B.A. Third Year

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CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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MADHYA PRADESH BHOJ (OPEN) UNIVERSITY - BHOPAL

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   Professor
   IEHE, Bhopal

COURSE WRITERS

Deb Dulal Halder, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi

Units (1.0-1.1, 1.2, 1.3-1.3.4, 1.4-1.4.2, 1.5-1.9, 2.0-2.2, 2.3-2.3.2, 2.4-2.8, 3, 4, 5.0-5.1, 5.2-5.2.1, 5.2.2-5.2.3, 5.4-5.8)

Dr. Amita, Former Lecturer, IBRI College of Technology, Oman

Unit (5.3)

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• Website: www.vikaspublishing.com • Email: helpline@vikaspublishing.com

SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

Contemporary Literature

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UNIT-IV:	APJ Abdul Kalam	: "Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion" from *Ignited Minds* (Penguin Books)	**Unit-4:** A. P. J. Abdul Kalam and Amartya Sen **(Pages 99-119)**
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INTRODUCTION

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When we talk about contemporary literature, we are talking of all the literary works, which were produced after the First World War. This period saw major transformation in sensibilities from hopeful romantic fervour to despondent, existential and spiritual vacuum. The writers started breaking away from age-old traditions and started questioning the position of man in the grand universe. These writers shared a prevailing sense of disillusionment and mistrust towards institutions of power such as government and religion, and rejected the notion of absolute truths.

In the context of Indian English literature, these above-mentioned changes in sensibilities can be observed in Indian English writers, who were known for writing Indian English literature (IEL). It began with the works of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. It is also associated with the works of Indian diaspora, who are of Indian descent. These writers, in a sense, are responsible for bringing modern perceptions and thinking to India. However, they treated India and its issues by maintaining their distinct Indianness.

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

UNIT 1 ELIOT AND YEATS

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Structure

1.0 INTRODUCTION

'*Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold*
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world'

These two lines from W. B. Yeats' famous poem, *The Second Coming*, sums up the ethos and sensibilities of early twentieth century, making Yeats the true representative of the modernist writers. In the English canon of modernist literature, especially poetry, W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot play central roles as their poetry are most representative of the Modern Age. In this unit, four poems – two by Eliot (*The Hollow Men* and *Ash Wednesday*) and two by Yeats (*Fragments* and *Prayer for my Daughter*) will be studied critically so as to understand modernist poetry in detail. The unit will first introduce us to the concept of Modernist Poetry.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the life and times of T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats
- Describe the *The Hollow Men* and *Ash Wednesday* in a nutshell
- Critically comment on the poems *Fragments* and *Prayer for my Daughter*

1.2 MODERNISM

Modernism is an aesthetic movement of the early twentieth century, which looked at the world with a fresh perspective. Though there is a debate about the exact

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beginning of modernism, but when we talk of literary modernism we usually refer to the first half of the twentieth century. The writers like James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and poets like W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, W.H. Auden and others shaped the literary concerns of the age by portraying the spiritual and metaphysical vacuum created in the modern minds by various forces and events such as–industrialization, World War, etc.

Modernist writers had a new 'subject matter' for literature as they believed that their new way of looking at life required a new form, a new style and writing. Consequently, writers were more experimental, innovative and very individualistic in their writing. Therefore, they tried to do something pioneering in their writing. They were influenced by a number of factors:

- New ideas from the emerging fields of psychology (James Joyce in his novels *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegan's Wake*; Virginia Woolf with her 'Stream of Consciousness Technique' in her novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway,* D. H. Lawrence with his novel dealing with the theme of 'Oedipus complex' in his *Sons and Lovers*) and sociology (such as the working class background of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, where the class background of the hero has much to do with his psychology and artistic temperament). One of the main focuses of the modernist writers was to probe the 'unconscious' as done by Sigmund Freud. It was seen as one of the most significant aspect of our everyday existence.
- Turning away from teleological ways of thinking about time to a sense of time as discontinuous, overlapping, non-chronological in the way we experience it; a shift from linear time to 'duree' or psychological time. All the stream of consciousness novels, whether of Virginia Woolf or that of James Joyce deals with the psychological time.
- Anthropological studies of comparative religion became one of the subject matter of writing (there are numerous examples of such work, but one of the best known is that of T. S. Eliot's famous poem, *The Waste Land*; Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* also talks about inner illumination or enlightenment and compares it to Buddha).
- If the Victorian art was more inclined to portray the external reality (Realism), then the modernists attempted to reflect the inner turmoil, the inner reality of man. Therefore, there is less emphasis on art's reflection of external reality and a greater emphasis on art's reflection of the perceiving mind. It can be seen not only in fiction and poetry, but also in painting such as, the shift from 'representational' Victorian painting to Impressionism (for example, James Abbott McNeill Whistler's paintings); or Post-Impressionism (for example, Henri Matisse's paintings).
- The growing concern for feminist cause–the females were no longer passive consumers of the male literature but came to the forefront with the literature of their own. Moreover, they talked about the feminist causes and issues in detail to create awareness amongst people about the patriarchal victimization, oppression, suppression and silencing of the female voice. (Virginia Woolf, not only in her fictional works, but

also in her non-fictional writings such as *A Room of One's Own* or *Three Guineas* emphasized on all of these issues).

- Myth as 'collective unconscious' (Carl Jung) and the modernist preoccupation with myth (James Joyce and W.B. Yeats).
- The effect of the World War, imperialism and heavy industrialization on human psyche (T. S .Eliot, Wilfred Owen and Virginia Woolf).
- The drabness of everyday routine existence and metaphysical anxiety (T. S. Eliot, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett and others).
- A growing critique of British imperialism and the ideology of empire.
- The advent of mass democracy, the rise of mass communication and Fin-de-siècle ["end-of-the-century"] consciousness, etc.
- The replacement of a belief in absolute, knowable truth with a sense of relative, provisional truths (Einstein's works on relativity); an awareness of 'reality' as a constructed fiction.
- A focus on epistemological (how do we know what we know?) and linguistic concerns (how is the way we think inseparable from the forms in which we think?); a sense of the break-down of a shared linguistic community; a reaction against the dominance of rational, logical, 'patriarchal' discourse and its monopoly of power.

1.2.1 Literature in the Modern Age

'Modernism' generally refers to the broad aesthetic movement of the twentieth century, but 'modernity' refers to a set of philosophical, political, and ethical ideas, which provide the basis for the aesthetic aspect of modernism. 'Modernity' is older than 'modernism'; the label 'modern', first articulated in nineteenth-century sociology, was meant to distinguish the present era from the previous one, which was labelled 'antiquity'. Scholars have always debated when exactly the 'modern' period had begun and how to distinguish between what is modern and what is not modern. The modern period seems to be starting earlier and earlier every time historians look at it. But generally, the 'modern' era is associated with the European Enlightenment, which begins roughly in the middle of the eighteenth century. But for the present purpose, we will limit our discussion to the literature of the first few decades of the twentieth century, which the literary historians have termed as modernist era of literature.

The age was vastly influenced by psychoanalysis, behaviourism and determinism. The modernist approach to life produced scepticism, anti-authoritarianism, fatalism and insistence on the right to the unfettered enjoyment of the pleasure. Moreover, we perceive angst of everyday existence prevalent in many modern literary works. All these characteristics are noted in post-war literature in England, which has been characterized as nightmarish and ghoulish. The brutal nakedness and frankness of sex is exploited by various novelists and literary practitioners. D.H. Lawrence came directly under the influence of modern psychology. His novel, *Sons and Lovers*, is an illustration of what the psychologists call 'Oedipus Complex'. Lawrence tried to show the stifling influence of modern civilization and culture. James Joyce with his novels like *Portrait of an Artist as*

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a Young Man, Ulysses and *Finnegan's Wake* stormed the literary world. *Ulysses* was shocking and revealing in its realism. In it, Joyce revealed the life of his hero, Stephen Dedalus, for twenty-four hours in Dublin. However, within these twenty four hours we could understand the growth in Stephen Dedalus's character in the drab city of Dublin as well as be confronted with the modernist ethos. It is thought to be a jarring medley of irrelevant speeches, dreams and unconscious desires.

The other novelist who experimented on a similar line was Virginia Woolf. Her fiction is known to use the technique of stream of consciousness. She reveals in her novel the strange, mysterious and gripping life of the unconscious mind. According to her, nothing that happens to an individual is insignificant. It has its value and importance in the overall schemes of things. In her novels, she endeavours to put everything in. A sneeze, an inadvertent cough, scratching of the toe, snapping of the fingers, biting of the nail–all these apparently insignificant acts are pregnant with hidden meaning. She formulated the theory of stream-of-consciousness in her essay, 'Modern Fiction' (1921). In it, she asserts: 'Examine for a moment an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impressions–trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel.' Life in her novels is presented as a series of separate moments and not as a continuous flow. In this way, we note that Freudian psychology has not only changed the themes and the content of modern fiction, it has changed the form and technique of the novel. As far as content is concerned, we find that the mental state or life finds a prominent place in the modern novel. Moreover, we find that there is an absence of memorable and outstanding characters in modern fiction. The hero in the sense of the Victorian Age is dead and gone. Psychological treatment requires a probing beneath the surface. It has proved that the so-called heroes are nothing but a bundle of complexes. Freud paved the way for the stream-of-consciousness novel, internal monologue, the headline style, symbolism, impressionism and surrealism.

English poetry also shows evidence of significant changes in the modern era. The disillusionment caused by the war found expression in the works of T.S. Eliot in the form of ghoulish and nightmarish atmosphere. T.S. Eliot is an idol-breaker. The exploration of 'the boredom, and the horror, and the glory' was extended in *The Waste Land*, which was published when Eliot was thirty-four. T.S. Eliot had tried to overcome the 'schism in the soul' in his remarkable poem, *Four Quartets*. He had found a solution for the modern crisis, but it is highly personal solution like that of Yeats in his later poems.

W.H. Auden had expressed his remorse and despondence regarding the modern tradition, conventions and institutions. In his later works like *Ends and Means* and *Brave New World Revisited*, Aldous Huxley has elaborated mystical experiences, which can give ever-lasting and smoothing effect to the disillusioned West. He has adopted the principle of non-attachment formulated by the Lord Buddha. William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), like so many of his contemporaries, acutely conscious of the spiritual barrenness of his age, and his whole artistic career was best seen trying to escape from the sordid materialism, and later to formulate a new positive ideal which would supply his spiritual needs. As one of the most difficult of modern poets, his preoccupation with the attempt to formulate a philosophical system, which could replace the scientific materialism of his age, underlies most of his later verse. It is doubtful whether he ever succeeded in

crystallizing a completely systematized philosophy and his most comprehensive exposition of his ideas. *A Vision* (1925) is in many places very obscure. Yeats' philosophy is often expressed though a carefully devised system of symbols, some purely private, others drawn from his study of philosophy or his reading of the works of the French symbolists, or of earlier symbolical poets, particularly Blake and Shelley.

The disillusionment and despair found their supreme expression in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and *The Hollow Men* (1925). A new awareness of sociological factors enabled the poets of this period to perceive a disintegrating culture with no positive values to replace it. There was need for a new world, for a new outlook on life. As yet, a political answer to this problem had not penetrated into poetry to any extent. The picture of the inter-war years is, then, one of continued uncertainty and experiment in an age well described in the title of Auden's collection, *The Age of Anxiety*, which was not, however, published until 1948. There was still no strongly established poetic tradition to compare in stability with that of Victorian age, but at least the inter-war poets had passed through the despair of the middle twenties and had produced something like a constructive approach to life. In such an age, it is natural to find a great proportion of didactic verse, but even in the work of those poets who devoted themselves most wholeheartedly to finding a solution to the problems of a perplexed generation, we find lyric poetry of great intrinsic value.

T. S. Eliot's first volume of verse, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), portrays in contemptuous and often witty ironical satire, the boredom, emptiness, and pessimism of its own day. The poet tries to plumb the less savoury depths of contemporary life in a series of sordid episodes. The irregularities of rhyme scheme and line length in his verse form, the pressure of his condensed and often vividly contrasted images, the skilful use of rhythmic variations, and the restrained power of his style distinguished Eliot as a gifted and original artist. *The Waste Land* (1922) made a tremendous impact on the post-war generation, and is considered one of the most important documents of its age. The poem is difficult to understand in detail, but its general aim is clear. Based on the legend of the Fisher King in the Arthurian cycle, it presents modern London as an arid, waste land. The poem is built around the symbols of drought and flood, representing death and rebirth, and this fundamental idea is referred to throughout the poem.

Other symbols in the poem are, however, not capable of precise explanation. In a series of disconcertingly vivid impressions, the poem progresses by rather abrupt transitions through five movements – 'The Burial of the Dead', 'The Game of Chess', 'The Fire Sermon', 'Death by Water', and 'What the Thunder Said'. The figure of Tiresias appears throughout the poem, whose presence helps to give the work unity. Its real unity, however, is one of emotional atmosphere. The boredom of his earlier poetry gives way to a mood of terror in face of an outworn and disintegrating civilization, a terror deeply felt even when hidden beneath the surface irony of some parts of the poem. The style shows a typical comprehension of clearly visualized, often metaphysical imagery, a vocabulary essentially modern and a subtle, suggestive use of the rhythms of ordinary speech. One of its greatest difficulties lies in the numerous allusions to out-of-the-way writers; the notes which Eliot himself provided are often inadequate. *Poems* 1909–1925 adds only *The*

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Hollow Men to his earlier work. The five movements of this short poem again treat the hopelessness and emptiness of modern life.

W.H. Auden, the leader of the poets of the thirties, is of considerable importance. He was influenced by Hopkins and Eliot, and like the latter, he was deeply aware of the hollowness of the disintegrating post-war civilization. A spokesman of the masses, which he studied with warm understanding and deep insight, Auden showed a faith in violent social revolution as a means to a better order. His latest poems, however, reveal a new note of mysticism in his approach to human problems. He has attempted, with considerable success, to prevent poetry from becoming exclusively 'highbrow,' and has found his subjects among the everyday, often sordid, realities of a diseased social order.

Auden is profoundly conscious of sex and its importance in human life. His approach to life is that of an intellectual. He followed Eliot partially due to his inclination towards the poetry of the metaphysical school. Technically, Auden is an artist of great virtuosity, a ceaseless experimenter in verse form, with a fine ear for the rhythm and music of words. He has been described as the 'most accomplished technician now writing poetry in English' by Stephen Spender. Essentially modern in tone, he has a wide variety of styles; often he writes with a noisy jazziness and gaiety, often in a cynically satirical vein, and on occasion he can be 'tough'. He shows joy in elliptical thought and closely packed imagery, and if his proletarianism has sometimes led him into flaws of taste, it has also led him to exploit more fully than any of his predecessors the richness and vigour of everyday idiom and vocabulary.

Stephen Spender was deeply aware of the suffering and unhappiness of the inter-war period, and like Auden, he pinned his hopes for future on left-wing political theories. The most introspective of the poets of his school, he approaches the problems of the world through his own individual experience, and in his later poetry has shown a tendency to look more and more within himself for the subject of his poems. The majority of his poems are short lyrics, and he is at his best when shaking off his political heroics, he gives rein to his very considerable lyrical gifts. It is to be regretted that he has not given fuller play to this lyrical faculty. Spender combines a subtlety of the latter. In his early poetry, it is obvious that he is fully aware of the appeal of the modern age and its machinery, but his is a sensuous imagination and he appeals more often to the feelings than the intellect. Spender shows himself to be an artist of fine sensibilities and considerable technical accomplishment. His poetry is to be found in *Poems* (1933*), The Still Centre* (1939), *Ruins and Visions* (1942), *Poems of Dedication* (1946) and *The Edge of Being* (1949).

This brief survey of modern tendencies supports the belief that it was one of the supremely important revolutionary periods of English poetry. A more settled world, a more stable society would have doubtlessly helped poets to derive new forms of surprising power and resilience with which they can shape for us the thoughts and emotions coming, still in a puzzling way, from the rapidly expanding world of the mind and soul. One may also add a new vitality, for modern poetry has the rhythm of life its throb of joy, its hush of pain, and its infinity of experience.

The modern poet does not take you on a perpetual joy-flight into the regions of romance.

The poems of the first half of the twentieth century broke away from the romantic tendencies of the earlier period and presented life in its darkest essence the modernist anxieties and worries. The poets such as T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats reached the greatest heights that the modernist poetry could achieve, which brought to the fore the anxieties of the age and tries to provide a just representation of the modern man. T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* is thought to be the greatest of the modernist poetry for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize. In the following section of this unit you will come across some of the significant characteristics of the modernist poems.

Modernist Poetry can be talked about as an experiment in the poetry. The poets reacted against the romantic tendencies of the earlier age and tried to write poetry in an objective fashion. For example, T. S. Eliot in many of his critical writings emphasizes the role of 'impersonality of the poet' and how the Wordsworthian tradition of 'outpouring of emotions' recollected in tranquillity needs to be overthrown to write poems, where objectivity is the main criteria. Moreover, T. S. Eliot in his essay, 'Tradition and Individual Talent', emphasized on the role of 'tradition' in writing poetry.

Check Your Progress

1. Name the important writers who shaped the modernist age.
2. What does T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock and Other Observations* portray?

1.3 T.S. ELIOT

Thomas Stearns Eliot has been a popular name in English poetry since the early 1920s. He had ruled the age in which he lived with absolute authority. The twentieth century cannot be signalled by a single voice or authority. Still, T.S. Eliot might be considered as its best spokesperson in English literature, probably more than any other literary figure. Amongst the post-war poets, playwrights as well as critics, who have enjoyed honour and prestige, Eliot can be seen as a towering celebrity. He alone could face and enjoy the life of austere and harsh realities. He would never sit back and ignore the complicated and confusing problems being faced by people of his time. He always wanted to come forward as one of us and give a first-hand report on the difficult issues of the age.

As a poet, Eliot drew from many different sources to gather his material. He was deeply influenced by some famous personalities of the past and of the modern scene. Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Ben Jonson, Arnold, etc., in general, and Donne and the metaphysical poets, particularly, added up in shaping Eliot's mind. Many French symbolists such as Laforgue and Gautier, German philosophers such as Hegel, Meinong and Bradley and the Indian religions and philosophies also influenced him. By accepting the influences so wide and varied in nature, Eliot significantly increased his knowledge and augmented his susceptibility. This is also why he is a universal poet.

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Eliot was a versatile genius. He was a very talented man. His appeal was not just limited to the English or to the European tradition. Instead, he was a rather universal poet. Therefore, it might be correct to say that Eliot was aware of a vastly rich tradition that was not just English or European, but had a wider application. He derives knowledge not just from the best that is known and thought in the Bible, or Christian theology, but also from Buddhism and Hinduism and many other religions. That is the reason why Eliot's outlook was neither just catholic, nor insular and neither national; his outlook was international to all tribes and peoples. For him creed and caste did not matter; he was only concerned with the best. This also explains another stand taken by him, that of a classicist in literature.

T.S. Eliot was born in 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri (the USA). His family was of Devonshire origin, traditionally interested in trade and commerce and academics. He was an undergraduate at Harvard during 1906–1909. Here, he came under the influence of the symbolists and Laforgue. During 1909–1910 he was a graduate student at Harvard and completed his early poems, including *Portrait of a Lady* and began *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. In the years 1910 and 1911 he went to France and Germany and spent a year at Oxford reading Greek philosophy. Again he was back to Harvard University as a graduate student. It is then that he started work on the philosophy of Francis Herbert Bradley, whose *Appearance and Reality* influenced him a lot. During 1914–1915 he resumed his study in Germany, which was cut off by the First World War. After this, he took his residence at Oxford, and worked on some short satiric poems. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* was published in Chicago in June 1915 and his marriage to Vivienne Haigh-Wood took place in July 1915.

After a brief experience of teaching at Highgate School, Eliot entered business in 1916. He also completed his thesis in that year. Then he spent eight years as an employee of Lloyd's Bank. He took up various reviewing and editorial assignments. During 1917–1920 he wrote many poems in quatrains after the French fashion. *Gerontion* deserves special mention in this connection. He was an assistant editor of *The Egoist* (1917–1919) and also published a collection of poems and *The Sacred Wood* in 1920.

Eliot was the London correspondent for *The Deal* during 1921–1922 and *La-Nouvelle Revue Trancaise* during 1922–1923. In October 1923, he began his career as an editor of *The Criterion*. His epoch-making poem, *The Waste Land*, appeared in public in 1922. It is a much discussed poem with five movements. In it, the poet has displayed fears, doubts and distrust of the post-war generation. The poem won for him the Dial Award. In 1925, his many poems appeared which included *The Hollow Men* that was written in the spirit of *The Waste land*.

During 1926–1927 came out his satiric pieces 'Fragment of a Prologue' and 'Fragment of an Agon'. In 1927, Eliot declared himself to be an Anglo-Catholic and assumed British citizenship. The year 1934 saw a huge change in the poet's attitude. He had now sided with the poetic drama, which he renovated and energized during the later years of his life. Eliot's first work in this direction was *The Rock* (1934). Since then a wave of publications flooded the dramatic field. *Murder in the Cathedral* appeared in 1935. *The Family Reunion* in 1939 was

a stage failure, but the dramatist remained unshaken. During the years 1940–1942 appeared *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages* and *Little Gidding.* These three and *Burnt Norton* were combined together to form *Four Quartets* (1943).

The year 1947 brought a disaster for Eliot. His first wife died after a long illness. In 1948, he wrote *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*. Till now he had been honoured by his fellow poets, writers, literary associations and clubs on many occasions. Among the many literary honours bestowed upon him, the main ones include the following:

- Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard (1932–1933)
- Classical Association
- Nobel Prize for Literature (1948)
- Order of Merit (1948)

He also received honorary degrees from twelve universities in Europe as well as America.

T.S. Eliot wrote *The Cocktail Party* in 1950, *The Confidential Clerk* in 1955 and *The Elder Statesman* in 1959. After *Four Quartets*, poetry almost remained untouched by him, though poetic element was indisputably retained in all his dramas. Eliot's chaotic literary life came to an end on January 4, 1965, and the news of his death was received by the world with a sense of deep loss and sorrow.

With the passing away of T.S. Eliot, an age of Masters of English literature got over. However, he will be forever remembered by people.

1.3.1 Eliot's Contribution towards English Poetry

As a poet, Eliot belongs to the Classical tradition. He has nothing to do with the Romantic excesses and 'purple patches'. A classicist remains crystal clear and controlled in his expression, and his guiding force is reason. He exalts head over heart, objectivity over subjectivity and reason over emotion. He owes allegiance to an external authority, like that of Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Homer, Virgil or the three great tragedians of Greek literature, whereas a Romantic listens to his own 'inner voice'. No one can make such a threadbare distinction between 'classicism' and 'Romanticism' as R.A. Scott–James has done in his brilliant book, *The Making of Literature* (1928).

Form is the first distinctive element in classicism, and it helps in increasing the beauty of the outwards appearance, with its attributes towards symmetry, balance, order, proportion and reserve. As opposed to this, the romantic tends to focus on the spirit behind the form. Spirit does not imply the formless. It implies the freedom that is not content with any one form, but experiments and expresses itself in different ways as the spirit dictates. The former tends to emphasize the 'this – worldliness' of the beauty that we know; the latter, it's 'other – worldliness'…. While the form always seeks a mean; the spirit seeks an extremity.

Form satisfies the Classic whereas the spirit attracts the Romantic. Form appeals to tradition while the spirit demands the novel. On the one side you may range the virtues and defects that go with the notion of fitness, propriety, measure, restraint, conservatism, authority, calm, experience, comeliness on the other, those

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that are suggested by excitement, energy, restlessness, spirituality, curiosity, troubles, progress, liberty, experiment and provocativeness.

Eliot has paid utmost attention to verbal precision, which demands a conscious choice of words and phrases and a thoughtful construction of sentences. The verbal precision needs the utmost care in making use of words and the placing of words flawlessly. Eliot has hinted at it in the following lines:

Where every word is at home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentations,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together)
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph.

(Little Gidding-Four Quartets).

The poet's emphasis here is on verbal precision, which must not give the impression of stiffness or inaccuracy.

Eliot's search for precision and accuracy makes room for clarity and propriety in poetry. You have already seen that in Eliot's concept of poetry—which is the classical concept—the poet is a mere medium of expression. Eliot has also given his views about the role of emotion and the role of thought in the poetic process.

Eliot emphasizes the role of emotion in poetry. But how should it be expressed? It cannot be simply transmitted from the mind of the poet to the mind of the reader. It has to turn itself into something concrete—the picture of a person, place or thing—in order to convey effectively the same emotion in the reader.

Eliot makes use of the phrase 'objective correlative' in his famous essay, 'Hamlet and His problems'. He clarifies how an emotion can be best expressed through poetry. He remarks that:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative' in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events that shall be the formula of that emotion such that even the external facts that must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion immediately evoked.

In Eliot's view, Shakespeare was though a consummate artist in his plays; he failed in finding an 'objective correlative' to express the tortuous emotions of Hamlet. Eliot thinks that Shakespeare has superbly succeeded conveying the raging malady in Lady Macbeth's mind by making her repeat the past actions in the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*.

Critics like Eliseo and Vincent Buckley have found fault with Eliot's theory of objective correlative for conveying emotion in poetry. They say that Eliot develops the formula of an objective correlative in order to avoid a direct utterance of emotion, but he makes the issue difficult by praising Dante for his view of life and Shakespeare for his emotional maturity.

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What Eliot is concerned with is the expression of emotion in an objective way. He is opposed to the direct expression of emotion, and hence he propounds the theory of 'objective correlative'. He is concerned with art–emotion, not with raw emotion that bursts forth spontaneously. Eliot also gives his mind to the question of the role of 'thought' in poetry. The poet confronts a thought in the same way as you confront a man; he accepts or rejects it to build his artifice, to suit his poetic purpose. What comes to us is the semblance of thought, not thought at first hand, but the result of his conscious selection or rejection.

According to Eliot, the poet who thinks is merely the poet who can express 'the emotional equivalent of thought'. Thus, what Eliot means by thought is its 'emotional equivalent'. Like 'significant emotion' serving the poetic purpose, 'significant thought' (or 'art – thought') is the objective of Eliot as a poet. If a distinction could be drawn between 'imaginal thinking' and 'conceptual thinking,' you can say that the former is the privilege of a poet while the latter is that of a philosopher or scientist. In imaginable thinking, the poet expresses his ideas in a state of illumined consciousness.

Further, Eliot maintains that a synchronization of emotion and thought affects the poetic sensibility. In his well-known essay, 'The Metaphysical Poets', Eliot is clutched with this matter. In this essay, he speaks of the dissociation of sensibility as well as of the unification of sensibility. By the latter phrase Eliot means 'a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling'. When the unification of sensibility is found, as in the poetry of Chapman and Donne, the result is good poetry. Then, thought is transformed into feeling to steal its way into the reader's heart. It is the union of thought and feeling that constitutes poetic sensibility. But when the poet's thought is unable to transform itself into feeling, the result is the dissociation of sensibility. For good poetry, it is essential that thought must issue forth as sensation. According to Eliot, the Victorian poets Tennyson and Browning do not pass this test, as 'they think, but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose'. The poet's function is not to versify ideas but to convert them into sensations.

As Eliot imagines susceptibility, it is the faculty that enables a poet to respond to diverse experiences in a unified manner. In its function, it is close to Coleridge's concept of 'Secondary Imagination', which also gives form to the shrubby undergrowth of experiences in life. The noted critic, F.W. Bateson, subjects Eliot's concept of sensibility to a strict inspection. He opines that Eliot's concept of sensibility is a synonym for sensation, and if it is so how can it contain the element of thought? He sees a paradox in Eliot's concept of sensibility.

It would be, perhaps, in pace to draw a distinction between 'sensibility' and 'imagination'. For one thing, the faculty that shapes experience is sensibility and not imagination. Eliot's sensibility is a unifying faculty for disparate experiences. For Coleridge, imagination is a reconciling agent aiming at 'recreation' after dissolving, diffusing and dissipating the material at hand. Imagination does not allow a place to memory that plays a vital role in Eliot's poetry. Eliot speaks of 'mixing memory and desire' in the beginning of *The Waste Land*.

Eliot's poetic technique is compatible with the spirit of his time. Like the time itself, his technique is bare and stark, direct and unadorned. Eliot was highly

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impressed by the technical discoveries of John Donne. He thought that Donne's greatest achievement lay in his ability to convey 'his genuine whole of tangled feelings'. Like Donne and his school of poets, Eliot aimed at the 'alliance of levity and seriousness.' The use of irregular rhyme, which was to Eliot's taste, was actually inspired by Donne. Eliot largely used free verse in his practice, instead of conventional metric verse; his versification is essentially 'a disturbance of the conventional'. His technique is, for the most part, allusive and suggestive. This sort of technique suits a poet of scholarly temperament.

One can easily understand it when one keeps in mind the vast number of allusions and references used by Eliot in *The Waste Land*. No fewer than thirty five authors and six foreign languages have been alluded to or used by him in this difficult poem. Such a technique lends obscurity and complexity to the poem. According to Eliot, this kind of technique suits the temper of the age. In his brilliant essay on the metaphysical poets, Eliot remarks that 'Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity', and he tailors his technique to catch up this great variety and complexity of the modern age. The employment of apt images and suggestive symbols by Eliot in his poetry consolidates his technique to a great extent. Eliot had learnt a good deal from the French symbolists, and shaped his symbolist and allusive technique under their irresistible influence.

1.3.2 Themes, Motifs and Symbols in Eliot's Poetry

Eliot is a representative poet of the twentieth century and hence he has voiced forcefully the moral and spiritual degradation of modern man, the loss of human values and the prevalence of chaos, confusion and tension in the human world. His poetry is an expression of the age in which he lived. It does not take recourse to the past or the medieval age. It tries to feel the pulse of man and articulate his problems and tensions in a touching way.

A critic has rightly pointed out that Eliot's early poetry is the poetry of suffering and tension. As you know, he began his poetic career with *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, and this poem brings to the fore the dilemma and the pangs of a middle aged man in the presence of beautiful movement. The question that haunts him incessantly is: 'Do I dare disturb the universe?' Similarly, the poem *Portrait of a Lady* highlights the same kind of dilemma and sense of futility in the life of a lady advancing in years 'I shall sit here, serving tea to friends.' In fact, all the protagonists of Eliot-Prufrock, the Lady, Gerontion, Mr. Apollinax, Tiresias, etc. are great sufferers in the drama of life.

In his early poetry, Eliot portrays persons and scenes full of disillusionment, repulsion and horror. His awareness of 'the universe panorama of futility and anarchy' in the human world is quite acute and intense. The imagery of the poems prior to *The Waste Land* is modern, urban and even cosmopolitan and it habitually tends to highlight the boredom of modern urban life. The boredom of life, even the meaninglessness of existence, may be marked in the following extract from *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*:

So the hand of the child, automatic,

Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was summering along the quay.

I could see nothing behind that child's eye.

Here, you have a glimpse of the utter emptiness and the lack of fulfilment in the child life. A grown-up man's or woman's life is no better in any way. The life of the middle-aged lady is painted as a follows:

And I must borrow every changing shape To find expression… dance, dance Life a dancing bear, Cry life a parrot, chatter like an ape. Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance

(Portrait of a Lady)

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Clearly, her life is meaningless and no better than that of an animal. Prufrock is also faced with 'the overwhelming question' of seeking meaning in life. Gerontion, an old man, is also preoccupied with a sense of loss and nostalgia, of failure and frustration:

Here I am, an old man in a dry month, Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.

The 'sign' of Christ given in the poem is not taken by man. With *Gerontion* onwards, Eliot's poems deal with the depths of human depravity. In these poems, animal images become frequent, emphasizing thereby the bestiality and immorality of man. There is Princess Volupine, whose name suggests both a consuming wolf and a voluptuary. There is Bleistein, like some creature from a primitive swamp; there is Sweeney, the 'Apeneck', who is 'clawing' at the pillow slip', while a cosmopolitan woman associated with him is–

Rachel nee Rabinovitch

Tears at the grapes with murderous paws.

(*Sweeney among the Nightingales*)

In *Whispers of Immortality*, Grishkin is seen in a drawing soon, distilling a rank 'feline smell'. *The Waste Land* (1922) employs the theme of 'the divitalization of human civilization' and 'the destabilization of human society'. Critics like F.R. Leavis and Paul Elmer More think that the poem begins with a description of a cruel season and a dead land, and that it ends on a chaotic note. But these critics have not been able to grasp the full implication of the Sanskrit words properly. The poem is highly suggestive of the loss of spirituality in the modern world; that is why London is called an 'unreal city' and the London Bridge is depicted as 'falling down'. The poem has a mythical structure.

The Fisher King of the Grail legend suffers from a mysterious sickness, as a result of which the land he rules over becomes a waste land and suffers from infertility. This infertility can be healed and removed by the Deliverer. The subject matter concerns the entire humanity, though the focus is on modern London. The overall mood of the poet is one of despair and not of excitement over the potential dawn of a better future. *The Hollow Men* continues the mood and ironic vision of *The Waste Land*. It is replete with sardonic tone and pessimism. The hollow men are the empty or stuffed men, with no bright hope. The poet's vision comes out vividly in the following lines:

This is the way the world ends

Not with a bang but a whimper.

Up to *The Hollow Men* the note of suffering and pessimism is predominant, but after this poem the Christian hope returns to the poet. *The Ariel* poems definitely mark the break, and the dark vision of the poet yields place to a brighter vision.

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The Ariel poems consist of *Journey of the Magi*, *A Song for Simeon*, *Animula* and *Marina*. These poems make use of the religious theme connected with the life of Christ. The Magi travel a long way to see the infant Christ. The narrator, who is one of the Magi, is sure that he has seen the saviour. In *A Song for Simeon*, Simeon also has the impression of having seen the saviour, but he feels that he is not to be redeemed. *Animula* is somewhat gloomy in outlook. It paints a process of degeneration–from innocence to irresolution and selfishness and then to death. This poem asserts that the new life after death is the gift of Christ. The poet is acutely conscious of time here. The fourth of the Ariel poems, *Marima*, is based on the reunion of Pericles with his daughter and subtly shows the graceful life leading to salvation through the intervention of Christ. Thus, it can be noticed that Eliot's poetry written since 1927 breathes in fresh air of religious certainty and spiritual discipline. The poem *Ash Wednesday* (1930) is precisely steeped in spiritual atmosphere of self–abnegation. The earlier atmosphere of chaos and confusion, doubt and distrust, has now disappeared. By this time, the poet has achieved a new religion and a new hope for the salvation of man.

Four Quartets (1943), which is a bunch of four poems–*Burnt Norton*, *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages* and *Little Gidding*–is the summit of religious meditation and eventual salvation. The poem combines in its texture the deep reflections on time and eternity, word, speech and silence, attachment and detachment, love, human and divine etc. It achieves a contemplative depth that English poetry has hardly ever witnessed.

Eliot has also written some poems on the political theme. The different themes have surprised many of Eliot's readers, as they deviate from the mainstream of his poetry of the two fragments; the first one exalts the hero of the triumphal march at the expense of the admiring crowds. The second one mocks at the very democratic system. Eliot had announced in 1927 that he was a royalist in politics, and hence his anti-democratic stance should be taken as deliberate and purposive.

The themes mentioned above are all related to human life. Eliot is also a poet of nature, though his treatment of Nature is neither Wordsworthian nor Shelleyan. To him, nature is the bare phenomenon of the human world, as it was to Pope in the eighteenth century. Man is the supreme consideration in Eliot's scheme of things. Eliot describes natural beauties in relation to the urban surroundings rather than to rural countryside. He is concerned with the civilized rather than with the wild aspects of natural beauties. No doubt, he is a poet of towns and cities and of crowds to be seen there. Nature is nothing more to him than a scenery, a mere phenomenon, an object for sensual and concrete imagery–an evening 'spread out against the sky' and an afternoon 'grey and smoky'.

