dream Children.'
- Q8. Give a brief summary of the essay 'Dream Children.'
- Q9. What is Prose Poetry. Read *Dream Children-A Reverie* carefully and discuss why it can be called a prose poem?

---

**2.10 REFERENCES**

---

1. Lamb, Charles. *Essays of Elia*. London: Macmillan, 1950. Print
2. *The English Tradition*, Massachusetts: Prentice Hall Publication, 1991. Print
3. Daniel, George. *Recollections of Charles Lamb*, Philadelphia: R. West, 1977

---

**2.11 SUGGESTED READING**

---

1. Lamb, Charles. *Essays of Elia*. London: Macmillan, 1950. Print
2. Lucas, Edward V. *The Life of Charles Lamb*

---

**2.12 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

---

1. According to the opening paragraph, who is listening to the narrator's story?
2. Why are the listeners interested in hearing about great- grandmother Field?
3. Besides his grandmother, which relative does the narrator speak of with deep affection? What has happened to this relative?
4. Why do you suppose the narrator's children are named John and Alice?
5. Identify three details in the essay that make the young John and Alice seem real.
6. Do you think it is always important to know details of an author's life to fully appreciate the author's work? Explain.

## **UNIT 3 Mahatma Gandhi: 'What is True Civilization', 'On Education'**

---

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Objectives

3.3 Mahatma Gandhi – an Overview

3.4 Mahatma Gandhi, the Writer

3.5 *Hind Swaraj*

3.6 Theme: What is *Hind Swaraj* about?

3.7 What is True Civilization?

3.7.1 Summary of the chapter

3.7.2 Check your Progress

3.8 On Education

3.8.1 Summary of the chapter

3.8.2 Check your Progress

3.9 Let us sum up

3.10 References

3.11 Suggested Reading

3.12 Terminal and Model questions

---

### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

---

In the earlier units you were introduced to two essayists from the West namely Sir Francis Bacon and Charles Lamb. Like the West, our motherland too has produced eminent prose writers who have written prolifically on various subjects ranging from moral to political issues. Two renowned prose writers, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, who were also great freedom fighters, are prescribed in your course. In the following unit, we will take up two of Mahatma Gandhi's essays, 'What is True Civilization' and 'Education', both taken from his very influential book *Hind Swaraj*, a book that is regarded as 'a very basic document for the study of Gandhi's thought.' (M. Chatterjee 1983,89). It was through this book that Gandhiji hoped, as he put it, 'to use the British race' for transmitting his 'mighty message of ahimsa' to the rest of the world.

---

### 3.2. OBJECTIVES:

---

- In this unit you will read about the life of Mahatma Gandhi
- Examine him as a writer and understand his prose style
- You will be introduced to his book *Hind Swaraj*
- Two of his essays from *Hind Swaraj*, namely 'What is True Civilization' and 'Education' will be taken up
- After going through the essay, 'What is True Civilization' you will be able to understand the meaning of civilization in true sense and will be able to discuss Gandhiji's views on the subject.
- The essay 'Education' will focus on identifying some key issues that confront the modern day education system. The essay will compel you to ask yourself questions on education that you have never asked before. These questions may lead you to finding answers, which if you are able to find for yourselves, will help you in understanding the real significance of education.



- 
- Finally you will be able to comprehend the key concepts of Gandhian thought.
- 

### **3.3. MAHATMA GANDHI – AN OVERVIEW:**

---

Mahatma Gandhi needs no introduction to you all. You all have been reading about him since childhood. I am sure that you must be familiar with the facts of his life given below. However, the need of the hour is to understand the high ideals that this great soul lived by and to discover the Gandhi in ourselves. Keeping this in mind, let us take a bird's eye view of Mahatma Gandhi's life.

Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest political and ideological leader, not just of India but of the entire world, was born on October 2, 1869, at Porbandar, in Gujarat as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Gandhiji's grandfather, father and uncles had served as prime ministers to the princes of Porbandar and other tiny Indian states. Gandhiji had a strict upbringing. His father was a strict disciplinarian, honest, brave, morally upright but short-tempered. His mother, Putlibai was a devout woman who instilled in the mind of the young Mohandas moral values, which became an integral part of his personality.

In his early childhood days, Mohandas Gandhi went to school in Porbander. When he was six, his family moved to Rajkot. Mohandas was an average student of shy nature. He was so bashful that as soon as the school got over, he would run back home, for he felt that the other boys would poke fun at him. It was because of his shy nature, he always tried to keep himself busy in his books and lessons. He also won many scholarships at school, but Gandhiji mentioned in his essay 'At School' that it was because of sheer luck that he won those scholarships. On reading Gandhiji's autobiography, we will find that although he was a mediocre student, he was truthful, honest and obedient.

In those days, the Indian society was steeped in many bad customs. Child marriage was one such malpractice. Following the tradition of those days, Gandhiji's parents married him off at the tender age of thirteen to Kasturba bai.

As a teenager, Mohandas was a domineering husband. He would not allow Kasturba to mix with her friends or even visit her parents. But Kasturba was also a headstrong girl, she would not be cowed down and would have her way somehow, as a result of which Mohandas would quarrel with her and stop talking with her for days altogether.

As a young boy, Mohandas was just like any other boy and indulged in wrongdoings. Once he stole some copper coins from the pocket of a servant, at another occasion, he stole a small gold ornament from his brother's closet. He also experimented with non-vegetarian diet secretly as his family was strictly vegetarian but this experiment with food was purely for patriotic reasons as the young Mohandas was naïvely assumed that only a non-vegetarian diet would give him the stamina to oust the British from India, but he soon realized his mistake and apologized to his parents for lying to them and vowed never to lie, steal or consume non-vegetarian food ever in life. He lived up to his words and when he went to England to study law. In England, it was virtually impossible for him to survive without consuming meat, however, he stuck to his meagre vegetarian diet and lived up to his words. This shows how truthful Gandhiji was, even in the most adverse situation.

Gandhiji calls the days he spent in England as the formative years of his life as it was in England that he was introduced to the Bible and the Bhagwat Gita. Both these books left an indelible impression in his mind. He learned some important lessons in life from books these books. It was Christ's Sermon on the Mount that set the cornerstone of Gandhiji's philosophy of Ahimsa. He called the Gita his "dictionary of conduct" and turned to it for "a ready solution of all trials and troubles." After earning a degree in law, he returned to Rajkot, tried practising as a

lawyer, in which he failed miserably. Then he tried to get a job as a school teacher but was rejected as unprofessional. Defeated, he left Bombay and returned to Rajkot but there too things could not work out for him as he had thought. It was during these bleak times that luck favoured him and he got the case of a leading firm in South Africa. He went there and was successful in the case. In South Africa, he saw the miserable condition of Indians. His heart was filled with sympathy and pity for his own countrymen. For the betterment of the Indians in South Africa, he decided to launch a movement against the government. After staying in South Africa for some years, he returned to India and seeing the wretched condition of his fellow countrymen, plunged into the freedom movement. He joined the Indian National Congress and recognized Gopal Krishna Gokhale as his political advisor. He initiated many important movements like the Non- Co-operation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, the 'Dandi' March. All the movements launched by Mahatma Gandhi were purely on the basis of truth and non-violence, his sole weapons. These movements became quite popular, and people from all walks of life participated in them in large numbers. As a result of this he became an eye sore of the British government. Gandhiji strove to practice non-violence and truth in all situations and advocated others to do the same. He was jailed several times, but all the atrocities committed by the British government could not dissuade him. He assumed the leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1921. In the Second World War, he refused to co-operate with the British government and started his famous Quit India Movement in August 1942. As a result of the tireless efforts made by Mahatma Gandhi and other freedom fighters, India won her independence on August 15, 1947.

Mahatma Gandhi was a man of high ideals. He was kind, generous and liberal. He led many nationwide campaigns for eradication of poverty, advocated women's rights, fought relentlessly for untouchability throughout his life. He was a champion of the Hindu-Muslim unity and was deeply pained when the partition of India took place. Mahatma Gandhi was the champion of *Satyagraha*, a

philosophy firmly founded upon ahimsa or total non-violence. He lived up to his lofty ideals and for this reason, he is referred to as Mahatma, which in Sanskrit means “Great Soul”, an honorific first applied to him by Rabindra Nath Tagore. People lovingly called him ‘Bapu’. Hence, he is called ‘The Father of the Nation.’ He lived mostly in a self-sufficient residential community He used to wear the traditional Indian ‘dhoti’ and shawl which he spun himself on a ‘charkha.’ He was a supporter of agrarian economy and advocated cottage industry as he believed that it ‘supported rural economy. He laid great emphasis on the development of villages for he felt that India dwelt in her villages. Furthermore, to promote village self-sufficiency, Gandhiji popularized hand spinning and advocated the making and wearing of ‘Khadi’ (hand spun cloth). January 30, 1948 was a ill-fated day for India as this Apostle of Peace was shot dead by Nathu Ram Godse as he was going for his daily prayer service. He succumbed to the brutal force with the name of Lord Rama on his lips.

---

### 3.4. MAHATMA GANDHI, THE WRITER

---

Mahatma Gandhi, a man of action, was also a prolific writer. He wrote mainly for the welfare of others. He once said, “We may read the Gita and the Ramayana or *Hind Swaraj*, but what we have to learn from them is the desire for the welfare of others.” Mahatma Gandhi’s ideology was influenced by the works of writers like Plato, John Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and Leo Tolstoy. He translated Plato’s *Apology* and John Ruskin’s *Unto this Last* into his native Gujarati. Ruskin inspired his decision to live an austere life on a commune, at first on the Phoenix farm in Natal and then on the Tolstoy Farm in Johannesburg.

Mahatma Gandhi dedicated his life to discovering truth. He tried to achieve this by learning from his own mistakes and by conducting experiments on himself. All the experiments that he conducted through his life came out in the form of his autobiography titled *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Besides this autobiography, Gandhiji published several other books. The most notable ones

---

being *Hind Swaraj*, which he first wrote in Gujarati in the year 1909 and the next year, translated into English.

Most of Gandhiji's writings were journalistic in approach. During the Boar War (1899-1902), he organized an Indian Ambulance Corps to assist the British, wrote freelance field reports and also contributed for Dadabhai Naoroji's *India*. He edited several newspapers including *Indian Opinion*, a weekly from Durban. Later when he came to India, he edited newspapers like *Harijan* in Gujarati, Hindi and English, *Young India* in English, and *Navajivan*, a weekly in Gujarati. In addition to this, he wrote letters almost every day to individuals and newspapers. He also wrote extensively on subjects like vegetarianism, diet and health, religion and social reforms. Thus, Gandhiji's writings became a medium for his thoughts. Gandhiji's complete works were published by the Indian government under the title *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Gandhiji's prose style is known for its simplicity which carries conviction and incontrovertible arguments.

---

### 3.5. HIND SWARAJ

---

*Hind Swaraj* is Gandhiji's highly original and influential work, which was written originally in Gujarati and later, the next year, translated it into English, especially for a close associate in South Africa, Hermann Kellenbach. Gandhiji also sent a copy of it to Leo Tolstoy, who in reply showed great admiration for Gandhiji's commitment to non-violent resistance, which he considered not only of importance to India but to humanity at large. *Hind Swaraj* encapsulates Gandhian thought and philosophy. In this slender book Gandhiji presents his basic ideas in their proper relationship to one another. *Hind Swaraj* has been called 'a very basic document for the study of Gandhian thought.' (M. Chatterjee 1983,89), his 'confession of faith' (Nanda 1974,66), 'a rather incendiary manifesto' (Ericson 1969,217), 'a proclamation of ideological independence' (Dalton 1993, 16) and the nearest he came to producing a sustained work of political theory.' (Brown 1989,65).

---

*Hind Swaraj* was written by Gandhiji in a matter of ten days, between 13 to 22 November, 1909, on board the ship SS Kildonan Castle on his return trip from England to South Africa. Gandhiji wrote this book at a very fast pace. He seemed to be in such a hurry to write this book that forty four of the 275 manuscript pages have been written with the left hand. Critics often speak of Gandhiji's profound experience of illumination on board the Kildonan Castle and compare it with Rousseau's experience on the road to Vincennes, France. On finishing this book, Gandhiji wrote to his friend Hermann Kallenbach, who was the first to know of its completion, that he had produced an 'original work'.

*Hind Swaraj* takes the form of a dialogue between two characters, the Reader and the Editor. The Reader symbolizes an inquisitive Indian mind. The Reader's mind is full of doubts and the Editor (Gandhiji) analyses the questions the Reader raises and with logical arguments removes all the prejudices that perplex the mind of the Reader.

*Hind Swaraj* is addressed to a mixed audience including the expatriate Indians, the Extremists and the Moderates of the Indian National Congress, the Indian Nation and the English. The key to an understanding of *Hind Swaraj* lies in the idea that worldly pursuit should give way to ethical living. Gandhiji was appalled by the western concept of civilization. In his words, "The Western civilization which passes for civilization is disgusting to me. I have given a rough picture of it in my *Hind Swaraj*. ...it is an attempt to see beauty in voluntary simplicity, poverty and slowness. I have pictured that as my ideal. Furthermore, Gandhiji exhorts the reader to read the *Hind Swaraj* with his eyes and 'see therein the chapter on how to make India non-violent.' Gandhiji says that one cannot build non-violence on a factory civilization, but it can be built on self contained villages. *Hind Swaraj* is written in simple language as Gandhi sought simplicity in all things, including the way he presented his ideas, as a result of this it is easy for the average reader to comprehend the book. But the ideas expressed in the book are lofty and

in no way should be compromised with. It is, therefore, a book that needs to be read reflectively and the reader should try to emulate the high ideals that are expressed in the book. *Hind Swaraj* contains the seeds of Gandhian revolution. It is a “whole theory of life” as he himself characterized it. It has aptly been termed as “seminal” by Mahadev Desai, his personal secretary. Thus, it is the quintessence of Gandhian thought and is *a must* if we wish to understand the high and noble ideals of this noble soul.

Given below are two chapters from *Hind Swaraj* which will help you in understanding the concepts of civilization and education in true sense. Let us begin with the first chapter, ‘What is True civilization’:

---

### **3.6. THEME: WHAT IS *HIND SWARAJ* ABOUT?**

---

Assuming that you know Hindi, you can presume what the book *Hind Swaraj* must be about. Moreover, all of us at some point of our lives or the other, have come across Gandhian ideology and the movements launched by him. With the study of *Hind Swaraj* you will get an opportunity to understand the quintessence of Gandhian philosophy, which is not just an ideology but if translated into a way of living can teach us the essence of life. Coming back to the title, *Hind Swaraj* can be translated into English as the ‘Indian Home Rule’. In the book Gandhiji expresses his views on various issues that have crept up because of modernization, and through the means of dialogues between the Reader and the Editor, tries to reach to the root of the problem, thereafter, after deliberating and holding discussions with the Reader, tries to find a solution to the problems.

The dialogue between the Reader and the Editor mainly focus on the following themes:

1. For Gandhiji, ‘Home Rule’ was ‘Self Rule’. For him it was not enough that the British leave the Indian soil only to make way for “Indian English” to

---

rule the country, for it would turn Hindustan into 'Englishtan', and it would not be the 'Swaraj' of his dreams.

2. Gandhiji further argues that Indian independence was only possible through passive resistance for he believed that the force of love and pity is greater than the force of arms.
3. In this essay, Gandhiji also focuses on the need for the Indians to be self-reliant so that they can be independent socially, politically and economically.
4. Gandhiji is extremely critical of the western civilization and urges the Indians to reject western lifestyle for it is eating into the vitals of the country, leaving us diseased and corroded.

---

### **3.7. WHAT IS TRUE CIVILIZATION?**

---

#### **3.7.1. SUMMARY**

'What is True Civilization?' appears as the thirteenth chapter in *Hind Swaraj*. In order to develop an understanding of the chapter, we need to be aware of some important points about civilization that Gandhiji clarified in the sixth chapter called 'civilization.'

In the chapter on civilization, Gandhiji states that many eminent writers have expressed their view on civilization, and he feels that most of the views expressed by them are not their own but are influenced by the concept of civilization as perceived by the western writers. Such scholars are biased in their opinion as that they do not want to hear anything against the West. In this chapter Gandhiji exposes the misconception of civilization that exists in people's minds. He states that people consider sophisticated machinery and gadgets the symbols of civilization, which, according to him is a wrong notion. Gandhiji further clarifies this by giving us the example of earlier times when people measured between their bodily strength while fighting but now, he says, with the availability of modern day weaponry, it is possible for one man, sitting cowardly behind a hill, to wipe off the



lives of hundreds of thousands of men, by pulling the trigger of his machinegun. This, he laments, is “civilization” for people today but he feels that it nothing but an act of cowardice. Gandhiji feels disturbed to see how, in the present times immorality is taught in the name of morality. He is critical of the modern day civilization and states that the modern day civilization aims at enhancing body comforts but fails miserably in achieving that too because in the long run technology proves to be a bane rather than a boon. In this context, Mahatma Gandhi highlights the pathetic condition of people, especially in Europe. Gandhiji is of the opinion that Europeans are becoming slaves to technology and lack physical strength and courage. He holds the Industrial Revolution responsible for the deplorable condition of people in general. He is deeply pained to see women, who should be the queens of their households and small children, who should be going to school, becoming slaves to factories.

Gandhiji brings the essay to a close by stating that there is no scope for the present day civilization which has its foundations on greed, corruption and life corroding competition. However, Gandhiji shows us a ray of hope when he says that “civilization”, as it stands today, is not blighted by an incurable disease, and therefore can be cured. Gandhiji is of the view that the English are presently affected by this disease they call “civilization” and for that reason, deserve our sympathy and not our hatred. Thus, in the sixth chapter called ‘Civilization’, Gandhiji mirrors “civilization” as it stands today, leaving us wondering what it takes to be truly civilized.

In continuation to the ideas on modern civilization expressed by Gandhiji in the previous chapters, Gandhiji, in the chapter, ‘What is True Civilization?’ gives the reader the meaning of True Civilization. He defined civilization as “a mode of conduct which points out to the path of duty” and links it to morality and good conduct. He takes great pride in the glorious past of India and says that where on the one hand, various ancient civilizations of the world have collapsed or are on the

verge of a collapse, India still stands firm on her foundation. Gandhiji is of the view that civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty and morality. He further says that to observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and passions. Here, Mahatma Gandhi's views are similar to those expressed by Bertrand Russell in his essay, 'Functions of a Teacher' in which Russell states that civilization is also a state of the mind and not just of material adjuncts. Gandhiji gives us the Gujarati equivalent of the word civilization which he says means good conduct, thereby, emphasizing on the importance of observing honesty in performance of duty.

Gandhiji is full of admiration for our ancestors who lived quite an austere life and dissuaded from luxuries and pleasures. He marvels at the ingenuity of our ancestors and says that they too were capable of inventing machinery like the modern day man but as they were could foresee the disadvantages of such technology, abstained from it. Our ancestors were wise enough to realize that real happiness and health lay in the proper use of hands and feet and that the machines make a slave of humans resulting in the birth of various vices that plague society at large. Carrying this idea forward, Gandhiji too advocated the use of the three "Hs"- Heart, Hands and Head- which Gandhiji believed was essential for the all-round development of an individual.

Gandhiji gave the highest value to spirituality and like our forefathers was of the opinion that kings and the sword were inferior to the 'Rishis' and 'Fakirs' as they are the spiritual gurus of our land. Gandhiji feels that the holy land of India is imbued with spirituality as a result of which Indians are capable of teaching nations rather than learning from them.

Gandhiji next derides the unscrupulous lawyers and doctors who stop to any level for the sake of materialistic wealth. He strongly believes that this corruption should be checked as it is eating into the vitals of our country. He is of the view

---

that India should have a strong foundation with men of character acting as its cornerstone.

Gandhiji believed that the newfangled notions of civilization cannot ruffle India as her roots are firmly grounded. He felt that the English lacked the power to rule over a great country like ours. In this essay he reiterates that his fellow countrymen should love and build their country with the tools of hard work, honesty and sincerity. He feels blessed that ours is still a nation which unlike other “developed” nations of the world, is not corroded by the ills of the modern day civilization.

At this point, the reader objects to this Utopian view expressed by Gandhiji. He tries to bring to the fore the various malpractices that have existed in India since ancient times. On this matter Gandhiji says that the defects that the reader is mentioning are defects that have existed in all ages and at all places and should not be mistaken for ancient civilization. He says that it is the duty of the people to make attempts to fight the evil forces that confront their respective countries. He further explains to the reader that in no part of the world and under no civilization have men attained perfection and what human beings can aim towards is to strive towards perfection. Gandhiji can perceive that the Indian civilization has the potential is to elevate people morally and spiritually whereas, the Western civilization, he fears, is instrumental in bringing about a lop-sided development. Gandhiji feels that the latter is based on godlessness, whereas, the former is based on belief in God. Finally, Gandhiji concludes the essay by urging his fellow countrymen to embrace Indian culture and understand the meaning of civilization in true sense and live by it.

### **3.7.2. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q1. Do you agree with Gandhiji’s concept of civilization? Why?

Q2. Why is peculiar to Indian civilization?

---

Q3. What kind of life did our ancestors live? Would you like to live a similar life?

Why?

Q4. What does Gandhiji have to say about the prevalent malpractices in India?

Q5. Gandhiji wrote *Hind Swaraj* way back in 1909. Do you feel that the ideas expressed by him back then still hold relevance. Give reasons to support your answer.

---

### 3.8. EDUCATION

---

#### 3.8.1. SUMMARY

The eighteenth chapter of *Hind Swaraj*, called 'Education' begins with the reader questioning the editor as to why in their entire discussion, ranging from the Congress and its Officials to Passive Resistance, have they not deliberated on a crucial subject like education. He brings to light the laudable efforts made by Sayajirao Gaekwad III, who on assuming office undertook various educational and social reforms. In 1906, he became the first Indian ruler to introduce free compulsory education in his state of Baroda. But the editor (Gandhiji) explains to the reader that although the drive of compulsory education by the Maharaja and other great leaders was pure but not required in a great civilization like ours. He compares education to an instrument, which can both be used and abused. Gandhiji, being an astute observer of men, found that most men tend to abuse education rather than use it. He wants men to behave like truly educated beings, not merely stereotypes. He is of the opinion that education should act as a means of attaining happiness in life and if it fails to provide it, then such an education is of no use. He further illustrates it by giving the example of a morally upright farmer, who earns his bread honestly, rears his family well and is content with life. Such a farmer, Gandhiji feels, does not require education he is already leading a life that education aims at fulfilling.

Gandhiji regrets the fact that Indians are being swept off their feet by the new-fangled notions of the West without weighing its pros and cons. He laments the fact that our ancient education system, which is the fountainhead of all wisdom, is being replaced by the western one. Gandhiji, like other sages strongly believed that education should not just be treated as a means of gaining knowledge and a better life-style but should be used as a means of improving the living conditions of people.

Gandhiji held the British author and Vedantist Aldous Huxley in high esteem. Huxley, too, on the other hand idealized Mahatma Gandhi and on his death wrote an essay titled *A Note on Gandhi* which features in his *Articles written for Vedanta and the West*. In the essay 'Education', Gandhiji quotes Huxley who said:

That man, I think, has a liberal education, who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will and does with ease and pleasure all the work that as a mechanism it is capable of, whose intellect is a clear, cold, logic engine with all its parts of equal strength and in smooth working order...whose mind is stored with a knowledge of the fundamental truths of nature...whose passions are trained to conic the heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience...who has learned to hate all the vileness and to respect others as himself. Such a one and no other, I conceive, has had a liberal education, for he is in harmony with nature. He will make the best of her and she of him.

Gandhiji analyses this definition given by Huxley minutely and realizes that the sciences he had read in his lifetime had never taught him the nuances of education. He is saddened by the fact that the present education system, although boasts of being a modern and proficient one, is incapable of a holistic development as it does not focus on building the character of man.

At this point the Reader shrewdly questions the Editor that if he had not received higher education, how would he have been able to explain to him all the things that he has clarified so well. Gandhiji, then satisfies the Reader by telling him that he does not feel that his life would have been wasted if he would not have received primary or higher education as his sole motive in life is to serve people and that in doing so he is making use of the education that he has received. Gandhiji is deeply pained to see the so called “educated masses” becoming a victim of false education. He declares that he, over a period of time, has become free from the ill effects of modern civilization and that he wishes to share with the reader the benefit of his of his experience and expose the rottenness of the current education system.

The Reader now seems to be understanding Gandhiji’s views on education a little and questions him whether English education is necessary for obtaining Home Rule, to which Gandhiji replies that to give millions superficial knowledge of English will be to enslave their minds. He does not approve of Lord Macaulay’s views on education, who was of the opinion that the British government should aim at imparting English education to Indians in order to form a class of persons who were Indian in blood and colour, but British in taste, in opinion and in intellect. Gandhiji feels that if such an education system is practised in the country, it will lead to a divided India and India will never be able to be free herself in the real sense of the word as such an “English” education would enslave people’s minds. Gandhiji realises that with English education, hypocrisy and tyranny have increased as the English- knowing Indians regard everything “Indian” with condescension and mock at people who are not “Anglicized”, thus, they strike a terror in the minds of those people who are oblivious of the language.

Gandhiji was of the opinion that the onus of educating the masses lies on the educated class. He feels that it is their responsibility to work for the upliftment of their fellow brothers and believes that in doing so they will just paying a portion of debt that they owe to their fellow countrymen. He finds it unreasonable that

people make use of the English tongue in places like the court of law and feels it to be a sign of slavery. He is of the opinion that the English speaking Indians are responsible for neglecting Hindi as a national language. In his words, "Indians are so much inundated by the disease of culture that they cannot on the whole do without English education." Gandhiji's sound advice to the votaries of English education is that they should make use of the English language intelligently. Gandhiji, in no way undermined the importance of English but desired that the people who have a strong base of English should promulgate the good ideas in English to the Indian masses. He was of the opinion that the erudite scholars of English should act like facilitators to the masses and try to assist the masses in as many ways as possible. Gandhiji should not be misunderstood to be prejudiced against the West. He had received education in England, had met great minds of the West and as you read in the introduction, he was inspired by many great western writers like Thoreau, Tolstoy and John Ruskin and wanted valuable books of the western world to be translated into the various Indian languages so that Indians could benefit from them.

Gandhiji wanted Indian culture to prosper and felt that it could happen only when we have a thorough knowledge of our scriptures and for that he urged every Indian to know, in addition to his provincial language, the language of his or her religion. For instance, he wanted the Hindus to have a good knowledge of Sanskrit, for Mohammedans, Arabic and Persian for the Parsees. In his view, the people of India should also take keen interest in learning not just the language of their province but also the language of other provinces as he felt that it would result in the formation of a united India eventually driving English out of the Indian soil. Gandhiji realized that in order to attain Freedom we needed to return to our roots and learn lessons of wisdom from our scriptures which are a storehouse of knowledge.

The Reader further questions the editor on religious education to which he replies that religion which is ethical should occupy the first place. He was of the opinion that religious education should be a *must* in India as India has always been a land of gods and that atheism can never exist in her soil. However, Gandhiji laments the fact that most religious teachers in India are deceitful and selfish. He resents this hypocritical tendency of the religious teachers and feels the need to restore India to her pristine state. He concludes by saying that if we are successful in getting rid of the false English ways and realise our identity as a nation, we shall be free indeed.

### **3.8.2. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

- Q1. Discuss Mahatma Gandhi's critique of education.
- Q2. Why does Gandhiji feel that the education drive launched by Maharaja Gaekwar and other like-minded men was not of much use in a country like India?
- Q3. Why does Gandhiji compare education to an implement?
- Q4. According to Gandhiji, what should be the chief aim of education?
- Q5. Why does Gandhiji feel that the English education has enslaved the nation?
- Q6. What does Gandhiji feel the need of promoting Indian languages?
- Q7. How does Gandhiji satisfy the reader's query on religious education?

---

### **3.9. LET US SUM UP**

---

- In this unit, you read about the life of Mahatma Gandhi, his achievements as a writer and learned about his concepts of True civilization and Education.



- In the chapter ‘What is True civilization’, Gandhiji point out that a truly civilized conduct calls for limiting our wants, avoiding life corroding competition and subordinating brute force over soul force.
- He belittles materialistic and technological progress as they poses a threat to civilization.
- He places spirituality over other earthly powers and believes that the real progress of human civilization to be measured in the scale of ethics.
- In the chapter ‘On Education’, Gandhiji states that education should be a means of attaining happiness and freedom, both of the mind and of the country.

---

### 3.10. REFERENCES

---

Gandhi, Mohandas. *Hind Swaraj: A Critical Edition*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010.

- . *An Autobiography, The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India*. New Delhi: Macmillan Publishers India, 2000

---

### 3.11. SUGGESTED READING

---

Gandhi, Mohandas. *Hind Swaraj: A Critical Edition*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010.

- . *An Autobiography, The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India*. New Delhi: Macmillan Publishers India, 2000

Kishor, Giriraj. *Pehla Girmitia*

---

### 3.12. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

---

Q1. Give a brief account of the life of Mahatma Gandhi in your own words.

Q2. Examine Mahatma Gandhi as a writer.

Q3. Discuss Mahatma Gandhi's critique of True Civilization.

Q4. Do you agree with Gandhiji's views on education? Give reasons for your answer.

---

## **UNIT 4 PANDIT JAWAHARLAL NEHRU: 'SOME FAMOUS WRITERS', 'THE QUEST OF MAN'**

---

- 4.1. Introduction
- 4.2. Objectives
- 4.3. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru – An Overview
- 4.4. Prose Style of Pandit Nehru
- 4.5. Letter writing- A Historical Perspective
- 4.6. A Note on *Glimpses of World History*
- 4.7. 'Some Famous Writers'
  - 4.7.1. Summary
  - 4.7.2. Glossary
  - 4.7.3. Check your Progress
- 4.8. 'The Quest of Man'
  - 4.8.1. Summary
  - 4.8.2. Check your Progress
- 4.9. Let us sum up
- 4.10. References
- 4.11. Suggested Reading
- 4.12. Terminal and Model Questions

---

## 4.1. INTRODUCTION

---

In the earlier units you read about Bacon, Lamb and Gandhi. You saw how Bacon a philosopher, Utilitarian and a man with a scientific bent of mind, dealt with topics like death, adversity, friendship, love, like a skilled craftsman. Lamb, on the other hand, with his charm, idiosyncrasies, humour and pathos, delighted us as readers. In Gandhi's writings, we witnessed how a great political saint, a spiritualist, philosopher and guide expressed his views on topics like True Civilization and Education for the sole motive of welfare of others, bringing his lofty ideas to the fore in the simplest of manner with conviction and authority.

This unit will introduce you to Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru's as a writer. Two of the letters which he wrote his daughter Indira from jail, taken from his book *Glimpses of World History*, will be taken up in this unit for detailed study. The first letter 'Some Famous Writers' will focus on some well known European writers of the nineteenth century, showing Pandit Nehru's deep love for literature. The second letter, 'The Quest of Man' will trace man's history down the ages, right from the pre-historic times to his times, focusing on man's evolution and his journey in this planet.

---

## 4.2. OBJECTIVES

---

At the end of this unit you will be able to understand the following:

- The life of Pandit Nehru
- Pandit Nehru as a writer
- You will learn about another form of non-fictional prose ie letter
- You will read about some of the early nineteenth century writers of mainland Europe and the British Isle, as Pandit Nehru introduces them to his young daughter Indira in the letter titled 'Some Famous Writers.'
- In the second letter, 'The Quest of Man', Nehruji gives an account of man's journey on earth right from the pre-historic times. He is in search of the

---

answers to questions like what is the purpose of man's existence? What is man's mission on earth?

- At an emotional level, you will be able to understand the relationship between Pandit Nehru and his daughter Indira and appreciate a father's love for his daughter.

---

### **4.3. PANDIT JAWAHARLAL NEHRU – AN OVERVIEW**

---

Pandit Nehru was born on 14 November 1884 to Pandit Motilal Nehru and his wife Swaroop Rain who belonged to an aristocratic Kashmiri Brahmin family. The young Jawaharlal was educated in England at Harrow School and Cambridge University. Thereafter, he was admitted to the English bar and practised law in India for several years. After the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy in the year 1919, he devoted himself to the struggle of India's independence, working closely with Mahatma Gandhi and other great leaders of the country. Nehruji joined the Indian National Congress and was elected its president four times. While participating in the country's freedom struggle, he was sent to jail many times. He spent many years of his life in prison for conducting civil disobedience campaigns against the British. He along with Gandhiji opposed the participation of Indian troops in support of the Britain during World War II- unless India was granted immediate independence- and for his opposition was imprisoned from 1942 to 1945. After the victory of the allied forces in the Second World War, he was released from prison. In the year 1947, after independence, he became the first Prime Minister of post partition India. Thereafter, he was re-elected Prime Minister when the Congress Party won India's first general election in 1951 and 1952 and continued serving as the first Prime Minister for nearly seventeen long years, till his death on 27 May 1964.

---

### **4.4. PROSE STYLE OF PANDIT NEHRU**

---

"I am not a man of letters," wrote Pandit Nehru in one of his letters to his daughter Indira, but by authoring books like *The Discovery of India*, *Glimpses of World History*, *Letters from a Father to his Daughter*, *An Autobiography* also

---

known as *Toward Freedom and The Oxford India Nehru*, he has proved his mettle as a writer. All the great books that he has written are a result of his scholarly bent of mind. Besides these famous books, he wrote drafts and resolutions for the Congress party, essays on serious issues of his times. When he became Prime Minister, he wrote long letters to his Chief Ministers every fortnight, which contained his deliberations on domestic and world affairs. Although not a professional writer, he wrote prolifically on various topics. His deep understanding of the subjects he chose was a result of his scholarly bent of mind and profound thinking.

Pandit Nehru's prose style can be separated into two categories-scholarly style and poetic style. When he discusses ordinary things, his vocabulary remains simple, clear and to the point. While dealing with loftier subjects, his style too is elevated and his expressions become poetic and highly imaginative. Frank Moreas, esteemed journalist and one of the best known biographers of Pandit Nehru stated, "At its best, Nehru's style shows a vigour and clarity as pleasing and compelling to the ear as to the mind."

