



GAUHATI UNIVERSITY

Institute of Distance and Open Learning

B.A. First Semester
(Regular Course)

Paper: ENG-RC-1016

The Individual and Society

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UG-ENG-RC-1016

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ENGLISH

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THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY



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Unit 1

Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*

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1.0 Introduction:

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340 – 1400) is prominently known as the Father of English Literature and the first modern poet. The poet was born at a time when England was experiencing great socio-political and cultural changes. At that time, the King of England was Edward III. It was a period of transition when the old was gradually replaced by the new social and political order. The hundred-year War and its influence changed the political scenario of England and it was accompanied by a strong sense of nationalism in England. This was a new-age of humanism in the West and Chaucer represented this glorious era of great creativity and literary taste.

1.1 Objectives:

The objective of this Unit is to make you familiar with:

- Chaucer's England and the literary scenario,
- The life and literary works of Geoffrey Chaucer,
- Chaucer's use of irony, humour and characterization,
- Chaucer's response to fourteenth-century life and society.

1.2 The Age of Chaucer in England:

King Richard II's reign (1377-1399) was a time of great transition. As Andrew Sanders observes, it was a time of quality, quantity and great variety in the English literary enterprise. England was originally a rural society. By the fourteenth century, cities began to take shape with increasing population and economy. During c1370, the population of London was around 40,000. This was accompanied by a growth in literacy. The monopoly of the clerical institution began to decrease due to a growing sense of nationalism and an interest in literature and creativity. According to William J Long, the age of Chaucer was marked by two great movements in the complex life of England. The first was political which culminated in the reign of Edward III. The age witnessed a growth of the English national spirit after the great victories of Edward and the hundred-years War. Long observes:

In the rush of this great national movement, separating England from the political ties of France and, to a less degree, from ecclesiastical bondage to Rome, the mutual distrust and jealousy which had divided nobles and commons were momentarily swept aside by a wave of patriotic enthusiasm. The French language lost its official prestige, and English became the speech not only of the common people but of courts and parliament as well. (Long 67)

In the above quote, Long mentions that England became free from ecclesiastical bondage and the spirit of English began to rise. You need to know here that French and Latin were the two dominant languages in England before Chaucer. After the hundred-year War, England's victory over France transformed the political scenario of England. The second movement was social which was the result of the growing disparity between the wealthy classes and the deprived peasants. Remember that such discontent between two classes of the society ultimately gave rise to the capitalistic spirit of the Age which had consolidated in the eighteenth century in the form of Colonialism and Imperialism. See Colonialism and Imperialism.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Let us know something about the French influence on England before the advent of the Age of Chaucer. The Normans, who were a race of sea-rovers, conquered a section of northern France and adopted the French civilization and language. Under the Duke of Normandy, William, the Normans conquered Anglo-Saxon England in the Battle of Hastings in 1066. As a result of cultural exchange and assimilation, the Normans and Saxons got united and the literature of the Normans began to colour the imagination of the Saxons. In case of language also, the Saxons preferred to drop the Teutonic, that is tribal, inflections. Instead, they gradually began to absorb the French terminology. Thus, English language and literature is a conglomeration of French and Saxon elements.

Space for Learner's Notes

1.2.1 From the Medieval to the Modern:

It has been mentioned earlier that the Age of Chaucer was an age of transition. Before the time of Chaucer, the socio-cultural and political structures of the English land was mostly medieval. After Chaucer, we see a mingling of the modern with the medieval in England. England began to grow in terms of its self, power and politics. English anti-clericalist sentiments and English Protestantism prepared England for a new destiny.

The English language and its increasing influence contributed to the birth of the national spirit in England. English language became the vehicle of school teaching. It is significant to mention here that the Bible was available in common English terms after John Wycliffe's translations. During the time of Chaucer, the culture of medieval France prevailed in Court circles and Chaucer became quite familiar with such a medieval set-up. It was Chaucer who set the pattern of modern English poetry and derived the forms and meters from France and Italy. Chaucer was the first English poet to introduce the English sense of humour in poetry in England. You will come to know more about this in Chaucer's the *Canterbury Tales*. The objective of such humour was to critique the excess that was prevalent in the society. Thus you can see that Chaucer's England was undergoing a massive transformation in various fronts. You are already informed about the political changes that took place in England after subsequent conquests. In the economic sphere also, England began to experience changes. The English clergyman, John Ball, who was one of the prominent leaders of the Peasant's Revolt, asked an important question in medieval terms:

When Adam delved and Eve span

Who was then a gentleman?

He spoke these lines during his public address at Blackheath. John Ball was excommunicated for fanning inflammatory sermons for a classless society. Its medieval set-up began to yield to the modern set-up. Such a modern system broke down the old medieval pattern of politics which is discussed in the next section.

1.2.2 The End of Feudal Order and the Birth of Nationalism:

The most significant social change that took place in England during Chaucer's time was the breakdown of the feudal order which was a highly hierarchical system. Instead, a new individualist society began to form with people's legal rights and freedom. The famous historian G. M. Trevelyan observes the following in the changing society:

This great change broke the mould of the static feudal world and liberated mobile forces of capital, labor and personal enterprise, which in the course of time made a richer and more varied life in town and village and opened out new possibilities to trade and manufactures as well as to agriculture. (Trevelyan 4)

In the above quote, Trevelyan identifies two major developments in English social life. One is the end of a static social pattern marked by social hierarchy, and the other is the growth of trade, manufacture and agriculture. This was indeed the beginning of England's imperial journey and formation of a capitalist society. The feudal system was static because it did not give power to the common people. The system worked under the realms of the nobility, the clergy and the peasantry.

The method of cultivation was the 'Open Field' that consisted of a village community and that worked upon the principles of strip allotment. The cultivators formed a self-governing committee, but they had to work as serfs under the lord of the manor within the same system. There were certain obligations for such serfs. Some of them are:

- The serfs did not have the legal right to leave their holdings. They were bound by the soil.

- They had to grind their corn at the lord's mill.
- Before their children's marriage, the serf had to take the consent of the lord.
- According to the feudal law, the object of each peasant was to raise food for his family rather than for the market.

The end of such a feudal order was a result of many historical factors. Some reasons are mentioned below:

- Change in the military structures and formation of professional fighters in the West.
- The Magna Carta from 1215 reduced the power of the English Kings.
- Black Death and a deadly plague broke down the whole society. The nobility could not hold over the lower classes. The nobles became weaker in power.
- Unusual progress and developments in England in terms of trade and expansion.
- The Crusades.
- The series of religious wars that destabilized the Christian world.
- The power of the Pope collapsed with the clash between the Pope and King Henry VIII. This was followed by the dissolution of the monasteries in England.
- Growth of towns and huge migration from the countryside to the town areas.
- Birth of a nationalistic spirit and the subsequent establishment of a centralized government.

Chaucer was born at such a time when these socio-political and religious changes were taking place in England, and he successfully reflected the spirit of his age in his famous compositions. The political and religious unrest of his time formed the seed of his writings. Chaucer, like a historian, narrated the story of England in his famous *Canterbury Tales* in order to keep a record of the events and the people of fourteenth-century England. The portrait gallery that Chaucer provides us in the long narrative of the epic poem is an evidence of his understanding of his Age. Chaucer chooses his characters from all the sections of the English society, and that adds to the beauty of the poem. Read the poem and try to identify the characters that Chaucer describes from his fourteenth-century social set-up.

Space for Learner's Notes

STOP TO CONSIDER

Black Death: A disastrous mortal disease spread across Europe in the fourteenth century claiming millions of people. It was between 1346 and 1353. This epidemic shattered the whole structure and the economy of Europe and subsequently brought tremendous changes to the whole of England. The aftermath of Black Death was a time of great crisis and scarcity. The population in some places in Europe began to increase due to migration after the disaster. This was followed by people's hunger for land and shortage of labour. As a result, the price of labour also increased.

John Wycliffe: John Wycliffe was a famous reformer, theologian and a priest in the fourteenth century who is mostly known for his translation of the Bible. His contribution to English Protestantism was remarkable and he was one its predecessors. He critiqued the status and luxury enjoyed by the Church clergymen in England and initiated the movement against corrupt practices in the Church. The followers of Wycliffe were known as Lollards and the movement, later on, was known as Lollardism. The Lollards sought reforms in Western Christianity and continued till English Reformation in the sixteenth century.

1.2.3 Life and People in the Age of Chaucer:

The discussion so far informed you about the changing socio-economic and political scenario in England that heralded a new era in the fourteenth century. In this section, an attempt will be made to introduce you to the different classes of people that played an active role in the formation and transition of the society in the fourteenth century. This will be an important study for you because Chaucer's famous narrative, the *Canterbury Tales*, is about those people in England. Hence, you need to know about the different kinds of people in fourteenth-century England to understand the social context of the text. You will come to know later that Chaucer has wonderfully and wittily critiqued the excess that was prevalent in the then English society.

It has already been mentioned that fourteenth-century England witnessed a growth in the spirit of individualism as there was a decline of the old feudal order and the power of the King. However, you need to understand that the new wave of individualism was also a result of the formation of the new middle class in England and the active role played by the manufacturers and merchants. There were protests and revolts initiated by some rebellious peasants against a few such employers who had tried to exploit the

employees. Such protests were often about low wages paid to the employees. The Peasant's Revolt is one such important historical incident.

Chaucer's England was also known for sheep farming which had been practised there since the medieval times. England produced the best wool in Europe and its cloth production gave a remarkable status to the entire country. The sheep farming barons, the bishops, the professional shepherds and the peasants were actively involved in sheep farming and wool production.

During Chaucer's time, a change took place in the cultivation process. The lords decided to lease out field services for cash. However, due to the rising price of labour many landlords decided to cultivate their demesne on lease through a new farming class known as the Yeomans. Chaucer refers to a Yeoman in his *Canterbury Tales* and writes that he was a skilled Bowman and was well versed in woodcraft. Trevelyan writes that the villain serf of the feudal order was in the process of extinction during the fourteenth century and he was replaced by a Yeoman farmer or a landless labourer (Trevelyan 10). Subsequently, in history, we see a growing clash between the small farmers and the landless labourers because of low wages.

STOP TO CONSIDER

The Rising of 1381: The Rising of 1381 is historically known as the Peasants' Revolt or Watt Tyler's Rebellion. The prominent reason behind the rising was the unpopular poll tax that was imposed upon the public. This gave rise to economic discontent among the labourers and working classes. This uprising was further fuelled by the Statutes of Labourers (1351) which intended to fix the maximum wage for labourers after the great Plague. Wat Tyler, the Kentish Man, actively headed the revolt.

The Parliamentary laws on wages in Chaucer's England: During the fourteenth century, a new middle class came into existence. They promoted a new agricultural policy to keep down wages. It was preceded by the division of the peasantry as employers and employees. This resulted in the quarrel between the small farmers and the landless labourers. The medieval manorial system gradually broke down and Parliamentary rates were encouraged money economy in England. The famous 'Statutes of labourers' was an important step to control price rise and rise of wages.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Discuss how the diplomatic life of Chaucer helped him in his growth as a literary person.

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2. Discuss how the spirit of individualism and nationalism changed the social scenario of fourteenth-century England.

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1.3 Geoffrey Chaucer: Life and Career:

Born in London, on Thames Street near the river, Geoffrey Chaucer was the son of a wine merchant who was closely associated with the Royal household. Chaucer was a great reader but no information is clearly available about his education. At the age of seventeen, Chaucer was appointed as a page in the house of the wife of Gaunt, one of the sons of Edward III, the King. It is known that Chaucer actively participated in the hundred-year War with the King and that is how he became familiar with the medieval chivalric life and culture. As you will see later as to how Chaucer writes about this chivalric life in his *Canterbury Tales*. During one unsuccessful move, Chaucer was imprisoned by his enemy and later on he was rescued by the King after being ransomed by money. He was appointed as valet to the King after his return from the War.

Chaucer's life as a diplomat gave him the wonderful opportunity to travel to different countries, and this contributed a lot to his growth as a literary person. He was sent to Italy in 1370 where he was greatly influenced by Italian art and literature. He acted as the Controller of Customs in London. In 1386, Chaucer became a Member of the Parliament from Kent and devoted himself to his work. Even though he was highly busy with the political affairs of his time, Chaucer managed to read books, when he was in Italy; he became familiar with the rich Italian literature. As a political person, Chaucer was closely associated with John of Gaunt.

Chaucer can be called the forerunner of modernity and enlightenment in the West as he played a very crucial role in importing the spirit of humanism and Renaissance from Italy to England. Chaucer's life bears the evidence

of this important fact. His life may be studied in terms of three different periods of time. The first period includes the first thirty years of his youth and early manhood. The second period consisted of fifteen years and that was the time when he was an active diplomat and a man of affairs. The third period, that also included fifteen years, was the most fruitful period of Chaucer.

Space for Learner's Notes

STOP TO CONSIDER

Who was John of Gaunt?

Geoffrey Chaucer worked under the guidance of John of Gaunt. John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, was the most powerful patron of Chaucer. He was the third son of King Edward III of England. Chaucer received the opportunity to travel abroad as a diplomat under his patronage. When he went to Italy, he came into contact with the literature of two famous writers – Petrarch and Boccaccio.

Let us learn about some of his most important works during the immensely productive periods of his life. As it has been mentioned earlier, Chaucer's life and literary career can be classified into three time periods during which he had composed the following works:

- **The First Period:** This period was also known as his time of apprenticeship, that is, the French Period. The best-known composition was his allegorical poem, *Romaunt of the Rose*, which was a translated form of the French *Roman de la Rose*. Another poem, "Dethe of Blanche the Duchess" or "Boke of the Duchesse", was written after the death of the wife of Chaucer's Patron, John of Gaunt. Other poems written during the first period were "Compleynte to Pite", "A B C" etc.
- **The Second Period:** The second period was known as the Italian Period. During this period, Chaucer composed his famous *Troilus and Criseyde* which contains eight thousand lines. This work was inspired by Boccaccio's famous work, *Il Filostrato*. Chaucer skillfully worked on it and tried to reflect the spirit of his Age. Chaucer's incomplete poem, "Hous of Fame", was also composed during this second period. Another great poem, *Legende of Goode Wimmen*, was composed which was about dreaming of Love God.

Space for Learner's Notes

- **The Third Period:** This period was the most fruitful period in Chaucer's life when he started working on his *magnum opus*, the *Canterbury Tales*. This was a great piece of work which can be termed as a classic social document about English life and people. After this great contribution to English literature, Chaucer was respected as the "Father of English Poetry". The *Canterbury Tales* was inspired by Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Chaucer's originality lies in his use of innovative metrical devices and a skillful organization of materials.

Self Asking Questions

1. Name two historical events that changed the socio-economic structure of England.

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2. Write briefly about the third period in Chaucer's literary career.

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1.4 Chaucer as a Representative Poet :

Geoffrey Chaucer was known for his skillful handling of meter and brilliant characterization. Chaucer is called a representative poet of his Age because of his wonderful ability to present his time and culture in his writings. No doubt he borrowed materials from the French and Italian masters, but his originality and expertise lie in his ability to represent contemporary reality in his own unique way. Chaucer responds to the corrupt Church practices of his time, the stark socio-economic changes in England after the expansion of trade, and the decline of the feudal order. The entire framework of the *Canterbury Tales* was based on fourteenth-century lifestyle and social customs – the medieval set-up of England, the hierarchical society, the transition from the old to the new, the expansion of trade and commerce, the rise of the Merchant class and consolidation of the English middle class, and their influence on English life. In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer writes about popular pilgrimages of the fourteenth century. People used to visit holy shrines when they were in trouble or crisis. This was an important

aspect of fourteenth-century English life. The characters that Chaucer introduced in the poem represent the different classes of people that were there in England at that time. The contemporary interest in chivalry is represented through the two foremost characters: the Knight and the Squire. The Merchant in the tales is described as a man on his horse. He is seen busy in profit-making and is a clever businessman. This refers to the rising Merchant class in the fourteenth century. The ecclesiastical characters in the *Tales* throw light upon the luxurious lifestyles and corrupt Church practices in Chaucer's England. Look at the character of the Monk, the Friar and the Pardoner in the poem, where Chaucer critiques the deformities of the fourteenth-century ecclesiastical order and seeks to present a complete account that is replete with utmost irony and humour. Do you know what is 'irony' in literature? It is a literary device used by writers to present a contrast between the appearance and reality of a situation. Irony is also used to add a humorous effect in literature.

1.5 Chaucer's Literary Style and Use of English Language

Chaucer used Realism in his writings. His writings were about courtly love, chivalry, allegory, alliteration and humour. His sense of wit and expertise in representing English life is seen in his beautiful characterization in the epic narration of the *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer was the first English writer to use humour in literature and remained an inspiration for succeeding humorists in English literature, such as, William Shakespeare in the sixteenth century and Charles Dickens in the nineteenth century.

Chaucer is well known for his use of "rime royal" which consists of seven-line stanzas. The rime royal has a musical quality and has a literary appeal to the readers. Chaucer was the first to revive the East Midland Dialect and he refined it for future purpose in England. He gave importance to the development of his native tongue and refined it as a wonderful medium of expression. William J. Long even observes that Chaucer was the first English writer to meticulously narrate the complexities of human relationships and describe the daily chores of human life (Long 77).

Chaucer was an observer from an early age and he minutely recorded and stored them in his memory. The precise descriptions, use of similes and metaphors, and other comparisons mark his excellent mastery over selected materials. His art of narration and storytelling devices remained as a source of inspiration for subsequent writers in the history of English literature.

STOP TO CONSIDER

What is “rime royal”?

It is a seven-line iambic pentameter stanza with the rhyme scheme “ababbcc”. This form was first used in English verse by Geoffrey Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde* in the fourteenth century. Chaucer is known to have borrowed this form of rhyme from the French poet Guillaume de Machaut. Later, this form was used by William Shakespeare in the sixteenth century, William Morris in the nineteenth century and John Masefield in the twentieth century.

1.6 Reading the “Prologue” to the *Canterbury Tales*

1.6.1 The Context of the Poem

During the reign of Richard II, the poet started a journey to the shrine of Thomas Becket at Canterbury. Before the journey, he stayed at an inn for one night in Southwark in Southern London. The inn was known as “Tabard”. At that place, there were other pilgrims from distant lands and from different class backgrounds. A total of twenty-nine pilgrims gathered there. It is important to mention here that people, in the past, used to visit shrines of their favourite saints for various reasons. When they got sick or wanted a spiritual rejuvenation, they went on pilgrimages. Such journeys were usually made during the spring time when nature remains pleasant and comfortable. Chaucer uses this idea of pilgrimage in his book, the *Canterbury Tales*, and portrays the society of fourteenth-century England with all its vividness and characteristic features. The host of the inn (probably the Landlord of the inn) made an interesting plan after seeing such a considerable gathering. He informed the travellers that the journey to the shrine was full of challenges and difficulties. So, he suggested that they could spend the weary hours by entertaining each other by telling stories. Everyone in the group agreed to his suggestion and accepted him as a guide and leader of the trip. This is how the journey began the next day and among the pilgrims, who were part of that journey, were a knight, a squire, a yeoman, a prioress, a monk, a friar, a merchant, a clerk, a law sergeant and many others from different strata of life and profession. The Knight was the first to tell his story. In the “Preface” to the book, *Stories from Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*, W.T. Stead writes:

In the *Canterbury Tales* the fourteenth century rises from the grave, so to speak; and Chaucer's pilgrims – a motley band – are almost the only men of his time who live and breathe immortalized by the genius of the poet. ("Preface" to *Stories from Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*)

Space for Learner's Notes

STOP TO CONSIDER

Where was the Tabard inn?

The inn was situated opposite old London, near London Bridge. This place of Southwark was well-known because the first playhouse, where Shakespeare had his training, was the same place. Besides, that was the point of departure for all travel to the south of England.

1.6.2 The Text with Explanations:

Lines 1-10

The poem begins with an introduction to the season when people used to go for pilgrimages during the fourteenth century. The season is spring and the time is the month of April every year. It is a season of freshness and abundance. It is the season when the sun is young, the birds begin to sing and plants begin to grow and bloom. In such a pleasant season, people prefer to go to distant places for pilgrimage. Here, Zephyrus is the west wind. Thus, nature inspires all to enjoy during this season. The sun is called young because, during spring time, it does not become too hot. Look at the opening passage of the text and find out what people want to do when April comes. Try to understand the idea of pilgrimage and the nature of the pilgrims.

Here you need to look at Chaucer's use of words. Words are differently spelt and meant during Chaucer's age. Here are some examples: "swoot": sweet, "eek": also, "croppes": twigs, "smalle": small, "holt": forest, "sleepen": sleep, "al": all

Lines 11-21

The poet says that pilgrims prefer to go to places, like Canterbury, to seek the blessings of the holy, blissful martyr, Thomas Beckett, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was murdered in 1170. He was murdered because he tried to enforce the ecclesiastical claims in England. This place, later on, became a holy shrine for pilgrimage. Such visits were made when people were in some trouble. The poet halted there at an inn called the Tabard in

Southwark. At total of twenty-nine pilgrims from different classes and places gathered there for a night's stay. Next day all were ready for Canterbury.

Difficult words:

“Palmer’s”: Pilgrims who visited shrines in foreign countries, “Ferne”: Foreign, “Hallows”: Holy shrines, “Couth”: Famous, “Wend”: Went, “Holpen”: Helped, “Wenden”: To go

Lines 22-35

All the twenty-nine pilgrims were set for Canterbury and, before sunrise, the poet had a talk with each one of them and became a good companion. He promised to rise early next morning to go to Canterbury. The chambers and stables were widely built and they received their best entertainment at the inn.

Difficult words:

“Corage”: Heart, “Hostelry”: Inn, “Chambers”: Rooms inside the inn, “Weren”: Were, “Anon”: Soon, “Forword”: Promise, “Devise”: Describe

Lines 36-42

The poet thinks it proper to describe the nature, rank and position of the pilgrims before the narration of the tale. He began his tale with the description of the Knight among the pilgrims.

Difficult Words:

“Natheless”: Nonetheless, “Ere”: Before, “Thinketh”: Think, “Accordant”: Accordance, “Alle”: All, “Degree”: Rank, “Array”: Dress

Lines 43-78

It begins with the description of the Knight. The Knight, who was at the head of the table, was a worthy man. From his early life, he loved chivalry, truth, honour, freedom and courtesy. The knight was honoured for his bravery and worth, during his wars, in Christian and heathen countries. He had his victory in Prussia, at Alexandria, and joined expeditions in Lithuania and Russia. The Knight had been to Grenada during the siege of Algeciras. He bravely took part in the battle against the infidels. The siege took place in 1344 and it continued for about two years. No Christian of his rank and position had ever taken part in such a crusade before him. The knight fought fifteen bloody battles. He also fought for his religion. The knight was not only worthy, but was also wise and meek. He was well-mannered and a perfectly gentle knight. He had never been rude to anyone in his life.

The Knight had a good horse but he was not dressed gaily. He wore a dirty woolen jerkin for he had just returned from a long voyage. Thus, Chaucer's Knight was perfect for his job and is a representative of the old chivalry that existed during the Middle Age. Identify the places where the Knight had fought. Learn about the Knight's appearance and way of conversation.

Difficult words:

“Farre”: Farther, “Alisandre”: Alexandria, “Prusse”: Prussia, “Lettowe”: Lithuania, “Russe”: Russia, “Algesir”: Algeria, “Leyes”: A port of Asia Minor which was captured by the Christians in the fourteenth century, “Satalie”: Attalia, captured by the Christians in the fourteenth century.”Tramissene”: A place in Algeria, “Ilke”: Same, “Palatie”: Palathia in Asia Minor, “Gipon”: Short doublet, “Besmotter’d”: Soiled by his coat, “Wente”: Went

Lines 79-100

The next pilgrim was the son of the Knight, a young Squire, who was a lover and a lusty bachelor. He had curled locks, was about twenty years old and was of medium height. He had great strength and had been to battles in Flanders, Artois and Picardy. He maintained his youth well in the hope of winning the grace of his lady. His dress was embroidered in red and white. He played his flute all day long. He was as fresh as the month of May. He wore a short coat with long sleeves. He knew how to compose songs, fight in tournaments, draw, write and dance. He was a passionate lover, who was courteous and serviceable. It was a part of the custom for squires of the highest rank to carve at their father's table. Compare the Squire with the Knight.

Difficult Words:

“Cruelle”: Curled, “Wonderly deliver”: Wonderfully nimble, “Chevachie”: Cavalry raids, “Mead”: Meadow, “Indite”: Write, “Nighertale”: Night-time

Lines 101-117

The Knight was accompanied by a Yeoman who was as his servant. He was in a green coat and hood. There were a set of peacocks and bright and sharp arrows under his belt. He was quite efficient in hitting his target. He carried a mighty bow with him, a gay armguard, a sword, a buckler and a fine, sharp dagger. His face was brown with the sun and was clean-shaven. He had a bright silver-coloured St. Christopher on his breast. He also carried a horn and a green belt. So he looked like a woodman.

Difficult Words:

“No mo”: No more, “Pecokarwes”: Arrows decorated with peacock feathers, “Thrifty”: Carefully, “Nut-head”: Roundhead, “Visiage”: Face, “Coud”: Know, “Bracer”: Small shield, “Soothly”: Certainly

Lines 118-164

These lines are about a fashionable and kind-hearted Prioress or Nun. Her name was Madam Eglantine. She smiled very simply and quietly and sang her prayers beautifully. She tried to speak French and imitated the table manners. Chaucer reveals ironically that she had hardly any interest in her duties as the head of her Convent. The Prioress has another Nun who was her chaplain. Notice the Prioress's attitude towards animals. Does it signify her fashionable character?

Difficult words:

“Coy”: Quiet, “Cleped”: Called, “Fetisly”: Properly

St. Loy – Saint Loy was asked by the King to swear upon the relics of the Saint. But, he refused to do so and burst into tears. Hence, this reference means that there was no oath at all. The Nun, similarly, never swore at all and thus she was not devoted to her job.

“Entuned”: Intoned, “Mete”: Food, “Leet”: Let, “Digne”: Worthy, “Pitous”: Full of Pity, *Amor vincit omnia* – Love conquers all

Lines 165-207

Chaucer introduces the Monk in the next few lines. The Monk was not a traditional and obedient kind of a monk. He preferred the modern ways of living and, hence, did not believe in the rules of Saint Maure or St. Benedict. He was an ‘outrider’ and had an interest in hunting. He was a fat and healthy person with bright eyes and fine horses. Chaucer praised him as a man who is worthy to be the head of a monastery. He ignored the scriptures because he believed that they were narrow and austere. The Monk was called an ‘outrider’. Find out why?

Difficult Words:

“Venery”: Hunting, “Swinken”: Toil, “Prickasour”: Hard rider, “Lust”: Pleasure, “Steep”: Deep-set, “Forpined”: Wasted

Lines 208-269

There was a Friar among the pilgrims who was quite cheerful and wanton. He had successfully arranged many marriages of young women and was well loved. He familiar with the rich landlords there. The Friar was of the opinion that the act of giving anything to a poor friar indicates that the person was repentant. He spoke of himself boastfully that he had the power of hearing confessions. He opines that man should give silver to the poor instead of weeping and praying. He was very kind and pleasant to the fair wives and he kept pins and knives inside his bag to give to those women. Chaucer writes that he was the best beggar in the Convent. He was the most virtuous person and was helpful by nature. Find out the name of the Friar from the text. What kind of absolution did he give to sinners?

Difficult Words:

“Limitour”: A Friar who is permitted by authority to beg within particular limits, “Penance”: Penance, “Tivet”: Bag, “Taverns”: Inns, “The orders foure”: The friar belonged to the four religious orders of the society: the Dominicans, the Franciscans, the Carmelities and the Augustines.

Lines 270-284

The Merchant, with a forked beard, was a worthy man and he was so shrewd that nobody knew that he was in debt. He was neatly dressed in parti-colored attire and sat on his horse. He was quite aware of the bargains during his time and knew how to sell French coins during exchange. Does the narrator talk about his name? What type of subject does the Merchant talk about?

Difficult words:

“Motley”: A cloth with a woven design

Lines 285-308

Here is the description of a scholarly Monk of Oxford who took great interest in reading books. His horse looked very thin like a rake and he himself was thin. He did not speak much and whatever he said was brief and weighty. He was like a philosopher and took real interest in teaching and learning. Who was a Clerk in medieval times?

Difficult Words:

“Oxenford”: Oxford, “Rake”: A debauch, “Hollow”: Poorly, “Leane”: Thin

Lines 309-330

There was a wise Sergeant of Law who was discreet and a man of dignity. He had been at the porch of St. Paul's Church several times and participated in legal discussions there. He was an authorized judge at the local legal sessions. He was the busiest among all and he seemed busier than he actually was. He was well-versed in his work and no one could find fault in him.