Nature is neither spiritual, nor ethical or metaphysical entity. She lacks any order or plan, which she had in store. Nature contains no 'healing balm' for Eliot; neither does she have a plan or design for man's development. She is no longer a shelter or solace for the afflicted mind, as it is now controlled by the rational man. This idea is clearly ventilated in the following lines of *The Dry Salvages (Four Quartets)*:

I do not know much about Gods, but I think that the river Is a strong
brown God – sullen, untamed and intractable Patient to some degree….

The problem once solved, the brown God is almost forgotten By the dwellers in the cities – ever….

Thus, nature is harnessed to serve the utilitarian ends of man. In fact, Eliot was so much preoccupied with the problems of life, death, of man's moral and spiritual degradation, of the intersection of tirelessness with time, of God and the Universe, that he had hardly any time to get interested in natural descriptions, in some of his poems, Eliot uses the garden–scene (or, simply the garden) to symbolize the moment/place of illumination. According to a scholar, a formal garden is an admirable symbol for man's attempt to impose a pattern on his experience and to discipline nature. Eliot's treatment of nature is quite in keeping with his classical leanings.

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Motifs and fragmentation

Eliot's poems employ fragmentation and are meant to display the disorganized chaotic lives in the modern times as well as to show contrast among literary texts. According to Eliot, humanity was jolted into adopting this disjointed consciousness as a direct result of World War I and due to the British Empire's losing its earlier power.

Eliot formed brilliant poetry out of fragments of dialogue, imagery, intellectual ideas, words from other languages and formal styles and tones. For Eliot, this kind of a collage represented humanity's hurt psyche and the existentialism in the modern times by the sheer potency of its sensual impact. Critics consider the following line from The Waste Land as the representative of Eliot's poetic work: 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins.' Almost each phrase in The Waste Land is adopted from an existing literary text. For many of these phrases, Eliot has written long footnotes in order to both explain references and to encourage the reader to research deeper into his sources.

Another technique that Eliot uses is that he has used only portions, rather than entire lines or stanzas. These fragments serve to emphasize recurring themes and images in the literary tradition, and canonize his notions about the current state of human beings along the range of history.

Myths and religious references

Reading Eliot's poetry is like shining a light into the extent of his enormous knowledge of myth, religious ritual, academic works and key books in the literary tradition. Almost all poems are full of references to both recognized and largely unknown texts, which also means that the reader can increase his personal wealth of knowledge through Eliot's poetry. *The Waste Land* is similarly embellished with the role of religious symbols and myths. One peculiar feature of his *Waste Land* is frequent references to ancient fertility rituals, where the myth is that the fertility of the land was directly dependent on the health of the Fisher King. The King was wounded and could only be healed by sacrificing an effigy. Interestingly, the Fisher King is linked to the Holy Grail legends, in which a knight is on a crusade to find the grail, which is the only thing that can heal the land. In the end, however, ritual is unable to heal the wasteland, and Eliot brings forth other religious options, such as Hindu chants, Buddhist speeches and pagan ceremonies. In the poems written towards the end of his literary career, images are almost exclusively

from Christianity, such as the echoes of the Lord's Prayer in *The Hollow Men* and the recounting of the story of the wise men in *Journey of the Magi* (1927).

1.3.3 *The Hollow Men*

NOTES

Mistah Kurtz-he dead
A penny for the Old Guy

I

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us-if at all-not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

II

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
In death's dream kingdom
These do not appear:
There, the eyes are
Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices are
In the wind's singing
More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star.

Let me be no nearer
In death's dream kingdom
Let me also wear

Such deliberate disguises
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
In a field
Behaving as the wind behaves
No nearer-

Not that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom

III

This is the dead land
This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.

Is it like this
In death's other kingdom
Waking alone
At the hour when we are
Trembling with tenderness
Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.

IV

The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places
We grope together
And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men.

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V

Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
At five o'clock in the morning.

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow
Life is very long

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom

For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

Summary and critical analysis

The poem, *The Hollow Men*, was written in 1925. Like many of Eliot's poems, it deals with the fragmentary post–World War I Europe under the Treaty of Versailles, the problem with being too hopeful, and his own failed marriage. The poem is divided into five parts; its last four lines are 'probably the most quoted lines of any 20th-century poet writing in English'. The poem starts with two epigraphs–

(a) Mistah Kurtz –he dead.

(b) A penny for the Old Guy.

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'Mistah Kurtz –he dead' is a reference to Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness,* which portrays the hollowness of western man as he endeavours to ascertain his superiority over the black Africans. Mister Kurtz, a European, lacks a soul and when he figures that out just before his death, he could just shout 'The horror! The horror!' The second epigraph refers to England's November 5th tradition of Guy Fawkes Day. In 1605, Guy Fawkes unsuccessfully tried to blow up the Parliament building. Eliot's quote *'A penny for the Old Guy'* is called out on Guy Fawkes Day by children who are attempting to buy fireworks in order to burn straw figures of Fawkes. In the two references in the Epigraph, Eliot presents two different types of 'hollow/stuffed men´–One who lacks a soul (Mister Kurtz) and one who lacks a real body (Guy Fawkes dummy), representing both physical and spiritual emptiness.

'We are the hollow men, we are the stuffed men'–These lines in the beginning of the poem indicate a contradiction that surprises us. When he comes to the line '*Headpiece filed with straw*', we realize that it is because the brains of the hollow men are filled with straw and therefore, they are hollow as well as stuffed. This kind of use of oxymoron in the beginning of the poem makes the poem very poignant with meaning. As these men are hollow, therefore, their voices, when they whisper together are '*quiet and meaningless*'. When the hollow men in their leaning–praying whisper together, in a group, their voices have no sense, they don't even exist. In lines 8-10, the voices are compared with '*wind in dry grass or rat's feet over broken glass in our dry cellar'*. This comparison greatly talks about the `meaninglessness´ of the voices. The state of the hollow men are such that they are: '*Shape without form, shade without color*' as well as '*Paralyzed force, gesture without motion*'. In such a state of meaninglessness, these hollow men are existing and therefore, they say that they have '*crossed with direct eyes, to death's other kingdom'*. There is reference to Dante's *Inferno* here, as the hollow men are saying that they haven't been able to pass similar to the people in *Inferno,* as they have neither committed any sin nor done something which will achieve them grace.

In the next part of the poem, Eliot uses the symbol of the 'eye' which dares not even meet in the dreams as the hollow men are souls, who have achieved a state of existence, where they live with a sense of horror of their own existence as they are devoid of any spiritual containment. The spiritual vacuity of the modern existence has made the modern men 'hollow' and directionless; these people do not know where to proceed in life. They are, like all modern man, devoid of any meaningful sensibilities which is worthy enough to make them take their life seriously. One needs to understand here that Eliot started his poetic journey through his portrayal of iconic modern man Prufrock in the famous poem, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. The passivity and meaningless of Prufrockean existence found expression, when the modern man found out that they live in a war-torn, spiritually dry and psychologically debilitating state, where they have no other hope but waiting for 'humanity' to awake in them. They are like those souls who have even lost their capacity of 'being human' and till humanness finds expression in their souls through

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some kind of spiritual upliftment, they are doomed into a life of meaninglessness. In the poem, *The Hollow Men*, it is the many Prufrocks who have come together and even their little society is not able to provide each other with the necessary impetus and motivation so as to pursue their life in a meaningful way. In such a state, they are directionless souls who are living in a kind of horror of the modern existence, where their sense of living has been marred by their sense of purposelessness.

'*There, the eyes are sunlight on a broken column'*–very coherently presents the fragmentary quality of their life as when sunlight falls on a broken column, then instead of giving light in a particular direction, it goes in all directions leading to them being 'directionless'. In such a situation, they can nothing be but '*paralysed force*'– a force, they are, but not having enough impetus to make any worthwhile changes in their own lives and to the civilization. The image of the '*fading star*' signifies that the light of spirituality has faded from their lives and they are therefore living in a state, in which they are living in '*death's dream kingdom*'. But in the twilight, when the star is fading, we know that there is a chance of a new day coming into the horizon very soon. When changes happen, it is bound to be so that it will lead to something positive at some point of time or the other. The hollow men may be going through a dark phase in their lives at the present, but at the same time, they are also sure that this time of darkness will lead into a new dawn and when the time comes, they will again be spiritually illuminated and their lives will again achieve significance.

The Hollow men, therefore, just want to spend or kill the time in their present state as a '*paralysed force*' in their '*passivity*' and therefore, wear '*deliberate disguises*' so as not to talk into following a wrong path. They are just waiting for the rejuvenation to happen when their lives will again achieve some kind of significance. So, in their present state, they are wearing '*Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves*' and therefore, they are like scarecrows who are immobile, soul-less puppets, who are just spending time driving away forces, which are trying to tempt the hollow men to the path of evil. In the world, where the evil forces are dominating every aspect of human lives, it is essential to keep and carry on with one's goodness by being a '*scarecrow*'. Now, we understand that even though in the epigraph the hollow characters of 'Kurtz' and 'Guy Fawkes' are being referred to, the hollow men are nothing like them–they are not evil–they are just empty and therefore, they have a chance of spiritual regeneration.

In such a state of existence, which is dried up of spirituality, the hollow men are living in a '*dead land*'–a '*cactus land*'–a desert–and therefore, their voices are dry and desolate lacking any softness. They have become stone-like creatures in absence of love and warmth in their lives and in the present state therefore, they are just under the '*twinkle of a fading star'*. Yet, the hollow men are tender and at the moment they are *'trembling with tenderness'*– a kind of tenderness which will make their spiritual regeneration possible, as has been stated earlier too. In this dead and cactus land, where their voices are like rats in a dry cellar, they are still trying to form their prayers–'*Lips that would kiss form prayers to broken stone*', suggesting that their only hope are their prayers. The paralysed force now starts showing some grace as they are able to form or say prayers. As the hollow

men are able to make prayers, the '*eyes*' seem to disappear from their horizon to tempt them into evil ways and therefore, the poet writes–'*The eyes are not here, there are no eyes here'*.

From the world of '*fading stars*', they have fallen into a world of '*dying stars*' and they have reached a state in which they are in '*the broken jaw of our lost kingdoms'*. At this moment, the hollow men avoid all speeches and in their blindness they '*grope*' together to reach an end, but their prayers carry on as the poet says–'S*ightless, unless the eyes reappear as the perpetual star, multifoliate rose of death's twilight kingdom'*. From '*dying star*', we now reached the '*perpetual star*', which suggests that they have found the path for their spiritual attainment and that they will be crossing over to a world of eternal shining. The freshness of the '*multifoliate rose*' also suggests the warmth of life. This part of the poem ends with the note that '*the perpetual star*' and the '*multifoliate rose*' are the only hope of the hollow men as they pursue their empty lives. Some may see this as a '*futile hope*' as the hollow men may never reach the desired spiritual regeneration, while others may see it as a spiritual hope for the rebirth of the Christ, who would save them from their empty existence.

In the next part of the poem, we are made to acquaint ourselves with a nursery rhyme where the '*mulberry bush*' is being exchanged with '*prickly pear*'. Although, for children '*mulberry bush*' has playful associations, but '*prickly pear*' seems to refer to the pains and angst of the modern lives, which makes one at five o'clock in the morning to go round and round a prickly pear. The next few small stanzas of the poem shows the gap/shadow that is there between *idea* and *reality*, between *motion* and *act*, between *conception* and *creation*, between *emotion* and *response*, between *desire* and *spasm*, between *potency* and *existence*, and between *essence* and *descent*. In such a state, they carry on and wait for the necessary development in their life as they know that '*Life is very long*'. However, Eliot and the hollow men are probably hopeful that at the end the world will end '*Not with a bang but a whimper*', where '*whimper*' suggests the birth of the Christ. Thus, a poem which starts with the hollowness of the modern existence ends with the spiritual regeneration as that is what, is the trajectory of Eliot's poetic journey, which we will come across in a much more concrete way in the poem, *Ash Wednesday*.

1.3.4 *Ash Wednesday*

I

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
I no longer strive to strive towards such things
(Why should the agèd eagle stretch its wings?)
Why should I mourn
The vanished power of the usual reign?

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Because I do not hope to know
The infirm glory of the positive hour
Because I do not think
Because I know I shall not know
The one veritable transitory power
Because I cannot drink
There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is nothing again

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are and
I renounce the blessèd face
And renounce the voice
Because I cannot hope to turn again
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice

And pray to God to have mercy upon us
And pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain
Because I do not hope to turn again
Let these words answer
For what is done, not to be done again
May the judgement not be too heavy upon us

Because these wings are no longer wings to fly
But merely vans to beat the air
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will
Teach us to care and not to care Teach us to sit still.

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death
Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

II
Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree
In the cool of the day, having fed to sateity
On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained

In the hollow round of my skull. And God said
Shall these bones live? shall these
Bones live? And that which had been contained
In the bones (which were already dry) said chirping:
Because of the goodness of this Lady
And because of her loveliness, and because
She honours the Virgin in meditation,
We shine with brightness. And I who am here dissembled
Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd.
It is this which recovers
My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible portions
Which the leopards reject. The Lady is withdrawn
In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown.
Let the whiteness of bones atone to forgetfulness.
There is no life in them. As I am forgotten
And would be forgotten, so I would forget
Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose. And God said
Prophesy to the wind, to the wind only for only
The wind will listen. And the bones sang chirping
With the burden of the grasshopper, saying

Lady of silences
Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving
Worried reposeful
The single Rose
Is now the Garden
Where all loves end
Terminate torment
Of love unsatisfied
The greater torment
Of love satisfied
End of the endless
Journey to no end
Conclusion of all that
Is inconclusible
Speech without word and
Word of no speech
Grace to the Mother

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For the Garden
Where all love ends.

Under a juniper-tree the bones sang, scattered and shining
We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other,
Under a tree in the cool of day, with the blessing of sand,
Forgetting themselves and each other, united
In the quiet of the desert. This is the land which ye
Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity
Matters. This is the land. We have our inheritance.

III
At the first turning of the second stair
I turned and saw below
The same shape twisted on the banister
Under the vapour in the fetid air
Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
The deceitul face of hope and of despair.

At the second turning of the second stair
I left them twisting, turning below;
There were no more faces and the stair was dark,
Damp, jaggèd, like an old man's mouth drivelling, beyond repair,
Or the toothed gullet of an agèd shark.

At the first turning of the third stair
Was a slotted window bellied like the figs's fruit
And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene
The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
Lilac and brown hair;
Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind over the third stair,
Fading, fading; strength beyond hope and despair
Climbing the third stair.

Lord, I am not worthy
Lord, I am not worthy

but speak the word only.

IV
Who walked between the violet and the violet
Whe walked between
The various ranks of varied green
Going in white and blue, in Mary's colour,
Talking of trivial things
In ignorance and knowledge of eternal dolour
Who moved among the others as they walked,
Who then made strong the fountains and made fresh the springs

Made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand
In blue of larkspur, blue of Mary's colour,
Sovegna vos

Here are the years that walk between, bearing
Away the fiddles and the flutes, restoring
One who moves in the time between sleep and waking, wearing

White light folded, sheathing about her, folded.
The new years walk, restoring
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring
With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem
The time. Redeem
The unread vision in the higher dream
While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse.

The silent sister veiled in white and blue
Between the yews, behind the garden god,
Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and signed but spoke
no word

But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down
Redeem the time, redeem the dream
The token of the word unheard, unspoken

Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew

And after this our exile

V
If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,

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The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word.
O my people, what have I done unto thee.
Where shall the word be found, where will the word
Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence
Not on the sea or on the islands, not
On the mainland, in the desert or the rain land,
For those who walk in darkness
Both in the day time and in the night time
The right time and the right place are not here
No place of grace for those who avoid the face
No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and deny
the voice

Will the veiled sister pray for
Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee,
Those who are torn on the horn between season and season,
time and time, between
Hour and hour, word and word, power and power, those who wait
In darkness? Will the veiled sister pray
For children at the gate
Who will not go away and cannot pray:
Pray for those who chose and oppose

O my people, what have I done unto thee.

Will the veiled sister between the slender
Yew trees pray for those who offend her
And are terrified and cannot surrender
And affirm before the world and deny between the rocks
In the last desert before the last blue rocks
The desert in the garden the garden in the desert
Of drouth, spitting from the mouth the withered apple-seed.

O my people.

VI
Although I do not hope to turn again
Although I do not hope
Although I do not hope to turn

Wavering between the profit and the loss
In this brief transit where the dreams cross
The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying
(Bless me father) though I do not wish to wish these things
From the wide window towards the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell
Quickens to recover
The cry of quail and the whirling plover
And the blind eye creates
The empty forms between the ivory gates
And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth

This is the time of tension between dying and birth
The place of solitude where three dreams cross
Between blue rocks
But when the voices shaken from the yew-tree drift away
Let the other yew be shaken and reply.

Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit
of the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

Summary and critical analysis

T. S. Eliot's long poem *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) was the first major poem written by Eliot after his conversion to Christianity in 1927. Part I introduces the speaker, who is a person without hope, for whom the world holds few pleasures. Life has lost its meaning and joy because the speaker has lost his faith. There are echoes of *The Hollow Men* here: the idea of a person in a sense cast out from the world of

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life and growth. The speaker renounces all earthly and temporal things, and acknowledges the emptiness of worldly aspirations and ambitions.

Part II opens with the line, '*Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree*' (the '*Lady*' picking up on the female aspects of the previous section). The leopards might be read as images of death and destruction, but they show the speaker's desire for, rather than fear of, death. In a surreal image, the leopards feast upon the speaker's organs and flesh, destroying his sensual desire and leaving only his bones, which have been purified by the '*Lady*' figure (that is, by religion, specifically the Virgin Mary). The bones sing a '*song*' in praise of their achieved purity.

Part III sees the speaker climbing a series of stairs–ascending to a higher plane that is, the world of God–and reviewing his past at each turn of the stair. This section is derived from a section of Dante's *Purgatorio* (the middle part of *The Divine Comedy*). At the first turn of the second stair, he meets a shape grappling with the devil: this '*shape*' is his past self. He has conquered doubt and despair, and can ascend. He passes on to the window, which looks out on a pastoral scene, where a Pan-like figure (Pan was the pagan god of the pastoral world) is playing a flute and enchanting the world around him. This seems to suggest worldly pleasures (Pan was half-man, half-goat, with the goat half suggesting sexual lust), which the speaker must reject (just as he had to reject the devil and despair) and move beyond.

Part IV focuses on the Lady, that feminine symbol of spiritual and religious fulfilment. She is described as '*wearing/White light folded*' (a symbol of her purity) and '*blue*' (the colour of the Virgin Mary). Now, '*the fiddles and the flutes*' are borne away (that is, the flute being played by the figure at the end of the previous section), suggesting that the temptation of earthly, temporal delights is being overcome. But death will also be vanquished: the yew tree, mentioned twice in this section, is a symbol of death (the trees are often found in churchyards).

To understand Part V it helps to know about the double meaning of '*Word*'. '*Word*' can refer both to the Bible (as the word of God) and to Christ himself as God (with a capital that is, 'the Word'). So '*the Word*' can be used to refer to Christ, who was both the son of God and God himself in human form. This is what St John means, when he opens his Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' This means '*the Word*' is both the manifestation of God (Jesus, who was God come down in human form walking amongst the world) and the revelation of God (the Bible, the revealed truth of God). In other words (as it were), the modern world no longer hears God, or heeds his '*word*' (that is, Biblical scripture). Will the '*veiled sister*' (often analyzed as a version of the Virgin Mary) pray for those who '*oppose*' God, who oppose '*the Word*', or who walk in darkness. The repeated line, '*O my people, what have I done unto thee*', is Biblical, from Micah 6:3: God addresses these words to those who have forgotten him and fallen into idolatry, or worship of worldly things, instead of worshipping him.

Part VI begins by echoing the opening words to the first section, but with one key difference: '*because*' is now replaced by '*although*'. Although the speaker does not hope to turn to the world (now he has found his faith in God, he doesn't

need to), he can nevertheless enjoy the world around him again (as he couldn't at the opening of the poem, because he had lost his faith). We then get another window-image (cf. Part III): this window reveals the beauty of the world to him.

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Critical comments on *Ash Wednesday*

- According to James D. Hart (*The Oxford Companion to American Literature,* 5th edition, 1983):

  > *Ash-Wednesday* was published in 1930 as a profession of Eliot's faith in the Church of England and represented a statement of the faith which he had called for at the end of *The Waste Land*. By employing certain portions of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and a sermon of Lancelot Andrewes in the frame of reference within which this poem of doubt and faith is constructed, Eliot manages to objectify the emotions he desire to evoke, concerning the security, the emotional satisfaction, and the profound truth that he can find only by accepting the traditions of the Church.

- According to F. O. Matthiessen (*Literary History of the United States*, 3rd edition, 1969):

  > Eliot's later poems, from *Ash Wednesday* (1930) through the *Four Quartets,* which were inaugurated by 'Burnt Norton' in 1935, must be judged like any other poems, not on the basis of whether we accept or reject their theology, but of whether they have conveyed in moving rhythms the sense that, whatever their author's final beliefs, he is here reflecting perceptively and persuasively on human nature as we know it. By any such test, *Ash Wednesday* may well prove to be his most integrated long poem, as it certainly is a remarkable musical whole. Its themes are not calculated for popularity. They do not give voice to easy affirmation. Their realm is that of a Purgatorio, where suffering is made more acute by doubt, by 'stops and steps of the mind' between skepticism and assurance. But their integrity to actual experience allows them to fulfill what Eliot believes to be one of the most valuable services of poetry, its power to make us 'a little more aware of the deeper unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly an evasion of ourselves.

- According to Elizabeth Drew (*T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry,* 1949):

  > The new dominating figure is that of a Lady, but inseparable from her is a garden, a rose, a fountain and two yew trees. These all form a new symbolic *centre*, in which the poet finds a renewal of life. They alternate with a desert of sand and of blue rocks, and there are further contrasting images of sounds and silence… In *Ash Wednesday,* what Jung calls the 'dangerous moment,' the hovering between the possibility of permanent distortion or of the total arrest of growth on the one hand, and the possibility of fertility springing from spiritual renewal on the other, is over. That was present throughout 'The Waste Land,' but was at its greatest intensity in 'The Hollow Men.' There, 'unless the eyes reappear,' the spirit seems doomed to permanent imprisonment in the 'dry cellar' of the ego. But in *Ash Wednesday* that danger is past…it means that the new redeeming symbols are established as the new centre from which the new life will radiate and

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in which it has its being…. The emotional condition may seem little different from that in 'The Hollow Men,' but the *attitude* toward the condition is changed completely. The complete passivity of the opening poem has nothing in it of negative frustration. In place of hopeless abandonment to the blighting power of the Shadow, the compulsion to evade and escape, there is the willed renunciation and patience of a *chosen* attitude. Jung describes this as a condition of 'not doing,' which is quite different from that of 'doing nothing'… The symbols themselves dramatize the inner conflict, while the conscious will collaborates by its own disciplines. In Eliot's poem this is represented forcibly by the reminders of traditional worship to which the poet turns perpetually in his distress. The individual vision of his personal redeeming symbols comes and goes, but prayer is a technique of concentration to which he reverts throughout. The poem returns again and again to it; to the submission of the penitent, to the ordering power of a discipline, to the placing of the individual within the traditional corporate experience of the race….

The work of Dante, he says, 'belongs to the world of what I call the *high dream*, and the modern world seems capable only of the low dream.' *Ash Wednesday* certainly belongs to the world of high dream, and its reminiscences of the world of Dante have been pointed out frequently. More particularly the figure of the Lady inevitably recalls that of Beatrice. Eliot's own remarks on the *Vita Nouva* suggest strongly that he sees in the story of the relationship of Dante to Beatrice a mixture of the personal and the imaginative which parallels something in his own life… When distinguishing between 'romantic' and 'classical' mysticism, Eliot declares that it is characteristic of romantic mysticism to *substitute* divine love for human love, whereas in Dante the effort was to enlarge the boundary of human love so as to make it a stage in the progress toward the divine…. In this Jung would concur, and would interpret both Beatrice and the Lady as examples of the *anima* archetype, the woman image which, according to his theory, regularly appears at this stage in the process of 'transformation.' The *anima*, in spite of its name, is in no sense a 'soul' image in the religious sense. It is the 'contra-sexual component' alive in every man, and its images, like the other archetypes, have both creative and destructive aspects….

The poem as a whole has much that is mysterious and ambiguous in it, in spite of several elucidations, and we cannot hope to find any easy allegorical content of the various symbols. They remain 'complexly opalescent,' as do the constantly shifting moods and tones. And just as it takes us into a new world of psychic experience, so is its rhythmical organization, imagery and language unlike any earlier poem of Eliot. It swings with the '*turning world*' of the poet's inner consciousness, while it is framed and controlled by the unchanging ritual of common prayer.

It has been pointed out that the condition in the opening poem is that of the initiate who enters the '*dark night*' of St. John of the Cross. He must achieve a spiritual detachment from all things, whether sensual or spiritual, and a leaning on pure faith alone…. The desert of *The Waste Land* is seen in a new light…. The three white leopards have puzzled commentators, but perhaps Eliot did have a dream in which he saw them. They are in the tradition of all the devouring myths in

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which the hero is swallowed and emerges regenerated, just as the scattering of the bones tells of the same psychic reality as the dismemberment of Dionysus or of Osiris. The leopards are devouring beasts, but obviously at the same time beneficent ones. Their whiteness and their quiet pose show them to be harmless: they lose terror in beauty. Moreover, as the bones know very well, the loss of the parts devoured by the leopards has made it possible for the brightness of the Lady to shine upon them. The ego which had been dispersed gladly relinquishes itself….

The Garden is a many-faceted symbol, suggesting the Garden of Eden where God walked '*in the cool of the day*'; the earthly Paradise of Dante; the rose-garden of the *Romance of the Rose*; and the medieval hymns to the Virgin which allegorize the rose and the '*garden enclosed*' of the *Song of Songs* as the womb of Mary. At the opening of the lyric, however, the Lady is the mediating figure between the two sequences of love, carnal and spiritual, and therefore subsumes both…. She is the rose of memory and forgetfulness… The torments of the temporal, the meaningless, and all the ambivalence of love in its aspect of desire, are transcended in a vision of the Mother of the Word: '*…the Garden / Where all love ends*.'… The poem ends with further allusions to Ezekiel…. The '*clear visual images*' of the third poem give perfect 'sensuous embodiment' to the allegorical content…. The whole poem has been in a rhythm of rotation and transition between states of feeling centered in the presence or absence of the Lady.

- According to Walter Blair (*The Literature of the United States* 3rd edition, 1966):

  Ash-Wednesday is one of the most important religious poems which have been written in English during the present century. Although Eliot's religious position is specifically Anglo-Catholic, the poem has a broad validity for all religious experience. The poem describes the progress of the soul from despair to hope, from unbelief to belief. The hopelessness in the early stanzas seems as profound as that expressed in *The Waste Land*, and more apathetic: '*Because I do not hope*,' the poet says—and '*I no longer strive to strive*.' But by means and in ways which defy scientific description, the upward movement of the soul begins in Section 3, where the poet employs the symbol of an ascending stair.

  At the second and at the third turning of the stair, the soul pauses to look back upon the '*twisted shapes*' below—its former unhappy states. At length, the soul attains the goal happily epitomized in the phrase from Dante, '*Our peace in His will*.' The poem concludes with a prayer to the '*Blessed sister, holy mother*.' In developing and expressing his thought, Eliot has drawn upon the Bible, Dante, and the liturgies of the Roman and English Churches. Like much modern poetry of the intellectual school, *Ash-Wednesday* is a difficult poem, even to the sympathetic reader, and gives up its meaning slowly.

- According to Donald Heiney (*Recent American Literature* 4, 1958):

  Ash Wednesday is a poetic contemplation expressing the religious ideas which Eliot had worked out in 1927-28. The major theme is the neo-Platonic love of Dante, Cavalcanti, and other medieval Italian poets; the Lady who dominates the poem is a symbol of perfection or beauty through which man may be drawn to God. There are many echoes of the Bible and of Church litanies.

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- According to Roy Harvey Pearce (*The Continuity of American Poetry*, 1961):

  This, then, is the meaning of *Ash Wednesday* (1930): '*Teach us to care and not to care*.' *Ash Wednesday* is an acolyte's poem. He would still learn to give, sympathize, and control; but now he grants fully that the way to such powers is the way of positive denial and discipline. He would learn to know and to love the world for what it is, so as to be able to renounce it fully. The fragmented, futile, anarchic world is to be transcended; history is to be comprehended mythically and thus also to be transcended. But now the myth is mythic only to those of Eliot's readers who cannot assent to it. We are caught up in the paradox of mythic consciousness—that for those who believe in what we outsiders call a myth, it is not myth.

  The mythic truth of *The Waste Land* was a truth pertaining to that area in the psychic cosmos at which historical process was touched and stabilized by a supervening theistic order. The fragments of history, understood mythically, manifested the fragmented consciousness of modern man. But in *Ash Wednesday* mythic understanding itself is transcended, because it is discovered to be available to man directly, not mediated by the fragments of history. Myth begins to be absorbed into Christian doctrine and so gradually is bereft of its quality as myth. The poet now would drain himself of even his historical consciousness. He would leave behind even his image of himself as the myth-maker of *The Waste Land*… The structure of *Ash Wednesday* is tied to a continual, if at times only implicit, reference to the Christian doctrine which tells how through time man may transcend time…. The three white leopards and the lady…are part of the poet's private myth—the myth which, by means of his prayerful discipline, he has come to envisage—and they lead to something beyond myth. The structure of the poem and its action work so as to make the poet's readers grant him the need and the power (a boon of his prayer) to make such a myth, but only in order to transcend it. The poem, in fact, registers the dialectic of that prayer; it evokes a series of psychic states whereby the poet moves from '*Because I do not hope to turn again*' to '*Although I do not hope to turn again*.' '*Because*' signifies that the poet is confined and constrained by the myths of this world. '*Although*' signifies that he accepts his confinement and constraint and therein is on his way to the single myth, the only myth, the myth beyond myth, Truth. He no longer acts '*because*'; he acts in spite of, '*although*.' He grants his sad condition in his sad world, and so comes directly to apprehend and to confront his deepest need. It is, in short, a need not to be himself, not to be in history, not to be bound even to the mythic structures of history.

  The ruins of the self begin to be reconstituted into a whole, the principle of the reconstitution is not generally but particularly mythic. It finds its vital center in an absolute beyond myth—that revealed by Christian dogma. The poet must be lost, and his world and his history lost with him, so that he can be found….only through abject submission and the surrendering of all that makes him a man might he transform his humanity—or rather, might he be granted the power to work the transformation. Only the blind eye can create. This is the only sort of creation proper to him who would learn to give, sympathize, and control. The insistent repetitions of the poem, held together merely

by their loose parallelism, not controlled by the usual analytic devices of language—such repetitions insistently register the movement of the human spirit in the process of exhausting itself of its humanity, so to be filled with something larger. '*And let my cry come unto Thee*' the poem concludes.

The weakness of *Ash Wednesday*, if indeed it is a weakness, derives from its excessively meditative, disciplined manner. We are allowed to see how the poet disciplines himself into the discovery of a yet larger disciplinary force. This is at once a progress of the soul and a psychomachia. Yet there is nothing in the poem which we can conceivably imitate or recognize—nothing like the clearly etched allegorical figurations in medieval poetry. Likewise there is not much we can see.

- According to Max J. Herzberg (*The Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*, 1962):

The first three sections of the poem appeared separately in periodicals, indicating that the six sections which make up the *Ash Wednesday* should perhaps be considered as individual poems on the same theme rather than as one long poem. The sections are meditative, associative, and circular rather than logical, and deal with a state of mind which is only suggested and never clearly delineated. The dominant imagery is religious, and in several places the style approaches that of a litany. As the title suggests, the major theme is penitence, the difficulty of the spiritual life, and the need for renunciation of both despair and hope; although some readers have difficulty with its theology, *Ash Wednesday* remains one of Eliot's most finely structured and melodic poems.

Check Your Progress

3. Mention the personalities who influenced the work of T.S. Eliot.
4. What is the meaning of the epigraph 'Mistah Kurtz –he dead' *in The Hollow Men*?
5. What does the poem, *The Hollow Men* deal with?
6. Which event in Eliot's life affected *Ash-Wednesday*?
7. How does the speaker of *Ash Wednesday* appear in the beginning of the poem?

1.4 W.B YEATS

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) came at a time when the Victorian Era was at variance with Modernism. The currents of this reflected in his poetry. Yeats was born in Dublin but spent a considerable part of his childhood in London, where his family moved when he was two. He lived in London till the age of sixteen. Yeats however remained connected with Ireland through his mother's Irish songs and stories and holiday visits to Co. Sligo.

Yeats studied at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art. In 1889, he published his first collection of poetry. The themes that his writings centred on were Ireland,

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spiritualism and love and these were reflected in *The Wanderings of Oisin* and other poems. His earliest books drawn on the romantics and pre-Raphaelite ideals and mythologized 'Celtic Twilight'. Yeats has had immense influence in Modern art, music and poetry. Few of these are as follows:

- Yeats was an important influence on Máirtín Ó Direáin.
- The title of the album *Like a Flame* by Frederik Magle is derived from a quote from Yeats' play, *The Land of Heart's Desire*.
- In 2011, The Waterboys released *An Appointment with Mr Yeats*, an album that contains fourteen tracks, all of which are based upon Yeats' poetry, a long-term influence on lead-songwriter Mike Scott.
- Yeats's poem, *When You Are Old And Grey,* inspired Australian playwright Jessica Bellamy to write a theatrical monologue, *Little Love*, which was subsequently adapted for the short film, *Bat Eyes*, by director Damien Power.
- His poem, *No Second Troy*, is quoted in, and is the inspiration for, the song 'Yeat's Grave' by Irish band, *The Cranberries*. It also inspired Sinéad O'Connor's metaphor in *Troy*.
- Joni Mitchell's 1991 album, *Night Ride Home* contains a song called 'Slouching Towards Bethlehem' which derives its lyrics from Yeats's poem, *The Second Coming*.

His poetic style was considerably influenced by his increased involvement with nationalist politics. His diction became simpler, the syntax grew rigid and the verse structures became better developed at the same time, preserving their traditional form. To this middle period belongs his failed courtship of the beautiful nationalist, Maud Gonne, and his founding of the Abbey Theatre in 1899 in Dublin, which became a focus for many of the writers of the Irish Revival of which Yeats was a key figure. Though Yeats wrote prolifically for the stage, he also continued with his poetry. Yeats was also influenced by Modernism. Ezra Pound, especially, was a great influence. He introduced Yeats to the principles of Japanese Noh theatre. Political events saw their way into Yeats' writings. As events in Ireland became laced with violence, Yeats' poems dealt with public themes. *Easter 1916* is his troubled tribute to the Easter Uprising.

Yeats also dabbled in politics. He was elected to the Senate, the upper house of the new Free State, in 1922. On the personal front too, his life underwent many changes. Being finally rejected by Maud Gonne and subsequently by her daughter, Yeats married Georgie Hyde Lees with whom he was very happy. They had a shared interest in spiritualism and Yeats' investigation in this area led to some of his powerful visionary poems.

Yeats had now matured as a poet. This led to his development of a symbolism to mediate between the demands of art and life. His later collections, *The Tower and The Winding Stair,* are often considered his best. Yeats had made a name for himself as a poet par excellence. He was honoured with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. He died in France in 1939 and as per his wish, was buried in Drumcliffe Church, Co. Sligo.