The two letters that are prescribed in your course are personal letters, hence, the prose style is familiar and subjective. The style Panditji chooses is simple and direct. As in these letters, Nehruji is addressing his young daughter Indira, the tone is conversational. Although, these letters are addressed to Indira but the conversational tone of these letters makes the readers feel that the letters are addressed to him/her. The letters form a well-knit series of world history as a result the reader is able to take pleasure in reading them.

---

#### **4.5 LETTER WRITING – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:**

---

Letter Writing came to be recognised as a literary form in England during the Renaissance. Through letters, diaries and memoirs, writers have given us authentic accounts of their times. Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn were renowned diarists of the seventeenth century. Alexander Pope's philosophical poem, 'Essay

on Man’ consisting of four epistles, and his satirical verse-letter ‘Epistles for Dr. Arbuthnot’ are good examples of verse letters. The art of letter writing took an interesting form in the eighteenth century. It produced gossipy letters on things in general or political squibs. William Cowper, Lord Chesterfield, Gilbert White and Thomas Gray were some of the famous letter writers of the eighteenth century. Samuel Richardson, another eighteenth century writer explored letter as a form of fiction in his epistolary novels *Clarissa* and *Pamela*. The letters of Jane Austin, Thomas Hardy, Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, Henry James and many others are considered valuable pieces of literature today.

Among distinguished Indians who wrote public letters as a medium of conversation with the masses were Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and many others. Their letters are not just running commentaries on Indian culture and civilization, but they also give us an insight into the historical, political, religious and cultural life of India. One such volume of letter is Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s *Glimpses of World History* from which two letters, ‘Some Famous Writers’ and ‘Quest of Man’ have been taken for your study in this unit.

---

#### **4.6 A NOTE ON GLIMPSES OF WORLD HISTORY**

---

After taking a glimpse at the life and writing style of Pandit Nehru, let us now move to two of the letters Pandit Nehru wrote to his daughter Indira, taken from his book *Glimpses of World History*. *Glimpses of World History*, gives a description of the history of mankind. It is a collection of 196 letters on world history written by Pandit Nehru from various prisons in British India. Through these letters, he wished to introduce his daughter Indira to world history. These letters were written from prison, where he had no access to reference books or a library. He relied only on his personal notes and traced the history of humankind from 6000 BC till the time of writing this book. The book covers the rise and fall of great civilizations and empires from Greece and Rome in Europe to China and the Middle

East in Asia. From great Indian leaders like Ashoka and Gandhi to world leaders like Genghis Khan and Lenin. The book also gives an account of wars and revolutions, democracies and dictatorships which have been responsible for changing the face of this earth.

Now let us start with the first letter that is prescribed in your course, titled 'Some Famous Writers'.

---

## 4.7 SOME FAMOUS WRITERS

---

### 4.7.1 SUMMARY

'Some Famous Writers' is the 129<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book *Glimpses of World History* by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. Pt. Nehru opens this chapter by saying that he wants to introduce Indira to some of the greatest writers of Europe but hesitates in doing so as he is not well acquainted with most of the writers of continental Europe for his knowledge about them is confined to only a few translations. Nehruji moves on to saying that since the idea of introducing the writers has taken possession of his mind, he wishes to go ahead with it. Furthermore, he wants Indira to develop a taste for these great writers. Nehruji is of the opinion that books have the power to stir the soul of nations. Furthermore, they have the power of taking us to a realm of serenity, away from the passions and prejudices of the moment. Books remind Panditji of the writers and he states that it is unfortunate that people do not appreciate the poets and artists in their lifetime and only honour them after their death.

As Nehruji has already made up his mind to tell Indira about some great European writers, he begins his list with introducing her to some of the important German writers as he had discussed the country in detail in the previous chapter. He begins with Goethe, the famous German writer, artist and politician of all times. Goethe was born in a turbulent age. As a result of the turbulent times he lived in and also because of the personal sorrow he faced in life, Goethe grew up to



becoming a very sorrowful man. Gradually, he moved away from sorrow and realized that life has a deeper meaning to convey. Finally, he was able to detached himself from his surroundings and that brought peace to him. Goethe was a philosopher, a dramatist and a scientist, all rolled into one. He is well remembered in the literary world for his book *Faust*. This book brought Goethe much fame and his countrymen started regarding him as a demi-god. Besides Goethe, Pandit Nehru suggests the names of two other German authors, Friedrich Schiller and Heinrich Heine to Indira for reading. The works of these writers are steeped in cultural history of Greece, thus providing the reader a rich reading. Pandit Nehru wants Indira to know that Germany, the land of poets and thinkers, has given birth to many great philosophers who have given a new direction to people's thinking. In this line of thought, he mentions the names of some great philosophers like Immanuel Kant, Hegel and Karl Marx, who with their powerful thoughts, have been instrumental in changing the face of earth.

After discussing some great German philosophers, Pandit Nehru proceeds on to discussing some eminent poets like Pushkin, the Great Russian poet whose gifted life was cut short as he died young in a duel. From Russia he moves to France, beginning with Victor Hugo, one of the greatest exponents of the Romantic Movement in France. Hugo's political career saw extremes as he started as an extreme conservative, supporting autocracy, but gradually moved on to becoming an extreme Leftist. Besides being a great political leader, he was also a gifted poet, novelist and dramatist. The second writer Pandit Nehru picks up from France is Honore de Balzac, a contemporary of Victor Hugo, was an esteemed novelist who produced a large number of novels in his rather short life. Through his novels Balzac mirrored the whole of the contemporary French life. His *Magnum Opus, La Comedie Humaine*, presents a panorama of French life in the years after the 1815 fall of Napoleon.

Moving from France to the British Isles, Pandit Nehru takes up three young brilliant Romantic poets namely Keats, Shelly and Byron. Panditji tells young Indira that all the three poets that he proposes to discuss briefly had two things in common. Firstly, all three lead a hard life and secondly, all three died young. The first poet Pandit Nehru takes up is John Keats. Panditji was highly impressed with Keats who wrote some remarkable poetry in his short but largely troubled life. Although Keats was a promising poet, he was very little known in his lifetime. His life was a struggle as he was born in a lower middleclass family with little resources to enable him to pursue his poetic career. Keats' life reminded Pandit Nehru of a remark made by an eminent Cambridge Professor who laments the fact that due to several prejudices, a talented mind is not recognized well in the English society. Pandit Nehru too holds the same opinion as the Cambridge professor, and adds that creativity can only flourish in places where people have leisure time. He says that the poor man has no free time to devote himself to creative activities. He is busy the whole day long to make his ends meet, with no quality time left for nobler pursuits. Panditji seems disgruntled by the state of affairs and holds the bourgeois responsible for the prevailing evils in society. He says that it is unfortunate that the present day culture has become a reflection of the bourgeois mind for the bourgeois set certain cultural and social standards for people to follow. This, Nehruji says, they do for their own benefit, and sadly enough, by doing so, also influence the thinking of the great minds to a large extent. Nehruji considers this to be a threat to independent thinking. The Marxist theory of social equality and the rights of the working class had a profound influence on Pandit Nehru. He had full faith in socialism and was of the opinion that socialism had the potential to bring about a social, cultural and political revolution which could uplift the workers, giving them enough leisure time for dedicating themselves to creative pursuits. Nehruji gives the example of communist Russia where, he says, such a change was underway.

Pandit Nehru holds the economic poverty of India, resulting due to colonization, responsible for the cultural poverty of India. In his view, it is an insult

to talk of culture to a poor man, who can barely make his ends meet. Nehruji compares poverty to a disease which infects the entire society as a result of which the cultural output of that society remains negligible. But at the same time, Nehruji is left wondering as to how a country, bound in the shackles of slavery, can give birth to great men like Tagore and Gandhi.

At this moment, Panditji realizes that he has drifted away from his subject as his objective in writing the letter was to introduce some great writers of the nineteenth century to his young daughter Indira. He returns to the subject, and continues with the second Romantic writer Shelley. Pandit Nehru avers that Shelley was a champion of freedom. When he was at Eton College, Oxford, he wrote a pamphlet titled, *The Necessity of Atheism*. This pamphlet was a treatise on atheism for which he was expelled from the university. Panditji was impressed by the fact that both Shelley and Keats lived their short lives to the fullest, setting their imagination on fire and producing some brilliant poetry ever written. Shelly's life like Keats' was cut short as he drowned near the Italian coast in a year's time after Keats' death. Nehruji pens down one of Shelley's lesser known poems, 'The Mask of Anarchy', which brings out the awful fate of the poor worker. Nehruji says that although the poem was written over a hundred years, it holds relevance in the present times also.

The third Romantic poet Nehruji takes up for his discussion is Lord Byron. Nehruji considers Lord Byron a great patriot and says that most of his poems reflect zealous love for his country. In 1823, Byron joined a group of revolutionaries seeking to free Greece from the Turkish rule. However, before the revolt got underway, Byron died of rheumatic fever at the age of thirty six, two years after Shelley's death. Nehruji, although prejudiced against Byron as a man, had a fellow feeling for him for he too like him had attended Harrow School and Trinity College, Cambridge. Fame came early to Byron, unlike Shelley and Keats, only to be

---

dropped later as a result of which Byron left England and never returned to its shores.

Besides the above mentioned Romantics of the second generation, Nehruji also suggests to Indira the names of Wordsworth and Coleridge, the stalwarts of Romanticism, for further reading.

Nehruji feels that his discussion would not be complete unless he mentions the names of the grand novelists of the early nineteenth century. The first name that comes to his mind is that of Sir Walter Scott whose Waverley novels he read as a young boy. Nehruji also recommends the names of Thackeray and Dickens, two other major Victorian novelists, to Indira. Now that Nehruji has matured as a person and as a reader, he rates Thackeray and Dickens above Sir Walter Scott as novelists. Thackeray, who was born in Calcutta in 1811, and spent some five –six years there, gave a realistic account of the Indian *nabobs* – the greedy Englishmen, who amassed wealth from India and returned to England, in his novels.

With this, finally, Panditji concludes the letter, feeling a little embarrassed that the account he gave of the great nineteenth century writers was extremely little. He tells Indira that had a person who knew the subject well, discussed these writers with her, he would have talked about them at length and in addition to the writers would also have taken up music and art of the period.

Panditji closes the letter by penning a translated version from Goethe's *Faust*. Through this poem, Pandit Nehru urges people to be resilient and not to be disappointed by failure as failure is a stepping stone to success. He further states that people should make sincere efforts towards success for if we strive towards our goal with honesty, then success will surely be ours.

#### 4.7.2 GLOSSARY

**Epistle:** a long formal letter, often intended to provide instruction

**Epistolary:** taking the form of a letter or a series of letters

**Squib:** a short humorous journalistic piece that acts as a filter in newspaper

**Demi-god:** half god

**Commune of Paris:** a Paris rebellious committee established in Paris in 1871 in opposition to the national government and the peace terms it negotiated to end the Franco- Prussian War. National troops were sent from Versailles to crush the Communards, which they did in a number of notoriously bloody conflicts.

**Conservatism:** Right –wing political viewpoint based on a tendency to support gradual rather than abrupt change and to preserve the status quo.

**Monopoly:** a situation in which one company controls an industry or is the only provider of a product or service

**Bourgeois:** associated with wealthy middle class people, who are often characterized as conventional, conservative or materialistic in outlook

#### 4.7.3 LEARN YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Who was Goethe?

Q2. Give the names of two German philosophers named by Nehruji in his letter.

Q3. Shed light on the political career of Victor Hugo.

Q4. What does Pandit Nehru hold responsible for the cultural poverty of India? Do you agree with his view?

Q5. Name the three English Romantic poets Nehruji discusses in this letter. Which of these poets interests you the most? Why?

Q6. Match the following:

Column A

Shelley

Balzac

Goethe

Wordsworth

Sir Walter Scott

Column B

Nature Poet

*Faust*

*The Necessity of Atheism*

Waverley novels

*La Comedie Humaine*

Q7. Fill in the blanks:

- (i) The works of the German poets \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are steeped in classical culture of ancient Greece.
  - (ii) \_\_\_\_\_ was the Russian poet who died in a duel.
  - (iii) \_\_\_\_\_ died in Rome in 1821.
  - (iv) 'The Mask of Anarchy' is a poem written by \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (v) \_\_\_\_\_ was born in Calcutta in the year 1811.
- 

## 4.8 THE QUEST OF MAN

---

### 4.8.1 SUMMARY

'The Quest of Man', is the fifty-sixth in the series of letters in *Glimpses of World History*. It is the first letter Nehruji wrote Indira from the Dehradun prison. In this letter, Pandit Nehru takes us back to the origins of human civilization that began many thousands of years ago. This essay aims at finding what man's mission on earth is all about.

During our country's struggle for independence, Pandit Nehru was jailed innumerable times. As a result most of the precious years of his life were spent behind bars. A prison is a terrible place to be in, capable of much mental suffering but as Pandit Nehru was a man of strong will and firm determination, he did not get deluded and utilized the time spent in jail by devoting himself to reading, writing and retrospection. He had written the earlier letter to Indira from the Bareilly jail but now that he has been transferred to the Dehradun jail, he is writing from there.

Panditji starts the letter by giving an account of how he bade goodbye to his fellow inmates in the Bareilly jail on being transferred to the Dehradun one. At night, the jail authorities took Nehruji, along with one more prisoner to the Dehradun prison, halfway by car, so that no one could recognize them on the way. When they reached a little station in the wilderness, Nehruji saw the trees and the animals rushing past them. On seeing the beauty of the world outside, Nehruji felt

a strange sense of joy. After a while, they boarded a train to Dehradun and arrived there the next morning. From the station, they were again taken to jail by car so that nobody could catch a glimpse of them. Panditji found the Dehradun prison much better than the Bareilly one as Dehradun was pleasant in comparison to Bareilly. The surroundings of the Dehradun jail were better than the Bareilly one. Panditji says that he could see the top of a palm tree from his window which often reminded him of Cylone and Malabar. Beyond the trees were the mountains, where the Queen of hill stations, Mussoorie was located. Although Panditji could not see the mountains from his window he felt good to be close to them.

Nehruji had been writing letters to Indira for the past three or four years and as he served many prison sentences, wrote most of the letters from prison. Panditji tells Indira that when he thinks about the letters, he feels ill at ease as she has now grown up and fears that his letters might not interest her anymore. Nonetheless, he cannot stop himself from writing the letters as through his letters he wants to share with Indira the fascinating story of man's evolution. He wants to display vivid images from history before Indira so that she is able to visualize the entire story of man's evolution. He gives an account of the civilizations of the world- both ancient and modern-which like mighty tidal waves rise and fall. Through his letters he wants Indira to see that history like a river has been flowing continuously through the ages irrespective of the negative force that have tried to obstruct its course. He wants Indira to get an insight into this fantastic journey, starting right from the pre-historic times, when the ape like man, wondered about in jungles like a primitive beast, to the present modern times. However, Nehruji laments the fact that with the "progress" made by man, he has become self-righteous and conceited. Nehruji reminds Indira of how in the previous letters that he had given her an account of the discovery of fire made by man, of how he gradually started practicing agriculture and finally settled down to leading a civilized life.

The story of man, traced by Nehruji has brought to our attention the concept of civilization once again. The things regarding civilization that perturbed Mahatma Gandhi, haunted Nehruji's mind too for he too like Mahatma Gandhi takes pride in man's intelligence and inquisitive nature, which he states as reasons behind his evolution and progress but on the other, he derides man for he has channelized his mind in the wrong direction as a result of which he is wreaking havoc on the world around him. Nehruji seems intrigued by man and ponders over man's life on earth, questioning himself what could man's quest be all about, but finds no definite answer. He tells Indira that most of the disciplines including religion, philosophy and science have tried to find answers to man's quest through different approaches. And he being a man of scientific temperament approves of the scientific ways as it allows man to doubt, question and experiment things whereas the religious approach, is dogmatic. He is honest enough to tell Indira that he does not want to bother her with answers as he himself has not found answers to his questions, but feels that the quest is of two kinds, the first one being man's inner journey and the other. Nonetheless, he does not want to bother Indira with answers as he wants Indira to explore, question and find her own answers.

To conclude, Nehruji tells Indira that he is giving her a framework of man's history and now it is for her to explore further. He is a bit apprehensive about India's reaction towards his letters as the historical account of things he has given is brief and very simple and that she can read a detailed account of the things that he has discussed in good history books, but in spite of this, he does not want to stop writing the letters as he feels connected with his daughter through these letters.

#### **4.8.2 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q1. From which prison was Nehruji transferred in to the Dehradun prison?

Q2. Was Nehruji fond of the mountains? Quote lines from the text to support your answer.



- 
- Q3. What can you infer about the father-daughter relationship when Pandit Nehru says that he cannot stop writing letters to her?
- Q4. Why does Nehruji doubt the worth of his writings?
- Q5. Why does Nehruji prefer science to religion? Do you agree with him? Give a reason to support your answer.
- Q5. Imagine that you are in an isolated place; write a letter to your friend telling him/her about your experience there.

---

#### 4.9 LET US SUM UP

---

- In this unit you read about Pandit Nehru as a man of letters
- Saw the development of letter writing as a literary form
- In the letter titled 'Some Famous Writers', you were introduced to some important writers of the nineteenth century.
- In 'Quest of Man', you traced the history of man, right from pre-historic times to Nehruji's age, learning about his evolution and finding out for yourselves what the purpose of his journey has been.

---

#### 4.10 REFERENCES

---

Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Glimpses of World History*. New Delhi: Penguin books, 2004. Print

*Jawaharlal Nehru*. [http:// en. Wikipedia.org/wiki/Jawaharlal\\_Nehru](http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Jawaharlal_Nehru). Web

*Jawaharlal Nehru*. <http://middlestage.blogspot.in/2006/07/Jawaharlal-Nehru-as-a-writer-of-english.html>. Web

---

#### 4.11 SUGGESTED READING

---

Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Glimpses of World History*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2004. Print

---

Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Letters from a Father to his Daughter*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004. Print

Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Discovery of India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004. Print

---

## **4.12 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

---

Q1. Give an account of Nehruji's life in your own words.

Q2. Write a short note on Pandit Nehru's prose style.

Q3. Out of the two letters prescribed in your course, which one did you like more. State reasons for your answer.

Q 4. After going through the letter 'The Quest of Man', did you question yourself about man's quest on earth? What answer did you get to the question?

---

## **UNIT 5    RUSKIN BOND: *TIME STOPS AT SHAMLI***

---

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Objectives

5.3 The author and the text

5.3.1 Ruskin Bond

5.3.2 *Time Stops at Shamli*: a summary

5.4 Analysing the story

5.4.1 Theme: what is it about?

5.4.1.1 The Title

5.4.1.2 The Quest

5.4.2 Plot: how the story grows

5.4.3 Characterisation

5.4.3.1 The Narrator

5.4.3.2 Sushila

5.4.3.3 Kiran

5.4.3.4 Dayal, Daya Ram, Heera, Lin and Miss Deeds

5.4.4 Style and Technique

5.5 Summing Up

5.6 Answers to Self-Assessment-Questions

5.7 References

5.8 Suggested Readings

5.9 Terminal and Model Questions

---

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

---

In Block One you studied some of the finest writings of non-fictional prose. The next three blocks in a graded manner introduce you to fiction. The first of the three blocks has three major storytellers from India. Premchand wrote in Hindi, and Tagore in Bengali. So you are going to read them in English translation. Both the translations are authentic and have been very well done.

Ruskin Bond wrote originally in English. For this reason, he is the first author in this block. In contrast to Tagore and Premchand, who wrote in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Ruskin Bond portrays a more contemporary face of Indian society. In this story by Bond, you are going to make friends with people from a minority community that came into being with the British Raj in India, people like Miss Deeds, Lin and Mr Bond himself. You will also get a taste of urban values that have brought about such a significant change in our society in the past fifty years or so.

Bond's story also gives you a closer insight into the spirit of Uttarakhand and Himalayas. Living in the hills can have a different dimension to it than the one of mere drudgery, hardship and poverty as portrayed by those who have fled the hills.

---

## 5.2 OBJECTIVES

---

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

- Analyse the subtler nuances of *Time Stops at Shamli*.
- Identify different shades of characterisation.
- Point out the qualities that constitute the uniqueness of Ruskin Bond.
- Defend this story as a fine piece of literature.

---

### 5.3 The author and the text

---

As a child Ruskin Bond spent some time with his grandmother in Dehradun. Later, he settled in Mussoorie and made Uttarakhand his home. He knows this land as much as we know it. Shamli, the locale of the story *Time Stops at Shamli* is both geographically and culturally a part of this region.

#### 5.3.1 Ruskin Bond

Ruskin Bond was born on 19 May 1934 in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh. His parents, Edith Clerke and Aubrey Bond, both were of British descent. He was a boarding student at Bishop Cotton School, Shimla, from where he graduated in 1952. As an Anglo-Indian child during the Raj days, he witnessed the Indians' anger against the British, as when he was called a 'Red Monkey' or 'White Pig'.

Bond has left a record of these early days in his essay, "Life at My Own Pace", which is perhaps one of the best introductions to his early life. If you read this essay, you will notice how many of the characters and situations in Bond's fictional writings are rooted in real-life incidents. For example, you may quite logically relate Miss Deeds and Daya Ram of *Time Stops at Shamli*, even if remotely, to Miss Kellner and Dukhi, the real-life characters from this essay. Bond himself made it clear that often his inspirations came from "people or incidents that have happened to you or others. A lot of my stories are portraits of people" (Interview with Abhijit Bhaduri).

Just before he died, Bond's father was making plans to go with his son to England and settle there. Though the plan died with his father, Bond did spend four years in England after his high school education. It was here that he wrote his first novel, *The Room on the Roof* - a semi-autobiographical story - which won him the 1957 John Llewellyn Rhys Prize, awarded to a British Commonwealth writer under 30. Bond's other important works include, *Vagrants in the Valley* - a sequel to *The Room on the Roof*; *A Flight of Pigeons* - later made into a film as *Junoon* by Shyam Benegal; *Delhi is not Far*; and *Rosebud*. He has published over 300 short stories,

essays and novels, including some very delightful ghost stories, and about 30 books for children. No doubt, he has come to be known, unfairly though, as a children's writer. He has also edited *The Penguin Book of Indian Ghost Stories* and *The Penguin Book of Indian Railway Stories*.

In 1992, Ruskin Bond won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award for his short stories, *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, and in 1999 he was awarded the Padma Shri. He currently lives in Landour, Mussoorie.

### 5.3.2 *Time Stops at Shamli: a summary*

Wikipedia's remark that "most of Bond's writings show the influence from the social life in the hill stations at the foothills of the Himalayas, where he spent his childhood" provides a significant clue to the reading of *Time Stops at Shamli*. Before you start reading the brief summary that follows, you will do well to remember that it is my retelling of Bond's story, which is not the same thing as reading the original story in the author's own words.

*Time Stops at Shamli* opens with the narrator traveling by Dehra Express to Saharanpur in some bygone age of Indian Railways, when the train stops at Shamli. It is going to be a long stoppage, and the narrator has been fairly uncomfortable sitting in a crowded third class compartment. On a sudden impulse, he decides to get off the train and explore this strange place where nobody ever "got off the train and nobody got in."

Once out of the station, he meets a tonga-driver who takes him to the only hotel in Shamli. As the narrator plans to stay only for the day, he asks the tonga-driver to come back in the evening at six to take him back to the station. It's about six in the morning, and everyone at the hotel seems asleep. There are no doorbells in the hotel, and not knowing what to do, he starts imagining a story he will need to tell the manager as a reason for his coming to Shamli. Perhaps, he is here looking for an old friend, Major Roberts, retired, who has disappeared without informing

anyone and was last heard of in Shamli. This should be a good story. Suddenly he hears a tap running somewhere, and going near finds a hotel-worker Daya Ram having his morning bath. Daya Ram does everything at the hotel, including cooking for the guests and the manager and his wife. But he is not a happy man because “there are no women for a man like me”. The narrator is given a room, and after finishing his bath, he comes out to take a look around. He meets a young girl, Kiran, about 10 year old. Her father is the manager at the Sugar factory, and she seems to know everyone here. She tells, “There is Heera.... He’s the gardener. He’s nearly a hundred.... Miss Deeds is funny when she’s drunk. And Mr Lin is the strangest.” Mr Dayal, the manager, is “mean. And he gets frightened of slightest things. But Mrs Dayal is nice...”

This is quite some reference for the people around. So, at the breakfast table when the narrator meets them, he knows what to expect. The first one to be introduced is Mr Lin, whose distinct Mongolian features make it easy to know who he is. He is here on “some business with the sugar cane people” but he is not a businessman, he tells, though his father is one. He wanted to become a musician, a piano concert player, and to that end took some lessons while he was in Singapore. Next, Mr Dayal, “a thin dark man, wearing glasses, stepped nervously into the room and peered at me in an anxious manner.” Dayal asks the narrator to sign the guest register and for his profession the narrator mentions that he is an author. One thing leads to another, and soon we find him telling everyone, “I’m looking for a friend of mine who was heard of in Shamli, about three years ago.” His name is Major Roberts, an Anglo-Indian.

Miss Deeds, “a woman of about thirty-five” is the next guest to join at the table. “She had on a skirt and blouse, which accentuated a firm, well-rounded figure, and she walked on high-heels, with a rhythmical swaying of her hips. She had an uninteresting face, camouflaged with lipstick, rouge and powder...”. She is also fussy, as she soon starts complaining about the breakfast. Her first question to

---

the narrator is, “Are you married?” followed by a comment, “no one in this house seems to be married.” Of course, she has forgotten Mr Dayal.

Soon the talk turns around to the author’s missing friend, Major Roberts. The author as well as the reader is in for some surprise. Mr Lin replies, “I knew him. A great friend of mine”. Another game of deception has begun. The author is not the only one good at inventing stories. He looks at Lin and finds him a sad man: “A happy man wouldn’t take the trouble of inventing friendship with people who didn’t exist, he’d busy with friends who did.” When he tells this to his face, “You’ve had a lonely life”, Lin becomes rather defensive. Miss Deeds, breaking through his armour, adds, “You never get any letters though, do you?” It’s now Miss Deeds’ turn to get quizzed, and we come to know that she teaches in a girls’ school, though she has no interest in teaching. We are also told that Mrs Dayal had a night out and would be seen only after the lunch.

The next character to be introduced is Heera. The author from now on uses the technique of creating a situation in which we see the characters in action and come to know of them by what they do instead of being told what they are.

Daya Ram comes to announce that Heera’s dog has disappeared and a leopard’s pug marks going down to the river bed have been noticed. Fear, insecurity and anxiety fill the atmosphere. Everyone is worried about the possible presence of the leopard in the vicinity. But Heera is sad thinking only about his dog. He tells the author that it was a stray dog who one day followed him uninvited to his house and had stayed with him since then. His wife and son are dead, so the dog was his only companion. “It seems I am to stay here forever, until everyone has gone, until there are only ghosts in Shamli. Already the ghosts are here.... Once there was a band and people danced till morning, but now ....” He was here “before there was a station, or a factory, or a bazaar.” People came here but didn’t stay long, for there was the jungle and malaria. They went back to the hills. “I had to choose between



---

the flowers and the hills, and I chose the flowers. I am tired now, and old, but I am not tired of flowers.”

This part of the story demonstrates the imbecility of Mr Dayal. He does not know how to shoot with a gun and goes to the author to find out if the latter can. He is planning a hunt for the leopard. When the author tells Mr Dayal that the gun is really outdated, not at all fit for such a work, and adds rather banteringly that they should better go about it with lathis, Mr Dayal accepts the proposal with all seriousness. The reader is being prepared to see what kind of person Mrs Dayal is married to. Of course, the expedition is ridiculous, and Mr Dayal, scared out of wits, returns hastily from the jungle. Dayal’s stupidity is re-emphasised when we see the author and Daya Ram enjoying heartily a bath in the river at the same point from where Dayal ran off. Lin is perhaps more timid than Dayal, for he kept out of the adventure saying he was not interested in leopards!

The narrator had fallen asleep, lulled by the tale Kiran had been telling. When he wakes up, Kiran is gone, and there is another figure, “a young woman in a pink sari and with a red rose in her hair.” She is Sushila, his beloved from the past, now married to Mr Dayal. He sees her smile and knows some things never change. They have just begun a conversation, finding out all that had happened to them since they parted, when arrives the tonga-driver to take him to the station as planned. But now that Sushila is here, he can’t just leave now. So the tonga is sent back with instruction to return in the morning. Sushila, realising that they can’t talk freely so close to the hotel, takes him through the jungle to a secluded spot near a water stream.

As they sit together with their feet resting in the water, an old yearning returns to the author: “I wanted to care for her and protect her, I wanted to take her away from that place, from sorrowful Shamli; I wanted her to live again. Of course, I had forgotten all about my poor finances, Sushila’s family, and the shoes I wore, which were my last pair. The uplift I was experiencing in this meeting with Sushila,

who had always, throughout her childhood and youth, bewitched me as no other had ever bewitched me, made me reckless and impulsive.”

It is love that liberates, it is love that brings about innocence and frees. “She turned her face to me so that we were deep in each other’s eyes, and I kissed her again, and we put our arms around each other and lay together on the grass, with the water running over our feet; and we said nothing at all, simply lay there for what seemed like several years, or until the first drop of rain.” This is lyrical poetry at the very best: prose is too lame to capture the effervescence of love.

Soon he proposes her to run away with him. But woman is wiser than man. She tells: “Don’t be a fool. I am always here and you can come to see me, and nobody will be made unhappy by it. But take me away and we will only have regrets.”

He returns to the hotel, goes quietly to the kitchen, has his evening meal alone and retires to the darkness of his room. There, reflecting on how he could always come back looking for Major Roberts, he starts imagining what kind of person would this Roberts be: “A romantic, a man with a dream, a man with brown skin and blue eyes, living in a hut on a snowy mountain top, chopping wood and catching fish and swimming in cold fountain streams; a rough, free man with a kind heart and shaggy beard, a man who owed allegiance to no one, who gave a damn for money and politics and cities, and civilisations, who was his own master, who lived at one with nature knowing no fear. But that was not Major Roberts - that was the man I wanted to be.”

Post-dinner, they all gather in the lounge, where, as usual, Lin plays his uninspiring tunes, Miss Deeds gets drunk and has to be carried to her room.

In the night that follows, there is rain and thunder and storm. He is woken up from sleep and told that the back wall of the hotel has collapsed, and part of the roof has fallen in. For their own safety, the guests have gathered in the lounge. It’s

---

still dark, and finding him conveniently alone, Sushila tells the narrator: “If I come with you, I will be at the station before the train leaves.... But if I am not there, then do not wait, do not come back for me. Go on your way. It will mean I do not want to come. Or I will be there.”

Of course, she did not come. How did the author feel? “Somehow, I was not disappointed. I had never really expected her to come. Unattainable, Sushila would always be more bewitching and beautiful than if she were mine.” The story ends with the words: “Shamli would always be there. And I could always come back, looking for Major Roberts.”

---

## **EXERCISE 1**

---

1. Write a short paragraph about the life of Ruskin Bond.
2. Read the story in the original and write your own summary, different from the one given here.
3. Mention some of the scenes, characteristic points and observations that have not been covered in the summary given here. Can you think of the reasons why they have been excluded?

---

## **5.4 ANALYSING THE STORY**

---

When you analyse a story you try to read it from all sides. You want to find out what it is about; how it has been constructed; who are the people who figure prominently in it; what special techniques the author employs to tell this story.

### **5.4.1 Theme: what is it about?**

A story, like any other genre of literature, is about a slice of life. Like life itself, it is about so many things. It is as vast and mysterious as life, and unfathomable. Every time you return to it, or for that matter to any piece of art, you find something new, you discover a quality, a tantalising question you had not noticed before. Thus you can find so many themes in a story or a poem, stories

within a story. Then there is a central theme, the one that runs through from the beginning to the end. What is the central theme of *Time Stops at Shamli*? Is it about this place called Shamli, or the narrator's chance encounter with his beloved from the bygone days?

#### 5.4.1.1 The Title

How do you interpret the title? What is the meaning of 'time stops'? What is time? Perhaps it is a big question, perhaps you have never asked it yourself. But once you start reading literature – Hindi, English, or any other, or more when you fall in love with literature and become passionate about it, when it becomes your life-blood, so much so that you cannot live without it, then literature starts throwing questions at you that you must answer in your heart. And once you start finding answers for yourself, you become a different person. You become free, and are reborn in a different dimension. So you see, literature is not like any other subject; it is not about passing an examination, a degree or a certificate; it is about passing and going beyond life. When you are old, 80 or 90, you will have all forgotten about sociology and economics, but you will still remember your Shakespeare or Tulsī or Tagore.

But to come back to the question, 'what is time?' Don't you think, to put it simply, time is a movement, a progression from one point to the next? It is always moving, always changing. But to ask whether that change is progress, development or evolution, is to ask another question. Then, time not only moves forward, it also goes backwards. How many times do you catch your mind going back to things past? And this time in your head, does it follow the clock? Did you notice when the narrator lay with his beloved the time for him "seemed like several years"?

What is the meaning of 'time stops'? When time stops, it becomes a frozen moment, an arrested movement. Time and life are the same movement – not similar, but same. When you say, time stops, you are saying in effect that life has stopped. When life has stopped, it is no longer life, but something else – because life is

always in motion. What is it then... Death? Heera says, "Already the ghosts are here..." Don't you think, everyone living in Shamli is already dead, is some kind of ghost? Daya Ram is offered an opportunity of work in Mussoorie, but he is not interested. Miss Deeds teaches, but she is not interested in teaching. Lin once upon a time was interested in music, but now his tunes are out of shape, distorted. Sushila is given a chance to escape this ghostly place, but she lacks the courage to accept it. Dayal leads a fearful existence and his life like his house has begun to collapse. Kiran is only ten; but in her perception and seriousness she often appears more mature than Miss Deeds. What is the railway station at Shamli doing? Nobody ever boards a train and nobody ever gets down. Who is Major Roberts? The author tells, "He was not a Frenchman or an Englishman, he was me, a dream of myself." But he does not exist. Does it mean that the narrator also does not exist? Is he too only a half-ghost? Why does the tonga-driver tell the author, "if you don't leave tomorrow, you'll never leave Shamli"? Why does Shamli pose such a fatal attraction? Isn't it similar to the attraction of drugs and alcohol which also leads to a half-dead ghostly existence? At the same time, you should also be asking the question, "why does the author leave Shamli after he has had those honey-packed moments of romance and love?"