Difficult words:

“Parvis”: The porch of St. Paul's Church in London was a place where lawyers used to get together for discussion on various legal matters, “Discreet”: Prudent, “Plein”: Full, “King Will”: King William, “Array”: Dress, “Pinch at”: Find fault at

Lines 331- 360

The Franklin is described as a pleasure-seeking person. Chaucer compares him with the philosopher Epicurus's son whose philosophy was about believing in eating, drinking and merry-making. He was a lover of wine and he always looked for foods of best quality. He punished his cook for not keeping the kitchen in order. He is compared with Saint Julian of his countryside by Chaucer.

Difficult words:

“Franklin”: A rich landowner, “Berd”: Beard, “Sanguine”: Red, “Table dormant”: Fixed dining table, “Sire”: Chairman or judge

Lines 361-378

Next Chaucer narrates about a Haberdasher, a Carpenter, a Weaver, a Dyer and a Tapestry-maker. They composed a great fraternity and they were in fresh and new attire. Each of them was fit to be an alderman and they had sufficient food and income for maintenance. An alderman's wife was respected as Madame and, so, the wives wanted their husbands to be worthy as aldermen. Do you know about the Guildsmen in the age of Chaucer?

Difficult Words:

“Haberdasher”: A merchant who deals with smaller goods, “Alderman”: The head of the guild, “Chattels”: Property, “Y-clep'd”: Called

Lines- 379-387

There was a cook among the pilgrims who knew how to roast, stew and fry foods. The cook had been suffering from ulcer. Is there any irony about the representation of the cook?

Difficult Words:

“Tart”:Sharp

Lines 388-410

The Shipman was from the West. He wore a gown of coarse cloth and had a dagger hung by a lace. He was a good fellow. The summer sun had given him a brown complexion. He was not a man of nice conscience and had interest in wine. He bravely fought against his enemies. He was unsurpassable in terms of reckoning the time-and-tides. He had to face many hurdles in life but he came out successfully. The name of his ship was Magdelain. What did he steal while the traders were asleep?

Difficult Words:

“Rouncy”: A strong horse, “Falding”: Coarse cloth, “Fellow”:Human, “Reckon”:Guess, “Y-cleped”:Called

Lines 411- 444

The Doctor of Physics was a scholar in astrology and a medical practitioner of the Middle Ages. He could tell the cause of any malady or disease. He was always ready to help his patients with drugs and ointments. He took proper care of his health and was a good reader of books. He was an economical person. He loved gold because it is congenial to medicines. There is reference to different chemists and Greek physicians of the second century.

Difficult Words:

“Sanguine”: Red, “Sendall”: Fine silk, “Y-know”: Known

Lines 445-476

Among the women characters, there was a good wife from the place Bath. She was deaf but was very skillful in weaving and cloth-making. She had a bold face and a red complexion. Chaucer explains the way she dresses herself up. She had been to Jerusalem thrice in her life. Besides, she had travelled to Rome, Bologne and Cologne. Chaucer expresses sympathy for her for being deaf. She was a worthy woman all her life with five husbands, apart from her company in youth. She was gap-toothed and wore a fair

head dress. She knew how to play the old game of love and as such she had all the remedies of love.

Difficult Words:

“Scath”:Pity, “Haunt”: Skill, “Coverchiefs”: Head-dresses, “Nouth”: Now, “Gat-toothed”: Gap-toothed

Lines 477-528

The poor Parson was a learned man and a good preacher. He was very hardworking and patient in his dealings. He was happy with the little he had and he practised what he preached. He led a noble life and remained a good and an ideal example for his followers.

Difficult Words:

“Werk”: Work, “Preche”:Preach, “Y-proved”:Had proved, “Tythes”:Tax, “Apostles”: Followers

Lines 529-541

The ploughman was there with them. He was good and a hard-working person. He lived peacefully and with perfect charity. He was a devotee of God and loved his neighbour. He was in a farmer's attire and he had a mare with him.

Difficult Words:

“Y-laid”:Carried, “Fother”: Cartload, “Swinker”:Hard-worker, “Smart”:Loss, “Dike”:Dig ditches, “Tabard”:Sleeveless coat worn by labourers

Lines 544-566

There was also a stout miller in the group. He was quite well-built and huge. He was a loud talker and knew how to steal corn. He did prosper in his life through dishonesty. He was in his white coat and a blue hood. He could blow a bagpipe.

Difficult Words:

“Soun”: Sound, “Weared”: Wore, “Jangler”:Noisy talker, “Goliardais”:Buffoon, “Steale”: Steal

Lines 567-586

There was a gentle Manciple who was very efficient in buying. He was quite cautious about his monetary dealings with people. He was an expert in law and witty enough to befool others.

Difficult Words:

“Achatours”:Buyers, “Temple”: Law institution, “Algate”:Always, “Lewed”:
Unlearned

Lines 587-622

The Reeve was from Norfolk and he was cunning enough to derive profit from his master. He was a good manager of household life. His beard was shaven and he had cropped hair. He had long and thin legs like a staff. He was a slender but choleric man.

Difficult Words:

“Choleric”:Ill-tempered, “Y-shorn”:Cut short, “Y-like”:Like, “Hyne”:Servant,
“Mistere”: Trade, “Pers”:Blue

Lines 623-668

The Summoner was a sharp, active person with a fire-red, pimpled face. Children were afraid of him. He was a hard drinker and loved garlic and onions. When he was drunk, he spoke only Latin which he learnt from reading legal documents. He had no fear in excommunication. So the poet did not agree with his views. He was well familiar with the young ladies and was their adviser. Thus, the Summoner was dishonest, notorious and corrupt.

Difficult words:

“Sompnour”: Summoner, “Sausefleme”:Red or pimply,
“Grope”:Search,*Questio quid juris*: ‘I ask which law’ (a Latin phrase)

Lines 669-714

A Pardoner is a person who sells ‘indulgences’ in the Church. The Pardoner, among the pilgrims, was from Roncesvalles and he was coming straight from the court. He had yellow-colored hair, like wax, that hung smoothly like flex. He wore no hood and had no beard. He sang prayers in the church loudly and merrily.

Difficult words:

“Strike”:Strip, “Compere”: Companion, “Comen”:Came, “Wallet”:Wallet,
“Relikes”:Relics

Lines 715- 746

Here the poet seeks forgiveness for the many shortcomings in telling the stories. He says that his wit is short.

Lines 747-828

The last character that is introduced is that of the host of the inn. He was bold in his speech, wise and good-mannered. He was a jolly person and tried his best to entertain his guests. It was his proposal that everyone should take part in the story-telling to make their journey interesting. He decided to give them company and acted as their judge. All pilgrims agreed to his proposal and started on their journey. The Knight was the first to tell his story.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Discuss the women characters in the “Prologue”. Do they represent the fourteenth-century society?

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2. How does Chaucer critique the corruption of the Church in the fourteenth century?

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1.6.3 Chaucer’s art of characterization, use of humour and Irony in the Prologue:

Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* was composed during the third period of his life. It was a magnificent work undertaken by the great poet to represent fourteenth-century life and the then society of England. By using the medieval technique of story-telling, Chaucer presented the contemporary world with utmost realism, vividness and humour. William J. Long writes:

Chaucer not only attempted this new realistic task, but accomplished it so well that his characters were instantly recognized as true to life, and they have since become the permanent possession of our literature.(Long 77)

Chaucer's vivid art of characterization, sense of humour and irony are a remarkable contribution to English literature. Here are some of the instances of humour used by Chaucer:

There was also a Nun, a PRIORESS,
That of her smiling was full simple and coy;
Her greatest oathe was but by Saint Loy;
And she was cleped Madame Eglantine
Full well she sang the service divine,
Entuned in her nose full seemly;

Chaucer critiques the Nun for being too luxurious and fashionable. He ironically mentions that she failed to perform her duties as a responsible Nun. Instead, she kept herself busy in learning table manners which were essential for a rich society.

Chaucer describes the Franklin in the following way:

A FRANKLIN was in this company;
White was his beard, as is the daisy.
Of his complexion he was sanguine.
Well lov'd he in the morn a sop in wine.
To liven in delight was ever his won,
For he was Epicurus's owen son,
That held opinion, that plein delight
Was verily felicity perfite.

The Franklin is compared with the Greek philosopher Epicurus whose doctrine, "Pleasure is the chief good and aim of life", inspired him. Here, you can see Chaucer's close observation of the nature of different characters, and his dexterous use of irony and humour that both delights and instructs his readers. You should remember the fact that Chaucer was the first English humorist. However, Chaucer did not attempt to laugh at characters. His objective was to show the fourteenth-century scenario in its true light. Thus, he enjoyed his liberty as a writer, without being prejudiced in his expression and description of interest in his writings.

1.7 Summing Up:

Literature is a mirror to the society. To understand a literary work of art, an effort is required to go through the socio-cultural and economic history of the time against which such texts were produced. Similarly, Chaucer will be unintelligible to us if we ignore his Age. The present Unit attempts to highlight the important issues related to the content and context of the text, prescribed for you, so that you can have a better understanding of the text as a whole. A single work is not sufficient to understand a writer. For that, you need to search more about the writer. It is hoped that the present Unit will provide you the guidelines to study Chaucer in the right direction and with the true perspective.

1.8 References and Suggested Readings:

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Links to Online Contents and Sources

www.britannica.com

www.archive.org

1.9 Model Questions:

1. What were the noticeable social movements in the fourteenth century? What were their influences on the writers of the time?
2. Discuss Chaucer's contributions to English literature.
3. How does the "Prologue" reflect upon fourteenth-century life and people of England?
4. Write a note on the structure of the *Canterbury Tales*.
5. Who were the contemporary writers of Chaucer? What were the thematic concerns of those writers?

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Space for Learner's Notes

Unit: 2

Pope: Epistle 3 (from An Essay on Man)

Contents:

2.0 Introduction

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2.6 References and Suggested Readings (links to online contents and sources)

2.7 Model Questions

2.0 Introduction:

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) was a representative figure of the eighteenth century whose literary input had given a distinctive touch to the literature of that time. To understand the nature and philosophy of his poetry, you have to study the background history of the eighteenth century with special reference to its politics, religion, law and social developments. The eighteenth century is known mostly as the Neoclassical Age which was between 1660 and 1798. The age represents the Restoration period, the Augustan period and the age of Johnson. In the present unit you need to study the Augustan age which was also the age of Alexander Pope. Pope represented the early eighteenth century and he made a remarkable contribution to the history of

English tradition and literature by inculcation and imitation of various classical ideas. At that time Queen Anne was on the throne. The century witnessed the development of the middle class, enlightenment and revolutionary ideals. The age was in between the Renaissance period and the Romantic era. Hence it is important to study the chain of events that took place and shaped the socio-political-cultural-literary tendencies of the neoclassical age. The prefix 'neo' means new and 'classical' represents the Classic Age of Greek and Roman poetry. The writers of the century tried to imitate the ideals of the classical writers such as Horace and Homer in an attempt to revive classic taste in literature. The eighteenth century is also known as the Age of Reason for its focus on rationalism, logic and common sense. Essays, Satire, Novels, Epistles, Melodrama, Couplets, fables were the popular types during the age of Pope. Let us explore the age of Pope more in detail to understand the literary tendencies of the age. The Epistle which is prescribed for you is just such a specimen for you to see Pope in the light of the eighteenth century.

Stop to Consider

The Classical Age was the age of the great Greek and Roman writers such as Homer and Virgil. This represents the literature of the highest order when the writers practiced the best forms of literature in the most simple and noble form of expression. The Age of Augustus in Rome was considered a classical age or golden age. Dante, in Italy represented the classical age. In France, the age of Louis XIV is known as the classical age. Similarly in England, the age of Queen Anne is known as the classical age. However the eighteenth century writers could not truly follow the colour and taste of the past classics and remained formal and artificial. Thus the age has another tag i.e. Pseudo-classicism.

2.1 Objectives:

The present unit is an attempt to analyze the poetical features of Alexander Pope with special reference to his *Essays on Man*. After going through this unit you will be able to-

- *understand* the Age of Pope
- *discuss* his literary features and ideas
- *explain* the concept of his poetry and his views on life and society

2.2 The Eighteenth century and Alexander Pope:

As it has been mentioned in the Introduction, the eighteenth century was known as the age of reason and commonsense. However, unlike the age of Queen Elizabeth, the general tendency of the age was towards rationalism and conservatism. The writers of the age focused more on intellectualism and paid less attention to free expression of emotions and exercise of imagination. As a result the eighteenth century poetry lacked the enthusiasm and colour that marked the poetical endeavour of the classical writers. Their preferred genres were parody, satire, criticism, fables etc which they effectively used to critique the society. Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift, Richardson, Fielding, Goldsmith, Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, Gibbon and Pope were among many luminaries of that century. These writers were inspired by the classical French and Greek Masters of the past and endeavored to imitate their style.

Before discussing the literary skills of Pope, let us look at the characteristic features of the Neoclassical Age in terms of its transition of social order and cultural changes.

Significance of the Neoclassical Age:

- **New social order after Restoration and the Revolution:** After the Revolution of 1688 when the last of the Stuart Kings were banished and William of Orange came to the throne, England witnessed the end of the struggle for political freedom. The new social order after the Revolution brought changes to the life and manners of the English people. It was comparatively a time of political stability and tolerance as social and intellectual developments began to refine and reshape the society.
- **Birth of new political ideas and role of the printing press:** New political ideas were formed and practiced after the formation of modern form of cabinet government and this happened during the reign of George I in England. Importance was given to school education and publication of books and magazines. The press was on power and the first daily newspaper *The Daily Courant* appeared in London in the year 1702. Other famous dailies were the *Chronicles*, *Times* and *Post*.

- **The age of Enlightenment and rise of Materialistic philosophy:** The eighteenth century was the age of science and empirical philosophy. Sir Isaac Newton's interpretation of Nature and Nature's philosophy influenced the spirit of that time and people began to look at nature through a different perspective. Philosophers like Bacon, John Locke, and Thomas Hobbes inspired the people of the West by their empirical philosophies and ideas. Scientific rationalism and materialism became the motivating force of that time.
- **Methodism and spiritual Revolution in England:** The key persons related to this revival and revolution were John Wesley, Thomas Charles, Philip Embury, Francis Asbury and many others. The movement was founded by John Wesley and its objective was to reform the Church from within. The group is known for its methodical devotion and studies. An Anglican clergyman George Whitefield joined the movement and they worked together. The Methodist Church of Wesley continued to exert its influence on the people in the twentieth century.

Stop to Consider

English Neoclassicism actually began after the Restoration age of John Dryden. In fact Dryden was Alexander Pope's inspiration. The sense of realism, general formalism and the use of heroic couplets that we see in the age of Neoclassicism, actually began in the Restoration Age with writers like John Dryden. John Dryden is famous for his satirical masterpieces like "Absalom and Achitophel".

In the next section an attempt will be made to introduce you to the literary tendencies and practices of the eighteenth century. Here you have to study the various literary forms and styles that were used by the eighteenth century writers. Pope was one among those excellent masters.

Literary Characteristics of the eighteenth century:

- **Triumph of English prose:** The eighteenth century was remarkable for its triumph of English prose and novels. The age witnessed the birth of the English novels with writers such as Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding,

Lawrence Sterne and Tobias Smollett. The prose form was available in various other shapes such as pamphlets and essays. Poetry was almost overshadowed by the multiple prosaic forms of self expression. Addison's witty writings, Jonathan Swift's satire, Edmund Burke's political writings were unrivalled in the century. Alexander Pope occupied a special place in the eighteenth century by writing exclusively on various socio-cultural and religious topics. Pope's intellectual writings were about refined, polished thoughts based on the knowledge of the world. It was less about imagination and more about study of life and human nature.

- **Use of Satire:** Have you read Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*? These two are important contribution to eighteenth century satirical literature. In the eighteenth century satire was practiced as a predominant genre and its objective was to focus on realism and refined expression of thoughts. Satire was used by Pope as a major instrument against the unrestrained and corrupt practices of men and institutions. Satire was reformative in much sense and its objective was to ridicule the deformities in the society. It was an age of refined thought and expression and the literature of the age aimed at high type or classical type of literature. Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift were the two prominent satirists of the age. To understand Pope better as a satirist, you need to go through his famous work *The Dunciad* and his *Epistles*. Heroic couplet became the popular style during the age of reason.

- **Early Romanticism in the era:** Alongside the development of rationalistic and formal literature a new romantic movement began to appear with writers such as Thomas Grey, Oliver Goldsmith, William Cowper, Robert Burns, William Blake and James Thomson. The Romantic revival can be seen as a reaction to the hardheaded rationalism of the early eighteenth century with its chief focus on liberalism and freedom of expression. Romanticism shifted its attention to nature, plain humanity and natural language. The era witnessed a revival of interest in the eternal ideals of youth, childhood and human-nature relation. The writers of this revival were inspired by the writings of Spencer, Shakespeare and Milton and protested against strict adherence to rules. Read Grey's *Odes*, William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, Thomson's *Seasons* to understand this transition period in literature.

Self Asking Questions

1. Define Neoclassicism in English History.

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2. What was the history that shaped the Neoclassical temperament?

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3. Why do you call Alexander Pope a Neoclassical writer?

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2.2.1 Pope as the representative writer:

Alexander Pope was a representative poet and satirist of his age for his writings reflected the spirit of the age. The age was marked by refined sensibilities and decorum in style. Pope's lifelong experimentation with various forms of literature and his concern for precision and propriety of thoughts and expression made him the most radical writer of his age. Even though it was not clear whether he supported the Tory or Whig politics, Pope represented the mainstream culture and worked wholeheartedly for an elegant and classical approach to literature. Minor writers of his age found him as their role model. Despite suffering from physical deformities, Pope devoted his whole life to literature. He was not involved in any other profession. Pope's approach to life and literature was somewhat different from that of the Romantic writers. His *Essay on Criticism* is mostly known for the learned and witty maxims. Through those maxims, Pope tried to promote good thoughts and good literature. A few critical maxims we still use in our day to day speech and writing such as "To err is human, to forgive divine", "A little learning is a dangerous thing" etc. In *The Rape of the Lock* Pope critiques the mannerisms of society through a presentation of witty and comic story. Pope was a representative poet because his writings were intended to satirically represent the vanity and artificiality of the eighteenth century people. His sense of morality and didacticism has greatly inspired the successive writers in the history of English literature.

2.2.2 Pope as a Neoclassicist:

Alexander Pope was a classicist who looked to past ideals for literary inspiration. Leslie Stephen writes about him in the following words,

Though nominally the poet of reason, he was the very antithesis of the man who is reasonable in the highest sense; who is truthful in word and deed because his conduct is regulated by harmonious and invariable principle (Stephen 188-189).

His imagination used to work upon a single framework, though mostly borrowed from classics. His views on Nature, wit and good criticism were inspired by the great ideas of the past. Look at the following lines from his *Essay on Criticism*,

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame

By her just standard, which is still the same
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright
One clear, unchang'd, and universal light,
Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
At once the source, and end, and test of Art (Lines- 68-73)

Pope tells his readers to learn about the past in the following lines,

Know well each Ancient's proper character,
His Fable, Subject, scope in ev'ry page,
.....
.....
Be Homer's works your study and delight,
Read them by day, and mediate by night,
Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims bring,
And trace the Muses upward to their spring

He corrected, polished the materials and eliminated the incongruous and the superfluous. He minutely observed the things around him and harmonized the fragmented pieces into an organized whole. Robin Sowerby, in his Introduction to his book *Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry and Prose* writes about Pope's dexterous handling of poetry,

Pope constantly keeps before us the relation between poetry, criticism and moral sense. True wit, true judgment, and true taste do not merely belong to a realm we might label the aesthetic; they are only possible when literary endeavours are fully integrated with the rest of life. (Sowerby 13-14)

As a poet, Pope was a skillful writer and wrote rhymed prose which was not similar to ordinary prose. Pope mostly wrote for ordinary moods. Stephen writes,

He aimed at giving us the refined and doubly distilled essence of the conversation of the statesmen and courtiers of his time. (Stephen 190)

Pope's conversational style of writing which is at once didactic, strong and quick in its effect added a dramatic quality to his verse.

Pope denounced corruption of his time. He had friendship with a friend of the opposition party in politics who undermined the ruling authority at that time. Through his satire Pope strongly reacted to the corrupt politics of his time. During his literary career, Pope had developed animosities with some prominent figures of his time. Some of his satirical works aimed at rival figures such as Montagu, Earl of Halifax.

2.2.3 Pope's views on Nature, Human and Universe:

Alexander Pope was not a professional philosopher. However, towards the later period of his literary career, Pope began to write philosophically on various existential and social issues. The evidence lies in his *Epistles and Moral Essays*. Even his *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) is written upon the issue of good criticism and good composition. Apart from that the witty maxims that Pope composed in the book are rich in philosophical insights and observations. In his famous work *An Essay on Man*, Pope has exclusively written on God, Human and Nature relations. Even though the work is inspired and borrowed from classical masters, Pope has skillfully blended the thoughts and organized the work. The book is divided into four Epistles and each represents a specific thought and argument. In the preface to the book, Pope clearly mentions that he was interested in the anatomy of human mind and nature in the abstract form. Pope opines that we need to study the system of nature that works around us. In the second Epistle, Pope writes that the proper study of mankind is man. Human always remains in a confused state of mind. During crisis, he remains indecisive and fails to take rational stand. Pope observes that two principles of man- self-love and reason are always necessary. Virtue and vice both are present in human nature and they differ only in degree. In the third Epistle, Pope explains the nature of human relationship with the universe that the whole universe is a system of society where everything is related to everything else by a mutual

bond of love and care. Thus the Essay contains valuable insights on Human life, Nature and the Universe. These ideas are discussed in the thematic analysis part in some detail with textual references.

2.3 The literary works of Pope:

Pope's literary career can be grouped into three specific periods of his life corresponding to his early, middle and concluding period of life. At a very early age Pope wrote his "Pastorals". For his *Essay on Criticism* he was mostly known as a famous critical writer. In 1712, *The Rape of the Lock* was published for which he was honored all over England. Within a very short time, this writer successfully placed himself as a man of letters. It is important to mention here that his works were published mostly in the form of verse. In fact, he was at his best in verse. "Windsor Forest", "Messiah" are two other important works of Pope. All these were composed during his early stage.

Pope was also a skillful translator. He is known for his translation of Homer. His translation works are done during his middle age. Pope's fame rests on his translation of the entire *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. He interpreted Homer in his most elegant way and created him in his most artificial language. However, Pope could not complete his work and his work was completed by two Cambridge Scholars namely Elijah Fenton and William Broom.

Moral Epistles were written during his days at Twickenham and these were composed as poetical satires. At Twickenham, he developed close friendship with Martha Blount who remained with him till the end of his life. These epistles in *Essay on Man*, the *Dunciad* and "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" were the products of his concluding period of life.

2.3.1 Satire and poetics and critical works of Pope

An Essay on Criticism: The book first appeared in 1711. The book is about good composition and good criticism. Here Pope explains the art of poetry as inspired by classic masters like Horace and Boileau. The book is best known for its wise and critical maxims which have become integral part of English language. Heroic Couplet is used in its composition and Pope has used Horatian mode of satire.

The Rape of the Lock: For this book, Pope's reputation was at its greatest height. The book was written in a mock-heroic narrative pattern. The story of the poem revolves round the lock of a lady called Arabella whose lock was cut off by Peter without her permission. This trivial incident took place as a result of the clash between two families in London. Pope mocks at the trivial situation and the readers enjoy its sense of humour in the presentation of the characters. The poem came out anonymously in the year 1712. It had originally two cantos.

The Dunciad : The book is also called the "Iliad of the Dunces". It includes a revengeful satire on all those literary men of his age who had infuriated Pope. It came out in 1728 in three books and the main character in the poem is Lewis Theobald because of his quarrel with Pope. The book is a coarse satire on the dunces in the kingdom of Dulness.

Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot: This is a famous epistle by Pope addressed to a physician, Dr. Arbuthnot. It was first published in 1734 and it was considered as Pope's autobiographical work. Here he attacks those critics in his literary career who had been his jealous opponents and rivals.

Stop to Consider

Mock- heroic narrative: A narrative device in the form of a burlesque in imitation of the heroic character. In such a narrative, a very trivial incident is explained in an epic and formal mode. Pope used this device to critique man and manners in his society.

Horatian Satire: Satire involves humour, irony, mockery and fun. The word Horatian comes from the Roman satirist Horace. The satire is intended to ridicule the follies and foibles in society. The readers enjoy the sense of humour produced in such a work. Horatian satire is mild compared to Juvenalian satire which is intended to make fun.

2.3.2 Pope's use of Heroic Couplet:

The heroic couplet is called heroic because its ten-syllable iambic verse celebrates heroic themes and is mostly used in epic forms. In a heroic couplet the two iambic pentameter lines of ten syllables rhyme together where the first line involves a pause and the second line completes the sense of the end. The heroic couplet was first used by Geoffrey Chaucer in England. Later on Edmund Spenser used it in his verse. During the Elizabethan age,

this couplet was used by Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Marlowe for specific purpose. Try to find out the texts where such couplets are used by these writers. With writers like Waller and Denham this couplet form received a glorious structure. However, John Dryden and Alexander Pope did the commendable work by endowing more quality to this ancient form. They mostly used it as a more formal and intellectual metrical form of verse. Dryden used this form in *Mac Flecknoe* (1682) in a very flexible and robust way.

Alexander Pope enjoyed a special place in literature for his skillful handling of heroic couplet. He perfected the rhymed couplet from his inspiration, John Dryden. He used the couplets for his satirical and philosophical objectives. *The Rape of the Lock* (1714), *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) and *An Essay on Man* (1733-34) were composed in heroic couplets. Pope was very 'acrobatic and elusive' in his use of these couplets (Cuddon 378). Here are some examples of Pope's heroic couplets.

Hope springs eternal in the human

Breast;

Man never is, but always to be blest

(Pope's *An Essay On Man: lines 95-96*)

Good nature and good sense must ever

Join;

To err is human, to forgive, divine

(Pope's *An Essay on Criticism: Lines-524-525*)

Apart from Pope, heroic couplets were used by writers like Samuel Johnson, Goldsmith, Crabbe and William Cowper in the eighteenth century.

Self Asking Questions

1. Define Heroic Couplet. Give examples.

.....
.....

2. Who was the first writer to use Heroic Couplet in English?
Can you cite one such text?

.....
.....

3. Comment on Alexander Pope's use of Heroic Couplet.

.....
.....

2.4 Understanding the Text:

2.4.1 *The Essay on Man: A General Idea:*

Alexander Pope was a didactic and philosophic poet. Pope tried different genres in his early literary period. He did several poetical experiments and one of such prominent forms was Satire which he chose to practice to refine and reform the eighteenth century England. When Pope composed *The Essay on Man*, Bolingbroke declared that Pope had exercised the genre which was eminently his own. Pope called it 'a system of ethics in a Horatian way' (Stephen 182). The Epistle is significant for its selection of theme and use of language. They are mostly known as 'Ethic Epistles' because of their ethical design.

The beginning of the book constitutes 'The Design' which is addressed to H. St. John, L. Bolingbroke. The Argument of the Epistle I is headlined as "Of the Nature and State of Man, with respect to the Universe". The second Epistle is titled as "Of the Nature and State of Man with respect to Himself, as an Individual while the third Epistle carries the headline "Of the Nature and State of Man with respect to Society". The book consists of four Epistles and they are addressed to Lord Bolingbroke. The book is available in incomplete form and the work is more about moral order of the universe. In this respect his chief inspiration is Bolingbroke. It is however not clearly known whether the argument of the Essay was supplied by Bolingbroke. It is said that Pope had presented the argument in verse which was initially composed by Bolingbroke in prose form. Mark Pattison, in his Introduction to the book *Pope: Essay on Man* observes that Pope's *Essay on Man* was written at a time when the reading public of the country were speculating over the first principles of Natural Religion. Initially Pope was interested more in personal and social themes. However, as time passed, Pope began to take interest in philosophical and abstract subjects that were concerned mostly with Nature, Human life and the Universe. Pope thus attempted to catch the popular taste of his time. Pattison writes,

In the level on which he treats his theme we find Pope to be the man of his age. The age was one that seemed to have no sense for transcendental ideas in religion, in metaphysics, or in poetry. It was an age of common sense, and the experience of life as it is. To this common sense Pope appeals throughout. (Pattison 6)

The strength of his book *The Essay on Man* lies in this use of commonsense in the interpretation of the universe. His ethical outlook is reflected in the work and his understanding of the universe was based on his knowledge of the world. Thus the source of his poetics was the contemporary world. Politics became an important subject of eighteenth century literature and the writers of the age were inspired by this political spirit. This aspect of eighteenth century poetry gave a new dimension to English poetry. The writers of the age preferred to debate over the contemporary socio-cultural and political subjects and subsequently entered into a philosophical debate and language was chosen to address the common people. Verse was preferred to prose and it became a rhymed rhetoric and in most cases it became an elaborate prose. However, as it became evident later, the poetry of the eighteenth century could not survive as they became more superficial and artificial.

The Essay on Man echoes Miltonic philosophy in *Paradise Lost*. Pope's objective was to justify the ways of God to man. According to this philosophy, God has a holy plan and everything works according to the some natural rules. The pattern of God's universe is in perfect harmony and balance. Here you need to know why Pope revived the classical Biblical pattern. In England, in the mid eighteenth century, optimistic writings were hardly available. Pope was among those few writers who were optimistic in his approach to writings. He threw fresh light on classic ideas and wrote intellectually and philosophically on Human nature and society. He revived the classical epistle forms in English.