His works include:

- **Non-Fiction***: Four Years*
- **Fiction:** *The Celtic Twilight*
- **Plays:** *The Countess Cathleen, The Hour Glass* and *The Land Of Heart's Desire*
- **Short stories:** *Rosa Alchemica, Stories of Red Hanrahan, Synge and the Ireland of his Time, Out of the Rose, The Heart of the Spring, The Curse of the Fires and of the Shadows, The Old Men of the Twilight, Where there is Nothing, There is God, Of Costello the Proud*
- **Poetry:** *A Prayer for my Daughter, Aedh Wishes for the Clothes of Heaven, Against Unworthy Praise, Baile and Aillinn, Broken Dreams, Easter, 1916, He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven, Her Praise, In the Seven Woods, King and No King, Lapis Lazuli, Leda and the Swan, No Second Troy, O do not Love too Long, Politics, Sailing to Byzantium, Swift's Epitaph, The Arrow, The Black Tower, The Crucifixion of the Outcast, The Dolls, The Everlasting Voices, The Fish, The Harp of Aengus, The Host of the Air, The Hosting of the Sidhe, The Lake Isle of Innisfree, The Lover Tells of the Rose in his Heart, The Mask, The Moods, The Old Age of Queen Maeve, The Rose Tree, The Second Coming, The Secret Rose, The Seven Sages, The Shadowy Waters, The Song of the Happy Shepherd, The Stolen Child, The Three Beggars, The Tower, The Two Trees, The Wheel, The Wild Swans at Coole, The Wisdom of the King, To a Young Beauty, To a Young Girl, To the Rose upon the Rood of Time, Towards Break of Day, What was Lost* and *When you are Old.*

Mysticism in Yeats' Poetry

Yeats was interested in esoteric practices like ceremonial magic. He studied Hindu philosophy and meditation, investigated Japanese Noh drama, and as a young man interviewed rural Irish elders about fairy realms. This poem is filled with images and symbols that struggle to objectify the mystic realm. The mystic world is of course obscure–an obscurity that adds a dimension of symbolic richness to the poem. The speaker, is mostly not sure of what he beholds: 'an image, man, or shade.' Eventually, he decides that the apparition is ultimately composed of an image. Unravelling this image reveals still more mysterious pathways into the spectral realm of Hades.

The mystical and invisible dimensions of life and consciousness fascinated Yeats. He was not convinced by the teachings of dogmatic Christianity, nor was he satisfied by his father's insistently skeptical outlook on spiritual matters. Rejecting these two contraries, Yeats pursued his spiritual yearnings in the various ancient esoteric traditions that he encountered as a part of his research and scholarship.

Symbolism in Yeats' Poetry

In essence, symbolism is difficult to define. It broadly implies the use of material and tangible objects or phenomena to depict something that is itself immaterial,

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nontangible and does not manifest as a phenomenon. Symbols, for Yeats, come to stand for the poet's emotion and, in every way, serve to add complexity to the poems. In addition, they are able to facilitate a certain movement from the divine life to the outer counterpart. In *Byzantium*, symbolism is the elemental vehicle that Yeats employs to realize the mythical idea of Byzantium.

Yeats idealizes Byzantium as a symbol of unity in spiritual and day-to-day life. The bird is also a sustained symbol throughout the poem. Yeats makes use of the image of a bird set upon a golden bough to sing to symbolize the timelessness and spirit he covets. Just as the bird is there forever, singing all the time, Yeats yearns to sing in the form of poetry.

1.4.1 *Fragments*

I
Locke sank into a swoon;
The Garden died;
God took the spinning-jenny
Out of his side.

II
Where got I that truth?
Out of a medium's mouth.
Out of nothing it came,
Out of the forest loam,
Out of dark night where lay
The crowns of Nineveh.

Summary and critical analysis

The very title of the poem, *Fragments,* speaks volumes about the modernist sensibilities, which is much fragmental in nature. Like Eliot's *Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*, where Prufrock is a fragmented creature, who cannot decide the course of action in his life, W. B. Yeats too in the poem, *Fragments,* presents the modernist sensibility of fragmentation, which has made the modern man go through different kinds of angst and filled him with existential crisis and dilemma. The poem is aptly named *Fragments*, not only because the poem is 'fragmentary' in nature, but also because the modern existence has become fragmentary.

Apart from the poem being fragmental in nature, the poem is highly humourous which makes the poem worth reading. Locke, referred to in the first stanza is John Locke, the famous eighteenth century Enlightenment philosopher who advocated reason. Many scholars refer to the eighteenth century as the beginning of the modern age as it is from the eighteenth century that the European world wholeheartedly engaged itself in pursuing reason as the means of understanding and interpreting the world. Anything, which was not rational or scientific was thought to be not significant enough to be pursued. However, in Yeats poem Locke, the philosopher is shown to be 'swooning', suggesting the comical aspect of the modern living, where we, in spite of our philosophical outlook as well as modernist approach, live in a world, which has itself become comical

because of the absurdity of our existence. For example, in Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot,* when we see the absurd existence of the tramps Vladimir and Estragon, we feel it to be comical, whereas we all are going through the same absurdity of routine existence as the tramps. The comical aspects of Locke swooning only make us understand that in the modern age we all are in that state, where the apparent seriousness of life is lost in the absurdity of our existence.

What next W. B. Yeats refers to is something which is very crucial in our understanding of the modern civilization–as and when rationality become the dominant mode of western thought process, the existence of God started getting questioned. The faith of human beings in the Almighty was something, which was based on man's belief in God and as man started becoming more and more 'rational' and scientific in his temperament and enquiry, he started questioning God, which consequently led to the spiritual degeneration of man. This spiritual degeneration led to a kind of existence in which the modern man could not find any purpose in their existence leading their to live a meaningless absurd existence. This aspect of modern living is well brought out in the next three lines of the poem when the poet writes– '*The Garden died;/ God took the spinning-jenny/Out of his side*.' God taking out the spinning jenny suggests that the essence of one's living is taken out of his existence. It is actually that God did not take out the spinning jenny, but mankind with rationality questioned and denied the existence of God and therefore, lost all sense of purpose in life.

The second stanza of the poem is darker than the first, which seems to be more comical in nature, though beyond the apparent comic aspects, there lies a direct attack on the rationality as a means of understanding and analyzing the world. The poet starts the second stanza with a question–where from he has got this knowledge and himself answers at the end that he got it from Nineveh–the powerful and ancient Assyrian Crowns, which is known for its knowledge. What Yeats tried to mean here is the fact that when the whole of the modern world is lacking spirituality, he from the ancient world got the knowledge, according to which, it is only in Godliness that salvation lies and it is only by doing that we can look forward to a purposeful and meaningful life. What Yeats is referring to is the mysticism of the ancient knowledge which can be a guide for the modern civilization.

1.4.2 *A Prayer for My Daughter*

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
But Gregory's wood and one bare hill
Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind,
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
And for an hour I have walked and prayed
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,
And under the arches of the bridge, and scream

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In the elms above the flooded stream;
Imagining in excited reverie
That the future years had come,
Dancing to a frenzied drum,
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.

May she be granted beauty and yet not
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,
Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,
Being made beautiful overmuch,
Consider beauty a sufficient end,
Lose natural kindness and maybe
The heart-revealing intimacy
That chooses right, and never find a friend.
Helen being chosen found life flat and dull
And later had much trouble from a fool,
While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,
Being fatherless could have her way
Yet chose a bandy-leggèd smith for man.
It's certain that fine women eat
A crazy salad with their meat
Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.

In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned
By those that are not entirely beautiful;
Yet many, that have played the fool
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,
And many a poor man that has roved,
Loved and thought himself beloved,
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.

May she become a flourishing hidden tree
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,
And have no business but dispensing round
Their magnanimities of sound,
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
Nor but in merriment a quarrel.
O may she live like some green laurel
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.

My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
The sort of beauty that I have approved,

Prosper but little, has dried up of late,
Yet knows that to be choked with hate
May well be of all evil chances chief.
If there's no hatred in a mind
Assault and battery of the wind
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.

An intellectual hatred is the worst,
So let her think opinions are accursed.
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,
Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
By quiet natures understood
For an old bellows full of angry wind?

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl
Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;
For arrogance and hatred are the wares
Peddled in the thoroughfares.
How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

Summary and critical analysis

Stanza 1

The poem begins with a violent, dreadful storm blazing outside. A wind is blowing directly from the Atlantic but is obstructed by a naked hill and the woods of Gregory's estate. The poet then brings to light her infant daughter who is sleeping in her cradle peacefully, quite unaware of the dreadful storm that is raging outside. The poet keeps moving the cradle up and down as he prays for her daughter because a storm has been raging in his soul too. Along with being preoccupied with the thoughts of safety of her daughter, he also worries for the safety of the whole humanity.

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Stanza 2

In the second stanza, the poet vividly describes the condition of the place he dwells in. The shrill sound of the sea-wind is introduced. It hits the tower and the arches of the bridge that connect the castle with the main road and in the elms above the flooded river. The shrill sound of the wind also distracts the poet while praying. Fear engulfs him. The future years lay bare in front of him as if dancing to the crazy beats of the drum.

Stanza 3

In this stanza, the poet brings the main subject of his poem to the forefront. He shares with the readers what he has been praying for all this while. He prays for his daughter to be beautiful but not to that extent that it distracts others. According to him, the women who are beautiful, in a way forget their natural kindness and, therefore, fail to accept sincere love.

Stanza 4

Here, the poet justifies why he feels so. He talks about the Greek mythological character, Helen of Troy and what were the consequences of her beauty. Helen was the beautiful daughter of Zeus and Leda. She eloped with Prince Paris of Troy which ultimately led to the destruction of the whole city. Aphrodite also married Hephaestus and betrayed him later on. Maud Gonne, too in the same way had rejected Yeats' proposal which slowly led to her destruction as she was not happy with her husband.

Stanza 5

The poet wants her daughter to have something more than enchanting beauty itself. Rather than being beautiful, he wants her to be courteous. The poet believes that just the virtue of kindness and courtesy can win a million hearts. Maud Gone was beautiful too and he was a fool to believe that she too loved him. It was courtesy that won his heart.

Stanza 6

In this stanza, the poet brings out the concept of inner happiness and its importance. The poet feels that the soul of his daughter should reach self-fulfilment just like a tree that flourishes. He compares her to the bird linnet (famous for the melodious song) that is always clustered around happy thoughts that also make others happy. He wants her daughter to be happy from within just like the bird.

Stanza 7

In this stanza, the poet talks about his experiences of life and how those experiences have shaped his personality. He finds hatred in his heart because of the experiences of his life and the beauty that he loved. He prays that his daughter should stay away from such evil because if the soul is free from any kind of evil, nothing can ruin the happiness.

Stanza 8

The poet here talks about the concept of intellectual hatred. He also wishes his daughter should not grow up to be opinionated. He considers that this is a great flaw in one's character. He wants that his daughter should shun away from such kind of feelings of hatred for anyone. He wants her to avoid doing what Maud Gonne did to him.

Stanza 9

The poet continues with the thought expressed in the previous stanza and says that if this inner peace is achieved and if a person is free from any kind of intellectual hatred; the person will be happy. When a person is going through hardships and misfortunes, such inner peace will definitely help him face the challenges and difficulties of the hard times.

Stanza 10

He concludes with the view that he desires his daughter to get married into a good aristocratic family where he gets a husband who would take her to a house where aristocratic traditions are followed. He wants her daughter to lead a life with a person where high spiritual values are adhered to. He believes that real beauty can only flourish in such a place.

A Prayer for My Daughter, written in 1919, reveals the typical modernist take of the poet. The kind of philosophy, he formulates in the poem is oriented towards an emphasis on the importance of tradition, custom and culture in the modern world which is dominated by chaos. The tradition, custom and culture is certainly aristocracy. He feels that there is chaos and anarchy in the modern world and only aristocracy can redeem the modern world of it. Aristocracy for him is anything that calls for aesthetic, intellectual and cultural beauty. Yeats was strong influenced by Nietzsche. It is probably due to this fact that he expresses his hatred for commoners and wishes that his daughter should be trained in the school of aristocracy.

Yeats here cultivates an almost tragic outlook by leaving sentiments and pathos behind. His poetry becomes a vehicle for public speech. The movement of the poem is worth noting here – from the description of the bad weather, the tower to the gloomy mood of the poet, the poet goes on to describe bigger issues such as the concept of beauty and the relevance of aristocratic values. Symbols and figures of history are also introduced.

The images follow one after another in succession. The image of Helen evokes another figure Aphrodite, who rose out of the spray. The union of Aphrodite with Hephaestus— bandy legged Smith, brings to mind the Maud Gonne-McBride episode. Thus, the image cluster becomes increasingly complex. The poet has formulated an essentially non-Christian order, the keynote of which is man's sense of his own nobility and self-sufficiency. The poet has been true to his convictions and so the poem is another expression of his artistic honesty. This poem is a prayer-like poem. In the end, the poem is a prayer for order and grace in a battered civilization. Behind the prayer, of course, are Yeats' bitter memories of Maud Gonne who had come to stand for the tragedy of how beauty and grace can be

distorted by politics, intellectual hatred and arrogance. The poem gradually takes the shape of a more philosophical one rather than a personal one as it seemed in the beginning.

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Check Your Progress

8. In which year did W. B. Yeats publish his first collection of poetry?
9. When did W. B. Yeats receive the Nobel Prize for Literature?
10. How does the poem *A Prayer for My Daughter* begin?
11. What are the qualities that the poet wants his daughter to possess in *A Prayer for My Daughter*?

1.5 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The writers like James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and poets like W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, W.H. Auden and others shaped the literary concerns of the modernist age.
2. T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock and Other Observations* portrays, in contemptuous and often witty ironical satire, the boredom, emptiness, and pessimism of its own day. The poet tries to plumb the less savoury depths of contemporary life in a series of sordid episodes.
3. Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Ben Jonson, Arnold, etc., in general, and Donne and the metaphysical poets, particularly, added up in shaping Eliot's mind. Many French symbolists such as Laforgue and Gautier, German philosophers such as Hegel, Meinong and Bradley and the Indian religions and philosophies also influenced him.
4. The epigraph *'Mistah Kurtz –he dead'* in *The Hollow Men* is a reference to Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*, which portrays the hollowness of western man as he endeavours to ascertain his superiority over the black Africans. Mister Kurtz, a European, lacks a soul and when he figures that out just before his death, he could just shout 'The horror! The horror!'
5. Like many of Eliot's poems, *The Hollow Men*, deals with the fragmentary post–World War I Europe under the Treaty of Versailles, the problem with being too hopeful, and his own failed marriage.
6. T. S. Eliot's conversion to Christianity in 1927 affected the long poem *Ash-Wednesday* (1930).
7. The character of the speaker of *Ash Wednesday* appears to be a person without hope, for whom the world holds few pleasures. Life has lost its meaning and joy because the speaker has lost his faith. There are echoes of *The Hollow Men* here: the idea of a person in a sense cast out from the world of life and growth. The speaker renounces all earthly and temporal things, and acknowledges the emptiness of worldly aspirations and ambitions.
8. In 1889, W. B. Yeats published his first collection of poetry.
9. W. B. Yeats received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923.

10. The poem *A Prayer for My Daughter* begins with a violent, dreadful storm blazing outside. A wind is blowing directly from the Atlantic but is obstructed by a naked hill and the woods of Gregory's estate. The poet then brings to light her infant daughter who is sleeping in her cradle peacefully, quite unaware of the dreadful storm that is raging outside.
11. The poet wants her daughter to have something more than enchanting beauty itself. Rather than being beautiful, he wants her to be courteous. The poet believes that just the virtue of kindness and courtesy can win a million hearts.

1.6 SUMMARY

- Modernism is an aesthetic movement of the early twentieth century, which looked at the world with a fresh perspective. Though there is a debate about the exact beginning of modernism, but when we talk of literary modernism we usually refer to the first half of the twentieth century.
- Modernist writers had a new 'subject matter' for literature as they believed that their new way of looking at life required a new form, a new style and writing.
- 'Modernism' generally refers to the broad aesthetic movement of the twentieth century, but 'modernity' refers to a set of philosophical, political, and ethical ideas, which provide the basis for the aesthetic aspect of modernism. 'Modernity' is older than 'modernism'.
- The age was vastly influenced by psychoanalysis, behaviourism and determinism. The modernist approach to life produced scepticism, anti-authoritarianism, fatalism and insistence on the right to the unfettered enjoyment of the pleasure. Moreover, we perceive angst of everyday existence prevalent in many modern literary works.
- Modernist Poetry can be talked about as an experiment in the poetry. The poets reacted against the romantic tendencies of the earlier age and tried to write poetry in an objective fashion.
- Thomas Stearns Eliot has been a popular name in English poetry since the early 1920s. He had ruled the age in which he lived with absolute authority. The twentieth century cannot be signalled by a single voice or authority.
- As a poet, Eliot drew from many different sources to gather his material. He was deeply influenced by some famous personalities of the past and of the modern scene. Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Ben Jonson, Arnold, etc., in general, and Donne and the metaphysical poets particularly added up in shaping Eliot's mind.
- Eliot was a versatile genius. He was a very talented man. His appeal was not just limited to the English or to the European tradition. Instead, he was a rather universal poet.
- T.S. Eliot was born in 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri, (USA). His family was of Devonshire origin, traditionally interested in trade and commerce and academics.

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- Eliot was the London correspondent for *The Deal* during 1921–1922 and *La-Nouvelle Revue Trancaise* during 1922–1923.
- *Murder in the Cathedral* appeared in 1935. *The Family Reunion* in 1939 was a stage failure, but the dramatist remained unshaken. During the years 1940–1942 appeared *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages* and *Little Gidding*.
- T.S. Eliot wrote *The Cocktail Party* in 1950, *The Confidential Clerk* in 1955 and *The Elder Statesman* in 1959. After *Four Quartets* poetry was almost untouched by him, though poetic element was indisputably retained in all his dramas.
- Two eminent poets of Eliot's time were Yeats and Ezra Pound. While Yeats was devoted whole-heartedly to 'the stuff of dreams' and to the Irish questions and Pound was devoted to his idiosyncrasies about art and politics, Eliot alone showed in poetry the 'complex intensities of concern about soul and body'.
- Correlated to this traditionalism was Eliot's concept of art. His most remarkable contribution to modern literature is the impersonal theory of poetry. *Tradition and the Individual Talent* is a very good essay in which Eliot says that the poet and the poem are two separate things.
- Most of the 'modernist' trends of poetry – the new psychology, anthropology, symbolism and metaphysics are described in the work of T.S. Eliot and it contributes most towards its surprising success.
- Eliot has paid utmost attention to verbal precision, which demands a conscious choice of words and phrases and a thoughtful construction of sentences.
- Eliot makes use of the phrase 'objective correlative' in his famous essay, *Hamlet and His problems*. He clarifies how an emotion can be best expressed through poetry. Further, Eliot maintains that a synchronization of emotion and thought affects the poetic sensibility. In his well-known essay, *The Metaphysical Poets*, Eliot is clutched with this matter. One can easily understand it when one keeps in mind the vast number of allusions and references used by Eliot in *The Waste Land.*
- Eliot is a representative poet of the twentieth century and hence he has voiced forcefully the moral and spiritual degradation of modern man, the loss of human values and the prevalence of chaos, confusion and tension in the human world.
- Eliot is also a poet of nature, though his treatment of Nature is neither Wordsworthian nor Shelleyan. To him, nature is the bare phenomenon of the human world, as it was to Pope in the eighteenth century.
- Eliot used fragmentation in his poems both to display the disorganized state of modern existence and to contrast literary texts against one another. According to Eliot, humanity's consciousness had been shattered by World War I and by the British Empire's collapse.
- In Eliot's poetry, water symbolizes both life and death. Eliot's characters wait for water to quench their thirst, watch rivers overflow their banks, cry for rain to quench the dry earth and pass by fetid pools of standing water.

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- The poem, *The Hollow Men*, was written in 1925. Like many of Eliot's poems, it deals with the fragmentary post–World War I Europe under the Treaty of Versailles, the problem with being too hopeful, and his own failed marriage. The poem is divided into five parts; its last four lines are 'probably the most quoted lines of any 20th-century poet writing in English'.
- T. S. Eliot's long poem *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) was the first major poem wrote by Eliot after his conversion to Christianity in 1927. Part I introduces the speaker, who is a person without hope, for whom the world holds few pleasures. Life has lost its meaning and joy because the speaker has lost his faith.
- William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) came at a time when the Victorian Era was at variance with Modernism.
- Yeats was born in Dublin but spent a considerable part of his childhood in London where his family moved when he was two.
- Yeats's poem *When You Are Old And Grey* inspired Australian playwright Jessica Bellamy to write a theatrical monologue *Little Love*, which was subsequently adapted for the short film *Bat Eyes* by director Damien Power.
- His poetic style was considerably influenced by his increased involvement with nationalist politics. His diction became simpler, the syntax grew rigid and the verse structures became better developed at the same time, preserving their traditional form.
- Yeats was interested in esoteric practices like ceremonial magic, studied Hindu philosophy and meditation, investigated Japanese Noh drama, and as a young man interviewed rural Irish elders about fairy realms.
- The very title of the poem, *Fragments*, speaks volumes about the modernist sensibilities, which is much fragmental in nature. W. B. Yeats, in the poem, *Fragments*, presents the modernist sensibility of fragmentation, which has made the modern man go through different kinds of angst and filled him with existential crisis and dilemma.
- *A Prayer for My Daughter* reveals the typical modernist take of the poet. The kind of philosophy, he formulates in the poem is oriented towards an emphasis on the importance of tradition, custom and culture in the modern world which is dominated by chaos. The tradition, custom and culture is certainly aristocracy.

1.7 KEY TERMS

- **Teleological:** It is a philosophy relating to or involving the explanation of phenomena in terms of the purpose they serve rather than of the cause by which they arise.
- **Impressionism:** It is a 19th-century art movement characterized by emphasis on accurate depiction of light in its changing qualities, ordinary subject matter, inclusion of human perception and experience, and unusual visual angles.

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- **Post-Impressionism:** It emerged as a reaction against Impressionists' concern for the naturalistic depiction of light and colour. It is characterized by a subjective approach to painting, as artists opted to evoke emotion rather than realism in their work.
- **Proletarianism:** It is the political character and practice of the proletariat or working-class people; advocacy or advancement of the proletariat's interests.
- **Mysticism:** It is a belief characterized by self-delusion or dreamy confusion of thought, especially when based on the assumption of occult qualities or mysterious agencies.

1.8 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What are the factors which influenced modernist writers?
2. Briefly explain the life of T.S. Eliot.
3. Write a short note on mysticism and symbolism in Yeats' poetry.
4. Briefly explain the crux of the poem *Fragments.*

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the literature of modern age in detail.
2. Compare the hopelessness of situation found in *The Hollow Men* and *The Waste Land*.
3. Critically analyze the poem *Ash Wednesday*.
4. Discuss the theme of *Prayer for My Daughter***.**

1.9 FURTHER READING

Murphy, R. 2007.*T.S. Eliot: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. New York: Infobase Publishing.

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Brown, T. 2001.*The Life of W. B. Yeats*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

UNIT 2 AUDEN AND PLATH

NOTES

Structure

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, some of the poems of Eliot and Yeats were discussed. In this unit, the discussion will turn towards the poetry of W.H. Auden and Sylvia Plath. W. H. Auden and Sylvia Plath are two names who ring the late modernist writings and their poems are still considered to be very contemporary in terms of their significance in our lives. The poetic sensibilities that these two poets present make us wonder not only at the way the modernist sensibilities found expression in the latter part of the twentieth century, but also at the same time, their poems open up the wounds of the modern civilization to make us wonder at the ways we have been trying to deal with the angst of modern existence. In the rest of the unit, we will be dealing with Auden and Plath in detail, along with critical appreciation of their poems. In Unit 1, while discussing Yeats and Eliot, the essence of Modernism was discussed in short and therefore, without repeating the same in this unit once again, this unit directly approaches the poems of Plath and Auden, along with some biographical and literary details of both these poets.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the life and times of W.H. Auden and Sylvia Plath
- Describe the summary of *Night Mail* and *Autumn Song* in detail
- Critically comment on the poems *Daddy* and *A Better Resurrection*

2.2 W.H AUDEN

Wystan Hugh Auden or W.H. Auden was one of the most important poets of the 20th century. He was born on 21st February 1907, in York, England. His father

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George Augustus Auden was a psychologist, while his mother Constance Rosalie Bicknell Auden was a devoted Angelican. Auden started his education at St. Edmunds Preparatory School. At the age of thirteen, Auden continued his education in Gresham's School. Later, he attended Oxford University, where he and his fellow undergraduates formed a group called the 'Auden Generation'. They were influenced by Modernism and rejected traditional poetic forms.

W. H. Auden was the leader of the Oxford Poets and therefore, he showed much awareness about the disintegrating war-torn civilization of the early twentieth century. He knew very well that the world around him is full of political and social evils apart from the metaphysical anguishes that marred the modern existence and therefore, in his poetic art it found a manifestation. He had a leaning towards the left politics and therefore, thought that leftist ideology is probably a solution to the political, social and cultural evils of the modern western society. In other words, it can be said that he was deeply influenced by the philosophy and writings of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. His early works include *Poems* and *The Orators* which makes social criticism and they were protests against the contemporary political, social and economic tensions that arose in the industrial cities of the modern civilization.

W. H. Auden migrated to U.S.A in 1939. During this period, he became disillusioned with the Marxist philosophy as the German and the Soviet came upon a pact. Therefore, in Auden's poetry one can notice a great shift–a shift towards the metaphysical and religious. Auden's later collection of poetry consists of *The Shield of Achilles* (1949), *Homage to Clio* (1960), and *About the House* (1966).

Major Works of W. H. Auden

Poetry

- *Collected Poems*
- *Thank You, Fog: Last Poems*
- *Epistle to a Godson*
- *Academic Graffiti*
- *City Without Walls and Other Poems*
- *Collected Longer Poems*
- *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957*
- *About the House*
- *Homage to Clio*
- *Selected Poetry*
- *The Old Man's Road*
- *The Shield of Achilles*
- *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue*
- *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden*
- *For the Time Being*
- *The Sea and the Mirror*
- *The Double Man*
- *The Quest*
- *Another Time*
- *Selected Poems*
- *Spain*
- *Look, Stranger*
- *The Orators*

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Prose

- *Forewords and Afterwords*
- *Selected Essays*
- *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays*
- *The Enchaféd Flood*
- *Journey to a War*
- *Letters from Iceland*

Drama

- *On the Frontier*
- *The Ascent of F.6*
- *The Dog Beneath the Skin: or, Where is Francis?*
- *The Dance of Death*
- *Paid On Both Sides*

2.2.1 The Oxford Poets

The poets such as W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and Louis MacNeice are popularly known as the Oxford Poets. Michael Roberts (1902-48) was the one who brought these poets under the same umbrella and later, it was W.H. Auden who did the same. These poets were graduates from Oxford and they had been great friends and supported each other's writing and artistic skills. The common characteristics of these poets are the following:

- The themes of these poets' works were marked by certain kind of innovation and modernity, which was experimental in nature.
- Their works had more intellectual appeal rather than an emotional appeal.
- They had a political involvement with communism.
- They were much influenced by the psychologist Sigmund Freud.
- Their works had a kind of cynicism and satire, which came from a sense of rootlessness.

These features gave these poets a common identity as their works had not much emotional appeal and was meant to stimulate the readers intellectually. They were also influenced by Imagism and French Symbolist poetry.

2.2.2 *Night Mail*

This is the night mail crossing the Border,
Bringing the cheque and the postal order,

Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,
The shop at the corner, the girl next door.

Pulling up Beattock, a steady climb:
The gradient's against her, but she's on time.

Past cotton-grass and moorland boulder
Shovelling white steam over her shoulder,

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Snorting noisily as she passes
Silent miles of wind-bent grasses.

Birds turn their heads as she approaches,
Stare from bushes at her blank-faced coaches.

Sheep-dogs cannot turn her course;
They slumber on with paws across.

In the farm she passes no one wakes,
But a jug in a bedroom gently shakes.

Dawn freshens, Her climb is done.
Down towards Glasgow she descends,
Towards the steam tugs yelping down a glade of cranes
Towards the fields of apparatus, the furnaces
Set on the dark plain like gigantic chessmen.
All Scotland waits for her:
In dark glens, beside pale-green lochs
Men long for news.

Letters of thanks, letters from banks,
Letters of joy from girl and boy,
Receipted bills and invitations
To inspect new stock or to visit relations,
And applications for situations,
And timid lovers' declarations,
And gossip, gossip from all the nations,
News circumstantial, news financial,
Letters with holiday snaps to enlarge in,
Letters with faces scrawled on the margin,
Letters from uncles, cousins, and aunts,
Letters to Scotland from the South of France,
Letters of condolence to Highlands and Lowlands
Written on paper of every hue,
The pink, the violet, the white and the blue,
The chatty, the catty, the boring, the adoring,
The cold and official and the heart's outpouring,
Clever, stupid, short and long,
The typed and the printed and the spelt all wrong.

Thousands are still asleep,
Dreaming of terrifying monsters
Or of friendly tea beside the band in Cranston's or Crawford's:

Asleep in working Glasgow, asleep in well-set Edinburgh,
Asleep in granite Aberdeen,
They continue their dreams,
But shall wake soon and hope for letters,
And none will hear the postman's knock
Without a quickening of the heart,
For who can bear to feel himself forgotten?

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Summary and critical analysis

Night Mail was written in 1936. In the same year, a documentary film was also released with the same title. The film concerned a London, Midland, and Scottish Railway (LMS) mail train traveling from London to Scotland. Auden's poem was to be read toward the end of the film. The poem, *Night Mail*, is a beautiful rendition of the way in which the train carrying the letters approaches the town with vivid messages of all kinds from different people of different places. Auden is talking about a time, when letters were a significant medium of communication as the other means of communication such as the emails, mobile phones, and social media sites had not been in practice that is, the early decades of the twentieth century. Letters were a significant means of communication not only because they brought messages from people, but they also represent the ways in which people are remembered.

It is to be understood here that it is the way we communicate with each other, it is the means through which we communicate with each other and it is the language in which we communicate with each other which makes us 'human'– a distinct species of the animal world. We, as humans, cannot afford to live in isolation as we are heavily dependent on each other not only because of our financial and cultural needs, but also because we dread loneliness and cannot afford to live in seclusion, being cut off from the rest of the humankind. Whenever we are cut off from the world for some reason or the other, we usually live in a tormented state leading to our psychological desolation and mental disturbances. In T. S. Eliot's poem, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, one sees Prufrock shuddering, when he thinks about going to a party and thus, he ended up locking himself up in his room. He thinks aloud about his state and here, we come across a sensibility, which suggests that the modern man lives a life of intense mental agony–whose reasons are socio-political and cultural and yet the most significant one is that he cannot communicate and trust his fellow human beings. The lack of spiritual contentment as well as lack of trust in fellow human beings (to some extent caused by the World War I as well as the industrial developments) has made man a lonely creature, who suffers in his own hell–a hell created in his own mind.

While living in this hell of his own creation, he does not only shudder to accept and participate in the world outside, but also leads a very passive life leading him to become a desolate individual. In such a state, he looks forward to little associations and communications such as letters for which he eagerly waits. In such a circumstance, the poet is writing the poem, *Night Mail*, to suggest the ways in which the people wait for these letters. The most significant line of the

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poem is the concluding sentence where the poet says–'*For who can bear to feel himself forgotten?*' It is a rhetorical question, which suggests that no one in the world would like to be forgotten and be a lonely creature and that everyone waits for communication from others.

Thus, the poet, Auden, describes the approaching mail train as it crosses the border bringing letters and checks as well as orders both for the poor and rich. The train passes through steep terrains, boulders, white streams and '*silent miles*' of grasslands while the birds peer at it and the sheepdogs look at it. As the train passes the farm, dwellers carry on with their sleeping, while the jug by their bed side '*gently shakes*'. During early morning, the train passes through Glasgow and comes towards Scotland, where people are waiting for letters and news of all sorts–receipts, invitations, applications, declarations of love, gossip from around the world, news both '*circumstantial*' and '*financial*', letters from family members, letters with doodles in the margins, letters from all over Europe, and letters of condolences, all written on papers of every color imaginable. The Night Mail carries on with its journey while people are asleep in Glasgow and in Edinburgh and people are having dreams and nightmares, but everyone is waiting for the knock of the post man on the door.

2.2.3 *Autumn Song*

Now the leaves are falling fast,
Nurse's flowers will not last,
Nurses to their graves are gone,
But the prams go rolling on.
Whispering neighbours left and right
Daunt us from our true delight,
Able hands are forced to freeze
Derelict on lonely knees.

Close behind us on our track,
Dead in hundreds cry Alack,
Arms raised stiffly to reprove
In false attitudes of love.

Scrawny through a plundered wood,
Trolls run scolding for their food,
Owl and nightingale are dumb,
And the angel will not come.

Clear, unscaleable, ahead
Rise the Mountains of Instead,
From whose cold cascading streams
None may drink except in dreams.
— March 1936

Summary and critical analysis

Autumn Song by W. H. Auden is an unusually significant modern poem, which does not deal with the autumn season as the season is usually being perceived. In the western seasonal cycle, the spring suggests the birth; the summer, the young age; the autumn as the old age; and the winter as death. Thus, through the seasonal cycle, many poets before Auden have commented on life–starting from birth to death. Before the Romantic poet, John Keats, all other poets made attempts to present autumn to be a season of desolation and decay which is looking forward to death in winter. But John Keats for the first time changed the notion in his ode, *To Autumn*, where he presents the season of autumn to be a season of '*fruitfulness*' and moreover, comments that if autumn comes, can spring be far behind. Thus, for the first time, the season of autumn is presented in a positive light by Keats leading to many changing their perceptions about the season.

Carrying on with a similar vein of thought, many poets have also presented the autumn season to be pleasant and productive and showed how the season is one of the significant one in understanding the cycle of life and its processes, but W. H. Auden suggests how the scene of autumn is indifferent to him suggesting that when the Modern poets look at the season, they do not see the '*fruitfulness*' anymore that Keats had perceived. The romantic associations of the autumn season is taken away by Auden to again present it is to be a season of death and decay and also to be a season of transition–any transition means that it is a destruction of the old order and the coming up of the new order. In other words, it can be said that the beauty of a thing lies in the eyes of the beholder. So when the Modernist poets look at the season of Autumn, instead of listening to its melodious harmonious note and images of fruitfulness (as Keats does in *To Autumn*), poets like Auden look at the desolation that is representative of the modern age. The desolation–both of the inner world and the outer one–finds expression in a poetic sensibility of the poet through the symbol of autumn.

Moreover, autumn is seen as a metaphor for Modernism by W. H. Auden in the poem as the desolation, decay and meaninglessness of the modern life is typified in the season of autumn by him. For the poet, autumn is symbolical of the departure of old things and waiting for the new things. It is a time between these transitional phases, which is one of hopelessness, nothingness and nightmare of dead and decay. Modern life–which is that of a life of immense changes not only in terms of physical and social changes, but also mental and psychological, has been one which has tormented all the modern poets and the reason of the torment has been well documented by Auden in the poem, *Autumn Song*.

Modern age is an age of dreadful nothingness, where each individual is suffering from various angst and anguishes. Some of the angst and anguishes of the modern man are portrayed in the poems of Eliot and Yeats in the last unit. The war-torn civilization (referring to The First World War), the spiritual degeneration, the lack of faith in human life, the heavy industrialization and its consequent effect on human life, the busy city life, the routine nature of modern day living, the existential questions and so many vivid issues like these have marred the lives of modern man for a long time and the desolation and decay that came to the psychological arenas of modern man has been a subject of much discussion in almost all the works of

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modernist writers and poets. W. H. Auden through the poem, *Autumn Song*, is making an attempt to understand the essence of modernism through the symbolical use of the autumn season.

When one reads the poem closely and critically, one figures out that there are two veins of thoughts going on in the poem–the first, description of the autumn season and the second, attaching certain parallels to the human lives. Autumn is a season of shedding old leaves from trees so that the new leaves can be welcomed and consequently, at the time of autumn, the environment is one of barrenness. Time is shown to be merciless as it makes one lose what greenness one gains through much attempts. Leaves fall, flowers wither, the owls and nightingales do not sing, the cascading river's water, one cannot drink, the attitudes of love are false and there is no '*true delight*'–all these images and many more are provided to the readers in quick succession in the short poem to understand that in such a state of affairs there is nothing that we can do but to stiffly '*reprove*' as one is almost frozen by the '*dead in hundreds*'. In such a state, the only hope probably is that time is a continuous process and it does not "freeze" in a moment and therefore this desolate state is also going to get over.