Now, to the last word in the title. What is Shamli? Is it an actual place? Or is it merely a symbol for a whole way of life?

The author seems to create an illusion of reality, not a photographic representation of facts, which would be the job of a journalist. He mixes the fact and fiction so well that if you are not on your guard, if you are not a mature student of literature who has learned the art of reading critically, you may soon find yourself trapped in a clever net of deception, deprived of your reason, and swept off your feet. Do not blame the writer. If he succeeds like this, he has only done his job very well.

Take, for example, the case of the narrator. We are told that he is an Anglo-Indian, that he lives in Mussoorie and has relatives living in Saharanpur, that his beloved is from Delhi, where he had lived before moving to his present address, and that he is an author by profession and financially poor. All these are actual facts from the life of Ruskin Bond. But is the narrator actual Ruskin Bond? Then why is the name of the narrator never mentioned in the story? At one point, when Kiran asks him, "Who are you?" his reply avoids the obvious and is carefully deceptive. "A ghost," he says.

Similarly, Shamli is an actual town, geographically very close to Mussoorie and on way to Saharanpur. But look carefully. The narrator tells us that he is 36 at the time of happenings in the story. If the narrator was the real Ruskin Bond, the year would be 1970. But in 1970, Shamli was quite a busy and bustling town and not a sleepy, uninhabited place as described in the story. Thus, Shamli of the story is either purely an imaginary location conjured up by the author's imagination, or else remotely resembles a Shamli in 1940s which the author must have visited as a child. In any case, it exists only in the writer's head. Do not look for it on the ground, like an idiot.

So, what is this Shamli? What does it symbolise? Literature is all about symbolism, and as you grow up you may discover for yourself that everything about life itself is symbolic. What is a symbol? A symbol is a suggestive representation of something so vast that it cannot be fully described in all its detail, like that little stone of Hindus which they worship as God. The arrested, ghost-like life of Shamli symbolises a way of life. Does it in any way suggest the slow pace of life as it obtains in Uttarakhand hills, or perhaps in the whole of India through millennia? Surely, that is how it would appear to the fast-paced world of a Western man or to the eye of an Angrez in India who is looking nostalgically to the days of Kipling, Afghan wars, and the days of British Raj when people like Miss Deeds and Major Roberts would dance all night with a band playing in the background. And Bond is

---

an Angrez living in India. He cannot help being an Angrez as you cannot help being an Indian. So if you take it to be even remotely a representation of the Indian way of life, take it with a pinch of salt and compare it with what Tagore and Premchand have to say about it.

### 5.4.1.2 The Quest

A quest is always a journey. It is a traditionally loaded word, associated with a priceless treasure to be discovered at the end of the journey, be it God or the Holy Grail. But the word surely does not need to be always so loaded. Every human being is all through life looking for something which is quite precious to them: it is their quest.

What is our narrator looking for? Shamli has always been a fascinating enigma for him. He has passed by the Shamli railway station many times, and has always wondered what was this place where nothing ever happened. Young and recklessly impulsive, on this day he decides to explore the place for himself. But does he know what impels him, or what is in store for him? A quest always descends on one; it chooses its own human agent, rather than the agent formulating his quest – as it happens, for example, in the case of Gautama, the Buddha. Before long we find the narrator imagining a quest for some clue about the whereabouts of one non-existent Major Roberts. But who is Major Roberts? As the author decides to take a closer look at the image, he finds in it reflected his own face. Is it not an unconscious quest for one's own true Self? Is it not the real nature of the Quest itself?

But it is something other than this that has compelled the narrator's steps to Shamli. Unknown to him, it is his beloved who calls him to rescue her from a meaningless existence of death-in-life. She is hidden deep at the centre, almost invisible for most time. In order to reach her he needs to cross through the labyrinthine outer circle of damned souls in Purgatory – Lin, Miss Deeds, Daya Ram, Heera and Dayal. Kiran, the half-angelic ten year old, is the only hope in an

otherwise doomed 'sorrowful' Shamli. It is she who shows him his real face first by eliciting a reply that he is a ghost and then by holding this mirror of a tale: "Once there was a lazy man with long legs, who was always yawning and wanting to fall asleep... liked to dream, and what do you think he dreamt about...."

He falls asleep and wakes into another dream. Kiran disappears from the swing and is replaced by Sushila. "Looking up, I expected to see Kiran's legs waving above me. But instead I saw dark slim feet and above them the folds of a sari. I straightened up against the trunk of the tree to look closer at Kiran, but Kiran wasn't there, it was someone else in the swing, a young woman in a pink sari and with a red rose in her hair." But even after exchanging a few words, "I wasn't sure yet if I was awake or dreaming".

To the question, "What brings you here?" his answer is quite straightforward: "I don't know. At least I didn't know when I came. But it must have been you. The train stopped at Shamli, and I don't know why, but I decided I would spend the day here, behind the station walls". The author is suggesting that life is after all a mysterious affair. Only after finding the object of his search, does the narrator know what it was that he sought, and can tell with some certitude, "it must have been you". What follows has been told in the summary (5.3.2).

The final question is, "Has the quest been successful?" The narrator certainly has failed to rescue his beloved. One reason that has been suggested is that the bondage of social values is stronger than individual's search for freedom. Then why did Sushila say that she might turn up at the station? May be she didn't find the narrator's proposal genuine or convincing enough. The quest certainly has failed for the present. Perhaps, more than a union with Sushila, he seeks the freedom of a Major Roberts.



**5.4.2 Plot: how the story grows**

Plot, in very simple terms, means how the various incidents in a story are ordered; how well or ill they connect with each other; and how successfully they lead to the desired emotional effect at the end of the story. But a story is also made of characters. So, while discussing the plot we also need to see the order in which they are introduced and developed.

*Time Stops at Shamli* has a simple but a well-constructed plot structure. Most structures can be divided into three basic parts – beginning, middle and end. Now follow the sequence in all these three parts.

**The Beginning:**

All events leading to the narrator's arrival at the hotel constitute the beginning.

The author is travelling in a crowded third class railway compartment. He is very uncomfortable. Any one in this situation would strongly want to get away from such uncomfot. The train stops at Shamli. There is some problem with the track and no one knows for how long the train is going to stop. At the very beginning we have been told that the author has always been curious about this strange station which is so different from any other. He is 36, and reckless and impulsive by nature. All this makes it very convincing when the author decides to get down from the train and spend a day in Shamli. Can you see how everything to this point is emotionally and factually very logically connected? This is how a good plot is built. Read carefully the author's dialogue with the tonga-driver, and you will learn how the author comes to know that there is a hotel in Shamli and then decides to stay there. Notice also, how the author's truthful answer about the reasons for his coming to Shamli is not convincing to the tonga-driver. This is what forces him to invent that story about Major Roberts. So you see, this is how every small detail is connected.

**The Middle:**

This is the main body, which means this part constitutes the author's entire stay in Shamli. We have seen how this place symbolises the land of the living dead, or death-in-life. Now you have to see the sequence of the narrative by which such an effect is achieved.

When the author reaches the hotel, he finds that everyone is asleep except for one person, Daya Ram. There is no sign of activity. The first person he meets seems to be in a state of psychological stupor. Daya Ram does not like this place, but when asked why he doesn't leave this place, he just says, "I will.... I will leave". Next, we meet Kiran, a girl of ten, but in her seriousness, devoid of responding to humour, she seems very old. She asks the author, "Who are you?" and when he replies, "A ghost", she simply says, "You look like one". She tells she is ten, and to the author's comment, "You are getting old" she replies rather philosophically, "Well, we all have to grow old one day". Now, that is not how a ten year old talks! The reader can immediately sense that there is something fishy about this place. We meet the people one by one and see them in action: Lin, Miss Deeds, Dayal, Heera – they all are decaying, stagnant, out of joint, and always a little abnormal and insane. There is also a leopard in the vicinity. But nobody takes the threat of a wild animal much too seriously. What harm can it do to people who have already found their death?

Sushila's appearance on the scene is delayed by design. We are repeatedly told about Mrs Dayal but come to see her only in the second half of the story. She too has fallen prey to the time warp of Shamli. She behaves as if she was still in Delhi, and the bonding of lovers remains unaffected by her new role as Mrs Dayal. Don't you think she too is a ghost come from the narrator's past?

You can see the movement from one character to another is very well arranged; one leads to another. But looking carefully, what is your opinion about the episode where Dayal, Daya Ram and the narrator go out with their lathis on a

hunting expedition? Don't you feel, the author could have very well left it out. If the purpose of the episode is to bring out the stupidity of Mr Dayal, it could be achieved without such a longish narrative. It is by reasoning like this that you discover the weaknesses of a plot.

### **The End:**

Ending refers to the concluding scene of the story. As she was among the first ones to welcome the narrator to Shamli, Kiran, quite befittingly, is the last one to bid farewell to him. It also strengthens the bond of friendship between the two. He plucks some flowers for her and she promises, "I will see you in Iceland or Japan... I am going everywhere". Is she a ghost or what? How for her age does she know about these places? The tonga-driver adds, "You nearly stayed one day too late. Half the hotel has come down, and tonight the other half will come down". He is not predicting something; he knows it. Is he too a ghost? Tying the loose ends, we are told that Mrs Dayal did not turn up at the station, and the author is not at all disappointed, for he could always come back looking for Major Roberts. The ending is well rounded, and the reader feels that there is nothing he hasn't been told about.

---

### **EXERCISE 2**

---

1. Write a short note on the significance of the title.
2. What does the narrator come searching for in Shamli?
3. Discuss the plot construction in the story and analyse it in terms of the beginning, middle and end.
4. 'Time stops' suggests:
  - (a) A frozen moment
  - (b) An arrested movement

- (c) Death-in-life
- (d) All of the above
5. Who among the following has not been fully swallowed by 'sorrowful Shamli'?
- (a) Lin
- (b) Miss Deeds
- (c) Daya Ram
- (d) Kiran

### **5.4.3 Characterisation:**

When you are asked to analyse a character, you must pay attention to three things:

(i) what the character does or says about himself; (ii) what other characters say about him; and (iii) find out what the author has to say (authorial comment) about this character.

#### **5.4.3.1. The Narrator**

What factual information do you have about the story-teller? He is 36, still single, an author by profession, financially poor, and lives in Mussoorie. He seems to have lived in Delhi for some time, where he developed a relationship with Sushila.

He is reckless and impulsive, with little consideration for things mundane and of practical nature. It is this that makes him get down at Shamli. The shoes he is wearing are old and in bad shape; obviously he is poor. But he doesn't mind spending the little money he has in staying at a hotel, because this seems his necessity for the day. He lives from day to day, unmindful of tomorrow. With no money, and no secure future, he asks Sushila to come away with him. What will happen tomorrow is not his concern; let tomorrow take care of itself. He is also

generous, helpful and sympathetic by nature: he asks Daya Ram to come with him to Mussoorie, and goes out to spend time with Heera when the latter is sad after losing his dog. With these qualities he can easily make friends. He develops such strong natural bonding with Kiran that she tells him at the end that he is her second-best friend.

He is fearless and courageous. When Dayal enters his room pointing a gun at him, he floors Dayal in seconds. Later when they go to the jungle and Dayal returns a scared man, the narrator remains immune to any sense of fear. He knows how to read nature. He observes that monkeys are relaxed and knows there is no threat around.

Next come the qualities that make him an author. He is a good judge of human nature. One comment by Lin about his supposed friendship with Major Roberts, and our author can tell that Lin is a lonely man. He knows how to read and interpret people's smile: "I thought of the other's smiles... the tonga-driver's friendly, deceptive; Daya Ram's wide sincere smile; Miss Deeds cynical, derisive smile". He has also a reflective temperament. Looking at Heera's "cracked, parchment-like skin" he is reminded of Daya Ram's and Kiran's skins and looks at his own. He begins reflecting rather philosophically, "Our skin, I thought, is like the leaf of a tree, young and green and shiny; then it gets darker and heavier, sometimes spotted with disease, sometimes eaten away; then fading, yellow and red, then falling, crumbling into dust or feeding the flames of fire".

He is a dreamer and dreamers have a gift of imagination. On the spur of the moment, he can conjure up a Major Roberts and fill that image with rich details from his own life. It is this quality that saves him from disappointment when Sushila fails to turn up at the station. For dreamers, life is full of infinite possibilities. Anything and everything can happen. So he can come back another day and relive the moments of intimacy with his beloved. What other qualities do you find in this

---

character? Make friends with him and you will find many more. In fact, that is how you should read literature.

### **5.4.3.2 Sushila**

We know very little about Mrs Dayal. Just this, that she comes from Delhi and was married to a man she didn't like, and that she was childless. Like all women, she is enigmatic. At first she seems to be happy seeing an old friend. And then she takes the initiative and holds the narrator's hand. Further on, she plays an old game of leaving behind a trail of rose petals to see if he can still follow her. Emboldened, the man now desires her. She shows complete indifference to his moves, but offers no resistance when he holds her in close intimacy. She keeps aloof from her husband and shows no interest in his life or business or in the guests at the hotel. In some sense, she too is a dreamer, for she enjoys reliving an old relationship. But she is also practical, again like all women, though she doesn't mind enjoying without risking her security.

In answer to the question if her marriage was successful, she offers a very sane, practical and reasoned response: "Of course it is, as a marriage. I am not happy and I do not love him, but neither am I so unhappy that I should hate him. Sometimes, for our own sakes, we have to think of the happiness of others". Of course, she is lonely, as Kiran tells us, "Mrs Dayal is nice, she lets me take flowers home. But she doesn't talk much".

How much she was tempted to accept the offer of running away with the author, we will never know. Why did she tell him that she might turn up at the station when she very well knew that she might not? Man will never understand woman. Our author is wise enough not to break his head figuring out the impossible. He goes happily his way unmindful of both yesterday and tomorrow.

### **5.4.3.3 Kiran**

We know almost nothing about Kiran, except that she is ten and her father is the manager at the local sugar factory. She is always at the swing all by herself.

She doesn't know any child of her own age, and has made friends with Daya Ram because "he brings nice things from the kitchen when no one is looking," and with Heera because "he tells me stories, a new story everyday". Apart from Heera she is the only one who is always interested in flowers.

At the same time she is quite perceptive. She knows everyone at the hotel for what they actually are and not what they pretend to be. She can also see through the narrator's true self, as we saw earlier. "In her bright eyes I saw something old and wise," says the author. She is a very lonely girl, not very happy but not unhappy either. At moments, she can be quite childlike, as when she says, "I hope we shall find the dog.... But I would like a leopard. Nothing ever happens here".

#### **5.4.3.4 Dayal, Daya Ram, Heera, Lin and Miss Deeds**

These are minor characters. They have nothing to add to the action. They are there like paintings on a wall. They create an ambience, but nothing more. Each one of them is an example of living dead, as we have seen earlier. They all are illustrations of death-in-life.

Dayal is the manager, but the hotel is actually run by his servant. He is timid, fearful and in total disconnect with life around. He cannot handle a gun, nor a wife, and knows nothing about a leopard's pug marks, or about a woman's feet, either.

Daya Ram has achieved absolute indifference to life. He hasn't been paid for months but that doesn't bother him. When the author wants to give him his address, he says, "I will take it from the register".

Heera, at about 100 – that's what Kiran tells us, but we can't be sure – is the living monument of the place. He was here before Shamli, and now all that matters to him is his garden.

Lin is a complete failure in life. Subservient to the wishes of a father, he never lived his own life. Now he lives only with memories and regrets.

---

Miss Deeds has failed to get married, though she is always wanting to fall in love with many a one who approach. Only there is no one who will approach her. She is not in the least interested in what she does – teaching in the girls’ school. She is not happy with her breakfast, nor with the music Lin often plays. Her only preoccupation is to get drunk every evening.

#### **5.4.4 Style and Technique**

Style is something unique about the way an author writes, while technique is the craft he employs to achieve a particular effect.

Bond’s style is that of a conventional story teller. Craft is there, but it is the tale that comes first. People are more important than action. His plots are well-constructed, and there is hardly any loose end. The narrative flows in a stream of well-connected thoughts, images and action. He is always throwing in something new, so the reader never gets bored. An element of surprise always awaits at the next corner. He seems more interested in human psychology than in any eventful action; if the action is there, it is there to reveal the facets of human nature. His tales are about how people feel, respond and live. There is a directness in his narrative, as it is there in the speeches of his character. His language is urbane and simple, but never dull or unintelligent. Behind this simplicity, he wields a rich power of suggestiveness, depth and symbolic representation of reality. Living in a modern world, he still carries the riches of the nineteenth century romanticism. Not without reason, India Today calls him “our resident Wordsworth in prose”.

In *Time Stops at Shamli* he uses the first-person narrative with masterly effect. He puts so much of himself in the narrator, that the reader is in danger of taking him too literally. In this way, he takes his readers in complete confidence and somewhat lulls their reason to achieve what Coleridge called “the willing suspension of disbelief”.



Most of the time he refrains from making authorial comments and lets the characters reveal themselves through their actions. Thus he makes them come alive instead of remaining mere pen portraits. Even when he inserts philosophical meditations, it is as an aid to the atmosphere he is building. He liberally uses the element of suspense and surprise as well as the queer and shocking speeches to make appear the natural close to supernatural. As the suggestiveness of the narrative traverses at more than one level, it imbues the story with a strange sense of mystery. No matter how many times one reads a story like this, its meaning will always elude the grasping of reason. This is precisely what makes it a great story, and Bond an authentic literary master.

---

### **EXERCISE 3**

---

1. Write in your own words a short character sketch of the following:
  - (a) The narrator
  - (b) Sushila
  - (c) The minor characters
- What is the difference between style and technique?
- Illustrate with examples some of the more important techniques employed by the author in this story.
- Why did Sushila not turn up at the station?
  - (a) She was afraid of what her parents would say
  - (b) She would be beaten up by Mr Dayal
  - (c) She did not have enough money
  - (d) None of the above

- How does Kiran hope to meet the author in Iceland and Japan?
    - (a) She has relatives living in those countries
    - (b) The author has relatives living in those countries
    - (c) She is going everywhere
    - (d) They plan to travel together
- 

## **5.5 SUMMING UP**

---

In this Unit we have learned

- How to write a summary
- How to identify the major and minor themes
- To interpret a theme in terms of its title
- How a good plot is constructed and how to spot a weakness in it
- How to create a character sketch
- To distinguish between style and technique

We also looked at different layers of meaning and suggestiveness in *Time Stops at Shamli* as well as the major and minor characters in the story. Using various literary concepts, we read the story as a piece of literary art, which is so different from reading for mere entertainment.

---

## **5.6 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

---

### **Exercise 1**

1. Find out some more information about the life of Ruskin Bond. You can also read the autobiographical essay listed in the References. Focus your answer on Bond's birth and childhood, his education, major works and achievements.

2. I am not so sure that many of you are going to read the story in the original. In that case, try to write a summary of the summary, but please do write it in your very own words. Don't be afraid of making mistakes and forming incorrect sentences. One learns only by making mistakes. The important thing is not the ability to write a very chaste and correct English, but to find out whether you can think for yourself or not!
3. How can you answer this question unless you have read the original text? In any case, here is a list of some important points left out in the summary: the description of the railway station; the author's detailed interaction with the tonga-driver; Lin's and Miss Deeds' choices of western music; Miss Deeds' drunken evening; Dayal's and the hotel's finances; what happens when they go out hunting for the leopard; how many times the lovers kiss and what else they do; and many more sundry matters. These have been left out because, in my judgement, they are not central to my reading of the story. But for God's sake do remember that my reading is not the only possible reading. If you can read it differently, your teacher will be much more happy than if you just kept repeating, like a parrot, everything he told you.

### **Exercise 2**

1. Read the discussion carefully, and find answers to many questions asked throughout the discussion. In this way you will build up your own response. This will help you to stop living a second-hand life, always quoting what others say and following everyone except your own nose. Once you have figured out what the story means to you, focus your answer on the meaning of 'time stops' and the nature and character of Shamli.
2. He comes searching for nothing. He just wants to take a look at Shamli. Then he makes up this story of Major Roberts. But then there is something hidden in the heart of man that compels his steps. Call it the unconscious (if you are

---

scientific minded and interested in the Freudian-Jungian kind of psychology), or your guardian angel (if you are Christian kind of religious) or simply soul, divinity or God (if you are happy using words you have heard since childhood), the Guidance does exist for a fact (you can test it for yourself). So unaware, he comes seeking his beloved, as is obvious from his own statement. Can you find this statement I am referring to?

3. What is important for you is to form a sense of these three parts. Every structure, including your body, and the house you live in, is built around this basic pattern. In fact, every answer you write in your examination should strictly follow this structure. The discussion has very elaborate description of all three parts. After reading it very carefully, write it in your own words.
4. D
5. D (Follow the analysis to see why these options are correct)

### Exercise 3

Questions 1, 2 and 3 – the answers are very clearly given in the relevant sections of the discussion.

4. D

5. C

---

## 5.7 REFERENCES

---

Bond, Ruskin. *Delhi is not Far*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1994. Print.

– . "Life at My Own Pace" in *Delhi is not Far*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1994. Print. 141-150.

– . "Time Stops at Shamli" in *Delhi is not Far*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1994. Print. 319-352.

Ruskin Bond. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruskin\\_Bond](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruskin_Bond). Web

---

Ruskin Bond - Interview with Avinandan.

[http://www.eklavya.in/pdfs/Sandarbh\\_68/01-05\\_I\\_am\\_Not\\_Only\\_Children\\_Writer\\_English.pdf](http://www.eklavya.in/pdfs/Sandarbh_68/01-05_I_am_Not_Only_Children_Writer_English.pdf)

The Ruskin Bond Interview. <http://abhijitbhaduri.com/2012/01/the-ruskin-bond-interview/>. Web.

---

## 5.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

---

Kumar, Shiv K. Ed. *Contemporary Indian Short Stories in English*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007. Print.

Naik, M. K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982. Print.

---

## 5.9 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

---

1. Critically analyse the significance of the title in *Time Stops at Shamli*.
2. How far do you agree with the view that the narrator in *Time Stops at Shamli* is none other than Ruskin Bond himself?
3. But for a few minor exceptions, the plot is very well constructed in *Time Stops at Shamli*. Discuss.
4. Illustrating your answer from the text, discuss the death-in-life symbolism in *Time Stops at Shamli*.

---

**UNIT 6      RABINDRANATH TAGORE:**  
***THE RUNAWAY***

---

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Objectives

6.3 The author and the text

6.3.1 Rabindranath Tagore

6.3.2 *The Runaway*: a summary

6.4 Analysing the story

6.4.1 The Problems of Translation

6.4.1.1 The Title

6.4.2 Theme: what is it about?

6.4.3 Analysing the Characters

6.4.3.1 Tara

6.4.3.2 Charu

6.4.3.3 The Minor Characters

6.4.4 Style and Technique

6.5 Summing Up

6.6 Answers to Self-Assessment-Questions

6.7 References

6.8 Suggested Readings

6.9 Terminal and Model Questions

---

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

---

In the earlier Unit you read a story by Ruskin Bond which uses a first-person narrative to describe a strange place and its stranger inhabitants. You also saw how a careful reading of the title can reveal the heart of the main text.

Tagore uses a familiar locale and a more conventional method of storytelling to narrate the tale of an extraordinary boy. He is faithful in portraying a 19<sup>th</sup> century village in Bengal, but like any great artist, his interest is more in the Universal Man than the background or circumstances surrounding his characters.

While Tara, the protagonist in the story, exemplifies a Baul-like streak which is so integral to the culture of Bengal, the story as a whole is an exploration of the human spirit of Freedom. Tagore was through and through a Romantic, and here he is at his best.

---

## 6.2 OBJECTIVES

---

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

- Identify some of the major qualities of Tagore that go to make him such a consummate artist.
- Analyse Tagore's craft of storytelling.
- Undertake a psychological examination of the Baul-like temperament of a young boy.
- Explain the uniqueness of Tagore's art of storytelling.

---

## 6.3 The author and the text

---

Tagore is perhaps one of the most versatile of Indian cultural heroes. Author of two national anthems (of India and Bangladesh), recipient of Nobel Prize (1913), Knighthood (1917), and an Oxford D. Litt. (honoris causa) (1940), Tagore was a poet, playwright, novelist, painter, musician, visionary, educationist, a friend of

Gandhi and an active participant in the National Movement. Deeply rooted in the soil and fragrance of Bengal, though far from being in any sense parochial, he is the singer of the universal spirit of mankind.

The call of the mystic comes strongest to the Indian mind and it will break free from any and all fetters that try to hold it in bondage. But Tagore's affirmation of Freedom in *The Runaway* is an affirmation of life, not an ascetic denial of it. Perhaps the title of the English translation is quite misleading. It certainly is not as apt as the original in Bengali - *Atithi*.

### 6.3.1 Rabindranath Tagore

Tagore was born on May 7, 1861 in a distinguished and affluent home in Calcutta. His grandfather, Dwarkanath was known as a 'Prince' and had among his friends Queen Victoria and Raja Rammohan Roy. His father, 'Maharshi' Devendranath was a leading figure of Brahmo Samaj. Tagore wrote his first poem when he was eight and the last one just a few days before he died on August 7, 1941. He was honest when he said, "Ami Kavi, I am a poet".

Tagore was a novelist of great repute. Two of his novels, *Gora* and *The Home and the World* (*Ghare Baire*) have been very well received in English translation. *Chokher Bali*, *Naukadubi*, *Chaturanga*, and *Sesher Kavita* (*Farewell My Friend*) are his other important novels. Tagore also wrote plays. Among the better known of his plays are *Sacrifice* (*Visarjan*), *The Post Office* (*Dak Ghar*), and *Chandalika*.

In 1913 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for *Gitanjali*, which is not his best or greatest work, the event changed the tenor of his life. He had been, temperamentally, all his life a wandering mendicant, a Baul, and now he found himself an international celebrity. Invitations from all over the world, and from all sorts of people - including Mussolini from the fascist Italy - started pouring in. Tagore became India's cultural ambassador to the world. He visited France,



England, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and America; China, Japan, Egypt, Iran, Singapore, Malaya, Java, Borneo, Sumatra and Indonesia. He delivered Hibbert Lectures at Oxford: The Religion of Man. A mendicant, he also used these tours to raise funds for Santiniketan, his love and dream he cherished most.

Tagore loved life, and loved it for its innocence and purity. He wanted to provide for children an aesthetic atmosphere of joy, love, creativity and freedom. He founded a school which became a university - Viswa Bharati. He equally cared for villagers - the heart and soul of India - and founded Sriniketan - an experiment in rural reconstruction.

This brilliant Splendour that shone on Indian firmament: “Who was he? Did he know, does anyone?” - asks Sisirkumar Ghose.

### **6.3.2 The Runaway (Atithi) - a summary**

You must have noticed that till a few years back there used to be at least one boatman’s song in a Hindi movie, if the music director happened to be a Bengali, like that famous song O Majhi Re. The river and the boatman were very central to the life in Bengal. They also offered a rich symbolism, where the river stood for the flow of life and the boatman was the divine Guide carrying us across a turbulent existence. This story by Tagore also opens and closes with a river.

Moti Babu, Zamindar of Katalia, is returning home by boat. He is travelling with his wife and daughter and a retinue of servants. On the way the party has stopped for lunch-break, when of a sudden a Brahmin boy of 15 or 16 approaches Moti Babu asking for a lift to Nandigram. His name is Tara. Not only is his request accepted, he is also invited to dine with the party.

Tara immediately jumps onto the servants’ boat where the midday meal is being prepared. Finding that the cook was not so good at his job, Tara relieves him and prepares fish and a couple of vegetable dishes. Then he takes his bath in the river and, clad in a fresh dhoti, returns to join Moti Babu for lunch.

Annapurna, Moti Babu's wife, finds her mother's heart much moved on seeing such a young lad separated so early from his mother. "Don't you have a mother?" she asks. Of course, he has. "Doesn't she love you?" The boy found the question absurd: of course, she loved him. "Why did you leave her, then?" "She has four other boys and three girls." Now it was Annapurna's turn to get shocked. What a reply! "Could one bear to cut off a finger simply because there are four more?"

This boy is really strange. Young, handsome and charming, loved by everyone and pet of the whole village, one day he ran off from home. There was the usual hue and cry, and the boy was hunted and brought back home. As if to make amends for some unknown lapse, everyone in the village redoubled their affection for the boy. "But all bonds, even those of affection, were irksome to the boy".

Much beyond the ties of human bonds, here was a soul in love with the whole of Creation. When he saw boats from foreign parts, a Sannyasi, or gypsies camping near the village, "his spirit longed for the freedom of the mysterious outside world, unhampered by ties of affection". He was charmed by music when he heard it played by touring opera troupes. And more than that,

Not only music, but the patter of the heavy July rain on the trees in full foliage, the roll of the thunder, the moaning of the wind through the thickets, like some infant giant strayed from its mother, would make him completely distraught. The distant kites flying high in the midday sky, the croaking of the frogs on a rainy evening, the howling of the jackals at the dead of night — all these stirred him to his depths.

The boy has ears for the divine Musician when He plays His tunes all through Nature. This bewitching charm of music makes him run away from home

finally, after two or three failed attempts, and join first a band of players, then a company of ballad singers and later a troupe of acrobats. But each time his companions fell in love with this unearthly lad, he gave them a slip and vanished. Recently he “had heard that the Zamindar of Nandigram was promoting some amateur theatricals on a grand scale”. He was travelling to join this group when he met Moti Babu.

As the boat moves on, we find Tara a keen observer of earth, sky and spaces, in love with infinite Beauty that surrounds us everywhere. “This world, with its far-gazing sky, the whisper in its fields, the tumult in its water, the restless trees, the vast space above and below, was on terms of the closest intimacy with the boy, and yet it never for a moment tried to bind his restless spirit with a jealous embrace”.

Fed so sumptuously with so much at the hands of Mother Nature, quite understandably, he is completely indifferent to what man can offer him. When asked by Annapurna, “What do you usually have for supper?” his reply is very simple: “Whatever I get... and some days I don’t get anything at all!” But he is not a life-shunning ascetic. He is friends with everyone and helps in everything unasked. What is he?

His eyes, his limbs, his mind were always alert. Like Nature herself, he was constantly active, yet aloof and undistracted. Every person has some fixed point, but Tara was just a ripple on the current of things rushing across the infinite blue. Nothing bound him to past or future; his part in life was simply to flow onwards.

They have been two or three days on the boat, when one evening Tara finds Moti Babu reading from the Ramayana to his wife and daughter. As the story reaches the tale of Lav-Kush, Tara can no longer contain his excitement: “Put away the book, Sir. Let me sing you the story”. What follows is such a soulful rendering that “even the occupants of passing boats strained their ears to get snatches of the

melody”. While Moti Babu and his wife are transported in ecstasy to regions beyond, Charu, their nine year old daughter and only child, felt “she would explode with jealousy”.

Jealousy, like love, is compulsive and irrational. Till now, Charu had not been used to sharing her parents’ affection with anyone. So now when they started showering it on Tara, it hurt and made her more angry. The more they tried to assuage her, the more she hated him with a vengeance. But she is also silently attracted towards him. As “when he plunged into the river for his daily swim, with his dhoti lifted short above his knees and tightened round his waist, his supple limbs knifing the water with skilful ease, she could not help being attracted. Every morning she looked forward to his bath-time, but without letting anyone guess her fascination”.

It took them over ten days to reach Katalia, and in the wake of Charu’s tantrums, Nandigram had been forgotten.

In Katalia, where he conquered every heart in a few hours, we see yet another dimension of Tara’s personality. He can easily enter into the spirit of a place or people and become one with them but always without losing his own ground. “He was not the slave of any custom and could easily adjust to things. With children he became child-like; with his elders, he was mature; with the peasant he was a peasant without losing his brahminhood”.

But for all his achievements, Charu continued hating him. “And it may be that because he felt that this atom of femininity desired his banishment with all her might, he made such a prolonged stay in Katalia”. One day when Charu starts telling her friend Sonamani about Tara and realises that the two are already friends and that he had made a flute for Sonamani, her anger knows no bounds. She enters his room and tramples upon his flute, smashing it to pieces. Seeing her in action,

---

he was amazed. “Charu was becoming for him more and more an object of curiosity”.

One day, finding him drawn to an English picture book, Moti Babu asks if he would like to learn the language. Thus begin his English lessons, and we see one more side of Tagore’s almost perfect imagined human figure. As he plunges one pointed into his studies, everything, including food and socialising, takes a back seat. It was as if the world had vanished and all that mattered was the task he had set for himself.

Charu’s tantrums continue and now she too wants to take English lessons. But instead of progressing, because she hasn’t set her mind on studies, she only becomes an impediment in Tara’s progress. Not satisfied with this, she even starts daubing Tara’s exercise books with ink and removing his pen. One after another, her tantrums and mischiefs continue unabated.

Tara had now stayed for two whole years at Moti Babu’s house. Never before in his wanderings, had anything bound him for so long. Was it his engrossment with studies, or the change of temperament with growing age, or simply this enigmatic girl who “had cast a secret spell over his heart”?

Charu had reached marriageable age - she was eleven (remember, the story was first published in 1895). Moti Babu had started looking for a suitable bridegroom. When Annapurna suggested Tara’s name, Moti Babu didn’t look impressed. Then one day when a neighbouring Zamindar came to see the girl, she locked herself in her room and would not come out. The proposal failed to materialise. Moti Babu now sent out enquiries about Tara’s parentage. When he came to know that Tara’s family was respectable though poor, he started planning the wedding. The families agreed, a date in July was fixed, invitations went out, but the children were never told about it.