2.4.2 The Argument in the Epistles:

The book *An Essay on Man* begins with a small preface which introduces the design and philosophy of the work. It is titled as "The Design". The preface indicates that the writer is mostly concerned with the abstract concept of Man, his nature and state. Pope tries to justify the fact that it is important to study the abstract nature of humans and his relation to the universe to understand and enforce the moral duty and precepts. According to Pope,

The science of human nature is, like all other sciences, reduced to a few clear points: there are not many certain truths in this world. It is therefore in the anatomy of the mind as in that of the body; more good will accrue to mankind

by attending to the large, open, and perceptible parts, than by studying too much such finer nerves and vessels, the conformations and uses of which will forever escape our observation. (Pope: *An Essay on Man*: "The Design")

Here Pope writes about the importance of the study of the human mind. In the same preface, Pope states the reason for choosing verse and rhyme over prose to work on the topic. The first reason is that principles, maxims or precepts are best expressed and received through verse. Secondly, things can be expressed briefly through verse and the force and grace of an argument depends on its conciseness.

Now let us look at the nature of the first two epistles of the book and their arguments.

Epistle I:

"Of the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to the Universe" is the subtitle of the first epistle. Here Pope philosophically speculates over the existence of the humans in the cosmos. Pope's argument is that to justify God's ways to Man, one must justify man's relation to all other things. Thus the argument is about the divine design that incorporates us all. This, Pope says is the great chain of being that includes everything in the universe in its hierarchical pattern. Pope writes,

What is now published is only to be considered as a general map of Man, marking out no more than the greater parts, their extent, their limits, and their connections, and leaving the particular to be more fully delineated in the charts which are to follow. (Pope's *An Essay on Man*: "The Design")

In the first Epistle, Pope states the following arguments:

- We, the people are ignorant of the relations of systems and things. We can judge only with regard to our own system.
- Humans enjoy a suitable place and rank in the hierarchy of the Creation as per the general order of things.
- The happiness of the human in the present depends on his/her hope or ignorance of future state.
- Man's error and misery is a result of man's pride in knowledge and desire for perfection. Humans eventually try to compare himself with God and judges the qualities and drawbacks in one's life.

- Reason countervails all other faculties in humans.
- The whole world is has a design or order. If any part of that design breaks, the whole connected creation will be destroyed.

Epistle II:

The subtitle of the second Epistle is “Of the Nature and State of Man with respect to Himself, as an Individual. The important arguments presented in the Epistle are mentioned below:

- Man’s business is to study himself including his power, middle nature and frailties.

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,

The proper study of mankind is man. (Epistle II, Lines: 1-2)

- Pope writes that man is ruled by passion and guided by reason. Man is governed by the two principles of self-love and Reason and both are necessary.

Two principles in human nature reign;

Self-love to urge, and reason, to restrain;

Nor this a good, nor that a bad we call,

Each works its ends, to move or govern all

And to their proper operation still,

Ascribe all good; to their improper ill. (Epistle II, Lines: 53-58)

- Pope opines that man as a person is often driven by passion and his temptation is stronger in him than reason. As he gathers experiences, he comes to know about his unrestrained urge for wild pleasure. Pope says that passion is the king while reason is a guard.
- Virtue and vice are present in our mixed nature. Human capacity has its limits.
- Envy can be possessed by the brave and the learned. Ambition has the power to destroy or save. It can make us a patriot or a knave.
- Lights and shades are parts of Human life. Man’s virtue and vice differs only in degree.

Virtuous and vicious every man
must be,

Few in th’ extreme, but all in the degree (Epistle II, Lines: 231-232)

- Humans take pride in his achievements.

Space for Learner’s Notes

Stop to Consider

In the second Epistle, Pope offers a balanced view of human life, of nature with respect to himself. That in human life self love and reason, virtue and vice are distributed in all orders of men. In the poem Pope tries to address the existential issues of mind-body dualism. Pope's dexterity lies in his skillful handling of versification and organization of thoughts.

Pope's fourth Epistle was about the subject of happiness. He writes about the false notions of happiness. Happiness, according to Pope is general and must be social because God intends happiness to be equal. Happiness of the individual should be consistent with the constitution of the world. The external goods are not proper for human because they destroy the virtues. Thus Pope states that happiness is always a result of virtuous actions.

Know then this truth, enough for man to know

Virtue alone is happiness below (Epistle IV, Lines: 309-310)

Epistle III:

Thematic analysis

There are total Four Epistles in *An Essay on Man*. The third Epistle is prescribed for you. Even though the earlier two epistles are not in the syllabus, you have to study all the epistles to have a better understanding of the book. Moreover, a few ideas are being repeatedly used by Pope in those epistles. Hence all the epistles are equally important for you. Now in this section you will be informed about the third epistle which is prescribed in your course.

Like all other works of Pope, this epistle is full of wise and valuable insights. You need to remember that Alexander Pope is one of the most quoted poets in English literature. The quotes that we find in his *Essays on Criticism* are still popularly in use. Even though the poem *An Essay on Man* has a reference to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the book has its own ethical framework. What makes it so significant is its vast thematic philosophy and wise insights for humanity.

Some of his important insights from Epistle III are listed below:

- Man and his universe have a harmonious relation. However, Humans cannot understand fully the design and purpose of human life by using mental faculties.
- The Creator of the Universe created everything in relation to one another. God and Nature is linked in general frame.
- Self-love and reason are essential for humans to comprehend himself. Self-love can be through just and unjust ways. Pope writes that self love gradually forsook its path and became self-centric or individualistic.

Lines: 269- 282

So drives self-love.....and found the private in the public good.

- Humans must maintain harmony with Nature and Society.
The harmony that existed in the past among various creatures was a result of man's studious head, generous mind, divine and friendly and moral nature of man. The beast or angel, servant, lord or king comes to the same point.

Lines: 283-300

'Twas then the studious head or gen'rous mind.....And in proportion as it blesses blest;

- The universe acts by various natural laws where everything is related to everything else.
- Everything is related to everything else by a chain of love 'combining all below and all above'. Read the following lines from the Epistle.

Look round our world; behold the chain of love combining all below and all above.

See Plastic nature working to this end,

The single atoms each to other tend,

Attract, Attracted to, the next in place

Form'd and impell'd its neighbor to embrace. (*Epistle III*, Lines: 7-12)

- All forms of life have their time limits. The cycle of life begins with birth and ends with death. Life is compared with ocean. Things are like bubbles on the sea. They get life, break and return to complete the cycle.

All forms that perish other forms supply
(By turns we catch the vital breath, and die)
Like bubbles on the sea of matter born,
They rise; they break, and to that sea return.
Nothing is foreign; parts relate to whole;
(*Epistle III*, Lines: 17-21)

- The Human is criticized for being self-centric and individualistic. The world is not solely for human beings. All other animals, birds and other creatures are equal parts of Nature. Pope asks a series of rhetorical questions to mankind in the following lines:

Has God, thou fool! Work'd solely for thy good,
Thy joy, thy pastime, thy attire, thy food?
Who for thy table feeds the wanton fawn,
For him as kindly spread the flow'ry lawn:
(*Epistle III*, Lines: 27-30)

In the next few lines, Pope writes that humans fail to see the whole because of he is short of reason.

Know, Nature's children all divide her care;
The fur that warms a monarch, warm'd a bear.
While man exclaims, 'See all things for my use'
'See man for mine!' replies a pamper'd goose:
And just as short of reason he must fall,
Who thinks all made for one, not one for all.
(*Epistle III*, Lines: 43-48)

- The powerful section of mankind always tries to control the weak. At times man turns a tyrant. Humans takes care of all but his charity for other animals are governed by his sense of pride and pleasure for a luxurious life. Some people, however, do charity out of sheer interest.

Man cares for all: to birds he gives his woods,
To beasts his pastures, and to fish his foods;

For some his interest prompts him to provide,
For more his pleasure, yet for more his pride:
All feed on one vain patron, and enjoy
Th' extensive blessing of his luxury,
That very life his learned hunger craves,
He saves from famine, from the savage saves;

- Human wit has its limit. Whether it is reason or instinct, it guides humans in the best direction. Full instinct can be the unerring guide.

Lines: 79-90

Whether with reason or with instinct blest.....While still too wide
or short is human wit;

- God creates an eternal order in the universe based on mutual wants and mutual happiness.

Lines:99-114

Who taught the nations of the field and flood.....And
creature link'd to creature, man to man.

- Nature is the inspiration and gives power to all in nature. Humans are not alone. Everything is governed by a bond of natural love and care. A helpless man always craves for longer care.

Lines:121-130

Each love itself, but itself alone.....Another
love succeeds, another race.

- Humans become helplessly trapped in the web of memory and forecast. Human virtues like pleasure, gratitude and hope together can preserve the essence of the human.

Lines: 141-146

The last, scarce ripen'd into perfect man.....Still spread the
int'rest and preser'vd the kind.

- Human nature has undergone a huge change from his birth. Self-love and social nature began at his birth. People had a shared sense of life and had a community life. Man did not have the intent to rule,

but to spare. The Human is no longer the same human. He has become a betrayer, a murderer and an exploiter of nature and society.

Lines: 147-169

The state of nature was the reign of God.....And turn'd on man, a fiercer savage, man.

- Pope asks mankind to learn from creatures around him about sense of unity and life in harmony. There are natural laws that govern and preserve all.

Lines: 172-180

Go, from the creatures thy instructions take.....And hence let reason, late, instruct mankind.

Lines: 189-197

Mark what unvary'd laws preserve each state.....Thus let the wiser make the rest obey.

- It was Virtue always that defended everything in history.

Lines: 205- 212

What war could ravish, commerce could bestow.....'Twas virtue only.

- True faith, true policy and a sovereign being can bring sovereign good. It was man who enslaved all others for greed and lust. Conquests were made and manmade laws were formed.

Lines: 237-245

No ill could fear in God.....Force first made conquest, and that conquest, law.

- Fear is a factor that makes people a tyrant by promoting superstitious faith. That hell was built on spite and heaven is formed by pride. Charity was not their guide.

Lines: 246- 262

Till superstition taught the tyrant awe.....And hell was built on spite, and heaven on pride.

- The forms of governments are critiqued by Pope because such governments are ruled by fools.

Lines: 303-305

For forms of government let fools contest. For modes of faith,
let graceless zealots fight.

- All human’s main concern is charity. A person cannot be in the wrong when he is in the right. S

Lines: 306- 310

He can’t be wrong whose life is in the right. And all of God, that
bless mankind, or mend

Space for Learner’s Notes

Stop to Consider

In this third Epistle Pope makes some important observations on the creation of art, origin of monarchy, patriarchal government, origin of true religion from the principle of love. Besides, origin of tyranny and superstition is explained from the principle of fear. The essay philosophically explains that self-love is operating to the social and public good. That reason is instructed by instinct in the artistic creation process. Both operate alike for the good of individuals.

Self Asking Questions

1. Write about the versification in Pope’s *An Essay on Man*.

.....

2. Justify the subtitle of the Epistle “Of the nature and state of man with respect to society”.

.....

2.5 Summing Up:

The present unit is just an introduction to Alexander Pope’s literary endeavour and output. The text which is prescribed for you is like a window to understand Pope in the context of his socio-historical scenario. The Epistles are the product of his long inclination towards philosophy and classicism.

Hence it is important to understand the philosophy behind his writings. Try to compare Pope with his contemporary writers in terms of his treatment of themes and literary styles.

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2.7 Model Questions:

1. Justify the Augustan Age as the Age of Reason and Good Sense.
2. Discuss Satire as a prominent genre practiced in the eighteenth century.
3. Do you consider Pope's Epistles as successful delineation of good life and good criticism?
4. Discuss the classical influences on Alexander Pope. How did he imitate Horace?

====x====

Unit: 3
Charles Dickens: *Oliver Twist*

Contents:

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3.0 Introduction:

Oliver Twist is a vivid picture of 19th century England during the Industrial Revolution, and tells the story of an orphan whose attempts at survival amidst misery and poverty acquaints him with the underbelly of London. It highlighted the author's concern about issues such as the Poor Law, ill treatment of orphans, child labour, and the poverty and squalor of the poor and the greed and indifference towards them of the government and church, that characterised 19th century England in general, and London in particular.

3.1 Objective:

This unit shall help you to understand the 19th century English novel *Oliver Twist* written by Charles Dickens one of the most well-known critics of 19th century industrial England. Apart from knowing the life and times of Charles Dickens, you will also see the author's main concerns which reflect as themes in *Oliver Twist*. Apart from the summary and thematic analysis of the text, you will also be able to get a glimpse into its general reception.

3.2 Text, Author and Background:

3.2.1 The Text:

Oliver Twist; or, The Parish Boy's Progress appeared even as the serialization of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* was nearing its end. Charles Dickens's second, this novel too was initially serialized from 1837 to 1838 in the literary magazine called *Bentley's Miscellany*, and was published in book form by the end of 1838.

Through the events and characters of the story, Dickens makes a telling commentary on his contemporary society and critiques the government and the church, two pillars of the society he lived in. He reveals their hypocrisy and the flaws of the various welfare institutions. The sordid lives of the London underbelly as well as the hypocrisy of the so-called gentle folk are portrayed by the author without any colouring.

Like its predecessor, *Oliver Twist* was an instant success and has continued to be a success. It has been considered one of Dickens's classics and its protagonist Oliver is one of the first of many memorable Dickensian boys such as David Copperfield and Pip.

Oliver Twist has been adapted into a successful musical play titled *Oliver!* as well as into several films and television series in various languages.

3.2.2 Charles Dickens: The Author:

Charles Dickens was born to John and Elizabeth Dickens in Portsmouth, England, in the year 1812. He spent the early years of his childhood in Chatham, Kent, till the family moved to London in 1822 due to its financial constraints. When Charles Dickens was 12 years old, his father, who worked as a clerk for the Naval Pay office, was sent to the debtor's prison. As a result, he was withdrawn from school and put to work at a warehouse

known as Warren's Blacking Factory run by a relative on his mother's side. This experience left a deep psychological effect on him and has been the primary catalyst for the scathing critique we see in his writings against a society that was highly unfavourable towards the working class.

After the release of his father, Charles Dickens was allowed to leave the warehouse and continue with his formal education. After completing his formal education at the age of fifteen, he worked at an attorney's office as office boy while he learned shorthand at night. He then went on to work as a parliamentary and newspaper reporter which provided him the scope to know such corners of the city which revealed the real condition of the poor.

His first assignments as a journalist were for the journals *The Mirror of Parliament* and *The True Sun*. In 1833, he became parliamentary journalist for *The Morning Chronicle*. He published a series of sketches under the pseudonym Boz titled *Sketches by Boz* in 1836. Around the same time, he wrote *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* which was immediately followed by *Oliver Twist*. From here on, there was no stopping him and he went on to write a number of novels, all appearing initially in monthly instalments in various magazines. These novels were *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* as part of the *Master Humphrey's Clock* series (1840-41). From 1843 to 1848, Dickens published his five Christmas Books *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *The Chimes* (1844), *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), *The Battle of Life* (1846), and *The Haunted Man* (1848). In 1848, he also wrote *Dombey and Son* which was followed by the largely autobiographical *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Bleak House* (1852-53), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1857), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and *Great Expectations* (1861). He created memorable characters such as Oliver Twist, David Copperfield and Pip through his fiction.

His literary output had gained for Dickens much fame and popularity and had made him economically sound enough to buy an estate called Gad's Hill Place in 1856. In 1858, he began a series of lectures which were as popular as his writings. He is believed to have given about 400 lectures in all. Despite being a successful novelist, Dickens continued to edit weekly periodicals such as *The Daily News*, *Household Words* and *All Year Round*.

Charles Dickens gave his last lecture in London in March 1870, during which he collapsed due to a mild stroke. He died on June 9, 1870 after another stroke leaving his last novel titled *Edwin Drood* incomplete.

Check Your Progress

1. Which experience in his early life left a deep psychological effect on Dickens' mind?
2. What pseudonym did Dickens adopt in the beginning of his literary career?
3. Name Dickens's first novel.
4. In which magazine was *Oliver Twist* serialized before its publication in book form in 1838?

3.2.3 The Background:

Rapid industrialization in 19th century Victorian England saw a rise of population in the towns and cities as more and more people from the villages migrated to those places looking for job opportunities. This gave rise to problems of shelter, hygiene and health. Large areas surrounding London turned into enormous slums, where the poor lived in utter poverty and degradation. Poverty and unemployment turned these slums into springs of crime where young children became pick-pockets and thieves and women became prostitutes.

The period also saw a rise in religiosity and a concern for the underprivileged. It was characterised by a high moral purpose where the upper class section of the society sought to bring change through the various institutions that already existed. One such attempt had resulted in the amendment of the Poor Law in 1834. As per this amendment, the government or the church would no longer give assistance to the able-bodied poor unless they entered the workhouse. These workhouses maintained and run by government agents, severely curtailed the rights of the poor, separated families and compelled the poor to survive on the poorest of living conditions. Run on the principle that the poor were poor because of their laziness, they were never allowed a moment's peace or joy so that they never grow satisfied. The inmates of such workhouses starved, suffered in cold and died in illness without the basic amenities for living a decent life. The worst sufferers were children, whom the government or parish officials wished to teach one or another trade for a living.

Written a few years after the introduction of the new Poor Law, *Oliver Twist* is a criticism of the provisions of this law and the hypocrisy of the officials who ran the various charitable institutes of the state. The novel highlights the failure of institutional charity. Apart from the flaws of the

government and church institutes, Dickens's own experience as a boy in Warren's Blacking Factory finds place in the portrayal of Oliver's life.

Space for Learner's Notes

Self Asking Question

- i. Do you think *Oliver Twist* is inspired much by Dickens's own life and times?

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3.3 The Form of the Text:

The novel became the leading literary form in the 19th century Victorian era after the success of poetry in the Romantic period. Authors like Jane Austen, Walter Scott, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot and the Bronte sisters wrote during this period. However, Charles Dickens gained extraordinary popularity during his time and continues to do so. This is probably because of his mass outreach.

Industrial Revolution had helped in the expansion of newspapers and the periodical press. Due to the possibility of their mass production, they were cheap and easily available even for the rising middle class. Dickens's immediate popularity can be attributed to the accessible nature of his writings which were mostly serialized in newspapers or journals. While retaining the sensationalism and melodrama that characterised the novels of the earlier period, Dickens's novels portrayed a life and created characters that the rising middle class could relate to. Novels like the *Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist* not only provided the readers with entertainment, but also offered social commentary. Due to the portrayal of contemporary times, Dickens's novels can best be categorised as belonging to the genre of Social Realism.

A *bildungsroman* that follows the development of Oliver Twist since birth, the novel is considered to be the first Victorian novel with a child protagonist. With the introduction of the first child protagonist, Dickens participated in the general Victorian concern for the well-being of children. At the same time, he also revealed the hypocrisy of the age which despite the efforts to stop child labour and educate children, saw the highest exploitation of children.

3.4 *Oliver Twist*: The Novel

3.4.1 Brief Summary and Analysis:

3.4.1.1: Chapter 1- 10

The story begins with Oliver's birth in a workhouse, where his unmarried mother dies soon after. He is brought up in an orphanage under the care of Mrs. Mann who believed in pocketing a greater part of the allowance given to her for the care of the orphans. Oliver grows up to an undernourished boy. However, Dickens tells us that he was luckier than others, for most orphans died either of starvation or disease, or accident.

On his ninth birthday, Oliver is taken away to the workhouse where he was born. The workhouse is one of the many charitable institutes of Dickens's time. These workhouses were run by the government and the church on the principle that the inmates must be starved so that they don't grow too lazy. In the workhouse, Oliver, compelled to speak up for a group of underfed boys asks for more soup. His request for more soup is considered by the authorities to be 'heinous crime' and as a result, he is locked up. The workhouse board decides to get rid of him by giving him away for apprenticeship along with a sum of five pounds.

An undertaker who makes coffins and funeral arrangements for the dead, called Mr. Sowerberry takes him. He is impressed by Oliver's beautiful and melancholy face and hopes to make him a mute to walk ahead of funeral processions. Oliver probably would have grown up with Sowerberry learning to make a business out of people's death like his master. But Mr. Sowerberry's relative kindness towards Oliver is outweighed by Mrs. Sowerberry's dislike and Noah Claypole's constant bullying and insults. One day when Noah Claypole, a charity boy (but not an orphan like Oliver) working at Sowerberry's coffin shop, insults his dead mother, Oliver reacts violently. He is beaten up by Noah and locked up by Mrs. Sowerberry who accuses him of attempt to murder. Oliver runs away to London from there the following morning.

Stop to Consider

Through *Oliver Twist*, a social novel, Dickens critiques the various institutions of charity run by the church and the government in his time. As per the Poor Law of 1834, the poor were given government

assistance only if they moved into the workhouses maintained and run by government agents. These workhouses severely curtailed the rights of the poor, separated families and compelled the poor to survive on the poorest of living conditions. Run on the principle that the poor were poor because of their laziness, they were never allowed a moment's peace or joy so that they never grow satisfied. Therefore, we see the utter failure of institutional charity, one of the novel's most important themes, right in the beginning.

Space for Learner's Notes

On the way to London, Oliver meets a boy dressed as a man, and with the manners of a grown up. He was called Jack Dawkins or "the artful Dodger". He not only bought a hearty meal for Oliver, but also offered him shelter with an old man.

The 'respectable old gentleman' called Fagin lived in an old house in one of London's many crowded neighbourhoods with a number of other boys of about the same age as the Dodger. Oliver is readily welcomed into the group. He spends a number of days with the old Jew Fagin without realizing their source of livelihood. He sees a number of silk handkerchiefs and wallets being brought into the house by the Dodger and Charley Bates and believes that those were made by the boys in the warehouses they worked in. Seeing the boys, Oliver is eager to learn a trade and start working and pleads with Fagin to send him out so. He is sent out with the Dodger and Charley Bates. It is only when he sees the Dodger pulling out a handkerchief from the pocket of an old gentleman that Oliver realises what the boys and Fagin did for a living. The shock he received at this realisation makes him run at the very moment the theft is discovered, while the actual culprits get away safely. He is chased, beaten up and taken by an officer to be presented in front of the police magistrate.

Check Your Progress

1. At what age is Oliver taken away from the orphanage and where?
2. Why is Oliver punished by the workhouse authorities?
3. Who is Mr. Sowerberry and how does Oliver come to live with him?
4. Which incident makes Oliver run away from Sowerberry?
5. What is the other name of Jack Dawkins?
6. Where does Jack Dawkins take Oliver?

Self Asking Questions

- ii. Do you think Fagin's profession is a result of the difficulties imposed upon the poor in the workhouses?

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3.4.1.2: Chapter 11- 20:

By the time Oliver is presented in front of Mr. Fang, the magistrate, Mr. Brownlow, the victim of the theft begins to doubt whether Oliver had really stolen his handkerchief. He tells the magistrate as much and adds that the boy looks very ill. Nevertheless, Mr. Fang who had no patience for anybody, sentences Oliver to three months of hard labour in the prison. By then, Oliver was so ill that he had fainted and in that condition, he was ordered to be taken to his cell. However, the bookseller in front of whose stall the theft had occurred comes to his rescue. He is exonerated from the crime of theft and later taken by the kind old Mr. Brownlow to his house

At Mr. Brownlow's Oliver stays for a number of days recovering from his illness under the nurture and love of Mrs. Bedwin, Mr. Brownlow's housekeeper. As his health improves and begins to move about the house, Oliver is fascinated by the portrait of a woman whose eyes seemed to speak to him. When Mr. Brownlow sees Oliver standing near the portrait, he discovers a striking resemblance between the boy and the woman in the portrait. However, the matter is not pursued further due to Oliver's delicate condition.

Meanwhile, Fagin and his associate Bill Sikes are worried that Oliver might tell about them to the police and decide that he must be retrieved from custody. Nancy, a young woman working for Fagin goes to the prison dressed in decent clothes accessorized with a basket in one hand and a key in the other, disguised as Oliver's distressed sister. Nancy returns with the information that the old gentleman had taken Oliver to his own house. Soon there ensues a search for Oliver and one day when he was out on an errand for Mr. Brownlow, Nancy and Sikes capture him and return him to Fagin.

Fagin locks up Oliver and strips him of the new gentlemanly clothes that Brownlow had given him. His own rags which he had given away to a Jew are returned to him. In his confinement, after a period of utter loneliness and constant attempts by Fagin and his boys to lure him towards their way of

life, he is sent away to Sikes to assist him in robbing a house. He is given a new pair of shoes and warned by Fagin about the terrible consequences that would befall him if he did not obey Bill Sikes. Oliver's innocence again prevents him from knowing the purpose for which he is sent away with Sikes. Though he tries to find it out from Nancy who comes to fetch him, he gets no definite answer except a caution that if he acts foolishly he would be bringing trouble for both himself and her.

Oliver, we have to see, remains uninfluenced by the rosy picture of their lives painted by the thieves for his benefit. This shows that the boy is truly noble and filled with goodness. This quality of Oliver's proves Dickens's belief that virtue is its own reward, as true.

Stop to Consider

Oliver's first brush with the truth of his friends in London almost lands him in prison. However, his intrinsic goodness and innocence wins for him new friends in the kind old man called Mr. Brownlow and his housekeeper called Mrs. Bedwin. Though the truth about the portrait hanging in one part of Brownlow's house remains a mystery, we are given the impression that it is crucial to knowing Oliver's true history.

We also see for the first time that Oliver's outward appearance reflected his inner virtues which are completely opposite to the many accusations of viciousness that had been attached to him in the workhouse by people like Mr. Bumble.

Check Your Progress

1. Why does Mr. Fang release Oliver?
2. Where does Oliver live after being released by Mr. Fang?
3. Why are Fagin and Sikes concerned to hear about Oliver's arrest?
4. How does Oliver end up with Fagin again?
5. Why is Oliver sent to Sikes? What are the two warnings he receives from Fagin and Nancy?

Self Asking Questions

- iii. What according to you is the main theme of the novel?
- iv. Do you think Nancy's true spirit is contradictory to her profession? Justify your answer.

3.4.1.3: Chapter 21- 30:

It is a rainy morning when Sikes and Oliver go on their expedition. Sikes hurries through the crowded streets of the city pulling Oliver along without stopping anywhere. Hitching hikes and mostly walking for miles they reach an old house outside Shepperton. At this house they are welcomed by Toby Crackit and Barney. An hour after midnight, the two men and the boy set out for their work. Wearing long heavy coats and wrapping themselves up in shawls, Sikes and Toby Crackit hurry through the town street with Oliver between them. They reach a house outside the town and climb over the wall. It is only then that Oliver realises they are about to rob the house. He is horrified and pleads with Sikes to let him run away. He is silenced with threats to his life. He is then led towards a small window at the back of the house, which is so small that no thief could possibly go in. It was for this purpose that Oliver was brought along. Sikes pushes him in through the window and orders him to go straight towards the front door and open it. Oliver however, decides that whether he lives or dies, he will make at least one attempt to awaken the family and warn them about the theft. While he moves ahead with this determination in mind, he hears Sikes calling him to return. Just then there is a loud noise and a flash of light. Oliver is injured. There is a hot pursuit to catch them while Toby and Sikes run carrying the injured Oliver. When they could go no further, they dumped Oliver in a ditch and ran in different directions.

Oliver remains unconscious in the ditch till the morning when he wakes up in a terrible pain. Looking around for help, he arrives at the same house they had tried to rob the night before. Mr. Giles, the butler of the house recognises Oliver to be the same boy he had shot the previous night and alerts the mistress of the house as well as the police. However, Mrs. Maylie and Rose, the inhabitants of the house, and their doctor friend Mr. Losberne find it difficult to believe that such a young and innocent looking boy as Oliver could be a thief. The sick and injured Oliver was made to rest in Giles's bed, and when he wakes up, he narrates his story to the doctor and the two ladies. It is then decided that just as Mrs. Maylie had taken care of the orphan Rose, she would take care of young Oliver too, and Mr. Losberne must take the necessary steps to prevent Oliver from being taken away to the prison.

Stop to Consider

Oliver's encounter with frequent misfortune and misery in his young life seems to be balanced by the occasional good fortune that visits him. His inherent goodness reflected in his young and innocent eyes wins friends for him, who readily trusts him and love him. Just as his first misfortune of being arrested for theft is balanced by the good fortune of meeting such kind people as Brownlow and Bedwin, similarly, his second misfortune provides him the opportunity to know the kind and gentle Rose, Mrs. Maylie and Mr. Losberne.

Space for Learner's Notes

Meanwhile, after the failed attempt of burglary, Sikes is nowhere to be found. Fagin is very agitated and angry at the fact that Oliver is lost to him again. It is revealed to the readers that Fagin has met a man called Monks who seems to have a special interest on Oliver and pressurises Fagin to find him anyhow. There is money involved and hence Fagin is determined to turn the reluctant boy into a thief.