Probably that is the only hope for the humankind. In the poem, *The Hollow Men*, by Eliot (in the last Unit), we have seen that the only hope of the hollow modern man was the '*whimper*'–suggesting the birth of the Christ, though the hollow men are caught in a strange state of affairs where they can neither live nor die but merely carry on being '*sightless*'. Similarly, Auden seems to suggest that as autumn too is a season of desolation, but it is not merely a painting which is frozen in time, but is a continuous process which is suggested in the present continuous tense in which the poem starts. So, this process will lead to a state when the present desolation will lead to a brighter warmer time. Modernists are worried about their spiritually debilitating state, their routine bored life, their mechanization of everyday life, and the psychological suffering that has been caused by various socio-political as well as industrial developments, but they are at the same time hopeful that this state will also be over and there will be a new lease of life, which will make the humankind achieve a much more fresher perspective. It is with this hope that the Modernists carry on though they are very much anguished about their present life which Auden successfully and marvelously presents in *Autumn Song*.

Check Your Progress

1. Why can one notice a shift towards the metaphysical and religious in Auden's poetry in his later years?
2. Which poets were known as Oxford Poets?
3. When was the poem *Night Mail* written?
4. How did John Keats manage to change perception about the autumn season?

2.3 SYLVIA PLATH

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

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

It was at Cambridge that she met the English poet, Ted Hughes with whom she fell in love. They were married in 1956. In 1960, at the age of twenty-eight, Plath published her first book, *The Colossus,* in England. The poems in this book were formally precise and well-wrought yet they only give an indication of the kind of poems that she will be writing in early 1961. Plath settled with her husband, Ted Hughes, in an English country village in Devon. The life of marital bliss did not last long and in less than two years after the birth of their first child the marriage broke apart. Sylvia's life after that was filled with difficulties. She now lived in a small London flat with her two small children and struggled to survive with her ill health and a meagre income. This prompted her to write more than she wrote before. She often wrote between four and eight in the morning while her children were still asleep. At times, she managed to write a poem a day pushed by some unseen force that drove her on relentlessly. Her last poems reflected her state of mind; it seemed as if she was controlled by some deeper, powerful force. Death was considered cruelly attractive and psychic pain was something that could physically be felt. Sylvia killed herself with cooking gas on 11 February 1963, at the young age of thirty. It was the tragic end of a troubled life. Two years later *Ariel*, a collection of some of her last poems, was published; this was followed by *Crossing the Water* and *Winter Trees* in 1971, and, in 1981, *The Collected Poems* appeared, edited by Ted Hughes.

Sylvia Plath is one of the leading figures in twentieth-century Anglo-American literature. In her book, *Sylvia Plath: An Introduction to the Poetry*, Susan Bassnett writes:

> The rise of Plath to this iconic status has been rapid. In the aftermath of her death, she was first seen as a relatively minor though gifted poet, overshadowed by the powerful poetry of her husband, Ted

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Hughes. Early responses to her poetry focussed on its darkness, on the imagery of blood and violence that appeared to prefigure her eventual suicide. Later, her work was reassessed, particularly by feminist critics, who drew attention to the power of her language, to the expressions of rage and outrage that run through her writing and to the way in which her work can be seen as exemplifying many of the contradictions and dilemmas faced by women struggling for self-realization while endeavouring to conform to social expectations. While some critics read into Plath's work the story of a damaged individual whose death was the culmination of a long flirtation with the idea of dying, others saw her as an Everywoman, whose poetry spoke of the pain of being a women struggling to live up to impossible ideals of womanliness.

Her works include:

Poetry collections

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

Collected prose and novels

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

Children's books

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

2.3.1 *Daddy*

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot

For thirty years, poor and white,
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.
You died before I had time—
Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
Ghastly statue with one gray toe
Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic
Where it pours bean green over blue
In the waters off beautiful Nauset.
I used to pray to recover you.
Ach, du.

In the German tongue, in the Polish town
Scraped flat by the roller
Of wars, wars, wars.
But the name of the town is common.
My Polack friend

Says there are a dozen or two.
So I never could tell where you
Put your foot, your root,
I never could talk to you.
The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.
Ich, ich, ich, ich,
I could hardly speak.
I thought every German was you.
And the language obscene

An engine, an engine
Chuffing me off like a Jew.
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
I began to talk like a Jew.
I think I may well be a Jew.

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna
Are not very pure or true.
With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck
And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack
I may be a bit of a Jew.

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I have always been scared of you,
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.
And your neat mustache
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You—

Not God but a swastika
So black no sky could squeak through.
Every woman adores a Fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you.

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
In the picture I have of you,
A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
But no less a devil for that, no not
Any less the black man who

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
I was ten when they buried you.
At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do.

But they pulled me out of the sack,
And they stuck me together with glue.
And then I knew what to do.
I made a model of you,
A man in black with a Meinkampf look

And a love of the rack and the screw.
And I said I do, I do.
So daddy, I'm finally through.
The black telephone's off at the root,
The voices just can't worm through.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two—
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years, if you want to know.
Daddy, you can lie back now.

There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always knew it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

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Summary and critical analysis

The poem *Daddy* written by Sylvia Plath is the most widely read and anthologized poem of Plath. This is despite the fact that the daddy portrayed in the poem is not a good man. This poem was written in 1962, just a year before she committed suicide. The poem was published posthumously in her most famous collection of poems, *Ariel*. The poem, written at the age of 30, is a recollection of her relationship with her own daddy who died of complications resulting from diabetes, when she was barely eight. The age of the speaker in the poem is also thirty. Even though the father-daughter relationship lasted for just eight years, the strict authoritarian attitude of her father and his early death had a lasting impression on Plath's life and her approach to poetry. In the poem, the speaker's daddy died when she was 10. This is a major problem who reads the poem as autobiographical. The style of the poem is elegiac.

The poem starts with a phrase that is repeated with the sounds '*oo*'. This reflects the beginning of the train journey that the speaker is about to undertake in the poem through Electra's many mindscapes and tunnels. The black shoe is a metaphor for her father whose strictness makes it impossible for her to breathe. The narrator has been trapped in this kind of atmosphere for almost 30 years. This journey is an attempt to escape imprisonment and the coming of age.

In the second stanza itself the speaker realizes that only by killing her father she can be free. Even before the realization sets in, her father died. This corresponds to the real life death of her father, Otto, when Sylvia Plath was eight years old. He had to have his leg amputated due to complications from diabetes. His toe turned black from gangrene. The bizarre, surreal imagery builds up—the toe as big as a seal from San Francisco, the grotesque statue fallen. San Francisco is where Otto conducted his studies of Muscid Larvae. This image of the leg in the first and second stanza recalls Otto Plath's leg that had to be amputated due to complications from diabetes. This is the starting point of the fall of the statue.

The metaphor of the statue continues in the third stanza as well. It is so huge that the statue's head is in the Atlantic coast, on the coast at Nauset Beach, Cape Cod, where the family used to holiday. The father icon stretches all the way across the US, west to east. As the speaker goes in and out of the metaphor, she says that she used to pray to get her father back, restored to health.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker takes us to the place where her father was born, Grabow, Poland. This town was destroyed during the Second World War. The destruction of the town is also an allusion to the idea that her father has demolished her life.

In the next stanza, she talks about the strained relation between the father and daughter. They never could communicate. The lack of communication may be

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because of the physical condition of the father or may be because of the authoritarian stance or even lack of a common language. As a result, the speaker does not know the exact location of her father's birth place. Now the speaker tries to address her father in second person. The reason for the lack of communication gets clearer in the sixth stanza. The use of barbed wire snare clearly talks about the repressive atmosphere in which she lived. The use of run on lines in the last line of the fifth stanza and the first line of the sixth stanza connects them literally as well as thematically. The German 'ich' is repeated four times as if her sense of self-worth is in question; or is she recalling the father shouting 'I, I, I, I' and she is unable to speak because of the shock; the obscene stress within the language. The father is seen as an all-powerful icon just like any other German in the Third Reich.

The train is moving and the narrator suddenly reveals that this is no ordinary train. It is a death train taking her off to a concentration camp in Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen. The narrator now identifies fully with the Jews.

Till now the speaker was talking about her father. In the eighth stanza, she talks about her mother. She takes us to Tyrol, Austria, the country where Sylvia Plath's mother was born. Here, we get to see another aspect of Sylvia Plath, who was keenly interested in the Tarot card symbols for some time.

In stanza nine, the speaker uses the Second World War imagery in a more pronounced manner to intensify the kind of torture that she had to go through in the last 30 years. She tells that like the German air force (Luftwaffe) and army (Panzer) in Second World War, her father scared her. She also describes the ideal Aryan male (one of the aims of the Nazis was to breed out unwanted genetic strains, producing the perfect German).

The next stanza introduces yet another metaphor—father as swastika, the ancient Indian symbol used by the Nazis. It is used as a symbol of racial supremacy. This is in correlation with the ideal Aryan male from the earlier stanza. This symbol is also used as a symbol of intimidation which is the major theme of this poem. This can be seen when she says the swastika is so big that it blacks out the entire sky. Lines 48-50 are controversial but probably allude to the fact that powerful despotic males and brutes in boots often have female victims attracted to them.

Stanza eleven is perhaps the most personal of all the stanzas, where the speaker reveals her sole engagement with her father. This is made possible through a photograph of her father standing against a blackboard. This image breaks through into the poem and the reader is taken into the classroom (Otto Plath was a teacher). The devil is supposed to have a cleft foot but here he has a cleft chin. The personal engagement that started in the earlier stanza continues to build up here as well. She knows that this is the man who tore her apart, reached inside and left her split, a divided self. It can be thus, that when she was twenty, she attempted suicide with an intent to re-unite with her father.

In stanza thirteen, which is a crucial stanza, the speaker resurrects after suicide with the help of the doctors. In that process, she understood how to overcome the present problem that she is facing. In the poem, this is the catalyst for action and the rest of the poem has bearings on this stanza. The girl creates a model (a voodoo like doll), a version of her father. For the time being, this turns out to be her husband (Ted Hughes, in real life). He had a Meinkampf look.

The line containing '*I do, I do*' (wedding vows) in stanza fourteen reinforces the idea of marriage within it. But the new man is also not averse to the idea of torture. The girl addresses daddy again, for the last time. There will be no more communication, no voices from the past. In the penultimate stanza, the girl achieves her motive, killing both father and husband. The latter is referred to as a vampire (Ted Hughes), who has been drinking her blood for seven years. She also assures her daddy that he can now lie back and rest. In the last stanza, we see how the speaker has achieved the goal—murder. She has stabbed her father's fat black heart by a wooden stake. The villagers are also thoroughly happy about it. To put the lid on things, the girl declares daddy a bastard. The exorcism is over, the conflict resolved.

The entire poem can be seen as a coming of self for the speaker who is the alter ego of Sylvia Plath. As we have already noted, there are many similarities between the narrator of the poem and the poet. Although the poem appears very confessional and autobiographical like Plath's other poems, she did not view *Daddy* as one of them. This can be seen in her own description of the poem. When Plath introduced this poem for a BBC radio reading, which was before she committed suicide, she described the piece in the third person. She stated that the poem was about

> …a girl with an Electra complex (whose) father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyze each other—she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it.

The poem *Daddy* is written in sixteen quatrains, that is stanzas of five poetic lines each. There is a total of 80 lines in this poem. The poem like other modern poems is characterized by irregular meter that is the length of each poetic line is different or the number of syllables in each line is not fixed. Enjambment or run on lines are frequently used in the poem. Out of the 80 lines, only 37 lines end in a full stop.

The poem also characterizes irregular rhyme and most often the rhyming words all end with an 'oo' vowel sound (like the words ehoo choo - oo oo, glue, you, do, du, shoe, two, screw, through, gobbledygoo, Jew, blue, Achoo.). This characteristic sound can be seen as the speaker wailing all throughout the poem which is also the major theme. This repeated sound can also be seen as the sound of a train chuffing its way to its final destination. The poem is also the speaker's journey to self-realization.

There is ample use of metaphors and similes. For example, lived like a foot, chuffing me like a Jew, talk like a Jew, brute like you, etc. The major metaphor in the poem is that of the German Nazis and Jews, who stand for the authoritarian daddy (and by extension, all males) and the suffering daughter (by extension, females) respectively.

Another noteworthy aspect of this poem is the abundant and apt use of German words. This points to the fact that Sylvia Plath's father was of German descent and he must have conversed with young Sylvia in German. This also enhances the major metaphor that has been discussed earlier. Achoo (= to sneeze), ich (= I), Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen (these are names of the concentration camps

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used by Germans to kill the Jews and now stands for the ultimate symbol of cruelty and evil), Luftwaffe (= air force, especially used to refer to the one in First World War), gobbledygoo (= 'Gobbledygoo' follows 'Luftwaffe', as if it has some significant meaning, but it is actually a meaningless word), meinkampf (= my fight), panzer (= a German armoured unit), ach (= oh), du (= you), swastika (=an ancient symbol in the form of an equal-armed cross with each arm continued at a right angle, used (in clockwise form) as the emblem of the German Nazi party), etc. are some of the images which are used extensively.

Critic, George Steiner, is of the view that *Daddy* is 'the Guernica (a symbol of destruction) of modern poetry', arguing that it 'achieves the classic art of generalization, translating a private, obviously intolerable hurt into a code of plain statement, of instantaneously public images which concern us all'. The critic Robert Phillips says this about the poem:

> Finally the one way (Plath) was to achieve relief, to become an independent Self, was to kill her father's memory, which, in *Daddy*, she does by a metaphorical murder. Making him a Nazi and herself a Jew, she dramatizes the war in her soul. . . From its opening image onward, that of the father as an 'old shoe' in which the daughter has lived for thirty years—an explicitly phallic image, according to the writings of Freud—the sexual pull and tug is manifest, as is the degree of Plath's mental suffering, supported by references to Dachau, Auschwitz, and Belsen.

2.3.2 *A Better Resurrection*

I have no wit, I have no words, no tears;
My heart within me like a stone
Is numbed too much for hopes or fears;
Look right, look left, I dwell alone;
A lift mine eyes, but dimmed with grief
No everlasting hills I see;
My life is like the falling leaf;
O Jesus, quicken me.

Summary and critical analysis

Sylvia Plath's *A Better Resurrection* is a small but powerful poem, though a less anthologized one. Often it is thought that Plath has taken the concept of the poem from Christina Rossetti. The poem deals with Plath's desire to die and be resurrected once again. In the first stanza, the poet symbolically provides the reasons why she wants to die. She seems very desperate in the poem as she has lost her objectives of carrying on living and thus, she records that she has a heart as that of a stone. As a stone, which is numb, she has also turned numb. She presents herself to be a distressed woman as she says-'*I have no wit, I have no words, I have no tears.*'

It seems that the world has pained her so much that she has become so numb that she has lost her wit, her speech as well as her tears. But it is to be remembered that she hasn't lost her sensitivity which is making her write the poem. In this gender oppressed world, all women are forced to leave their wit, their speech behind so that they fit into the patriarchal societal moulds. Patriarchy wants women to abide by the ways and dictates of the male-dominated structure in which they need to obey what is being told to them and not respond in negative

manner. It is not that women only suffer from physical violence in a patriarchal society, but they are also made to suffer from a kind of psychological and emotional violence as their concerns are not given any space in any way.

The women are supposed to have no desire of their own, but only serve as objects of desire and fit into the supposed notion of beauty according to the patriarchal and racial standards. In such a situation, the women of the world carry on living without questioning the reasons of their suppression and oppression. This kind of living makes them numb creatures which the poet has become–a kind of witless, speechless and tearless woman, who is just living for the sake of carrying on with life, but she does not want to carry on like this for long and therefore, asks Jesus to quicken her death so that she gets some relief from this kind of a torturous life.

Women's lives are full of tortures which often makes them so numb that they merely carry on living without making any noise against the patriarchal injustices that they suffer, but Plath, being a sensitive soul, does not want to carry on further and assumes the tone of a death wish, where she wants to quicken her death so as to make herself face a better world than this unjust inhuman world which is dominated and ruled by the men who are atrocious towards women. The poem is aptly named resurrection which suggests that she is looking forward to better days in the other world as life in this world is full of miseries. With a '*heart like a stone*', it is not easy to survive and Plath does not want that; she wants to be relieved from this torturous life as she has suffered alone all the while and does not want to carry on any further–'*Look right, look left, I dwell alone/A lift mine eyes, but dimmed with grief.*' Her alienation and suffering is very much apparent from this line, which not only marks her loneliness but also makes her a grievous woman who cannot but want to disassociate herself from all. The whole poem seems to be the manifestation of Plath's life long battle with depression. It perhaps deals with various reasons for her depression from social to personal one that is, from patriarchy to loneliness. At last she appeals to Jesus, the savior, to save her from this life of peril, pain and desolation, so that she can begin a new life in the other world where probably there will be no desolation, no coldness and hardness of rocks and where there will be the warmth of living.

Check Your Progress

5. Mention the autobiographical novel written by Sylvia Plath.
6. What is the style of the poem *Daddy*?
7. What metaphor does Plath use in the tenth stanza of *Daddy*?
8. What does the poem *A Better Resurrection* deal with?

2.4 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. In 1939, W. H. Auden migrated to U.S.A. During this period, he became disillusioned with the Marxist philosophy as the German and the Soviet came upon a pact. Therefore, in Auden's poetry one can notice a great shift–a shift towards the metaphysical and religious.

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2. The poets such as W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and Louis MacNeice are popularly known as the Oxford Poets.
3. The poem *Night Mail* was written in 1936.
4. John Keats for the first time changed the notion of autumn season in his ode, *To Autumn*, where he presents the season of autumn to be a season of '*fruitfulness*' and moreover, comments that if autumn comes, can spring be far behind. Thus, for the first time, the season of autumn is presented in a positive light by Keats leading to many changing their perceptions about the season.
5. *The Bell Jar* was the autobiographical novel written by Sylvia Plath.
6. The style of the poem *Daddy* is elegiac.
7. The tenth stanza in *Daddy* introduces a metaphor—father as swastika, the ancient Indian symbol used by the Nazis. It is used as a symbol of racial supremacy.
8. The poem *A Better Resurrection* deals with Plath's desire to die and be resurrected once again.

2.5 SUMMARY

- W. H. Auden and Sylvia Plath are two names who ring the late modernist writings and their poems are still considered to be very contemporary in terms of their significance in our lives.
- The poetic sensibilities that Auden and Plath present make us not only wonder at the way the modernist sensibilities found expression in the latter part of the twentieth century, but also at the same time, their poems open up the wounds of the modern civilization to make us wonder at the ways we have been trying to deal with the angst of modern existence.
- *Night Mail* was written in 1936. In the same year, a documentary film was also released with the same title. The film concerned a London, Midland, and Scottish Railway (LMS) mail train traveling from London to Scotland.
- The poem, *Night Mail*, is a beautiful rendition of the way in which the train carrying the letters approaches the town with vivid messages of all kinds from different people of different places.
- *Autumn Song* by W. H. Auden is an unusually significant modern poem, which does not deal with the autumn season as the season is usually being perceived.
- W. H. Auden in *Autumn Song* suggests how the scene of autumn is indifferent to him suggesting that when the Modern poets look at the season, they do not see the '*fruitfulness*' anymore that Keats had perceived. The romantic associations of the autumn season is taken away by Auden to again present it is to be a season of death and decay and also to be a season of transition
- Sylvia Plath, an American poet, novelist and short story writer, was born on 27 October 1932 to middle class parents in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.

- Her father, Otto Emil Plath, a German, came to America in 1901 at the age of 16. After studying at several universities throughout the United States, he became a university professor and an expert in entomology, specializing in the study of bees.
- Sylvia joined Smith College in 1950, receiving three scholarships in her first year. In June 1953, Plath fell into depression when she learned she had not been accepted in Frank O'Connor's summer school writing course at Harvard. She attempted suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills.
- Sylvia Plath married Ted Hughes in June 1956. Hughes was not a famous poet back then. Hopelessly in love with Hughes, Plath describes him as 'the only man in the world who is my match'.
- Disillusioned from her crumbled marriage, burdened financially, struggling to care for two young children, and affected by the medication she was taking, Plath committed suicide on 11 April 1963. She took many sleeping pills and allowed herself to be consumed by the fumes from the gas oven.
- Two years later in 1965, *Ariel*, a collection of some of her last poems, was published; this was followed by *Crossing the Water* and *Winter Trees* in 1971, and, in 1981, *The Collected Poems* appeared, edited by Ted Hughes.
- What makes Sylvia Plath intriguing to her readers is her being a tortured soul as a majority of her readers have had a feeling of agony at least once while reading her works.
- The poem *Daddy* written by Sylvia Plath is the most widely read and anthologized poem of Plath. This is despite the fact that the daddy portrayed in the poem is not a good man. This poem was written in 1962, just a year before she committed suicide.
- The poem, *Daddy*, written at the age of 30, is a recollection of her relationship with her own father who died of complications resulting from diabetes when she was barely eight.
- The entire poem can be seen as a coming of self for the speaker who is the alter ego of Sylvia Plath. As we have already noted, there are many similarities between the narrator of the poem and the poet. Although the poem appears very confessional and autobiographical like Plath's other poems, she did not view *Daddy* as one of them.

2.6 KEY TERMS

- **Exorcism:** It is the expulsion or attempted expulsion of a supposed evil spirit from a person or place.
- **Quintain:** It is a 5-line stanza of any kind.
- **Electra complex:** In Neo-Freudian psychology, the Electra complex, as proposed by Carl Jung, is a girl's psychosexual competition with her mother for possession of her father.

2.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on W.H. Auden as a poet.
2. How is the poem *Autumn Song* different or similar to the poems of Romantic Poets.
3. In what ways does the poem *A Better Resurrection* manifest the sensibilities of the females in the modernist age?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Write a critical appreciation of the poem *Night Mail* by W. H. Auden so as to suggest the ways in which the poem talks about human communication and its significance.
2. Critically evaluate the poem *Daddy* by Sylvia Plath. Is the poem autobiographical in nature?
3. Do you agree that Sylvia Plath is a poet par excellence? Write your answer with reference to the poem *A Better Resurrection*.

2.8 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3 RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Structure

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will discuss Rabindranath Tagore's short story *Kabuliwala* as well as Tennessee Williams' play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Rabindranath Tagore is not only known for his contribution to literature, music and painting, but also for being the political and cultural icon that he is. His songs are the national anthems of both India and Bangladesh, which only tells the kind of significance he holds for both the countries and how his ideas are of significance for the whole of the Indian subcontinent or South Asia.

In this unit, we will begin with an examination of a short story named *Kabuliwala* by Tagore, which presents a very sweet relationship between a small girl and a dry fruit seller from Kabul. The beauty of the story lies in the human relationship which cuts across national boundaries. Tagore through his short stories tried to present the 'slice of life' of Indian sensibilities which has its own greatness. Through the short story, we will come across not just the beauty and preciseness of Tagore's writings, but also a celebration of the human relationships. It is advised that one reads the short story, *Kabuliwala,* in original as the summary of the short story in no way can capture the beauty of Tagore's writings.

Just like Tagore who had left his mark on the Modern Indian Literature, Tennessee Williams too had left his mark on American Literature. He is well-known for his plays such as *The Glass Menagerie, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* and *The Street Car Named Desire* and others. He was able to portray the dilemmas and problems of the mid twentieth century generation in the United States of America, when the society was going through immense changes leading to many psychological adjustments and metaphysical anguishes.

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3.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the life and times of Rabindranath Tagore and Tennessee Williams
- Describe the plot of *Kabuliwala*
- Critically comment on the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

3.2 RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) is one of the greatest writers/poets of the world. He was born on 7th May 1861 in Jorasanko, Calcutta. He belonged to the gentry. His father Devendranath Tagore was a zamindar. He was known among the people as 'Maharshi'. His mother's name is Sharada Devi. Rabindranath Tagore was brought up in a large family in their palatial mansion at Jorasanko. He did not have a formal education in school like other school going children. Tutors were provided at home. He was sent to St. Xavier's school for some time, but he failed to continue being in school. The reason was that he was never comfortable in school and was unable to take interest in the school curriculum. For him, the school was a combination of hospital and jail. So, he was brought back home by his family. He had his training in various subjects through home tutors. He also joined Presidency College in Calcutta. But he left the college as soon as he joined. Then, he went to England in early October of 1878 for higher studies. The atmosphere of a large and affluent family was responsible for his character development. He was not very social and preferred his own company. The members of his family were very interested in artistic activities. The Jorasanko house always seemed to be buzzing with artistic activities and every member participated in that. Having been brought up in such an artistic atmosphere, his inclination towards literature was quite natural.

Rabindranath Tagore started writing at a very tender age. He was not only a writer, but a self-trained singer cum painter. He developed his own style of writing. He wrote novels, short stories, dramas, songs and essays. His famous novels are *Gora, The Home and the World, Four Chapters*, etc. Rabindranath Tagore also won Nobel Prize in literature in 1913 for his famous collection of poems, *Gitanjali.* He actively participated in the freedom struggle. During the partition of Bengal in 1905, he vehemently opposed the British policy of divide and rule. Rabindranath Tagore gave up his knighthood as a protest against the Jalianwala Bagh incident, where many innocent Indians were killed by the British. His participation in the Indian freedom struggle directly through his actions and indirectly through his writings created a stir in the early 20th century Bengal. Our national anthem '*Jana gana mana*' was written by him.

As we have already seen, the formal education in schools and colleges was disliked by him when he was a child, therefore, when he was an adult he tried to experiment with the idea of education system. Consequently, he opened a school

in Shantiniketan on 21st December 1901. Till now, in West Bengal the Shantiniketan University is one of the famous universities, which believes in an informal relationship between students and teachers. He was not only a great writer but a great visionary. He has his dream of a perfect, and peaceful world. His visions and dreams are reflected in his works. He passed away on 7 August 1941.

3.2.1 Text and Summary of *Kabuliwala*

Text

My five years' old daughter Mini cannot live without chattering. I really believe that in all her life she has not wasted a minute in silence. Her mother is often vexed at this, and would stop her prattle, but I would not. To see Mini quiet is unnatural, and I cannot bear it long. And so my own talk with her is always lively.

One morning, for instance, when I was in the midst of the seventeenth chapter of my new novel, my little Mini stole into the room, and putting her hand into mine, said: "Father! Ramdayal the doorkeeper calls a crow a krow! He doesn't know anything, does he?"

Before I could explain to her the differences of language in this world, she was embarked on the full tide of another subject. "What do you think, Father? Bhola says there is an elephant in the clouds, blowing water out of his trunk, and that is why it rains!"

And then, darting off anew, while I sat still making ready some reply to this last saying, "Father! what relation is Mother to you?"

"My dear little sister in the law!" I murmured involuntarily to myself, but with a grave face contrived to answer: "Go and play with Bhola, Mini! I am busy!"

The window of my room overlooks the road. The child had seated herself at my feet near my table, and was playing softly, drumming on her knees. I was hard at work on my seventeenth chapter, where Protrap Singh, the hero, had just caught Kanchanlata, the heroine, in his arms, and was about to escape with her by the third story window of the castle, when all of a sudden Mini left her play, and ran to the window, crying, "A Kabuliwallah! a Kabuliwallah!" Sure enough in the street below was a Kabuliwallah, passing slowly along. He wore the loose soiled clothing of his people, with a tall turban; there was a bag on his back, and he carried boxes of grapes in his hand.

I cannot tell what were my daughter's feelings at the sight of this man, but she began to call him loudly. "Ah!" I thought, "he will come in, and my seventeenth chapter will never be finished!" At which exact moment the Kabuliwallah turned, and looked up at the child. When she saw this, overcome by terror, she fled to her mother's protection, and disappeared. She had a blind belief that inside the bag, which the big man carried, there were perhaps two or three other children like herself. The pedlar meanwhile entered my doorway, and greeted me with a smiling face.

So precarious was the position of my hero and my heroine, that my first impulse was to stop and buy something, since the man had been called. I made some small purchases, and a conversation began about Abdurrahman, the Russians, the English, and the Frontier Policy.

As he was about to leave, he asked: "And where is the little girl, sir?"

And I, thinking that Mini must get rid of her false fear, had her brought out.

She stood by my chair, and looked at the Kabuliwallah and his bag. He offered her nuts and raisins, but she would not be tempted, and only clung the closer to me, with all her doubts increased.

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This was their first meeting.

One morning, however, not many days later, as I was leaving the house, I was startled to find Mini, seated on a bench near the door, laughing and talking, with the great Kabuliwallah at her feet. In all her life, it appeared; my small daughter had never found so patient a listener, save her father. And already the corner of her little sari was stuffed with almonds and raisins, the gift of her visitor, "Why did you give her those?" I said, and taking out an eight-anna bit, I handed it to him. The man accepted the money without demur, and slipped it into his pocket.

Alas, on my return an hour later, I found the unfortunate coin had made twice its own worth of trouble! For the Kabuliwallah had given it to Mini, and her mother catching sight of the bright round object, had pounced on the child with: "Where did you get that eight-anna bit? "

"The Kabuliwallah gave it me," said Mini cheerfully.

"The Kabuliwallah gave it you!" cried her mother much shocked. "Oh, Mini! how could you take it from him?"

I, entering at the moment, saved her from impending disaster, and proceeded to make my own inquiries.

It was not the first or second time, I found, that the two had met. The Kabuliwallah had overcome the child's first terror by a judicious bribery of nuts and almonds, and the two were now great friends.

They had many quaint jokes, which afforded them much amusement. Seated in front of him, looking down on his gigantic frame in all her tiny dignity, Mini would ripple her face with laughter, and begin: "O Kabuliwallah, Kabuliwallah, what have you got in your bag?"

And he would reply, in the nasal accents of the mountaineer: "An elephant!" Not much cause for merriment, perhaps; but how they both enjoyed the witticism! And for me, this child's talk with a grown-up man had always in it something strangely fascinating.

Then the Kabuliwallah, not to be behindhand, would take his turn: "Well, little one, and when are you going to the father-in-law's house?"

Now most small Bengali maidens have heard long ago about the father-in-law's house; but we, being a little new-fangled, had kept these things from our child, and Mini at this question must have been a trifle bewildered. But she would not show it, and with ready tact replied: "Are you going there?"

Amongst men of the Kabuliwallah's class, however, it is well known that the words father-in-law's house have a double meaning. It is a euphemism for jail, the place where we are well cared for, at no expense to ourselves. In this sense would the sturdy pedlar take my daughter's question. "Ah," he would say, shaking his fist at an invisible policeman, "I will thrash my father-in-law!" Hearing this, and picturing the poor discomfited relative, Mini would go off into peals of laughter, in which her formidable friend would join.

These were autumn mornings, the very time of year when kings of old went forth to conquest; and I, never stirring from my little corner in Calcutta, would let my mind wander over the whole world. At the very name of another country, my heart would go out to it, and at the sight of a foreigner in the streets, I would fall to weaving a network of dreams, —the mountains, the glens, and the forests of his distant home, with his cottage in its setting, and the free and independent life of far-away wilds.

Perhaps the scenes of travel conjure themselves up before me, and pass and repass in my imagination all the more vividly, because I lead such a vegetable existence, that a call to travel would fall upon me like a thunderbolt.

In the presence of this Kabuliwallah, I was immediately transported to the foot of arid mountain peaks, with narrow little defiles twisting in and out amongst

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their towering heights. I could see the string of camels bearing the merchandise, and the company of turbaned merchants, carrying some of their queer old firearms, and some of their spears, journeying downward towards the plains. I could see—but at some such point Mini's mother would intervene, imploring me to "beware of that man."

Mini's mother is unfortunately a very timid lady. Whenever she hears a noise in the street, or sees people coming towards the house, she always jumps to the conclusion that they are either thieves, or drunkards, or snakes, or tigers, or malaria or cockroaches, or caterpillars, or an English sailor. Even after all these years of experience, she is not able to overcome her terror. So she was full of doubts about the Kabuliwallah, and used to beg me to keep a watchful eye on him.

I tried to laugh her fear gently away, but then she would turn round on me seriously, and ask me solemn questions.

Were children never kidnapped?

Was it, then, not true that there was slavery in Kabul?

Was it so very absurd that this big man should be able to carry off a tiny child?

I urged that, though not impossible, it was highly improbable. But this was not enough, and her dread persisted. As it was indefinite, however, it did not seem right to forbid the man the house, and the intimacy went on unchecked.

Once a year in the middle of January Rahmun, the Kabuliwallah, was in the habit of returning to his country, and as the time approached he would be very busy, going from house to house collecting his debts. This year, however, he could always find time to come and see Mini. It would have seemed to an outsider that there was some conspiracy between the two, for when he could not come in the morning, he would appear in the evening.

Even to me it was a little startling now and then, in the corner of a dark room, suddenly to surprise this tall, loose-garmented, much bebagged man; but when Mini would run in smiling, with her, "O! Kabuliwallah! Kabuliwallah!" and the two friends, so far apart in age, would subside into their old laughter and their old jokes, I felt reassured.

One morning, a few days before he had made up his mind to go, I was correcting my proof sheets in my study. It was chilly weather. Through the window the rays of the sun touched my feet, and the slight warmth was very welcome. It was almost eight o'clock, and the early pedestrians were returning home, with their heads covered. All at once, I heard an uproar in the street, and, looking out, saw Rahmun being led away bound between two policemen, and behind them a crowd of curious boys. There were blood-stains on the clothes of the Kabuliwallah, and one of the policemen carried a knife.

Hurrying out, I stopped them, and enquired what it all meant. Partly from one, partly from another, I gathered that a certain neighbour had owed the pedlar something for a Rampuri shawl, but had falsely denied having bought it, and that in the course of the quarrel, Rahmun had struck him. Now in the heat of his excitement, the prisoner began calling his enemy all sorts of names, when suddenly in a verandah of my house appeared my little Mini, with her usual exclamation: "O Kabuliwallah! Kabuliwallah!" Rahmun's face lighted up as he turned to her. He had no bag under his arm today, so she could not discuss the elephant with him. She at once therefore proceeded to the next question: "Are you going to the father-in-law's house?" Rahmun laughed and said: "Just where I am going, little one!" Then seeing that the reply did not amuse the child, he held up his fettered hands. " Ali," he said, " I would have thrashed that old father-in-law, but my hands are bound!"

On a charge of murderous assault, Rahmun was sentenced to some years' imprisonment.

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Time passed away, and he was not remembered. The accustomed work in the accustomed place was ours, and the thought of the once-free mountaineer spending his years in prison seldom or never occurred to us. Even my light-hearted Mini, I am ashamed to say, forgot her old friend. New companions filled her life. As she grew older, she spent more of her time with girls. So much time indeed did she spend with them that she came no more, as she used to do, to her father's room. I was scarcely on speaking terms with her.

Years had passed away. It was once more autumn and we had made arrangements for our Mini's marriage. It was to take place during the Puja Holidays. With Durga returning to Kailas, the light of our home also was to depart to her husband's house, and leave her father's in the shadow.

The morning was bright. After the rains, there was a sense of ablution in the air, and the sun-rays looked like pure gold. So bright were they that they gave a beautiful radiance even to the sordid brick walls of our Calcutta lanes. Since early dawn to-day the wedding-pipes had been sounding, and at each beat my own heart throbbed. The wail of the tune, Bhairavi, seemed to intensify my pain at the approaching separation. My Mini was to be married to-night.

From early morning noise and bustle had pervaded the house. In the courtyard the canopy had to be slung on its bamboo poles; the chandeliers with their tinkling sound must be hung in each room and verandah. There was no end of hurry and excitement. I was sitting in my study, looking through the accounts, when some one entered, saluting respectfully, and stood before me. It was Rahmun the Kabuliwallah. At first I did not recognise him. He had no bag, nor the long hair, nor the same vigour that he used to have. But he smiled, and I knew him again.

"When did you come, Rahmun?" I asked him.

"Last evening," he said, "I was released from jail."