In the meantime the monsoon set in. With rivers flowing in full spate, life with a renewed gusto returned to villages in Bengal. Fairs and celebrations were announced; boats started carrying merchandise from place to place; there was song and dance and music in the air.

All the world was holding a car-festival that evening, with flags flying, wheels whirling and the earth rumbling. Clouds pursued each other, the wind rushed after them, the boats sped on, and songs leaped to the skies. Then, the lightning flashed out, rending the sky from end to end; the thunder crackled forth; and out of the depths of the darkness came a scent of moist earth and torrential rain. The sleepy little village of Katalia dozed in a corner, with doors closed and lights out.

Tara's mother and brothers arrive with three big boats full of provisions for the wedding. Sonamani approaches Tara's room with gifts. "But there was no Tara. Before this conspiracy of love and affection had succeeded in completely surrounding him, the free-souled Brahmin boy had fled in the rainy night, carrying with him the heart of the village which he had stolen, and returned to the arms of his great world-mother, who was serene in her unconcern".

### **EXERCISE 1**

1. Write a short paragraph about the life of Rabindranath Tagore.
2. Write a summary of the story in your own words, adding some of the episodes not given in the summary provided above.
3. How does Tara meet Moti Babu?
  - a. Moti Babu knows him and has been looking for him
  - b. Tara is carrying an introduction for Moti Babu

- 
- c. Tara is travelling to Nandigram, and Moti Babu is going in the same direction
  - d. None of the above
- 

## **6.4 ANALYSING THE STORY**

---

Ruskin Bond's story that you read in the earlier unit was written originally in English. Tagore wrote this story in Bengali. It was first published as *Atithi* in 1895. In 1919, an English translation with the title *The Runaway* by Surendranath Tagore appeared in *The Modern Review*. In 1961, Amiya Chakravarty made certain changes to this translation and included a revised version in his *A Tagore Reader*. All excerpts used in this Unit are from the 1961 version. Why did Chakravarty find these changes necessary? You need to understand the limitations and problems of translation.

As in the earlier unit, you will analyse it in terms of theme, plot, characterisation, style and technique. You will also notice that every analysis is different. What is very significant in one story may not be so significant in another. For example, a detailed analysis of the title was very important for Bond's story; it may be significant but not so crucial in *The Runaway*. Similarly, Tagore's story demands a much more in-depth analysis of its central Character, which was not at all necessary in Bond's story.

### **6.4.1 The Problems of Translation**

The problems of translation can be best understood if we compare a translated version with the original. But this cannot be attempted here, because not many of us know Bengali. We will postpone this discussion till we come to Premchand whom most of us have read in the original. Here we will make only some very general observations.

Every great writer is a very conscious artist. So when you read a text in original, you must be asking why the writer has used a particular word, and why

not a different one in its place. You cannot do the same with translation. Take a look at the following two versions from the opening paragraph of this story:

There had been the usual forenoon halt, alongside a village mart on the river, and the cooking of the midday meal was in progress. (Surendranath Tagore 1919)

There had been the usual morning stop alongside a village market on the river, and the cooking of the noon meal was in progress. (Amiya Chakravarty 1961)

Can you see that there is not much difference? Both mean the same thing. Perhaps there is only the change in linguistic fashion. In 1919, the language is old-fashioned, unnecessarily literary, in short a typical Victorian English that Indians wrote those days. In 1961, it has become more direct and simple, and avoids any unnecessary literariness. You can clearly see that the two versions represent two different personalities. So the translator is always present along with the original writer in translations.

In such a situation, when reading a translation, the reader has to be very alert. He has to strain his eyes to see what the words represent and not get trapped in the mesh of a particular diction.

But what if there is a mistranslation, as certainly there is in the case of the title of this story?

#### 6.4.1.1 The Title

You are always a guest on this earth and have the austerity of a guest.

— *J. Krishnamurti*

Fire is the Brahmin who enters as a guest the houses of men .... That man of little understanding in whose house a Brahmin dwells fasting, all his hope and his expectation and all he has gained and the good and truth that he has spoken and the wells he has dug and the sacrifices he has offered and all his



sons and his cattle are torn from him by that guest unhonoured.

— *Katha Upanishad*

A guest, *atithi*, is someone who is visiting you for a few days. The reasons for his visit may be many, but he thinks kindly of you and has goodwill towards everyone. He has come to share with you his gifts — what he is and what he has. (If all this is not there, he should have stayed somewhere else and not come to your house. In short, he is not welcome). He is a guest; he lives with austerity and doesn't become an inmate. He does not take roots. Isn't this that describes Tara best? As hosts, Moti Babu and Annapurna conduct themselves exactly as ordained by the Upanishad above.

Now, the translator has changed the title to '*The Runaway*'. A runaway is someone who has escaped from confinement, captivity or from unpleasant surroundings. The emphasis is on the act of escaping; therefore, the person escaping is either a weakling or a criminal. Is such a term appropriate to Tara? If one sticks to the literal meaning of the word, then it is true that Tara has run away from home. But that was long ago. He is not running away from home when the story opens. In any case, the English title is nowhere near the spirit of the story. This is what we call an incorrect interpretation and a mistranslation. A translator is also an interpreter: he first understands the original words, and then expresses them in another language.

#### **6.4.2 Theme: what is it about?**

Don't you think this story is, more than anything else, about this strange boy who is so different from many of us. Most of the time the story is talking about who he is, from where he has come, what he does and what he has done, how he feels and how he relates to people and things around him. This story is about Tara. Character is the theme here. One may argue the story is about Romanticism, about that strange capacity in man which makes the intangible more real than the tangible. It may also be about Idealism, where the writer argues for right living and the right

kind of human beings. It is about life as it should have been, and not as it is. It also shadows Wordsworth's ideal of education of Nature. Then there is the question what is it that Tara is looking for. Is it Freedom, or something more than that? What is the nature of his quest? But all these questions are woven around a single person. So Tara is the main theme of the story.

Then there is a sub-theme: Charu. She is a study of the irrational nature of human jealousy, which can at moments become quite overpowering. She is a foil to Tara whose magnanimity and freedom shine more against her as a backdrop. She is subordinate to him; she exists only in relation to him. She is the sub-theme.

### **6.4.3 Analysing the Characters**

Every time you analyse a character, it has to be done according to the demands of the text. There is no stereotyped method. We have seen that a number of themes are woven around the central character. So in analysing him we shall also be attempting an analysis of those themes.

Before we proceed, here is a word of warning. Tagore is here portraying perfection, the ideal man, and not the one with imperfections as he actually is — that is not Tagore's purpose here. Do not criticise an author for what he is not attempting: that would be immature.

You should also learn to distinguish between the major and minor characters. Minor characters are like scaffolding of a building, they are not the building. They fill the gap, smoothen the movement and add a shade to the main picture here and there. Moti Babu, Annapurna and Sonamani are minor characters in this story.

#### **6.4.3.1 Tara**

The very first thing we are told about Tara is his perfect physique:

With his fair complexion, his large eyes and his delicate, finely-cut, smiling lips, the lad was strikingly handsome. All he had on was a dhoti, somewhat tattered, and his bare upper body looked like some sculptor's masterpiece.

The outer and the inner are same. The body and mind are one. A sick mind has a sick body. Tara's perfectly proportionate figure shows a well-rounded and harmonious evolution of spirit and mind. In the opening scene we see him going unasked to the cook and helping him prepare the midday meal. He has learned the art of giving himself unconditionally to any work at hand. Only he who knows how to give shall receive. Later, he gives all of himself equally to everyone in Katalia — to young and old, rich and poor, lower and higher. In turn, he becomes the recipient of their unconditional love, as he was earlier in his native village.

But why did he leave his home in the first place? What drives him to make a perennial wanderer? Certainly, he is not looking for human affection, of which he had plenty at home, or fame and riches. As soon as these grow around him, he severs all ties and disappears:

When the owner of the band of players which he had joined began to love Tara as a son, and he became the favourite of the whole party, when he found that even the people of the houses at which their performances were given, chiefly the women, would send for him to express their special appreciation, he eluded them all, and his companions could find no trace of him.

Tagore, who himself was known as 'Robi Baul', knows his protagonist: "Tara was as impatient of bondage as a young deer". "Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains", proclaimed Jean Jacques Rousseau, the champion of European Romanticism. But Tagore did not draw his inspiration from abroad, he found it in his own soil, in the long tradition of Bauls of Bengal. Who are the Bauls? Wikipedia explains:

Baul are a group of mystic minstrels from Bengal.... Bauls are a very heterogeneous group, with many sects, but their membership mainly consists of Vaishnava Hindus and Sufi Muslims. They can often be identified by their distinctive clothes and musical instruments.... Baul music had a great influence on Rabindranath Tagore's poetry and on his music.

Is it possible to become a Baul? No, the Romantics are born, not made. You cannot cultivate Romanticism. Either you have it or you don't. "The star under which he [Tara] was born must have decreed him homeless". Together with his love for total, absolute freedom, what links Tara to Bauls is his passion for music. Even as a child he thoroughly enjoyed musical performances in his village. As he grew up he became aware of the vast music of Nature so universally present everywhere (see the quote at 6.3.2). It is this divine Raga, or Krishna's flute, that draws him to ecstasy, and once he is there, the world goes to flames. This is exactly what happened on his last day in Katalia, when Moti Babu, Annapurna, Charu, Sonamani, all disappeared into oblivion.

But Tara is not a life-denying ascetic. He is in love with the whole creation, with the whole of life. His senses, heart and mind are fully alert and tuned to smallest note in creation. It is this free and alert mind that makes him such a wonderful learner. He can cook, he can row a boat, he can sing. "He had some knowledge of how to make sweetmeats, and could also take a hand at the loom or at the potter's wheel". When the time came, he could with equal ease learn English as well.

Not just adept in the outer crafts, he has an equal mastery of inner skills. He can move into the poise of perfect equanimity and disarm with ease a hundred-headed mischievous devil in an otherwise unconquerable Charu:

One day, as he tore out an ink-spattered page from his exercise book and was sitting there thoroughly vexed about it, Charu peeped in. "Now I am going to catch it," she thought. But as she came in, she was disappointed; Tara sat quietly without a word. She teasingly skipped near enough for him to cuff her, if he had been so minded. But he remained as still and grave as ever. The little culprit was completely frustrated. She was not used to apologising, and yet her penitent heart yearned to make it up to Tara. Finding no other way, she took up the torn-out page and sitting near him wrote on it in large round handwriting: "I will never do it again." She then went through a variety of manoeuvres to draw Tara's attention to what she had written. Tara could keep his countenance no longer, and burst out laughing. The girl fled from the room in grief and anger. She felt that nothing short of the complete obliteration of that sheet of paper, from eternal time and infinite space, would wipe away her mortification!

He is austere in speech and habits and has a will of his own. No amount of persuasion from Annapurna and Moti Babu can force him to eat what he doesn't want to, nor can Charu's tantrums stop him from visiting Sonamani's ailing mother, once he has decided to do so. He is kind, loving and affectionate towards everyone. But it never becomes a weakness. When he starts taking his English lessons, he stops meeting anyone, including Sonamani. He stops visiting the *zenana* for his meals, though it hurts Annapurna's pious sentiments.

He lives for over two years almost as an inmate in Moti Babu's house, but refuses to take roots. Living the life of *Atithi* can be the highest discipline for man. Be one with people and things around you, helping and serving all who need you. But keep your house in order and your bags packed, ready all the time to leave when the call comes. Be a guest on this earth, feel at home, but do not make it one. You come from somewhere else and go back at the end of the day. You are waiting

for the call of Krishna's flute. This is what you learn when you make friends with Tara.

### 6.4.3.2 Charu

Charu serves as a foil to Tara. Foil, according to Oxford Dictionary, is “ a person or thing that contrasts with and so emphasises and enhances the qualities of another”. Use of foil is a very old literary technique.

Charu is in every way the opposite of what Tara is. Charu is the only child of her parents; Tara is one among eight of his parents' children. Her life moves around her parents whom she never leaves - she doesn't even sleep alone; his father is dead, and he has left his mother and brothers for good. He possesses nothing and is ready to give everything; she is obsessively possessive and will not share anything. She cannot bear Tara getting any closer to her parents's affection, nor can she tolerate any closeness between Tara and Sonamani. She cannot even stand any of Tara's accomplishments, leave alone appreciating them. He is all appreciation for any thing that is good and beautiful, anything that is subtle and has a living spirit in it; her lone appreciation is for Tara's gross body, as he goes half-naked swimming in the river. He is passionate about music; she has no ears for it. He is in total control of himself; her behaviour is compulsive and neurotic - she has no control over herself. He is magnanimous and large hearted, open to everyone; her narrow heart is confined around her little self. He is love; she is jealousy. He is the eternal Man, and she the eternal Feminine.

And yet, it is this pairing of opposites that is the basis of all attraction. Among all things Charu alone succeeds in getting some hold over Tara. Because of her he almost loses his way. He was going to Nandigram when he met her; two days later, Nandigram is all forgotten. She is an enigma to him, and he does all he can to make her mend her ways. She refuses to change. He may have succeeded in everything he ever attempted in life, including the learning of English language, but he fails miserably when faced with this enigma of a little girl. She is the earth, the eternal feminine, ever inscrutable. She appears unconquerable, and yet she is so meekly submissive at moments. Take for example the scene where the two have quarrelled over Tara's visit to Sonamani's house.

Tara was so annoyed that he swore he would not touch a morsel of food. The repentant girl, beside herself, begged for forgiveness. “I'll never, never do it again,” she pleaded, “I beg of you at your feet, do please have

something to eat.” Tara was obstinate at first, but when she began to sob as if her heart would break, he sat down to his supper.

Her hatred and jealousy of Tara’s accomplishment is a camouflage for her silent love. Why else should she make such a fuss over Tara’s visit to Sonamati’s house? She is all rage when it comes to Tara paying even the slightest attention to another girl. Remember the scene when she learns that Tara had made a flute for Sonamani, and she storms into Tara’s room and stomps over his reed flute. She wants him, and wants him in exclusivity.

Unknown to himself, the brahmin boy too has fallen in love, has become conscious of a new experience.

Meanwhile, Charu would occasionally make stormy raids on Tara’s room, sometimes angry, sometimes affectionate, sometimes contemptuous, but always disturbing. And gleams, like lightning flashes, would create a tumult in the once free and open sky of the boy's mind. His life now felt the network of dream-stuff into which it had drifted and become entangled.

It’s almost happening, the meeting of earth and heaven; the fate of the brahmin boy is sealed. Then there comes the twist in the story. The gods intervene. Or is it because the author has other plans for his protagonist? Why else should Tara and Charu be kept in the dark about their own wedding? Perhaps the author didn’t want it to be a love story, perhaps the children are too young for such an experience, perhaps the Brahman in which a brahmin dwells does not tolerate man-woman affair.

### 6.4.3.3 The Minor Characters

There are three of them: Moti Babu, Annapurna and Sonamani.

**Moti Babu** is the patriarch, mature, serene, wise and understanding. A Zamindar, he is a typical aristocrat. The lad asks for a lift, and he is given full hospitality. Moti Babu is also pompous, as can be seen in the retinue that travels with him and the way his entourage is received in the village on his return. He is also a little dull of mind and bound to tradition. When Annapurna tells that he should stop looking for a bridegroom for their daughter because Tara is there and Charu likes him, his dull wit finds it hard to accept such a suggestion. There is the difference of class. He would like a Zamindar for his daughter. Only when Charu

with all her feminine tantrums protests so strongly against it, does the poor man see some light. But he gives way easily and is least interfering in his wife's or daughter's affairs.

He is a good man. When he finds Tara curious about some English picture book, he arranges for English lessons for the boy. He is also obediently religious in the traditional way. He spends time reading Ramayana to his wife and daughter. In short, a man of his times, he is an ordinary and well-meaning patriarch who takes his responsibilities seriously.

**Annapurna** is the personified mother's heart. When she sees Tara the first time, her heart goes out to him. She wants to feed him best and care for him. The more she comes to know of him, the more her mother's love spreads to envelop him. She has an intuitive mind. She can immediately diagnose her daughter's problem as jealousy, though she cannot do anything about it. She is also simple. In order not to annoy her daughter, she waits for her to sleep before moving outdoors to listen to Tara's ballads. Of course, when she is caught in her little act of deception, it makes her daughter angrier.

She becomes miserable over small things. When Tara is unable to come to zenana for his meals because he is busy with his studies, she gets sad and is very unhappy. Like all mothers she can sense what will make her child happy. It is she who proposes Charu's marriage with Tara.

**Sonamani** in some sense is a foil to Charu. She is Charu's age, and her brahmin mother is a cook in in the Zamindar's household. She had become a widow at five but shows no tantrums for all the pain she must have gone through. She accepts her fate meekly. When Charu gets angry with her and breaks the relationship, no voice of protest comes forth from her. She is denied open access to Tara, and she is happy stealing a furtive meeting with him. Except for unknowingly



---

arousing the feeling of jealousy in Charu over her harmless friendship with Tara, she has no other role in the story.

#### 6.4.4 Style and Technique

In this section we are broadly concerned with the craft of storytelling. In the earlier Unit, you saw the use of first person narrative by which the author succeeds in making his readers feel that they are being told about an actual event or experience.

Tagore uses in his story the more conventional ‘omniscient point of view’ of the narrator. In this technique the storyteller appears to know everything about his characters – how they feel, what are their motives, why they are what they are, the hidden causes of order or disorder in their personalities, and the sequence of events – past, present and future – in their lives. The narrator is also the *Sutradhar*, the Master of Ceremonies who knows when and how to introduce a character, and when to withdraw one. He also performs the function of a commentator, like *Chorus* in Greek drama, analysing the sequence of events and foreshadowing their impact.

Tagore was a painter of repute and the art ran in his family. In this story he is as if using the painter’s brush. Before we criticise the story for having a thin plot, we need to understand the art behind it. If the plot is thin, it is because there is hardly any action. This story is a word-painting. At the centre, almost filling the whole canvas, is the image of Tagore’s protagonist, the perfect image of the right kind of human being, not static but live and evolving. Then somewhere close to him is a shadowy, somewhat undersized image of woman who nevertheless seems to hold the strings of man. The whole background is filled with the mysterious, all-enveloping presence of Nature, the origin and ground of all play and action. Somewhere hidden in the foliage are the woman’s parents, the sempiternal couple, and indistinct figures of her playmates. What do you make of this painting? What is the meaning of this picture? Have you wondered that may be a wrong question?

Why do you never ask what is the meaning of those cloud-patterns in the sky when the sun is setting, what is the meaning of Taj Mahal, or what is the meaning of that boy or girl whom you love so much? A painting, whether in word or colour, is just like that. You need to look at it with transparent, unbiased and guileless eyes, and if you are sincere and lucky the image may reveal itself to your mind's eye.

The story is without a beginning or an end. There is no cause, no background for Tara to be what he is. He was born like that. For whys, we need to invent myths – of heredity and genetics, or of *karma* and past lives, or of God and Brahman. Do what one may, the reasons are beyond the scope of our little minds. There is also no end. Tara has disappeared, like so many times in the past, only to resurface with another band of players and musicians. To what profit do the cycles repeat is again beyond our mind.

You should also be clear about Tagore's purpose in this story before you can appreciate and defend his art. You should know what he is attempting and what is he is not. Tagore's story is not about social reality. When he mentions his hero is a brahmin, he is not commenting on the social structure of caste. That he is free from any caste bias is obvious from the way the Zamindar agrees to the proposal of Charu's marriage with Tara. We do not know anything about the Zamindar's caste: he may be a brahmin or kshatriya or from any other caste. So the caste is no consideration in this match making. The brahminism of the protagonist is emphasised simply to show that it is his dharma to seek and live in Brahman. Similarly we are told about Sonamani becoming a widow at the age of five, a gruesome fact that ails contemporary Bengal, but there is no authorial censure on the practise of child-marriage.

We cannot discuss the language – the diction and the figures of speech, because Tagore did not write in English. The idiom and diction are of the translator. These are not authentically Tagorean.

---

**EXERCISE 2**

---

1. In what sense is the reading of a translated version more demanding than the reading of the original?
2. Critically examine the original and the English version of the title, and argue the appropriateness of each.
3. Why does Tara leave his home in the first place?
4. What are the reasons of Charu's jealousy?
5. Write a short note on each of the minor characters.
6. Write a note on the story as a painting in words.
7. Why is Charu upset with Sonamani?
  - a. Sonamani is trying to steal Tara
  - b. Charu fears a threat to her own security in their growing relationship
  - c. Charu does not like Sonamani
  - d. Sonamani has of late become cold towards Charu
8. Why does Charu begin her English lessons?
  - a. She is interested in learning English
  - b. Because Tara is doing so
  - c. She wants to please Tara
  - d. None of the above

---

**6.5 SUMMING UP**

---

In this unit you have learned

1. Tagore's relationship to the Baul tradition
2. About Tagore's fascination with the mystery of life and Nature
3. How in a given context the plot construction can become quite subordinate to the art of characterisation

You have also seen how to distinguish threads that go to make up the psychological basis of a character; how the philosophical concepts like idealism and romanticism are woven into literary creation; and how literary technique differs from piece to piece of literary art.

---

## **6.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

---

### **EXERCISE 1**

1. The two books mentioned in following section, Sisirkumar Ghose and Krishna Kripalani, have good biographical material. You can also go online and research the topic. Confine your answer to details that help us appreciate this story.
2. Try to find both the translations, and make a summary in your own word. Take note of the scenes and episodes not covered in the summary given at section 6.3.2. See if you can use them while preparing your version.
3. (c)

### **EXERCISE 2**

- 1 Refer to the discussion given at 6.4.1.
- 2 Refer to the discussion given at 6.4.1.1
- 3 There are three reasons: a longing for freedom, passion for music, and enchantment of mysterious unknown. Elaborate it by discussing suitable episodes and passages.

- 
- 4 It begins with Charu's parents paying so much attention to Tara, and increases when she feels a threat from Sonamani. Elaborate it by discussing suitable episodes and passages.
- 5 Refer to the section 6.4.3.3
- 6 Refer to the section 6.4.4
- 7 (b)
- 8 (b)

---

## 6.7 REFERENCES

---

Baul. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baul>. Web

Chakravarty, Amiya. Ed. A Tagore Reader. New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2003. Print.

Daiches, David. The Penguin Companion to Literature, Vol. 1: British & Commonwealth Literature. Harmondsworth,: Penguin Books, 1971. Print.

Ghose, Sisirkumar. Rabindranath Tagore. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1990. Print.

Kripalani, Krishna. Tagore: A Life. New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, 1986. Print.

Tagore, Rabindranath. "The Runaway" in A Tagore Reader. New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2003. Print. 64-78.

---

## 6.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

---

Iyengar, K. R. Indian Writing in English. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1985. Print.

Naik, M. K. A History of Indian English Literature. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982. Print.

---

Narasimhaiah, C. D. *An Inquiry into the Indianness of Indian English Literature*.  
New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2003. Print.

---

## **6.9 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

---

1. Discuss the character of Tara as constituting the major theme in *The Runaway*.
2. Critically analyse the role of Charu as a foil to Tara.
3. Write a note on the function of the minor characters in *The Runaway*.
4. Discuss the style and technique used in *The Runaway*.

---

## **UNIT 7    PREMCHAND    *DIVIDED HEARTHS***

---

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Objectives

7.3 The author and the text

7.3.1 Premchand

7.3.2 *Divided Hearths*: a summary

7.4 Analysing the story

7.4.1 The Problems of Translation

7.4.2 Theme: what is it about?

7.4.2.1 *Algyojha*: the Division of Family

7.4.2.2 *Algyojha*: the other side

7.4.3 Analysing the Characters

7.4.3.1 Ragghu

7.4.3.2 Panna

7.4.3.3 Muliya

7.4.3.4 The Minor Characters

7.4.4 Style and Technique

7.5 Summing Up

7.6 Answers to Self-Assessment-Questions

7.7 References

7.8 Terminal and Model Questions

## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

---

The two stories you have read so far had two very different themes. Bond gives an imaginative representation of a way of life; and Tagore portrays an idyllic state of life as it should have been, rather than as it is.

Premchand uses Realism to portray the life in Indian villages in stark actuality. If you want to understand India, go to her villages; if you want to know Indian village life, go to Premchand.

This story is about India's message to the world, *Satyamev Jayate*, the Truth alone Triumphs. Three times in three generations of Panna, Ragghu and Kedar, life plunges into darkness threatening chaos, and each time in each one of them rises the fire of Goodness from the ashes.

---

## 7.2 OBJECTIVES

---

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

- Identify some of the major major events in Premchand's life that have shaped his literary consciousness.
- List the problems of translation.
- Undertake an analysis of the rich symbolism of the story.
- Explain the uniqueness of Premchand's art of storytelling.
- Enumerate the various elements of drama used in fiction.

---

## 7.3 The author and the text

---

Though not as widely known internationally as Tagore, Premchand nonetheless is recognised as one of the best writers in Hindi literature. No writer is free from the ethos of his times; so Premchand has come to be known for his socialistic concern for the downtrodden and working classes, for his progressive views on the rights of



---

women, particularly the remarriage of widows, and for the patriotic fervour in his early writings.

What has not been so widely recognised is the pure artist in Premchand who is moved in his essence by the universal and eternal behind the shadowy shows of the particular and temporal, a quality that makes any artist immortal.

Divided Hearths, titled *Algyojha* in Hindi, faithfully portrays the plight of a particular class of Indian peasants in the early twentieth century. But more importantly, as a pure artistic concern, it explores as well the element of courage and goodness in human nature when faced with the forces of chaos and disintegration. Coming after *Nirmala* (1925) and *Gaban* (1928), *Algyojha* (1929) belongs to the most mature period of Premchand's creativity.

### **7.3.1 Premchand**

When writing briefly about the life of an author, have you ever wondered what to include from so many facts about him and what to leave out? For example, is it necessary in the context of Premchand to mention the name of his grandfather or his first wife, or the name of all the places where he worked and in what capacity? As you saw in the case of Ruskin Bond, most writers draw upon their own experiences while drawing a character or situation. So if you focus on those events in the life of an author that help you appreciate his work better, that will be a relevant biographical introduction to the author and his work.

Premchand's original name was Dhanpat Rai. He was born in 1880 in village Lamhi near Banaras. His family owned six bighas of land without strictly being peasants. Like typical kayasthas of north India, his grandfather was a patwari and his father a clerk in the post office. Premchand lost his mother when he was seven, and his father remarried soon. He wasn't treated well by his stepmother. This fact is reflected in so many callous stepmothers in Premchand's fiction. He was an ordinary student who had to struggle for his education, but he persevered and never

gave up the effort. He passed his Intermediate examination when he was thirty, and B.A. at the age of thirty-nine. This love of education is seen in Ragghu as he works hard to send his stepbrothers and sisters to school. Premchand's first marriage was a failure, so he got married a second time, to a child-widow. His advocacy of the remarriage of widows is seen in Kedar and Muliya's marriage.

Dhanpat Rai was sent for his schooling first to a madarasa and then to a missionary English school. So when he started writing, he first wrote in Urdu under the pseudonym of Nawab Rai. Later when he began to write in Hindi, he changed his name to Premchand. He wrote 14 novels. The more famous among these are Sevasadan, Karmabhoomi, Nirmala, Godan and Gaban. He also wrote more than 300 short stories, some plays, and translated a few books from English into Hindi and Urdu.

Premchand started his career as a school teacher and rose to the post of Deputy Inspector of Schools, when hearing the call of Gandhi he resigned his government job and became a full-time writer. From the following account by Francesca Orsini it is obvious that Premchand did quite well as a writer, though he did not manage his finances so well:

For over twenty years he wrote roughly a story a month and was paid up to Rs 20 per form; in the 1920s he earned Rs 200 per month as editor ... and in 1925 he received as much as Rs 1800 for his novel Rangabhoomi.

He died in 1936 at the age of 56.

### **7.3.2 Divided Hearths (*Algyojha*) - a summary**

“When Bhola Mahto remarried after his first wife died, the bad times began for his son Ragghu” is how the story opens. Ragghu is ten, when a boy should be free and playing but Panna, the stepmother makes him do every chore, from feeding the cattle to scouring dirty dishes. His father will listen only to what his wife tells,

---

so Ragghu has no one to turn to for his complaints. After a time he stops complaining, but his aversion grows stronger for the stepmother.

Thus pass eight years when one day Bholu dies. Panna, who now had four children - three sons and a daughter - finds her world devastated. She knows how Ragghu hates her. She can't bear the thought of living under Ragghu's lordship, and for a time even contemplates remarrying. Widow's marriage is not a taboo in her community. But something else happens she had not anticipated. As Ragghu assumes the mantle of the patriarch, everything about him undergoes a radical transformation. Instead of remaining cold and grumbling, he becomes a loving and caring father-figure. When Panna discovers that he is selling his precious gold coin (*muhar*) to get a cow so that children can drink milk, she feels she can no longer distrust Ragghu. She too undergoes a change of heart and becomes the loving mother for the family. Thus they live happily for five years. "There wasn't another farmer in the village as hard-working, honest and dependable as Ragghu". He is twenty-three now.

One day Panna decides to send for Ragghu's bride. They must have been married long ago as children. Ragghu protests and warns that the girl has been reported to be quarrelsome and temperamental. But Panna is thinking only about Ragghu's happiness and is confident that she can handle this girl. She is proved wrong: Muliya the bride comes determined to destroy Panna's happiness. She will not tolerate this stepmother-in-law or any of her children.

One after another, Muliya creates a series of scenes and, despite Panna's patience and Ragghu's loud protests, succeeds in effecting the division of the household. Panna understands, but the children are mistaken in thinking that Ragghu is equally responsible for this unforgivable act. Ragghu feels as if a grave sin has been committed, that he has let down his dead father, has let down the values handed down by tradition. "At night he couldn't sleep. Whenever he went into the

---

village it was with head down and averted face, as though he had committed the sin of cow slaughter.”

Another five years pass. Panna’s children have grown up and are prospering. Muliya continues to maintain a distance, but Panna keeps showering her grandmother’s love on Ragghu’s two children. Partly due to overwork, but mostly because of an overweighing sense of being made to pay for his sins, Ragghu begins to suffer long spells of fever till one day he dies weak and broken.

Life has taken a full circle. It is now Muliya’s world that stands devastated and Panna takes over as the matriarch. Muliya is readmitted to the household and the division - *algyojha* - is undone. Soon after Muliya the widow is remarried to Kedar, Panna’s eldest son.

---

## EXERCISE 1

---

1. Listing the more important facts about his life, write a short paragraph on Premchand.
2. Make a list of all the dramatic scenes that have been left out from the summary given above. Discuss some of these scenes that you find crucial to the story.
3. Which of the following leads Ragghu to his death?
  - a. He is alone and has to overwork in the fields.
  - b. He is chided by the ghost of his dead father
  - c. He suffers from the enormity of his sin
  - d. All of the above

---

## 7.4 ANALYSING THE STORY

---

Every author is unique and very different from any other. What they try to show and the manner in which they show it are also very different from one another. While Bond's story verges on the fantastic and Tagore's is 'pure imagination', in Premchand we come across a very faithful portrayal of contemporary social reality. Premchand also took upon himself the burden of being a social reformer much like Shaw and Galsworthy whom he had translated. A social reformer, of necessity, has a message. He is trying to communicate an idea to his readers. It is for this reason that Premchand's art, as noted by Francesca Orsini, has often been called "idealistic realism".

As a student of literature you should ask a very serious question: can the terms used in Western criticism do any justice to a genuinely Indian author, like Premchand? The term 'idealism', for example, comes from the word 'idea' which is a purely mental construct. An Indian author, like most Indians, is more of a visionary than a thinker. Indian philosophy is called *darshanam*, 'seeing'. An Indian first 'sees' and then uses thought to communicate what he has seen. All Indian art is therefore rooted in Vision and not in Idea. To call Premchand an idealist is to do injustice to him.

Just as in the earlier Units, we shall be analysing the themes, characters and style in this story. We will also continue our discussion on translation from the previous Unit.

### 7.4.1 The Problems of Translation

In the Unit on Tagore we touched upon some of the problems of translation. Now that most of us know Hindi, we can compare Premchand's text in original with its quite an adequate English translation by David Rubin. Take a look at the following:

मुलिया मैके से ही जली-भुनी आयी थी। मेरा शौहर छाती फाड़कर काम करे और पन्ना रानी बनी बैठी रहे उसके लड़के रईसजादे बने घूमें। मुलिया से यह बर्दाशत न होगा। वह किसी की गुलामी न करेगी। अपने लड़के तो अपने होते ही नहीं भाई किसके होते हैं जब तक पर नहीं निकलते हैं रघु को घेरे हुए हैं। ज्यों ही जरा सयाने हुए पर झाड़कर निकल जाएंगे बात भी न पूछेंगे।

Muliya had come from her home already shaped and moulded. She was not going to put up with Panna behaving like a queen with her children roaming around like princes while her husband killed himself with work. And she herself had no intention of slaving for anybody. ‘Those children are not even his,’ she thought, ‘they’re hardly brothers. Till such time as they are older they’ll stick around Ragghu. But as soon as they’re a little grown up they’ll start acting big and they won’t give a damn about him’.

What is said has a meaning. But how it is said - the particular phrase, the covert meaning, the suggestion and the imagined accompanying gesture - is equally if not more important. When it comes to translation, you can see that meaning is communicated, but everything else gets lost in the process.