In this section, we are introduced to Mrs. Corney, the matron of the workhouse where Oliver was born. Around the same time when Oliver was taken away by Sikes to the outskirts of the city to rob a house, Mrs. Corney discovers a secret relating to Oliver's birth from an old nurse called Sally, who was at her deathbed then. Sally tells Mrs. Corney about a gold locket and ring which she had stolen from Oliver's mother and kept them for herself. On the very night of this discovery, Mr. Bumble, the parish beadle visits Mrs. Corney with gifts of wine, and their conversation about the poor whom they consider lazy and hard to please, ends in a marriage proposal.

Stop to Consider

Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Corney's conversation about the poor 'paupers' is a representation of the general neglect and indifference towards the poor working class who lived under the mercy of the government institutes and the church. They are symbolic of the officials who ran institutions of charity by blatantly violating the values they preached to the poor, and allowing their greed and rapaciousness to snatch even the little that is provided to the poor. In this episode, Mr. Bumble also appears to be a very calculative person for whom his own interest is foremost. When Mrs. Corney is away for a while, Mr. Bumble inspects her belongings and thinks about what he would get if he married her.

Check Your Progress

1. Where do Sikes and Oliver stop and whom do they meet before robbing the house at Chertsey?
2. What happens to Oliver during the robbery?
3. Who is old Sally? What does she tell Mrs. Corney before dying?
4. What is the name of the owner of the house where Oliver finds shelter?

3.4.1.4: Chapter 31 – 40:

Oliver takes several days to recover from his illness. Rose and Mrs. Maylie give him love and care and in return the boy is immensely grateful. In his happiness, he remembers his old benefactor Mr. Brownlow and the kind old Mrs. Bedwin. So one day, Mr. Losberne takes Oliver to visit Mr. Brownlow. However, it comes as a big disappointment to Oliver to discover that Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin had left the place and gone to the West Indies.

Few weeks after that Mrs. Maylie, Rose and Oliver leave the house outside London and go to their country cottage. The spring season, the fresh air of the countryside and the love and care he received from the two ladies helps Oliver to gain a peaceful joy in life. He learns to read and write better. He goes for walks with the ladies and loves to run errands for them or pick flowers. In the evenings, he did his homework and listened to Rose who sang and played the piano.

As spring comes to an end and summer approaches, Rose falls very ill. The entire household is thrown into a sudden gloom as they suspect that she would not recover from her illness. Mrs. Maylie writes a letter to Mr. Losberne and asks Oliver to run as fast as possible to post the letter. Oliver does as directed and reaches the inn where he hires a horse and a man who would deliver the letter to Mr. Losberne. On his way out he stumbles into a tall man wearing a cloak who behaves strangely on seeing him. It frightens the boy but the incident is soon forgotten as he is preoccupied with Rose's health.

After days of waiting in agony, Rose appears to be recovering from her illness. Oliver is overwhelmed with joy and goes for a walk. On his way back home with armful of flowers for Rose, he meets Giles and another young man. On being told that Rose is recovering the young gentleman sobs with relief. This young gentleman who looks very much like Mrs. Maylie

is her son Harry Maylie. On reaching home he reproaches his mother for not writing to him about Rose's illness. From the conversation between the mother and son, it is revealed that he is in love with Rose and wants to propose to her. But Mrs. Maylie knows that Rose would reject his proposal and she didn't want her son to go through the pain of rejection.

Space for Learner's Notes

Stop to Consider

We have to notice how the countryside stands in stark contradiction to the city. In the villages, even the poor live in dignity amidst the fresh and clean environment. Whereas the miserable living conditions of the city provide no dignity to its poor.

As Rose begins to recover, there is joy in the house again. On one such morning, Oliver falls asleep while reading. He dreams that he is back at Fagin's house and is locked up there. He suddenly wakes up and finds Fagin standing outside the window looking at him closely. The man he had stumbled upon outside the inn was there too. He screams for help. The two men disappear as soon as he does. Harry Maylie and the others search all around in vain. Giles is sent out to find out about the two men in the nearby town but returns with no information. Soon the matter is put to rest.

Before leaving for London, Harry finds an opportunity to express his love to Rose. True to Mrs. Maylie's prediction, Rose rejects Harry's proposal though she loves him. There is a stain upon her name which she believed would be an obstacle in Harry's bright career. Despite Harry's various attempts to convince her, Rose does not give in. Harry returns to London with Mr. Losberne leaving Giles behind and acquiring a promise from Oliver that he would write to him from time to time to let him know about the well being of the family.

Stop to Consider

In this section we discover that Rose comes from an unknown parentage. For this reason, she refuses Harry Maylie's proposal despite reciprocating his love.

Though the incident is gradually forgotten, there is something to worry about in Oliver's case, as Fagin appears to have found him.

In the provincial town of Oliver's birthplace, Mr. Bumble is no longer the parish beadle and hence no longer wears a cocked hat or carries a cane. He has married Mrs. Corney and has become the master of the workhouse. His position, without the hat and the cane of a beadle, seems to be rather reduced in power and stature as Mrs. Bumble appears to have an upper hand in their marital power struggle. One evening after a quarrel with his wife Mr. Bumble runs into Monks in a pub who wants to know about the secret shared by Sally before her death. The following evening, Mr. and Mrs. Bumble meet Monks in an old house where for exchange of twenty-five pounds in gold, Mrs. Bumble gives Monks a small bag. The bag contained a gold locket, with two locks of hair inside, and a little gold wedding ring, with the name "Agnes" inscribed inside, along with the date (within a year before Oliver's birth), but no last name. These were the articles that old Sally had stolen from Oliver's mother and later pawned them. She had given the note from the pawnbroker to Mrs. Bumble before her death, and Mrs. Bumble had retrieved them. Monks is relieved to get the jewellery, but soon with Mr. and Mrs. Bumble as his witnesses, he discards the bag in a stream that flowed underneath the house.

We meet Sikes again in chapter 39. He is sick and appears to be living in very poor condition. Nancy who also looks very unwell is taking care of him. When Fagin visits him along with the Dodger and Charley Bates, in between growls and complains, Sikes tells Fagin that he needs money. After an initial hesitation Fagin agrees to send him some through Nancy. While Nancy is seated at Fagin's house waiting for him to hand over the money to her, Monks arrives there. Fagin takes Monks upstairs for a private conversation leaving Nancy waiting downstairs. But while they are at it, Nancy sneaks upstairs after them and listens to their conversation. Despite her deep agitation on hearing the conversation between Fagin and Monks, Nancy returns to Sikes putting on a cheerful face.

The next morning Nancy drugs Sikes drink with laudanum and while he falls asleep, she rushes off to meet Rose, who she gets to know from Monks, is staying at a family hotel near Hyde Park. After telling her who she is, reveals everything she had found out about Oliver from the conversation between Fagin and Monks including Monks's happy declaration to Fagin that he has destroyed the only proof of Oliver's true identity.

Stop to Consider

While Mr. and Mrs Bumble despite their profession of being officials of a charitable institute such as the workhouse, they reveal the most uncharitable character when they dispossess the innocent Oliver by selling his proof of identity to Monks. In contrast to them, Nancy reveals a heart full of kindness when she runs to Rose so that she may help Oliver. This shows that the hardened environment of London's underclass had not succeeded to corrupt Nancy completely.

Check Your Progress

1. How much does Monks pay for the information held by Mrs. Bumble?
2. What did the bag contain? What does Monks do with it?
3. What does Nancy discover about Oliver?

Self Asking Question

- v. How do you think Dickens juxtaposes the good and the evil through the various characters in the novel?
- vi. Do you think Rose's reasons for refusing Harry's proposal are justified? Give a reasoned answer keeping the values of 19th century Victorian society in mind.

3.4.1.5: Chapter 41 – 53:

Rose is filled with a desire to know more about Oliver's past after hearing hints of it from Nancy. Yet she did not know how to go about it since she had promised Nancy that none of her associates would be given away to the authorities. After considering the impossibility of sharing the secret with Mr. Losberne who would act impulsively, or Mrs. Maylie who would tell Mr. Losberne, she was just about to write to Harry Maylie, when Oliver returns from a walk with Giles and tells her that he had seen Mr. Brownlow. Rose immediately goes along with Oliver to meet Mr. Brownlow and on meeting him, tells him all. While Brownlow is very happy to see Oliver again, Mr. Bedwin cries tears of joy. Even Mr. Grimwig, Brownlow's old friend who was present expresses his gratitude to Rose for bringing Oliver by kissing her.

Mr. Brownlow meets Mr. Losberne and Mrs. Maylie that very evening and it is decided that their first aim is to find Monks while keeping Nancy's faith on Rose, whom she trusted not to give away Fagin and Sikes, intact.

Stop to Consider

Dickens shows us how deep in his heart, Brownlow remains attached to Oliver even when Oliver is discredited in front of him by Mr. Bumble. He appears to be only too eager to accept Rose's story about Oliver and do more for the boy. In the midst of a world which is filled with misery and evilness, the author also shows us the existence of kindness and goodness.

In chapter 42, we see that Noah Claypole and Charlotte have run away from Sowerberry after stealing his money. They have arrived in London after walking for a number of days. Charlotte is carrying a heavy bag containing the stolen money and is hardly able to walk under its weight. The clever Noah Claypole, we are told, did not want to carry it, in case they were caught on the way. They halt for the night at "Three Cripples", the very inn where Fagin and his associates come and go. Barney, the Jew who looks after the inn immediately recognises Noah and Charlotte to be like-minded people and informs Fagin about them. After listening to Noah, Fagin walks up to them and recruits Noah. The first assignment given to Noah is to check on the Dodger who had been arrested and was to be tried soon. Noah returns with the information that the Dodger has been sentenced despite a brave show of diffidence and nonchalance.

Check Your Progress

1. What stops Rose from writing to Harry about Oliver?
2. What has Noah and Charlotte done to run away from Sowerberry?
Where do they stay?
3. What makes Fagin take Noah under his wings?
4. What is Noah's first assignment?

As promised, Nancy tries to go out and meet Rose at 11 o'clock on Sunday night. However, her guilt feeling of having betrayed Sikes and Fagin had thrown her into an emotional turmoil and her strange behaviour had been noticed by the two men. Just as she is about to slip out, Sikes stops her.

She struggles with him till midnight and finally gives up. While Sikes just concludes that she is ill, Fagin suspects Nancy of having found another man. He sees this as an opportunity to get rid of Sikes who knows too much. He decides if he could persuade Nancy to poison him it would be very convenient for him. For then, he would not only have gotten rid of Sikes, but also would have more control over Nancy. He decides to find out Nancy's new man so that he could use the information to force Nancy to kill Sikes by blackmailing her.

Space for Learner's Notes

Stop to Consider

Fagin lives by and preaches the philosophy of individualism. He believed that everyone is 'number one' and that individuals must look after their own interest, by doing which, he would be looking after the group's interest. It is this philosophy that drives the Dodger and Charley Bates to join the mob and cry 'thief' when Oliver is pursued after they had stolen Brownlow's handkerchief. It is this same principle which makes Fagin dream about getting rid of Sikes through Nancy. Noah appears to be a perfect person to replace the Dodger in Fagin's group because he exhibits the same individualism that Fagin preaches. However, Dickens proves this kind of individualism as problematic by showing us Fagin's family held together by individual self-interest falling apart towards the end.

The assignment to follow Nancy falls upon Noah or Bolter. On the following Sunday, while Sikes is away, Nancy goes out to meet Rose and Brownlow, and Noah follows her. He hides himself and listens to their conversation where Nancy begs them to ensure that her friends do not get into trouble. She gives them Monks' description and where and when to find him. Nancy's description of Monks startles Brownlow who appears to know him. She also tells them why she could not meet them the previous Sunday night and how she had managed to meet Rose before that. Brownlow and Rose beg her to accept their help and try to show her hope of a better future. But she declines their help saying that she is chained to her life and to Sikes, the man she loves. After shedding bitter tears on her fate, Nancy returns home. Noah returns to Fagin and tells him all. When Sikes goes to Fagin with some stolen goods, he is told everything which sends him into a violent rage. Fagin knew what the short tempered Sikes would do but very slyly,

he advises her to not be very violent. The result is that Sikes rushes home and beats Nancy to death while she tries to dissuade from committing the crime of murder. After that, Sikes leaves the city without knowing where to go. He moves about in the countryside but never too far away from London while he is constantly haunted by his guilt. He feels as if the ghost of Nancy is following him around, and he sees her wide open eyes, blank and lifeless everywhere. The murder is discovered and there is a search for the culprit in the countryside. Sikes returns to the city thinking that would be the last place they would suspect him to be in. His dog, that had followed him in his aimless walk appears a nuisance to him as it would surely lead to his detection. So he tries to drown it. But the dog escapes.

Stop to Consider

Through Nancy, Dickens tells us that an honest heart is not always the prerogative of the well off people. It is poverty and drudgery that throws people towards a criminal life and given the chance, even a girl like Nancy could have been as kind as Rose. It is Nancy's kind thoughts for Oliver that makes her betray Sikes and Fagin and make such a great sacrifice of her life. At the same time, it is her love and loyalty for these very friends that torment her for having betrayed them.

Meanwhile, Mr. Brownlow finds Monks and takes him to his house. As Brownlow locks himself up alone with Monks, there ensues a long interview from which we discover the entire history of Oliver. Monks's real identity, it turns out, is Edward Leeford, whose father was Brownlow's friend. His father was forced into a marriage as per his status, and was extremely unhappy. The couple hated each other and finally separated. Later on his father became engaged to the daughter of a friend, but died before he could marry her. He had visited Brownlow before going away to Rome where he died, and told him about the girl he loved and left a portrait of her with him. So, after his death, Brownlow had gone in search of the girl only to discover that the family had left. When he came upon Oliver, he had discovered a familiarity in the boy's face, but before he could ascertain his identity, Oliver was taken away by Fagin's gang. But he wanted to dig further into the matter and had gone to the West Indies to find Monks, believing that Monks would be able to tell him something about the boy. Contrary to what was believed Monks's father had actually left a will mentioning a child that would

be born. But his mother destroyed it. Brownlow tells Monks that his deal with Fagin is known to him, and his confession to Fagin about having destroyed the only proof of Oliver's identity has been heard.

The result of the long conversation between Brownlow and Monks is that Monks would give a statement about Oliver's true identity and parentage, and the inheritance that was due to him would be given to Oliver.

Space for Learner's Notes

Check Your Progress

1. Why does Nancy suffer from guilt?
2. What does Sikes think about Nancy's wish to go out in the night?
3. Why does Sikes kill Nancy? What does he do after that?
4. What is Monks' real name? How is he related to Brownlow?

Soon after Fagin and Noah are arrested while there is a hot pursuit for Sikes whose dog was seen loitering around the city. With all the hideouts under scrutiny, the thieves have only one place left. This place was situated on Jacob's Island where Toby Crackit, Chitling and Kags are hiding. Their conversation reveals that Chitling ran away from the house after Fagin and Noah were taken. Charley Bates escaped and everyone at "Three Cripples" has been arrested. Bet screamed like a mad woman on seeing Nancy's corpse and has been taken to the hospital. Kags reveals that Fagin had welcomed the police as he was at the risk of being lynched by the angry mob that had gathered outside his house.

As they were talking, Sikes' dog arrives without its master. Just as they had begun to assume that he must have fled the country, Sikes arrives, looking haggard and exhausted. Though he is not very welcome there, the three men agree not to turn him over. But at this juncture Charley Bates arrives and on seeing Sikes starts screaming, crying out for help and attacking Sikes, all at the same time. The scuffle between Charley Bates and Sikes attracts attention and the house is surrounded by an angry mob and the police. Sikes tries to escape by using a long rope which he ties into a noose around his neck. He would have jumped into the water by cutting himself loose. But at that very instant he sees Nancy's wide vacant eyes and slips. He hangs himself to death accidentally. Till his death he was pursued by his own guilty conscience symbolised by Nancy's eyes.

Oliver and his friends travel to the place of Oliver's birth where the rest of Oliver's history is revealed. Monks, still full of hatred for Oliver, acknowledges him as his half-brother, the son of his father and Agnes Fleming who died at the workhouse during childbirth. The will which was left by Monks's father and destroyed by his mother had said that if the child born from Agnes is a girl, she would get the inheritance unconditionally, and if it was a boy, then he would get the inheritance only if he lived an honourable life. This explains Monks's desire to turn him into a thief. It is revealed that after the death of Agnes and then her father, Rose, Agnes's young sister was adopted by a poor couple. Monks' mother had taken care that this sister, or Oliver's aunt may meet only misery in her life, and this purpose was carried forward by Monks after his mother's death. However, as luck would have it, a widow, Mrs. Maylie, took pity on the girl and adopted her.

Stop to Consider

Despite living the lowest of all lives, we see a certain code among the thieves in *Oliver Twist*. They live by certain principles, and Dickens shows to us that most of them have a conscience. Charley Bates, Bet, Toby Crackit and others are horrified by the murder of Nancy. They do not know how to welcome Sikes among them when he comes. Charley Bates is so horrified that he tells everyone that he is going to give up Sikes to the police. Even Sikes, overwhelmed by the extent of the horror of his crime is haunted by guilt and reveals to us that he has a conscience. Only Fagin seems to lack that conscience and it is only apt that he must be punished by the law if he cannot repent on his own.

As Rose's parentage is established, Harry Maylie renews his proposal and also tells her that he has left all the glitter of a bright political career and has decided to become a clergyman living a humble life in the countryside with his wife. Rose at last agrees to marry him much to the joy of Oliver and others.

Fagin is sentenced to death and during the last hours of his life he becomes ill and delirious. Oliver and Brownlow visit him to know the whereabouts of the papers that Monks had given him.

Noah had been pardoned after he testified against Fagin. He continued to make his career out of it and become an informer.

Monks takes his portion of the inheritance and goes to America where very soon, the narrator tells us, he squandered all and fell into a criminal life again.

Rose and Harry get married and settle down in the countryside, and are soon joined by others. Mrs. Maylie lives with her son, while Losberne settles down in a bachelor's cottage nearby. He does a great deal of gardening and is often visited by Mr. Grimwig with whom he had become great friends.

Mr. and Mrs. Bumble lose their positions due to the role they had played in destroying the proof of Oliver's identity. Subsequently, they become paupers and live in the very workhouse they use to look after.

Charles Bates realises that it is safer to live an honest life. He tries various small jobs and struggles and works hard to live honestly.

Oliver is adopted by Brownlow and they settle down in the same village as Harry and Rose. Under the guidance of the kind old man, Oliver grows up to be as noble as his father.

Check Your Progress

1. What happens to Fagin and Noah after their arrest?
2. Who is Oliver's mother?
3. Where do Rose and Harry settle after marriage?
4. How does Charley Bates change his life?
5. What happens to Monks?

Self Asking Questions

- vii. Do you think the theft committed by petty criminals like Sikes is different from the theft committed by respectable people like Mr. and Mrs Bumble? Give a reasoned answer.
- viii. Do you think Brownlow and the other members of the gentle society are eager to know about Oliver's true history so that he may be smoothly conducted into their society? Give a reasoned answer.
- ix. Do you think clothes play an important role in creating impressions about people? Discuss.

3.4.2 Themes:

Themes are the important ideas and concerns that the author explores or highlights in his work of literature. *Oliver Twist* has a number of themes that explore Dickens's concern about the flaws and hypocrisies inherent in his contemporary Victorian society.

Poverty and its degrading effects may be considered to be the foremost theme in *Oliver Twist*. One side effect of Industrial Revolution was that there was a massive rise in the poor population of England. The poor have dehumanized existence as is revealed by Mr. Bumble's method of alphabetical naming of orphans in the workhouse. The misery and drudgery in which they lived must have been a prime pre-occupation with Dickens, as he had experienced a similar life during his early life. He addresses the theme of poverty by closely observing its effects on Oliver and others who surround him. He shows us how not only disease and death, but also a criminal life becomes unavoidable for the poor.

By showing us the hypocrisy of government and church officials and the manner in which orphanages and workhouses were run, Dickens makes his readers see his next theme, the failure of the system that professes charity to the poor. The poverty-stricken masses are made all the more miserable by these very institutions that are founded on principles of charity and benevolence.

Dickens also reveals to his readers the irony of Victorian era obsession with morality and virtue. While Rose, brought up in a decent environment by aristocrats can profess morality and virtue, the same is denied to people like Nancy who become thieves and prostitutes for survival. The clear divide in the novel between the good and the evil is reflected in a clear division between Bronlow and his class, and Fagin and his class respectively. It almost appears as if being good is only the prerogative of the upper class, while Nancy's goodness comes as a surprise. At the same time, Dickens also plays with the Victorian idea that virtue is its own reward, by showing us Oliver's triumph over all negative influences by his sheer virtue.

Another important concern of Dickens reflected in the novel is the fate of the Victorian child or rather orphan. While one section of the Victorian society were obsessed with children's education, their upbringing and freeing them from child labour, another section was unscrupulously using poor homeless children as chimney sweepers, pick-pockets and thieves. Through Oliver's life, Dickens shows us the existence of both these groups. Like

himself, Dickens shows us Oliver getting a taste of both kinds of lives as a poor apprentice and thief, and a well loved and nurtured child.

Space for Learner's Notes

Check Your Progress

1. What are the main themes of *Oliver Twist*?

3.4.3 Dickens's Style in *Oliver Twist*:

Oliver Twist, due to its initial serialized version, continues to keep the readers' on their toes throughout. Each chapter of the novel recounts an event and ends in suspense filling the reader's mind with curiosity to know what happens next. There are dramatic twists, and highly imaginative and fantastic episodes which are attributed by some critics to the frantic pace in which he was writing at that time. Others attribute them to Dickens's focus on building characters rather than developing the plot.

In "*Oliver Twist: A Patchwork of Genres*", Claire Wood looks at the novel as a patchwork of genres where Charles Dickens was being 'deliberately experimental'. According to her, Dickens manipulated with the conventions of various genres in order to challenge the readers expectation. The novel appears to Claire Wood to be a curious mixture of satire with sentimentality and melodrama with social realism. William T. Lankford says in "'The Parish Boy's Progress': The Evolving Form of *Oliver Twist*", that the novel begins on a realistic note and ends in melodrama. He sees an apparent thematic and symbolic confusion in the form of *Oliver Twist*.

As social satire is one important element in the novel, Dickens is often seen to adopt a sarcastic tone while narrating about the charitable institutions or their officials. This sarcastic tone become periphrastic at times as he uses a roundabout language to describe certain events like the theft of Brownlow's handkerchief by Charley Bates and the Dodger. As for the narrative voice, it is difficult to find one constant voice, since it appears to be constantly shifting sides. If at one moment it is a distanced observer mockingly commenting on the vainglorious character of petty officials like the beadle, at another it takes on an overtly intimate and sentimental tone to describe moments such as that when Harry proposes Rose.

3.4.4 General Critique of *Oliver Twist* and its Reception:

Dickens's unabashed portrayal of crime and the London underbelly had acquired for *Oliver Twist* the title 'Newgate novel' after Newgate prison in London, even as it became extremely popular for the same purpose. In general, it can be said that *Oliver Twist* was more or less well received by Dickens's contemporaries. T. H. Lister praised Dickens for his 'comprehensive spirit of humanity' 'untainted with sentimentality' in the *Edinburgh Review* for October 1838. William Makepeace Thackeray, Dickens's contemporary and rival too was bound to appreciate his style of writing which managed to win sympathy even for Sikes, Nancy's murderer (cited in victorianweb.org). However, there were also others who found the story or the characters unrealistic. For instance Thackeray doubted the truthfulness of Nancy's character while the magazine *Punch* called the novel 'a startling romance' (Chin Sei). It must have been in response to second category of opinions that he wrote a preface for the third edition of the novel in 1841 where he tries to defend his choice of bringing in characters from the underclass and presenting them in all their raw truthfulness.

20th century criticism of *Oliver Twist* looks at it as representing Dickens's view about his contemporary society. Critics saw a moral purpose of exposing the flaws of Victorian institutions in *Oliver Twist*. Some use psychoanalytical and biographical criticism to look at the novel.

Though later critics had problems with the loose plot of *Oliver Twist*, it did not lose its popularity and is still considered to be one of the classics of English fiction. It has been adapted into films by the same name in 1948, 1997 and 2005. There is also a Bengali film titled *Manik* which was made in 1961. Apart from television series produced by BBC in 1985 and 2007, there has also been a Broadway musical called *Oliver!* in 1968.

Self Asking Question

x. Do you agree that Dickens' *Oliver Twist* is a patchwork of genres?

.....
.....

3.5 Summing Up:

This unit on Charles Dickens's second novel *Oliver Twist* begins with an introduction to the author, his life and career as well as the milieu he wrote

in. It then goes on to provide a detailed summary and analysis of the novel which would help the students to have a full understanding of the novel and its plot. Other important aspects of studying a novel, such as its themes, style and critical reception has also been included for the benefit of the students. The **Stop to Consider** boxes mostly specify the highlights of the sections discussed and their main concerns. These boxes also provide a better understanding of some concerns such as the failure of charity, the problematic nature of 19th century individualism, the good versus evil motif, and the juxtaposition between the city and the country.

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The Victorian Web: <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/dc/index.html>

The Dickens Page: Oliver Twist: <http://www.lang.nagoya-u-ac.jp/~matsuoka/CD-OT.html>

3.7 Model Questions:

- i. Why do you think Oliver is taken back to the workhouse at the age of nine?
- ii. Why do the workhouse board decide to remove Oliver from the workhouse?
- iii. Who is Noah Claypole? Why does Oliver assault him?
- iv. Why did Bill Sikes require Oliver to assist him in the robbery at Chertsey?
- v. Who is Monks? How is he related to Oliver?
- vi. What causes Nancy's death?
- vii. Write an essay on the main themes of the novel.
- viii. How does Harry succeed to convince Rose to marry him?
- ix. What circumstances help to rescue Oliver permanently from a life of poverty and dependence on friends?
- x. In the end, Oliver and all his well-wishers are seen to have settled in the countryside. What do you think is the author's aim in bringing about such an end?

3.8 Answer keys to the Self Asking Questions:

- i. Dickens's early life experience as a child labour and his encounter with a poverty stricken life in the poor quarters of London gave him much material to write *Oliver Twist*.
- ii. The poor population in 19th century Victorian England had very little opportunity to improve their condition. They either had to live in the workhouses and lose all liberty or loiter around the provincial towns and cities as vagrants, homeless and destitute. In such a state Fagin's profession appears to be a lucrative option.

- iii. Dickens's believe that virtue is its own reward may be considered to be the main theme of the novel as we see Oliver being again and again rescued from committing a crime due to his own inherent goodness.
- iv. Nancy, as a thief and a prostitute is looked upon with suspicion and disrespect. However, she knows the good from bad and is kind towards Oliver.
- v. There appears to be a clear divide between the inhabitants of the London underbelly who are thieves, and thus bad, and the respectable class to which Brownlow, Losberne, Mrs. Maylie or Rose belongs to, and who are all good and kind towards Oliver. Yet, one must keep in mind the characters of the officials of charitable institutes, who despite belonging to an upper class are thieves in disguise.
- vi. Rose's rejection of Harry's proposal is justified from her perspective. Victorian society measured the worth of a person by his birth. Rose, whose parentage is unknown would have brought a disgrace to Harry's name and thwart his career in the public world if he had married him then.
- vii. The only difference between petty thieves and people like Mr. and Mrs Bumble is that while the petty thieves steal from the rich items such as handkerchiefs, purses and gold watches, the rich steal from the poor their very dignity and liberty.
- viii. A poor orphan with no rich relatives could not possibly have had the chance to enter into a respectable society in 19th century England. It almost is a telling commentary on the exclusive upper class that their kindness towards Oliver and their interest in his welfare is justified by virtue of his rise through the discovery of his parentage and his inheritance.
- ix. Clothes mark a person's class. Right in the beginning Dickens tells us about the miraculous quality of clothes when it made the infant Oliver look like a poor baby as soon as he was swaddled in rags. This trope of clothes giving away people's identity or clothes transforming people's identity runs throughout the novel.
- x. A close reading of the novel reveals the existence of various characteristics of comedy, satire, sentimental novel, social realism and Victorian morality.

Unit: 4

T.S. Eliot: 'Preludes' & Allen Ginsberg: Howl

Contents:

- 4.0 Introduction:**
- 4.1 Objectives**
- 4.2 T. S. Eliot's "Preludes"**
- 4.3 Allen Ginsberg's "Howl"**
- 4.4 Salient Themes**
- 4.5 Stylistic Features**
- 4.6 The significance of the poem**
- 4.7 Summing Up**
- 4.8 References & Suggested Readings**

4.0 Introduction:

This unit covers two poems "Preludes" by the noted Anglo-American poet critic T. S. Eliot and "Howl" by one of the most famous American writers of the Beat Generation Allen Ginsberg. Constituting the middle part of this paper, this unit is to be seen as a link between the literary pieces of the past and the present. Despite their differences in terms of ideological leanings, in the two poems the two contemporaries Eliot and Ginsberg give voice to the unrest, anxieties, boredom and rampant materialism of western society during the first half of the twentieth century America. In this unit, we are going to learn about the two authors, their lives and times and how their works in general and the prescribed poems in particular are the products of not simply their individual imagination and genius, but of the era they lived in. While we should be aware of the fact that writers do not necessarily express their personal views and ideologies in all their works, more often than not, there is a close connection between the author, the world s/he inhabits and the world s/he represents in his/her literary works.