The words struck harsh upon my ears. I had never before talked with one who had wounded his fellow, and my heart shrank within itself, when I realised this, for I felt that the day would have been better-omened had he not turned up.

"There are ceremonies going on," I said, "and I am busy. Could you perhaps come another day?"

At once he turned to go; but as he reached the door he hesitated, and said: "May I not see the little one, sir, for a moment?" It was his belief that Mini was still the same. He had pictured her running to him as she used, calling "O Kabuliwallah! Kabuliwallah!" He had imagined too that they would laugh and talk together, just as of old. In fact, in memory of former days he had brought, carefully wrapped up in paper, a few almonds and raisins and grapes, obtained somehow from a countryman, for his own little fund was dispersed.

I said again: "There is a ceremony in the house, and you will not be able to see any one to-day."

The man's face fell. He looked wistfully at me for a moment, said "Good morning," and went out. I felt a little sorry, and would have called him back, but I found he was returning of his own accord. He came close up to me holding out his offerings and said: "I brought these few things, sir, for the little one. Will you give them to her?"

I took them and was going to pay him, but he caught my hand and said: "You are very kind, sir! Keep me in your recollection. Do not offer me money!—You have a little girl, I too have one like her in my own home. I think of her, and bring fruits to your child, not to make a profit for myself."

Saying this, he put his hand inside his big loose robe, and brought out a small and dirty piece of paper. With great care he unfolded this, and smoothed it out with both hands on my table. It bore the impression of a little band. Not a

photograph. Not a drawing. The impression of an ink-smeared hand laid flat on the paper. This touch of his own little daughter had been always on his heart, as he had come year after year to Calcutta, to sell his wares in the streets.

Tears came to my eyes. I forgot that he was a poor Kabuli fruit-seller, while I was—but no, what was I more than he? He also was a father. That impression of the hand of his little Parbati in her distant mountain home reminded me of my own little Mini.

I sent for Mini immediately from the inner apartment. Many difficulties were raised, but I would not listen. Clad in the red silk of her wedding-day, with the sandal paste on her forehead, and adorned as a young bride, Mini came, and stood bashfully before me.

The Kabuliwallah looked a little staggered at the apparition. He could not revive their old friendship. At last he smiled and said: "Little one, are you going to your father-in-law's house?"

But Mini now understood the meaning of the word "father-in-law," and she could not reply to him as of old. She flushed up at the question, and stood before him with her bride-like face turned down.

I remembered the day when the Kabuliwallah and my Mini had first met, and I felt sad. When she had gone, Rahmun heaved a deep sigh, and sat down on the floor. The idea had suddenly come to him that his daughter too must have grown in this long time, and that he would have to make friends with her anew. Assuredly he would not find her, as he used to know her. And besides, what might not have happened to her in these eight years?

The marriage-pipes sounded, and the mild autumn sun streamed round us. But Rahmun sat in the little Calcutta lane, and saw before him the barren mountains of Afghanistan.

I took out a bank-note, and gave it to him, saying: "Go back to your own daughter, Rahmun, in your own country, and may the happiness of your meeting bring good fortune to my child!"

Having made this present, I had to curtail some of the festivities. I could not have the electric lights I had intended, nor the military band, and the ladies of the house were despondent at it. But to me the wedding feast was all the brighter for the thought that in a distant land a long-lost father met again with his only child.

Tagore's short story deals with the relationship between a five-year-old child Mini and Kabuliwala (an Afghan), Rahamat. Rahamat's little daughter back at home in Afghanistan is essential to the story, though she never appears in the story. The Kabuliwala's love for his daughter is manifested in his love for Mini. But when a strange incident lands the Kabuliwala in jail, Mini forgets all about him. Kabuliwala again appears on the wedding day of Mini and realizes that his daughter must also have grown up by that time. Mini's father, the narrator, realized this and thus, curtails some expenditure of the festivities of the wedding to sponsor the Kabuliwala's return journey back to his country. As the whole story revolves around Kabuliwala, therefore, Tagore is justified in giving it the title 'Kabuliwala'.

The narrator of the short story, *Kabuliwala,* is a novelist, who begins the story with the narration of his daughter Mini, who is a small child, continuously prattling. One day while the narrator is busy writing the seventeenth chapter of his novel and little Mini is playing in the room, she suddenly rushes to the window and shouts 'Kabuliwala! Kabuliwala!' As the Kabuliwala enters the house, the narrator is forced to buy some dry fruits. The little girl, fearing the presence of the Kabuliwala, runs away from the room. The father, the narrator, thought that it would be better

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for Mini, if she is called and introduced to the Kabuliwala so as to diminish the fear of the Kabuliwala from her mind. Mini believed that inside the big bag of the Kabuliwala, there are two or three other children like her. The narrator calls Mini and introduces her to the Kabuliwala and this was their first meeting.

Many days later when the narrator is leaving the house one morning, he is surprised to see Mini and the Kabuliwala conversing near the entrance door. She is animatedly saying something and the Kabuliwala is ardently listening. She had some almonds and raisins in her hands. So the narrator handed eight anna to the Kabuliwala. When the narrator returned after an hour, he found Mini's mother angrily asking Mini that where did she find eight anna. Mini replied that it was given to her by the Kabuliwala. The narrator then figures out that Mini and the Kabuliwala have met many times and the two have now become good friends. They have many jokes which provide them much amusement. One of them being, Mini would ask 'O Kabuliwallah, Kabuliwallah, what have you got in your bag?' and the Kabuliwala would reply, in the nasal accents of the mountaineer: 'An elephant!' Then, the Kabuliwala would say 'Well, little one, when are you going to the father-in-law's house?' Mini, instead of replying would ask him if he was going there. In the language of Kabuliwala's class, father-in-law's house also is a euphemism for jail. So the Kabuliwala would say that he would thrash his father-in-law and both of them would laugh at it and be amused.

The narrator then goes into a contemplative mood about the distant places. As and when he sees the Kabuliwala his heart would wander all over the world. But the warnings from Mini's mother about the Kabuliwala would upset it. The narrator says that Mini's mother is a very timid lady and whenever she hears a noise in the street, or sees people coming towards the house, she always jumps to the conclusion that they are either thieves, drunkards, snakes, tigers, malaria, cockroaches, caterpillars, or an English sailor. She is afraid that the Afghans will kidnap any children as they still have slavery in their country.

Once a year in the middle of January, the Kabuliwallah usually returned to his own country, and as the time approached he would be very busy, going from house to house collecting his debts. But he always used to find time to come and meet Mini. On one such day when he had already made up his mind to visit Afghanistan, the narrator heard uproar in the street and saw the Kabuliwala being led away bound between two policemen. There were blood-stains on his clothes and one of the policemen carried a knife.

A certain neighbour of the narrator had owed the Kabuliwala something for a Rampuri shawl. When the Kabuliwala went to ask for the money, he was denied and a quarrel ensued. When the Kabuliwala was abused, in the heat of anger, he stabbed the neighbour. The uproar also made Mini come out of the house and she at once asked the Kabuliwala, 'Are you going to the father-in-law's house?' The Kabuliwala laughed and replied, 'Just where I am going, little one!' On a charge of murderous assault, the Kabuliwala or Rahmun was sentenced to few years of imprisonment. Time passed and everyone forgot about the Kabuliwala. Even Mini forgot about him as new companions filled her life. Years had passed away, and it was in an autumn that Mini's marriage was fixed. During the Puja Holidays, similar to Goddess Durga, who returns to Kailas, Mini was also about to go to her father-in-law's house.

On the wedding day, from early morning, the wedding-pipes were sounding and a great hustle and bustle pervaded the house. The narrator was sitting in his study, when the Kabuliwala entered, saluted respectfully, and stood before him. The narrator could not recognize him first, but eventually he did. When asked where he had come from, the Kabuliwala replied that last evening he was released from jail. The narrator informed him that there was wedding in the house and immediately the Kabuliwala turned to go and then he hesitated and asked if he could meet Mini for a moment. It was his belief that Mini was still the same young girl. When the narrator again requested him to come another day, the Kabuliwala went out and again returned in a while to give the narrator a packet of dry fruits and asked to give it to Mini. When the narrator offered him some money, the Kabuliwala caught his hand and requested him not to pay for it as he had not come to make profit. Immediately, he put his hand inside, and brought out a small and dirty piece of paper from his big loose robe; it had the impression of the Kabuliwala's daughter's ink-smeared hand. The narrator realized that the Kabuliwala was also a father.

Immediately Mini was summoned and she came clad in the red silk sari with the sandal paste on her forehead, adorned as a young bride. The Kabuliwala was surprised as he could not revive their old friendship. He just smiled and said: 'Little one, are you going to your father-in-law's house?' to which Mini merely blushed. When Mini was gone, the Kabuliwala heaved a deep sigh, and sat down on the floor as he realized that his own daughter must have grown during the time period when he was in jail and that he would have to be friends with her anew. The narrator realized this and immediately took some money and gave it to him saying, 'Go back to your own daughter, Rahmun, in your own country, and may the happiness of your meeting bring good fortune to my child!' The narrator had to curtail some festivities like the electric lights, the military band, etc. but he was satisfied that 'in a distant land a long-lost father has met again with his only child'.

3.2.2 Critical Appreciation of *Kabuliwala*

Set in Calcutta (present Kolkata) and published in 1892, the short story, *Kabuliwala*, speaks of a time, when traders from Afghanistan spent many months selling petty merchandise and dry fruits on the street. The story portrays an attachment between a Kabuliwala and a five year old girl. Though it seems to be a simple story, but like other works of Tagore, it portrays a great emotional story of a father's love for his daughter and the fear of the Kabuliwalas or outsiders in the minds of the people.

Significant themes of *Kabuliwala*

The important themes of this short story are:

- **Friendship:** Friendship is a very difficult word to describe in words, as it is an emotional relationship, an attachment between two people. It is not necessary that the friends are of the same age, gender, class, caste, religion, etc. Anyone can be friends with anyone. In the short story, *Kabuliwala*, we see a five year old girl, Mini, befriending a Kabuliwala. The relationship between the two is not based on any selfish interests or motifs–it is merely that both of them enjoy the company of each other. In other words, it can

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be said that friendship is a beautiful feeling that two people, in this case– Mini and the Kabuliwala, share between each other.

- **Love for one's daughter:** There are two fathers in the short story, *Kabuliwala*—one the Kabuliwala, whose daughter is far off in Afghanistan and the other is the narrator whose daughter is Mini. Whereas Mini is always in front her father, the Kabuliwala's unnamed daughter whose reference just comes once at the end of the story virtually grows up without her father around her. Even though the Kabuliwala could not be with his daughter, but she is always there in his mind. The Kabuliwala always carries an impression of his small daughter's palm in his pocket, as that is the only way he can carry something of his daughter with him. The Kabuliwala's affection for Mini is a result of him being far off from his own daughter. In Kolkata, the Kabuliwala could see in Mini, an impression of his own daughter and therefore, he visited Mini every day.

  The narrator's love for his daughter is also portrayed by Tagore very passionately as we see the narrator as a patient listener to the prattles of Mini, when she was a child. As she grows up, there is a distance that comes between Mini and her father, but that distance does not mean that they do not have affection for each other. When Mini is about to be married, the narrator is shown to be very melancholic as Mini is about to go to her father-in-law's house. The narrator's emotion as a father gets more pronounced in the story when he curtails some festivities of Mini's marriage to give some money to the Kabuliwala, so that he can go back to Afghanistan and meet his own daughter. The narrator could feel the emptiness that the Kabuliwala had been facing in his life for not able to meet his daughter. A father feels for another father and thus, helps him reunite with his daughter.

- **Foreigner/foreign land:** A foreign place is attractive to some, but some fear it. Same is true with the foreigners. In the short story, we see Mini's mother, a timid lady, fearful of the Kabuliwala, thinking that he must be a kidnapper, who will kidnap Mini and take her to Afghanistan, where she believes slavery is prevalent. She not only fears the Afghans, but also the English men as is mentioned in the story. The fear in the mind of Mini's mother is not a lone example, but many people have similar notions about Afghanistan and therefore, the same idea has also affected Mini, who is fearful of the Kabuliwala in the beginning of the story and believes that in the big bag that the Kabuliwala carries, there must be two/three children like her.

  If through Mini's initial reaction to the Kabuliwala and Mini's mother's mindset, Tagore has presented the fear of the foreigners, then, it is through the character of the narrator that Tagore presented the love and attraction for the foreign places. Whenever the narrator sees the Kabuliwala, as he says in the story, he is immediately transported to the arid mountains of Afghanistan, which he relishes. Thus, Tagore through the figure of the Kabuliwala, portrays both the fear of the foreigner and attraction for the foreign land.

Characterisation

The various characters are described as:

- **The Kabuliwala–Rahmun:** The most significant character in Rabindranath Tagore's short story is Rahmun, the Kabuliwala, after whom the story is named. Apparently, the Kabuliwala seems to be merely a dry-fruit seller peddling in the streets of Kolkata; but underneath a peddler there is a great emotional being, who loves his daughter so much that when he sees Mini, he immediately sees his own daughter in her. Consequently, he befriends her and meets her every day without fail. He is a father who is living far off from his own daughter and thus, trying to emotionally connect with the little girl, Mini. In the beginning of the story, the readers have no knowledge about his daughter and find it strange when the Kabuliwala tries to bond with the little girl and bribes her with raisins and almonds. But at the end of the story when we come to know about his daughter and when he takes out a small piece of paper from his pocket which had the handprint of his daughter, the readers can fathom his yearning for his daughter. He may be living in Kolkata, far off from his daughter in Afghanistan, but his mind is always preoccupied with the thoughts of his daughter and thus, he needed to befriend someone of his daughter's age, so that he can live all those moments with the little girl, which he is missing because of being far from his home.

  Apart from showing the loving nature of Rahmun, Tagore beautifully depicts other characteristics of the Kabuliwala. The stereotype of a Kabuliwala is initially maintained by Rabindranath Tagore as he is described dressed in loose, soiled garments, turban on his head, a cloth bag on his shoulder, with a few boxes of grapes in his hands. His typical Afghan look creates a sense of fear in the mind of Mini. Mini is afraid that the Kabuliwala will capture children and place them in the large bags, which they carry on their shoulders. Not only Mini, but the way Mini's mother is fearful and anxious about the growing closeness between the Kabuliwala and Mini shows that the fear in Mini's mind is inherited from her mother and from the people of those times, who used to feel that Afghans are mostly criminals.

  Incidentally, a freak incident lands the Kabuliwala in jail. He has sold some goods on credit and when he goes to collect money, he was abused and a fight ensues leading to Rahmun stabbing the guy. Consequently, he is arrested and sentenced to few years in jail. Here, we notice that Rahmun is short-tempered and falls prey to his own anger as he is not able to digest the abuses.

  When he is released from prison after some years, he immediately comes to meet Mini, but Mini is now a grown up lady and it is on her wedding day that Rahmun arrives in her house. But as it happens with a child, Mini had forgotten all about the Kabuliwala. It makes Rahmun realize that his own daughter has probably also forgotten about him. The story ends on a hopeful note, as with the monetary help from the narrator, Rahmun is about to go to Afghanistan to meet his own daughter.

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- **Mini:** Mini is a little five-year-old girl, when we first meet her in the story. She is an extremely talkative girl, who prattles all the time. When we meet her first, she is sitting under the table of her father and asking her father numerous questions one by one, without letting her father answer any of them. She sees the Kabuliwala from the window and calls him and immediately runs away as she is fearful of the Kabuliwala. She thinks that the Kabuliwalas catch children and put them in large bags, which they carry on their shoulders. All these aspects present Mini as a sweet natured child. Her nature finds its beauty when we see her befriending the Kabuliwala very soon after the initial fear is over.

  However, as it happens with children, she forgets everything about Kabuliwala once he vanishes from her sight after being sent to prison for stabbing a customer who abused him. And after some years when the Kabuliwala returns on her wedding day, she is not able to recognize him.

- **The narrator:** The narrator is a novelist, who is shown in the initial part of the story to be writing a novel. His daughter Mini continuously prattles, but he bears all of it. Even when he is busy writing, he does not mind her playing under his table and prattling.

  It is he, who, consciously tries to drive away the fear of the Kabuliwala from Mini's mind and paves the path for a beautiful friendship between the Kabuliwala and Mini. Moreover, unlike Mini's mother, he does not have any stereotypical belief that Kabuliwalas are criminals. So, he provides all the space needed for the friendship between the Kabuliwala and Mini to grow.

  The greatness of the narrator becomes more noticeable, when we meet him at the end of the story. He is unlike other men of his generation who thinks that girls should be married off early and has waited till the right moment to get his daughter married. Moreover, when Rahmun, the Kabuliwala, arrives after so many years, and incidentally narrates his story and his yearning for his daughter back in Afghanistan, the narrator gives him money to go back to his own country. The money given to the Kabuliwala is from the budget of Mini's marriage. The narrator had to curtail some festivities such as electric lights and military bands to give the money to the Kabuliwala, but he is happy as he feels that Mini's marriage will be much brighter by the fact that a long-lost father is able to meet his only daughter.

Style

Rabindranath Tagore is widely regarded as the innovator of the modern Bengali short story and is credited with introducing colloquial speech into Bengali literature. As a short story writer, Tagore was a practitioner of psychological and social realism as his stories depict poignant human relationships within a simple plot. Critics feel that the phenomenon of the combination of lyricism with the realism in his short-story is unique. The short story, *Kabuliwala*, begins abruptly, develops around incidents and ends with a twist. It starts with Mini as a girl and her developing friendship with the Kabuliwala. However, there is a sudden twist in the story as the Kabuliwala was sent to prison, whom we see years after on Mini's wedding

day. The twist happens as the story is no longer about friendship, but portrays a father's love for his daughter who is living far off.

Tagore pays more attention to the richness of the inner world of man and emotions and less to outward events. The artistic mastery of Tagore's stories is visible in their successful endings. Having heard the end of the story, the reader must feel that though that was the end, the story did not end there. This 'incompleteness' helped the writer to show the continuous flow of life and make the reader think over problems of life.

Check Your Progress

1. When did Rabindranath Tagore win the Nobel Prize in literature?
2. Who is the narrator of the short story, *Kabuliwala*?

3.3 TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Tennessee Williams was a Pulitzer Prize-winning dramatist whose works include *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Street car Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* among others. The world still remembers him for these plays which are unique in their representation of the times. Apart from plays, he also wrote short stories, novels, poems and screenplays.

Born as Thomas Lanier Williams on March 26, 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi, Tennessee Williams was the second son among three siblings. He was primarily raised by his mother, Edwina Williams, as his father stayed busy with his job as a salesman. He had less time for parenting, which led Tennessee Willaims' mother to take up the responsibility of parenting. Even though, he describes his childhood to be happy, it was later revealed that he grew up in a tense atmosphere as there used to be frequent fights between his parents. The dramatist was so much influenced by his mother that he created the figure of Amanda Wingfield in the play, *The Glass Menagerie,* based on her personality. Similarly, it is thought that the figure of Big Daddy in the present play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, is based on his father.

In 1929, Tennessee Williams joined University of Missouri to study journalism, but was soon withdrawn from the university by his father. Williams went back home despondently and joined a job as a sales clerk of a shoe company, which he hated from the core of his heart. The job took a toll on his mental health and soon he suffered a nervous breakdown. During thids time, he again went back to his studies and even started writing. Soon in 1938, he graduated from the University of Iowa. When Tennessee Williams was twenty eight, he moved to New Orleans and changed his name to Tennessee. In 1940, Williams' play *Battle of Angels* debuted in Boston. Though the play did not do well, it had potential and therefore, Tennessee Williams reworked and revised the play and brought it back as *Orpheus Descending,* which was also later made into a movie. Other works followed soon as he was working hard to get himself noticed. On March 31, 1945, his play, *The Glass Menagerie,* was performed on stage and critics and audience alike liked the play very much. This changed the fortunes of the dramatist

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and he carried on producing one play after another with popular success. Two years later, his play *A Street Car Named Desire*, was performed even with greater success, establishing him on a firm ground as a dramatist. This play also earned him the Drama Critics' Award and his first Pulitzer Prize. He then continued writing more and more plays such as *Camino Real*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

Then, started a decline in his dramatic career as his plays were not so well-received. This phase was a difficult one for him. He became an alcoholic and after prolonged suffering, he died in a New York Hotel on February 25, 1983.

3.3.1 Summary of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

The play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* is a three act play set in an evening on the suite of a big estate (Cotton Plantation) of Big Daddy Pollitt. It is advised that you read the original play before you go any further with the study material so as to acquaint yourself with the play first hand. There is no way that an original text can be reproduced in the summary. The summary that is given here below is just an attempt to understand the play in a better fashion and not meant to be a substitute for reading the play.

Act One

The setting of the play, *Can on a Hot Tin Roof*, is a cotton plantation home of a large estate, which is located in the Mississippi Delta. The setting is that of 1950s America. All the action in the play happen in the big house of the Pollitt Family. As the play begins, we come across this idea that Brick and Maggie (Brick's wife, full name Margaret) are childless. Maggie complains to Brick that Brick's brother, Gooper and his sister-in-law, Mae, are consciously and deliberately displaying their kids in front of Brick's father, who is named Big Daddy. They are doing so in order to persuade him to leave his estate to them, when he is no more as they have come to know that Big Daddy has cancer and he is soon going to die.

We meet Brick when he has a cast in his leg as he had broken an ankle in a drunken state the previous night. He is with a crutch. Even though Maggie shows much concern about their not having any kids and about the property of Big Daddy, Brick seems to be completely detached and disinterested about his wife, Maggie's concerns. Maggie, therefore, again states that Big Daddy really has a liking for Brick and does not share the same kind of liking for Gooper and Mae.

Maggie also complains to Brick that he does not like and love her anymore the same way he used to do earlier. She seems to be frustrated that Brick does not make love to her any more. She fondly remembers those days when Brick was passionately in love with Maggie. Even though, Maggie carries on talking about all these things, Brick still shows no concern. He seems to be lost in his own world, without being concerned about Maggie and her wishes at all. Even when Maggie asks her husband Brick to sing Big Daddy's birthday card, he refuses to do the same. He seems to be disinterested in everything around him.

At this point, Mae enters the scene and starts bragging about her children. Maggie cannot take it any longer and starts making fun of Mae and Gooper's children, which makes Mae furious and she leaves the scene suddenly. At this

point, Maggie seems nervous–she seems like a cat on a hot tin roof. Brick suggests at this point that she should jump off the roof and take a lover. To which, Maggie merely states that she only wants Brick and no one else. At this point, Big Mama enters the scene and informs that Big Daddy probably does not have cancer. Maggie feels that this is a lie as the doctors must be lying about the cancer to avoid breaking the bad news. The news stuns Brick.

Then, a significant revelation is made by Maggie as she speaks that she has made love to Brick's friend Skipper, though both of them wanted to come closer to Brick. Moreover, it is claimed that Brick had a homosexual relationship with his friend, Skipper. Though Maggie thinks that Brick does not have any homosexual feelings for his friend, but Skipper has some feelings, which he denies. Moreover, Skipper made love to Maggie only to prove that he was not gay. Skipper then drank a lot leading to his death. After listening to all these allegations from Maggie, Brick loses his control and tries to hit Maggie with his crutch, though he misses. At this moment, other people come in to the room for the birthday celebration of Big Daddy.

Act Two

Act Two begins with the birthday celebration of Big Daddy Pollitt, where Gooper, Mae, Big Mama, Reverend Tooker, Doctor Baugh, and Maggie celebrate his sixty-fifth birthday. Big Daddy, though a part of the celebrations, shows his disgust for his wife Big Mama and Brick remains detached from the whole celebration and carries on drinking more and more liquor. Big Daddy shouts at Big Mama, calling her a hypocrite, pretending to be happy about Big Daddy not having cancer, while she was really looking forward to his death and taking control of the big estate.

At this moment, Big Daddy Pollitt wants to have a private talk with his son, Brick and therefore, he asks all guests, including Big Mama, to leave. Brick informs Big Daddy that both Maggie and Mae are afraid that they will not inherit Big Daddy's big estate. Big Daddy, at this moment, is confident that he does not have cancer and says that for inheriting the estate they will have to wait for more time. Though Big Daddy carries on talking, Brick seems disinterested as he does not care too much about these issues. Big Daddy still insists on talking and also keeps on wondering why his son Brick has got into the habit of drinking too much. Brick claims here that he is disgusted about the mendacity, deception and lying that he has to deal with. According to Brick, he is disgusted with all the lies and mendacity that he sees all around him and cannot take it anymore. Listening to this, Big Daddy informs him that he has lived his entire life with mendacity.

At this moment, Big Daddy thinks aloud about the fact that when he thought that he was going to die, then to whom to leave his estate to–whether to Brick or Gooper or to Mae. Brick tells him that he does not care to whom the estate goes to after Big Daddy is no more. Big Daddy then asks if Brick has started drinking much after Skipper's death as he feels that Brick had a homosexual leaning towards Skipper. This horrifies Brick and he merely states that he only had a deep, decent friendship with Skipper and nothing else. At this, Big Daddy wonders why Brick has become so. At first, Brick claims that it is Maggie's affair with Skipper, which has made his so, but Big Daddy informs him that this story is a complete lie. Brick

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then admits that Skipper once had confessed about his homosexual feelings for Brick to which Brick did not respond and therefore, Skipper went on a drinking binge and consequently died. Big Daddy, then, accuses Brick that he is the reason behind Skipper's death to which he states that no one can face the truth of this world. At this moment, Brick lets Big Daddy know that he really has cancer, which stuns Big Daddy and he leaves, calling everyone liars.

Act Three

Maggie (Margaret), Mae, Gooper, Reverend Tooker, and Doctor Baugh join Brick in the room. At this point, Mae thinks that Doctor Baugh should tell Big Mama the truth that Big Daddy really has cancer. Big Mama enters the scene at this point; she becomes suspicious about the rest of them. Brick gets another drink for himself and Big Mama asks him to come and sit with him, which Brick refuses as he does not want to be a part of anything. Doctor Baugh tells Big Mama that Big Daddy really has cancer, which is at a dangerous stage. At this moment, Revered Tooker and Doctor Baugh leave the scene. Gooper shows Big Mama a preliminary trusteeship, which would give him control of the estate. Big Mama feels that Gooper's plan is very disgusting and at this point Big Daddy enters the room.

Maggie informs Big Daddy that she is pregnant which Big Daddy readily believes. Big Daddy informs that before he gives up his estate to others, he wants to go to the roof and have a look at his estate. Big Daddy and Big Mama, therefore, leaves the scene. Mae accuses Maggie of lying about her pregnancy and then leaves with Gooper.

Brick takes the opportunity to take his drink and go out onto the gallery. Maggie is left alone in the room, she then locks up Brick's liquor. When Brick returns to the room, Maggie informs him that it is now a good time for her to conceive a baby and informs Brick that she has locked up Brick's liquor and will only give it to him if he has sex with her. What Maggie wanted from the beginning of the play, she gets it by hook or crook, which shows her catty nature. Brick is amazed by this and agrees to his wife's proposition. Maggie, at this point, expresses her love for Brick to which Brick reacts by saying, 'Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?'.

3.3.2 Critical Appreciation of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

The following section of the study matter will engage itself with the play from a critical point of view.

Brick Pollitt's Retreat from Life–The Existential Dilemma

The play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* by Tennessee Williams deals with Brick Pollitt's retreat from life as he has become an alcoholic and seems to be fighting a battle within himself. Therefore, it is often thought that the play deals with the existential crisis of Brick Pollitt. American Drama in the mid twentieth century depicted the existential crisis of the protagonists and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* seems to be no different.

According to existentialist philosophy, developed in the middle of the twentieth century, the man in the grand scheme of things felt out of place and not at peace with himself; he pondered over the question of the meaning of life. Men felt

at odds with themselves and often therefore thought that life was meaningless. Tennessee Williams' play, *Cat on a Hot Roof*, deals with this question when one looks at the way in which Brick Pollitt behaves; he is unconcerned about anything in this world and seems to be engaged only with his drinking.

Tennessee Williams portrays the way in which the Pollitt family is celebrating the birthday of Big Daddy, where everyone is more concerned with Big Daddy's impending death due to cancer and to whom he is going to leave his big estate, rather than about his wellbeing. Brick is the only character in the play, who seems not to be concerned about the big estate and has completely secluded himself from all these by pouring himself in the world of liquor. Moreover, the whole family goes through some kind of existential turmoil as they hear the news of Big Daddy's cancer. Big Daddy, as he came to know about his cancer, wants to establish a strong relationship with his son Brick. In Act II, Big Daddy says:

> *Y'know how much I'm worth? Guess how much I'm worth! Close on ten million in cash an' blue chip stocks, outside, mind you, of twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile! But a man can't buy back his life with it, he can't buy his life back, his life with it when his life has been spent, that's one thing not offered in the Europe fire-sale or in the American markets or any markets on earth, a man can't buy life with it, he can't buy back his life when his life is finished ... I'm wiser and sadder, Brick, for this experience which I just gone through.*

Big Daddy's this dialogue makes it pretty clear to the readers and audience that Big Daddy has gone through a big realization as he waits for his death. Apart from Brick, Big Daddy has cared about no one else throughout his life and now that he is on the verge of death, he wants to establish a cordial relationship with his son, Brick and take Brick out of his self-deception and alcoholic stupor. William Sharp makes a pertinent comment when he says:

> *Like a most real writers of tragedy, Williams sees man as something unique, special in the universe. The problem in his plays is how the human being can realize this uniqueness... Williams' heroes and heroines are confused, they are naive, they fear the grave. Their intelligence is limited, their goals are unsure, but their real struggle for meaning in life is a real struggle that has its parallels in our own living experience.*

The problem of mendacity

Tennessee Williams' characters have some realizations at the end of the play, especially Big Daddy who has a brush with death. This realization probably means that he will be dealing with life in a different fashion. It is evident in the play how the problem of mendacity (as against honesty) is something that perturbs Brick Pollitt, which makes him take up liquor, as he himself states in the play. He is of the opinion that the mendacity of the people around him has affected him so much that he does not have any more urges towards life. At this point, therefore, Big Daddy informs Brick that he has lived with mendacity all his life – which means that throughout his life, Big Daddy has been fighting a battle against untruth. He knew very well that there were all lies, yet he carried on. So in Act III, when he came to know that he has cancer for sure, he wants to go to the roof to have a look at the large estate. This probably signifies that he wants to compare his large estate with his puny self and wants to see how he has been living a life where the estate has become a concern of every family member except the same estate cannot save

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Big Daddy's life. It is this realization, which makes Big Daddy's character stand out in the play.

The play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* is also about family relationships. It shows how the different members of the Pollitt family react when they hear the news of Big Daddy's cancer. What most of the members of the Pollitt family are concerned about is not the health and life of Big Daddy, but his estate. At one level, the play seems to be a commentary on the issue of family relationships in modern times. Act I seems to be mostly about the conversation between Maggie and Brick as they talk about Big Daddy's cancer and Brick's detachment from everything. Act I is composed almost entirely of a conversation between husband and wife as Maggie attempts to shake Brick from the emotional lethargy threatening their marriage. As Maggie tells Brick:

> *Laws of silence don't work ... When something is festering in your memory or your imagination, laws of silence don't work, it's just like shutting a door and locking it on a house on fire in hopes of forgetting that the house is burning. But not facing a fire doesn't put it out. Silence about a thing just magnifies it. It grows and festers in silence, becomes malignant....*

Each member in the family is putting up a face of pretence in front of the other, which Big Daddy refers to as 'mendacity'. This mendacity is taking away from the Pollitt family its warmth for each other as well as eating away its spiritual aspects. In Act II, though the family gathers in one place to celebrate Big Daddy's birthday, yet we find that soon Big Daddy dismisses everyone, so that he could talk to his son Brick. This conversation seems to be central moment of the drama as Big Daddy explains how his life has changed after his brief encounter with the news of his cancer. Therefore, Big Daddy tells his son Brick: 'Life is important. There's nothing else to hold onto. A man that drinks is throwing his life away. Don't do it, hold onto your life. There's nothing else to hold onto ...'

Big Daddy declares that throughout his life he has lived amongst people who have always pretended–in other words, he had encountered mendacity a lot. Yet it did not lead him to give up on life as has happened with Brick. Therefore, he berates his son in the following terms: 'What do you know about this mendacity thing? Hell! I could write a book on it!' So, instead of holding onto a death-in-life existence as Brick has done, one should 'hold onto' life as Big Daddy suggests. Instead of being stuck with the 'moral paralysis' of the past, Big Daddy suggests to his son Brick that he should urge himself for the realization of the present. The following conversation between Big Daddy and Brick therefore is very significant:

> *BIG DADDY*
>
> *WAIT! - Brick...*
>
> *Don't let's —leave it like this, like them other talks we've had, we've always— talked around things, we've talked around things for some rotten reason. I don't know what, it's always like something was left not spoken, something avoided because neither of us was honest enough with the —other...*
>
> *BRICK*
>
> *I never lied to you, Big Daddy.*
>
> *BIG DADDY*
>
> *Did I ever to you?*
>
> *BRICK*

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No sir...

BIG DADDY

Then there is as least two people that never lied to each other.

BRICK

But we've never talked to each other.

BIG DADDY

We can now.

Big Daddy is able to take responsibility for his own life at this point of time. In other words, the brush with death made him realize that he should talk to his son in a much more honest way so as to bring him back to life:

> *What do you know about this mendacity thing? Hell! I could write a book on it! Don't you know that? I could write a book on it and still not cover the subject. Well, I could, I could write a goodam book on it and still not cover the subject anywhere near enough!! Think of all the lies I got to put up with—*
>
> *Pretenses! Ain't that mendacity? Having to pretend stuff you don't think or feel or have an idea of? Having for instance to act like I care for Big Mama!—I haven't even been able to stand the sight, sound, or evern smell of that woman for forty years now!—even when I laid her! Regular as a position... Pretend to love that son of a bitch of a Gooper and his wife Mae and those five same screeches out there like parrots in a jungle! Jesus! Can't stand to look at 'em'! Church!—it bores the Bejesus out of me but I go!—I go an' sit there and listen to the fool preacher! Clubs!—Elks! Masons! Rotary!—crap!.*

Gooper and Mae and their mendacity

Act III is also a verbal confrontation as Gooper and Mae confront the rest of the family with the inevitability of Big Daddy's death. Even though initially the act seems to be much about Gooper and Mae, but we soon realizes that it is more about Big Daddy. Thus, in the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, we see that family relationships are on the verge of collapse. Everyone in the family is repelled by the other; even Big Daddy and Brick who have been apparently honest with each other till this time. This is because they have never communicated with each other. Gooper and Mae show their mendacity towards the family as they want Big Daddy to bequeath them his estate. What they try to present is that while Brick has been completely dependent on alcohol, Gooper is sober about the family as well as about the plantation. They also point out that Maggie is barren while Mae is fertile. So in some sense, they (Gooper and Mae) are more worthy to have Big Daddy's love as well as money and estate. While they make an extra effort to show their filial devotion to Big Daddy, their extra devotion seems disgusting to Big Daddy.

Maggie–The cat

If Gooper and Mae are duplicitous with Big Daddy, Maggie is also the same. She thinks of doing anything she can to get the favour of Big Daddy and makes Brick get his share of inheritance. Apart from that she even pretends to be a happily married woman, who is trying to generate some interest in her husband so that they can have a child. So, from the very beginning of the play, she repeatedly pleads with Brick to regain some interest in her and to make their love life exciting. Thus, at the end of the play, Maggie opted for the extreme and locked up Brick's liquor, telling him that only after sex, she will return the liquor bottles.