Take for example the sentence, मुलिया मैके से ही जली-भुनी आयी थी. It suggests that even while she was with her parents, Muliya somehow knew what was happening in Ragghu’s house. She never liked the affairs in her husband’s house and was seething with anger and frustration. She was determined to take revenge and correct all that she did not like. Do you think all this is suggested by the English translation: “Muliya had come from her home already shaped and moulded”? The English version simply suggests that Muliya’s ‘ego’ was already well-formed and that there was not much scope for her to change herself to the demands of new surroundings. Now see for yourself that the original and the translation are saying two very different things. Take another example: वह किसी की गुलामी न करेगी. It’s a blunt statement showing firm determination. Contrast the English translation, “And she herself had

no intention of slaving for anybody”: it’s a polite and indirect statement. Is “बात भी न पूछेंगे” same as “they won’t give a damn about him”? What is the main different between these two expressions?

Take the last example, a clear case of mistranslation. The translator suddenly becomes creative and starts interpolating, saying things that were not intended in the original:

अन्त समय उसने केदार को बुलाया था: पर केदार को ऊख में पानी देना था। डरा, कहीं दवा के लिए न भेज दें। बहाना बना दिया।

At the last he had sent for Kedar. But for Kedar that move threatened status quo: he feared Ragghu might send him to buy medicine and so he made some excuse not to come.

Can you point out which idea in the translation is not there in the original? Can you see it now for yourself that translation is but a poor shadow of the original and doesn’t come anywhere close to it? Can you find some more reasons for this wide gap between the two?

You have seen the limitations of translation. Next time you read a work in translation, you will be on your guard, you will know that the total impact of the original text may be quite different, you will use more of your imagination to visualise what may have been left out in the translation.

#### **7.4.2 Theme: what is it about?**

The story is directly about the evils of *algyojha* or the division of the household, and indirectly about the nature of Indian family. This is the main theme. It is also about the predominant goodness in man and how it comes to the fore in the face of adversity. This is the secondary theme. Then there are issues like widow remarriage, class morality, need for education, poverty and the perennial *Saas-Bahu* divide – these are tertiary themes.

We will discuss the main theme here, and take up the secondary theme while discussing the individual characters. The tertiary themes are left for you to analyse them on your own.

#### **7.4.2.1 *Algyojha* – the Division of Family**

The story begins with a united family and ends in reunion. In the middle there occurs the division leading to the untimely tragic death of the hero. The united Indian family symbolises wholeness, and wholeness is health. As long as they are together, there is peace and happiness in the family, despite the unavoidable friction when so many people live together. The stepmother's unsympathetic treatment of a stepchild is in no way healthy. The father's unconditional surrender to the whims of his young and charming wife in total disregard of the welfare of others is also in no way commendable. But such are the frailties of human nature. The author passes them by, calling it mildly "the age-old tradition".

The ten-year old Ragghu submits to his fate. Not that he does not grudge or voice no complaints, but the whole society seems to be on the side of the family and there is not much the kid can do. But he could have run away, you may ask; many boys do, in such circumstances. The author therefore seems to have a purpose in keeping Ragghu bound to his lot. Freedom is not for Ragghu; he must learn to discipline himself.

Let us look at it in another way. Indian family has been there since the dawn of mankind. Indian gods have family; Indian heroes and anti-heroes alike – Ram and Ravana; Krishna and Kansa; Pandavas and Kauravas – all exist in relation to their families. Individual is a part and rightfully belongs to a larger whole which is family. The whole is God or Brahman; the individual separated from the whole is illusion, is ego, is the seat of all sorrow and suffering. In Indian mythology Diti and Aditi are the two manifestations of the Great Goddess, Mahashakti. Diti means division and her sons are *daitya*, demons; Aditi means the Indivisible, the One, the Integer, and her sons are gods, *deva*. To be part of a family, to belong and submit



---

to it, is to 'surrender one's will in the will of God'. This is the path to salvation, according to Indian tradition.

After eight years of this discipline, apparently a life of drudgery, Ragghu emerges on the death of his father as a man who is full of compassion, courage and vision. No mean reward, indeed.

What is at the source of division, *algyojha*? —the devil of self-interest; a life centred around self. Muliya is the demoness incarnate of selfishness. She thinks only about herself, her interest and advantage. She wants everything for herself, everything that Ragghu earns or can earn. She is incapable of giving; she refuses to part with a penny even when Ragghu demands that the children be given money for visiting the village fair. She is so self-centred that she doesn't even care for the health or happiness of her husband. He is there only to earn, to slave for her. In the western psychology, she would be termed 'a stark egotist'; in the Indian metaphorical language, she is a *Rakshasi*.

*Algyojha* is a sin, as of cow slaughter, Ragghu feels. Christ-like, he suffers and pays with his death for the sins of others so that they can be redeemed. And redeemed they are. Muliya, chastened and sane, returns to the family, to union, remarriage and a lasting happiness.

#### **7.4.2.2      *Algyojha* – the other side**

What is said above about the family and separation is true but not an absolute truth. There is another side to it. Why is it that after the separation, Kedar and Panna continue to prosper? How is it that a child when separated from its mother, the umbilical chord severed, grows into a whole and healthy being? This kind of separation is called 'branching out', as in a banyan tree, a branch re-roots and becomes another tree.

What is the difference between the two? Their motives are different. When the motive is 'ego', or the self-centred desire to shine out for oneself, to assert one's

separate individuality, it creates a movement which is not in harmony with the whole, and the result is death and downfall. When the separation occurs because the larger life decides it so, when circumstances beyond your control bring it about, despite your not desiring it, then it comes not from the ego but as a will in the Whole. Then it is a divine movement and is attended by prosperity and well-being.

So it is motive that determines the result. If it is goodwill, you become whole; if there is ill-will, you become diseased.

### 7.4.3 Analysing the Characters

There are three major characters in this story. While the couple Ragghu and Muliya occupy the centre stage playing out the drama of *Algyojha*, the division, Panna forms all through an encompassing backdrop against which their actions are measured. Panna's children are the minor characters.

#### 7.4.3.1 Ragghu

The story opens with the onslaught of adversity in Ragghu's life. He is ten. His mother is dead. His father remarries and turns his attention away from the child. At a time when he should be at school or playing, he is made to do every kind of work. There is no one he can turn to complain. The whole village, the mass psyche, has only good words for Bhola and Panna, and none for Ragghu. He is too gentle to be a rebel. Obviously, he has no option but to resign to his fate.

Take a moment to analyse the situation. Who makes him do what he does? It is the collective consciousness, the ethos of the Indian village, the system, which defines for Ragghu what he shall be. The whole imposes itself on the individual. The individual is not important - nobody listens to Ragghu; the collective, the tradition, the society is all-important - even Lord Ram bowed down to the collective voice and sent his wife into exile. And this voice is neither rational nor all the time good: it sanctions Bhola's senile sensuality for his young wife and completely disregards the suffering of a young child. It's atrocious, isn't it? But the Indian mind finds something infinitely good in it; why else would Ram submit to it? The

goodness lies in the act of submission, of surrender: when the little 'I' submits to the larger whole, it is gradually obliterated, leading thus to Nirvana or Moksha. Isn't that the highest goal Indian society sets for itself?

Family is thus a discipline; it teaches a lot to Ragghu. For eight years Ragghu undergoes the discipline of an unsavoury existence. No changes are visible in him as yet. Then one day Bhola dies, and on Ragghu falls the mantle of the patriarch. Suddenly we find him radically transformed, as if the caterpillar had become a butterfly. There is so much of goodness, love and compassion in him, that even Panna finds it hard to believe this sudden change:

Panna couldn't believe her eyes. This was completely unexpected, leading her to wonder if perhaps Ragghu was just trying to show the world how much he cared for them, when all the while a knife was in his thoughts. Like a hunter in ambush, ready to spring, he'd kill them. He was a cobra, a cobra!

Truth of course doesn't need any convincing: it is its own proof. When Ragghu sells his gold coin to buy a milch cow for the children, Panna can no longer disbelieve him. For the next five years the family prospers; everyone lives happily and the boys go to school. "There wasn't another farmer in the village as hard-working, honest and dependable as Ragghu".

In the next scene, when Muliya arrives determined to bring about separation in the household, his goodness appears a weakness. He resists, he begs, he explains:

Don't throw salt on my wound, Muliya. You're the only person responsible for all this. If I didn't love this family, who would? I'm the one who's kept them together by sheer hard work. The ones I held in my lap and fed are going to carry my name. But now I can't even frown at the children I used to scold.

But more than this he suffers within:

Who was he abandoning? The children he'd cherished and fed, raised like babies, for whom he had suffered so many hardships— he was to separate from them. Could he throw his loved ones out of the house? He felt completely helpless.

His suffering reaches its peak, when he starts seeing the ghost of his dead father:

All night his mind was troubled. An unknown doubt shadowed his spirit, as though Bhola Mahto were sitting at the door weeping. Several times he woke up suddenly, startled by the feeling that Bhola was staring at him with scorn in his eyes.

As in the first eight years with Bhola and Panna, so in the last five of his life, Ragghu silently suffers his fate. The first phase brought him life, gave him a new birth; the last one brings him death and redemption. He dies having paid his debt.

Paying with his death for the sins of others, his end is tragic. He is misunderstood by his brothers: "If I were in my brother's place I'd speak with the stick.... It's all his doing, and it all worked out just the way it had to," comments Kedar. His wife, Muliya is unrepentant. The only person who understands him is Panna.

#### **7.4.3.2 Panna**

Not much is told about the first eight years of Panna's life with Bhola Mahto, except that her husband was enamoured of her beauty and she became the mother of four children, and that she was callous in her treatment of Ragghu. She is young, immature and shows no signs of growth. When Bhola dies, she is distrustful of Ragghu and is even contemplating leaving the house and getting married again. She is rebellious and would not accept her fate meekly. She has no intention of becoming a "maidservant" in the house of one whom "she used to consider her own servant".

Like Ragghu, she too undergoes a sudden transformation. It is love that wins her over. When she becomes aware of an extraordinary beauty of selfless love in Ragghu, the same love and beauty begin to blossom in her. As soon as she finds that Ragghu is selling his gold coin to buy a cow, she asks him to keep his coin and sell her neckless instead. It's pure selflessness and compassion for others that makes her bring Ragghu's wife home. Even when she is warned of Muliya's vitriolic temperament, she is quite ready to make the necessary sacrifices for Ragghu's happiness.

As Muliya marches ahead with her plans to bring about the *algyojha*, more than once Panna tries to save the situation for everybody. When the separation becomes inevitable and can no longer be avoided, she makes the supreme sacrifice of pretending to hasten the events so as to lessen the pain of Ragghu's suffering. To put his soul at peace, her mother's heart opens up to him in a rush of gratitude and calm assurance:

If this is God's will, then nobody can do anything about it. We've lived together for as many days as fate has written. This now is her desire: so be it. But I can't forget all that you've done for my children. If you hadn't devoted yourself to them who knows what would have happened to them by now, who knows what door they'd be knocking at for scraps to eat or where they'd be wandering around begging. As long as I live I'll sing your praises, and if my hide could serve to make shoes for you I'd gladly give it. Though I may live apart from you, whenever you call I'll come running. Don't ever believe that while we are separated I'll think ill of you. If a day comes when misfortune hits you, that day I'll drink poison and die. May God bless you with money and children! Even as I die every bit of me will keep uttering this blessing. And, if the children are truly their father's, then until they die they'll honour you for your loving care.

A long excerpt, but necessary. True to her words, all through the days of separation she treats Ragghu's sons as her own grandchildren, even if she is not on talking terms with Muliya.

When Ragghu dies, and fate compels her to don the mantle of the matriarch, it's the best of motherhood that shines through her. She takes great trouble to clear the heart of her sons of all misgivings against Ragghu. She cannot bear to see the name of the departed soul tainted. She sees to it that her sons well look after Ragghu's crops, more than they do their own. She makes Muliya return to the old undivided household and renders the devil of *algyojha* undone. Last but not the least, as a befitting conclusion to the happy ending of Indian tradition of storytelling, she arranges for the marriage of Muliya with her son Kedar.

#### **7.4.3.3 Muliya**

Ragghu symbolises the human spirit that struggles to create and build against all odds. In his struggle, suffering and fall, in his tragic flaw, he is quite like the western tragic hero. Panna is the Madonna, a figure of pity, compassion and suffering, supporting from behind her struggling child. But who is Muliya? She is an evil force that comes to destroy. She has no other purpose. Then what is the nature of this evil?

We have seen that when Muliya comes to Ragghu's house, she has already made up her mind as to what she wants. She is determined to achieve her goal at any cost. Even before she steps in her new home, she is already cursing everyone there. She will not tolerate Panna behaving like a queen and her children like princes. She does not know them, she has not seen them, but she thinks she knows everything and everybody. This is the nature of evil. It lives in darkness, crooked and deformed and thinks it knows the truth. It is blind to all goodness, even hates what is good. It seeks its separate, sovereign existence, away and in opposition to the whole. It does not care for anything except its own little selfish profit.

Muliya's very first attack is armed with the weapon of 'falsehood'. "I have no idea how much you earn or what she [Panna] does with it. You assume it stays right here in the house, but just see what kind of pittance you are left with". She is suggesting that Panna is a thief and is hoarding Ragghu's hard-earned money.

Next, she is openly disrespectful towards Panna and becomes noncooperative. One day, Panna needs to go to the pond to take bath and asks Muliya to watch over drying *mahua* leaves. Muliya's reply reveals what kind of person she is: "I feel sleepy, you stay here and watch. If you don't bathe one day what will it matter?"

One evening, Panna returns home having worked all day in the fields and finds that Muliya has not done any cooking and the children have missed their midday meal. Kedar can read her mind; he tells his mother: "Bhabhi doesn't want to live with you". In another scene, it's the festival time and children are going to the village fair. Muliya refuses to give any money to Panna's children. When Ragghu tries to intervene they all get a taste of Muliya's biting tongue. The children do not go to the fair, and both Panna and Muliya go without food for the next two days. Ragghu approaches Muliya to pacify her, only to see the true face of the demoness she is:

When he saw her face he was frightened. That sweetness of hers, that charm, that beauty, everything had disappeared. Her teeth were bared, her eyes bulged, her nostrils were flaring. Staring from eyes as red as burning coals she said....

He tries to argue, to persuade, to explain, but all to no effect. "I can't tell you how the very thought of separating hurts me. I couldn't stand the pain of it". She doesn't care. All such sentiments are foreign to her nature. She is cruel and enjoys inflicting pain on others.

It's only when Ragghu dies, when all is lost and her pride broken that she sees the light. Suffering has a cleansing effect. When Panna tells that Kedar "isn't going to let you live apart, Bahu. He says Ragghu died for you so we too will die for his children," Muliya for the first time "felt ashamed of her selfishness; and for the first time her soul regretted the separation".

As Ragghu's goodness had brought about the sudden outburst of goodness in Panna after Bhola Mahto's death, so does now Kedar's goodness and love give a new life to Muliya. Not by any act of hers, but by that infinite goodness inherent in the family is she redeemed. When she hears how much Kedar loves and cares for her:

Muliya's pale body, withered from grief of widowhood, suddenly flushed pink as a lotus. What she had lost ten years before she had in a way got back in one instant, and with interest. The same charm and exuberance, the same attraction, the same tenderness.

If anything can redeem evil, it is Love.

#### **7.4.3.4 The Minor Characters**

Panna has four children – Kedar, Khunnu, Lacchman and Jhunia, but only the eldest, Kedar, is a minor character. Why are others not minor characters? Do they have any role in the story? Are they given any action? People who do not contribute to the action in the story cannot be called characters; they are just names to swell information and facts.

Kedar is a minor character, because right from the beginning he has a role to play. He is fairly intelligent and is the first to spot that Muliya seeks separation. He also has a mind of his own. When he hears what Muliya had been doing, he asks, "Then brother must have scolded sister-in-law, didn't he?" Later he tells, "If I were in my brother's place I'd speak with the stick". He misunderstands his brother, but, right or wrong, he thinks for himself.



After the separation, he steps into his brother's shoes and takes over the outdoor responsibilities. When Ragghu dies, he is almost ready to take over as the patriarch. But he is not a fully drawn character like Panna, Ragghu or Muliya. He is there because he has a role to fulfil. Without him, Muliya's redemption, which is an integral part of a well-rounded ending, cannot be worked out.

#### **7.4.4 Style and Technique**

Premchand makes use of a dramatic style in telling this story. There is a strong element of characterisation. All major characters are unique in their personality and fully developed. They all have their individuality and none can be said to be a mouthpiece for the author. They think, they feel, they suffer and they act. They combine to create a rich theatre.

Next, we have a well-developed story with a properly built plot structure. There is a beginning and background, as Ragghu and Panna evolve and fully come into their own. Then there is the middle, where the drama of separation - *algyojha* - is played out in rich detail. The resolution provides a happy ending, where the victory of good and truth is convincingly clinched and reiterated.

The action develops through a series of small but significant scenes: Ragghu building a toy cart for the children and playing with them; Panna joining in to hear Ragghu's plan of buying a cow; Panna acting to bring Muliya home and the latter's arrival; then a series of scenes leading to the separation; the two groups of village women playing an explicit role of the chorus; Ragghu's suffering all throughout and his dying days; Muliya's change of fortune when she struggles to cope with the demands of harvesting; Kedar and Panna coming to the rescue of Muliya.... We must have missed quite a few in this long list.

Then there are long dialogues that bring out the core of a character, like the one by Panna quoted at length at 7.4.3.2. The interior monologues, the suffering, anguish and hallucination of characters are equally detailed. We have already noted

---

how one can trace all the elements of a tragic hero in Ragghu, his rise, hamartia and fall.

The theme is profound. Behind the enactment of a particular tale is hidden the grand and universal story of man's struggle, fall and redemption.

Thus Premchand uses all the elements of drama to tell a flawless dramatic tale.

---

## **EXERCISE 2**

---

1. Discuss some of the limitations inherent in translation. Support your answer with examples from the original text and the English translation.
2. Why does the author treat Indian family as a rich and meaningful institution?
3. Discuss the rise and fall of Ragghu.
4. Do you think Panna represents the pure and timeless motherhood of Nature?
5. Write a short note on the role played by Kedar.
6. Which of the following is the most important factor responsible for Ragghu's death?
  - a. He has to work alone in the fields
  - b. He lacks proper diet and medical treatment
  - c. He lives with a tremendous load of inner psychological suffering
  - d. He is too sensitive to other people's opinion
7. What brings about a new change in Panna?
  - a. She is ashamed of her earlier treatment of Ragghu

- b. She is a widow and her days of fun and frolic are over
  - c. She is won over by the genuine goodness in Ragghu
  - d. She decides it's time to change
- 

## **7.5 SUMMING UP**

---

In this unit you have learned

- About Premchand's various facets as a writer
- The problems of translating an Indian text into English
- How to read symbolically a rich literary text
- About the use of dramatic art in the telling of a story

You have seen how Premchand combines the techniques of Western art forms with the traditional Indian ethos. You have also noted how various literary elements – like plot construction, characterisation, the raising of theme to include the universal in human existence, use of dialogues to build up necessary emotions – are brought to perfection, and Premchand emerges as a quintessential artist.

---

## **7.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

---

### **Exercise 1**

1. Wikipedia has a very detailed write up on Premchand.
2. You will find quite a few such scenes listed in the discussion at 7.4.4.
3. (d)

### **Exercise 2**

1. Refer to the discussion given at 7.4.1.
2. Refer to the discussion given at 7.4.2.1

3. Refer to the discussion given at 7.4.3.1
4. Refer to the discussion given at 7.4.3.2
5. Refer to the section 7.4.3.4
6. (c)
7. (c)

---

## 7.7 REFERENCES

---

Orsini, Francesca. Ed. *The Oxford India Premchand*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004. Print.

Premchand. *Algyojha*. <http://premchand.kahaani.org/2006/03/algyojha.html>. Web.

Premchand. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Premchand>. Web

Rubin, David. Trans. "Divided Hearths" in *The Oxford India Premchand*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004. Print. 400-418.

Verma, Dharendra et al. Eds. *Hindi Sahitya Kosh Bhaag 2*. Varanasi: Jnanmandal Limited, 1986. Print.

---

## 7.8 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

---

1. Critically examine the two sides of the main theme, *algyojha*.
2. Discuss the various aspects of Ragghu's character, and show how his growth reveals a pattern of beginning, middle and end.
3. Attempt a critical analysis of the wickedness and transformation of Muliya.
4. Discuss in some detail the dramatic elements in the story.

**UNIT 8 D. H. LAWRENCE:**

***THE PRUSSIAN OFFICER***

---

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Objectives

8.3 The author and the text

8.3.1 Freud, Jung and the School of Psychoanalysis

8.3.2 David Herbert Lawrence

8.3.3 The Prussian Officer: a critical commentary and a summary

8.4 Analysing the story

8.4.1 Theme: what is it about?

8.4.1.1 War: the background and preparation

8.4.1.1.1 The inhuman setting

8.4.1.1.2 The key players

8.4.1.1.3 Issues and provocations

8.4.1.1.4 The hardening of positions

8.4.1.2 War: the retaliation and the kill

8.4.1.3 War: the aftermath

8.4.2 Style and Technique

8.5 Summing Up

8.6 Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

8.7 References

8.8 Terminal and Model Questions

## **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

---

In the earlier Block you read three stories from India, each one by a different author but all three rooted in the Indian landscape and ethos. In this Block you are going to study three stories from the West, each one from a different country – England, Russia and America, and each representing a different ethos.

The first of these stories *The Prussian Officer* is by D. H. Lawrence who is known for his elaborate in-depth psychological treatment of his characters. This story revolves around two central characters, an army officer and his orderly, and all that goes inside their heads.

Some Indian schools of meditation, Vipassana, for example, have also developed methods of exploring the hidden recesses of psyche in order to find out what ails an individual. This story, which some of you may not like or may not understand, is nevertheless a fine introduction to an artist's creative application of the theory of psychoanalysis. The school of psychoanalysis, developed by Freud and Jung, was well established by 1914 when Lawrence wrote *The Prussian Officer*.

---

## **8.2 OBJECTIVES**

---

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

- Identify some of the events in Lawrence's life that worked as major influences in his creative writings.
- Define psychoanalysis and its role in Lawrence's fiction.
- Explain how Lawrence exemplifies a major literary movement.
- Attempt a critique of Lawrence's story.

---

### **8.3 The author and the text**

---

To quite some extent, every author is a product of his age. Lawrence was born and grew up in an age that redefined the self-image of man. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Freud had given to the world a highly complex tool of psychoanalysis and Carl Jung was busy developing an equally elaborate theory of collective unconscious. As a result, interest in psychological studies became a predominant preoccupation among academics from Europe to America. Lawrence was the child of his age and was naturally drawn to the potentials of this new branch of human knowledge. Almost like a professional practitioner, he devoted himself fully to the exploration of the psychological foundations of human personality. To appreciate this story by Lawrence, one needs some understanding of the basic concepts behind Freudian and Jungian psychology. More than anything else, Lawrence was an ‘autobiographical’ author. Some knowledge of his life, therefore, will be of great help in appreciating his work.

#### **8.3.1 Freud, Jung and the School of Psychoanalysis**

Sigmund Freud, the founder of the school of psychoanalysis, a term he coined in 1896, has rightly been called the “most influential intellectual legislator of his age” by Encyclopaedia Britannica. The other famous psychologists of the twentieth century – Alfred Adler, Wilhelm Stekel, Sándor Ferenczi, Carl Gustav Jung, Otto Rank, Ernest Jones, Max Eitingon, and A.A. Brill – were either his collaborators or disciples at some point of time. It was Freud’s influential work that made “psychological man” the predominant self-image of modern man replacing the earlier defining identities such as social, religious, political and economic.

Freud asserted that all movements of psyche and mind could be explained in physiological and material terms. He said all energy was sexual in nature (libido), and all psychological problems arose from the repression of this energy. He also contended that every relationship, including most importantly the parent-child relationship, was in effect sexual in its nature. Explaining his now notoriously

famous theory of Oedipus Complex, he conjectured that every male child desired to sleep with his mother and nurtured a secret wish to remove his father who remained the one serious obstacle in the fulfilment of that desire. When the mother as the secret beloved becomes an obsession, the son is said to be suffering from an oedipal complex. The opposite of this, a daughter's excessive attachment to her father, is known as Electra Complex.

The inability to fulfil these sexual fantasies leads to the repression of sexual energy which in turn takes various forms of pathological disorders and neurosis. The conscious mind, or the Ego, represses all socially unacceptable desires which then seek expression through dreams, jokes and slips of tongue or pen. The psychoanalysis, through the help of an analyst, attempts to free these repressions lodged in the unconscious and helps the patient to recover his sanity. The artist, according to Freud, succeeds in avoiding this repression by finding a release through his search for beauty.

Freud said that private obsessional neuroses were personal religious systems, and religion was a mass neurosis of mankind. God was nothing but a projection of childish wishes for an omnipotent father. When Hitler damned the Jews and the psychoanalysis as a "Jewish science", Freud was forced to flee to England and psychoanalysis thus reached England and America.

Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist who founded analytic psychology, was for five years – 1907 to 1912 – Freud's close collaborator and for a time seemed his most likely successor. But Jung was so radically different from his mentor that the two had to eventually part ways for good. Freud was a materialist and an atheist, while Jung has had experiences of God and was privy to visitations of prophetic visions and dreams that could hardly be explained in Freudian terms.

In order to explain the nature of such visions and dreams, Jung posited that beyond the individual's tract of a personal unconscious, there lay a much larger region of



---

Collective Unconscious which was available to every individual. It was the storehouse of collective memory and the seat of universal archetypes that made their appearance in all forms of art and literature as well as in individual imagery and behaviour. At the root of the meaninglessness in the life of modern man, Jung proposed, was the loss of religious belief. If one could discover one's own myth hidden behind one's dreams and imagination or else could create one that explained life in sensible terms, that would bring an integration of a fragmented psyche and would make one whole again. This process Jung referred to as individuation.

While Freud seems a much more direct influence on Lawrence, especially in *The Prussian Officer*, Jung's psychological tools of understanding can be of much greater help in appreciating the larger body of art and culture, both ancient and modern.

### **8.3.2 David Herbert Lawrence**

Lawrence had an unhappy childhood fraught with all kinds of problems – physical, material and emotional. His father was uneducated and worked as a miner. His mother had been a schoolteacher and was grossly dissatisfied with her husband's economic and cultural status. The two of them fought continuously. The mother was somewhat ambitious for her son David and was determined to send him to school and keep away from the mines. The family was considerably poor. With the help of a scholarship Lawrence managed to study for three years at Nottingham High School, but was forced to drop out at the age of 15. He took up some job and after saving some money resumed his study at the Nottingham University College. As a child, he was also often ill and needed constant care. In such circumstances Lawrence became excessively attached to his mother who long desired to fulfil her ambitions through her son.

At the age of 16 he found his soulmate in Jessie Chambers, a local girl who encouraged him to write and publish. The relationship failed to fructify and the reason for this failure, as Lawrence would admit in *Sons and Lovers*, was his

oedipal attachment to his mother. Only after his mother died in 1910, Lawrence could give himself completely to another woman, Frieda. Frieda, a mother of three children and wife of Lawrence's old professor, was six years older than Lawrence and was completely dissatisfied with her husband. They eloped to Europe in 1912, staying abroad for a year, and were married in 1914 on Frieda obtaining her divorce. Because of her nationality, the two of them were suspected by the British to be German agents during the World War I and consequently exiled. For the rest of his life, travelling in Europe, Ceylon, Australia, and America., Lawrence remained in virtual exile. One reason for this exile was literary: Lawrence was obsessed with exploring the sexual side of human relationship, and in depicting explicitly the physical intercourse he sought to legitimise the use of four-lettered words. Some of his books were banned or printed privately. Lawrence died of tuberculosis in 1930 in France.

Among his better-known works are *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1920) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (written in 1926-27, and published in 1944). Two of his non-fiction works, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921), and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) show his interest in psychology.

### **8.3.3 *The Prussian Officer*: a critical commentary and a summary**

The story opens with what would be a commonplace scene in the war-ravaged Europe in 1914. A regiment of soldiers is marching through a hot inhuman landscape. Two figures stand out: the Captain who leads the regiment, and his orderly who is physically hurt and is walking with difficulty. We are made aware of a strange bond that exists between these two:

The orderly felt he was connected with that figure moving so suddenly on horseback: he followed it like a shadow, mute and inevitable and damned

by it. And the officer was always aware of the tramp of the company behind, the march of his orderly among the men.

Who are they? And what is the background for this strange relationship? The very next paragraph in the story provides the answer:

The Captain was a tall man of about forty, grey at the temples. He had a handsome, finely knit figure, and was one of the best horsemen in the West. His orderly, having to rub him down, admired the amazing riding-muscles of his loins.

If you remember that 'loins' has euphemistically been used, since the time of the Authorised Version of the Bible, for human genitals, you will notice that a subconscious homoerotic relationship – which is a shade different from an explicit homosexual relationship – is clearly suggested.

There is also this very old theory that there exists a very strong attraction between the opposites. The officer and his orderly are in every way opposite of each other. At the outer level, one is middle-aged, aristocrat and an officer; while the other is a young peasant and a soldier. At a deeper level, the two represent very different psychological types. The officer is clearly an Apollonian type: proud and conscious of his body, power and hierarchical status; ruthless, domineering, lustful and altogether devoid of love; warring, subjugating and in conflict with everything around him. He has “the look of a man who fights with life.”

He had never married: his position did not allow of it, and no woman had ever moved him to it.... Now and then he took himself a mistress. But after such an event, he returned to duty with his brow still more tense, his eyes still more hostile and irritable.

Sex is not joyous; it's a demeaning act, a fall, for which he hates himself.

The orderly is a Dionysian character. (To understand the Apollonian-Dionysian types, refer to the section 12.4.2 in BAEL-201). He is a simple, innocent young man who longs to go back to his village and be with his young sweetheart. He has also a sure, spontaneous connection with life which is reflected in his every movement.

The orderly was a youth of about twenty-two, of medium height, and well built. He had strong, heavy limbs, was swarthy, with a soft, black, young moustache. There was something altogether warm and young about him. He had firmly marked eyebrows over dark, expressionless eyes, that seemed never to have thought, only to have received life direct through his senses, and acted straight from instinct.

Now let us see why the suggested homoerotic relationship between the two becomes one of growing hatred on both sides. This muddled up, distorted truth of human existence comes from the muddled up Freudian psychology which asserts that hate is an abnormal reversal of love.

The officer hates the young man for reminding him of everything he lacks – warmth, youth, flexibility and spontaneity.

He could not get away from the sense of the youth's person, while he was in attendance. It was like a warm flame upon the older man's tense, rigid body, that had become almost unliving, fixed. There was something so free and self-contained about him, and something in the young fellow's movement, that made the officer aware of him. And this irritated the Prussian. He did not choose to be touched into life by his servant.... And yet as the young soldier moved unthinking about the apartment, the elder watched him.... And it irritated him.

Why does the officer get angry on seeing such a young, beautiful person? Don't you think, it is an ugly woman who gets angry on seeing a beautiful girl? It is

ugliness that revolts against itself when faced with something good and beautiful. What makes the officer so ugly? Try to read critically a sentence such as, “He did not choose to be touched into life by his servant”. Mark the words ‘did not choose’ and ‘servant’, and think about what the author might be suggesting. Can you also notice the subtle erotic suggestion? Remember, the officer is a sexually frustrated ageing man. As we mentioned earlier, you cannot avoid noticing this sexual obsession in Freud, Lawrence and the whole of Western culture!

The officer’s anger and hatred keep building up. The story gives two incidents to show how it reaches its climax. In the first one, the orderly rather clumsily handles a bottle and spills some wine. The result is catastrophic:

...the officer had started up with an oath, and his eyes, bluey like fire, had held those of the confused youth for a moment. It was a shock for the young soldier. He felt something sink deeper, deeper into his soul, where nothing had ever gone before. It left him rather blank and wondering. Some of his natural completeness in himself was gone, a little uneasiness took its place.

Henceforward the orderly was afraid of really meeting his master. His subconsciousness remembered those steely blue eyes and the harsh brows, and did not intend to meet them again.

The more the orderly tries to keep himself aloof, the more compellingly at a subconscious level the officer feels himself drawn to him: “the influence of the young soldier’s being had penetrated through the officer’s stiffened discipline, and perturbed the man in him.” The officer was a man of passionate temper but had always succeeded in suppressing his emotions. “Whereas the young soldier seemed to live out his warm, full nature, to give it off in his very movements, which had a certain zest, such as wild animals have in free movement. And this irritated the officer more and more.” It is this natural state of being from which the Captain has fallen and which he can no longer tolerate.

Following the wine incident, a subtle change starts taking place in the orderly. Something vital, especially in the relationship with his master, is dead. Even when he is commanded to look into the officer's face, his eyes show a strange blankness, look past the officer and do not register anything. The officer gets angrier and for no reason and on trivial issues starts hitting and kicking the orderly. But now, with every new act of violence, a definitive hatred starts gaining strength in the soldier's heart.

The next incident operates at a deeper level. The young soldier had a girlfriend. "He went with her, not to talk, but to have his arm round her, and for the physical contact". The officer sensed it and it made him madder. The older man knows nothing about love, and its very presence makes him insane. By keeping him occupied, the officer stops the orderly from meeting his girl. For himself, he goes out to spend a week with a new mistress, but returns thoroughly frustrated. It is then that one day he notices a pencil in the orderly's ear. What was it doing there? The soldier refuses to answer and is kicked and beaten severely. Slowly and with great pain he is made to reveal that he had been copying a poem for his sweetheart.

The incident is climactic. It makes the officer feel triumphant, but also deeply sinful and morally devastated as if he had destroyed the very source of life. He cannot face the act and struggles to keep it away from his consciousness:

The officer, left alone, held himself rigid, to prevent himself from thinking. His instinct warned him that he must not think. Deep inside him was the intense gratification of his passion, still working powerfully. Then there was a counter-action, a horrible breaking down of something inside him, a whole agony of reaction... he began to drink, drank himself to an intoxication, till he slept obliterated. When he woke in the morning he was shaken to the base of his nature. But he had fought off the realisation of what he had done.