4.1 Objectives:

This unit intends to familiarise you to two representative texts of the twentieth century. After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify the close association between the writer and the milieu they function in
- Appreciate how artistic works are product of innumerable personal as well as socio-cultural factors
- Grasp the meaning and significance of the various parts of “Preludes” and “Howl”
- Comprehend the salient thematic and stylistic features of the two texts covered in this unit
- Critically realise the importance of these two poems in the larger frame of this paper on Individual and Society

For the sake of convenience, first we would discuss T. S. Eliot’s “Preludes” in details and then approach Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl.” The summing up section would place the two texts together

4.2 T. S. Eliot’s “Preludes”:

- a. The Author and the Background
- b. General Introduction and the Form of the Text
- c. Analysing the text
 - i. Explanation of the Four parts
 - ii. Salient themes
 - iii. Stylistic features
 - iv. The significance of the poem

A. The Author and the Background:

T S. Eliot (1888-1965) is regarded as one of the finest poets of the twentieth century. As a literary critic and commentator of culture and society also his writings have been widely influential. Affecting the literary and intellectual worlds of both America and England, Eliot has been an indispensable part of any curriculum on English and American Literature till date.

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St Louis, Missouri, an industrial city of America in the year 1888. He was the youngest of the seven children of Henry Ware Eliot and Charlotte Champe Stearns. His father was a successful businessman and his mother a school mistress, and both of them had artistic leanings. His mother, was a woman of high taste and rigid sense of propriety. While this obviously had a formative influence on the young and artistically inclined Eliot, the greatest family influence came from his grandfather William Greenleaf Eliot. You must note here that the Eliot family was the descendant of the celebrated New Englanders. W. G. Eliot was a leading philanthropist and founder of the first Unitarian Church in St Louis and of Washington University. Though T. S. Eliot could never meet his grandfather in person who had died a year before he was born, he inherited his conservatism, the laws of self-denial and an immense sense of social responsibility from W. G. Eliot.

Space for Learner's Notes

New England: New England is a region composed of six states in the north eastern United States: Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut. These territories have a distinctly colonial English past. In the 1620s, for the first time, English pilgrims fleeing religious persecution in Europe, settled and established a colony in one of these territories which later came to be termed as New England. Early New Englanders played a formative role in this colonial establishment.

Eliot's childhood was reasonably comfortable. In 1906, Eliot entered Harvard University and graduated in 1909. It was during this period that he developed a deep interest in literature and philosophy. The two teachers who influenced him most in Harvard, were Irving Babbitt and George Santayana. They taught him courses in Literary Criticism and History of Philosophy and Philosophy of History. Both of them played an immense role in shaping Eliot's creative and critical thought processes. In 1910 he took his M.A. and then went on to Paris to study French literature and Philosophy. Here, he came across the ideas of Henry Bergson and Charles Maurras and some of his writings reflect his engagement with their theories and ideas. He returned to Harvard in 1911 to begin his doctoral dissertation on the philosophy of F.H. Bradley. For four years he pursued his research and did some teaching. In 1914, Harvard University awarded him a travelling

fellowship to Europe. Eliot stayed at Oxford for sometime, working on his doctoral dissertation on F.H. Bradley, but could not go to attend his PhD viva-voce examination at Harvard. It must be noted here that Eliot was a voracious reader and during his academic life he made an extensive reading of Dante, Baudelaire and Laforgue, all of whom left a deep impression on his poetry in multiple ways. So far as English poetry is concerned, Eliot drew inspiration mainly from nineteenth century English city poets James Thomson and John Davidson, who specialised in depicting the dreariness and drudgeries of modern city life. He greatly admired the 17th century Metaphysical poets.

Stop to Consider:

Literature shares a very intimate relationship with philosophy. You may want to explore this idea further. In addition, there is a clear distinction between History of Philosophy and Philosophy of History. Try to think about this distinction.

In 1915, he married Vivian Haigh-wood, and decided to settle in London. Though Eliot had started writing some of his celebrated poems during 1910-11, it was not until he settled in London that these were published in periodicals. "Preludes" is one such case. Between 1915 to 1925 he worked as a teacher in a school in London first, and then took up a job in a London bank. He continued writing and publishing his poems and critical reviews. His first poem to appear in print in 1915 was "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock". His first published collection of poems *Prufrock and Other Observations* came out in 1917. Though his reputation as a poet and critic was building up, it was in the year 1922 that he reached the highest landmark in his literary career. In this year, when he founded the influential quarterly *The Criterion*, his "The Waste Land," a masterpiece of modernist literature, appeared in print. Since his settlement in England, Eliot was markedly influenced by the ideas of early modernists like T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound. In 1925, Eliot left his odd job in the bank and joined the London publishing firm Faber and Gwyer, which was later renamed as Faber and Faber. He continued to serve this Firm till the end. In 1927 Eliot abandoned his American citizenship and became a British subject, and, got baptised into the Anglican Church leaving his family affiliation with the Unitarian Church. These shifts in personal life in terms of faith, home, roots are reflected in most of Eliot's literary endeavours, including his poetic dramas.

Stop to Consider:

Unitarian Church vs. Anglican Catholic Church: The followers of the Unitarian Church believe that God in Christianity is one only. Jesus Christ for them was inspired by God and was a Saviour, but he was not god incarnate. Unitarianism is much closer to Protestantism in spirit. They also believe in the ultimate role of reason in interpreting even sacred scriptures. Without any official document they are united by certain principles and purposes which promote good works, tolerance, justice, liberty and equality. On the other hand, the Anglican Church believes that God exists in three separate entities: The Holy Spirit, God the Father, and Jesus Christ, who is one with God. They are much more rule bound in comparison to the Unitarians. They have a number of scriptures and believe in the ideas of excommunication, celibacy, chastity, and sin.

This information must set you to wonder about the possible reasons why T. S. Eliot took the decision to shift from Unitarianism to Anglican Church.

By the late 40s Eliot had established his literary career well. Several of his classic poems were already in print including *The Hollow Men*, *Ash Wednesday*, *Four Quartets*, etc. He had already published his celebrated poetic plays like *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*. In 1948, at the age of sixty, Eliot received the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize for Literature. After this he got engaged in extensive public lecturing in England and America. In 1957 he married his secretary, Valerie Fletcher. Around the winter of 1962-3 Eliot suffered a long spell of illness and he breathed his last on 4 January, 1965.

Spending most of his formative years and even later life in exclusively urban areas, he had a first-hand experience of city life and developed a thoroughly urban imagination. It is this depiction of drab, mechanical, fragmentary urban modern life that we encounter in his "Preludes."

Check Your Progress:

1. Name the two teachers from Harvard who influenced T. S. Eliot most. Which courses were they offering?
2. Which factors contributed towards the development of Eliot's urban imagination? Which writers inspired him in this field?
3. Write a brief note on the literary career of T. S. Eliot.

B. Introduction and the Form of the Text:

“Preludes” is one of the early poems written by T. S. Eliot. It was written during his student days between October 1910 to November 1911 in Harvard and Paris. It is actually a collection of four poems (numbered I, II, III and IV) of various lengths. In general, the term “Preludes” refers to short musical compositions on one theme. Possibly composed as a result of Eliot’s expeditions through the South Boston slum areas, (with echoes of Paris and St Louis), these short pieces are united by the common theme of the depiction of the tedium, filth and horror of modern urban life. Originally the first three poems were titled “Preludes in Roxbury” (Roxbury was a squalid suburb of Boston). However, by renaming them simply as “Preludes,” Eliot gave them a larger universal significance. All the four poems together were first published in Wyndham Lewis’s experimental modernist journal *Blast* in 1914. Altogether, the four parts of “Preludes” consist of 54 lines. The passages of “Preludes” are not easy to understand. Many readers find the poem puzzling. Anyone who encounters the early poetry of T.S. Eliot for the first time, is usually struck by the difficulty of getting at the meaning conveyed by the poems. This was because Eliot felt that in order to capture the complex experiences of the modern era, poetry itself must, of necessity, be difficult. Intellectual, cerebral effort is required to engage with his poetry

The difficulty of “Preludes,” however, should not deter you from enjoying and appreciating it. Rather than seeing it as a puzzle in which all the parts must fall into the right place to provide a complete picture, try to consider “Preludes” as a poem that needs to be experienced. You must keep in mind that this poem conveys feelings and images in a suggestive fashion, and paraphrasing it cannot do justice to any of the features of this text. On the one hand, while the poem records the sensibilities of a very young man who is acutely conscious of the boredom and emptiness of modern life, on the other hand, these pieces exemplify the modernist claim that ugly urban squalor could be the material for poetry.

Thematically, “Preludes” depicts city scenes, where there are streets, rain, windows, blinds, coffee-stands, a woman in a dingy room, a crowd hurrying to go to work. All these are depicted from a particular frame of mind. The four poems are set at different times - evening, morning, night and day respectively. This sequence eventually only helps to emphasise the feeling of monotony as if one day simply repeats another day.

Self-Assessment Questions:

1. What is your understanding of modernism? What were the pertinent issues that the modernist artists tried to address through their works?
2. Urban setting is very common in modernist literature. Are you familiar with any of them? In which way is the city life and culture depicted in those pieces?
3. “Preludes” is typically interpreted as a city poem. As you go through the four parts of the text for the first time, try to write a passage in your own words about the city life depicted in each of these parts. You are expected to undertake this exercise without going through the following analysis of the text.

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C. Analysing the Text

i. Explanation of the Four Parts

I

This first poem of “Preludes” presents us with a winter evening scene which “settles down” with the smell of evening meals being cooked in “passageways”. The first three descriptive lines of neutral setting are followed by a weary tone in the image of “the burnt-out ends of smoky days”. As you are going through this poem, a very good exercise would be to pay attention to all the adjectives that are used here. This will help you to understand the tone of the scene described. “Burnt out ends of smoky days” indicates an urban industrial slum setting, while the analogy of the burnt out butt ends of cigarettes and the evening brings in ideas of the emptiness and dreariness of the experiences described. The next line suggests rain. But rather than bringing a fresh hope of life, here, the gusty shower wraps the “scraps/Of withered leaves” and bits of discarded newspapers about one’s feet. Words like “grimy”, “withered” “vacant” underline the sense of decay and disintegration. The showers beat against the broken blinds and chimney pots, and immediately one is reminded of what showers could do in another time and setting. In the penultimate image we see in a street-corner a lonely cab-horse, steaming and stamping uncomfortably. After all these details smoky, stale, grimy, broken things and an impatient, irritated consciousness, comes the final sentence.

“And then the lighting of the lamps.”

This sentence is placed a little apart from the rest of the body of the poem. But soon we can see that this lighting of the lamps is just another mundane chore of listless life and simply announces the approaching night. It certainly does not provide any saving grace or hope as is traditionally expected from the images of the light and the lamp.

As you read the poem, you would feel that there is no visible narrative persona in the poem. It apparently looks like a list of images drawn from an urban low class setting. However, a close reading would reveal that each of these images have been coloured by the perspective of the recorder which gives such images their grim mood.

Stop to Consider:

“Preludes” is a poem that tries to convey a lot through very little. It evokes images, typically familiar ones and obliquely reminds one of what is missing in the present scenario. Think of the images of rain, horse, and lamp in this part. Take time to consider how these familiar images of life, energy and light are depicted in a very different light in this poem.

II

In this short, ten-line part, one can easily notice the continuity of the earlier ideas. Despite the shift in time, many things remain the same. After the evening of the first part and intervening unconscious night, the second poem of “Preludes” brings us the morning. Just as in the first line of the first part, evening was personified, here, morning is personified. It comes to consciousness with smell, the stale smell of last night’s beer. The rest of the lines convey a sense of the daily mundane city life of the common people who follow a routine which is devoid of any larger significance or meaning. There are scenes of streets trampled by

... muddy feet that press
To early coffee-stands.

The piece seems to emphasize the mechanical nature of life in a modern, industrialized city. It is a life controlled by the pressures of routine which demands urgent attention. People have to run through activities like rushing to work and, gulping coffee from the coffee stands, quite mechanically, driven by compulsion, and without a moment to halt or pay

attention to details. The last lines of this section evoke the boredom and solitariness of all the people who are caught up in such activities:

One thinks of all the hands
That are raising dingy shades
In a thousand furnished rooms.

The poet refers to all these daily activities as “masquerades” that time resumes. Once the façade of urgency which the modern life puts up is exposed, one is left wondering about the real significance of existence. This is a world devoid of any space for individuality and freedom.

Personification: Personification is a device frequently used in literary works as well as day to day language. It is a figure of speech in which something non-human - an object, a living thing or even an idea - is given human attributes. Thus in a sentence like “As we trekked through the desert, the mid-day sun frowned at us” involves attributing human characteristics to the sun.

In “Preludes” you come across multiple examples of personification. Identify and elaborate upon them.

III

In the third part of the poem, there is shift from the streets to a bedroom scene, where for the first time a human character is introduced. Written in the second person, this poem is very different from the descriptive, objective tone of the first two parts. It is night and we meet a woman who dozes restlessly. Intermittently, she waits for sleep and dozes. And in this in-between state of sleep and consciousness, her mind projects outwards her inner self, her soul in “thousand sordid images”. These images like a film on a screen flicker against the ceiling until it is morning. At daybreak she hears the “sparrows in the gutters”, and has

... such a vision of the street
As the street hardly understands;

You must note here that we are still in the same stale urban setting. No specific details of the woman is provided. What the poem seems to emphasize is the connection between the dreariness of her surroundings and her conflicted personality. The last part of the poem presents two more images about her. One, that sitting on the edge of the bed, she uncurls the

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papers from her hair (strips of paper were used to curl hairs before the advent of rollers, and this practice was pretty common). And two, she drowsily clasps the “yellow” soles of her feet in her “soiled” hands. Again, you must pay attention to the yellowed feet and soiled hands which imply unhealthy and exhausted life.

Stop to Consider:

Poetry across times and cultures has presented the waking of a beautiful woman at dawn as a beautiful moment, an occasion for celebration. Eliot provides a deliberate twist to this poetic convention. Some commentators have said that the woman described could be a prostitute. She is sleepless, restive, uncomfortable with her mind full of sordid images.

In short, this piece also underlines the pressures and anxieties of modern urban life where one cannot even sleep peacefully and fretful images keep haunting the subconscious mind. The reference to the sparrows singing “in the gutter” once more disappoints the conventional association between the dawn and the sparrows. This is a morning which does not bring any freshness or hope and once more emphasises the drudgeries of modern life.

IV

In the final section of “Preludes” the narrator reveals himself most fully. This section opens in the third person and with a reference to “His soul” but in the second half only shifts to the first person.

The first lines underline the drudgery and trivialities of life. Try to comprehend the sense behind the images. In a landscape of city blocks, someone’s (“his”) soul is “stretched tight across the skies”. His soul, his existence is worn out by the passing of hours which are empty. His life witnesses the chores of city life and the boredom of lonely people stuffing pipes, and reading evening newspapers. Most of the people in this urban setting are “Assured of certain certainties.” However, the tone of the poem suggests that actually there are no certainties. It is a world full of absurdities and insecurities. The lives that he sees around represent

The conscience of a blackened street
Impatient to assume the world.

The message is clear: these lives are 'blackened', blighted, pursuing false values. At this point suddenly the nature of the poem changes. The speaker of the poem now speaks in the firstperson, saying:

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

You must notice the intensity of this emotional outpour. The notion of some infinitely gentle and infinitely suffering thing is an expression which cannot be paraphrased and at the same time expresses the nature of contemporary life which is spent in longings and unfulfilled desires. Some commentators have also noted the possibility of the lines referring to the suffering of Christ. In contrast to the darkness and disgust so prominent throughout the poem these lines have a sort of tenderness, beauty and a suggestion of some kind of redemption. Although these lines seem to provide a certain kind of meaning to the poem, the lines that follow offer a contradictory message. The concluding lines establishes the nature of this world as utterly devoid of significance:

The worlds revolve like ancient women
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

Life is once again seen as routine drudgery, a struggle for survival amidst degradation and deprivation.

Space for Learner's Notes

Check Your Progress:

1. Write a comprehensive note on the world as presented in "Preludes".
2. Discuss the tone of the "Preludes".
3. Examine how the four parts of "Preludes" are united by common elements.
4. Discuss "Preludes" as a city poem.

ii. Salient Themes

The above discussion covers most of the salient themes of the poem. After reading the “Analysis of the poem” you must be able to elaborate upon these themes as reflected in “Preludes”:

- The drudgeries of modern urban life; its routines and repetitions
- The absurdity of human existence which is devoid of any significance
- Fragmentary and insular nature of life in an urban, mechanized environment.
- The alienation of the individual.
- The utter lack of space for individuality in a society that demands complete submission to its dull routines.
- The transformation of humans into automatons.

iii. Stylistic Features

As you must have gathered from the sections above, this poem consists of fragmentary images which when put together provide a larger picture of an urban society. Many critics have called Eliot's technique as cinematic impressionist style. We get the pictures of the city life as per the impressions on the observer. These impressions range from staleness to terror, anguish to eager desires. So far as the language of the poem is concerned, just like the life depicted, words and phrases are repeated here. These contribute immensely in enriching the experience of reading this poem. Structurally also, the four sections of the poem form parts of a pattern. Snapshots of city life in the evening, night and morning are provided in such a way that an impression of the cyclic repetition of monotonous activities is created. In this way, the poem emphasizes the repetitive meaningless chores which mark modern, urban existence.

Self Assessment Questions:

1. Several words are repeated in “Preludes”. Find out how many times the words like “street,” “hands,” “world,” and “feet” appear in the whole text. Does this kind of repetition help in maintaining the intrinsic unity of the poem? Discuss.

2. The poem presents the theme of degeneration with the images like “the burnt-out ends of smoky days”; “withered leaves”; “newspapers from vacant lots”; “broken blinds” etc. Try to locate some more.
3. The world of the poem is marked by filthy images. For example, “grimy scraps”; “muddy feet”; “dingy shades”; “a blackened street”. Can you identify some more instances? Which theme do these filthy images intensify?

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iv. The significance of the Poem

The poem is significant in the context of this paper as it illustrates the deep connection between the author, the world s/he inhabits and the artistic work produced. T. S. Eliot had lived a thoroughly urban life and the mechanical speed and materialist nature of this urban life and the pitiable condition of various suburbs he visited disturbed him a lot. “Preludes” transforms the ugly experiences of industrialised urban centres in aesthetic ways. Besides, the personal touch in the poem is palpable. Despite its apparent detached tone, the intense sense of anguish and disgust that the young writer must have experienced is remarkable. The Modernist era was a period of disillusionment, fragmentation and existentialist angst. Though written much earlier than the peak period of modernism, “Preludes” captures the spirit of the age brilliantly.

4.3 Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl”:

- a. The Author and the Background
- b. Introduction and The Form of the text
- c. Analysing the Text
 - i. Explanation of the Four parts
 - ii. Salient themes
 - iii. Stylistic features
 - iv. The significance of the poem

a. The Author and the Background

Irwin Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) was one of the most respected Beat Writers and a controversial, yet very popular cultural icon of America during the 1960s and 70s. He was born to Russian Jewish parents on June 3,

1926 in Newark, New Jersey. His father was a published poet and a school teacher. His mother Naomi was an active member of the communist party. The communist and socialist orientation of his parents had an immense influence on the life and psyche of Ginsberg who since his childhood days wanted to become “a labor lawyer” “fighting the good fight”.

Ginsberg's early childhood was marked by his mother's psychological disorders, who suffered several episodes of nervous breakdown. Many of his writings refer to these episodes of his life. During his high school days, he got fascinated by the poetry of Walt Whitman, who continued to remain an inspiration for Ginsberg in various ways. After schooling he went on to study at Columbia university. While studying in the university he became friends with William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, who later became the most important faces of the Beat Movement. He and his friends were rather notorious in the university, upholding unconventional views, and living a rowdy life. However, there was little doubt about the brilliance of the poet. Finally, in 1948 Ginsberg finished his degree at Columbia. He decided to remain in New York and got involved in various odd jobs.

Self Assessment Questions:

Ginsberg's life is one of the most fascinating lives you may encounter. His poem “Howl” is a revolutionary one and he himself lived a very unconventional life. Try to read some such episodes from his life. It may help you to read about his personal life on the internet. Specifically read about the various controversies he got involved in during his university days and later try to see the connection between those episodes and the poem prescribed for you.

The turning point in Ginsberg's life came in 1954, when he and Kerouac moved to San Francisco, where a counterculture movement was developing through the activities of poets like Kenneth Rexroth and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. These artists were using a number of artistic and sensory modes to undercut the rigidity of the society and in this atmosphere the two newcomers found a comfort zone. It was around the same time that Ginsberg met model Peter Orlovsky, who became his lifelong companion. In October 1955, Ginsberg read out excerpts from his poem “Howl” at the famous “Six Gallery Reading”, which eventually became the key manifesto of the Beat generation. In the following year, Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights

Press published *Howl and Other Poems* (1956), a volume that made Ginsberg the most popular beat poet and brought him worldwide fame. However, this success also came along with obscenity charges. At the same time, the obscenity trial connected with the poem did him more good than harm as it brought him immediate public attention world-wide, and finally the presiding judges ruled that the work had its own merits. Post “Howl” Ginsberg never looked back and continued producing many other valuable collections some of which are: *Kaddish and Other Poems* (1961), *Reality Sandwiches* (1963), *Planet News* (1968), and *The Fall of America* (1972).

Beat Generation: It was a literary movement started by a group of writers during the 1950s in America. Their artistic works mainly explored the restraining cultural and political scenario of post war America. They were basically radicals who tried to challenge all the restrictive codes of society which curtail individual freedom. It was a sort of counterculture movement which openly criticized the capitalist materialist American culture and tried to find solace in spiritual quests through eastern religions. They experimented widely with psychedelic drugs and sexuality and often attracted public attention for their unconventional lifestyle. At the literary level, their writing rejected conventional theme and modes of expression. They were for the explicit portrayal of human existence in art, and were often charged with vulgarity. Some of the core members of this group were: Herbert Huncke, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Lucien Carr and Jack Kerouac.

While an artist can be brilliant, s/he is inevitably influenced by many others who help in shaping up his/her ideas and styles. Allen Ginsberg was no exception. Though many of his works display a unique style, he did borrow a lot from others. In addition to Walt Whitman who formed the initial influence on his poetic endeavour, Ginsberg idolised the English romantic poet William Blake. In fact, he even claimed to have heard his prophetic voice in a series of auditory “visions” in Harlem in 1948. He was particularly inspired by the nightmarish image of the contemporary society and the woes of human life depicted powerfully in Blake’s “London”. Another major name in this context is of William Carols Williams who inspired him to style his poems according to the rhythm of breath rather than conventional metrical

measures. Further, Ginsberg's friend Kerouac who practised "spontaneous prose" and "stream of consciousness" encouraged him a lot. Both Williams and Kerouac emphasized the need of conveying emotions in the natural mode of expression rather than literary conventions. As you read "Howl" you will encounter this rawness of emotions and expressions, which make Ginsberg such an iconoclast in the literary history of American poetry. He won the 1974 National Book Award and in 1986 was awarded the Robert Frost medal. Surrounded by his family and friends he breathed his last in the year 1997.

Ginsberg was strongly libertine in his political views and was an outspoken critic of the commercialism, complacency, and conformity of post-war America. He strongly believed in individual freedom and criticized the ruthless impositions and codes of conduct of the traditional society. Throughout most of his adult life, he strongly advocated hallucinatory drugs, homosexuality, and civil rights. Besides, he dabbled in the spiritual and the visionary. He had studied eastern religions and believed in the power of mantras and rhythmic chants. It must be noted that his ideological orientation was reflected not only in his written works, but also his lifestyle. In short, he was an icon of the counterculture movement in America.

Michael Schumacher in his "Introduction" to *The Essential Ginsberg* writes that in one of his early poems Ginsberg, wrote half-humorously that "It occurs to me that I am America". Interestingly, he ended up being much more than that. Poet/editor J. D. Mc.

Ginsberg did not only follow and preach Buddhism, he also had a strong India and Krishna connection. You may want to explore this fascinating aspect of his life.

A good online resource to find more about Ginsberg is "The Allen Ginsberg Project: AllenGinsberg.org.html". Do visit the webpage.

Clutchy summed up Ginsberg's position in one simple statement published in the *New York Times* following Ginsberg's death in 1997: "His work is finally a history of our era's psyche, with all its contradictory urges."

B. Introduction and the Form of the Text

“Howl” is the best known poem of Allen Ginsberg. As mentioned earlier, it is this poem, which made Ginsberg one of the most prominent faces of the Beat movement. Just like the first poem of this unit, this poem is also divided into four parts. Taken as a whole it is a longish poem and runs for about 12 pages. It is full of references to real people: the so called junkies and the criminals and the poets and the visionaries of the beat generation who lived during the forties and fifties. In addition to its length and density of allusions to historical people, places and incidents, the poem challenges the readers because of its experimental style and innovative syntax. As you approach “Howl” remember that once again it is not an easy poem to be comprehended fully. However, just like Eliot’s “Preludes” you must first try an encounter with the poem rather than attempt an understanding. This fascinating poetic piece will undoubtedly shock you. A good point to start with perhaps would be to listen to an audio rendition of the poem easily available on YouTube.

The poem is dedicated to Carl Solomon (1928-93), who though not a writer of significance, became a prominent figure in the beat movement because of his lifestyle that represented a French version of street level beat life. Solomon was an experimentalist and regularly suffered from bouts of clinical depression. He had to go through many torturous episodes in the same mental institution where Ginsberg’s mother was being treated. Ginsberg who befriended Solomon was fascinated by the rebellious episodes of Solomon’s life and greatly admired his endurance. He recounted some of these in “Howl”.

The first section of “Howl” revolves around a series of actions and experiences of Ginsberg and his friends from the beat generation. It is in the form of countercultural attack on the authoritarian control which destructs the freedom of individuals. Here he gives a lengthy account of the mental instability of the young minds who had to turn to drugs, jazz, alcohol and homosexual sex as alternatives to the oppressive social systems and institutions. Section two is a direct and sustained attack on the materialistic orientation of the society obsessed with profit. This part is constructed around the actions of “Moloch” the Canaanite ùre God symbolizing a merciless post-war America. The third section deals with Carl Solomon,

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the young poet to whom the poem is dedicated and it relates his incarceration in a series of mental hospitals. His sufferings are also a result of the insensitive power structures of the society. The fourth part of the poem, titled "Footnote," is the emotional and thematic climax, and its core word "Holy!" celebrates the body and all that is devalued in the society and hints at a possible resolution. Once you go through the poem, you would realise that despite its length, the poem is quite symmetrical and has an organic unity. Its theme and style supplement each other as both challenge established conventions.

Controversies associated with the Poem:

In May 1957, a few months after the publication of "Howl" the book's publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti was charged with publishing and selling an obscene book. The obscenity trial that ensued brought national attention to Ginsberg, to Ferlinghetti's City Lights Bookstore, and to the Beat movement as a whole. By the end of the trial, more than ten thousand copies were in print, making the book a bestseller by the standards of American poetry. In the trial, Ferlinghetti defended Ginsberg's poetry against the charge of obscenity, claiming that it was not the poet but American society which was obscene. In October, Judge Clayton Horn ruled that the book was not obscene because, although it included "coarse and vulgar language" and presented "unorthodox and controversial ideas," it was not without "redeeming social importance." (*The Cambridge Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, page no 191)

By now you must have gathered that, autobiographical and biographical episodes play a major role in the poem. However, with his unique style and intense emotions, Ginsberg has been able to transform them into universal accounts. Whereas being familiar with the allusions in the poem would enrich your reading experience, even without having much knowledge in this regard, you can capture the real spirit of the poem. In addition to being a personal rambling, "Howl" is a social commentary. Hailed as a literary classic, it criticised the cultural barriers, undermined the establishment, and truly represented the anger and frustration of a generation in post-war America. In other words, it addresses the issue of the imposition of a shallow, materialist reality on the human spirit and the resultant repression and miseries of those who cannot or will not adjust. However, what makes this poem truly unique

is not just a portrayal of the darker aspects of the conservative urban society, but its juxtaposition with the possibility and urgency of a positive change.

A final word on the popularity of the poem which may interest you. "Howl" is one of the most widely read poems in the world. And this is so despite its length, difficult structure, too many allusions, unconventional language and vulgarity. Translated in most of the major languages of the world, its popularity has been a mystery to many.

C. Analysing the Text

a. Explanation of the Four Parts

While it will not be possible to provide a detailed discussion of this long poem, in this section an attempt will be made to capture the main ideas and spirit of the various sections.