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It can be said that Tennessee Williams uses the symbol of cat on a hot tin roof to convey the determination with which Maggie shows her ambitious concern to go up the social ladder. She is hell bent on acquiring the estate from Big Daddy and for that she is ready to do anything. It is on her that the title of the play is based. Though Brick and Big Daddy seems to be at the centre of the play, but when one looks at the title one feels that the play is about Maggie too. She is the one with whom the play begins and the play ends. She is the one whose ambition seems to be at the core of the play. When one looks at her character, one realizes that she is having difficulties in her marriage, but instead of being cowed down by those difficulties, she resolves to face them bravely. The difficulties of life probably has made her much 'catty' about things and now to achieve her ambitions she has decided that she will go to any extent. She even falsely informs the assembled family that she is pregnant. At one point in the play when Maggie looks at her own reflection in the mirror it seems to her that she has crouched like a cat and in a mocking voice, she says, 'I am Maggie the Cat.' Maggie stays on the hot roof of her marriage and therefore, has turned into a cat, who continues to howl to get what she desires.

It is interesting that Tennessee Williams decided to name the play after her because in doing so the play suggests how a woman needs to become extremely 'cat-like' or cunning to achieve her own ends. So, if on the one hand, there is a character like Brick who has given up on life and has taken recourse to alcohol, there on the other end, is the character of Maggie, who wants to take charge of her life in all possible ways so as to attain things for herself.

In this context, it is very important to realize that cats, even though they are kept as pets, have their own distinctive individuality and do not think of their owners as masters like dogs do. In this context of the play, it is to be seen that Maggie does not submit to the authority of the Pollitt household. Though the Pollitt family may demand her to be submissive –but Maggie is not willing to submit. From the point of view of feminism, she seems to be the central character of the play as she is the one who is willing to take charge of things. She does not want to be in a mere service of men, but wants to take charge of her own life and for that even if she needs to be a cat, then it does not matter. So, it can be said that Maggie stays on the hot tin roof of her marriage; she actually takes on some of the temperament of a cat, such as howling in heat to get what she wants.

The symbol of crutch

The crutch has been used as an important symbol in the play as Brick takes recourse to crutches. A crutch is symbolic as in order to cope up with the mendacity of others, Brick has taken to alcohol as a crutch. Brick's dependence on alcohol seems to be a tangible reality in the play, which may be due to numerous reasons. Brick says it is because of the mendacity of others, while both Maggie and Big Daddy feel that it is because of homosexual leanings of Skipper and his eventual death that has made Brick bitter. Homosexuality has been another significant theme, which has been discussed in the play to a great extent. We come to know from the play that Brick had no homosexual feelings for his friend Skipper, but his friend Skipper did have feelings for him. Moreover, after that declaration when Skipper does not get appropriate response from Brick, he delves himself into alcohol,

leading to his death. Big Daddy, in the play, states to Brick that he should not be living in the past and should value the present. He should not be dependent on the crutch of alcohol to live life as it does not mean enjoying the present. So, the crutch has to be taken away from him so that he can live life properly. Later in the play, Maggie throws the crutch away from the window–yet another symbolical representation of doing away with Brick's dependence on alcohol. The crutch is thus a significant symbol used in the play.

Check Your Progress

3. Who was the figure of Amanda Wingfield based upon in *The Glass Menagerie*?
4. Which play earned Williams his first Pulitzer Prize?
5. Where is the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* set?
6. What does the symbol of cat on a hot tin roof convey?

3.4 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913 for his famous collection of poems, *Gitanjali*.
2. The narrator of the short story, *Kabuliwala,* is a novelist, who begins the story with the narration of his daughter Mini, who is a small child, continuously prattling.
3. The dramatist was so much influenced by his mother that he created the figure of Amanda Wingfield in the play *The Glass Menagerie* based on her.
4. *A Street Car Named Desire* earned Williams' his first Pulitzer Prize.
5. The play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, is a three act play set in an evening on the suite of a big estate (Cotton Plantation) of Big Daddy Pollitt.
6. It can be said that Tennessee Williams uses the symbol of cat on a hot tin roof to convey the determination with which Maggie shows her ambition to go up the social ladder.

3.5 SUMMARY

- Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) is one of the greatest writers/poets of the world. He was born on 7th may 1861 in Jorasanko, Calcutta. He belonged to the gentry.
- Rabindranath Tagore did not have a formal education in school like other school going children. Tutors were provided at home. He was sent to St. Xavier's school for some time, but he failed to continue being in school. The reason was that he was never comfortable in school and was unable to take interest in the school curriculum.

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- Rabindranath Tagore started writing at a very tender age. He was not only a writer, but a self-trained singer cum painter. He developed his own style of writing. He wrote novels, short stories, dramas, songs and essays.
- Tagore's famous novels are *Gora*, *The Home and the World, Four Chapters*, etc. Rabindranath Tagore also won Nobel Prize in literature in 1913 for his famous collection of poems, *Gitanjali*.
- Set in Calcutta (present Kolkata) and published in 1892, the short story, *Kabuliwala*, speaks of a time, when traders from Afghanistan spent many months selling petty merchandise and dry fruits on the street.
- *Kabuliwala* portrays an attachment between a Kabuliwala and a five year old girl. Though it seems to be a simple story, but like other works of Tagore, it portrays a great emotional story of a father's love for his daughter and the fear of the Kabuliwalas or outsiders in the minds of the people.
- Tennessee Williams is a Pulitzer Prize winning American dramatist who is well known throughout the world for his plays such as *The Glass Menagerie, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* and *The Street Car Named Desire.*
- In the play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* Tennessee Williams presents the problems of the mid twentieth century American people as they live their lives amongst existential dilemmas. The play, apart from the existential dilemmas, also deals with the theme of mendacity as well Maggie's ambitions, for which she is ready to be all sneaky as a cat.
- *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* opened at the Morosco Theatre in New York on March 24, 1955. The setting of the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is a plantation home of a large estate which is located in the Mississippi Delta. The setting is that of 1950s America. All the actions in the play happen in the big house of the Pollitt Family.
- It is evident in the play how the problem of mendacity (as against honesty) is something that perturbs Brick Pollitt which makes him take up liquor, as he himself states. He is of the opinion that the mendacity of the people around him has affected him so much that he does not feel any urge towards life.
- Each member in the family is putting up a face of pretence in front of the other. This is what Big Daddy refers to as 'mendacity.' This mendacity is taking away from the Pollitt family its warmth for each other as well as eating away its spiritual aspects.

3.6 KEY TERMS

- **Existentialism:** It is a tradition of philosophical enquiry which takes as its starting point the experience of the human subject—not merely the thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human individual.
- **Crutch:** A support fitting under the armpit for use by the disabled in working.

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3.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life of Rabindranath Tagore.
2. How is the idea of the 'foreigner' presented in the short story Kabuliwala?
3. How would you describe the character of Big Daddy as being represented in the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically discuss the relationship of Mini and the Kabuliwala in detail so as to highlight the beauty of human relationships in Tagore's short story *Kabuliwala*.
2. Do you think that the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams is an existential drama? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Do you agree that the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams is all about family relationships? Discuss in detail.

3.8 FURTHER READING

Sil, N. P. 2015*Rabindra Miscellany. Critical Essays on Rabindranath Tagore's Thoughts on Love, Life, Gender, God, and Patriotism*. Bratislava: Ústav orientalistiky SAV.

Fraser, B. 2019.*Rabindranath Tagore*. London: Reaktion Books.

Gross, Robert F. (Ed). 2002. *Tennessee Williams: A Casebook*. London: Routledge.

Heintzelman, G. and A. S. Howard. 2009*Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams*. New York: Infobase Publishing.

UNIT 4 A. P. J. ABDUL KALAM AND AMARTYA SEN

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Structure

4.0 INTRODUCTION

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam's *Ignited Minds* is a book, which manifests before us the different facets of the world, especially India, so as to make the readers aware of the ways in which India can gain supremacy and have a say in world politics as per its capabilities. It is an inspirational book which every Indian should read so as to inspire themselves to go beyond their petty interests and think of India as a nation, so that the nation finds people who can achieve greatness for it. In those terms, it is an essential read for the young minds, who are the future of our nation and will shape the nation according to their education and sensibilities. So it is essential that the younger generation is provided with such works like *Ignited Minds* so as to facilitate their mental blooming as well as intellectual growth. The essay, 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion' is a core chapter from the book, *Ignited Minds*, which places before the readers Kalam's notion of patriotism, which is very essential to know, so as to realize our potential as an individual as well as a nation. In the essay Kalam not only talks about some of his achievements and the ways he had worked hard for them, but also focuses on his beliefs regarding religion, Indian culture and politics, which can pave the path for India to achieve greatness.

The unit also discusses the essay called 'Tagore and his India' by Amartya Sen, who is a famous economist from India and has also received the Nobel Prize. Students of economics usually read his writings, but Amartya Sen's essays are also prescribed for the English Literature students, which show the significance of Amartya Sen as a scholar and the multidisciplinary nature of his works. He is an economist, but also a political thinker as well as a sociologist, who with his works had proved that one can go beyond one's immediate subject and find oneself to be at a comfortable zone while discussing things which are of much concern to the world. It is also interesting to note that Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate is writing about another Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for his collection of poems, *Gitanjali*.

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4.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the life and times of A. P. J. Abdul Kalam and Amartya Sen
- Describe the essay, 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion' in detail
- Critically comment on the essay, 'Tagore and his India'

4.2 A. P. J. ABDUL KALAM

Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam (15 October 1931–27 July 2015) was an aerospace scientist, who served as the eleventh President of India from 2002 to 2007. He was born and brought in a Tamil Muslim family in the pilgrimage centre of Rameswaram. He moved to Madras in 1955 to study aerospace engineering in Madras Institute of Technology. He studied physics and aerospace engineering. He spent the next four decades as a scientist and science administrator, mainly at the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and was intimately involved in India's civilian space programme and military missile development efforts. He, thus, came to be known as the 'Missile Man of India ' for his work on the development of ballistic missile and launch vehicle technology. He also played a pivotal organisational, technical, and political role in India's Pokhran-II nuclear tests in 1998, the first since the original nuclear test by India in 1974.

Kalam was elected as the 11th President of India in 2002 with the support of both the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and the then-opposition Indian National Congress. Widely referred to as the 'People's President', he returned to his civilian life of education, writing and public service after a single term. He was a recipient of several prestigious awards, including the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour. On 27th July 2015, while delivering a lecture called 'Creating a Livable Planet Earth' at the Indian Institute of Management Shillong, he died. In his book, *India 2020,* Kalam strongly advocated an action plan to develop India into a 'knowledge superpower' and a developed nation by the year 2020. Wheeler Island, a national missile test site in Odisha, was renamed Abdul Kalam Island in September 2015.

A.P. J. Abdul Kalam's various writings are:

- *Developments in Fluid Mechanics and Space Technology* by A P J Abdul Kalam and Roddam Narasimha, 1988
- *India 2020*: A Vision for the New Millennium by A P J Abdul Kalam and Y. S. Rajan, 1998
- *Wings of Fire*: An Autobiography by A P J Abdul Kalam and Arun Tiwari, 1999.
- *Ignited Minds*: Unleashing the Power Within India, 2002.
- *The Luminous Sparks,* 2004.
- *Mission India*, 2005.

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- *Inspiring Thoughts*, 2007
- *Indomitable Spirit*, 2006
- *Envisioning an Empowered Nation* by A P J Abdul Kalam with A Sivathanu Pillai, 2003
- *You Are Born To Blossom: Take My Journey Beyond* by A P J Abdul Kalam and Arun Tiwari, 2011.
- *Turning Points: A Journey through Challenges*, 2012.
- *Target 3 Billion* by A P J Abdul Kalam and Srijan Pal Singh, 2011
- *My Journey: Transforming Dreams into Actions*, 2013.
- *A Manifesto for Change: A Sequel to India 2020* by A P J Abdul Kalam and V Ponraj, 2014
- *Forge your Future: Candid, Forthright, Inspiring*, 2014.
- *Reignited: Scientific Pathways to a Brighter Future* by A P J Abdul Kalam and Srijan Pal Singh, 2015.
- *Transcendence: My Spiritual Experiences with Pramukh Swamiji* by A P J Abdul Kalam with Arun Tiwari, 2015
- *Advantage India: From Challenge to Opportunity* by A P J Abdul Kalam and Srijan Pal Singh, 2015

4.2.1 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion' from *Ignited Minds*

Box 4.1 Some Significant Paragraphs from 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion'

I have been fortunate in that my work has taken me to very many beautiful places that opened up my mind to the cosmic reality. One such was Chandipur in Orissa. From Kolkata, the distance to Balasore is around 234 km and Chandipur is 16 km from the town. The name means the abode of the Goddess Chandi or Durga. The beach here is surely among the finest in India. … … Some forty years ago, the daredevil Biju Patnaik piloted his Kalinga Airways plane into Jakarta to find Indonesian President Sukarno in the first flush of fatherhood. Sukarno's wife had delivered a baby, and the family was searching for a name for the newborn girl when Bijuda called on them. Sukarno explained the problem on hand to the visitor from India. Biju Patnaik cast his mind back to the clouds that had greeted the baby's arrival and suggested the Sanskrit equivalent for them. Sukarno's daughter was promptly christened Megawati and thus the daughter of the leader of the world's largest Muslim nation got a Hindu name. For great men, religion is a way of making friends; small people make religion a fighting tool. Many years later, after several political upheavals, Megawati Sukarnoputri would become first the Vice President and then the President of Indonesia. … Dr Amartya Sen is a great economist and a Nobel laureate who is much respected for his ideas on development. …. 'I acknowledge the greatness of Dr Amartya Sen in the field of economic development and admire his suggestions … it seemed to me that Dr Sen looked at India from a Western perspective. … Pandit Nehru spoke in the United Nations against nuclear proliferation and advocated zero nuclear weapons in all the countries. We know the result. One should note that there are more than 10,000 nuclear warheads on American soil, another 10,000 nuclear warheads are on Russian soil and there are a number of them in the UK, China, France, Pakistan and some other countries. The START II and the

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recent agreements between the USA and Russia only talk about reducing the number of nuclear warheads to 2,000 each and even these agreements are limping. Nobody takes the reduction of warheads in serious terms. … Can India be a silent spectator?' … India has been invaded in the last 3,000 years by a succession of conquerors, including the British, French, Dutch and Portuguese, either to enlarge their territory or to spread a religion or to steal the wealth of our country. Why is it India never invaded other countries (with a few exceptions in the Tamil kingdoms) ? Is it because our kings were not brave enough? The truth is Indians were tolerant and never understood the true implications of being ruled by others for generations. …. … I call to my people to rise to greatness. It is a call to all Indians to rise to their highest capabilities. … For a people and a nation to rise to the highest, they must have a common memory of great heroes and exploits, of great adventures and triumphs in the past. … All nations which have risen to greatness have been characterized by a sense of mission. The Japanese have it in large measure. So do the Germans. In the course of three decades, Germany was twice all but destroyed. And yet its people's sense of destiny never dimmed. From the ashes of the Second World War, it has emerged a nation economically powerful and politically assertive. If Germany can be a great nation, why can't India? Unfortunately for India, historic forces have not given a common memory to all communities by taking them back to their roots a millennium down the ages. Not enough effort has been made in the last fifty years to foster that memory. I had the fortune of learning many of our religions in the country from my childhood, in high school and then onwards for nearly seventy years. One aspect I realize is that the central theme of any religion is spiritual well-being. Indeed it should be understood that the foundation of secularism in India has to be derived from spirituality. … It is because our sense of mission has weakened that we have ceased to be true to our culture and ourselves. If we come to look upon ourselves as a divided people with no pride in our past and no faith in the future, what else can we look forward to except frustration, disappointment and despair? … The greatest danger to our sense of unity and our sense of purpose comes from those ideologists who seek to divide the people. The Indian Constitution bestows on all the citizens total equality under its protective umbrella. What is now cause for concern is the trend towards putting religious form over religious sentiments. Why can't we develop a cultural — not religious — context for our heritage that serves to make Indians of us all? The time has come for us to stop differentiating. What we need today is a vision for the nation which can bring unity. It is when we accept India in all its splendid glory that, with a shared past as abase, we can look forward to a shared future of peace and prosperity, of creation and abundance. Our past is there with us forever.It has to be nurtured in good faith, not destroyed in exercises of political one-upmanship. The developed India will not be a nation of cities. It will be a network of prosperous villages empowered by telemedicine, tele-education and e-commerce. The new India will emerge out of the combination of biotechnology, biosciences and agriculture sciences and industrial development. The political leaders would be working with the zeal born of the knowledge that the nation is bigger than individual interests and political parties. This attitude will lead to minimizing the rural— urban divide as progress takes place in the countryside and. urbanites move to rural areas to absorb the best of what nature can give in the form of products and wealth. The most important and urgent task before our leadership is to get all the forces for constructive change together and deploy them in a mission mode. India is a country of one billion people with numerous religions and communities. It offers a wide spectrum of ideologies, besides its geographic diversity. This is our greatest strength. However, fragmented thinking, compartmentalized planning and isolated efforts are not yielding results. The people have to come together to create a harmonious India. The second vision of the nation will bring about a renaissance to the nation. The task of casting a strong India is in the hands of a visionary political leadership.

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Summary of 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion'

A.P. J. Abdul Kalam's 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion' is a chapter taken from his book, *Ignited Minds.* He starts by quoting Swami Vivekananda, where he talks about how 'doing good to others' is his religion. Kalam also believed in the same and therefore, started with Vivekananda.

Kalam states that every day he goes for a morning walk for about five kilometers and experiences the cool breeze, the singing of the birds and the arrival of the sun, which makes him feel how 'nature brings together all the elements that go into making this moment possible and feel thankful to God'. He further adds that he is fortunate that his work has taken him to many places, which have opened his mind. The place which he talks about in this chapter is Chandipur in Orissa. The name means the abode of the Goddess *Chandi* or *Durga.* It is situated in the Bay of Bengal beach and according to Kalam it is 'among the finest in India'.

Kalam further states that they have been testing their missiles from the Sriharikota Range of ISRO, but they needed their own missile test range. The Interim Test Range (ITR) was established in 1989, where many different kinds of missiles were tested, such as the multi-role Trishul, multi-target capable Akash, the anti-tank Nag missile, the surface-to-surface missile Prithvi, the long-range missile Agni, BrahMos, the Indo-Russian joint venture, etc. He further adds that the ITR extends to 17 km along the seacoast where a number of tracking instruments have been deployed along the flight path of the test vehicles, suggesting that it has a world-class range.

Kalam then states an incident from July 1995, when after the fourth consecutive successful flight of Prithvi, they were celebrating and at the same time pondering over what should be their next project. At that time, Lt. Gen. Ramesh Khosla, Director General Artillery, suggested that the Army needed a flight test on a land range with the accuracy of impact at the final destination within 150 meters. At this suggestion, Kalam and his team opened a geographical map of India and figured out that there are five islands called Wheeler Islands in the Bay of Bengal which is 70 to 80 km from ITR and it was decided that it is the right choice for testing land missiles. Consequently, a survey of the Wheeler Island started in helicopter as well as help was taken from the local fishermen.

Two of Kalam's colleagues, Saraswat and Salwan, reached the island after an arduous journey, when it was already dark. They had to stay on the island. Next morning, they surveyed the island and found out that on the eastern side of the island a Bangladesh flag was flying atop a tree with huts nearby. They quickly removed the flag. Thereafter, the district authorities, including forest and environment officers, visited the island and after Defence Minister's clearance to acquire the islands, the needful was done. Kalam got the necessary papers made by meeting the Orissa Chief Minister Biju Patnaik. Soon, he was informed that Biju Patnaik is ready to meet him.

Then, Kalam goes on to inform how Chief Minister, Biju Patnaik, particularly during his days as a pilot, shared a great friendship with President Sukarno. When Kalam meets Biju Patnaik, he not only agrees to give the four islands for DRDO Missile program, but also added 'Kalam, I have given the approval you asked for,

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I know you will use it well. Your mission—the missile programme—is very important to the country. Anything needed from Orissa will be yours.' Kalam further recounts how forty years back, Biju Patnaik piloted his Kalinga Airways plane into Jakarta to find Indonesian President Sukarno in the first flush of fatherhood. Sukarno's wife had delivered a baby, and the family was searching for a name for the newborn girl, when Bijuda called on them. Consequently, Sukarno's daughter was given a Sanskrit name Megawati and thus, the daughter of world's largest Muslim nation got a Hindu name. Many years later, after several political upheavals, Megawati Sukarnoputri would become the first Vice President and then the President of Indonesia.

Kalam goes on to talk about how we are having a kind of 'abnormal and paranoid fixation with a particular country', which has led to a situation, where we had not been able to realize the full potential of what India really has:

> *For a large country with a billion people, a country with a thriving industry and large pool of scientific talent, a country, moreover, that is a nuclear power, India does not count for as much as it should. In terms of our influence in world affairs, probably no other country is so far below its potential as we are.*

Kalam says how after the Pokhran II, the West speaks about India and Pakistan in the same breath. Kalam asks whether is it not in our nation's interest to demonstrate to the world that we can think of a world beyond Pakistan, that we are a qualitatively better, more mature and secular country with a greater commitment to the values of democracy and freedom?

Next, Kalam discusses Amartya Sen's statement about the nuclear test that was conducted in May 1998 by India, when he stated that it was 'ill-conceived'. Kalam acknowledges the greatness of Amartya Sen in the world of economics and his thrust on primary education, but he states that what Dr. Sen is doing is to look at India from the Western perspective. It is true that a friendly relationship with all countries will lead to economic prosperity, but at the same time one should keep in mind the experience India had in the past.

Kalam next quotes Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who spoke in the United Nations against nuclear proliferation and advocated zero nuclear weapons in all the countries. However, there are more than 10,000 nuclear warheads both in America as well as Russia and also many in the hands of the UK, China, France, Pakistan and some other countries. The talks between the USA and Russia are all about reducing the nuclear warheads to less than 2000 each, though in reality no one has reduced any of it. In this context, it is essential to understand that when the neighbouring countries of India are armed with nuclear weapons, then it cannot be that India remains 'a silent spectator'.

Kalam delves in the history at this point and talks about how in the last 3000 years, India has been attacked by a succession of conquerors (including British, French, Dutch and Portuguese) so as to:

- enlarge their territory, or
- spread a religion, or
- steal the wealth of our country.

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Kalam questions why India was invaded so many times. He believes that it is because of our 'tolerance', which made us never understand the true implications of being ruled by others for generations.

After a long struggle for freedom, India got united and presently, has a definite physical boundary. In the present context, therefore, economic prosperity of the nation is not the only concern. According to Kalam, we should also focus on the aspect of defending India. It is true that one needs to build one's strength and strength is achieved both by economic prosperity as well as military might. Moreover, all the members of the Security Council of the UN possess nuclear weapons, then why should India not develop nuclear warheads, especially when it is eyeing for a seat in the Security Council.

What Kalam wants is to inspire the Indians enough so as to make them reach the heights of greatness. Kalam thinks that there are three factors, which can lead to the rise of a nation–a collective pride in its achievements, unity and the ability for combined action. The people should have a common memory of great heroes and exploits, of great adventures and triumphs of the past. Moreover, all nations that have risen to greatness have been characterized by a sense of mission. Kalam gives the examples of Japan and Germany who have risen from the ashes of the Second World War and reached great heights, which is also possible for India, if Indians resolve to do so. But the problem for India is that unfortunately for India, historic forces have not given a common memory to all communities by taking them back to their roots a millennium down the ages. Not enough efforts have been made in the last fifty years to foster that memory.

Kalam thinks that he is fortunate that he could learn many of the religions in the country from his childhood, in high school and then onwards for nearly seventy years. What he figures out to be central aspect of all religions is 'spiritual well-being'. India's secularism has to be derived from spirituality. This, according to Kalam, will give much impetus to India's sense of mission. Even though, Islam and Christianity has come to India, but Indians have retained their sense of Indian-ness and therefore, Kalam is of the opinion that the core culture of India goes beyond time. For example, A. R. Rahman may be a Muslim but his voice echoes in the soul of all Indians, of whatever faith, when he sings *Vande Mataram*.

Kalam further states that the 'greatest danger to our sense of unity and our sense of purpose comes from those ideologists who seek to divide the people'. It is essential that Indians get over their religious biases and think of their common heritage so that the vision of the nation brings unity for India. Also, one needs to understand that India is not and will not be a 'nation of cities', as there are villages, which should be empowered by telemedicine, tele-education and e-commerce. Moreover, combination of biotechnology, biosciences and agriculture sciences, and industrial development can usher a tremendous growth for India. The political leaders, at the same time, need to think beyond their political gains and party politics and think of the national welfare. At the same time, the urban-rural divide also needs to be diminished, so as to achieve growth and progress. In this context, the leadership must put India under a 'mission mode', so as to achieve the targeted growth. Our wide spectrum of ideologies as well as diversities are our strength and therefore, a unity needs to be achieved as 'fragmented thinking,

compartmentalized planning and isolated efforts' cannot yield results. It is essential that a harmonious effort is made with the visionary political leadership so as to bring 'renaissance to the nation'.

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Critical appreciation of 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion'

A.P. J. Abdul Kalam was one of the greatest scientists that India has produced and also was the eleventh President of India; he became very popular across India for his scientific spirit, simplicity of living, high thinking as well as scholarly pursuits. His book, *Ignited Minds,* is one of the most popular reads amongst the masses, which present his ideas about India, about India's development as a nation as well as the map and the way it should take to march forward. A significant chapter from the book, 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion', states Kalam's concern with the Indian nation and what he wants India and Indians to do, if India wants to achieve its potential and see a growth both in terms of economic prosperity as well as military might.

All the great nations of the world who are thought to be developed nations have both economic prosperity and military might as their strength, which has made them have a major say in world politics. Kalam is of the opinion that India can also scale such greater heights and even more, if it makes efforts to do so. Kalam states the reasons which have made India not achieve this status till now and then focuses on the ways in which India can reach there. This chapter of the book is truly inspirational as it makes the Indians aware of their potential as well as their lacunas. One should know one's strengths and weaknesses so as to think of a way forward. One should know about one's weakness as one needs to get over them to succeed, whereas the strong points can be enhanced further to make one reach greater heights.

India's diversity (whether geographical, linguistic, religious or cultural) is India's strength, which Indians need to not only accept and tolerate, but also respect and accommodate in its cultural formations, so as to scale greater heights. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, was a Muslim by birth, but has been brought up in an atmosphere, where very early in his life, he realized the significance of multicultural and multi-religious essence of Indian existence. He reminds Indians that it is essential that one lives and carries forward that cosmopolitan as well as secular spirit of Indian existence so as to make India stand out in the world. It is true that Indians needs to be tolerant of other cultures and religions, but at the same time, Kalam warns that India should know who its enemies are and who its friends are. To build up friendly ties with other countries is always welcome, but at the same time, one should be aware that there are enemies of India, who have time and again proven in the historical past that they cannot be trusted. Kalam is not saying that India should not be friendly with other countries, but he is just suggesting that India needs to be cautious of the untrustworthy nations.

When Amartya Sen criticised the Pokhran II nuclear test, which was held in 1998, he suggested that India should focus on economic prosperity and not think in terms of making more and more arms and ammunitions (especially, Nuclear Warheads) as that do not in any way make India take a step further in economic terms. However, Kalam is of the opinion that Amartya Sen is wrong on this account as he is merely thinking about the world and India from the point of view of his

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own discipline, economics and not taking into account of the fact that though the whole world is talking about nuclear disarmament, but in reality, there have been no concrete steps to do so. America and Russia have more than 10000 nuclear warheads respectively and a good number of such nuclear warheads are also there with China, France, and Britain. Pakistan has also become a nuclear power and in that context, it is not prudent enough for India not to test its missiles and nuclear warheads.

Therefore, he starts the chapter with his experience of the missile tests in Orissa and then goes on to talk about how India should develop as a nuclear power and also as an economic power. Kalam is far-sighted and therefore, can see that if India has to become a global power then it has to plan accordingly. In this context, patriotism is a value that he regards very highly as he thinks that one should think about his or her nation above everything else. For him, love for one's country is what makes him or her stand out. This love for the country does not only mean caring for the land, but also for the people without any discrimination on basis of any lines whether religious, economic or caste. Only then the whole of India will prosper as a nation; with the development of every section of the Indian society, India will truly see growth.

The discriminations that we see in this world are man-made and therefore, they have no sanctity based on any religion. Religion cannot be a basis of any kind of affiliations whether to a state or a nation and therefore, one should upgrade their thoughts and ideas far beyond the petty politics of religion and think of the greater good of humanity, which is the true religion. But at the same time, when one thinks of the greater good of the humanity, one should not forget that nation is of supreme significance when one thinks in terms of conglomeration of people. Kalam through this chapter, 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion' makes an appeal to his readers to pursue the true religion of thinking in terms of nation and national development. He himself has given up his life for the sake of the nation whether as a missile scientist or as the President of India.

A simple incident that he quotes in the essay is of supreme significance in this context. When he and his team were exploring the Wheeler Islands in the Bay of Bengal, they notice that the Bangladeshi flag was being hoisted there. Kalam and his colleagues make every effort to bring down the flag from the Indian soil and claim it as the Indian territory. This shows that he is not only a scientist, but also a nationalist who thinks in terms of Indian territory and its rights. One should be aware that it is our religion to safeguard our nation from any outside threat and not a single ounce of tolerance should be shown as far as the integrity of the nation is concerned. It is because of Indian tolerance that people from outside India had been able to colonize and rule India for long, but Kalam is of the view that we need to be much more watchful of such forces and not entertain them in any way when the integrity of the nation is in question. This clearly shows the nationalistic aspect of Kalam, who cannot and did not think beyond his nation. His dedication for the nation can be seen at its height, when he and his colleagues endeavoured day and night to build missiles and nuclear warheads, which were essential for Indian security and he does not want any kind of compromise, when it comes to this issue.

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Further, it can be seen that he provides many such examples in the book, *Ignited Minds,* so as to ascertain the way through which the nation can understand its potential. We also observe that he urges his readers to have a similar view point so as to make India shine with its true colours. Another aspect that Kalam mentions in short is the communal harmony, which is essential for Indian society. He quotes the example of Biju Patnaik, who was the inspiration behind the Indonesian President Sukarno's daughter's Hindu name, Megawati as they were good friends and how the daughter of world's largest Muslim nation got a Hindu name. Many years later, after several political upheavals, Megawati Sukarnoputri, will go on to become the first Vice President and then the President of Indonesia. This shows two things– (i) one should think beyond nation and accept friendship of people from all corners of the world and second, (ii) one should not merely think in terms of religious bigotry and think of communal harmony, just like when President Sukarno took a Sanskrit name for his daughter, even though he was a Muslim president. This shows that friendship is more significant than one's religion.

It can be said that Kalam's 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion' is an extremely prudent discourse on patriotism, where he enumerates the ways in which India can realize its potential by getting over the petty issue, which has been pestering the Indian nation in many ways. The communal tensions, the Hindu-Muslim riots, caste-based and gender-based discrimination, violence as well as terrorist attacks and a continuous threat from Pakistan are some of the concerns that India should deal with effectively, so as to realize its greatness.

Check Your Progress

1. What was the other name of Kalam?
2. Mention any three works by A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.
3. What kind of missiles were tested at the Interim Test Range (ITR)?
4. Why did foreign nations try to attack India in the past?

4.3 AMARTYA SEN

Amartya Kumar Sen (born 3 November 1933) is an Indian economist and philosopher, who since 1972 has taught and worked in the United Kingdom and the United States. He was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science in 1998 and India's Bharat Ratna in 1999 for his work in welfare economics. Amartya Sen began his career in the Department of Economics, Jadavpur University as a Professor of Economics in 1956. From 1957 to 1963, Sen served as a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Between 1960 and 1961, Sen was a visiting Professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States. He was also a visiting Professor at the University of California, Berkeley (1964-1965) and Cornell University (1978-1984). He taught as Professor of Economics between 1963 and 1971 at the Delhi School of Economics. In 1987, Sen joined Harvard as the Thomas W. Lamont University Professor of Economics. In 1998, he was appointed as the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, becoming the first Asian head of an Oxbridge college. In January 2004, Sen returned to Harvard.

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He also established the Eva Colorni Trust at the former London Guildhall University in the name of his deceased wife. In May 2007, he was appointed as the chairman of Nalanda Mentor Group to examine the framework of international cooperation and propose structure of partnership, which would govern the establishment of Nalanda International University Project as an international centre of education seeking to revive the ancient centre of higher learning, which was present in India from the 5th century to 1197. On 19th July 2012, Sen was named the first chancellor of the proposed Nalanda University (NU).

Some of the significant works of Amartya Sen are:

- *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, 1982.
- *Choice, Welfare, and Measurement*, 1983
- *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, 1970.
- *Resources, Values, and Development*, 1997
- *Hunger and Public Action* by Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze, 1989.
- *India, economic development and social opportunity* by Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze, 1988.
- *Development as Freedom*, 1999.
- *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture, and Identity*, 2005.
- *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny. Issues of our time*, 2006.
- *The Idea of Justice*, 2010.
- *An Uncertain Glory: The Contradictions of Modern India* by Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze, 2013.

A brief note about Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore has been discussed in detail in the Unit 3 when we discussed his short story, *Kabuliwala*. We have known the literary side of Tagore in Unit 3. In this section of the Unit 4, we will be focusing on the political as well as cultural significance of Tagore. We have to remember that he was not just a writer, but a cultural icon of Bengal and India and also deeply participated in the Indian freedom struggle. His concern for India is not only perceived in his writings, but also in his actions such as his political protest during the Partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon in 1905 or his giving up of the Knighthood after the Jalianwala Bagh Massacre in 1919. Tagore abhorred all kinds of violence and thought that it is essential for the India to look forward to the communal harmony and social justice as well as gender equality, if India had to achieve greatness. In his 'Tagore and his India', Amartya Sen discusses these issues and others to provide us a comprehensive outlook on Tagore and also to look at the contemporary life in India and how Tagore would have reacted to them. In the essay, Amartya Sen makes an attempt to understand these ideas in detail so as to situate Tagore and his ideas in the present political and cultural scenario of India. For further studying the significance of Amartya Sen's essay of Tagore, a summary of the same is provided in the next

section which will make you understand the key issues that Sen talked about in the essay.