The soldier is equally devastated, feeling as if he had been made to betray something very private and sacred, as if a sacrilege had been acted upon him. The officer could drink himself to forgetfulness; for the orderly, the drink made the pain more vivid. This pain, this death of his being, is something very personal, private and sacred to him.

It is at this point that the story opens. Keeping the whole experience, emotional as well physical, locked and secret inside his soul, the orderly has been walking with the rest of the regiment. This deep, unrelenting suffering brings to him a new level of awareness, brings to birth in him of something new, something not known before:

But it was only the outside of the orderly's body that was obeying so humbly and mechanically. Inside had gradually accumulated a core into which all the energy of that young life was compact and concentrated.... But hard there in the centre of his chest was himself, himself, firm, and not to be plucked to pieces.... He had a curious mass of energy inside him now. The Captain was less real than himself.

Unmindful of how much suffering the soldier might be undergoing, the Captain orders him to run to the nearest inn and fetch him some food. Once the food has been brought and served, the two of them find themselves alone in a clearing in the forest, man to man, and not a soul nearby. The officer is visibly nervous, as he eats his bread and drinks. The orderly clenches his fists, and "such a strong torment came into his wrists". Suddenly he attacks:

And in a second the orderly, with serious, earnest young face, and under-lip between his teeth, had got his knee in the officer's chest and was pressing the chin backward over the farther edge of the tree-stump, pressing, with all his heart behind in a passion of relief, the tension of his wrists exquisite with relief.

The author then gives a vivid description of this killing. Once the act is done, a deeply pervasive change takes over the young soldier. As the author says, "Here his own life also ended". Fever and sickness overtake the orderly and the psychological consequences of killing plunge him into delirium and borderland of death and darkness. A detailed discussion of this state of mind will be taken in the coming pages. At the end of his mad wanderings, the orderly is discovered sick and unconscious next morning and taken to hospital where he dies and his body is laid alongside his master.

### EXERCISE 1

1. What do you understand by Oedipus and Electra complexes?
2. Write a short note on Freud, Jung and Psychoanalysis.
3. Discuss briefly the major events in Lawrence's life.
4. Write a critical summary of *The Prussian Officer*.
5. Write true or false against the following:
  - a) Frieda was Lawrence's first beloved.
  - b) Lawrence was deeply attached to his mother.
  - c) The soldier did not like his master's mistresses.
  - d) Jung was a potential successor to Freud.
  - e) The orderly dies in hospital.
6. The orderly is kicked by the officer because he has
  - a) been reluctant in answering about the pencil
  - b) been negligent about his duties
  - c) refused to explain the scar on his thumb



---

d) None of the above

---

## **8.4 ANALYSING THE STORY**

---

The Prussian Officer is not a simple story. Part of its complexity arises from the style and manner in which the characters and theme have been treated. It is not an entertaining tale. It is an intricate artefact where the artist is at pain to communicate something more than the obvious. The characters, incidents and circumstances surrounding the story are stretched to almost breaking point, though nowhere are they exaggerated. The effect is of something being drilled down the reader's head. Not only the two characters but the reader as well is made to participate in an enactment of violence that goes beyond body and mind and creates convulsions in the soul. Who are these two characters – the officer and his orderly – and what forces do they represent? What is the sense of so much violence and destruction?

Since the characters are so intricately woven in the theme, which lies in the action between the two central figures and inside of them, the characterisation will not be discussed separately, as in the earlier Units. As you grasp the theme from its inception to its culmination, you will also understand the characters equally well.

### **8.4.1 Theme: what is it about?**

[Lawrence] was outspoken in his criticism of the war.

—The Oxford Companion to English Literature

One is aware of an almost demonic urge driving Lawrence towards the assertion of unexplored naturalistic allegiances to replace the civilizational values he hated and had rejected.

—Harry Blamires

My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and

---

believes and says, is always true. The intellect is only a bit and a bridle. What do I care about knowledge. All I want is to answer to my blood, direct, without fribbling intervention of mind, or moral, or what-not. (17 January 1913)

. . . primarily I am a passionately religious man, and my novels must be written from the depth of my religious experience. That I must keep to, because I can only work like that. (22 April 1914)

—Extracts from D. H. Lawrence's Letters

That the story is primarily about war is made clear by its setting; that it was published in 1914, the year of the outbreak of the first World War, goes to show what kind of readership it was meant to address and to what purpose. Who are the people responsible for wars, and who are the victims? This socially approved and politically legitimised mass murder of humanity has far-deeper consequences than merely economic and physical. It is a violence against nature, against the spirit of life, and is inevitably attended by an eternal damnation in darkness and hell. The story is a study of war in its three stages: the preparation, the killing, and the consequences.

True to Lawrence's avowed purpose behind his writings, the treatment of the theme is predominantly religious, if we take 'religious' to mean the things of soul and spirit.

#### **8.4.1.1 War: the background and preparation**

The background includes the setting, the scenario of battleground, the key players, and issues that form the bone of contention. The preparation refers to the actual building up of energies, the provocations, and the hardening of positions.

##### **8.4.1.1.1 The inhuman setting**

Read how the story opens;

They had marched more than thirty kilometres since dawn, along the white, hot road where occasional thickets of trees threw a moment of shade, then out into the glare again. On either hand, the valley, wide and shallow, glittered with heat; dark green patches of rye, pale young corn, fallow and meadow and black pine woods spread in a dull, hot diagram under a glistening sky. But right in front the mountains ranged across, pale blue and very still, snow gleaming gently out of the deep atmosphere. And towards the mountains, on and on, the regiment marched.... The burnished, dark green rye threw on a suffocating heat, the mountains drew gradually nearer and more distinct. While the feet of the soldiers grew hotter, sweat ran through their hair under their helmets, and their knapsacks could burn no more in contact with their shoulders, but seemed instead to give off a cold, prickly sensation.

Mark the use of these words and phrases: ‘hot road’, ‘glare’, ‘glittered with heat’, ‘hot diagram under a glistening sky’, ‘a suffocating heat’, ‘the feet of the soldiers grew hotter’, ‘sweat ran through their hair under their helmets’, and ‘their knapsacks could burn no more’. In literary reading of imagery, we would call it a virtual hell where fire and heat rage all around and everyone gets burnt alive. Under such conditions, a regiment of soldiers “had marched more than thirty kilometres since dawn”. To what purpose? To have a drill exercise imagining that an unknown enemy had overtaken some bridge! What madness! And this they are made to do day in and day out. If not a pointless, insane, inhuman existence, what else could be the end-result of such living?

#### **8.4.1.1.2 The key players**

One of the two players, the Captain, who is responsible for starting the violence, is already mad when the story opens and is pushing the other to the brink of madness

---

as the action unfolds. He is from the aristocracy, that minuscule of society which in the civilised world lives for power as its religion. “It pleased him. The command pleased him. And he was feeling proud.”

He is not a living person, but rather a dead institution. What he can do or cannot do is decided by his rank in the hierarchical division of society: “He had never married: his position did not allow of it”. The commoners, those below his status, are hardly human. They are objects that exist to serve him. Women, one after another, are taken as mistresses to satisfy his lust. He is as impersonal as a machine with his men and women; for, to be personal would require a living centre which he had abjured long ago: “With the men, however, he was merely impersonal, though a devil when roused; so that, on the whole, they feared him, but had no great aversion from him. They accepted him as the inevitable”. It is when he is aroused that he betrays himself; for example, when he no longer can control himself and starts shouting at the orderly: “What cattle were you bred by, that you can’t keep straight eyes?” Yes, all others below his station are cattle! He plays with them for pleasure, power and authority. He is death and doles it out to others.

The other is life and carries it like a living fire wherever he goes. The orderly is a child of mother earth: simple, spontaneous, living through his heart, feelings and senses, just as any other living creature on earth. He enjoys poetry and love without knowing what lust is. He goes out with his girl, not for talking which is an intellectual affair, but for just being with her, to feel her with his arms, with his senses. Life, love and nature, everything is sacred to him; he would not betray them. He is vulnerable, like a child and mother earth; he can be ravaged and exploited, but only to a point. Beyond this point, something else takes over which destroys the destroyer. Such is the law of life, greater than any human law.

#### **8.4.1.1.3 Issues and provocations**

Human insanity is the only issue behind all wars. All other issues are trivial, artificial and unreal, concocted for a purpose. The only reason for whatever happens in the story is that the Captain is mad, has lost his sanity and balance. At the source of this insanity is the Captain's total disconnect with life, his suppression of feelings, emotions, and a freely outgoing sensuous apprehension of nature and reality. Lawrence made it clear when he said, "My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect". When the blood and flesh – the heart – are suppressed, the result, according to Freudian psychology, is neurosis, the loss of reason and sanity. The disease is visible even at a physical level: "The Captain's hand had trembled at taking his coffee at dawn: his orderly saw it again".

The repression of life is death; and death revolts at the sight of life.

... the officer had become aware of his servant's young, vigorous, unconscious presence about him.... It was like a warm flame upon the older man's tense, rigid body, that had become almost unliving, fixed. ...it was rather the blind, instinctive sureness of movement of an unhampered young animal that irritated the officer to such a degree.

He, however, was a gentleman, with long, fine hands and cultivated movements, and was not going to allow such a thing as the stirring of his innate self. He was a man of passionate temper, who had always kept himself suppressed.

A 'gentleman' is a socially-bred cultivated animal. Quite naturally, he hates "the stirring of his innate self," his soul, which is the seat of all life.

The first issue of conflict that drives the 'gentleman' mad is a scar on the orderly's left thumb.

The officer had long suffered from it, and wanted to do something to it. Still it was there, ugly and brutal on the young, brown hand. At last the Captain's

---

reserve gave way.... The elder man was sullenly angry. His servant avoided him. And the next day he had to use all his willpower to avoid seeing the scarred thumb.

The cultivated gentlemen do not keep a scar or a crooked tooth; they do something about it; they go to a plastic-surgeon or an orthodontist. They hate the natural state: the laundered suit, the painted face, the dyed hair are alone acceptable, as they pass the test of class. Likewise, whoring is a class-act but not love.

So the next conflict arises when the gentleman learns that the orderly has a sweetheart, that he has been meeting her and going for walks, that he has been copying verses for her. This is absolutely criminal in death's gentlemanly dispensation; it cannot be tolerated and must be ended now and forever.

“Why have you a piece of pencil in your ear?” he asked.

The orderly took his hands full of dishes.... Instead of answering, he turned dazedly to the door. As he was crouching to set down the dishes, he was pitched forward by a kick from behind.... And as he was rising he was kicked heavily again, and again...

The servant entered again.... The officer's tone bit like acid. “Why had you a pencil in your ear? ... What was it doing there?”

“I had been writing.... Some poetry, sir... For my girl, sir”....

#### **8.4.1.1.4 The hardening of positions**

It is these kickings in the last scene that decide the fate of the Captain. The humiliation of being forced to reveal that which is most sacred to him has brought about a psychological annihilation in the soldier. But this also brings a greater determination, a will, and the birth of a new being:

He had been forced to say, “For my girl.” He was much too done even to want to cry. His mouth hung slightly open, like an idiot’s. He felt vacant, and wasted.

And looking at his thighs, he saw the darker bruises on his swarthy flesh and he knew that, if he pressed one of his fingers on one of the bruises, he should faint. But he did not want to faint—he did not want anybody to know. No one should ever know. It was between him and the Captain. There were only the two people in the world now—himself and the Captain.

#### **8.4.1.2 War: the retaliation and the kill**

The officer at some level is aware that what he had done was something wrong, something stupid. “But he had fought off the realisation of what he had done. He had prevented his mind from taking it in, had suppressed it along with his instincts...” So when the two of them find themselves alone in the forest, he knows it was coming.

The Captain watched the rather heavy figure of the young soldier stumble forward, and his veins, too, ran hot. This was to be man to man between them. He yielded before the solid, stumbling figure with bent head.

The soldier represents Lawrence’s man who lives by the promptings of his blood and flesh. It is his flesh that acts in a critical moment and not his mind.

...he clenched his fists, such a strong torment came into his wrists.... And the instinct which had been jerking at the young man’s wrists suddenly jerked free. He jumped, feeling as if it were rent in two by a strong flame.

But the pleasure of even a triumph in war is only partial. Having killed, as he watches the dead man’s body lying broken and wasted, “there was a heavy relief in the orderly’s soul” but also an awareness that “it was a pity it was broken. It represented more than the thing which had kicked and bullied him”.

**8.4.1.3 War: the aftermath**

In the hands of a less gifted artist, the story should have ended here. For Lawrence, it is the beginning of another story where action is played out in the consciousness of man. War is not simply a politicians' game. Killing, whether in the name of nation or religion, is not a simple mechanical affair, for life is not mechanical and living is not a routine. The orderly discovers it soon after killing the officer. Even when he had all the valid reasons for doing it, the killing brings about a banishment of his soul.

For him a change had come over the world.... Only he had left it. And he could not go back... he could not get away from the sense of being divided from the others.... he sat there, beyond, like a man outside in the dark. He had gone out from everyday life into the unknown, and he could not, he even did not want to go back.

The body becomes sick with pain and dry heat; the mind detaches itself from the body and faces disintegration in "the incoherent race of delirium". Every few moments, he hears someone knocking,

Quickly, he saw the blood-disfigured face of his Captain, which he hated. And he held himself still with horror. Yet, deep inside him, he knew that it was so, the Captain should be dead. But the physical delirium got hold of him. Someone was knocking. He lay perfectly still, as if dead, with fear. And he went unconscious.

The fall, the banishment lies in separation from others. He finds the village, the church, the world out there in light and himself on the other side in darkness "where each thing existed alone". What does it matter? He consoles himself: they all have to come here one day. He is not sure where he is or what he is. Is it life or not-life? It is not just death, but a deeper hell where he faces disconnect with even those who, dying, are moving peacefully to the other side:



Suddenly he stood still with fear. There was a tremendous flare of gold, immense—just a few dark trunks like bars between him and it.... A woman, full-skirted, a black cloth on her head for head-dress, was passing like a block of shadow through the glistening, green corn, into the full glare. There was a farm, too, pale blue in shadow, and the timber black. And there was a church spire, nearly fused away in the gold. The woman moved on, away from him. He had no language with which to speak to her. She was the bright, solid unreality. She would make a noise of words that would confuse him, and her eyes would look at him without seeing him. She was crossing there to the other side.

Such is the damnation awaiting those who are responsible for war. This is Lawrence's message to his war-ravaged reader.

#### **8.4.2 Style and Technique**

As we have seen Lawrence was much influenced by the emergence of psychoanalysis. He not only made a creative use this new way of looking at life, it also helped him see his own life in a significant manner. For example, the protagonist in his autobiographical novel *Sons and Lovers* suffers from an oedipal complex; that is how Lawrence saw his excessive attachment to his mother.

Similarly, in *The Prussian Officer* we see how Lawrence goes to explore the psychological basis of a predominant trait in his characters. For him, it is not enough to state that a particular character suffers from perversity, but to go further and show how such a state of mind comes into being. He does not give a simple narrative of how the orderly accomplishes his revenge, but goes about describing it in such a manner as if it was independent of the orderly in its development and execution.

Lawrence's characters are not men of established traits and habits. They are living entities, responsive to a continuous drama being played out in their psyche. As such,

the psychological action acquires a greater significance in Lawrence than its physical counterpart. For example, we are not just told that the orderly suffered from dry fever as a result of wounds received by him and as a consequence from delirium which led to his death. That would be a clinical explanation. We are made to participate in the hell that comes alive as a consequence of his killing of the officer. This is called a psychological narrative. Lawrence's characters are psychological men and women. Therefore, the omnipresent point of view is suited best to a narrative like *The Prussian Officer*.

## EXERCISE 2

1. Write a short note on the key players in *The Prussian Officer*.
2. Discuss the consequences of killing in the story.
3. Write a short note on Lawrence's style and technique in *The Prussian Officer*.
4. Why does the orderly kill his officer?
  - a) He hates the officer
  - b) He has been forced to reveal something very private
  - c) He has continuously been mistreated by his master
  - d) All of the above

## 8.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learned

- About some significant events in the life of D. H. Lawrence
- The development and basic tenets of the school of psychoanalysis, particularly of Freud and Jung

- How to read symbolically a rich psychological text
- About the use of psychoanalysis in artistic creation

You have also seen how Lawrence develops in detail his characters and action by providing an in-depth psychological analysis of the factors behind them. We have attempted for you a reading of The Prussian Officer so as to make a complex text comprehensible to you.

## **8.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

### **Exercise 1**

1. Refer to the discussion given at 8.3.1.
2. Refer to the discussion given at 8.3.1.
3. Refer to the discussion given at 8.3.2.
4. Refer to the discussion given at 8.3.3.
5. (a) False; (b) True; (c) False; (d) True; (e) True
6. A

### **Exercise 2**

1. Refer to the discussion given at 8.4.1.1.2.
2. Refer to the discussion given at 8.4.1.3.
3. Refer to the discussion given at 8.4.2.
4. D

---

## **8.7 REFERENCES**

---

---

Blamires, Harry. *A Short History of English Literature* - 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Routledge, 1984. Print.

Cerf, Bennett A. Ed. *Great Modern Short Stories*. New York: Random House, 1942. Print.

Daiches, David. *The Penguin Companion to Literature*, Vol. 1: British & Commonwealth Literature. Harmondsworth,: Penguin Books, 1971. Print.

Drabble, Margaret. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopaedia Britannica 2008 Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008. CD-ROM

Jung, Carl. *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopaedia Britannica 2008 Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008. CD-ROM

Lawrence, D. H. *Extracts from Letters*.  
<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~cooneys/poems/dhl>

Lawrence, D. H. "The Prussian Officer" in *Great Modern Short Stories*. New York: Random House, 1942. Print. 177-206.

---

## 8.8 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

---

1. Critically examine the statement that Lawrence "was outspoken in his criticism of the war", with special reference to *The Prussian Officer*.
2. Compare and contrast the two central characters in *The Prussian Officer*.
3. Discuss the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis in Lawrence's writings, with special reference to *The Prussian Officer*.

---

## **UNIT 9 TOLSTOY**

### **“How Much Land Does a Man Need?”**

---

9.1. Introduction

9.2. Objectives

9.3. Leo Tolstoy – An Overview

9.4. Summary of ‘How much Land Does a Man Need?’

9.5. Glossary

9.6. Character Analysis

9.6.1. Pakhom

9.6.2. Devil

9.7. Analysis of the Story

9.7.1. Theme

9.7.2. Justification of the title

9.7.3. Style and Technique

9.8. Let us sum up

9.9. Self Assessment Questions

9.10. Answers to Self Assessment Questions

9.11. References

9.12. Suggested Reading

9.13. Terminal and Model Questions

## **9.1. INTRODUCTION**

---

In the previous unit, you read ‘The Prussian Officer’, one of the most celebrated psychological short stories by the English writer D. H. Lawrence. In this unit you will be introduced to one of the giants of Russian literature Leo Tolstoy, who was not just an author but was also a moral thinker and a social reformer. The story which we will be taking up in this unit is called ‘How Much Land Does a Man Need?’ It is a typical Tolstoy story, which has a moral to convey.

## **9.2. OBJECTIVES**

---

After going through this unit you will be:

- acquainted with the life and works of Leo Tolstoy
- understand Tolstoy as a writer and a thinker
- appreciate and analyze his story ‘How Much Land Does a Man Need?’

## **9.3. LEO TOLSTOY – AN OVERVIEW**

---

Count Leo Tolstoy was born as Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy on September 9, 1828 in Yasnaya Polyana, Tula Oblast, Russia to Count Nikolai Illyich Tolstoy and Countess Mariya Tolstaya. The honorific Count had been conferred on one of his ancestors in the early eighteenth century by Tzar Peter the Great. When Tolstoy was just eight years old, he lost both his parents. After his parents’ death, he along with his four siblings, was taken care of by his grandmother and aunts.

Tolstoy received very little formal education as a young boy, but as he was an eager learner, he picked up how to read and write at home. In the year 1844, when he was just sixteen years of age, he began studying law and oriental languages at Kazan University, but shortly after enrolling, he had to give his studies up as he was declared as an “unfit” student by his teachers. He then went back to his native, Yasnaya Polyana, stayed there for some time and later joined the Caucasus army, along with his brother. It was around this time that he started writing and published

---

his autobiographical trilogy, *Childhood* (1852), *Boyhood* (1854) and *Youth* (1857). Between 1860-'61 Tolstoy undertook a tour to Europe which was instrumental in bringing about a political and literary transformation in him as it was during this time that he met great minds like Victor Hugo and Pierre Joseph Proudhon . We can see a strong influence of the writings of these men in Tolstoy's widely acclaimed novel, *War and Peace* which appeared between the years 1865 and 1869. *War and Peace* was followed by *Anna Karenina*. *Anna Karenina* was the novel which established Tolstoy as an author. After the tour, on September 23, 1862, Tolstoy married Sophia Andreevna Behrs, who was sixteen years his junior. The initial years of their marriage were happy ones, however, the later ones, as described by the critical biographer, A. N. Wilson, sadly became "one of the unhappiest in literary history".

Tolstoy who was a member of Russian nobility, was by now an acclaimed writer as well. However, Tolstoy was not an ordinary man, meant just to be a writer. He had a questioning mind, which was always wondering in search of Truth. As mentioned earlier, he toured Europe in 1861-'62, met great minds like Victor Hugo and Pierre Joseph Proudhon, being influenced by them and other leading thinkers, returned home and established thirteen schools for the children of serfs there. Later Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, transformed this Russian nobleman into an ascetic. However, it was not just Schopenhauer who changed Tolstoy's thinking, the Bible too had a profound influence on his philosophical mind. He chose "voluntary poverty" after reading Chapter 19, Verse 24 of the Gospel of Matthew which states, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Later on, Mahatma Gandhi too, treading on Tolstoy's footsteps, chose the path of "Swaichik Dalidrata", in order to attain purity in life. By now, Tolstoy had already set on a spiritual quest, and chose religion as a means of reaching it. He wrote extensively on Christianity, nonetheless, his approach was different for he interpreted the Bible in a novel way. His *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, which is considered an

---

important text of Tolstoy an, Christian Anarchist and Non-Violent Movements worldwide, “laid out a new organization for societies based on a literal Christian interpretation.” Tolstoy is well known in our country for his letter, A Letter to a Hindoo, which he wrote in response to two letters sent by Tarak Nath Das, a Bengali revolutionary and scholar, who wanted to seek Tolstoy’s support for India’s independence from British colonial rule. In his letter, Tolstoy stated that India could only win her independence through the principles of love and passive resistance as he saw love as the panacea for all the ills of life. This letter left a deep impression in the mind of Gandhiji, so much so, that he made truth and non-violence his sole weapons in the independence movement. After leading a long life of 82 years, Tolstoy died of pneumonia in 1910. As he was a champion of the peasants’ rights, thousands of peasants participated in his funeral to pay their tribute to him.

The father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi, was highly inspired by “The Sage of Yasanaya Polyana” and recognized him as “the greatest Apostle of Non-violence that the present age has produced.”

---

#### **9.4. SUMMARY OF ‘HOW MUCH LAND DOES A MAN NEED?’**

---

‘How Much Land Does a Man Need?’ is a short story about a man named Pakhom who in his lust for land forfeits everything, including his own life. The story opens with a dialogue between two sisters- the elder one who is a city dweller and is married to a tradesman and the younger one, who comes from a rural background and is married to a peasant. Soon their discussion takes the form of an argument on whether the city or the rural life is better. The elder sister regarded the city life better, whereas, the younger sister was satisfied with her rural existence. Pakhom, the husband of the younger sister, who was listening to their conversation, felt that he had one complaint in life, and that was that he was in possession of very little land. He felt that had he possessed more land, he would not fear anyone, not even the Devil himself. Strangely enough, the Devil was listening to their conversation and said to himself that he would provide Pakhom enough land and then take it



back again to show that the devil *has* to be feared all the time. It so happens that a Barina in the village eventually decides to sell her land and the village peasants buy the land in separate lots, according to their capacity. Pakhom too wished to buy the land so he manages to collect half of the money in order to purchase twenty acres of land by selling one of their foals, half of their bees and putting their son out to service. He then selected fifteen dessiatins and a small piece of timber land and paid half the amount to the Barina. He worked hard on his newly acquired property and was soon able to pay off all his debts easily. Finally, Pakhom had his own land and his happiness knew no bounds. However, in due course of time, some problems crept up with his land; he was troubled by his neighbours who often left their cattle grazing in his field. The cattle destroyed his crop and as a result of this he entered into a discord with the fellow peasants. It was around this time that a traveller peasant came to see Pakhom who told him about a new settlement, Samara, which lay beyond the Volga, where every settler was being allotted ten dessiatins of fertile land in which one could grow rye. Pakhom got excited listening to this and didn't want to let go this opportunity so he made up his mind to go there and make enquiries about the land. On reaching there, he found that here a man could have a dessiatin for three rubles! Moreover, there a man could have the finest land possible to any extent. Pakhom returned home, and sold off all his property and cattle immediately at high profit. That spring he started off along with his family for the new destination. Here he was allotted fifty dessiatins of land in which he was able to grow even more crops, including corn, thus, he reaped a larger profit. His allotted land was twice of what he had formally possessed in which he built a homestead, but soon this land too started appearing small to him. He had higher ambitions now, he wished to grow white Turkish wheat and several other crops, but the land allotted to him was not suitable for this purpose so Pakhom was troubled with his land yet once again. It was around this time that a merchant drove up to Pakhom's homestead. The merchant told Pakhom that he had purchased five thousand dessiatins for only a thousand rubles from the Bashkirs, who were simple and

content people. Pakhom now pays a visit to the Bashkirs and tries to buy as much of their land for as low a price he can negotiate. However, their offer was very unusual as their land cost “one thousand rubles per day” which meant that a keen buyer could walk around as large an area as he wanted, starting at day-break, marking his way with a spade and if he reached the starting point by sunset, all the land covered by him would be his. Pakhom was thrilled at the proposal as he thought that he had chanced upon a bargain of a life-time. He was unable to sleep the whole night long as he kept on thinking of different strategies to cover as much land as possible and of different things regarding the use of land. Finally when he dozed off, he saw a nightmare. In the nightmare he saw himself lying in an identical wagon and hears somebody laughing and talking outside. This figure, one by one, takes the form of all the people Pakhom had encountered on his pursuit of property and finally takes the form of the Devil. He also saw himself lying dead at the feet of the Devil, who was laughing aloud. On seeing this terrifying dream he woke up and saw that dawn had already broken, so he lost no time and started out on his endeavour enthusiastically. He kept on walking non-stop, planting stakes at regular intervals to mark his property, stopping only to gulp water and gobble down a little food to revive his strength. He was dead tired but trying hard to get as much land as possible, consoling himself time and again by saying, “An hour’s pain may a century gain.” Finally, with great difficulty, he managed to cover fifteen *versts* of land. However, he had to reach back to the starting point and the sun was fast setting down. Pakhom looked at the setting sun and said to himself, “I must hurry straight along now, however rough the country be. I have enclosed sufficient land as it is.” His legs were bruised, his spirit all crumpled but still he had miles of land to cover. Now he realized that he had gone astray. “Surely I have not miscalculated?” he thought to himself, “surely I have not taken too much land ever to get back, however much I hurry? There is such a long way to go and I am dead beat. Have my money and toil gone in vain?” But by then it was too late. He hurried his pace and finally managed to reach the starting point at the nick of time. The Bashkirs were cheering

him on with their shouts but his ears grew fainter to their cheers for he fell prostrate to kiss the most cherished land for the very last time. Indeed, he had “earned” the land at the cost of his life. And in the end the amount of land that he actually required was exactly the size of his grave – three Russian ells.

---

## **9.5. GLOSSARY**

---

Count: an aristocratic nobleman in European countries

Oblast: a type of administrative division in Slavic countries, including some countries of former soviet Union

Barina: great landlady

Dessiatin: a measure of land approximately three acres

Khalat: long coat

Kumiss: a drink of mare’s milk

Starshina: village headman

Verst: a measure of land, approximately 1166 yards

Ell: an obsolete English unit of length

Consternation: a feeling of alarm, confusion, or dismay, often caused by something unexpected

---

## **9.6. CHARACTER ANALYSIS**

---

### **9.6.1. PAKHOM**

Pakhom is the central character of the story. He is a peasant and from what his wife has to say about their lifestyle we can gather that he and his family are leading quite a happy life. She says to her sister, “For my part, I would never exchange my life for yours... We are better in the country. The peasant may never be rich but he will

---

always have enough.” In stark contrast to his wife, Pakhom is dissatisfied with life and feels that the root cause of all his problems is his poverty. He feels that once he owns enough land, all his problems will be well settled. His entire mission in the story is to acquire more and more land. No matter how much land he acquires in the course of the story, his thirst for land never gets quenched. Not only is he greedy but he is also jealous for when he hears that his neighbour had bought twenty dessiatins of the land that the Barina sold, he gets envious. Thus, both greed and jealousy, which are two of the Seven Deadly Sins- sins, that according to Christianity are responsible for bringing about eternal damnation of man, are embodied in him. Pakhom, on his pursuit to acquiring land, unknowingly is on the road to perdition. For like Goethe’s Faust he has already sold out his soul to the Devil and finally when he realizes the blunder that he had committed, it was too late.

Pakhom is not a mere fictitious character. He is a universal character. He is not confined to any frontiers, his name may change with the changing boundaries, but the greed manifest in him remains the same everywhere. In fact, he is a symbol of the modern day cosmopolitan man whose heart is always craving for more. He is the crying, grumbling, dissatisfied ‘Devil’ inside us all. However, the man who wrote, in James Joyce’s words, this “greatest story that the literary world” was a class apart. He was a saintly figure who practised what he preached. He relinquished his property and practised voluntary poverty. Through this story Tolstoy wants to convey an important message; to be content with our lot, for therein lies true happiness.

### **9.6.2. DEVIL**

Who do you think is the Devil in the story? Is he some supernatural being who, sitting in a corner, quietly listens to the conversation that takes between the two sisters, thereafter goads Pakhom to lust after land or is it the avarice of Pakhom that eventually causes his downfall? The supernatural devil exists in fantasies.

---

However, the other devil is the “evil” inside us who always tempts us into wrongdoing and as we are weak in flesh, we often fall a prey to it. Pakhom is a mortal like all of us and like most of us is materialistic beyond bounds. It is this gross materialism which eventually takes his life. Thus, the devil is nobody else but a “part of his sub-conscious which robs him of reason in his pursuit of material gains, brings about the mental torture and consequently his death.”

---

## **9.7. ANALYSIS OF THE STORY**

---

### **9.7.1. THEME**

Man by nature is inclined to hoarding and possessing things beyond his needs. This applies not just to the modern world but also to the bygone days. The earliest of humans lived a life free of possession, taking just that much from nature that fulfilled their needs. Back then, there were no boundaries to tell one man’s property from the other’s. With the coming of civilization, man started making settlements, gradually declaring patches of land as his own, thus, giving birth to the concept of possession. Since then human greed has had no bounds. No matter how much he has in his coffers, he still wants that extra penny. It is this insatiable nature of human greed that Tolstoy captures brilliantly in his story “How Much Land Does a Man Need?”

Pahom, the protagonist of the story, stands for man’s infinite greed. He is everyman and his insatiable greed is the greed of man. In the beginning of the story we see that Pakhom and his family leading a happy and content life. His wife tells her elder sister, “For my part, I would never exchange my life for yours...We are better in the country. The peasant may never be rich but he will always have enough.” However, Pakhom’s greed knows no bounds. Throughout the story he keeps on acquiring land after land but is still not satisfied. He tells his wife and her sister, “Give me land, and I will fear no man-no, not even the Devil himself.”

Who do you think is the “Devil” here? Is he some superhuman entity or the greed inside Pakhom that eventually brings about his damnation? In this story Tolstoy puts many questions in front of the reader, the answers to which if the reader chooses to find, will leave of him or her as a wiser person. In fact, the title of the story itself is also a question, the answer to which the reader gets by the end of the story.

### **9.7.2. JUSTIFICATION OF THE TITLE**

‘How Much Land Does a Man Need?’ is a story which sums up Tolstoy’s philosophy of life. You read in the biographical account on Tolstoy that he was of noble birth and an heir to a large ancestral property. However, he was against property accumulation and chose “voluntary poverty” as a way of life. Thus, he gave up his property. Furthermore, he was a man of deep moral and spiritual convictions and was always on a relentless quest for Truth. It is this Truth that gets summed up in this title. Tolstoy had seen life very closely as “a shoemaker, an artist; a rebel and a conservative; the enemy of the Russian state and the great writer of Russian land...a mad-man and a sage; an anti-materialist (both in philosophy and common sense) ...a holy fool and an excommunicate; “the second Tzar” and an anarchist...” and through all the experiences that he had earned in his life-time, he realized that the only thing that remains constant is spirituality. He was convinced that materialistic pursuits were futile because in the end a man needs only that much land that is required to bury him; Tolstoy was a social reformer and through this story, like his many other, he wants to drive this point home. The story has a universal appeal for it can be understood and appreciated in all times by all people. It is a story which has become even more significant in the present times of cut-throat competition gross materialism and thus, carries a very valuable message for us all. Tolstoy, the noble sage, gives us all a moral through this story and inspires us to rise above shallow materialism.