I

The first section of "Howl" consists of one long, chanted sentence, with 78 verse paragraphs and without an in-between full stop. These paragraphs are of varying lengths and connect to each other with the recurring use of the first word "who". It opens with the following famous lines:

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,
starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for
an angry fix,
angel headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection
to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,

Notice the first person voice as well as the conviction of the narratorial tone "I saw". It directly gives a picture of the destruction of the best youthful minds by a madness in a rigid society which is not ready to accommodate. The rest of this section is an almost five-page long list of the misadventures and miseries of Ginsberg, his family and the generation of "angel headed hipsters" till the time the poem was written. These embittered people seek to transcend reality and are in a hunt for an "angry fix" in all kinds of forbidden elements: drugs, alcohol, sex and obscenity. They are immeasurably alienated and even get suicidal, first by the hostility of the society and second by the very impossibility of their quest for spiritual clarity and wisdom. Yet some of

them continue their pursuit and by indulging in excesses achieve occasional moments of epiphany and ecstasy, visions and hallucinations. Their attempts of transcending this mundane material reality is finally seen as madness by the materialist- rationalist society which is caught up in the immediate necessities. Here, you can identify a thematic parallel with "Preludes."

Stop to Consider:

In this section, you come across many autobiographical references such as Ginsberg's travels, his expulsion from the Columbia University, his vision of Blake, his time in the asylum, etc. He talks about his mother too, who could not adjust with the drudgeries of real life and constantly felt persecuted. There are references to his friends such as Herbert Huncke, William S. Burroughs, Neal Cassady, William Cannastra, and their eventful lives. It would be impossible to give details of all these references here. You may explore these on your own.

The last part of this section makes direct references to the sufferings of Carl Solomon, to whom this poem is dedicated. In him, Ginsberg sees a prototype of oppressed truth seekers. Ginsberg here asserts his spiritual solidarity with Solomon when he says "ah Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe." And this cry rises above the personal and becomes a statement of the camaraderie of the 'beaten' generation. The section concludes with a note on the style and intentions of the poem, and strong suggestions of rebirth and redemption.

II

The second part of the poem, which is much shorter, addresses the materialist and conformist tendencies of the society which destroy every chance of individuality. It refers to the orthodox attitude of America during the post-war period. The section begins with a question:

What sphinx of cement and aluminium bashed open their skulls
and ate up their brains and imagination?"

And the answer is:

Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless!
Moloch! Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of men!

The figure of Moloch is taken from the Old Testament. It is the name of a false God to whom children were sacrificed and here it represents Evil. His name works as the fixed base for most of the lines in this section. Money, machinery and munitions take a toll on the individual by alienating the soul from the body. Moloch is the controlling capitalist society which for the sake of immediate materialistic gains, curbs all the possibilities of variation. Around the middle of the section, however, Ginsberg suggests Moloch is within us: "Moloch whose name is the Mind!" According to Ginsberg, it is a mind-set which affects our inborn innocence very early in life. Visionless commercialism, ruthless militarism, unnatural sexual repression, lifeless technocracy, soulless industrialization, and the death of the spirit are the consequences of Mental Moloch. To overcome the powerful clutches of Moloch, to regain that pure vision of life, i.e. transcendence, is possible, but very difficult. Thus, in the fashion of William Blake Ginsberg identifies the source of human woes in our own consciousness. The rest of the section is more like a lamentation for what America has lost. In this section the poet also emphasises that transcendence is not merely of concern to poets and mystics but to every member of the social body.

III

This section is about Ginsberg's friend Carl Solomon whom he had met as a fellow patient in a New York psychiatric hospital in the late 1940s. It is about the spiritual connection that the poet feels for Solomon, who represents the "rebellious visionary victim" and by extension all the other likeminded ones of his generation. It opens with very simple but powerful lines:

Carl Solomon! I'm with you in Rockland
where you're madder than I am
I'm with you in Rockland
where you must feel strange
I'm with you in Rockland
where you imitate the shade of my mother

Here we see Ginsberg's celebration of the endurance of Solomon and everyone who had the courage to stand against the "Moloch". The piteous and brave cry of Solomon from the Rockland Mental Hospital is the howl that this poem seeks to record. His howl is the collective howl of the anguished and beaten generation. They are desperate, but not without faith. Notice the line that says: "The soul is innocent and immortal it should never die

ungodly in an armed madhouse” (19). Though this armed madhouse had high wall and choking rules, the soul must be set free.

Notice the imagery of crucifixion in the phrases like “cross in the void,” “fascist national Golgotha”. These underscore Ginsberg’s view of the visionary as sacrificial redeemer. The poet’s hope that Solomon “will split the heavens ... and resurrect your living human Jesus from the superhuman tomb”. Thus, this section represents a conviction and determination that confinement, repression, alienation, and the dark night of the soul are going to end. The “imaginary walls collapse” refers to the defeat of egotism, competition, materialism and victory of the human spirit and the values of virtue, mercy, and freedom.

FOOTNOTE:

The concluding section of the poem has been titled as Footnote by Ginsberg. On an occasion Ginsberg had said that rather than naming it as section IV, he preferred to call it a Footnote because in its assertion of what is “Holy” this part is a counter to section II’s refrain of “Moloch”. Thus, Ginsberg, didn’t see it as an additional section of the poem. During his readings of “Howl”, Ginsberg sometimes read the Footnote and sometimes did not. Critics also have opposing views about the literary and structural merits of the Footnote.

Basically, “Footnote” is a chant celebrating the sacredness of life and the holiness of the body, with the “Holy!” displacing “Moloch!” In the footnote the word “holy” is constantly repeated. It opens with the chant of the word for fifteen times.

Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!
Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!
The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy!
The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand
and asshole holy!

Rather than offering a conclusion, It is more or less like a prayer, a mantra for holy living. The intense orality of Howl’s language here is kinetic and performative. In a way it attempts to bring to reality the state that it is invoking. Thematically it is well connected to the first two parts of the poem with their frightening visions and the conviction of redemption evoked in the third

part. It fills the readers with a hope through its message of universal love, acceptance and tolerance.

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4.4 Salient Themes:

“Howl” has been recognised as a representative piece of the beat generation. It depicts the experiences of a young group who feel alienated, and lusting after life succumb to the effects of readily available temptations like drugs. So far as the salient themes of the poem are concerned, you must be in a position to elaborate upon the following themes with the help of your first-hand knowledge of the text and the analysis provided above:

- Madness vs rationalist attitude
- The oppressive capitalist America of the post war period which allows little freedom
- The angst and rebellion of the young generation
- Solidarity and the hope for a better future
- Mind and body relationship
- Politics and religion
- The countercultural practices

Self-Assessment Questions:

On the exercise of writing the poem “Howl” Ginsberg once said:

“I thought I wouldn’t write a poem, but just write what I wanted to without fear, let my imagination go, open secrecy, and scribble magic lines from my real mind—sum up my life—something I wouldn’t be able to show anybody, write for my own soul’s ear and a few other golden ears.”

To what extent do you think Ginsberg was successful in his attempt? Write an explanatory paragraph in your own words.

4.5 Stylistic Features:

“Howl” is a long poem written in the form of epic, free verse style. Without having any regular metre and rhyme scheme, it is almost like a prose poem. Try to recall that the first part of the poem consists of 78 long lines running

one after the other without a break or a full-stop. This style demands deep breaths and disciplined reading. Technically speaking “Howl” uses “anaphora”, the repetition of a “fixed base” in all the four sections, which give the poem its distinctive taste and unity. If the versification of “Howl” is unique, so is its language, which is not just vulgar and raw, but also full of experimentation in terms of syntax and vocabulary. Structurally, you may note that just like many other poems by Ginsberg, “Howl” is made up like a pyramid, longer sections followed by smaller ones.

As mentioned in the initial section of this unit, Ginsberg was most heavily influenced by many other writers. In the case of “Howl” three of his role models deserve special mention. From Walt Whitman, the iconic nineteenth century American poet he borrowed the technique of writing long dense lines. From William Carlos Williams, Ginsberg’s mentor, he got the lessons of keeping it raw and not follow the conventions. And lastly Kerouac, his own close friend, taught him the significance of spontaneous writing. “Howl” is a superb illustration of the Ginsbergian style which is a successful amalgamation of these external influences and his own brilliance.

4.6 The significance of the poem:

With a stark presentation of contemporary urban life, and his unique synthesis of surrealist imagery, visionary proclamation, and political counterblast, in “Howl” Ginsberg presents something very original to his readers. This poem is frequently regarded as an autobiography of Ginsberg up to 1955, and a brief history of the Beat Generation through its references to his relationship to other Beat artists of that time. In fact, it represented the howl of the “countercultural generation” that felt alienated from much of the American world. In this, its representative role cannot be overestimated.

With “Howl” Ginsberg blasted a barrier and showed that it was possible to write about anything you liked and not let oneself be chained by conventions. The poem in a way gave the liberating message to all the young upcoming writers to ignore the fears and throw away the masks. He established himself as a mentor of a generation of writers.

Another major contribution of Ginsberg and his “Howl” was towards the discourse on homosexuality. You must remember that, we are talking about

the America of 1950s, when homophobia was extreme. Ginsberg, with “Howl” was among the first ones who got the discussion about homosexuality started. In fact, many believe that this poem with its radicalism and illustration of freedom of speech invoked a new era in the American literary scenario.

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Check Your Progress:

1. Write a comprehensive essay on “Howl” as a representative Beat generation poem.
2. Discuss the significance of the title of the poem “Howl”.
3. Provide a brief illustrative account of the various writers who influenced the theme and style of “Howl”.
4. Do you think “Howl” has been able to transcend the times and place of its composition? Can we say it has a universal significance despite a strong personal touch? Answer with proper justification.

4.7 Summing Up:

After reading this short discussion of the two classics, you must be able to easily identify some major parallels and distinctions between the content and the style of “Preludes” and “Howl”. While doing so, you must not forget that both the poems are representative documents of the society of their own times. They project the personal angst of the poet towards an immediate environment which allowed little breathing space. However, both manage to transcend the personal and address the concerns of a larger generation and deeper issues of social structures. In short, the relationship between the individual and the society emerges in interesting ways in both the poems.

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Unit: 5

Vijay Tendulkar *Kamala* (Play. Translated from Marathi)

Contents:

5.0 Introduction

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5.6 Summing Up

5.7 References and Suggested Readings

5.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

5.0 Introduction:

Vijay Tendulkar is one of the most acclaimed playwrights in the history of Indian theatre. His plays mostly deal with the complexities of human life and offer a critique of the modern society in India. His plays have enriched Indian theatre incredibly and have important observations on violence and oppression in the contemporary Indian society. He has been an influential dramatist and has contributed immensely to Marathi theatre. His works cover a period of almost five decades. His first play was *Grihasti*. He has many famous plays to his credit which includes *Shantata Court Chalu*

Aahe, Ghasiram Kotwal and Sakharam Binder. Tendulkar was interested in understanding the idea of power and the issues of oppression. So his representation such issues in plays like *Shantata Court Chalu Aahe* and *Ghasiram Kotwal. Sakharam Binder* deals with the victimisation of women in postcolonial India and highlights male dominance and violence. *Kamala* and *Kanyadaan* are written on same contemporary themes. *Kanyadaan* is a play based on caste-divide and conflict between upper caste and Dalit. He also focuses on the various issues related to the theme of marriage. *Kamala* was based on a real life incident on the 'Indian Express' covered by the journalist Ashwin Sarin who bought a woman from a flesh market and arranged a press conference for her. The protagonist of the play is a self-centered journalist whose name is Jaisingh Jadhav. He treats Kamala, the woman he has bought from the market, as his commodity and exploits her for the sake of the promotion of his job. He even treats his wife like a slave who has no self-esteem in the house and is called a 'lovely bonded labourer' by Jain, Jaisingh's friend. He is very ambitious and blindly seeks his goals. He thrives to build a reputation in his profession without considering the sensitivity of a woman. Jaisingh finally decides to discard Kamala in an orphanage. Tendulkar exposes the motives behind the popular investigative journalism and criticizes the modern concept of sensational journalism.

5.1 Objectives:

This Unit is an attempt to familiarize you with Vijay Tendulkar's *Kamala*. After going through this unit you will be able to-

- *understand* the drawbacks of popular investigative journalism,
- *analyse* the various conditions of flesh trade in relation to the play,
- *explain* the condition of Indian women in the context of the play,
- *discuss* the representation of slavery in the play.

5.2 *Kamala*: A Critique of Investigative Journalism

Vijay Tendulkar had worked as a journalist professionally and this had helped him in portraying the experiences of journalism at close quarters. In the play *Kamala*, Tendulkar has attempted to analyse investigative journalism, its new trends and the inside story of this profession. He tries to expose the demerits of the new concept of journalism which mainly focuses on

sensationalising incidents and not providing any solutions for the same. Tendulkar has depicted a sharp contrast between the modern and old concept of journalism through the characters of Jaisingh Jadhav and Kakasaheb respectively. Kakasaheb represents the true ideals and values of a journalist who revolted against the British through his paper. He regrets that the true essence of journalism no longer exists. Tendulkar criticises Jadhav's way of newspaper reporting and shows how such practises damages the psyche of the victim. Kakasaheb observes, "I'm a back number- a remnant of times past. A dead journalist-who's just about staying alive! Now it is the day of your husband's type of journalism. The High-Speed type! Something catches fire- and there he runs! There is a riot somewhere else and off he flies... Eye-witness report! Being on the spot – that's what is important! Never mind what you write." (5)

5.2.1 Sensational Journalism:

Kakasaheb works for a paper in vernacular medium whereas Jadhav's medium of work is English. Tendulkar comments on the elitist nature of journalism represented by Jaisingh's character. Newspapers in the vernacular medium have better ability of making an impact on the Indian masses as English language cannot reach the entire Indian population. He also comments on the new concept of journalism which does not essentially bring awareness among the people but only intends to make profit by sensational reporting. When Sarita, Jaisingh's wife, talks about the work ethics of her husband, Kakasaheb says, "My dear, it's not the facts of an occurrence that are important. But the topic is. Discuss that. Comment on it. Suggest a way to stop it – suggest why waste our country's time and ours, writing accounts of them? What sort of journalism is it that smacks its lips as it writes blood-thirsty descriptions instead of commentary? It's business isn't news – it is bloodshed!" (6)

5.2.2 Profit-Making Journalism:

In the play it is seen that a journalist not only becomes famous but also acquires immense wealth by presenting sensational news. Kakasaheb brings forth this issue by reminding Sarita that Jaisingh has prospered hugely considering the life he had lived five years ago at Karol Bagh. He is now fortunate enough to have a bungalow at Neeti Bagh. He leads a luxurious

life and travels by plane around the country and stays at expensive hotels. Basically his life has completely changed over these five years and journalism has helped him achieve such success. Jaisingh is reluctant to admit the huge profit he has made from his profession and says that there is commitment on his part for the job he does. He says, "There's commitment behind it, there's a social purpose.....the common man.....needs to be shocked into looking at the truth..... We need a force that will raise his consciousness, prepare him to struggle for political and social change." (23-24). But Kakasaheb argues that Jaisingh is doing this for a small number of people who know English. Therefore a great change cannot be expected from the society because the rest of the population do not know English. If Jaisingh's sole intention is not profit making then he must learn the language and speak it and thereafter teach them.

Stop to Consider

The corrupt administration of the police and the government are exposed in the play, *Kamala*. The hypocrisy and the typical commercial approach to journalism are well reflected in Jaisingh's words:

"... The police know it is true, but don't want to admit it. They say we reporters are sensation seekers and that's why we are digging into. And the government oh they are pure and lily white. They say, shantampapam perishes the thought! Newspaper walas have the bad habit of misusing the freedom of the press. I needed evidence. I didn't have any but I could smell something wrong. The police washed away their hands of it. The Home Minister put his hands over his cars.... I turned the whole world upside down to find this bazaar. I was the first journalist to reach it. Today I've caught them properly." (14-15)

5.2.3 Jaisingh as a Modern Journalist:

Through the play, *Kamala*, Tendulkar has depicted the contemporary culture of journalism where publicity is the sole motto of a journalist. Jaisingh is portrayed as a hypocrite who is concerned about his own publicity and is least bothered about the reputation of Kamala. By presenting Kamala at the press conference, Jaisingh wants to prove how he has saved a woman's life but in reality we see that he desires his own recognition as a journalist and therefore he wants Kamala to be in worn out clothes to have the appearance of a woman who had been subjected to sexual exploitation.

Such a move on his part shows his double standard as a modern man and a journalist who only wants fame and money by exposing a tribal woman at the press conference. He considers himself to be quite modern and comments that Kamala is downtrodden and is happy with little things. She is not used to luxury and she offers to do some work for him. The press conference shows the hypocrisy of modern journalism where Kamala is embarrassed with odd questions thrown towards her. Many questions which were passed to Kamala simply humiliated her and the journalists did not show any respect for a woman while asking such questions. This shows the modern ways of journalism and the modern journalist who is only concerned about his progress is devoid of any moral values. Kakasaheb realizes the selfish motives of Jaisingh and calls Kamala 'a pawn in his game of chess.'

Self-Assessment Questions

- Discuss *Kamala* as a play that exposes middle-class hypocrisy.
- Compare and contrast the characters of Jaisingh and Kakasaheb.
- Discuss how the press conference exposes the mindset of modern journalists.
- Tendulkar raises some important questions about the value system of human society in the play. Explain.

A. Check Your Progress

1. Where did Jaisingh buy Kamala from?
2. Who represents Gandhian journalism in the play?
3. Where did Jaisingh finally decide to send Kamala at the end of the play?
4. Who calls Sarita as a 'lovely bonded labourer'?

5.3 *Kamala*: Portrayal of Flesh Trade:

Kamala is a true story of a journalist Jaisingh Jadhav who wants to be successful in his profession by bringing into focus the scenario of flesh-trade. The writer uses the play as a means to express the pathetic plight of the Indian middle-class women. Jaisingh Jadhav purchased Kamala for two hundred and fifty rupees from a village in Bihar. Vijay Tendulkar thus

mentions the presence flesh-trade in the remote villages in India. The hidden intention of the journalist Jaysingh behind purchasing Kamala for two hundred and fifty rupees is to present her in the conference for his own name and fame. Therefore he too can be considered a practitioner of flesh trade indirectly. Jadhav was a self-centred journalist. The actual role of a journalist is to present the real scenario to the public and to raise voice against all the odds. But Jadhav wore a mask of an ideal journalist as he forced Kamala go through the same mental harassment to which she earlier was subjected to by taking her to the press conference to satisfy his own selfish motive. Kamala, who belonged to the lower class society learnt to accept all inhumane tortures. When she was bought by Jaysingh, she assumed that he bought her home as his mistress. She regarded her position at Jadhav's house as a commodity to be used. Sarita, Jadhav's wife, is shocked and is worried to hear that her husband has purchased Kamala for two hundred and fifty rupees from the Luhardaga bazaar in Bihar. She was much astonished by Jadhav's attitude while describing it with no signs of pity- "They sell human beings at this bazaar. . . . they have an open auction for women of all sorts of ages." He continues, "The men who want to bid handle the women to inspect them. . . How they feel in breasts, in their waist, in their thighs and. . ." (14) This representation of women shows how flesh-trade is prevalent in our society and the extent to which women are molested. Women are treated as a tool for mere enjoyment. Their flesh are sought to be purchased and bargained.

5.3.1 The significance of Press Conference in *Kamala*:

The press conference highlighted how women were made to suffer in the society by men. Simply because Kamala was a part of the flesh trade, she was asked some pathetic questions by the male journalists who were insensitive towards her. But that evening Kamala was drowned with thousands of questions from the media about her past. She was forced to recall the journey of harassment she had been through which was witnessed by thousands of people but no one raised a voice to safeguard her dignity. Jaysingh's dialogue suggests how journalism aimed at gaining reputation and economic prosperity by creating sensation among the masses- "There's a

way of doing these things. You have to build them up that way. What's so unusual about the Luhardaga flesh market? Women are sold in many places like that, all over the Country.....that's not the point. The point is how we project Luhardaga the technique of it. The art lies in presenting the case-not in the case itself? There will be a high drama at today's press conference. It'll create uproar!" (15)

5.3.2 The Institution of Marriage in *Kamala*:

Not only Kamala, this story also portrays the pathetic condition of women suppressed under the institution of marriage. Sarita, the wife of JaisinghJadhav was simply serving as a labourer in the luxurious house that Jaisingh had built. She had no voice of her own. She had to act according to Jaisingh's will and therefore treated as a puppet at the hands of her husband. Women are still living in a cage like situation after marriage and these situations are explored by Tendulkar through the character of Sarita in this play. Although Kamala is illiterate she could understand how a woman suffers in her marital life. Kamala was one step ahead in understanding the actual reality of the institution of marriage. Through her question about Sarita's dowry, Kamala taught Sarita to see where she actually stands in her man's life. For the very first time after this realization, Sarita refused her husband in satisfying his physical desire and exercised her choice of having or not having sex. Her refusal was the first sign of her revolt against her husband. That night she stood for herself and took possession of her own body; it's wants and desires were not determined by her husband's will. The tag of marriage had given Jaisingh the authority over her flesh and to dominate her in every possible way. We can witness this dominant nature of Jaisingh when Sarita did not approve of his decision of sending Kamala to an orphanage. Jaisingh reminds her that only he had the sole right in the house to take decisions, which suggested that he was more of a master than a husband in the house. This is the time when Sarita estimates herself and her position as a slave who was also exploited physically by her own husband in a subtle way. Therefore we can say that not only lower class women like Kamala were victim of flesh- trade but there were also auctions of educated urban women like Sarita through the marriage transactions.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How has Tendulkar exposed the harsh realities of flesh trade in the play?
2. Discuss the significance of the episode of Press Conference in *Kamala*.
3. Discuss the husband-wife relationship in the play. What light does it throw on the character of JaisinghJadhav?
4. Analyse the theme of 'self-realisation' in the play.

5.4 *Kamala*: Condition of Indian Women:

The play *Kamala* does not merely present a satirical commentary on investigative journalism but it also presents one of the burning issue of modern India- the condition of women in free India. It is quite sarcastic to call India as free because women are still the victim of social discrimination. Now and then women are being raped and molested. This pathetic picture of women being exploited is very well depicted through the characters of Kamala and Sarita. This play also has projected the role of an Indian woman within marriage. Sarita, Jaisingh's wife was never given a chance to voice her feelings in the house. She was forced to play the role of an ideal house wife, to rear children and to be obedient to her husband. Her wishes and feelings remained unheard and often unnoticed.

5.4.1 Representing Patriarchy in *Kamala*:

Sarita and Kamala depicts two faces of a coin; one being the head representing upper socio economic, educated class and other being the tail standing for a lower socio-economic strata, the illiterate ones. But underneath these class and caste differences, both were of patriarchy both of them were bound to act as a slave to Jaisingh's will. Tendulkar, through both the characters has represented the condition of illiterate helpless women like Kamala and of literate woman like Sarita. Marriage at that time was considered as the sole identity of a woman and society expected her to be selfless and to act according to her husband's will even if he is wrong. Sarita too became a victim of this hypocritical society until the day when a strange awakening stroke Sarita, invoked by Kamala's illiterate but a very sensible question- 'How much did the owner pay for you?' Her question indirectly his Sarita with the realization of her worth in her husband's life.

5.4.2 The Awakening in Sarita:

Kamala has played a significant role in bringing about a sense of consciousness in Sarita about the exploitation done by Jaisingh. Kakasaheb was having a conversation with Sarita regarding Kamala and Jaisingh's intention to fulfill his own selfish motive. He commented that Kamala was just a pawn in his game of chess, indirectly projecting the fact that Jaisingh would again exploit Kamala for his own benefit and send Kamala back to the same place from where she had been purchased. But the shocking part of the conversation ended with Sarita's realization when she said "Not just Kamala, Kakasaheb, Not just Kamala, Kakasaheb, Me too...me too." (43) This incident reveals her awakened self against the dominance and hypocrisy of her husband. Having realized this she stood against him and she denies him in bed. Later she refuses to go with Jaisingh to the party. Both of these are signs of her revolt. She after witnessing what Jaisingh has done to Kamala in the press meeting, started to stand out against any injustice. She by her actions tried to emerge as a woman who challenges the male chauvinist acts independently. She was infuriated to such an extent that she wanted to expose her husband, "I am going to present a man who in the year 1982 still keeps a slave, right here in Delhi. Jaisingh Jadhav. I am going to say: this man's a great advocate of freedom. And he brings home a slave and exploits her. He doesn't consider a slave a human being – just a useful object. One you can use and throw away. Listen to the story of how he brought home the slave Kamala and made use of her. The other slave he got free – not just free – the slave's father shelled out the money – a big sum." (46) Sarita has used the word 'slave' several times in her speech which suggests that she now comprehends the oppression she was undergoing in her marriage. She was a meritorious student and had received many awards and honours during her college days. After her marriage, her entire life revolved round her husband and she could not think beyond her duties as a wife. She was indifferent towards her existence as an individual.

Space for Learner's Notes

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Analyse the character of Jaisingh projecting male dominance.
2. Discuss the play *Kamala* from a feminist perspective.
3. Comment on the master-slave relationship in the play.
4. *Kamala* deals with some of the social evils of contemporary society. Explain.

5.5 Kamala: Representation of Slavery

In this play Tendulkar has represented the stereotypical life of confinement and slavery for the middle class women. They are the victims of the dominating and hypocritical male who treat women merely as slaves and to serve their own selfish needs. Tendulkar has depicted the complex matrix of the relationship between the husband and the wife, Jaisingh and Sarita, in the play and has shown the inherent nature of the master-slave relationship in their marriage. In the beginning of the play, Sarita is seen as a sacrificing and devoted wife who serves her husband selflessly. She is exploited by Jadhav to the extent that she does not even realise how he dominates her and implements his wishes upon her and force her to act according to his selfish desires. Eventually Sarita decides not to yield to such slavery anymore and she tells Kakasaheb, "I'll go on feeling it. But at present I'm going to lock all that up in a corner of my mind and forget about it. But a day will come, Kakasaheb, when I will stop being a slave. I'll do what I wish, and no one will rule over me. That day has to come. And I'll pay whatever price I have to pay for it." (52)

Kamala, on the other hand, had accepted the rules of patriarchy and tried to pass it on to Sarita which is witnessed when she comments that the master would have children and that she would do the hardwork. She would take care of them, do the household chores and serve her master. Kamala opined that Sarita was an educated woman and she could keep the accounts and run the house. Sarita was supposed to put on lovely clothes and enjoy life with her husband. She would go out with her husband on vacations. But Sarita refuses to accept these roles because she realized that she was leading a meaningless life so far. She, therefore, in spite of her supposed sub ordinate role which was expected to be played by her in order to be a perfect wife in the eyes of the society, started to rebel against all odds. Through the character of Sarita, we see the transformation of an ideal wife to a modern woman. She is represented as a woman who tried to break the chain of marriage in order to protect her own dignity and freedom and therefore could be an example of a modern independent woman. Another female character exploited is not shown in the play but is mentioned by Kakasaheb and she is his wife. Realising the injustice he did to his wife, Kakasaheb says, "I too was just like this. Don't go by what I seem to be today. I gave your aunt a lot of trouble. As if it was my right. I didn't care what she felt at all. I just marched straight ahead looking in front of me. I was confident she would follow... And she did follow, the poor thing." (47) It is to be noted

that she too did not realize how she was exploited in her marriage and that she was indifferent towards her own existence.

Space for Learner's Notes

5.5.1 Sarita as a 'bonded labourer':

Tendulkar, through this play, has depicted how women are usually treated as the inferior sex and expected to work according to the expectations of the society and the family. Tendulkar also highlights the hypocrisy of the modern man who considers himself as liberal but is a chauvinist in reality. Like Kamala, Sarita can also be regarded as an object whose entire life revolves round her husband. She, like a true slave, looks after all the comforts of Jaisingh and acts as a means of his physical pleasure. The play portrays her as a woman who spends her days carrying out Jaisingh's instruction as a dutiful wife. She is therefore referred to as 'a lovely bonded labourer' in the play. The realization dawns upon her when Kamala enters into her life and she becomes an eye opener of her meaningless existence. Once Kamala gives her views on the kind of lives they both are living, it becomes clear to Sarita that all this while she has been serving her husband no better than a slave and the revelation makes her take a bold step towards putting an end to their worthless marriage. She denies following her husband's commands and this suggests her way of revolt. She emerges as an independent woman rather than an immature and docile wife. Sarita's dialogue shows her frustration with the norms of the society and wish to change it, "Kamala showed me everything. I saw that the man I thought my partner was the master of a slave. I have no rights in this house. Slaves don't have rights. Dance to their master's whim. Laugh, when he says, laugh. Cry, when he says, cry. When he says pick up the phone, they must pick it up. When he says, lie on the bed-she (she is twisted in pain) why? Why can't men limp behind? Why aren't women ever the masters? Why can't a woman ever ask to live her life the same way as a man? Why must only a man have the right to be a man? Does he have an extra sense? A woman can do everything a man can."(46)

Stop to Consider

The most crucial point in the story is when Kamala asks Sarita how much money was spent by Jaisingh to buy her. It was a clarion call for her to comprehend her position in the family. It is known that Jaisingh

had taken a good amount of dowry during the marriage and this shows the hypocrite man that he is. There is an awakening in Sarita when Kamala says, "Memsahab. If you won't misunderstand, I'll tell you. The master bought you: he bought me, too.....so, memsahab; both of us must stay here like sisters. We'll keep the master happy.....the master will have children... Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him. Agreed? (35) This is a turning point in the story when Sarita realizes that she has the position of a slave in her house and that she has been exploited by her husband. She even decides to arrange a Press Conference where she would expose the real character of her husband. She decides to live life on her own terms after her conversation with Kamala.