4.3.1 'Tagore and his India' from *The Argumentative Indian*

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Box 4.2 Some Significant Passages from Amartya Sen's 'Tagore and his India'

In contrast, in the rest of the world, especially in Europe and America, the excitement that Tagore's writings created in the early years of the twentieth century has largely vanished. The enthusiasm with which his work was once greeted was quite remarkable. *Gitanjali,* a selection of his poetry for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, was published in English translation in London in March of that year, and had been reprinted ten times by November, when the award was announced. The contrast between Tagore's commanding presence in Bengali literature and culture, and his near-total eclipse in the rest of the world, is perhaps less interesting than the distinction between the view of Tagore as a deeply relevant and many-sided contemporary thinker in Bangladesh and India, and his image in the West as a repetitive and remote spiritualist. Graham Greene had, in fact, gone on to explain that he associated Tagore "with what Chesterton calls 'the bright pebbly eyes' of the Theosophists." Rabindranath did come from a Hindu family – one of the landed gentry who owned estates mostly in what is now Bangladesh. But whatever wisdom there might be in Akhmatova's invoking of Hinduism and the Ganges, it did not prevent the largely Muslim citizens of Bangladesh from having a deep sense of identity with Tagore and his ideas. Nor did it stop the newly independent Bangladesh from choosing one of Tagore's songs – the "Amar Sonar Bangla" which means "my golden Bengal" – as its national anthem. This must be very confusing to those who see the contemporary world as a "clash of civilizations" – with "the Muslim civilization," "the Hindu civilization," and "the Western civilization," each forcefully confronting the others. They would also be confused by Rabindranath Tagore's own description of his Bengali family as the product of "a confluence of three cultures: Hindu, Mohammedan, and British".The profoundly original writer, whose elegant prose and magical poetry Bengali readers know well, is not the sermonizing spiritual guru admired – and then rejected – in London. Tagore was not only an immensely versatile poet; he was also a great short story writer, novelist, playwright, essayist, and composer of songs, as well as a talented painter whose pictures, with their mixture of representation and abstraction, are only now beginning to receive the acclaim that they have long deserved. His essays, moreover, ranged over literature, politics, culture, social change, religious beliefs, philosophical analysis, international relations, and much else. Since Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Gandhi were two leading Indian thinkers in the twentieth century, many commentators have tried to compare their ideas. On learning of Rabindranath's death, Jawaharlal Nehru, then incarcerated in a British jail in India, wrote in his prison diary for August 7, 1941: "Gandhi and Tagore. Two types entirely different from each other, and yet both of them typical of India, both in the long line of India's great men … It is not so much because of any single virtue but because of the *tout ensemble,* that I felt that among the world's great men today Gandhi and Tagore were supreme as human beings. What good fortune for me to have come into close contact with them."Tagore greatly admired Gandhi but he had many disagreements with him on a variety of subjects, including nationalism, patriotism, the importance of cultural exchange, the role of rationality and of science, and the nature of economic and social development. These differences, I shall argue, have a clear and consistent pattern, with Tagore pressing for more room for reasoning, and for a less traditionalist view, a greater interest in the rest

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of the world, and more respect for science and for objectivity generally.Rabindranath knew that he could not have given India the political leadership that Gandhi provided, and he was never stingy in his praise for what Gandhi did for the nation (it was, in fact, Tagore who popularized the term "Mahatma" – great soul – as a description of Gandhi). And yet each remained deeply critical of many things that the other stood for. That Mahatma Gandhi has received incomparably more attention outside India and also within much of India itself makes it important to understand "Tagore's side" of the Gandhi-Tagore debates.Given the vast range of his creative achievements, perhaps the most astonishing aspect of the image of Tagore in the West is its narrowness; he is recurrently viewed as "the great mystic from the East," an image with a putative message for the West, which some would welcome, others dislike, and still others find deeply boring. … We can imagine that Rabindranath's physical appearance – handsome, bearded, dressed in non-Western clothes – may, to some extent, have encouraged his being seen as a carrier of exotic wisdom. Yasunari Kawabata, the first Japanese Nobel Laureate in Literature, treasured memories from his middle-school days of "this sage-like poet": His white hair flowed softly down both sides of his forehead; the tufts of hair under the temples also were long like two beards, and linking up with the hair on his cheeks, continued into his beard, so that he gave an impression, to the boy I was then, of some ancient Oriental wizard. The idea of a direct, joyful, and totally fearless relationship with God can be found in many of Tagore's religious writings, including the poems of *Gitanjali.* From India's diverse religious traditions he drew many ideas, both from ancient texts and from popular poetry. But "the bright pebbly eyes of the Theosophists" do not stare out of his verses. For Tagore it was of the highest importance that people be able to live, and reason, in freedom. His attitudes toward politics and culture, nationalism and internationalism, tradition and modernity, can all be seen in the light of this belief. Nothing, perhaps, expresses his values as clearly as a poem in *Gitanjali:*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free; Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; … Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit; …Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.Rabindranath's qualified support for nationalist movements – and his opposition to the unfreedom of alien rule – came from this commitment. So did his reservations about patriotism, which, he argued, can limit both the freedom to engage ideas from outside "narrow domestic walls" and the freedom also to support the causes of people in other countries. Rabindranath's passion for freedom underlies his firm opposition to unreasoned traditionalism, which makes one a prisoner of the past (lost, as he put it, in "the dreary desert sand of dead habit").Tagore and Gandhi's attitudes toward personal life were also quite different. Gandhi was keen on the virtues of celibacy, theorized about it, and, after some years of conjugal life, made a private commitment – publicly announced – to refrain from sleeping with his wife. Rabindranath's own attitude on this subject was very different… Gandhi and Tagore severely clashed over their totally different attitudes toward science. In January 1934, Bihar was struck by a devastating earthquake, which killed thousands of people. Gandhi, who was then deeply involved in the fight against untouchability (the barbaric system inherited from India's divisive past, in which "lowly people" were kept at a physical distance), extracted a positive lesson from the tragic event. "A man like me," Gandhi argued, "cannot but believe this earthquake is a divine chastisement sent by God for our sins" – in particular the sins of untouchability. "For me there is a vital connection between the Bihar calamity and the untouchability campaign." Tagore, who equally abhorred untouchability and had joined Gandhi in the movements against it, protested against this interpretation of an event that had caused suffering and death to so many innocent people, including children and babies. He also hated the epistemology implicit in seeing an earthquake as caused by ethical failure. "It is," he wrote, "all

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the more unfortunate because this kind of unscientific view of [natural] phenomena is too readily accepted by a large section of our countrymen."Tagore was predictably hostile to communal sectarianism (such as a Hindu orthodoxy that was antagonistic to Islamic, Christian, or Sikh perspectives). But even nationalism seemed to him to be suspect. Isaiah Berlin summarizes well Tagore's complex position on Indian nationalism:Both Gandhi and Nehru expressed their appreciation of the important part Tagore took in the national struggle. It is fitting that after independence, India chose a song of Tagore ("Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka," which can be roughly translated as "the leader of people's minds") as its national anthem. Since Bangladesh would later choose another song of Tagore ("Amar Sonar Bangla") as its national anthem, he may be the only one ever to have authored the national anthems of two different countries.Tagore's criticism of the British administration of India was consistently strong and grew more intense over the years. This point is often missed, since he made a special effort to dissociate his criticism of the Raj from any denigration of British – or Western – people and culture. Mahatma Gandhi's well-known quip in reply to a question, asked in England, on what he thought of Western civilization ("It would be a good idea") could not have come from Tagore's lipsEven in his powerful indictment of British rule in India in 1941, in a lecture which he gave on his last birthday, and which was later published as a pamphlet under the title *Crisis in Civilization,* he strains hard to maintain the distinction between opposing Western imperialism and rejecting Western civilization. Rabindranath rebelled against the strongly nationalist form that the independence movement often took, and this made him refrain from taking a particularly active part in contemporary politics. He wanted to assert India's right to be independent without denying the importance of what India could learn – freely and profitably – from abroad. He was afraid that a rejection of the West in favor of an indigenous Indian tradition was not only limiting in itself; it could easily turn into hostility to other influences from abroad, including Christianity, which came to parts of India by the fourth century; Judaism, which came through Jewish immigration shortly after the fall of Jerusalem, as did Zoroastrianism through Parsi immigration later on (mainly in the eighth century), and, of course – and most importantly – Islam, which has had a very strong presence in India since the tenth century.Tagore's criticism of patriotism is a persistent theme in his writings. As early as 1908, he put his position succinctly in a letter replying to the criticism of Abala Bose, the wife of a great Indian scientist, Jagadish Chandra Bose: "Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter; my refuge is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live." Tagore was concerned not only that there be wider opportunities for education across the country (especially in rural areas where schools were few), but also that the schools themselves be more lively and enjoyable. He himself had dropped out of school early, largely out of boredom, and had never bothered to earn a diploma. He wrote extensively on how schools should be made more attractive to boys and girls and thus more productive. His own co-educational school at Santiniketan had many progressive features. The emphasis here was on self-motivation rather than on discipline, and on fostering intellectual curiosity rather than competitive excellence. Much of Rabindranath's life was spent in developing the school at Santiniketan. The school never had much money, since the fees were very low. His lecture honoraria, "$700 a scold," went to support it, as well as most of his Nobel Prize money. The school received no support from the government, but did get help from private citizens – even Mahatma Gandhi raised money for it.At the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence, the reckoning of what India had or had not achieved in this half century was a subject of considerable interest: "What has been the story of those first fifty years?" If Tagore were to see the India of today, more than half a century after independence, nothing perhaps would shock him so much as the continued illiteracy of the masses. He would see this as a total betrayal of what

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the nationalist leaders had promised during the struggle for independence – a promise that had figured even in Nehru's rousing speech on the eve of independence in August 1947 (on India's "tryst with destiny").In view of his interest in childhood education, Tagore would not be consoled by the extraordinary expansion of university education, in which India sends to its universities six times as many people per unit of population as does China. Rather, he would be stunned that, in contrast to East and Southeast Asia, including China, half the adult population and two thirds of Indian women remain unable to read or write. Statistically reliable surveys indicate that even in the late 1980s, nearly half of the rural girls between the ages of twelve and fourteen did not attend any school for a single day of their lives. Rabindranath would be shocked by the growth of cultural separatism in India, as elsewhere. The "openness" that he valued so much is certainly under great strain right now – in many countries. Religious fundamentalism still has a relatively small following in India; but various factions seem to be doing their best to increase their numbers. Certainly religious sectarianism has had much success in some parts of India (particularly in the west and the north). Tagore would see the expansion of religious sectarianism as being closely associated with an artificially separatist view of culture.He would have strongly resisted defining India in specifically Hindu terms, rather than as a "confluence" of many cultures. Even after the partition of 1947, India is still the third- largest Muslim country in the world, with more Muslims than in Bangladesh, and nearly as many as in Pakistan. Only Indonesia has substantially more followers of Islam. Indeed, by pointing to the immense heterogeneousness of India's cultural background and its richly diverse history, Tagore had argued that the "idea of India" itself militated against a culturally separatist view – "against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others."Tagore would also oppose the cultural nationalism that has recently been gaining some ground in India, along with an exaggerated fear of the influence of the West. He was uncompromising in his belief that human beings could absorb quite different cultures in constructive ways:Rabindranath insisted on open debate on every issue, and distrusted conclusions based on a mechanical formula, no matter how attractive that formula might seem in isolation (such as "This was forced on us by our colonial masters – we must reject it," "This is our tradition – we must follow it," "We have promised to do this – we must fulfill that promise," and so on). The question he persistently asks is whether we have reason enough to want what is being proposed, taking everything into account. Important as history is, reasoning has to go beyond the past. It is in the sovereignty of reasoning – fearless reasoning in freedom – that we can find Rabindranath Tagore's lasting voice.

Summary of 'Tagore and his India'

Amartya Sen starts his essay, 'Tagore and his India' with the idea of Rabindranath Tagore being the 'voice of Bengal' as he is known for his novels, short stories, poems, plays, songs as well as his paintings across the whole of West Bengal as well as Bangladesh. It is to be kept in mind that when Tagore died at the age of eighty in 1941, the euphoria of Tagore in the West (Europe and America) had died down to some extent even though he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for his collection of poems *Gitanjali.* Amartya Sen quoted Graham Greene as he said in 1937: 'As for Rabindranath Tagore, I cannot believe that anyone but Mr. Yeats can still take his poems very seriously.'

Though Tagore has become a forgotten personality in Western minds and discourses by the 1940s, but in the world of Bengali literature and culture he has a 'commanding presence'. It is his mysticism which appealed to the West in the

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initial years, but what is to be understood is the fact that there is a 'confluence of cultures' in the upbringing and sensibility of Tagore which goes on to make what he is. Amartya Sen writes:

> Rabindranath did come from a Hindu family – one of the landed gentry who owned estates mostly in what is now Bangladesh. But whatever wisdom there might be in Akhmatova's invoking of Hinduism and the Ganges, it did not prevent the largely Muslim citizens of Bangladesh from having a deep sense of identity with Tagore and his ideas. Nor did it stop the newly independent Bangladesh from choosing one of Tagore's songs – the "Amar Sonar Bangla" which means "my golden Bengal" – as its national anthem. This must be very confusing to those who see the contemporary world as a "clash of civilizations" – with "the Muslim civilization," "the Hindu civilization," and "the Western civilization," each forcefully confronting the others. They would also be confused by Rabindranath Tagore's own description of his Bengali family as the product of "a confluence of three cultures: Hindu, Mohammedan, and British.

Rabindranath's grandfather, Dwarkanath, was well known scholar of Arabic and Persian, and Rabindranath grew up in a Jorasanko Tagore mansion with a deep knowledge of Sanskrit and ancient Hindu texts, which was combined with an understanding of Islamic traditions as well as Persian literature. Later, he shifted himself to Shantiniketan (An Abode of Peace, in Bolpur, West Bengal) in his adult days, where he founded a school in 1901. His innovative approach to education was something which brought a name for Shantiniketan. Now, it has become a world famous university called Viswabharati University. Thus, Tagore not only dealt with creative writing, nationalist movement, but was also an educationist of a very highest order.

His status was such that often critics and commentators compare Tagore with Gandhi. Jawaharlal Nehru's diary note on August 7, 1941, after the death of Tagore is significant here, which Amartya Sen quotes:

> Gandhi and Tagore. Two types entirely different from each other, and yet both of them typical of India, both in the long line of India's great men … It is not so much because of any single virtue but because of the *tout ensemble*, that I felt that among the world's great men today Gandhi and Tagore were supreme as human beings. What good fortune for me to have come into close contact with them.

Tagore greatly admired Gandhi, although they had many disagreements. Tagore pressed 'for more room for reasoning, and for a less traditionalist view, a greater interest in the rest of the world, and more respect for science and for objectivity generally'. It was Tagore who popularized the term, 'Mahatma'– great soul–to describe Gandhi. Yet both of them were critical to each other. Towards the end of his life, Tagore was disillusioned with Indian state, especially due to hunger and poverty as well as 'communal' violence between Hindus and Muslims.

Next, Amartya Sen goes on to discuss Tagore's perception in the west as 'the great mystic from the East'. Rabindranath's physical appearance–handsome, bearded, non-Western clothes–may, to some extent, have encouraged his being seen as a carrier of exotic wisdom. He was even thought to be a 'sage-like poet'. Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats, among others, first led the chorus of adoration in the Western appreciation of Tagore, though W. B. Yeats later denounced him. Tagore, he had said, was the product of 'a whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably

strange to us', and yet 'we have met our own image,…or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as in a dream'.

Yeats perceived a large religious element in Tagore's writings. The idea of a direct, joyful, and totally fearless relationship with God can be found in many of Tagore's religious writings, including the poems of *Gitanjali*. An ambiguity about religious experience is central to many of Tagore's devotional poems, and makes them appeal to readers irrespective of their beliefs. Though Tagore had strongly held religious beliefs, but he was interested in a great many other things as well and had many different things to say about them. Some of the ideas he tried to present were directly political, and they figure rather prominently in his letters and lectures. He had practical, plainly expressed views about nationalism, war and peace, cross-cultural education, freedom of the mind, the importance of rational criticism, the need for openness, and so on.

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For Tagore, it was of the highest importance that people be able to live, and reason with freedom. His attitudes toward politics and culture, nationalism and internationalism, tradition and modernity, can all be seen in the light of this belief. The poem, *Where the Mind is Without Fear*, is a living example of Tagore's philosophy and political and cultural beliefs. Rabindranath as has been talked about earlier, vowed earnest support to the nationalist movement and was against the colonial rule, which he thought was detrimental to India or to any other colonized country. Rabindranath's passion for freedom underlies his firm opposition to unreasoned traditionalism, which makes one a prisoner of the past.

Though Tagore had the greatest admiration for Mahatma Gandhi as a person as discussed earlier and as a political leader, but he was also highly sceptical of Gandhi's form of nationalism and his conservative instincts regarding the country's past traditions. In the 1938 essay, 'Gandhi the Man', he wrote: 'Great as he is as a politician, as an organizer, as a leader of men, as a moral reformer, he is greater than all these as a man, because none of these aspects and activities limits his humanity. They are rather inspired and sustained by it.' He further adds later:

> We who often glorify our tendency to ignore reason, installing in its place blind faith, valuing it as spiritual, are ever paying for its cost with the obscuration of our mind and destiny. I blamed Mahatmaji for exploiting this irrational force of credulity in our people, which might have had a quick result [in creating] a superstructure, while sapping the foundation. Thus began my estimate of Mahatmaji, as the guide of our nation, and it is fortunate for me that it did not end there.

Although the spinning wheel was Gandhi's idea of India's self-realization, Tagore thought it to be going back to some kind of primitivism. Tagore found the alleged economic rationale for this scheme quite unrealistic. Tagore and Gandhi's attitudes toward personal life were also quite different. Gandhi was keen on the virtues of celibacy, theorized about it and after some years of conjugal life, made a private commitment–publicly announced–to refrain from sleeping with his wife. Rabindranath's own attitude on this subject was very different as he didn't think of celibacy as a justified objective of one's life. Gandhi and Tagore also clashed over their attitudes toward science. In January 1934, Bihar was struck by a devastating earthquake, Gandhi made a connection between the earthquake and untouchability in Bihar by stating 'this earthquake is a divine chastisement sent by God for our

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sins'–in particular the sins of untouchability. Tagore, who equally abhorred untouchability, on the other hand, hated the epistemology implicit in seeing an earthquake as caused by ethical failure. Thus, the two often differed in their attitude towards science.

Tagore was predictably hostile to communal sectarianism (such as a Hindu orthodoxy that was antagonistic to Islamic, Christian, or Sikh perspectives). But even nationalism seemed to him to be a suspect. Isaiah Berlin summarizes well Tagore's complex position on Indian nationalism:

> Tagore stood fast on the narrow causeway, and did not betray his vision of the difficult truth. He condemned romantic overattachment to the past, what he called the tying of India to the past like 'a sacrificial goat tethered to a post', and he accused men who displayed it–they seemed to him reactionary–of not knowing what true political freedom was, pointing out that it is from English thinkers and English books that the very notion of political liberty was derived. But against cosmopolitanism he maintained that the English stood on their own feet, and so must Indians. In 1917, he once more denounced the danger of 'leaving everything to the unalterable will of the Master,' be he Brahmin or Englishman.

Tagore was strongly involved in protest against the Raj on a number of occasions, most notably in the movement to resist the 1905 Partition of Bengal. He was forthright in denouncing the brutality of British rule in India, never more so than after the Amritsar massacre of April 13, 1919, when 379 unarmed people at a peaceful meeting were gunned down by the army, and two thousand more were wounded. It is fitting that after independence, India chose a song of Tagore (Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka) as its national anthem. Since Bangladesh would later choose another song of Tagore (Amar Sonar Bangla) as its national anthem, he may be the only one ever to have authored the national anthems of two different countries.

Though Tagore was deeply critical of colonialism and the British colonial presence in India, yet at the same time, he didn't believe in worshipping one's country as God. He wanted to assert India's right to be independent, but at the same time was against parochial patriotism. Tagore's criticism of patriotism is a persistent theme in his writings. As early as in 1908, he put his position succinctly in a letter replying to the criticism of Abala Bose, the wife of a great Indian scientist, Jagadish Chandra Bose: 'Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter; my refuge is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live.' His novel, *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*), has much to say about this theme, where through the character of Nikhil, Tagore utters 'I am willing to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it.'

In this context, Amartya Sen refers to Tagore's admiration and criticism of Japan, which is well presented in one of his lectures in Japan in 1916 ('Nationalism in Japan'), in which he observed that 'the worst form of bondage is the bondage of dejection, which keeps men hopelessly chained in loss of faith in themselves'. Tagore shared his admiration for Japan for demonstrating the ability of an Asian nation to rival the West in industrial development and economic progress. He noted with great satisfaction that Japan had 'in giant strides left centuries of inaction behind, overtaking the present time in its foremost achievement'. For other nations

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outside the West, he said, Japan 'has broken the spell under which we lay in torpor for ages, taking it to be the normal condition of certain races living in certain geographical limits'. But then Tagore went on to criticize the rise of a strong nationalism in Japan and its emergence as an imperialist nation. Tagore saw Japanese militarism as illustrating the way nationalism can mislead even a nation of great achievement and promise.

Coming back to the case of India, Tagore identified the lack of basic education as the fundamental cause of many of India's social and economic afflictions: 'In my view the imposing tower of misery which today rests on the heart of India has its sole foundation in the absence of education. Caste divisions, religious conflicts, aversion to work, precarious economic conditions – all centre on this single factor.' Tagore was concerned not only about the availability of wider opportunities for education across the country, but also wanted schools to be more lively and enjoyable. He himself had dropped out of school early, largely out of boredom, and had never bothered to earn a diploma. He wrote extensively on how schools should be made more attractive to boys and girls and thus, more productive. His own co-educational school at Shantiniketan had many progressive features. The emphasis here was on self-motivation rather than on discipline, and on fostering intellectual curiosity rather than competitive excellence. Much of Rabindranath's life was spent in developing the school at Shantiniketan.

Coming to the contemporariness of Tagore ideas, when India has almost achieved Independence for so many decades, Amartya Sen believes that Tagore would have been shocked to see the continued illiteracy of the masses. He would see this as a total betrayal of what the nationalist leaders had promised during the struggle for independence–a promise that had figured even in Nehru's rousing speech on the eve of independence in August 1947 ('Tryst with Destiny). Similar to the British, the traditional elite of independent India have neglected the education of the masses and is the main reason of continuing illiteracy. Tagore would also have strongly felt the need for a greater commitment–and a greater sense of urgency–in removing endemic poverty. Amartya Sen thinks that Tagore would undoubtedly find some satisfaction in the survival of democracy in India, in its relatively free press, and in general, the 'freedom of mind' aspect that post-independence Indian politics has. Unlike Gandhi, Rabindranath would not resent the development of modern industries in India, or the acceleration of technical progress, since he did not want India to be shackled to the turning of 'the wheel of an antiquated invention'. Tagore was concerned about people being dominated by machines, but he was not opposed to making good use of modern technology. Rabindranath had a deep interest in the environment–he was particularly concerned about deforestation and initiated a 'festival of tree-planting' (vriksha-ropana) as early as in 1928. He would want increased private and government commitment towards environmentalism, but he would not derive from this position a general case against modern industry and technology.

At the same time, Rabindranath would be shocked by the growth of cultural separatism in India. Religious fundamentalism still has a relatively small following in India, but various factions seem to be doing their best to increase their numbers. Tagore would see the expansion of religious sectarianism as being closely associated with an artificially separatist view of culture. He would have strongly resisted defining

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India in specifically Hindu terms, rather than as a 'confluence' of many cultures. Tagore would also oppose the cultural nationalism that has recently been gaining some ground in India, along with an exaggerated fear of the influence of the West. 'It is in the sovereignty of reasoning–fearless reasoning in freedom–that we can find Rabindranath Tagore's lasting voice'– and Tagore would have liked his India to develop that 'fearless reasoning in freedom'.

Critical appreciation of 'Tagore and his India'

Amartya Sen, a Nobel Prize winner for his contribution to the discipline of Economics, in his essay, 'Tagore and his India' from *The Argumentative Indian* (written in 2005) is discussing the ideas and greatness of another Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore, where he enumerates how Tagore and his ideas are still pertinent to the Indian society and how we should take inspiration from Tagore to build the India that we often dreamt about. All of us are aware that Rabindranath Tagore was not only a litterateur, a creative artist, a poet, painter and a musician, but was also a social and cultural thinker and actively participated in the Indian freedom struggle so as to manifest an India, which can look forward to betterment in terms of its honour and prestige in the world affairs as well as in terms of its internal unity. Tagore had envisioned India as a country which has the 'magic of man's living fingers' as it came together as a nation in spite of all kinds of diversities geographical, cultural, religious as well as linguistic. Amidst all these diversities, India because of its ethos and sensibilities as well as leaders like Tagore and Gandhi, could achieve what it did in the modern day world. Amartya Sen in the essay is not only making a tribute to Tagore, but also at the same time, making the world aware that though the West had forgotten Tagore soon enough, we Indians need to keep remembering him and take inspiration from him time and again so as to progress individually as well as a nation.

Amartya Sen, though from the discipline of economics, had interest in a wide-ranging subjects. Being a Bengali himself, he was well-acquainted with the works of Tagore and also the kind of influence Tagore continues to be in the modern day Bengal as well as in Bangladesh. Rabindranath Tagore, along with many other scholars argues that nationalism or the nation-state is primarily a construct of the West. Tagore in his lecture, 'Nationalism in the West', gives a brilliant analogy of the pre-colonial state and the colonial and post-colonial nation state. Tagore wrote:

> Before the Nation came to rule over us (under British colonial rule) we had other governments which are foreign, and these, like all governments had same elements of the machine in them. But the difference between them and the government by the Nation is like the difference between the hand loom and the power-loom. In the products of the hand-loom the magic of man's living fingers find its expression, and in its hum harmonizes with the music of life. But the power-loom is relentlessly lifeless and accurate and monotonous in its production.

What Tagore propounds in the above lines as well as in the lecture is that the Western nation and the Indian nation are two different concepts. When we talk of the notion of nation in the Western sense of the term, we need to understand that the modern Western nation-state came into existence during the rise of capitalism and imperialism, when one of the bases of their unity as a nation was to commit violence on others, the colonized. Ernest Renan in his famous essay, 'What is a

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Nation?', provided an account of how modern nation grew in the west with the rise of capitalistic trends in Europe and led to the colonizing trends across the globe. While, western nation and nationalism was a by-product of the organized violence that Western nations did to the colonized nations, Indian nationalism came into existence in the process of the anti-colonial mindset and struggles. So, even though scholars like J. S. Furnival would like to believe that modern 'India grew up with Modern Europe', one still should be able to distinguish between the growth of these two different kinds of nations and nationalisms as Tagore does.

It is true that before the West came to rule over us, we had no notion of nation as we were a kingdom or set of kingdoms as Sudipta Kaviraj mentions. In India, prior to colonialism, political belonging to territorial state was rather a tenuous affair because the kingdoms and empires collided and expanded at the expense of each other. Sudipta Kaviraj, therefore, writes that 'it was in that sense impossible to achieve the kind of firm identification between people and a form of politicized space which is presupposed in the political ontology of the modern nation state.' But as the British colonized us and we started our anti-colonial struggle, we started coming together as a nation and a sense of nationalism started developing in us. Even though the notion of 'nation' is a borrowed one, but we did not imitate the 'lifeless power loom' that the Western nationalism is all about and therefore, we did not lose touch with the 'magic of man's living fingers'. In other words, it can be said that the Western sense of nationalism had never completely took shape in India.

The nationalism that the West practices is violent and that violent nationalism took shape of imperialism, as Mahatma Gandhi said: 'Violent nationalism otherwise known as imperialism is a curse. Non-violent nationalism is a necessary condition of corporate or civilized life.' Rabindranath Tagore too believed in a similar idea of the Indian nationalism, where he wanted to do away with all kinds of violence in the name of nationalism and wanted India to come together as a nation, which can stand with its head held high for promoting peace and universal brotherhood.

In the beginning of our independence struggle, many extremists fought for Indian independence believing in the Western form of violent nationalism, but with the advent of Gandhi in the Indian scenario the extremist sort of nationalism diminished and a non-violent humanitarian nationalism came into existence. In that, we haven't just imitated the Western sense of nationalism and nation-state; our nationalism is our own product, which has a life of its own–our nationalism is not only for India, but for the whole world as Gandhi had said: 'Indian nationalism has, I hope, struck a different path. It wants to organize itself or to find full self-expression for the benefits and service of humanity at large.' Tagore too had a similar view of Indian nationalism, which is very much evident from his lectures on Nationalism as well as in his fictional writings. For example, in the novel, *The Home and the World* (*Ghare Baire*), Tagore makes a critique of the nationalism, which is based on violence and promotes a nationalism which takes into account the differences between people and accommodates each and everyone's concern while constructing one's idea about nation. The nationalism, which does not take into account the concerns of the poor and the oppressed, is not considered by Tagore to be fit for developing India as a nation. Similarly, in the novel, *Gora*, *Four Chapters*, and others, Tagore makes a critique of violent nationalism. This

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does not mean that he was opposed to nationalism per se, but was very careful in terms of forging a nationalism, which is for the development and progress of all and serves the spiritual purpose of man.

Therefore, in the essay, 'Nationalism in India', Tagore states that our 'real problem in India is not political. It is social'. What he means by that is while India was fighting against the British to gain political freedom, it was not the freedom from colonial British, which should be the main concern to formulate our nation, but the main idea should be to forge unity amongst ourselves by doing away with the communal, caste, linguistic, regional, gendered, class and other differences, which had been marring the Indian civilization for centuries. If India can forget these cultural man-made differences and come together as a nation, then India will truly show a path to the world. Therefore, Tagore adds in the same essay that:

> In finding the solution of our problem we shall have helped to solve the world problem as well. What India has been, the whole world is now. The whole world is becoming one country through scientific facility. And the moment is arriving when you also must find a basis of unity which is not political. If India can offer to the world her solution, it will be a contribution to humanity. There is only one history—the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one.

The problem of the world is that it is diverse and is looking for avenues to find some basis of unity, by which it can forget the differences and find some ways by which a universal brotherhood can be championed so as to look forward to universal peace as well as sustainability for all. According to Tagore, India has always been trying to do the same in its own way, as he says:

> In spite of our great difficulty, however, India has done something. She has tried to make an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them where these exist, and yet seek for some basis of unity. This basis has come through our saints, like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitnaya and others, preaching one God to all races of India.

Indian saints have always harped on the idea of peace and brotherhood and therefore, have always talked about universal and spiritual love. They have always made it a point to tell the world that if humanity has to survive then it is extremely essential that we forget the differences and made some ways to 'make an adjustment of races'. Tagore is thus, of the opinion that instead of looking at the Western notion of nation that we had always tried to 'make adjustment' with, it is better to look at the diversities and differences of people and cultures with the 'magic of man's living fingers'. We have done so in order to stop the encroachment of the colonial nation as Tagore writes that 'form yourselves into a nation, and resist this encroachment of the Nation'. The first 'nation' ('n' with small alphabet) is what we have tried to become with the notion of universal brotherhood and spiritual love to stop the encroachment of the Western 'Nation' ('N' with a capital alphabet).

Thus, Rabindranath Tagore in his writings, lectures, letters, essays, songs as well as through his actions tried to realize the kind of Indian nationalism, which is truly international in character, where love for others, spiritual upliftment, mysticism as well as doing away with man-made differences were the prime goals. If Indian nationalism could truly come up to be what Tagore and Gandhi visualized, then

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India can set an example for the world. What it means is that Indian nationalism is not just about the anti-colonial struggle to fight and drive out the British from India, but the real nationalism is the unity that India has achieved in spite of its diversities. Indian nationalism could accommodate all these diversities within its nationalist narrative as Indian national is truly spiritual, humanitarian and international in character, spirit and ethos.

However, at the same time this is also true that being 'national does not, in itself, deny the possibility of being international, but if we start off wanting to be international, then we may end up being denationalized instead' (Makarand Paranjape). So, it is required that one should start thinking of nationalism from the point of view of 'loving thy neighbour' (Gandhi), so that this love for neighbour then can spread to become universal brotherhood. Gandhi rightly said: 'Internationalism has got no malice, no ill will or contempt, but it had only peace and goodwill in its, and unless a man can began to love heartily his neighbours, he could not cultivate the spirit of love for the outside world.' Tagore too believed in the same spirit of loving one's own people, but that does not mean that one should have a hatred for the others. It is by acknowledging the differences that each individual has and then accepting and loving them for those differences that we can truly claim a sense of nationalism, which can be the basis for true internationalism. Tagore's nationalism is truly international and yet at the same time, spiritual and humanitarian, which makes him one of the most outstanding and vociferous intellectual, who has made Indian nationalism appeared distinct:

'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls'

This is the kind of India that Rabindranath Tagore visualized and he wanted India to achieve greater heights because it has the potential to be so, but at the end of his life, when Tagore perceived that poverty and hunger still pervaded sections of the Indian society, communal harmony is yet to be achieved and the education of Indian youths is also not progressing along a positive road, he felt very dreadful and often was very pessimistic. Amartya Sen feels that even after seven decades of Indian independence, India hasn't been able to achieve many of the goals that Tagore visualized, which would have really disappointed him. The present affairs of the Indian society would have pained him and he would have been really upset.

Thus, the essay, 'Tagore and his India', not only explores the ideas of Tagore and his various writings, but also talks about how Tagore is an important part of the Indian sensibility, which makes him such a key philosopher even for today's world. We often remember Gandhi and his contribution to the making of India, we similarly need to take into account the ways Tagore shaped and tried to make India achieve greatness not only as a spiritual nation, but also in the cultural as well as political spheres. Amartya Sen's essay can be called a tribute to the most significant cultural icon and creative writer that India has ever produced.

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Check Your Progress

5. When did Amartya Sen receive the Nobel Memorial Prize and Bharat Ratna?
6. Mention any three works by Amartya Sen.
7. What aspect of Rabindranath Tagore appealed to the West in his initial career?
8. Which poem is the example of Tagore's philosophy and political and cultural beliefs?

4.4 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Kalam was also known as the 'Missile Man of India ' for his work on the development of ballistic missile and launch vehicle technology.
2. Some of the works of Kalam are:
   (a) *The Luminous Sparks*, 2004.
   (b) *Mission India*, 2005.
   (c) *Inspiring Thoughts*, 2007
3. Missiles, such as the multi-role Trishul, multi-target capable Akash, the anti-tank Nag missile, the surface-to-surface missile Prithvi, and the long-range missile Agni, BrahMos, the Indo-Russian joint venture, etc. were tested at the Interim Test Range (ITR).
4. India had been attacked by a succession of conquerors (including British, French, Dutch and Portuguese) so as to:
   (a) Enlarge their territory, or
   (b) Spread a religion, or
   (c) Steal the wealth of our country.
5. Amartya Sen was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science in 1998 and India's Bharat Ratna in 1999 for his work in welfare economics.
6. Some of the works by Amartya Sen are:
   (a) *Poverty and Famines*: *An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, 1982.
   (b) *Choice, Welfare, and Measurement*, 1983
   (c) *Resources, Values, and Development*, 1997
7. Rabindranath Tagore's mysticism appealed to the West in his initial career.
8. The poem, *Where the Mind is Without Fear*, is a living example of Tagore's philosophy and political and cultural beliefs.

4.5 SUMMARY

- Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam (15 October 1931–27 July 2015) was an aerospace scientist, who served as the eleventh President of India from 2002 to 2007.

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- Kalam spent about four decades as a scientist and science administrator, mainly at the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and was intimately involved in India's civilian space programme and military missile development efforts.
- Kalam also played a pivotal organisational, technical, and political role in India's Pokhran-II nuclear tests in 1998, the first since the original nuclear test by India in 1974.
- Kalam was a recipient of several prestigious awards, including the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour.
- On 27th July 2015, while delivering a lecture called 'Creating a Livable Planet Earth' at the Indian Institute of Management Shillong, he died.
- A.P. J. Abdul Kalam was one of the greatest scientists that India has produced and also was the eleventh President of India; he became very popular across India for his scientific spirit, simplicity of living, high thinking as well as scholarly pursuits.
- His book, *Ignited Minds* (written in 2002), is one of the most popular reads amongst the masses, which present his ideas about India, about India's development as a nation as well as the map and the way it should take to march forward.
- A significant chapter from the book, 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion', states Kalam's concern with the Indian nation and what he wants India and Indians to do, if India wants to achieve its potential and see a growth both in terms of economic prosperity as well as military might.
- Amartya Sen is a famous economist from India, who was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science in 1998 and India's Bharat Ratna in 1999 for his work in welfare economics.
- Amartya Sen starts his essay, 'Tagore and his India', with the idea of Rabindranath Tagore being the 'voice of Bengal' as he is known for his novels, short stories, poems, plays, songs as well as his paintings across the whole of West Bengal as well as Bangladesh.
- Tagore greatly admired Gandhi though they have many disagreements. Tagore pressed 'for more room for reasoning, and for a less traditionalist view, a greater interest in the rest of the world, and more respect for science and for objectivity generally'. It was Tagore who popularized the term, 'Mahatma'–great soul–to describe Gandhi. Yet both of them were critical of each other.
- Rabindranath Tagore wanted India to achieve greater heights because it has the potential to be so, but at the end of his life, when Tagore perceived that poverty and hunger still pervaded sections of the Indian society, communal harmony is yet to be achieved and the education of Indian youths is also not progressing along a positive road, he felt very dreadful and was often very pessimistic.
- Amartya's Sen's essay can be called a tribute to the most significant cultural icon and creative writer that India has ever produced.