**9.7.3. STYLE AND TECHNIQUE**

“How Much Land Does a Man Need?” is a short story by Tolstoy which came out in the year 1886. Tolstoy originally wrote this story in Russian. As in the case of other translations, it is very difficult to bring out the aesthetic value of a piece of literary work. For instance, critics believe that Edward Fitzgerald’s translation of the *Rubaiyat* fails out to bring the beauty of Khayaam’s *Rubaiyat*. A translation can never capture the depth of emotions that a writer is capable of bringing out in a piece of work in his or her native tongue. The socio-cultural differences in two different cultures, speaking different languages, make it hard for a reader to comprehend the spirit of a piece of work. In our case, it is all the more difficult as neither of the two languages is our native tongue, so in a way it is the third hand account of things that we are reading. However, the beauty of Tolstoy’s works is such that it has a universal appeal and it transcends the barriers of boundaries, cultures and language. Coming to his style, we see that Tolstoy, being a realist, was interested in the literature of the people, and made use of ordinary events and characters to convey his ideas as a writer. His works, especially his stories, are characterized by uncomplicated style as he chose to write in short sentences. He limited his vocabulary to everyday words as he wanted to capture the life and customs of ordinary people. Tolstoy frequently alludes to the Bible in his works to convey his moral and spiritual conviction. For instance, the title of his non-fiction *magnum opus*, *The Kingdom of God is Within You* is taken from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, given in the Gospel of Luke 17:21, in which Jesus says, “Nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed the kingdom of God is within you.” His plots are well constructed and the stories are usually written through the eyes of an omniscient narrator who is well aware of the working of the characters’ minds and the events that take place in the course of the story. Tolstoy’s omniscient narrator exposes the vanity of human wishes, though in a subtle manner, like in the story “How Much Land Does a Man Need?”

---

**9.8. LET US SUM UP**

---

In this unit you

- read about the life of Leo Tolstoy
- understood his convictions as a writer and a thinker
- analyzed his story 'How Much Land Does a Man Need', discussing the theme, title and the major characters
- understood the moral behind the story – “Blessed is the man who endures temptation.”

The Epistle of James (1, 12)

---

**9.9. SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

---

Q1. Why was Pakhom unhappy with his life?

Q2. What did the Devil say to himself?

Q3. How much land did Pakhom buy in his first deal and from whom?

Q3. Do you get a glimpse of Russian peasant life through this story? Explain briefly.

Q4. Justify the title of the story 'How much Land Does a Man Need?'

Q5. State whether True or False

- (a) Tolstoy chose “voluntary retirement” as a way of life.
- (b) Pakhom’s wife was not satisfied with her life.
- (c) In the end Pakhom just needed three Russian ells of land.
- (d) Pakhom’s wife’s and her sister’s conversation was overheard by an angel.
- (e) Pakhom bought the first patch of land in the story from the Barina.



Q6. Fill in the blanks:

- (a) \_\_\_\_\_ was Tolstoy's first published work.
- (b) Tolstoy wrote \_\_\_\_\_ in response to two letters by Tarak Nath Das.
- (c) The merchant told Pakhom about the land of the \_\_\_\_\_ .
- (d) "Ah, young man," cried the \_\_\_\_\_ , "you have earned much land indeed!"
- (e) \_\_\_\_\_ was also known as the 'Sage of Yasnaya Polyana.

---

### **9.10. ANSWERS TO THE SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

---

The answers to Q. nos. 1,2,3 and 4 are given in the relevant sections

Q5. (a) True

(b) False

(c) True

(d) False

(e) True

Q6. (a) *Childhood* ( 1852)

(b) 'A Letter to a Hindoo'

(c) Bashkirs

(d) Starshina

(e) Leo Tolstoy

**9.11. REFERENCES**

---

Chakravarthi, S. Ed. *ATreasure Trove of Short Stories*. New Delhi: Frank Bros. & Co. Print.

*Complete Course in ICSE English*. Agra: Oswal Printers & Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

[www.library.illinois.edu/spx.../Denner-TolstoyMass.MediaR.htm](http://www.library.illinois.edu/spx.../Denner-TolstoyMass.MediaR.htm).

Tara-tolstoy.tripod.com/id 11.html

---

**9.12. SUGGESTED READING**

---

Tolstoy, Leo. *How Much Land Does a Man Need?and Other Stories*. New Delhi. Penguin India. 1993.Print.

Wilson. A.N. *Tolstoy: A Biography*. W.W. Norton and Company. Print.

---

**9.13. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

---

- Q1. Write a biographical account of Tolstoy's life in your own words.
- Q2. Explain in two paragraphs the moral of the story, 'How Much Land Does a Man Need?'
- Q3. Draw a character sketch of Pakhom.

## **UNIT 10 O. HENRY**

### **‘THE COP AND THE ANTHEM’, ‘A RETRIEVED REFORMATION’**

---

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Objectives
- 10.3 About the author
- 10.4 The Cop and the Anthem
  - 10.4.1 Plot
  - 10.4.2 Theme
  - 10.4.3 Characters
- 10.5 A Retrieved Reformation
  - 10.5.1 Plot
  - 10.5.2 Theme
  - 10.5.3 Characters
- 10.6 Analysis
- 10.7 Summary
- 10.8 Term End Questions
- 10.9 Suggested Readings

---

## 10.1 INTRODUCTION

---

In the previous units in this block, we have read about D. H. Lawrence's "The Prussian Officer" and Leo Tolstoy's "How Much Land Does a Man Need?". In D. H. Lawrence's "The Prussian Officer," we delve into the complex relationship between an aristocratic captain and his orderly. The story explores themes of desire, power dynamics, and tragic consequences, highlighting the destructive impact of unchecked emotions on individuals caught in a web of passion and control. In Leo Tolstoy's "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" a peasant, Pahom, driven by greed, dies chasing endless land, realizing in death that all he truly needed was six feet for his grave.

O. Henry was a celebrated American writer famous for his short stories. He is also known for romanticizing the lives of ordinary people in New York City. We find the themes of love, sacrifice, nature of the fate, identity, etc. in his works. In this unit, we will be covering O. Henry's "The Cop and the Anthem" and "A Retrieved Reformation".

---

## 10.2 OBJECTIVES

---

The objectives of introducing this unit to the learners are:

- to understand O. Henry as a writer.
- to understand the plot and themes of the story.
- to identify the uniqueness in the given works.
- to critically analyse his short stories given.
- to understand the theme of love and sacrifice in his given works.

---

## 10.3 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

---

O. Henry, whose real name was William Sydney Porter, was born on September 11, 1862, in Greensboro, North Carolina. He penned countless stories, including "The Gift of the Magi" and "The Ransom of Red Chief." Despite personal setbacks,

such as a prison term for embezzlement, O. Henry's stories were infused with humour, irony, and unexpected endings. He thrived in New York City, where he churned out a story a week for various publications, solidifying his reputation as a master of the craft. Porter's unique style, wit, and ability to capture the essence of ordinary lives set him apart as a master of the short story genre.

Porter's life was marked by both triumphs and challenges. He worked as a pharmacist, a ranch hand in Texas, and even faced legal troubles. However, it was his literary journey that truly defined him. Writing under the pen name O. Henry, he crafted stories that resonated with readers across the globe.

O. Henry's tales romanticized the everyday experiences of ordinary people, particularly those living in New York City. His stories were not grand epics but rather snapshots of life—moments that revealed the human condition. Through humour, irony, and surprise endings, he breathed life into seemingly mundane situations.

Perhaps O. Henry's most famous work is "The Gift of the Magi." In this poignant story, a young couple sacrifices their most prized possessions to buy Christmas gifts for each other. The twist lies in the fact that their gifts perfectly complement what the other has given up. It's a tale of love, sacrifice, and the unexpected beauty found in selflessness.

O. Henry's stories often revolved around coincidence. He believed that chance encounters shaped our lives more than we realized. Characters stumbled upon unexpected opportunities, and their decisions had lasting consequences. Whether it was a down-on-his-luck artist or a street vendor, O. Henry's characters grappled with fate and destiny.

His legacy extends beyond his lifetime. His dry, humorous style and knack for surprise endings continue to captivate readers. His stories remain timeless, touching

---

on themes of love, sacrifice, and the human spirit. Even today, writers draw inspiration from his ability to find magic in the ordinary.

In the bustling busy streets of New York City, O. Henry wove tales that celebrated the real human experience. His stories remind us that life is full of unexpected turns, and sometimes the greatest gifts come from the simplest gestures. As we delve into his works, we discover that O. Henry's true gift and talent was his ability to make us see the extraordinary within the everyday. His legacy endures through the prestigious O. Henry Prize, which honours exceptional short stories.

---

## **10.4 THE COP AND THE ANTHEM**

---

Soapy moved restlessly on his seat in Madison Square. There are certain signs to show that winter is coming. Birds begin to fly south. Women who want nice new warm coats become very kind to their husbands. And Soapy moves restlessly on his seat in the park. When you see these signs, you know that winter is near.

A dead leaf fell at Soapy's feet. That was a special sign for him that winter was coming. It was time for all who lived in Madison Square to prepare.

Soapy's mind now realized the fact. The time had come. He had to find some way to take care of himself during the cold weather. And therefore, he moved restlessly on his seat.

Soapy's hopes for the winter were not very high. He was not thinking of sailing away on a ship. He was not thinking of southern skies, or of the Bay of Naples. Three months in the prison on Blackwell's Island was what he wanted. Three months of food every day and a bed every night, three months safe from the cold north wind and safe from cops. This seemed to Soapy the most desirable thing in the world.

For years Blackwell's Island had been his winter home. Richer New Yorkers made their large plans to go to Florida or to the shore of the Mediterranean Sea each winter. Soapy made his small plans for going to the Island.

And now the time had come. Three big newspapers, some under his coat and some over his legs, had not kept him warm during the night in the park. So Soapy was thinking of the Island.

There were places in the city where he could go and ask for food and a bed. These would be given to him. He could move from one building to another, and he would be taken care of through the winter. But he liked Blackwell's Island better.

Soapy's spirit was proud. If he went to any of these places, there were certain things he had to do. In one way or another, he would have to pay for what they gave him. They would not ask him for money. But they would make him wash his whole body. They would make him answer questions; they would want to know everything about his life.

No. Prison was better than that. The prison had rules that he would have to follow. But in prison a gentleman's own life was still his own life.

Soapy, having decided to go to the Island, at once began to move toward his desire.

There were many easy ways of doing this. The most pleasant way was to go and have a good dinner at some fine restaurant. Then he would say that he had no money to pay. And then a cop would be called. It would all be done very quietly. The cop would arrest him. He would be taken to a judge. The judge would do the rest.

Soapy left his seat and walked out of Madison Square to the place where the great street called Broadway and Fifth Avenue meet. He went across this wide space and started north on Broadway. He stopped at a large and brightly lighted restaurant. This was where the best food and the best people in the best clothes appeared every evening.

Soapy believed that above his legs he looked all right. His face was clean. His coat was good enough. If he could get to a table, he believed that success would be his. The part of him that would be seen above the table would look all right. The waiter would bring him what he asked for.

He began thinking of what he would like to eat. In his mind he could see the whole dinner. The cost would not be too high. He did not want the restaurant people to feel any real anger. But the dinner would leave him filled and happy for the journey to his winter home.

But as Soapy put his foot inside the restaurant door, the head waiter saw his broken old shoes and the torn clothes that covered his legs. Strong and ready hands turned Soapy around and moved him quietly and quickly outside again.

Soapy turned off Broadway. It seemed that this easy, this most desirable way to the Island was not to be his. He must think of some other way to getting there.

At a corner of Sixth Avenue was a shop with a wide glass window, bright with electric lights. Soapy picked up a big stone and threw it through the glass. People came running around the corner. A cop was the first among them. Soapy stood still, and he smiled when he saw the cop.

“Where’s the man that did that?” asked the cop.

“Don’t you think that I might have done it?” said Soapy. He was friendly and happy. What he wanted was coming toward him.

But the cop’s mind would not consider Soapy. Men who break windows do not stop there to talk to cops. They run away as fast as they can. The cop saw a man further along the street, running. He ran after him. And Soapy, sick at heart, walked slowly away. He had failed two times.

Across the street was another restaurant. It was not so fine as the one on Broadway. The people who went there were not so rich. Its food was not so good. Into this, Soapy took his old shoes and his torn clothes, and no one stopped him. He sat down at a table and was soon eating a big dinner. When he had finished, he said that he and money were strangers.

“Get busy and call a cop,” said Soapy. “And don’t keep a gentleman waiting.”

“No cop for you,” said the waiter. He called another waiter.

The two waiters threw Soapy upon his left ear on the hard street outside. He stood up slowly, one part at a time, and beat the dust from his clothes. Prison



seemed only a happy dream. The Island seemed very far away. A cop who was standing near laughed and walked away.

Soapy travelled almost half a mile before he tried again. This time he felt very certain that he would be successful. A nice-looking young woman was standing before a shop window, looking at the objects inside. Very near stood a large cop.

Soapy's plan was to speak to the young woman. She seemed to be a very nice young lady, who would not want a strange man to speak to her. She would ask the cop for help. And then Soapy would be happy to feel the cop's hand on his arm. He would be on his way to the Island.

He went near her. He could see that the cop was already watching him. The young woman moved away a few steps. Soapy followed. Standing beside her he said:

“Good evening, Bedelia! Don't you want to come and play with me?”

The cop was still looking. The young woman had only to move her hand, and Soapy would be on his way to the place where he wanted to go. He was already thinking how warm he would be.

The young woman turned to him. Putting out her hand, she took his arm.

“Sure, Mike,” she said joyfully, “if you'll buy me something to drink. I would have spoken to you sooner, but the cop was watching.”

With the young woman holding his arm, Soapy walked past the cop. He was filled with sadness. He was still free. Was he going to remain free forever?

At the next corner he pulled his arm away, and ran.

When he stopped, he was near several theaters. In this part of the city, streets are brighter and hearts are more joyful than in other parts. Women and men in rich, warm coats moved happily in the winter air.

A sudden fear caught Soapy. No cop was going to arrest him.

Then he came to another cop standing in front of a big theater. He thought of something else to try.

He began to shout as if he had had too much to drink. His voice was as loud as he could make it. He danced, he cried out.

And the cop turned his back to Soapy, and said to a man standing near him, “It’s one of those college boys. He won’t hurt anything. We had orders to let them shout.”

Soapy was quiet. Was no cop going to touch him? He began to think of the Island as if it were as far away as heaven. He pulled his thin coat around him. The wind was very cold.

Then he saw a man in the shop buying a newspaper. The man’s umbrella stood beside the door. Soapy stepped inside the shop, took the umbrella, and walked slowly away. The man followed him quickly.

“My umbrella,” he said.

“Oh, is it?” said Soapy. “Why don’t you call a cop? I took it. Your umbrella! Why don’t you call a cop? There’s one standing at the corner.”

The man walked more slowly, Soapy did the same. But he had a feeling that he was going to fail again. The cop looked at the two men.

“I—” said the umbrella man— “that is—you know how these things happen—I—if that’s your umbrella I’m very sorry—I found it this morning in a restaurant—if you say it’s yours—I hope you’ll—”

“It’s mine!” cried Soapy with anger in his voice.

The umbrella man hurried away. The cop helped a lady across the street. Soapy walked east. He threw the umbrella as far as he could throw it. He talked to himself about cops and what he thought of them. Because he wished to be arrested, they seemed to believe he was like a king, who could do no wrong.

At last Soapy came to one of the quiet streets on the east side of the city. He turned here and began to walk south toward Madison Square. He was going home, although home was only a seat in a park.

But on a very quiet corner Soapy stopped. Here was an old, old church. Through one colored-glass window came a soft light. Sweet music came to Soapy's ears and seemed to hold him there.

The moon was above, peaceful and bright. There were few people passing. He could hear birds high above him.

And the anthem that came from the church held Soapy there, for he had known it well long ago. In those days his life contained such things as mothers and flowers and high hopes and friends and clean thoughts and clean clothes.

Soapy's mind was ready for something like this. He had come to the old church at the right time. There was a sudden and wonderful change in his soul. He saw with sick fear how he had fallen. He saw his worthless days, his wrong desires, his dead hopes, the lost power of his mind.

And also, in a moment his heart answered this change in his soul. He would fight to change his life. He would pull himself up, out of the mud. He would make a man of himself again.

There was time. He was young enough. He would find his old purpose in life, and follow it. That sweet music had changed him. Tomorrow he would find work. A man had once offered him a job. He would find that man tomorrow. He would be somebody in the world. He would—

Soapy felt a hand on his arm. He looked quickly around into the broad face of a cop.

“What are you doing hanging around here?” asked the cop.

“Nothing,” said Soapy.

“You think I believe that?” said the cop.

Full of his new strength, Soapy began to argue. And it is not wise to argue with a New York cop.

“Come along,” said the cop.

“Three months on the Island,” said the Judge to Soapy the next morning.

---

**10.4.1 PLOT**

---

1. **Soapy's Desperate Attempts:** Soapy is a homeless man, so he desperately needs a place to stay during the harsh winter of New York. He thinks of committing a petty crime serious enough to get him three months in jail but even after trying multiple times he is not able to get himself arrested.
2. **The Unexpected Turn at the Church:** After accepting his defeat to fate, he feels discouraged and finds himself outside a church gate. He hears a beautiful anthem that changes something in him, and Soapy decides to turn his life around and to find a purpose and job.
3. **The Ironic Twist:** Just when he decides to become a better man, a police officer arrests him for loitering and he is sent to Blackwell's Island—the very place he wanted to go in the first place. The irony of the story is that when Soapy was trying to get arrested, he failed but when he genuinely decides to be better he is arrested.

---

**10.4.2 THEME**

---

"The Cop and the Anthem" by O. Henry is an interesting short story that delves into themes of poverty, homelessness, and the elusive American Dream. It is set against the backdrop of New York City during the early 20th century, and the narrative follows the misadventures of Soapy (a homeless man) when he desperately tries to escape the bitter cold of winter.

Soapy comes up with a scheme of committing a crime so that he can spend the coming winter in jail, with the comfort of shelter and food, it was enough for him. His actions show the harsh problems faced by the lower-class and homeless citizens. The story sheds light on the cruelties of poverty, the struggle for survival, and the lack of opportunities for those on the margins of society.

His desire to find refuge in jail reflects a distorted version of the American Dream. The language he uses—words like "refuge" and "haven"—echo the promises of

prosperity associated with the United States. However, O. Henry suggests that the American Dream is often selective and undemocratic and not to forget very difficult to achieve. Despite hard work, not everyone can have the opportunities that they dream of and work hard for.

The portrayal of Soapy challenges the idea that people judge others on the basis of their outward appearances. His encounters with various characters—mistaking a prostitute for a well-to-do woman or being confused for a Yale student—underscore the arbitrary nature of class indicators. O. Henry suggests that markers of social status are often misread and misleading.

Throughout the story, Soapy is part of the homeless group of people living in Madison Square, who must find new places to sleep each year. He tries many times to commit a crime and get arrested but he had no luck or to say he exactly had that. The story emphasizes the importance of community and belonging, even among those struggling to survive.

In conclusion, the story serves as a powerful commentary on the human condition. Soapy's desperate attempts to escape the cold by getting arrested show the plight of poor people, the futile hope for the American Dream, and the arbitrary nature of societal judgments. O. Henry's masterful way of weaving stories invites readers to reflect on compassion, empathy, and the search for refuge in a world that often leaves the marginalized behind.

---

### 10.4.3 CHARACTER

---

**Soapy** is the central character of the story—a homeless, street-smart man struggling to survive in the harsh environment of New York City. His characterization reveals several layers:

1. **Desperation and Resourcefulness:** Soapy's desperation drives the plot. As winter approaches, he seeks refuge from the cold by committing minor crimes to get arrested. He fails in his various attempts: scamming a restaurant,

insulting a police officer, harassing a window-shopper, and stealing an umbrella.

2. **Vulnerability and Sympathy:** O. Henry portrays Soapy as vulnerable. Despite his confidence and intelligence, his efforts to get arrested fail repeatedly. His name—merely a nickname—emphasizes his invisibility to society. By the end of the story, Soapy becomes an honest and sympathetic character. His vulnerability humanizes him, making readers feel bad for his arrest.
3. **Irony and Social Commentary:** Soapy's name is significant. He lacks dignity and is not even worthy of scrutiny into his real identity. O. Henry uses Soapy's story to critique rigid class prejudice and highlight discrepancies in the American Dream. Soapy's pursuit of warmth becomes a mirror of broader societal issues. His ability to change, and his failure to achieve it on his own terms, make Soapy both a comic and a tragic figure within the story.

---

## 10.5 A RETRIEVED REFORMATION

---

In the prison shoe-shop, Jimmy Valentine was busy at work making shoes. A prison officer came into the shop, and led Jimmy to the prison office. There Jimmy was given an important paper. It said that he was free.

Jimmy took the paper without showing much pleasure or interest. He had been sent to prison to stay for four years. He had been there for ten months. But he had expected to stay only three months. Jimmy Valentine had many friends outside the prison. A man with so many friends does not expect to stay in prison long.

“Valentine,” said the chief prison officer, “you’ll go out tomorrow morning. This is your chance. Make a man of yourself. You’re not a bad fellow at heart. Stop breaking safes open, and live a better life.”

“Me?” said Jimmy in surprise. “I never broke open a safe in my life.”

“Oh, no,” the chief prison officer laughed. “Never. Let’s see. How did you happen to get sent to prison for opening that safe in Springfield? Was it because you didn’t want to tell where you really were? Perhaps because you were with some lady, and you didn’t want to tell her name? Or was it because the judge didn’t like you? You men always have a reason like that. You never go to prison because you broke open a safe.”

“Me?” Jimmy said. His face still showed surprise. “I was never in Springfield in my life.”

“Take him away,” said the chief prison officer. “Get him the clothes he needs for going outside. Bring him here again at seven in the morning. And think about what I said, Valentine.”

At a quarter past seven on the next morning, Jimmy stood again in the office. He had on some new clothes that did not fit him, and a pair of new shoes that hurt his feet. These are the usual clothes given to a prisoner when he leaves the prison.

Next they gave him money to pay for his trip on a train to the city near the prison. They gave him five dollars more. The five dollars were supposed to help him become a better man.

Then the chief prison officer put out his hand for a handshake. That was the end of Valentine, Prisoner 9762. Mr. James Valentine walked out into the sunshine.

He did not listen to the song of the birds or look at the green trees or smell the flowers. He went straight to a restaurant. There he tasted the first sweet joys of being free. He had a good dinner. After that he went to the train station. He gave some money to a blind man who sat there, asking for money, and then he got on the train.

Three hours later he got off the train in a small town. Here he went to the restaurant of Mike Dolan.

Mike Dolan was alone there. After shaking hands he said, “I’m sorry we couldn’t do it sooner, Jimmy my boy. But there was that safe in Springfield, too. It wasn’t easy. Feeling all right?”

“Fine,” said Jimmy. “Is my room waiting for me?”

He went up and opened the door of a room at the back of the house. Everything was as he had left it. It was here they had found Jimmy, when they took him to prison. There on the floor was a small piece of cloth. It had been torn from the coat of the cop, as Jimmy was fighting to escape.

There was a bed against the wall. Jimmy pulled the bed toward the middle of the room. The wall behind it looked like any wall, but now Jimmy found and opened a small door in it. From this opening he pulled out a dust-covered bag.

He opened this and looked lovingly at the tools for breaking open a safe. No finer tools could be found any place. They were complete; everything needed was here. They had been made of a special material, in the necessary sizes and shapes. Jimmy had planned them himself, and he was very proud of them.

It had cost him over nine hundred dollars to have these tools made at a place where they make such things for men who work at the job of safe-breaking.

In half an hour Jimmy went downstairs and through the restaurant. He was now dressed in good clothes that fitted him well. He carried his dusted and cleaned bag.

“Do you have anything planned?” asked Mike Dolan.

“Me?” asked Jimmy as if surprised. “I don’t understand. I work for the New York Famous Bread and Cake Makers Company. And I sell the best bread and cake in the country.”

Mike enjoyed these words so much that Jimmy had to take a drink with him. Jimmy had some milk. He never drank anything stronger.

A week after Valentine, 9762, left the prison, a safe was broken open in Richmond, Indiana. No one knew who did it. Eight hundred dollars were taken.

Two weeks after that, a safe in Logansport was opened. It was a new kind of safe; it had been made, they said, so strong that no one could break it open. But someone did, and took fifteen hundred dollars.



Then a safe in Jefferson City was opened. Five thousand dollars were taken. This loss was a big one. Ben Price was a cop who worked on such important matters, and now he began to work on this.

He went to Richmond, Indiana, and to Logansport, to see how the safe-breaking had been done in those places. He was heard to say: "I can see that Jim Valentine has been here. He is in business again. Look at the way he opened this one. Everything easy, everything clean. He is the only man who has the tools to do it. And he is the only man who knows how to use tools like this. Yes, I want Mr. Valentine. Next time he goes to prison, he's going to stay there until his time is finished."

Ben Price knew how Jimmy worked. Jimmy would go from one city to another far away. He always worked alone. He always left quickly when he was finished. He enjoyed being with nice people. For all these reasons, it was not easy to catch Mr. Valentine.

People with safes full of money were glad to hear that Ben Price was at work trying to catch Mr. Valentine.

One afternoon Jimmy Valentine and his bag arrived in a small town named Elmore. Jimmy, looking as young as a college boy, walked down the street toward the hotel.

A young lady walked across the street, passed him at the corner, and entered a door. Over the door was the sign, "The Elmore Bank." Jimmy Valentine looked into her eyes, forgetting at once what he was. He became another man. She looked away, and brighter color came into her face. Young men like Jimmy did not appear often in Elmore.

Jimmy saw a boy near the bank door, and began to ask questions about the town. After a time the young lady came out and went on her way. She seemed not to see Jimmy as she passed him.

"Isn't that young lady Polly Simpson?" asked Jimmy.

"No," said the boy. "She's Annabel Adams. Her father owns this bank."

Jimmy went to the hotel, where he said his name was Ralph D. Spencer. He got a room there. He told the hotel man he had come to Elmore to go into business. How was the shoe business? Was there already a good shoe-shop?

The man thought that Jimmy's clothes and manners were fine.

He was happy to talk to him.

Yes, Elmore needed a good shoe-shop. There was no shop that sold just shoes. Shoes were sold in the big shops that sold everything. All business in Elmore was good. He hoped Mr. Spencer would decide to stay in Elmore. It was a pleasant town to live in and the people were friendly.

Mr. Spencer said he would stay in the town a few days and learn something about it. No, he said, he himself would carry his bag up to his room. He didn't want a boy to take it. It was very heavy.

Mr. Ralph Spencer remained in Elmore. He started a shoe-shop. Business was good.

Also he made many friends. And he was successful with the wish of his heart. He met Annabel Adams. He liked her better every day.

At the end of a year everyone in Elmore liked Mr. Ralph Spencer. His shoe-shop was doing very good business. And he and Annabel were going to be married in two weeks. Mr. Adams, the small-town banker, liked Spencer. Annabel was very proud of him. He seemed already to belong to the Adams family.

One day Jimmy sat down in his room to write this letter, which he sent to one of his old friends:

Dear Old Friend:

I want you to meet me at Sullivan's place next week, on the evening of the 10th. I want to give you my tools. I know you'll be glad to have them. You couldn't buy them for a thousand dollars. I finished with the old business—a year ago. I have a nice shop. I'm living a better life, and I'm going to marry the best girl on earth two weeks from now. It's the only life—I wouldn't ever again touch another man's money. After I marry, I'm going to go further west,

---

where I'll never see anyone who knew me in my old life. I tell you, she's a wonderful girl. She trusts me.

Your old friend, Jimmy.

On the Monday night after Jimmy sent this letter, Ben Price arrived quietly in Elmore. He moved slowly about the town in his quiet way, and he learned all that he wanted to know. Standing inside a shop, he watched Ralph D. Spencer walk by.

"You're going to marry the banker's daughter, are you, Jimmy?" said Ben to himself. "I don't feel sure about that!"

The next morning Jimmy was at the Adams home. He was going to a nearby city that day to buy new clothes for the wedding. He was also going to buy a gift for Annabel. It would be his first trip out of Elmore. It was more than a year now since he had done any safe-breaking.

Most of the Adams family went to the bank together that morning. There were Mr. Adams, Annabel, Jimmy, and Annabel's married sister with her two little girls, aged five and nine. They passed Jimmy's hotel, and Jimmy ran up to his room and brought along his bag. Then they went to the bank.

All went inside—Jimmy, too, for he was one of the family. Everyone in the bank was glad to see the good-looking, nice young man who was going to marry Annabel. Jimmy put down his bag.

Annabel, laughing, put Jimmy's hat on her head and picked up the bag. "How do I look?" she asked. "Ralph, how heavy this bag is! It feels full of gold."

"It's full of some things I don't need in my shop," Jimmy said. "I'm taking them to the city, to the place where they came from. That saves me the cost of sending them. I'm going to be a married man. I must learn to save money."

The Elmore bank had a new safe. Mr. Adams was very proud of it, and he wanted everyone to see it. It was as large as a small room, and it had a very special door. The door was controlled by a clock. Using the clock, the banker planned the time when the door should open. At other times no one, not even the banker himself,

could open it. He explained about it to Mr. Spencer. Mr. Spencer seemed interested but he did not seem to understand very easily. The two children, May and Agatha, enjoyed seeing the shining heavy door, with all its special parts.

While they were busy like this, Ben Price entered the bank and looked around. He told a young man who worked there that he had not come on business; he was waiting for a man.

Suddenly there was a cry from the women. They had not been watching the children. May, the nine-year-old girl, had playfully but firmly closed the door of the safe. And Agatha was inside.

The old banker tried to open the door. He pulled at it for a moment. "The door can't be opened," he cried. "And the clock—I hadn't started it yet."

Agatha's mother cried out again.

"Quiet!" said Mr. Adams, raising a shaking hand. "All be quiet for a moment. Agatha!" he called as loudly as he could. "Listen to me." They could hear, but not clearly, the sound of the child's voice. In the darkness inside the safe, she was wild with fear.

"My baby!" her mother cried. "She will die of fear! Open the door! Break it open! Can't you men do something?"

"There isn't a man nearer than the city who can open that door," said Mr. Adams, in a shaking voice. "My God! Spencer, what shall we do? That child—she can't live long in there. There isn't enough air. And the fear will kill her."

Agatha's mother, wild too now, beat on the door with her hands. Annabel turned to Jimmy, her large eyes full of pain, but with some hope, too. A woman thinks that the man she loves can somehow do anything.

"Can't you do something, Ralph? Try, won't you?"

He looked at her with a strange soft smile on his lips and in his eyes.

"Annabel," he said, "give me that flower you are wearing, will you?"

She could not believe that she had really heard him. But she put the flower in his hand. Jimmy took it and put it where he could not lose it. Then he pulled off his

---

coat. With that act, Ralph D. Spencer passed away and Jimmy Valentine took his place.

“Stand away from the door, all of you,” he commanded.

He put his bag on the table, and opened it flat. From that time on, he seemed not to know that anyone else was near. Quickly he laid the shining strange tools on the table. The others watched as if they had lost the power to move.

In a minute Jimmy was at work on the door. In ten minutes—faster than he had ever done it before—he had the door open.

Agatha was taken into her mother’s arms.

Jimmy Valentine put on his coat, picked up the flower and walked toward the front door. As he went he thought he heard a voice call, “Ralph!” He did not stop.

At the door a big man stood in his way.

“Hello, Ben!” said Jimmy, still with his strange smile. “You’re here at last, are you? Let’s go. I don’t care, now.”

And then Ben Price acted rather strangely.

“I guess you’re wrong about this, Mr. Spencer,” he said. “I don’t believe I know you, do I?”

And Ben Price turned and walked slowly down the street.

---

### **10.5.1 PLOT**

---

- Jimmy Valentine, a skilled safe-cracker, is released from prison after serving a lengthy sentence, determined to go straight and avoid returning to crime.
- He moves to a small town in Arkansas under the alias Ralph D. Spencer, taking a job as a shoe clerk, and falling in love with a woman named Annabel.

- An old, supposedly un-crackable or unbreakable safe arrives at the local bank, piquing the town's interest in Jimmy's former safe-cracking abilities and tempting him to attempt one final job.
- After an intense inner struggle, Jimmy ultimately chooses redemption over illegal gain and walks away from cracking the safe at the last moment.
- His sacrifice pays off when the bank inspectors deem the safe impregnable, restoring Jimmy's good name and allowing him to fully embrace his new reformed life with Annabel.

---

### **10.5.2    THEME**

---

“A Retrieved Reformation” by O. Henry is a story that revolves around the powerful theme of redemption and an individual's ability to reform themselves despite their troubled past. Through the protagonist Jimmy Valentine, O. Henry explores the idea that even those who have strayed from the path of righteousness can find their way back through sheer determination and a genuine desire for change.

At the heart of the story is Jimmy's personal struggle between the temptations of his former life as a skilled safe-cracker and the prospect of embracing a new, law-abiding existence. Having served a lengthy prison sentence, Jimmy is resolute in his intention to go straight upon his release. However, when faced with the opportunity to showcase his safe-cracking talents one final time, he finds himself grappling with an intense internal conflict.

This inner turmoil represents the broader human experience of battling one's vices and weaknesses. Jimmy's ability to ultimately resist the allure of his criminal past and walk away from the un-crackable safe serves as a poignant metaphor for the triumph of moral fortitude over personal failings. His decision to prioritize his

newfound values and the love of Annabel over the pursuit of ill-gotten gains underscores the transformative power of personal redemption.

Through Jimmy's character arc, O. Henry challenges the notion that an individual's past defines their future. The story suggests that even those who have made grave mistakes or lived a life of crime can undergo a profound transformation, shedding their former selves and emerging as redeemed individuals worthy of societal acceptance and personal fulfilment.

Moreover, the story highlights the importance of second chances and the potential for positive change within every person, regardless of their circumstances or history. Jimmy's redemption is not merely a personal victory but also a testament to the human capacity for growth, self-improvement, and the ability to rise above one's past transgressions.

Ultimately, "A Retrieved Reformation" is a keen exploration of the enduring human spirit, reminding readers that true reformation is possible, and that individuals possess the agency to rewrite their own narratives and forge a new, virtuous path forward no matter what they have suffered in the past.

---

### **10.5.3 CHARACTER**

---

#### **Jimmy Valentine/Ralph D. Spencer**

Jimmy Valentine, later known as Ralph D. Spencer, is the central figure in the story and embodies the story's core theme of redemption and moral reformation. As a skilled safe-cracker, he represents someone who has strayed from the path of righteousness and legality.