5.5.2 Representing slavery through Kamala:

Kamala has been presented as a victim of flesh trade in the play and the playwright shows how women are exploited at various levels in the society. It is mentioned that she was purchased from a market for 250 rupees by Jaisingh who also mentions that in Bihar there are open auctions for women. Kamala's role as a slave does not end when she was rescued from the flesh market but she is treated in the same manner when Jadhav asks her to get ready for the Press Conference. Jadhav does not allow Kamala to bathe and wear fresh clothes for the conference which shows how she was objectified and was treated like a slave. Kamala refuses to go to the conference in tattered clothes but Jadhav forces her to be in her rags. Kamala is a simple, illiterate lady who is unaware of the place she is trapped in. It is mentioned that she does not even know that the place is Delhi as she believes that she is in Bombay. Jadhav takes advantage of her ignorance and presents her in the conference with a view to gaining reputation in his profession. Kamala is treated in a humiliating way by the people in the conference; she is laughed at for the way she talks and smiles and is compelled to answer some uncomfortable questions. Although Kamala is illiterate she understands how a woman suffers if she is unable to meet the expectations of the society. She tells Sarita that it is upsetting to her that Sarita was bought for 700 rupees and she could not bear any children. Since Kamala is purchased she feels obligated to work for her master and meet his demands. For her all the women she meets are purchased from some market so she asks the price that the master had paid for her. She asks Kamalabai, the maid servant

and Sarita the same question as to how much money they are bought for. For Kamala, the destiny of a woman is to be sold because that is her understanding of this world and she does not even realize that she is treated like a slave by Jadhav and exploited. She sympathises with Sarita over her childlessness and shows her readiness to give birth to children. She says, "...If you pay seven hundred and there are no children... I'll have as many as you want" (34)

Space for Learner's Notes

B. Check Your Progress

1. Where does Kamala believe she is living when Jadhav brought her home?
2. What was the amount of dowry for Sarita?
3. At what price was Kamala purchased?
4. Who helps Sarita in realising the hypocrisy of her husband?

5.6 Summing Up:

Tendulkar has depicted the contemporary concerns of the society in his play, *Kamala*, quite realistically. He has represented the universal challenges that women face irrespective of which caste or class they belong to. The play portrays the plight and predicament of women in the urban middle-class and the rural lower-class of society. The characters of Kamala and Sarita are etched by his artistic excellence that has originated from his understanding of society. The textual compactness, sharp dialogues, satire and sarcasm used by the playwright has helped in depicting the poignant reality of the condition of women effectively.

5.7 References and Suggested Readings:

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5.8 Answers to Check Your Progress:

- A.
1. Jaisingh bought Kamala from a flesh market at Luhardaga Village in Bihar.
 2. Kakasaheb represents Gandhian journalism in the play.
 3. Jaisingh finally decides to send Kamala to an orphanage.
 4. Jain, Jaisingh's friend calls Sarita a 'lovely bonded labourer.'
- B.
1. Kamala believes that she is living in Bombay when Jadhav brought her home.
 2. The amount of dowry for Sarita was 700 rupees.
 3. Kamala was purchased for 250 rupees.
 4. Kamala helps Sarita in realising the hypocrisy of her husband.

====x====

Unit: 6

Kamila Shamsie: *Burnt Shadows*

Contents:

- 6.0 Introduction**
- 6.1 Objectives**
- 6.2 Works of the Author**
- 6.3 *Burnt Shadows* in context**
 - 6.3.1 Nationalism in *Burnt Shadows***
 - 6.3.2 Trauma of Identity in *Burnt Shadows***
- 6.4 Summing Up**
- 6.5 Reference and Suggested Readings**
- 6.6 Model Questions**
- 6.7 Answers to Check Your Progress**

6.0 Introduction:

Kamila Shamsie is one of the most prominent contemporary novelists to have emerged from the South Asian literary scene. Born in Karachi, Pakistan in 1973, she now lives in London. The British Council website mentions her as “one of a new wave of Pakistani writers who are based in Pakistan” (*British Council*). Shamsie belongs to a well to do and literary family from Pakistan. Her mother, Muneeza Shamsie, is a successful critic, journalist and editor. She is also a great-niece of Attia Hossain who is renowned as a postcolonial writer. Hossain’s works have largely inspired Shamsie’s narratives which she has acknowledged in a number of interviews. Although she was born in a largely conservative society yet Shamsie’s childhood was not hampered by it. Her literary aspirations were indeed encouraged by the family that already had famous female writers, something which was not a commonplace in Pakistan.

After completing her school in Karachi, Kamila Shamsie pursued a graduate degree in Creative Writing from Hamilton College, New York. Shamsie carried out her further education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

It is in Amherst that she came across the writings of the Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali which influenced her greatly. A well-travelled author, Shamsie's body of work incorporate an elaborate description of the places she has lived in. Till date, Shamsie has penned seven novels in a relatively short span of time. Her novels have been critically acclaimed for the portrayal of her characters with questions of identity, gender, cultural hybridity and history at centre of the narratives. She is an avowed secular and she has expressed her views about Islam as a religion and Islam as a culture in her works.

Stop to Consider:

The influence of patriarchal society is often reflected upon the condition of women in a nation. Most of the Islamic countries, including Pakistan, did not exercise a great deal of freedom for women writers. The laws of the land are aligned with religion in most of the cases. Yet, Kamila Shamsie and the older women of her family have been writing with regularity and they have been vocal about the society in their body of works.

6.1 Objectives:

This unit should enable you to read Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* and connect the author with the context in which it was written. The Contents in the unit should enable you to:

- *read* the novel in the context of the author's society.
- *identify* the complication of identity arising out of historical events.
- *analyse* the emplotment of nationalism through fictionalizing history.
- *understand* the trauma associated with nation and home.

6.2 Works of the Author:

While Kamila Shamsie's first four novels are based in Karachi, *-Burnt Shadows* and *A God in Every Stone* also involve Pakistan in a subtle take on its politics. Shamsie wrote her first novel, *In the City by the Sea* in 1998 at the age of 25 while studying in college. The novel was shortlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and Shamsie also received the Prime Minister's Award for Literature in Pakistan in 1999 (Wikipedia). Her penchant for depicting political turmoil intertwined with personal narratives

becomes evident from her first novel itself. The protagonist of the novel is an 11-year-old boy named Hasan. His innocent world is ravaged by the sudden arrest of his beloved uncle Salman Mamoo amidst the chaotic military rule that drives the politics of Pakistan in the novel. Shamsie's narrative is an attempt to show how the military infiltration not only destroys the social fabric of Pakistan but also penetrates the seemingly peaceful world of a young boy belonging to an upper middle class family. The novel is also a glimpse of Shamsie's literary prowess, specifically expressed in the depiction of Hasan's imaginative world filled with characters from the Arthurian legends and Shakespearean creations. Her use of fantasy is a way to decipher the implicit political consciousness instead of merely providing an escape route from reality.

Shamsie's second novel *Salt and Saffron* was published in 2000 and, like her first novel, she uses Karachi as the backdrop of the events in the novel. The narrative of this novel is somewhat similar to the trajectory of Shamsie's own life as a girl named Aliya, whose family lives in Karachi, returns to her birthplace after pursuing her higher education in the United States of America. Aliya's experience through living abroad gives her an insight into a different view of the culture in which she was brought up. Shamsie's narrative is an attempt to subtly demand a fluidity in the rigid cultural pattern of the place in which she grew up. The novel also challenges the class structures in the culture where the rich-born Aliya falls in love with a lower-born named Khaleel- the title is suggestive of this relation between the rich and the poor, Aliya is saffron while Khaleel is salt. *Salt and Saffron* is an exploration of the tradition and the changing world of globalisation exercised through oral storytelling.

Kamila Shamsie intensifies her subject matter of culture and national identity in her third novel entitled *Kartography* (2002). Shamsie uses the history of Pakistan as well as the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 to depict the continuous political upheavals creating tensions in the lives of the people. Shamsie, for the third consecutive time, uses the upper middle and elite class of Pakistan as the primary characters, specially focusing on Raheen and Karim, to show that even the rich are no safer than the poor people in Pakistan. The tussle for power in Pakistani politics makes a precarious ground for one and all. The title of the novel is deliberately misspelt, it is actually a portmanteau of Karachi and cartography. After Karim and his family escape to London owing to the coup d'état attempt against Benazir Bhutto, Karim's fascination to understand the politics behind the national boundaries becomes intense,

so does his desire to draw a map of Karachi. Shamsie's narrative is straightforward in stating the need to rethink the narrow idea of nationhood. Kamila Shamsie's fourth novel, *Broken Verses* (2005) deconstructs ideas of Islam as inherently patriarchal by individualizing Zia-ul-Haq's particular brand of Islam as a misogynist deployment of religion to assert control over women. Shamsie tries to show that it is the development in culture juxtaposed with religion which oppresses women, unlike the presumption that it is because of direct exegesis of the Quran. The novel repeatedly voices the patriarchal interpretation of the Holy book and adds up the intervention of human activity through Samina and the Poet who proclaim to be the agencies justice and democracy in the novel in spite of their societal flaws: "How can words be used for such indignity?", the Poet said when he heard the details of the Hudood Laws being passed in the name of Islam" (*Broken Verses* 91). Shamsie's narrative emphasises the widening gap between what the Holy Quran really says versus the cultural interpretation of it. *Broken Verses* is also a reflection on the uneasiness of feminists like Samina in Pakistan and the main cause of this discomfort is the additional laws inherited from the Islamic rituals. Religion becomes an element dividing generations which is visible when the reader notices the difference between Aasmaani and Samina; at a time when Samina never fasts during *Ramzan*, the young Aasmaani lives with relative ease with the same rituals as religion, and the adopted authoritarian rules have become habitual for Aasmaani and her generation. It is clear enough that Shamsie uses religion not only to show its limits but to show its nationalistic importance as well.

Check Your Progress

1. Which setting does Shamsie incorporate in her first four novels?
2. In which novel does the author interrogate the influence of religion on women?

Burnt Shadows (2009) is Shamsie's fifth novel and it was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction. Shamsie steps out of her comfortable setting for the first time as the narrative explores a period of roughly 60 years of global history starting from the war devastated Nagasaki to the terrified post 9/11 America. *Burnt Shadows* is an epic tale of Hiroko Tanaka who is not only the protagonist, but also the vehicle through which the narrative discusses the effects of the global events on personal lives. The novel shall be explored further in the next section.

Shamsie continues to experiment with a vast sweep of history in her sixth novel, *A God in Every Stone* (2014). A historical fiction set in the early decades of the twentieth century, the novel is a complex narrative of two contrasting worlds- Vivian Rose Spencer of England and a young pathan named Qayyum Gul. Shamsie's prose is engaging and elegant in exploring this tale of love and betrayal set in the midst of colonial power struggle. The narrative is multi-layered where the author juxtaposes history with personal struggle and fate- a now similar route of Shamsie's novels.

The most recent novel of Kamila Shamsie is *Home Fire* published in 2017, The novel was shortlisted for the prestigious Man Booker Prize 2017 while she won the Women's Prize for Fiction for the year 2018. The narrative is a retelling of Sophocles' *Antigone* but the characters are British Muslims belonging to the modern day. The narrative is a sad tale about three orphans Aneeka, Parvaiz and Isma torn in search of an identity. The novel is an attempt to reflect the identity crisis of British Muslims who have to demonstrate their fealty for England time and again in the midst of constant security concerns.

Stop to Consider

Literature can be considered as a significant sign in the study of the history of a nation and how history builds up the lives of the people in it. The history of a nation becomes the catalyst in the formation of the peoples' mental framework and it is generally the documentation of the traumatic events of the past collocated with personal lives that brings out the real images of the stigmata. Events such as these have contributed to the relocation of identities or lack thereof and have problematized the identity of home and belongingness. And literature especially fiction, has not only been enriched by taking these events as the niche for the narrative, but also depict an overview of the past.

6.3 *Burnt Shadows* in Context:

Kamila Shamsie, in her novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009), tries to construct the narratives of the past with the intertwined notions of history, memory and identity. The narrative of the novel revolves around the characters with different national background and it is through the historic events beginning from the bombing of Nagasaki on 9th August, 1945 and culminating in the

post 9/11 America that Shamsie intermingles her characters with historical events. Shamsie problematizes each of the characters' identities when each one of them seemingly refuses to leave the culture of 'home' even while being compelled to leave their respective nations due to the traumatising events. The novel also seeks to demonstrate how the public world merges with the private world and there is no escape from it. From the very onset of the novel, there is a sense of loss; the Prologue gives a picture of a prisoner who is stripped naked- a symbol of losing one's basic needs as well as the absence of freedom. Again, the first chapter is named "The Yet Unknowing World" depicting the stranger-like behaviour of one's supposed home. The evolution of Hiroko, Sajjad and the Burtons has been deemed ubiquitous through the major incidents that shook the world from the World War II and beyond. Yet, the novel ends on a note which signifies that events will continue to occur and the "world will go on" even though the horrific past will continue to cast a 'burnt shadow' on one's existence.

Burnt Shadows begins in Nagasaki during the World War II where nineteen-year-old Hiroko Tanaka is seen tutoring a German Konrad Weiss who has spent a major part of the war-years in Japan and suddenly finds himself in an unknown territory after the Germans surrender to the Allies. Just at the point of time when the love of Hiroko and Konrad was starting to bloom, Konrad becomes a casualty of the atom bomb and Hiroko is left alone with the burnt images of the birds indelibly etched on her back for ever. Shamsie's work is a fiction, but characters like Hiroko represent the story of those lives which were decimated by partitions and wars against humanity, the real stories, mostly unrecorded in the state archives, of people displaced by war and forced to surrender their homes and identities. Yet these unrecorded stories of displaced identities need to be reviewed in critical parlance of the preceding century. What *Burnt Shadows* projects is the number of complex ways "in which the deformities of colonialism hardened and reified under the pressures of cold war geopolitics" (Eschen 463). While the partition of India and Pakistan was a product of the erstwhile colony's political propaganda, the subsequent hostile rivalry between India and Pakistan can be drawn symmetrical to the alliance of the USA with Pakistan and their hostility to the irresolute policies of India. Sajjad would not have been killed by the assassin nor would Hiroko have found herself in Karachi if the Americans had not rendered military support to Pakistan in support of a patriarchal ruler. What follows is Hiroko's aggravated fear of another assassination or bomb explosion or losing another person beloved to her.

Stop to Consider:

Events like war and famine in the past led to the exodus of millions of people across the world. Most of these people suffered identity crises as well as loss of identity which has not been reflected in the history books that often do not include the plight of private lives. Works of literature like *Time's Arrow* by Martin Amis, Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* are poignant tales about the private lives deeply affected by the public events.

Space for Learner's Notes

At the core of the novel, Shamsie keeps 'fear' attached to the global histories, some known and some unknown, which makes the protagonist lead the life of an immigrant. Hiroko's fear suggests the fear of those numerous Japanese natives who left their homes in fear of facing another nuclear warfare or even colonial takeover. The numbers project a further drastic scene which often goes unnoticed: about thirty percent of the victims in Hiroshima were Korean and at the end of the devastating war about twenty percent had to live outside their homeland as entry for them was restricted. Eschen writes, "scholars such as Lisa Yoneyama have challenged the erasures of the 30,000 Korean victims of Hiroshima from history and have created a frame for understanding movement and displacement, where borders crossing peoples and states conscripting peoples are as significant as people crossing borders" (463). This is exactly what Shamsie successfully does; she wakes up the dead to narrate the stories less heard and thus invokes a new dimension of history.

Check Your Progress

1. What is the nationality of Hiroko Tanaka in the beginning of the novel?
2. What does Hiroko Tanaka fear after the destruction of Nagasaki?

In *Burnt Shadows*, Shamsie tries to connect the characters' identities with the national history of the countries. This is literally inscribed in the body of Hiroko Tanaka whose bodily scars from the bombing of Nagasaki and whose subsequent eviction from Japan represents the scars in her mind and her constant migration in search of relocating an identity. Moreover, this the novel also depicts the intense politics intermingled with ethical obligations

that suffocates the possible *happy* private life outside the sordid public sphere. Kamila Shamsie, in an interview, claimed about her intentions with *Burnt Shadows* that she “throughout the book wanted to have dual things in place; one is a very large sweep of history, but I also wanted to have the intimacy of the readers and the characters with [some] sort of tiny images at the very heart of it. I wanted the novel to be about an interplay of history and personal lives”.

Self Asking Questions

Do you think that Shamsie uses major global events to depict a familiar loss of identity of the common people? Elucidate with reference to the text. (20+60 words)

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6.3.1 Nationalism in *Burnt Shadows*:

Nationalism is a feeling of right based on one's attachments that acts as the bond of collectivity larger than the state. In *Burnt Shadows* Shamsie's characters can be seen as a group of people more or less equally victimized by war and sharing a similar fate of homelessness. They continue to shift their 'homes' and pose challenges to the “existing and normative power structures” (Khan 2). The cosmopolitan Hiroko Tanaka is in a constant search for home, beginning with her expulsion for being a *hibakusha*, and she earns a unique multicultural persona in the process. Hiroko's migration from one place to another seeking a permanent home tends to take her away from her original home and it is through Hiroko that Shamsie draws the image of a modern cosmopolitan person: a person who is distinctively multicultural yet with the dissatisfaction of homelessness.

Stop to Consider

After the USA destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, effectively ending the World War II, survivors from these two cities were subjected to discrimination and termed them *hibakusha*, literally meaning 'people affected by nuclear bomb'. Thus, the *hibakusha* not only had to suffer the physical pain from the radiation but also the mental pain inflicted by their own native people.

Burnt Shadows is a multi-layered novel deeply concerned with issues of nation, home, identity and diaspora. The novel, like Shamsie's other novels, is a subtle statement of the condition of being without a home and without an identity even though one harbours the feeling of nationalism. Shamsie's narrative uses Hiroko Tanaka as a vehicle to explore a plethora of issues related to nationalism. We are introduced to Hiroko in the very beginning of the novel—she is a young Japanese woman who has always lived in and loved Nagasaki, the city of her birth and youth. "Standing at the edge of a dangerous precipice, Hiroko shares the fear of losing home with thousands of fellow Japanese families who inhabit this city amidst the horrifying destruction of the Second World War. It is a world in which human lives hang by threads and where bomb shelters are as familiar as homes" (Khan 6). The atomic bomb explosion ended lives and, for those who survived, started a never-ending search for an identity. Hiroko represents this particular section of homeless people who share not only the nationality that was destroyed by the bomb, but also the pain of being unable to live in the place that they love. On Hiroko's personal note, she loses her independent identity along with her love, Konrad, who dies in the blast. This instantly brings to light a sense of Hiroko's detachment from the sentimentality of loving a nation and a person. Khan writes, "From both a feminist and nationalistic perspective, this scene of devastation is a crucial moment in the novel. For one thing, there are several references to the "blut and boden" nationalism of Europe and America which thrived at the expense of cities such as Nagasaki and Hiroshima, but additionally, this nationalism is described as a predominantly masculine sphere which leaves its indelible marks on Hiroko, in the form of the hideously compelling bird-shaped burns on her back" (6).

Gohar Karim Khan emphasizes the aspect of Hiroko's nationalism in the novel as follows: "The Western nationalism is inscribed as a predominately masculine sphere which leaves its indelible marks on Hiroko, in the form of the hideously compelling bird-shaped burns on her back. . . [and] she bears the brunt of this monstrous and destructive form of nationalism for the rest of her life" (6). This statement can be justified by Hiroko's migration from Japan to India because her own nation disowned her as a radiation-affected woman; again it is the war over borders that makes her and Sajjad flee from India to Pakistan. Her migration to America was more of a search for a permanent peaceful home where she is no more compelled to cross borders. In other words, Hiroko's movement is compelled by the political and national unrest everywhere she goes. After leaving Nagasaki, Hiroko's

search takes her to many places, yet she fails to find peace. The nations are already at war with themselves: the 1947 Partition, the Afghanistan fighting against the Soviet in the Cold War period, the USA after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. The arrangement of the massive plot in which the characters live is beautifully constructed to depict the callousness of borders which affect the lives of the common people.

Elizabeth's sense of nationalism is reinstated due to Hiroko's presence. As they begin to get fond of each other, Elizabeth's feeling of homelessness in colonial India decreases to a large extent. Her desire to be identified as a German starts reviving, "she didn't want to keep hidden the fact that at times during the war—and especially when Berlin was firebombed—she had felt entirely German" (67). This notion of nationalism acts as a bonding device to keep Hiroko and Elizabeth together. Both feel the same love and attachment for their respective nations. When Elizabeth recalls her memories of leaving Berlin she feels resentful, "Elizabeth wanted to catch Sajjad by the collar and shake him. I was made to leave Berlin when I was a little younger than him—I know the pain of it. What do you know about leaving, you whose family has lived in Delhi for centuries?" (*Burnt Shadows* 56). Hence, Hiroko's notions about home acts as a positive factor for Elizabeth. Shamsie shows two sides of Hiroko— the first one as a woman who transcends the barrier of time, and the other one being a woman who always remains nostalgic about her Nagasakian past. Hiroko adapts the cultures of the places she goes to but she cannot part ways with the cultures she grew up with. She explains it to Elizabeth as:

"Do you see those flowers on the hillside Ilse? I want to know their names in Japanese. I want to hear Japanese. . . . I want to look like the people around me. . . . I want the doors to slide open instead of swinging open. I want all those things that never meant anything, that still wouldn't mean anything if I hadn't lost them. You see, I know that. I know that but it doesn't stop me from wanting them" (96).

James Burton not only shows his ignorance on the matter of language acquisition, his comments are also a revelation of his patriarchal vision of nationalism which is in stark contrast to Hiroko's views. Hiroko's long journey from Nagasaki to America itself is a documentation of the historic events of the real world. The void that is left in the tussle between public incidents and private life articulates itself through Hiroko Tanaka and justifies what Linda Hutcheon calls 'historiographic metafiction', that is the intrusion

of history into the personal sphere represented through fiction where it can neither be called a fabricated copy of the history nor an authentic representation of the same.

Hiroko Tanaka's incidental presence in the nations usurped by the violence of war makes her a witness to a unique sense of nationalism and it is through her that the readers see the difficulties of in seeking an identity. Kamila Shamsie's attempt is not merely to depict the search for identity and home after a historical event, she at the same time, uses fiction to deliver an image of the role of history in the formation of identity as well as to show that the past cannot be forgotten even in search of a new identity. This idea is reflected through Hiroko, the woman who transcends the major events of history while at the same time writing her own story.

Self Asking Question

How does the narrative use the cosmopolitan nature of Hiroko Tanaka to show her loss of identity? (100 words)

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6.3.2 Trauma of Identity in *Burnt Shadows*:

Out of the number of novels based on the 9 September terror attacks on America, it is glaringly visible that most of them have emphasized on the sufferings and the subsequent overcoming of the Americans. In critical parlance, it seems like this 'repetition compulsion' has led to a sort of monoculous attitude towards the suffering of people other than Americans or even those who do not share the geographical terrain. Kamila Shamsie, in her novel *Burnt Shadows*, subverts this blindness and turns the lens to show those figures who have been left unnoticed but have suffered similar trauma. "By redefining 9/11 as 'so tiny a fragment in the big picture,' she enables those 'others' — Japanese and Pakistanis, to name only a few — to trespass on the predominantly White American territory of 9/11 melancholia" (Itakura 1). Incidentally *Burnt Shadows* is also a narrative of personal trauma: the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, life as refugees in the post-Partition India, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and living with the fear of being an outsider in the USA reflects every bit of restlessness. Hiroko

Tanaka is not only saddened by the incineration of her fiancé, Konrad Weiss, who vanished into a 'lanky shadow', but also thwarted by the step-motherly in her homeland Japan where she remains a hibakusha forever. The dehumanisation where an unnamed man, possibly Hiroko's son, Raza Ashraf, is made to take off the clothes in Guantanamo detention camp is similar to the reduction of Hiroko's identity from being a Japanese to being a hibakusha. *Burnt Shadows*, hence, can be said to be a call to hear the unheard cries and the Shattered lives of those who have lost their identity amidst hordes of chaotic 9/11 anecdotes:

Once he is in the cell they unshackle him and instruct him to strip. He takes off the grey winter coat with brisk efficiency and then – as they watch, arms folded – his movements slow, fear turning his fingers clumsy on belt buckle, shirt buttons. They wait until he is completely naked before they gather up his clothes and leave. When he is dressed again, he suspects, he will be wearing an orange jumpsuit. (*Burnt Shadows* 1)

Thus begins Kamila Shamsie's critically acclaimed 'post-9/11' novel, *Burnt Shadows*. The broad psychological as well as the ethical notions of *Burnt Shadows* is escalated to the forefront by the 'prologue' itself. The anonymous male character's nakedness, and the inhuman orange jumpsuit is symbolic as well as evocative of the sexual humiliation of prisoners inside Guantanamo Bay detention camp. Moreover, the title of the book is also suggestive of the scars on the skin of Hiroko, the 'hibakusha', and therefore the trauma can be immediately connected to the flesh of the individuals at different places. The above mentioned points substantiate the further process of the novel as it draws a primary difference with other novels with similar themes. It is a global take on the destructive events with a stark contrast from the 'Western' novelists who rather put the mean upon the angst and fear within the white population and "unwittingly reveal their inability to extricate themselves from a kind of imaginative paralysis" (Itakura 3). On the other hand, the prologue does not provide any spatial or temporal specificity except for the deixes. This apparent lack reframes immediate socio-political concerns into more abstract, hypothetical questions of human ethics and psychology.

Stop to Consider

The psychological impact of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001 was worldwide. Most of the Islamic countries were feared by the Western countries; Islamophobia was at its peak and the world witnessed an unequivocal discrimination towards people from South-East Asian countries. In the aftermath of these events, many writers began writing about the world post 9/11. Such texts have been categorised under '9/11 literature'.

Space for Learner's Notes

At the centre of the novel lie the postcolonial and post 9/11 identity concerns like the dying through of the British Empire, the globally terrorizing effects of Muslim extremists, and America's open war against the growth of mujahedeen and jihadists. But the traumatic experiences of Hiroko, beginning from the Nagasaki bombing when she lost Konrad, is the matter which continuously binds the plot together. Hence, it is necessary to study the nature of the trauma that Hiroko experienced by analysing the brief period in Nagasaki and her flashbacks as the novel progresses. Hiroko's traumatic experiences are multiplied manifold by the subsequent losses of her Pakistani husband Sajjad Ashraf and her son, Raza, who is detained by the CIA. It is also important to draw a trajectory of Hiroko's attempt to survive, to thrive against her traumatic experiences "and move away from narcissistic preoccupations with her own suffering towards a more sensible consideration of suffering of the other" (Itakura 3). This shift is significant as the plot progresses because, on the one hand it projects that the global mishaps are not suffered by the West alone and, on the other hand, the readers realize the fragility of individual lives.

Hiroko Tanaka is depicted as the archetype of all the abominable atrocities created in the world by the so-called super powers. The Americans' bombing over Nagasaki not only burnt her back, it also burnt her identity of a normal human being and hung a question mark upon her identity. She is reduced to an object in the hand of nature. After the atomic bomb explosion, Hiroko becomes a foreigner in her own beloved country and her national identity is stripped as her native people's love is replaced by indifference and strangeness. "It was a fear of reduction rather than any kind of quest that had forced her away from Japan. Already she had started to feel that word 'hibakusha' start to consume her life. To the Japanese she was nothing beyond an explosion-affected person; that was her defining feature" (49).

Self Asking Question

Is Hiroko Tanaka an archetype of the sufferings faced by people from the various acts of violence? Give a well-reasoned explanation. (20+60 words)

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6.4 Summing Up:

In the narrative of *Burnt Shadows*, Kamila Shamsie has abundantly used the historical events which changed the landscape of the world. These incidents have been read in fewer amounts through the eyes of the private lives that are so important to the nationalistic urge of a nation yet whose toil often goes unnoticed. The institution of the family endorses certain nationalistic roles which are primarily determined by the economic relationships with the state. Within heteronormative patriarchal societies, a control over the economic structure not only leads to a dominant gendered role within a sexual relationship but it also determines the dynamics of property relations. Kamila Shamsie's fifth novel, *Burnt Shadows* is rich not simply because it offers a narrative on a grand scale taking within its wing the problems of patriarchal religion, segregated culture, woman's resistance against a decaying feudal patriarchal order and trauma suffered at the times of national struggle, because but it offers an interesting understanding of socio-economical dynamic of the family as an institution. This novel also deals with the political manipulations global super powers which seem to have a larger impact upon individuals than documented history testifies to.

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6.6 Model Questions:

- I. What are the recurring themes in the novels of Kamila Shamsie?
- II. Do you find *Burnt Shadows* as a text exploring national identity? Elucidate with examples.
- III. "The Western nationalism is inscribed as a predominately masculine sphere which leaves its indelible marks on Hiroko, in the form of the hideously compelling bird-shaped burns on her back... [and] she bears the brunt of this monstrous and destructive form of nationalism for the rest of her life". Elucidate this statement.
- IV. Analyse *Burnt Shadows* as a journey of traumatic national identity.

Space for Learner's Notes

6.7 Answers to Check Your Progress:

1. Which setting does Shamsie incorporate in her first four novels?

Ans: The setting in Kamila Shamsie's first four novels is Pakistan.

2. In which novel does the author interrogate the influence of religion on women?

Ans: In *Broken Verses*, Shamsie interrogates the influence of religion on women.

3. What is the nationality of Hiroko Tanaka in the beginning of the novel?

Ans: Hiroko Tanaka is a citizen of Japan, living in Nagasaki, in the beginning of the novel *Burnt Shadows*.

4. What does Hiroko Tanaka fear after the destruction of Nagasaki?

Ans: After the destruction of Nagasaki, Hiroko's immediate fear is of another explosion and subsequent loss of someone dear to her.

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Unit: 7
E.L. Doctorow: *Ragtime*

Contents:

- 7.0 Introduction**
- 7.1 Objectives**
- 7.2 Introducing the Author**
- 7.3 The Form**
- 7.4 The Plot in Brief**
- 7.5 Major Themes**
 - 7.5.1 Quest for Meaning**
 - 7.5.2 Immigration and Racism**
 - 7.5.3 Impact of Technological Developments**
 - 7.5.4 Acceptance of Change**
 - 7.5.5 The Women Question**
- 7.6 Style of the Text**
- 7.7 Importance of the Text**
- 7.8 Summing Up**
- 7.9 References and Suggested Readings**
- 7.10 Answers to Check Your Progress**

7.0 Introduction:

In this unit we shall be dealing with one of the most famous American novelists of recent times. This novel shall enable you to investigate the nature of historical documentation and look at the way Doctorow satirizes the prevailing atmosphere of America in the early 1900s. The beginning of the twentieth century brought tremendous variations in the way society functioned. With the fast pace of technological advancement and industrialization, the lives of the people were changing. Born in 1924 Doctorow himself had been well accustomed to these changes and their effects on people's lives. By taking various issues like immigration, religion, gender and social discrimination into consideration Doctorow asserts his interest in the socio-political aspects of his times.

The word 'ragtime' originally denotes a musical genre that was popular during the late nineteenth century in the United States of America. The ragtime music originated from the African-American communities, and is the first African-American music style to have an impact on the popular culture. Piano was the major musical instrument associated with this form, this being the reason why, as you will see later, one of the major characters in the novel is a piano player. The impact of this musical style was so high at that time that the sale of pianos sky-rocketed and ragtime swayed the musical industry. You should note that the popularity of ragtime music in America and the setting on which this novel is based share similar timeline. The title of the novel becomes significant in its association with the African-American community as well as with the time period of the novel. However, it is ironical that the African-American community did not receive such immense love and respect as did ragtime music. Though the music was loved, the people were socially discriminated. You shall see this issue becoming a central concern in the novel. Apart from the issue of racism, the novel gives a pictorial representation of a major turning point in the history of America.

7.1 Objectives:

After the completion of this unit you shall be able to-

- *discuss* the life and works of E.L. Doctorow
- *identify* the themes of the novel
- *analyze* the elements of modern American history
- *assess* the changes and their effects on individual lives

7.2 Introducing the Author:

Edgar Lawrence Doctorow (b. 1931), named after the famous American literary figure Edgar Allan Poe, is one of the most successful American novelists of the latter half of the twentieth century. His parents were second-generation Americans of Russian-Jewish origins. His father owned a shop that sold musical instruments and his mother was a pianist. Since early childhood he was familiar with the cultural trends of the city of New York. Since his parents were both associated with music and musical instruments he had the opportunity to attend many concerts and theatrical performance during his childhood days. He exhibited signs of literary interest while he was a student in the Bronx High School of Science. He invented a character

called 'Carl' and wrote a profile on him which was highly appreciated by his teacher. He graduated from Kenyon College in 1952 with philosophy as the honours subject. The noted American poet and critic John Crowe Ransom was his college mate. After his B.A., he studied English drama at Columbia University for a year.

He was drafted into the United States Army and was stationed in Germany as a corporal for around two years. After returning from military service he worked as script reader for an American motion picture company. He also worked as book editor for the New American Library and as an editor-in-chief at a publishing house called Dial Press. After working for a few years, he left his job to pursue his career as a writer. He eventually taught at many colleges and universities in the United States like the University of California, New York University and others and held various official positions. He has won a number of awards like the National Books Critics Circle Award, National Book Award, PEN/Faulkner Award, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters award to name a few. Some of his major contributions to literature include the novels like *Welcome to Hard Times*, *The Book of Daniel*, *Loon Lake*, *Ragtime*, *Billy Bathgate*, *The March*, and *Andrew's Brain*. Apart from these he has also written the volumes of short-stories like *Lives of the Poets and Sweetland Stories*; a play named *Drinks Before Dinner*; and quite a few essays. In 2015, Doctorow died of lung cancer at the age of 84.

Edgar Lawrence Doctorow is famous for the use of history in his works. If you go through his novels you shall be able to find a lot of historical events and characters acting in a parallel manner with the happenings of the plots. His use of such occurrences give newer insights to the historical periods on which his novels are based. His works give the readers into a whole new of perception about the documentation of history, and show how historical events are manipulated and distorted by the use of political power. In the novel under consideration – *Ragtime*, you shall come across many real life characters and events which will have significant impact in the development of the plot. The famous American figures like J.P. Morgan, Emma Goldman, Harry Houdini, Evelyn Nesbit, and Henry Ford appear in the novel. Moreover, ideas of the theorists like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung are also interwoven. You should note that though these characters are historically accurate in their professions and personalities, Doctorow brings into light their lived experiences which you might not be able to find in any documented history of America. However, it cannot be said that whatever Doctorow

has said is the definitive truth. You should focus on the way Doctorow handles the political and social atmosphere of his times.

Stop to Consider:

Apart from the use of history Doctorow has dealt with many other issues in his works. *Welcome to Hard Times*, his debut novel, concerns itself with the nature of good and evil. Set in Dakota's Western setting, it reacts and relates to the destruction brought about by irrational thinking. *Loon Lake* is more experimental in nature. Set during the Depression, it applies various post-modern literary techniques thereby making it slightly difficult to understand. *Big as Life* addresses the human crisis with the use of science fiction. His last novel *Andrew's Brain* takes the form of a monologue to show the variable interpretations of truth, fate, and memory. You should look at the themes of his other works and relate them to the context on which the novels were produced in order to get a comprehensive view of Doctorow's literary style.

7.3 The Form:

Since its establishment as a major literary genre of English literature in the eighteenth century, the form of the novel had undergone many changes across literary periods of history. One of the immensely popular forms of literature, it has been constantly in a state of evolution embracing the demands of the newer periods. "One common attribute is that they are extended pieces of prose fiction." You should also note that the form of the novel also varies from country to country. The novelist under consideration is known for his ability to appropriate traditional literary styles to serve his purpose. Though belonging to the period of American post-modernist writers, his novels like *Ragtime* dealt with the disillusionment people experienced in the new century. American issues are central to his works, and he uses the form of the novel to present a comprehensive and detailed view of the societal happenings. The narration and movement follow the somewhat traditional style in this novel, with no major dedication to other common post-modern literary techniques like the use of unreliable narrator or textual fragmentation. His major technique involves the juxtaposition of the real-life personas with his fictional characters which enables him to fictionalize the history of his nation. More political than historical, the events of the past are used to provide a satirical view of the contemporary society.

Recent developments in the society have always been his common subject, and he uses the form of the novel to comment and put forward his own views on the society. The characterization is simple, the characters being representatives of a various groups of people. The present novel, set in the early 1900s, employs the omniscient narrator and gives us a portrait of America and its people rather than indulging the readers deep into the narrator's consciousness. Being an American novelist belonging to the post-war generation, he is more concerned with the alterations in people's customs, habits and thoughts brought about by significant historical events and happenings.

Self Asking Questions:

1. What characteristics distinguish the post-modern American novel from those produced in Britain?
2. Bring out some distinctive features of the twentieth century American literary tradition.

7.4 The Plot in Brief:

The novel begins in 1902 with the then American society as its backdrop. Set in the town of New Rochelle, New York it starts with the description of an upper class family which comprised of unnamed characters simply called as Father, Mother, Mother's Younger Brother, the Little Boy and the Grandfather. Mother's Younger Brother is romantically attracted towards the popular sensation Evelyn Nesbit. They gradually see a lot of each other. Her husband Harry Thaw has been charged with the murder of her ex-husband, the famous architect named Stanford White. Another important part of the novel is the Jewish immigrant family comprising of Tateh, Mameh and the Little Girl. They are poor and live in the Lower East Side in determents. Tateh and the little girl weave for a living, while Mameh works as a peddler and sleeps with the one who offers her money. Once, Evelyn Nesbit travels towards the lower east side and meets the little girl. She develops a maternal affection towards the little girl and even cares for her when she falls ill. Stricken by the arrows of Cupid, Mother's Younger Brother follows Evelyn, without her knowledge, wherever she goes.

Harry Houdini, the famous American escape artist is introduced in the novel. On his way to somewhere, his car engine breaks off in front of the Father's

house and he pays them a visit. The Little Boy grows fond of Houdini's escapes and wants to break free from his life which he found monotonous. Shortly after, Father goes off for a trip to the North Pole along with the explorer named Peary. In another scene, Tateh, the little girl and Evelyn attend a socialist meeting where the famous social activist Emma Goldman was the chief speaker. Goldman notices Evelyn and humiliates her publicly saying that the latter uses her sexuality to assert her prominence in the society. Meanwhile, Mother discovers a new born baby buried alive in her backyard. After contacting the police she comes to know that the baby belonged to a washerwoman named Sarah. Mother takes responsibility of the child and begins caring for her.

Tateh and her daughter leave New York owing to the difficulties they had experienced there. In search of happiness and a better life they travel towards the eastern seaboard. Evelyn grows impatient and starts searching for the little girl. Mother's Younger Brother participates in her search but to no avail. In another instance, Houdini learns the art of flying an airplane and performs his demonstration in front of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Countess Sophie. On his return from the trip to the Arctic, everything seemed changed for the Father. He experiences loneliness and feels as if he was isolated from his family as well as the society. Tateh and his girl continue to travel and in one instance they come across a strike against the textile mills. While reaching Philadelphia Tateh is able to find a store whose owner is interested in selling the motion picture books that he had invented. In the meantime, Doctorow introduces two of the prominent personalities of that time - Henry Ford and J.P. Morgan. Morgan invites Ford for a lunch and they discuss spirituality, religion, science and technology and their impacts on human lives. Morgan's desire to seek aesthetic pleasure by visiting the centuries-old Egyptian Pyramids comes to the surface.

One fine day a black man named Coalhouse Walker visits the New Rochelle home of father waiting to meet Sarah, the washerwoman. Sarah refuses to meet him. Coalhouse repeatedly visits the house trying to persuade Sarah for a meeting, but Sarah appears adamant. After some time, Sarah yields and Coalhouse proposes to her for marriage. Coalhouse owned a Ford car; and once, as he was travelling towards New York, he comes across a road barricaded by the volunteers of the Emerald fire-house. Coalhouse tries to persuade them to give him the way but is denied. He decides to take help from the police; but in the meantime his car is ransacked by the mob of firemen. Coalhouse complains against the volunteers to the police. Surprisingly

he gets arrested instead of the volunteers who dealt damage to his car. He spends all the money he had saved for his wedding with Sarah while trying to find a lawyer to represent him in court. Their marriage is postponed as Coalhouse is determined to marry only after he gets full compensation for his car. Sarah leaves the house without anyone's knowledge one night and attends a meeting where influential members of the federal government were present. Her attempt was to meet and persuade the federal members to look after the case of her would be husband Coalhouse. In her effort to reach out to one of the members, the security officers hit her chest with the butt of a rifle and the secret service members plunge into her. As a result of the blow Sarah falls ill and eventually dies. This enrages Coalhouse and he decides to seek revenge. He and his associates bomb the Emerald Isle firehouse and end up killing four of the volunteers. In the house, Father and Mother's Younger Brother engage in an argument regarding the activities of Coalhouse. The latter leaves the house and joins the gang of Coalhouse. Father and Mother, along with their son, leave New Rochelle for Atlantic City. There they meet Tateh and his daughter; where the real name of Tateh is revealed. He now appears to be successful in his movie books business. Meanwhile, facing severe opposition Willie Conklin, the prime accuse in the Coalhouse car incident, also flees the town.

The novel reaches its climax. The intensity of Coalhouse's rebellious activities increases. He and his followers storm into J.P. Morgan's library. When the authorities seek negotiation Coalhouse raises his demands. The demands mention the compensation for his car, and death penalty for Willie Conklin. Booker T. Washington, a firm believer in the advancement of the black people living in America, joins the negotiation but leaves the scene after failing to persuade Coalhouse. At this point of time Father returns to New Rochelle. He talks with Coalhouse, and then with Whitman asking him to meet Coalhouse's demands. Whitman agrees and Coalhouse's car and Willie Conklin are brought in the perimeter. After requesting the authorities to let go of his followers Coalhouse surrenders. Father hears gunshots from inside the library. The police report that he had made an escape attempt and they had to fire. Mother's Younger Brother rides away with Coalhouse's car and drives around the country. Later he relocates to Mexico and joins a revolutionary group there. A year later he is killed in a coup with the authorities there.

The First World War approaches and countries in Europe begin experiencing political turmoil. In search of spiritual enlightenment J.P. Morgan visits the

Pyramids in Egypt. However, he realizes that he was not able to find the satisfaction which he had desired. He lives a melancholic life and dies eventually. On the other hand Houdini continues with his tricks and appears to be finally able to come to terms with reality and accept his mother's death. The death of Mother's Younger Brother had great impact on the relationship between Mother and Father. Father starts living in Washington and continues his fire-crackers business. He dies during World War I while he was on a ship. A year later, Mother and Tateh marry and continue to live together with the Little Boy and the Little Girl.

Check Your Progress:

1. Consider Doctorow's *Ragtime* as a historical novel. (200words)

7.5 Major Themes:

Doctorow's *Ragtime* takes up a number of issues pertaining to the American socio-political atmosphere. Some of the most important themes and motifs which you should take note of have been briefly discussed below.

7.5.1 Quest for Meaning:

From your reading you might have acquired the idea that the setting of the novel deals with the turn of the twentieth century. With the advancement of science and technology modernity had started to find an impact on the lives of the individuals. Amidst the complexities and confusions brought about by modernity, people desired stability in their lives. The inclusion and description of the real-life characters like the novelist Theodore Dreiser, the explorer Robert Peary and the business tycoon J.P. Morgan are testimonies to the fact that even leading personalities were looking after some sort of satisfaction in their lives. Dreiser's obsession with the position of his chair's alignment shows his effort to find mental stability after his first novel named *Sister Carrie* fails to catch any important attention in the literary world. The need for literary success was getting the better of Dreiser's consciousness. He was aware that only literary success would give his life a definite meaning and purpose. Again, when the explorer Peary reaches the Arctic he searches for the exact location of the North Pole. This can be seen as his effort to achieve stability in the midst of chaos. Morgan, even with his riches and

fortune, was not able to find satisfaction in life. His conversation with Henry Ford shows that he also strove for self-fulfillment. His visit to the Pyramid in Egypt could not bring him the contentment which he expected. He experiences restlessness and cannot sleep. It seemed that his search for truth yield no results. You should note that his failure in achieving meaning leads him to melancholy, depression and ultimately death.

The crisis brought about by the advent of modernity is experienced by the other fictional characters as well. Father is in constant search for meaning in life. He journeys towards the Arctic and upon his return, realizes that he was more isolated from himself as well as his family than ever before. His effort to negotiate with Coalhouse in the concluding part of the novel suggests his quest; he might have been aiming to serve the purpose of saving Coalhouse's life. His marriage falls and we are told that he died while aboard a ship. This suggests that he was trying to find something through travel which would satisfy his soul; only his death could end his quest. Similarly, Mother experiences turmoil throughout the novel. Her failing marriage and the death of her brother constantly tormented her at different periods of her life. Her decision to take responsibility of Sarah's illegitimate baby and gradually of Sarah suggests that she was also in search of inner peace. The narrator finally hints at her happiness when she decides to marry Tateh and start a new life thereafter. Similarly, Tateh's travels across the country were for his search for a better life, the life which he had thought would have made his life fulfilled. You shall find a number of other characters striving for a life characterized by mental stability and spiritual fulfillment. The quest for meaning becomes a driving force in developing the personalities of the characters as well as carrying the narrative forward. The narrative moves in league with the characters' individual journeys towards finding a direction in life.

7.5.2 Immigration and Racism:

In the first chapter we get a hint about the problem of immigration that prevailed in America during the earlier years of the twentieth century. This was the period when marginalized and persecuted people travelled to America as immigrants with the hope of making their lives better. The great 'American dream' lured immigrants towards the achievement of financial stability. You must be aware that America is a land of immigrants. However, Doctorow makes it clear that America is not what people generally tend to

believe. Though multiple races and people from all over the world migrate to America and find establishment, they are not looked upon with sympathy by the existing population. What is more, even the people who themselves were immigrants once upon a time despise the new immigrants. The novel intricately details the reality of the immigrants. The poverty they face; the disgusted gaze they experience and the conditions in which they live shows that their achievement of the American dream seems unreal. The Jewish immigrant family of Tateh and the Little Girl travel throughout the country in search of better living conditions. As the girl begins to mature concerns about her security also seemed to trouble Tateh.

They got very less opportunity to avail better living conditions. The existing population saw them as burdens to the society. The economy of America was capitalistic and highly competitive. A sense of hierarchy among the older and newer immigrants always prevailed because of this. Furthermore, rich and successful persons do not seem to be much concerned about the immigrants' lives and few charitable efforts were made to better their living conditions. They feel like being prisoners and continue to look for ways for their liberation. Similar was the plight of the African-American population. Their colour becomes a determining factor in denying them justice and the niceties of life. Of this, Coalhouse Walker is the prime example. Being denied justice he ultimately resorts to rebellious activities and ends up killing four of the firemen volunteers. Even though the society was termed to be modern, inequalities and racism prevailed. Coalhouse's success in assimilating a rebellious group suggests that there were other people who had experienced racism and were ready to fight against discrimination and social injustice. Though slavery had been abolished for quite some time, the plight of the black people living in America was far from being better. Finding no lawyer to defend his case, Coalhouse finally decides to take the law into his own hands and fight for justice that was denied to him as well as to others like him. The novel as a whole provides a stark criticism of the realities of American life.

Stop to Consider:

You should note that the novel is not limited to the themes discussed herein. The novel includes a lot of other themes, symbols, narration and motifs like the individual-social relationships, repression, injustice, modernization, voice of the narrator to name a few. Another important

aspect to consider is the context of the novel. A context-specific reading shall enable you to relate to the circumstances and events undertaken in the work. Every period of history carries its own traits and this novel specifically limits its setting to the early 1900s. Your reading should be focused on those developmental traits and their influences in the development of the characters as well as the plot of the novel.

Space for Learner's Notes

7.5.3 Impact of Technological Developments:

You have been told earlier that significant inventions and advancements occurred in the field of science and technology during the early twentieth century. Though industrialization and the economy flourished because of this, it was the working class that was affected the most. You might be wondering now how that can be possible since industrialization and establishment of factories create new jobs. However, you should also note that the advent of machines minimized human labour. The things that were done by the people were now performed by the machines. Hence the value of humans and human labour was undermined. The advancement in technology increased mass production and efficiency of labour. As a result the potential of the average American worker began to go unnoticed. On the other hand, the influx of immigrants was increasing day by day. This added to the increase in workforce, the supply was get higher than the demand. The novel takes into account the innovation made by the great American automobile company owned by Ford. You shall find ample references to this issue in the conversation between Ford and Morgan in the novel.

7.5.4 Acceptance of Change:

The dawn of the new century saw tremendous changes in all the aspects of human lives. Many of these changes have been dealt with in this novel. Change is always accompanied by confusion and complexities; some people tend to accept change, while others prefer to cling on to their old ways. It is generally seen that the people who refuse to accept changes suffer the most. The society was changing rapidly because of advancements in various fields of science, technology, medicine, social norms and customs, economy, religion, and politics. These changes had tremendous effect in the lives of the people. Father in the novel typifies the one who is not willing to accept

change. Upon his return from the Arctic voyage, it pains him to see that his son and his wife had become more self-sufficient. He feels alienated and struggles to come to terms with the newer ways of society. As a result his relationship with his family worsens. On the other hand, Mother finds the change liberating. The absence of her husband teaches her to manage the household as well as their business, and this leads to the realization of her self-confidence. She accepts the change and moves on with her life. Her marriage with Tateh can be seen as an example of her ability to endure new challenges in life. Coalhouse, on the other hand, can be seen as the one who struggled to bring changes. He rebels for his own cause as well as for the other oppressed black people. The theme of change pervades the novel and Doctorow highlights the reactions of the characters towards change.

7.5.5 The Women Question:

With the new century the strict and unjust rules imposed on women were being challenged and various movements for the assertion of female rights were gaining momentum. Women also began to come out of the grasp of patriarchy and were looking for individual freedom. The female characters of the novel are in accord with the changing times. Mother discovers her self-confidence and sexuality. Her marriage with Tateh is a voice against the perceived notions of society. Unwilling to sacrifice her newly found happiness and satisfaction; she dares to marry a Jew even though inter-faith marriages between Christians and Jews were not regular happenings at that time. Emma Goldman works for the betterment of lives. Her voice against the institution of marriage can be seen as her effort at women's liberation. Her clothes, manners and thoughts are all against the order of the day, the order imposed upon women by patriarchal system of beliefs. Evelyn Nesbit, though appearing as a sex symbol, shows the fight a female has to undergo in order to hold a respectable position in the capitalist society of America. Her charitable donations imply her riches as well as her desire to become an agent of change in the society. Sarah's daring venture to reach out to the members of the federal government is also an example of the liberation, confidence and individuality which the new century witnessed. Through all these characters Doctorow represents the newly discovered femininity and strength experienced by the females of that period.

Self Asking Questions:

1. Are the major themes of the text indicative of the socio-political environment of the earlier twentieth century America? Discuss.

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2. How do the historical events and characters help in the development of the plot?

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Space for Learner's Notes

7.6 Style of the Text:

The language used in the text is simple and straight-forward. Doctorow does not make use of bombastic words to ornament anything, nor does he resort to the complexity of narration; and the narrative is direct and sequential. The narration is in third person, and the narrator appears to know a lot of history. The narrator's voice provides information about all the related things of history. Using an omniscient narrator Doctorow successfully gives the readers a clear view of the character's consciousness. Along with this, the style of the narration also lets us know about the opinions of the author. However, the narrator does not interfere with the happenings or events of the novel. Nor does he delve too deeply into the characters' consciousness; the narrator in a simple manner provides us with an overview of the period in which the novel is set as well as the reactions of the characters towards various historical and social events. The episodes in the novel are arranged in a linear manner, and the time-sequence moves in parallelly with the narrative. There are no disjointed or digressive traits in the novel. The scene changes from place to place and interconnects many real and fictional characters thus providing multiple social views and opinions.

You should note that the style and the narrative technique, however, do not follow the literary tradition of the period in which it is set. Beginning in 1902 and moving towards the end of the First World War, the novel excludes the literary trend of that period particularly those practiced by the great writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Joseph Conrad and the like. Published in 1975, it develops its own style and technique. It is an ironical representation

of modern American history, and the mingling of factual and fictional characters allows Doctorow to associate the readers directly with the occurrences and traits of the period and the effects they had on the characters' lives.

7.7 Importance of the Text:

In the beginning of the novel Doctorow makes it clear that he shall be providing a comprehensive and an undistorted view of the historical happenings of the modern American scene. Doctorow takes up his subject matter from the period which just precedes his birth. It can be seen as a fine example of his social and historical awareness. The new century was marked by the arrival of significant changes in the fields of politics, economy, social structure, and culture. Patriotism was at its peak. Flags and firecrackers have been described as "accoutrements of patriotism." Doctorow has been successful not only in the description of the changes but in his remarkable way of presenting the effects that those changes had on individual lives. He mixes fact and fiction and allows the readers to consider the otherwise hidden aspects of history, thereby questioning the nature of historical truth. *Ragtime* ironically points out the darker side of an otherwise glorious and decorated period of America. Written in the period when the Vietnam War was coming to an end, he does not include the immediate social conditions of that period. He jumps backward to the dawn of a new century and chronologically treats that historical period till the end of the First World War.

This text gains prominence as a post-modern rendering of the modern American society. Its characters affect history and are in turn affected by it. Both real-life and the fictional characters play important roles in addressing the social changes which the new century offered. The characters are more types than individuals. The use of unnamed characters like Father, Mother, Little Girl, Tateh and the like shows that their troubles and experiences were universal and not limited to one family. The juxtaposition of the real lives of the famous personalities with the fictional characters opens up the scope for investigating the broader social and economical problems which America and its people faced. With a deeply humanistic attitude, Doctorow's text takes into account everything uncelebrated in American history. The treatment of the issues like immigration, industrialization, social discrimination, capitalist approach to life etc. brings into light the plight of the common

people. Unlike a general historical observation which concerns itself mainly with the powerful and the better sides of life, *Ragtime* considers the minorities and the exploited. His use of famous historical personalities act as a stark contrast to what the common public was experiencing at that period of time. Moreover, it provides the readers with a concrete context where one gets the opportunity to look upon the lives and actions of the characters with respect to their interaction with the society. More than a retelling of history, the novel is a complete picture of the then American society with all its flaws and shortcomings.

7.8 Summing Up:

By now you should be aware that *Ragtime* is the mirror of early 1900s of America. It is an ironical representation of the capitalist society of America. Facing immense shifts in the economy and politics, the demographics of the nation was rapidly changing. The hatred between the natives and immigrants; the unwelcoming gaze towards the new population; the social and racial discrimination against the African-Americans; the striving for success in a competitive economy; the concern for the poor and the downtrodden; the so-called interests of the rich for the under-privileged; the transformation of human labour to machinery efficiency, are the major areas treated by this novel. Doing so, it aims to clear the otherwise distorted images of American history. While reading the novel you should consider the context on which it is based as this unit aims to orient you with the individual-society relationships. It would also be beneficial for you if you go through the lives of the historical personalities appearing in the novel and compare that with Doctorow's representation.

Check Your Progress:

2. *Ragtime* is a political statement of the early twentieth century America. Do you agree? Justify your answer with proper references. (200 words)

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7.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

Ans 1. The novel begins in 1902 with the then American society as its backdrop. Set in the town of New Rochelle, New York it starts with the description of an upper class family which comprised of unnamed characters simply called as Father, Mother, Mother's Younger Brother, the Little Boy and the Grandfather. It takes into account the social and political conditions of the period and makes use of various historical figures in its settings. The historical characters like Henry Ford, J.P. Morgan and others enable the readers to understand their personalities and their response to the contemporary society. The juxtaposition of real figures with the fictional characters of the novel carry the narrative forward and provides a comprehensive view of their involvement with social and political works. His use of those historical characters reveals that Doctorow does not adhere

to the belief that history is a reliable field. The novel shows how history cannot be a fixed notion, rather is continuously rewritten and restructured. Doctorow uses fiction to speak about American history. The novel selects some important ideas, events and characters of early 20th century American history, and incorporates them in the fictional characters and settings created by him. This enables the novelist to expose the authenticity of documented history and allows the readers to consider alternative versions of history.

Space for Learner's Notes

Ans 2. Since *Ragtime* treats the history of America during the turn of the century, politics becomes inseparable from the textual settings, events and characters. The mention of ragtime music hints to the fact that though slavery had been long abolished, racial segregation and discrimination was still prevalent in the society. Ragtime music was a revolutionary form of music that gained popularity for its bold reaction against oppression. In the novel, Coalhouse Walker and Mother's Younger Brother take up revolution to fight against social injustices. The political aspects of Coalhouse and his protests against the government show his strict adherence to principles. The involvement of the political personalities like Booker T. Washington, Emma Goldman and others in the lives of the fictional characters enable Doctorow to put forward his views on the politics of America. Severe inequality prevailed in America on the basis of colour and race. The inclusion of the Jewish immigrant family in the novel enables Doctorow to highlight the political and social discrimination employed upon them. The competitive capitalist society failed to cast a sympathetic gaze upon those people. Hence, *Ragtime* becomes an ironical political statement of Doctorow which aims to expose the otherwise undocumented facts and events of that period of American history.

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