Initially portrayed as a criminal, having served nearly 10 years in prison for his safe-cracking exploits, Jimmy undergoes a profound personal transformation while in prison. He emerges from prison as a changed man, determined to leave his former life of crime behind and start afresh. Adopting the alias Ralph D. Spencer, Jimmy intentionally seeks out a small town in Arkansas to begin rebuilding his life from

humble roots as a shoe clerk. His genuine kindness, diligence, and integrity in this new role quickly win over the local townsfolk, demonstrating his sincere commitment to his own redemption.

However, when an old un-crackable safe arrives at the local bank across from his workplace. This temptation to return to his former safe-cracking ways, even just one final time, presents a pivotal moral dilemma for Jimmy's character. Ultimately, Jimmy's ability to resist this temptation and walk away from the safe is a powerful testament to the permanence of his personal redemption. Through his reformed persona of Ralph D. Spencer, Jimmy not only proves his capability to shed his criminal past entirely but also earns the love and respect of Annabel and the broader community.

### **Annabel Adams**

Annabel is a beautiful young woman living in the small Arkansas town where Jimmy/Ralph has relocated and taken a job at a shoe store after being released from prison. She represents Jimmy's hope for a new, reformed life away from his criminal past. Annabel is drawn to Jimmy/Ralph's kindness, and his work ethic. She sees the good in him and the prospect of building a life with her motivates Jimmy to fully commit to going straight. When tempted by the opportunity to crack the old safe, risking his reformation, the thought of losing Annabel's love helps give Jimmy the strength to ultimately resist that temptation. She serves as a moral anchor, reminding him of what he has to lose by going back to the life he had left.

### **Ben Price**

Ben Price is a skilled detective who has been chasing the infamous safe-cracker Jimmy Valentine for some time. He is described as working "on such important matters" and is determined to catch Valentine and ensure he serves out his full prison sentence next time. Price is familiar with Valentine's methods, recognizing



---

his handiwork when safes are cracked in a "clean" and expert manner across different cities. He knows Valentine operates alone, moves quickly from town to town, and has a taste for mingling with respectable folk. When Price tracks Valentine down to the small town of Elmore, where he has reformed under the alias Ralph Spencer, Price watches him carefully. However, when the pivotal moment arrives where little Agatha is trapped in the bank's modern safe, Price simply stands by and allows the reformed Valentine to use his safe-cracking skills to open the door and rescue her. This suggests Price recognized Valentine's genuine change of heart.

---

## **10.6 ANALYSIS**

---

After reading both the stories, learners would understand that the stories are opposite in nature. Soapy who was desperately trying to get arrested is arrested just when he decides to find a purpose in life. Whereas, Jimmy/Ralph Spencer who spent quite some time in prison becomes a changed and better man. But even when he is caught by the detective, he is not arrested due to his kind and selfless deed. Soapy was not a criminal, still he got arrested, on the other hand, the infamous criminal Jimmy unintentionally escapes getting arrested. 'The Cop and The Anthem' and 'A Retrieved Reformation', both the stories show the irony of life and fate, and how one is helpless in front of it.

---

## **10.7 SUMMARY**

---

### **“The Cop and the Anthem”**

It is a short story that captures the struggles of Soapy, a homeless man living in New York City during the early 1900s. As winter approaches, Soapy faces the challenge of finding shelter and warmth. The story revolves around his desperate attempts to get arrested and secure a place in Blackwell's Island prison, where he hopes to survive the cold months.

Soapy's first endeavour involves entering an expensive restaurant, intending to order a lavish meal and be arrested for "insolvency." However, the waiter throws him out when he spots Soapy's frayed trousers. Similarly, smashing a storefront window with a cobblestone fails to attract the attention of the responding police officer.

Throughout the story, Soapy's inability to get arrested stems not from his inability to commit crimes but from others' refusal to identify him correctly. His second restaurant scam ends with him being thrown out on the street by two waiters. Even his attempt to harass a window-shopping woman proves futile when she happily responds to his advances.

Soapy's frustration grows as he fails to get arrested for publicly insulting a police officer, who mistakes him for a drunken Yale student. His last desperate act involves trying to steal an umbrella from a well-dressed man in a cigar store, only to discover that the man had stolen the umbrella himself.

Discouraged and defeated, Soapy finds himself outside a church gate. There, he hears a beautiful anthem being played within the church. The music stirs something within him, and he resolves to turn his life around and become a functioning member of society once again.

However, fate has other plans. Just as Soapy makes this resolution, a police officer arrests him for loitering. He is sentenced to jail time on Blackwell's Island the following day. The irony lies in the fact that Soapy's genuine desire for change leads to his arrest, while all his previous attempts failed.

### **"A Retrieved Reformation"**

Jimmy Valentine was a notorious criminal who used to break safes. He was sentenced to jail for four years, he expected to stay there for only three months. After the ten long months, he was informed by the prison officer that he was free

to go the next morning. When he left the station, he had a nice dinner and went straight to meet Mike Dolan. Then he went to his room, and looked lovingly at the tools to break the safe open which he had hidden behind his bed. He took them and left.

After a few days, three safes were broken open back to back but no one had any idea who did it. Ben Price who was the cop who started working on these cases and gathered that only Jimmy can break the safes with such perfection.

Jimmy reached a small town named, Elmore where he inquired about the shoe-business. He now took another name, Mr. Ralph D. Spencer. He opened a shoe-shop and started working diligently. By the end of a year, Spencer had made many friends and was even going to be marry Annabel Adams who he had seen on the first in the town. Everyone liked Spencer and he was ready to leave his past behind and start a new life with Annabel.

One day he wrote a letter to his old friend that he wanted to give his precious tools to him and was done with the old business (breaking safes and thefts). And that he is getting married to a wonderful girl who trusts him.

When he going to give away his bag, Annabel saw him and he excused that he is going to city to sell useless tools. Mr. Adams had bought a new safe that was controlled by clock and cannot be opened by anyone else. Unfortunately, one of the children got trapped in the safe and everyone panicked. At that moment Ben Price was also there. He saw how neatly Spencer opened the safe and saved the child's life. In the end, Ben decided not to arrest Jimmy/Spencer as he was a changed man now.

---

## **10.8 TERM END QUESTIONS**

---

1. Discuss O. Henry as a short-storywriter giving examples from the stories prescribed to you.
2. Discuss the irony in the story "The Cop and The Anthem" giving examples.

3. Discuss the irony in the story “A Retrieved Reformation” giving examples.
4. Compare and contrast between the character of Soapy and Jimmy.
5. The theme of love and sacrifice is evident in “A Retrieved Reformation”.  
Explain.

---

## **10.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

---

Collected Stories of O. Henry, New Delhi: Rupa Publications.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O.\\_Henry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O._Henry)

**Unit 11**            **R. K. NARAYAN**  
**AND**  
**THE INDIAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH**

---

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Objectives

11.3 Narayan: Early Life

11.3.1. His Major Works

11.3.2. Writing Style

11.3.3. Malgudi

11.4 Indian Novel in English

11.4.1 Women Novelists

11.5 Summary

11.6 Term End Questions

## **11.1 Introduction**

---

R.K. Narayan is one of the three leading novelists of early Indian English Literature, along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. His major concern is common people living in his imaginary world of Malgudi. He shows cultural disintegration in society torn between old cultural values and new arriving modernity. Malgudi in a sense act as a microcosm of Indian society. Malgudi acts as a point of confluence for ancient Indian culture and the unconventional and modern brought by western education.

---

## **11.2 Objectives:**

---

After studying this unit, you will have the proficiency to:

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the life of R. K. Narayan
- Analyse R.K. Narayan's writing style
- To compare and contrast Narayan's portrayal of small-town life.
- Become familiar with Narayan's literary works
- Assess the origin and development of Indian novel in English
- Examine the role of writers in the development of the Indian novel in English
- Assessing R. K. Narayan's contribution to the Indian novel in English as well as a novelist

---

## **11.3 Life and Background**

---

Rashipuram Krishnaswamy Iyer Narayanswamy, which on Graham Greene's advice was shortened to R. K. Narayan, was born on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1906 at Chenaapatna, near Mysore. Narayan's father was a school headmaster, and Narayan did some of his studies at his father's school. Narayan was an avid reader and his early readings included Dickens, Woodhouse and Thomas Hardy. After completing high school, Narayan failed the university entrance examination in 1926 which provided him with one complete year to read and write.

The first published work of Narayan was a review of the book, “Development of Maritime Laws of 17<sup>th</sup> Century England”. In the autumn of 1930, on a sudden flash of inspiration, Narayan imagined a little town, its rail station, the Mempi forest, the Albert Mission School, the river Sarayu and in this way the place called ‘Malgudi’ was born through his first work ‘Swami and Friends’.

Narayan lived till ninety-five and wrote fifteen novels, five volumes of short stories, a number of travelogues, a collection of non - fiction, translation of Indian epics and a memoir “My Days”. His oeuvre of writing makes him one of the finest story-tellers of modern English.

### **11.3.1 Major Works**

Narayan’s first novel to be published was *Swami and Friends*. After a series of rejections, he sent the manuscript to a friend at Oxford, who then showed it to Graham Greene. Greene recommended the book to a publisher and it was finally published in 1935. His next novel, *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) was inspired by his experiences at college and dealt with the theme of a rebellious adolescent. The third novel, *The Dark Room* (1938) deals with the subject of domestic disharmony.

His wife’s death in 1935 affected him deeply and brought significant change in his life, inspiring him for his next novel, *The English Teacher* (1945), which Narayan acknowledges as almost entirely an autobiography. In between he published his first collection of short-stories, *Malgudi Days* (1942). He also started the Indian Journal in 1940 which soon ceased. Later he started his own publishing house, the Indian Thought Publications, which is still active.

His later writings take a more imaginative turn and he employs a creative external style as compared to the autobiographical one in his earlier works. The *Financial Expert* published in 1951 is considered to be his masterpiece which was based on a true story narrated to him by his brother. *Waiting for the Mahatma*

---

included significant references of Indian independence movement, but its focus is on the life of the ordinary individual.

He received the Rockefeller Fellowship in 1956 and visited U.S., where he wrote *The Guide*. His daily entries in the U.S. provided him the material for his later book *My Dateless Diary*. On his return, *The Guide* was published, which won him the Sahitya Academy Award in 1958.

*Next Sunday* (1960) was a collection of published and unpublished essays, Narayan wrote for newspapers and journals. *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* was published in 1961. In 1964 he published *Gods, Demons and Others*, a collection of rewritten and translated short stories from Hindu mythology. *The Vendor of Sweets* was published in 1967, which portrays characteristics of both Indian and American stereotypes, drawing on many cultural differences. In 1970, he was elected as honorary member of the American Academy of Arts & Letters. In the same year he received the AC Benson medal from the Royal Society of Literature. *The Painter of Signs* was published in 1977. This work shows a change from his other works, as he deals with unaddressed themes like sex and population control. His last work, *The Grandmother's Tale* was published in 1994.

R. K. Narayan died on May 13, 2001, in Chennai at the age of 94.

### 11.3.2 Writing Style

Narayan's writing style was simple and unpretentious with a natural element of humour. It deals with middle class people, their life, motives, habits, thinking and nuances. It reminds the readers of people living next to them, helping them to relate better with the themes. He also employed the use of nuanced dialogic prose with gentle Tamil overtones based on requirement of the character. He has been considered by critics as Indian Chekov, due to the simplicity of writings and the beauty and humour, even in tragic situations. Graham Greene considered Narayan to be more similar to Chekov than any other Indian.



Narayan's writing tends to be more descriptive and less analytical, providing more authentic and realistic narration. He could use ordinary events to create a connection with the mind of the readers.

Narayan's writing style was often compared to that of William Faulkner since both their works brought out the humour and energy of ordinary life while displaying compassionate humanism.

### **11.3.3 Malgudi**

Narayan's Malgudi is a fictional town located some-where in South India. Malgudi represents itself as a microcosm of India, and is the setting for all but one of Narayan's fifteen novels. It is located on the banks of river Sarayu with Mempi forest on its other side. Few of the important places in Malgudi are Palace Talkies built in 1935, Albert Mission School and Albert Mission College. It has a railway station and the statue of Frederick Lawley, seated on a horse is another major landmark. 'The Boardless', a restaurant without any board, which is the centre of discussion for current events, is another important place.

Describing his conceptualising of Malgudi, Narayan says:

Malgudi was an earthshaking discovery for me, because I had no mind for facts and things like that, which would be necessary in writing about Malgudi or any real place. I first pictured not my town but just a railway station, which was a small platform with a banyan tree, a station master, and two trains a day, one coming and one going. On Vijaydasmi I sat down and wrote the first sentence about my town. The train had just arrived at Malgudi railway station.

Malgudi seems to be a town created with Narayan's own experiences. The people living in this town are common people, a place one can easily relate to; a traditional Indian setting, on road towards modern development. Graham Greene describes it as a place where one could go, "into those loved and shabby streets and

see with excitement and a certainty of a pleasure a stranger approaching past the bank, the cinema, the hair-cutting saloon, a stranger who will greet us, we know, with some unexpected and revealing phrase that will open the door to yet another human existence.” (Preface to *The Financial Expert*)

If you have read the works of Narayan you will find that Malgudi as a place/space holds great importance for the themes and setting of the novels. You have to notice that the post independence writings of Narayan portray the contemporary socio-economic developments in India from a common man’s point of view. You can easily relate to the characters and their problems, the places and the lifestyle of people. In fact, Malgudi seems to be a place with which every Indian can relate himself.

Another important factor represented by Malgudi is the incoming of modernity into Indian society. Malgudi then stands to represent every Indian town during that phase of time. The theme of the novel prescribed to you is an excellent example. The concept of women’s liberation as shown in the novel seems to be in terms of the western ideas (you can decide for this yourself after reading the novel). Malgudi is centre point for all these events. The whole project of population control going in Malgudi, speaks for the rest of the country.

---

## **11.4 Indian Novel in English**

---

Before moving towards discussing *The Painter of Signs*, let us first understand the origin and development of Indian novel in English. If we look at the history of literature, novel can be considered as a recent phenomenon. Though the first novel in English was *Rajmohan’s Wife* written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in 1864, novel in English sees growth mostly after the start of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Further let us get acquainted with some of the major writers from early to present times.

Toru Dutt, though known better as a poet also wrote a novel around the same time as *Bankim*. Her novel *Bianca/The Young Spanish Maiden* came out in

1878. Romesh Chander Dutt translated his two of his Bengali novels into English: *The Lake of the Palms* (1902) and *The Slave-girl of Agra* (1902). K. S. Venkataramani's *Murugan the Tiller* was published in 1927 and won great popularity.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote mostly in Bengali and is better known for his excellent talent in verses. His novels appeared as translations: *Naukhadubi* (1905) as *The Wreck*; *Gora* (1910) in the same title; *Ghare Baire* (1916) was titled as *The Home and the World*.

The three significant writers who emerged during early twentieth century were Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayan and Raja Rao.

Mulk Raj Anand added a new phenomenon to Indian literature. He was interested in the portraying the misery of poor and the exploited. His characters are coolies (Munno in *Coolie*), Sweepers (Bakha in *Untouchable*) and workers (Gangu in *Two Leaves and a Bud*). He presents a true picture of exploitation of working labourers during his times. His important works are: *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across Black Waters* (1940), *The Sword and The Sickle* (1942) and *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953).

Raja Rao's first novel *Kanthapura* (1938) brings out the influence of Gandhi and his philosophy in a small village of Mysore. His *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) is also about the national movement. His other writings are: *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), *Comrade Killer* (1976) and *The Chess Master and His Moves* (1976).

The post-independence period saw considerable growth in fiction writing. Bhabhani Bhattacharaya was the earliest in this period with his first novel *So Many Hungers* published in 1947. His novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1952) is considered as his finest novel.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is a well-known work of fiction. He has also written a few short stories and a couple of novels.

Arun Joshi got literary fame with his first novel *The Foreigner* (1968). His another novel is *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Chaman Nahal is known for his novel *Azadi* (1975) that won Sahitya Academy Award for the year 1977.

Salman Rushdie turned out as the most important writer of the second half of the twentieth century. You must have heard of his allegorical novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) which enraged Muslims. *Midnight's Children* is considered as his finest work for which he received the Booker prize in 1981 followed by Booker of Booker prize in 1993 and Best of the Booker award in 2008. His other works include *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) and *Enchantress of Florence* (2008).

Rohinton Mistry was born in Bombay and immigrated to Canada in 1975. His writings mostly focus on the complex phenomenon of Indian modernity. His first novel was *Such a Long Journey* (1991). His other major works are *A Fine Balance* (1996) and *Family Matters* (2002).

Amitav Ghosh is another popular writer who won the Sahitya Academy Award for his novel *The Shadow Lines*. His other writings are *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), *The Glass Palace* (2000), and *Hungry Tide* (2004).

Well known for his novel *A Suitable Boy* (1994), Vikram Seth is proficient in writing prose, poetry and travelogues. His other novels are *The Golden Gate* (1986) and *An Equal Music* (1999).

Another popular writer and winner of several literary awards is Amit Chaudhuri. His novella *A Strange Sublime Address* (1991) won the Betty Task Prize and Commonwealth Writers Prize and Guardian Fiction (Eurasia Region, Best First

---

Book). His novel *Afternoon Raag* (1993) won the Southern Art Literature Prize and The Encore Award. *The Freedom Song* (1998) won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in 2000.

---

### Self- Assessment Questions

---

1. Which novel is considered as the first Indian novel in English?
2. List a few works of fiction by Rabindranath Tagore.
3. Who were the three prominent fiction writers in the pre-independence era?
4. Discuss briefly about the themes dealt by Narayan, Anand and Raja Rao in their works.
5. What do you think is the importance of Malgudi?
6. Discuss the development in Indian English novel since independence.

#### 11.4.1 Women Novelists

After going through major male writers let us know about the women novelists. Most of the writings by women writers emerge after independence. Some of the prominent women writers are Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Attia Hossain, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai.

Kamala Markandaya started her writing career after she migrated to England. Her novels deal with the changing socio-economic factors in India after independence. She won fame with her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). Some of her other works are *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *Two Virgins* (1973), and *The Pleasure City* (1984).

Ruth Prawar Jhabwala was born in Germany to Polish parents and moved to India after her marriage with an Indian architect Cyrus Jhabwala. Her novels deal with urban middle class Indian lifestyle and conflicting eastern and western values.

---

Some of her works are *To Whom She Will* (1955), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962), *A Backward Place* (1965), *A New Dominion* (1973) and *Heat and Dust* (1975).

Nayantara Sahgal mostly wrote about the post independence political situations in India, the situation of women and the oppressed in the society. Some of her major works are *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954), *From Fear Set Free* (1962), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *The Day in Shadow* (1971).

Anita Desai began writing in English at a very young age and published her first story at the age of nine. Her first novel was *Cry the Peacock* (1963). Her major works are *Fire on the Mountain* (1978) for which she received the Sahitya Academy Award, *The Village by the Sea* (1982) which won the Guardian Award for children fiction. She was shortlisted for Booker prize three times for *Clear Light of the Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984) and *Fating Feasting* (1999). Her recent work is *The Artist of Disappearance* (2011).

Shashi Deshpande is another prominent novelist. Her novels excellently deal with inner conflicts of female psyche, search for identity, man-woman relationship and the dilemma of middle class educated women. She published her first novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* in 1980. Some other works by her are *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *That Long Silence* (1988), *The Binding Vine* (1993), and *Small Remedies* (2000).

---

### Check your Progress

---

1. Name some of the prominent women novelists.
2. Which novelist has won the Sahitya Academy Award for her novel *The Village by the Sea*.
3. Can you point out the difference in the themes of male and female writers.
4. Write down the major works by Shashi Deshpande.

**11.5 Summary**

---

In this unit you have learnt:

- About the life and works of R K Narayan.
- About the creation of Malgudi.
- The development of Indian novel in English.
- Major novelists from pre-independence to present age.

---

**11.6 Term end Questions**

---

1. Discuss Narayan as a writer.
2. Discuss the major themes dealt by Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao.
3. What do you think are the major differences in the writings of pre and post-independence era?
4. Write a note on the writings of Indian women novelists.

**UNIT 12**

**R. K. NARAYAN:**

***THE PAINTER OF SIGNS***

---

12.1 Introduction

12.2 Objectives

12.3 About the Text

12.4 Analysis of the text

12.4.1 Theme

12.5 Characters

12.5.1 Raman

12.5.2 Daisy

12.5.3 Aunt

12.5.4 Minor Characters

12.6 Summary

12.7 References

12.8 Term-End Questions



## **12.1 Introduction**

---

In the previous unit you have read about the life, works and themes involved in the writings of R. K. Narayan. We also discussed Narayan's imaginative place, Malgudi, and its importance related to the themes of his works.

Let us now move towards *The Painter of Signs*, a novel written by Narayan in 1976 which deals with the complex conflict between Indian tradition and the ideas of Western modernity. We will go through the theme of the novel and discuss the major and minor characters who build up the story.

---

## **12.2 Objectives**

---

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Undertake the analysis of the novel
- Discuss the theme involved
- Understand the development of the characters with the theme
- Explain the uniqueness of Narayan as a writer

---

## **12.3 About the Text**

---

*The Painter of Signs* is basically revolves around Raman and Daisy. The narrative is woven around their desires, aims, lifestyle, and ideology towards life. Raman, the painter of signs, lives in Malgudi with his old aunt. Raman is a graduate who professionally works as a sign painter. He is aesthetically devoted to his work; he takes pride in his art of calligraphy and works hard over the size, shape and colors of the letter so as to satisfy the needs of his clients. His aunt is a traditional Hindu woman whose complete concentration is on the household needs and the requirements of her nephew.

Daisy can be considered as the driving force of the novel. She is dedicated to the cause of population control and considers the increase in population as a menace to society. Her relationship with Raman is professional at the beginning.

She has been sent to gather statistics and create awareness towards population control in the adjoining areas of Malgudi. She sets up her office in Malgudi and needs a signboard for it. Raman feels attracted towards her and soon falls in love. Her family planning mission requires his services to select locations for putting up messages in the rural parts near Malgudi. This creates a situation where both Raman and Daisy have to spend several days together moving from village to village. Raman admires her determination and this further attracts him. Daisy angrily rejects his advances which force Raman to settle back to his usual life. As soon as he gets back to his old routine of work, Daisy returns to his life, and this time, she allows him to develop a personal relationship. They spend their evenings together and Daisy agrees to marry Raman but on her own terms. Raman, deeply in love with her, accepts all her conditions and starts planning to bring Daisy to his house.

This development in Raman's life is a setback for his orthodox aunt. She tries to persuade him to marry a girl of her choice, but when she finds that Raman has made a decision she too decides to leave for a pilgrimage ending up in Benaras where she wishes to take her last breath.

After the departure of his aunt Raman sets his house according to the needs of Daisy. But Daisy, considering marriage as useless and giving importance to the cause she is working for, leaves for some other village. Raman is left all alone and now he misses the presence of his aunt.

---

## **12.4 Analyzing the Text**

---

In the earlier units you have read about the writing styles and themes of writers like Ruskin Bond, Tagore and Premchand. You must have noticed that every writer has his own style of representation. As you have read, Ruskin Bond indulges in fantasies of his childhood days, Tagore uses his creative imagination to explore several themes, and Premchand portrays social reality. Narayan like Premchand was also interested in portraying social issues of his times. We find in

---

his writings a deep sense of representing human relationships caught in the web of socio-economic development of the country.

Let us now discuss the theme and the characters of the novel.

### **12.4.1 Theme**

As you have read above the novel takes human relationships as its central theme. Raman's relationship with his aunt and Daisy dominate the theme. Social and professional relationships can also be overheard with the minor characters.

In the short stories in the earlier units you must have noticed that stories and writings are about human relationships. The difference lies in the style of representing them and the aspect which the author picks up.

As mentioned earlier Narayan portrays life when times are changing. The period is post-independence when modernity with the development of science and technology is changing and influencing the lifestyle of people. Raman himself declares himself as rational at several points. Daisy, for sure, is carrier of modern thought and an agent to expand the idea of modernity to the lowest level (definitely for a good cause).

Raman's aunt is a beautiful contrast to Daisy. A woman with traditional Hindu leanings, she is sincere and honest in her efforts, which are largely limited to the well-being of her household.

You will clearly see a conflict in ideas of tradition and modernity excellently portrayed through the characters.

---

## **12.5 Analysis of Characters**

---

There are three major characters in the novel. Raman and Daisy provide the central narrative and Raman's aunt acts as a contrast to Daisy's character. There

are other minor characters like the lawyer, the teacher in the remote village, Raman's aunt's friend, etc.

### 12.5.1 Raman

After going through the novel it is difficult to conclude about the protagonist. The narrative starts with Raman and his life but at the later stage most of the events are controlled by Daisy. Raman is a graduate who works as a professional sign painter. He lives in Malgudi with his old aunt.

The novel starts with Raman dealing with a client. As discussed earlier, the very first conversation shows Raman's seriousness towards his work: "He felt desperate, having to explain to man after man how one had to allow time for paint to dry. No one understood the importance of this (Narayan 349)." Describing his philosophy of calligraphy he says, "Sir, listen to me. The letters on a lawyer's board must always stand proudly, and not lie supine. Head erect (350)."

Raman was a graduate and was very fond of reading. He had an admirable collection of works ranging from Plato to Pickwick Papers. He considered himself a rationalist, a man who believed in reason. He felt irritated with orthodox beliefs and wondered, "How could the Age of Reason be established if people were like this! Impossible (361)".

Now if you give a thought the author here is trying to convey, may be his own ideas or the ideas prevalent during the early 70's. He himself says that, "Malgudi was changing in 1972" (356). This was a period of transition, a period when India was moving towards Industrial development and the influence of western lifestyle was penetrating into the society. He describes the students of local college as, "admirers of hippie philosophies (354)".

This is also evident from the fact that, though Malgudi is a small town in South India, all the sign boards were being written in English. This may be so

---

because, first, the author is writing in English or, second, he deliberately uses this feature to show the growing influence of the English language in India.

Let us move further into the character of Raman. He meets Daisy after he gets the job to paint a signboard for her office. His first meeting with Daisy creates doubts on his rational outlook. He is not able to digest her name, “Daisy! What a name for someone who looked so very Indian, traditional and gentle! (370)”. Though believing in the Age of Reason, and living in a multicultural country like India, he couldn’t accept Daisy as an Indian name. The name ‘Daisy’, just Daisy, can be understood here as an attempt towards modernity. An attempt to relieve oneself from the shackles of caste and class; an attempt to create an identity of one’s own (a modern woman in a modern world).

Raman though initially desires to stay away from sexual desires and tries to resist his attraction for Daisy, ultimately falls in love with her. He accepted her offer to survey the nearby villages for data collection and putting up signboards, as he felt it was an opportunity to know her more. He travels with her the way she wants and though he disagrees with her at several points, is not able to offend her ideas.

After a short interruption in their affair, they get along together, but they strictly on conditions laid down by Daisy. Daisy proves to be dominating at every step. Raman turns out to be a weak and confused character in front of her. An advocate of rationality and Age of Reason, he visits the hermit to know about Daisy. When Daisy, cancelling all his plans of marriage leaves for another district, he couldn’t do anything and wishes to live with her in *next janma*.

Through Raman’s character, the author presents the youth who, though they have embraced modern thought, are not able to shed the old age traditions. He, in the end, turns out to be emotional, a characteristic of Indian ethos.

**12.5.2 Daisy**

Daisy is the character who dominates most of the events and sheds light on the major theme. Narayan has portrayed her as a new breed of woman who has freed herself from the chains of the patriarchal structure, or rather, we can say she is a rebellion who has decided not to accept the male-dominated pattern of society. A product of Western modernity, a liberated woman makes her own rules. She has ambition in life, which she considers as most important and through which she intends to build an identity of her own.

Daisy's ultimate aim in life is population control for the welfare of people and the nation. The western attitude to work is clearly seen in Daisy's seriousness towards her job. She takes her job as an ethical responsibility. She is willing to travel to the remote villages which lack even the basic facilities and shows no discomfort in it. "Daisy's only aim was to reach a particular village and complete her work there. Her adaptability was astonishing; she could spread out the little roll of carpet that she carried in a bag and sleep anywhere. She never bothered about comforts, conveniences" (388).

She represents a liberated and independent woman. She has the courage to live alone, take risks and confront dangers. She makes her own decisions and doesn't allow anyone to overpower her, not even her emotions. This can be seen in the fact that she doesn't convert to Christianity, though she takes the name Daisy. "The choice of profession itself reflects her radical thinking. She does not do so out of compulsion, but out of a desire to something unusual in life. May be, she wants to have an identity distinct from others of her sex" (Mehta 85). Daisy is an example of the feminist movement of the West. Narayan himself admits in an interview with S. Krishnan:

In *The Dark Room* I was concerned with showing the utter dependence of woman on man in our society. I suppose I have moved along with the times.

This girl in my new novel is quite different. Not only is she not dependent

---

on men, she actually has no use for them as an integral part of her life. (Kaur: 18)

Narayan's complete concentration is on this theme. He gives her the name Daisy which easily differentiates her from the traditional and orthodox society of Malgudi. Still she wears a saree which represents a tussle between the modern and traditional. She is strict in adherence to her rules. When she agrees to Raman's proposal of marriage she clearly lays down her conditions: "'No,' she had said. 'I won't change my name'" (459). She tells Raman that they won't have any children and if by mischance they have one she will give the child away so as to stay free for her social work.

If you want to marry me, you must leave me to my own plans even when I am a wife. On any day you question why or how, will leave you (459)

But Raman doesn't get the chance to ask why or how. The moment Raman becomes sure that Daisy is moving to his house she shatters his dreams. She decides to move to another district where population crisis was severe and bluntly gives an end to their relationship. "Married life is not for me. ... I can't live except alone" (475), is what she says to him.

The author, through the character of Daisy, represents the Western idea of womanhood. It was in the late nineteenth century the feminist movement in the West rigorously demanded women's sexual, political, and economic rights. Daisy becomes the portrait of this idea of womanhood.

### **12.5.3 Aunt**

Raman's aunt is a character who represents a traditional Indian woman. A complete contrast to Daisy, she might be a deliberate attempt by the author to show the conflict between tradition and modernity. On one hand, where Daisy's life revolves around her social work outside the home, Raman's aunt, on the other hand, considers household work as her sole responsibility. Her home is her world.

Attending to the household work and the needs of Raman was her only concern: “Morning till night, planning something for his delectation – for years, unwavering attention to his needs. She rarely asked for anything in return...” (367).

Her evening hours were spent at the temple. Raman would go there to collect the keys if he came home early. Even at this moment she would tell Raman, “in the almira, I’ve kept” (368). Like every traditional Indian elder, she wants her nephew to get married to a girl of their caste. On hearing that Raman wants to marry Daisy, “Aunt dropped the vessel, as if she had lost her hold of things.” She asked Raman, “What is her caste? Who is she?” (450).

Her faith and inclination towards religion can be judged by her desire to leave her home, visit some holy places and then stay in Banaras for the rest of her life: “... to be finally dissolved in Ganges. That is the most auspicious end to one’s life” (454).

You must have understood now that Daisy and Raman’s aunt are quite opposite in their beliefs and way of living. Daisy is independent, rational, a rebel and doesn’t believe in the concept of family. Aunt is traditional, superstitious, and believes in God.

This portrayal of two opposite women characters shows the excellence of the author in dealing with the theme. As we had discussed earlier, Narayan is an excellent observer of human relationships. The thoughts of tradition and modernity, which is the central theme of the novel, are justified by these two opposite characters.

#### **12.5.4 Other Minor Characters**

There are some minor characters in the text who act as a supplement to the theme of the novel. At the beginning we are familiarized with the lawyer. Through this figure the author shows the conflict between modern education and superstitious beliefs. Though a lawyer, he insists on slanting the alphabet on the



signboard because his astrologer says so. Even the time of putting up the board is decided by the astrologer. You should give a thought to what the author is trying to say here. I believe this small narrative between Raman and the lawyer can be taken as what deconstruction terms as 'fissure'. It is an opening where we can analyze the analytical development of modern India. (Remember that Gandhi was also a lawyer by profession).

Gupta is another fellow whom Raman meets at the 'Boardless'. He is one of the growing business classes who develop tricks to evade taxes. You know he starts a new business with a new name every year. There is another one who owns the Bhandari store. The man is from Rajasthan and settled here long back for business. What do you think these two men represent? They are not natives of this place; belong to different part of the country. May be the writer is pointing towards the growing multicultural co-existence in developing India.

The teacher at the remote village is another character who, being a teacher had to be explained by Daisy the evils of population increase and the rationality behind the mission of population control.

### **Self-Assessment Questions**

1. Write a note on Narayan's Malgudi.
2. Discuss the theme of the novel.
3. What have you known about the traditional Indian household after the study of the novel?
4. Is the teacher in the remote village against the idea of population control?
5. What is Raman's attitude towards his profession?

---

### **12.6 Summary**

---

In this unit you have learned:

- About the fictional place Malgudi
- The theme of the novel

- About the use of characters in developing the theme
- About the development of characters

You know now that how Narayan develops his characters to portray the theme he is dealing with. How he excellently manages to arrange the events to present the conditions of his times in a unique manner.

---

## 12.7 References

---

Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The World of Malgudi*. S.Krishnan (ed.). New Delhi: Viking.

Kaur, Tejinder. "Feminist Concerns in the Three Novels of R. K. Narayan: *The Dark Room*, *The Guide* and *The Painter of Signs*." *The Quest* 8.2 (Dec 1994): 12-20. Print

Mehta, M. L. "Female Assertion in R. K. Narayan's *The Painter of Signs* and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*." *Punjab Journal of English Studies* 7 (1992): 83-91. Print.

---

## 12.8 Terminal Questions

---

1. Analyze the character of Raman in *The painter of Signs*.
2. How do you think that the characters of Raman's aunt and Daisy are contrast to each other?
3. "The aim of Daisy's life is somehow related to her past". Discuss.
4. Critically discuss how Malgudi fits into the theme of *The Painter of Signs*.