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4.6 KEY TERMS

- **DRDO:** The Defence Research and Development Organisation or DRDO is an agency of the Government of India, charged with the military's research and development, headquartered in New Delhi, India.
- **ISRO:** The Indian Space Research Organisation or ISRO is the space agency of the Government of India and has its headquarters in the city of Bengaluru. Its goal is to 'harness space technology for national development while pursuing space science research & planetary exploration'.
- **Colonialism:**Colonialism is the political and cultural establishment, economic exploitation, political maintenance, acquisition and expansion of colonies in one territory by people from another territory (country).
- **Nationalism:** Nationalism can be said to be a belief, creed or political ideology that makes a person identify with, or become attached to one's nation.
- **Post-Colonialism**: Post-Colonialism (often referred to, in short, as PoCo) is an academic branch of study that engages itself with the study of the experiences of the erstwhile colonized societies during colonialism and even after these nations got political independence from their erstwhile colonizers.

4.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life of A. P. J Abdul Kalam.
2. In what way does Kalam think that India can achieve greater heights? Do you agree with Kalam? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Do you agree that Rabindranath Tagore was a nationalist? Does Amartya Sen present him as a nationalist? Give reasons why you think so.
4. Briefly comment on Amartya Sen as a writer.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically appreciate Kalam's essay 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion' with special emphasis on communal harmony and development of India.
2. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam's essay 'Patriotism beyond Politics and Religion' is a coherent piece of writing which makes us realize the different facets that India needs to follow to make itself one of the greatest nations of the world. Do you agree with the statement? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Do you agree that Amartya Sen makes an evaluation of Tagore's ideas in the essay 'Tagore and his India' in a justified way? Explain your reasons with textual references to the essay.
4. Tagore is not just a creative writer, but a cultural icon. Do you agree? Write with reference to Amartya Sen's essay 'Tagore and His India'.

4.8 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 5 RUSKIN BOND AND R.K. NARAYAN

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Structure

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will discuss novels by Ruskin Bond and R.K. Narayan. Ruskin Bond is a name related to Indian English writing to such an extent that in any book store in any part of India, one can find books written by him, proving the fact that he is one of the most popular writers from India, writing both for adults as well as for children. His stories are very popular among the school children leading to syllabus makers often including his stories in the course of school and even in the graduate and undergraduate courses. One of the reasons why people often visit Mussoorie is to meet Ruskin Bond, who often sits in a bookshop in the Mall Road of Mussoorie and interacts with his readers/fans and provides autographs. He lives near Mussoorie in a place called Landour as he is in love with the Indian Hills.

The unit will then go on to discuss R.K Narayan's short story *An Astrologer's Day*. Like Guy de Maupassant, the great French writer, Narayan also sketches commonplace characters of the middle class life and watches them as a silent spectator. Narayan is best known for the creation of the fictional world of Malgudi. It is the setting for almost all of his novels and short stories, including *An Astrologer's Day*. Narayan's stories about Malgudi are often comic considerations of individuals trying to find peace in a turbulent world.

5.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the life and works of Ruskin Bond and R.K. Narayan
- Describe the plot of *The Room on the Roof* in detail
- Critically comment on *An Astrologer's Day*

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5.2 RUSKIN BOND

Ruskin Bond, born 19 May 1934, is an Indian author of British descent. He is considered to be an icon among Indian writers and children's authors and a top novelist. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999 for his contributions to children's literature. His stories reveal a deep love of nature and people, especially the flora and fauna of the Himalayas. His writing reveals the strong influence of life in the hills. He brings alive the landscape and the ethos of the people living there through vivid descriptions. His father served in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. He has two siblings, Ellen and William Bond. His parents separated when Bond was four and his mother later married a Punjabi Hindu, Mr Hari. When he was ten, his father died of malaria and jaundice and Bond went to Dehradun to live with his grandmother. He called her 'Calcutta Granny.' As a child he lived in Shimla, Jamnagar and London as well. Since the 1960s, he started living in London. He wrote his first novel, *The Room on the Roof,* when he was seventeen. The novel was published when Ruskin Bond was twenty-one. It is based on his and his friends' experiences in his one room rented flat in Dehradun. The novel won him the John Llewellyn Rhys memorial Prize in 1957. Since then he has written many short stories, essays and novellas (including *Vagrants in The Valley, The Blue Umbrella* and *A Flight of Pigeons*) and more than thirty books for children. He now lives with his adoptive family in Mussoorie. *Scenes of a Writer's Life* and *The Lamp is lit* are two autobiographical volumes dealing with his formative years and a collection of essays and episodes from his journal. The earlier autobiographical work *Rain in the Mountains* deals with his Mussoorie years. Commenting on this book he had said, 'Looking back, I find that those earlier years of my life have more incidents resulting from youthful enthusiasm. Two-third of the book talks about my life in Dehradun as a young boy.' While talking of *Scenes from a Writer's Life* he said that it deals with his desire to come back to India. He says, 'It also tells a lot about my parents. The book ends with the publication of my first novel and my decision to make writing my livelihood. Basically it describes how I became a writer.'

His work has been adapted into various forms of media. *The Flight of Pigeons* has been adapted into the Merchant Ivory film, *Junoon.* Similarly, *The Room on the Roof* has been adapted by the BBC into a TV series. His greatest success as a writer of the quintessential Indian experience lies in the fact that he has been introduced in school syllabi across India. Stories like *The Night Train at Deoli, Time Stops at Shamli,* and *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* are now taught in schools. Though he remains media shy, he was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for English writing in India for *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* in 1992. He has also been conferred with Padma Shri, one of the most prestigious civilian awards in India.

Nature plays an important role in his work. Even when it is not in the forefront, it is present in the background as the action unfolds. His trips with his father when they went on planting trips on the slopes of Dehradun, mark the beginning of his fascination with nature. His reading of Thoreau and Richard Jeffries further reshaped his attitude towards nature. In his stories, for example, the things man pretends to

see outside serve as a counter to the darkness in his life and his unease in revealing his condition to anyone. His writing is characterized by a respect for life, faith in the essential goodness of man, a world where man and God are one, and a desire to struggle against the odds of life. Writers like Dickens, Stevenson, Charles Lamb, Stephen Leacock and W. W. Jacobs were early influences on his writings. Later, when he got introduced to Indian writers, he found the works of Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan interesting. The influence of these writers is evident in the witty writings, the autobiographical mode of writing and the nostalgic punctuations found there. He calls himself 'the Indian Charles Lamb.' The humorous, sad and nostalgic note of his stories remind the readers of a simpler time. RK Narayan's influence can be seen in the comic stance to life, simplicity of narration and emphatic characterizations. Local colour is another salient feature in both writers: Malgudi for Narayan amd Dehradun for Bond. Bond was also influenced by the short story writers H E Bates, Saroyan and A E Coppard. Like them in his stories Bond too grabs at snatches of life and records the impressions and sensations of a slice rather than trying to grapple with a life in its entirety. In his stories he focuses on fleeting moments and reveals his force of vision and skill of condensed narration.

According to VS Naipaul, Ruskin Bond is the only writer of note to have emerged from the country. 'I have read nothing like that from India or anywhere else,' the Nobel laureate declares, referring to Bond's autobiography. 'It's very simple. Everything is underplayed, and the truths of the book come rather slowly at you. I was very moved by his book.' His work reflects the changing ethos of Indian society. He feels that people have become more materialistic now. 'The middle class hadn't emerged in those days, as it has now,' says Bond:

> *It is interesting to see that the villages that border the highway have developed faster. As you go off the beaten track, the change isn't that dramatic. If you go into the rural interiors, you are suddenly in the past. There are the men with the hukka, and the women in the fields and the children playing gulli-danda.*

He remarks that writing style has changed with the changing times. 'Early writing was more descriptive and spun out. Now it's more staccato and sharper.' He feels that, previously, people didn't have any other form of entertainment. Today, there is so much to see and do–television, movies and Internet–that the attention span has decreased. People tend to pick up books that are not too demanding, he points out. His favourite stories are those that he wrote for children. According to him it is harder to write children's fiction because it requires greater discipline. He says: 'I took myself very seriously before that, and was writing only for adults or the general reader. With adults, you can get away with 2-3 chapters before you start the story. Children want action and a definite storyline.'

His stories are marked by witticism. In the early years of independence, there was a very small English reading public and internationally renowned writers like R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand had to compete for this limited readership. In addition to this, publishers were not willing to take any risk. Most of them published textbooks and supplementary readers. In this environment, it became imperative that writers gained international acclaim before they could hope to be published in India. During this time Bond established the short story and novella as his favourite genres. According to him, these two 'favoured his temperament.' He wrote that 'the short novel, with its compositional economy

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and homogeneity of composition, has its place in the scheme of things.' Bond presents his characters in a restrained manner and delineates them swiftly in few words. The plot revolves from a revealing or defining episode. According to him the difference between a short story and essay is:

> *…upon whose personality comes through more strongly, the author's or the characters he describes. If it is the author's, then it is really an essay. If it is the character's, then it is a story. In my own case I have often found my stories becoming essays and vice versa.'*

He is an intelligent observer of human life and displays maturity, sophistication and ease in his storytelling. Most of Bond's short stories were published in the *Illustrated Weekly*. C R Mandy, the magazine's Irish editor, recognized Bond's talent and encouraged him to publish more stories. Later, his stories were also broadcast by the BBC London in fifteen minute slots.

5.2.1 Themes and Setting

Most of Bond's stories are in first person. Dehradun and the people he knew crop up prominently in his stories. Some of the best stories that he wrote are his 'train' stories. The writer has confessed to being a bad traveller, when it comes to train. However, he says he loves platforms, since he 'spent a great deal of time on them when he was a boy, waiting for connecting trains.' Both his grandfather, William Dudley Clerke, and his mother's cousin, Fred Clark, were connected with the Indian railways. The train compartment or the station of a small town then became the ideal setting for depicting a transitory relationship and for evoking the Indian scene. In the introduction to *The Night Train at Deoli*, he writes:

> *I find that in the stories I wrote in the 1950s… there is a good deal of romance, often associated with trains. People are always travelling through trains, but just occasionally two people meet, their paths cross, and though they may part again quite soon…their lives have been changed in some indefinable way.*

The plots of these 'train' stories revolve around meeting strangers, the brief acquaintance, the parting and the memory. His writing reveals his belief that a writer is responsible to society and man: his work is full of human values and universal appeal. Though the characters of his short stories and novels struggle for survival, they are not disillusioned with life. His plots reveal his sympathetic attitude towards the human soul. His characters are also lively embodiments of the magnanimity of his soul. He is a writer for the common man who enjoys the common joys of life and suffers its inevitable sorrows. His work shows his desire to go back to a more innocent time when the materialistic concerns of the modern age had not gained priority. In his delineation of characters, he makes a binary: the hill folk represent elemental primitive man whose actions are motivated by trust, goodness and truth, while the city folk stand for artificiality, snobbery and selfishness. According to Bond, it was necessary to respect one's own identity as well as the identity of others. He considered this mutual exchange of sensibility important for happiness in life.

5.2.2 Summary of *The Room on the Roof*

Rusty, a teenager and an Anglo-Indian boy is the protagonist of *A Room on the Roof*, written by Ruskin Bond. The story revolves around the life of Rusty as he

revolts against his 'legal guardian', Mr. Harrison, to take his own course of action in his life and decide his future. An adolescent boy's journey of life in a small town of Dehra has been portrayed poetically in the novel, which makes the readers not only travel the nooks and corners of the town of Dehra, but also makes them experience the ways in which the adolescent mind sees the world. It is to be kept in mind here that when the novel was written, Ruskin Bond, himself, was an adolescent boy and therefore, could provide a fresh perspective to the narrative by presenting the angst and anxieties of adolescent, along with the working of psyche.

When we meet Rusty for the first time in the novel, we see him walking alone on a lonely road of Dehra to his home in a pensive mood. He meets Somi, who was riding a bicycle; he offered him a lift. He then meets Somi's other friends and a friendship started developing among them, which flourishes into a beautiful relationships in the course of the novel. Rusty had lost his parents, when he was a kid and has been looked after by his Anglo-Indian guardian, Mr. Harrison, who believes in a strict code of conduct so as to prevent Rusty from getting influenced by the lives and ways of the Indians which will apparently corrupt his adolescent mind. Moreover, being the only white child in the whole white locality, he is the object of attention of all the white members of Dehra, making him live a life according to his own whims and wishes or in other words, turning him into rebel. Every moment, he had to follow the European code of conduct and live in the fear of a punishment by his legal guardian, Mr. Harrison.

On getting a chance once, while Mr. Harrison was out of town, Rusty decided to visit the bazaar near the clock tower of Dehra, where he met his Indian friends. In the market, he eats some savoury food from the local chaat shop. However, when Mr. Harrison cames to know about Rusty's adventures in the Indian bazaar, he beats him up with the cane. Even though he was beaten up for going to the bazaar, his encounter with the bazaar and his Indian friends opened up a completely different world to him, which he wanted to explore further, not just to quench his curiosity, but to feel that life, which was there with his friends in the bazaar. The bazaar now becomes synonymous with the notion of freedom.

Next, we see Rusty again taking a bold step by going out to play Holi, the festival of colours, with his friends. When he returns to his house, Mr. Harrison becomes annoyed with his physical state and again makes an attempt to beat him up. But before Mr. Harrison can do so, Rusty boldly hits back, making Mr. Harrison fall flat and completely shocked by this change of behaviour. Rusty then leaves Mr. Harrison's bungalow for good and ventures into the bazaar, but he figures out that the all shops are closed; it was a completely different world in night. He spends the night with extreme difficulty, however later he is taken by Somi to his house. He not only provides Rusty with his own clothes and food, but also finds a job for him as an English teacher for Kishen in the Kapoor mansion. As a remuneration for the job, he gets the room on the roof of the house of Kapoor's and also other essential things, including daily meals. He started staying with the Kapoor family and develops a liking for Mrs. Kapoor, Meena. During a picnic, organized by the Kapoor family, he enjoys his physical proximity with Meena. Mrs. Kapoor, who is married to a drunkard Mr. Kapoor, enjoys the company of Rusty as well and also started showing some interest in Rusty.

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However, soon things turned awry as Meena dies in a car accident when Mr. and Mrs. Kapoor are on their way to Delhi from Dehra. Not only he loses Meena, but also Kishen as a telegram arrives to inform Kishen that he should be living in Haridwar with his close relative. As days progress, Rusty is left alone in Dehra as all his friends–Suri, Somi and Ranbir–leave Dehra. It was also the time that the rain arrives in Dehra. Though Rusty enjoys the first rain after summers, but the monotony of rains and the loneliness of his life in the room on the roof without friends and Meena seem to take a toll on him making him decide to go to England with the help of the British High Commission in New Delhi. For that purpose, he thinks of going to Delhi, but before going there, he decides to go to Haridwar to meet Kishen as he has promised to do so.

As he reached Haridwar after an arduous train journey in the third class compartment, he got to know that Mr. Kapoor had married once again within a month of Meena's death and Kishen had run away from the house; he now survives by stealing from people in Haridwar. Kishen suffers from a sense of betrayal from his father and therefore, ends up as a notorious thief in Haridwar. Rusty then goes to the banks of river Ganga to meet Kishen and at last meets him. Here, Ruskin Bond very beautifully describes the state of Kishen and Rusty as he says–

> *…they were both refugees – refugees for the world … they were each other's shelter, each other's refuge, each other's help. Kishen was a jungli, divorced from rest of mankind and Rusty was the only one who understood him – because Rusty too was divorced from mankind. And there was a tie that would hold, because they were the only people who knew each other and loved each other.*

Kishen and Rusty decide to return to Dehra and thus, the novel ends on a hopeful note, when they cross the river the next morning and approach the forest; and Kishen tells Rusty

> *One day you will be great Rusty. A writer or an actor or a prime-minister or something … may be a poet! Why not a poet Rusty?" Rusty smiled, he knew he was smiling because he was smiling at himself. "Yes" he said 'why not a poet?' so they began to walk. Ahead of them lay forest and silence … and what was left of time.*

5.2.3 Critical Appreciation of *The Room on the Roof*

As has already been discussed earlier, the novel *The Room on the Roof*, written in 1956, is about an adolescent character, Rusty, and his ups and downs in life as he ventures forth to live life on his own by discarding his legal guardian. The novel portrays an adolescent, who decides to become independent and takes life in his own hands and steers the course of his life. The novel is dealt with by an adolescent writer (Ruskin Bond writing this novel at the age of seventeen) in an adept manner to represent some of the key issues pertaining to the then Indian small town of Dehra.

British adolescent in an Indian context–His loneliness and suffering

Ruskin Bond, a British by lineage, but Indian by birth and nature, in his first attempt at writing a novel, *The Room on the Roof*, produces a masterpiece, which can be compared to any other great novels of the world. It is to be kept in mind that when Ruskin Bond wrote this novel, he was only seventeen years old. An adolescent himself, he was writing about another adolescent character, Rusty, in the novel. It

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can be said that many of the experiences that the author himself went through in Dehra found expression in the course of the novel making it an authentic portrayal of the life of people during those days in small town India, where the real essence of India can be found. It is also interesting to note that some of the experiences that he had as an English boy in the small Indian town is something that not only made the book popular in the west, but also in India, though the initial reception of the book was not so good.

In this context, it is very essential to understand the colonial presence in India, which led to people like the author himself or his character, Rusty, be in India even after India got independence. In this context, let us understand colonialism first. Colonialism is not merely an economic and political rule of one nation over the other, but its manifestation can primarily be observed in the cultural and psychological parameter of both the colonized and the colonizer. It is true that the colonial power of the colonizer first takes over the land of the colonized by force (war) or by trick or by some agreement (*farman)* and then tries to settle down there so as to assume hegemony not just by taking over the political rule of that country, but also by assuming full control of the economy as well as the culture(s). So, the greatest manifestation of colonial temperament as well as its victimization can be seen in the psyche of the colonized. Usually, it is the norm that when one talks of colonialism, usually the colonized is shown to be the sufferer and the colonizer to be the winner in every situation. But this is not a complete picture. Ashish Nandy in the book, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, states how colonizers are also victims in many possible ways. Again, if we read the diaries of the women of the colonial officers who are posted in India, we will see that they suffered from immense solitariness in the hot and humid as well as dusty weather in India, without any one to share their predicament and ultimately getting down to pour their feelings in their diaries. Similarly, the children are also victims of the colonial system, as they were not allowed to mix or play with the other Indian boys and had to live life according to a standard set of rules and regulations leading to their life being very boring and monotonous.

Rusty in the novel, *The Room on the Roof*, while living with his guardian, Mr. Harrison, had to follow a certain set of rules and regulations, which did not allow him to mix with Indians and go to the Indian bazaar (which he thought and found to be charming). He had to follow strict code of conduct so that he would not get corrupted by the Indian ways and customs. The colonizer always thought himself to be superior than the colonized, so they thought that mixing with the colonized or interacting with them is like stooping low. Therefore, they did not allow their children to mix with the Indian kids. The initial few pages of the novel very dramatically presents the loneliness of Rusty, who had always lived among the English adults, but always had a kind of admiration for all things Indian.

In this context, it is also to be kept in mind that the setting of the novel is post-independent India, when most of the Europeans had already left for Europe and only a few remained, who could not leave for the following reasons:

- Some English men had businesses here in India, which they could not leave as going back to England means starting up everything afresh.

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- Some old men and women did not leave as they thought it to be too much trouble to go back to England.
- In India, they got accustomed to the Indian servants and knew that back to England they will not get those servants to get their everyday work done.

Because of the above-mentioned and many other reasons, a few British people were left behind in India after independence. In such circumstances, it is evident that the English boys will find even less number of other English boys to interact and play with. Rusty, in the initial chapters of the book, is shown to be not only suffering from a kind of loneliness, but also seemed to be sad all the time as he was living among adults and always under their supervision. Moreover, he being the only English kid, was the centre of attraction for every English man and woman living in Dehra. Therefore, everyday life for Rusty was very difficult and sad from where he wanted to escape. In addition to this, his foster caretaker, Mr. Harrison was also a very strict and cruel man who not only expects Rusty to behave in the manner that he has prescribed to him, but at the same time also beats him with a cane if Rusty is not able to live up to it. Obviously, any adolescent kid would like to escape this claustrophobic and abusive atmosphere, but under the nose of Mr. Harrison, it was impossible. He carried on bearing this torturous existence for quite some time before he finally revolted against the authority of his legal guardian, Mr. Harrison.

It is incidentally when Rusty is walking back home, he meets an Indian boy, who befriends him quite naturally and from then on starts Rusty's journey to the vast Indian territory, which leads him to experience many unusual things. The novel, *The Room on the Roof*, investigates this exploration of Rusty as he revolts against the authority of his legal guardian and decides to pursue his life on his own terms with his friends. Although in the process he faces many difficulties, he seems to be ready to endure them as that life holds its own fascination and beauty. It is the friendship which he values the most and in the process of the novel, he develops a friendship with Kishen, another clever adolescent boy, which is narrated in the course of the novel.

Bazaar–Its romantic charm for Rusty

It is essential to understand that the 'bazaar' of Dehra, near the Clock Tower, is of special significance in the novel, *The Room on the Roof*, as an Indian bazaar is a typical place, where not only do people come to buy and sell, but also to meet and discuss, eat and have fun, enjoy oneself, roam around, make the most of one's time, experience the essence of India, etc. In other words, it is not merely a place, where shopkeepers are selling and customers are buying, it is a hub of culture. It is a cultural landscape, which manifests India in miniature. So, when the bazaar is described by Ruskin Bond, he does not merely talk about the shops (the Chat Shop, in particular), but also the ways the cows and human beings are jostling in the bazaar, how adolescents expertly dodging people and animals while cycling in the bazaar, etc.

The bazaar seems to be in a different plane of existence than the India that Rusty knows. Rusty is accustomed to the India, which is accessible only to the

Europeans and not to the India where the commoners exist. It was the commoners' India, which seems to be much livelier and joyous to Rusty and therefore, its charm made him decide to visit the bazaar the moment his legal guardian decides to leave Dehra for his personal work. Rusty was punished severely for this violation by Mr. Harrison. However, he carries on visiting the bazaar as Rusty felt that it was where life existed. Moreover, the chaat shop in the bazaar had a special appeal to him as for the first time he tasted the *golgappas* and *aloo tikkis* and found them heavenly. Thus, he carries on visiting the bazaar for the savoury food. It is to be kept in mind here that as against the bland food of the Europeans, the spicy (*masala)* food of the Indian market is of supreme significance to the adolescent Rusty. Therefore, in the later part of the novel we see Rusty even visiting the *chaat* shop with the Kapoor family.

Holi–The festival of colours

The next incident in the novel, which affects Rusty is his experience of Indian festival Holi. Holi is the festival of colours in which people enjoy the end of the winter and the coming of the spring. It is an Indian festival about which, similar to the Indian bazaar, Rusty had no idea as his European upbringing by Mr. Harrison did not allow him to be part of anything Indian. So, when he came to know about Holi from his Indian friends, he became very excited about it and decided to play Holi, along with his Indian friends, violating his legal guardian's order of not mixing with Indians. Rusty spent the whole day with his friends playing Holi and when he finally returned to his bungalow, he could not be recognized by Mr. Harrison. Mr. Harrison infuriated with this, tried to beat him again, but this time Rusty boldly resisted and attacked him. Following this incident, Rusty decided to leave the place forever.

In the context of this particular incident, it is important to note that Holi, a festival of colours, is also a festival in which the social hierarchy is somehow subverted and all people are treated as equals; they play Holi forgetting all the differences among them. On such a day of festivity, Rusty takes the step of going against his legal guardian, Mr. Harrison and protests against him by beating him up and leaving the house forever. Thus, the Indian festival of Holi seems to have a special significance in the novel.

India and the caste system

Untouchables were known by various terminologies. For example, Jyotirao Phule used the term 'Dalit' to describe the Scheduled Caste people, though many like to believe that the term was coined by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. The term Dalit, as understood by the *Dalit Panthers*, indicates that the Dalits are those, who bear the worst forms of atrocities and violence, while having no power to counter them and thus, need to take the support of similar groups of people such as scheduled castes, tribes, neo Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. Although we can use various terms to describe the Dalits, yet their experience remains the same of being oppressed and suppressed by the unjust and unequal social order of the Hindu society.

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In the early parts of the novel, we meet a sweeper boy, who is the only boy who visits Mr. Harrison's house. Being an untouchable, the sweeper boy keeps his distance from Rusty. Although Rusty always feels sorry for the boy, he never approaches him for friendship due to his fear of being reprimanded by Mr. Harrison. It is again very significant that even though, the novel is about Rusty and his anguishes, yet Ruskin Bond felt that untouchability and the caste system should be presented in the course of the novel so as to make a just representation of India. Indian society was so much divided by the caste lines that it is evident that Ruskin Bond could not but think of presenting the sweeper boy and his pitiable state in the novel.

Moreover, in the course of the novel, Rusty comments that he has 'no caste'—suggesting as if being a European (English by nationality of the origin of the family) he does not fit into the social spectrum of the post-independent Indian society. He is neither here (Indian) nor there (European); in India, he is seen as an English boy, whereas he has no links with England in any physical sense of the term and therefore, he is alienated from both of the spaces. This alienation from the Indian society as well as the European one makes him live a lonely alienated life. It is from this state he wants to break free, which he does in the course of the novel. Though at the end of the novel, when all his friends leave Dehra, he momentarily thinks of going to England with the help of the British High Commission in New Delhi, but as soon as he meets Kishen in Haridwar, he changes his plan and decides to return back to Dehra, where he will start his life afresh with his friends.

Dehra: The love of Ruskin Bond

Ruskin Bond has a special bonding with the hills stations of Northern India and the foothill towns of the Himalayas, especially Dehradun and Mussourie as he was born and brought up here and finds this place to be very fascinating, which makes him present these places to be the setting/background in much of his stories and novels. Moreover, Dehra is a small town which has a fascination of its own when this novel was written.

It is to be remembered here that Ruskin Bond still lives in Landour, Mussourie as he feels most comfortable living there and spends most of his time either writing or interacting with his readers and well-wishers in the book shop of Mussourie. The special attraction that Ruskin Bond has for Dehra is manifested in the novel, *The Room on the Roof*, where the protagonist Rusty grows up in Dehra and has special fascination for the town of Dehra. The whole of the novel is set in Dehra, apart from the brief sojourn that Rusty makes to Haridwar to meet Kishen in the last three chapters of the book. At the end of the novel, Rusty and Kishen again decide to return back to Dehra to start their life afresh. This shows that the characters in the novel also has a fascination for Dehra which makes them come back to the town when they could have decided to go to any place in the world. Dehra also seems to be one of the protagonist of the novel, instead of just being the background.

Dehra's bazaar, its nearby forests, its summer and its rains–its vivid description throughout the novel makes the town come alive in the novel. We come to know that Dehra is a lively town, where both the Indians as well as the

Europeans live peacefully, even though they have little correspondence and the Indian and European colonies are different with different markets. Presently, Dehradun is the capital of the state of Uttarakhand and is a much developed place, but we have to remember that in the novel, *The Room on the Roof*, Ruskin Bond is talking of 1960s town, when the town was a small one and had a rustic beauty of its own. That town is being fondly remembered by Ruskin Bond in the novel, *The Room on the Roof*.

Characterization

The characters in the novel are described below.

Rusty

Rusty is an English adolescent boy living in the foothills of the Himalaya in Dehra with his legal guardian as his parents have died. Being an English boy, he is debarred from mixing with the Indian boys and from visiting the Indian bazaar. This prohibition has made these things more attractive to him. The novel explores how the adolescent boy breaks free from the inhibitions and prohibitions of the English colonial culture in India to experience the true India which opens up to him new vistas of experiences, leading him to see and understand life from close quarters.

His friendship with the Indian boys–Suri, Somi, Kishen and Ranbir, become very significant to him in the process of his growing up. In his legal guardian, Mr. Harrison's home, he was living a stifling life, where he had to abide by every whim and wish of Mr. Harrison and also follow a strict code of conduct. As he revolted against the authority and came out of the space of privilege, he understood the difficulties of life, leading him to take up the job of an English teacher at Mr. Kapoor's house for his son, Kishen. After the loss of Meena and consequently Kishen, he is left alone in the room on the roof in Dehra, from where he decided to flee to England with the help of the British High Commission, but he never manages to do that in the novel.

He soon meets Kishen and two decide that they will cross the river the next morning and start life afresh. As they cross the river and enter the forest, they seem to be two liberated adolescents who have decided to live life away from the inhibitions of the everyday hum drum of life. Thus, the novel *The Room on the Roof* represents the arduous journey of Rusty, who goes through many ups and downs in his adolescent life. He decided to live his life with his friends as that was more fun than just being told to live life within the European community and following the strict code of conduct that Mr. Harrison wanted him to follow. Rusty by breaking the code of living according to the European standards makes an attempt to understand the Indian way of living and its culture. It is this sensibility of his, which will probably make him a greater poet/writer that he wants to become in his life.

In some ways, it can be said that Rusty is a romantic kind of a person, who rebels against the tyranny of the authority and finds himself in quite a romantic mood as he lives in the room on the roof which is ideal for a poet or a painter. The room is so significant in this novel that Ruskin Bond thought that it would be an appropriate title of the novel, even when the whole of the novel centres on the adolescent life of Rusty from the beginning of spring to the beginning of the rains.

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Rusty's relationship with Meena, Mrs. Kapoor, also shows his romantic inclinations where not only he thinks that he has fallen in love with her, but at the same time, thinks that he can spend the whole life with Meena, when they visit the forest during the picnic. This adolescence romance makes the novel thrilling as adolescent minds often fall for women with the inclination to be physically close to them and enjoy their company. Rusty shows such a behaviour not only when he is with Meena, but even after Meena's death, he seems to be heartbroken as he feels that his world is somehow shattered with her death. When Rusty meets Mr. Kapoor in Haridwar and finds out that he has married again, Rusty feels betrayed not only for neglect towards Kishen, but also because he feels that Mr. Kapoor has been insensitive to the soul of Meena, who was not even dead for a month.

Rusty, thus, is a very sensitive soul which makes him vulnerable to pain and suffering as he gets one jolt after another or one loss after another. First, he loses Meena, then Kishen goes away from him to Haridwar, then his other three friends also leave Dehra due to some reason, leaving Rusty alone to face the world, which he is unable to do and thus, decides to go to England. But as soon as he meets Kishen, he decides that life in Dehra with Kishen has much more to offer and he will enjoy that life more than his life in London. So, he decides to stay in Dehra and pursue his life as a writer.

It can be said that not many characters in the history of Indian writing are presented like Rusty has. He, an English man by birth, display Indian sensibilities to such an extent that the readers consider him to be more of an Indian than the Indians themselves. Rusty makes the readers feel that his skin colour may be white like that of a European, similar to his creator Ruskin Bond, but he is as much a part of India as any other Indian. This celebration of Indianness is something which can be seen throughout the novel as Rusty is much more attracted to all things Indian than European. It is to be kept in mind here that through the character of Rusty, Ruskin Bond is trying to present a part of himself and therefore, the character can be considered as semi-autobiographical to a greater extent. The popularity of Rusty and his sensibilities made Ruskin Bond write many other novels and short stories with Rusty as the central character which shows the significance of the character in the oeuvre of Bond.

Rusty's friends

In the novel, Rusty befriends four Indian boys–Somi, Suri, Ranbir and Kishen. All these four boys are fun-loving as well as sensible and they make every effort to help Rusty when he comes out of Mr. Harrison's cage and decides to pursue his life by himself. They pursue their different interests and yet they have something common in them–their love for the Dehra Bazaar. They all love the *chaat* shop and often meet there to taste the savoury dishes. These characters make Rusty bold enough to take the difficult step of going against the authority of Mr. Harrison and live a life according to his own terms.

Meena

Meena or Mrs. Kapoor is a very significant character in the novel, though she appears briefly. She is a young vivacious beautiful lady, who is married to a much older Mr. Kapoor, who is a drunkard. She has to spend most of her time holding

back Mr. Kapoor from doing awkward things in his drunken state. Moreover, she also has to take care of Kishen as he is always indulging in some mischief or the other. She lives a very difficult life in the Kapoor mansion and was looking for some kind of relief, when Rusty appears in her life. Rusty feels attracted to Meena as soon as he meets her, even though she is much older and a mother to his friend Kishen. For Meena, this relationship is of much significance as in Rusty, she finds her much needed respite and escape that she craved.

Mr. Kapoor

Mr. Kapoor is a drunkard in the novel, who has acquired a lot of money with his luck and spends most of the time drinking while his wife Meena tries to control and take care of him. He is shown to be a happy-go-lucky character in the novel, who is hell bent on enjoying life without being much concerned about himself or his family. As Rusty approaches him for the job of being an English teacher for Mr. Kapoor's son Kishen, he readily accepts him and gives him the room on the roof where Rusty can stay. He seems to be a benevolent character in the beginning, but when we come to the end of the novel, we see a completely different picture of him. When all have left Dehra, and Rusty decides to leave for England and visits Haridwar to meet Kishen, he was shocked to find out that Mr. Kapoor had already married again within a month of the death of his earlier wife, Meena. Mr. Kapoor's insensitivity makes Rusty feels disgusted and also makes him understand why Kishen has run away from home.

Mr. Harrison

Mr. Harrison is the legal guardian of the protagonist, Rusty, in the novel, *The Room on the Roof.* After his parents' death, Rusty had to be in the care of Mr. Harrison as he had no one else whom he knew. Mr. Harrison is shown to be a very strict and cruel man. He decided that Rusty should grow up in a strict European way and therefore, put many restrictions on him so that he does not mix with the Indian boys and remains far away from anything India. This kind of hatred for anything Indian comes from the fact that the English men in India felt that they are superior in every way and therefore, should stop their children from getting in touch with the Indian culture and civilization as that would pollute their minds. This kind of racial prejudice of the West had made many people suffer. Rusty is presented to be suffering too much in the beginning of the novel, when he was staying with Mr. Harrison as he not only had to follow the strict code of conduct but was also abusedby being beaten up with cane if he does anything which is not according to the European standards. In the novel, we see that when Mr. Harrison came to know about Rusty's visit to the Indian bazaar, he got so agitated that he cruelly beat up Rusty with the cane. This kind of behaviour of Mr. Harrison ultimately leads to Rusty being rebellious. Ultimately, he fought back by not only hitting Mr. Harrison back, but also by leaving his house for good. Mr. Harrison, thus, can be seen as a person who works as a catalyst in Rusty's realization of himself as an individual. At the end of the novel, we are informed by the sweeper boy as he speaks to Rusty that Mr. Harrison has left Dehra and gone away for good.

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Check Your Progress

1. When was Bond awarded the Padma Shri?
2. What was Bond often known as?
3. How did Kishen survive after his father's remarriage?
4. Which of the delicacies were especially enjoyed by Rusty at the bazaar?

5.3 R.K. NARAYAN'S *AN ASTROLOGER'S DAY*

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami (1906–2001) is one of the most notable authors of India. He was born in Madras (now Tamil Nadu), India. He was one among the three authors who shaped Indian writing in English (especially in fiction). The other two writers were Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. Narayan introduced realism and psychology in Indian writing. He was a close associate of Graham Greene and a person who believed in promoting regional novels like Thomas Hardy. He created an imaginary town of Malgudi and set his works there, using it as a background. While Hardy is known for his tragic novels, Narayan's Malgudi novels are humorous.

Born to a school headmaster, he was brought up under the guardianship of his maternal grandmother, Parvathi. His family was modern and educated, where the members conversed in English in their daily life. He studied at his father's school in his early years. Later, he was sent to Lutheran Mission School, CRC High School to study at Madras. He read the works by Dickens, P G Wodehouse, Arthur Conan Doyle and Thomas Hardy with great interest. Narayan also used his experiences in his novel. He later moved to Mysore because his father was transferred there. There, he made a clever use of the resources that was furnished by the Government library of his father's school. He had ample material to feed his imagination. He attended the Maharaja College of Mysore in 1926 and completed his graduation from there. When he finished his bachelor's degree which he completed in four years, he began to teach in a school. Then, he turned to writing and journalism. It was in 1930 that his first book, *Swami and Friends*, was published. Though it did not bring him much public applause, but with this, he initiated his fictitious world of Malgudi. This artificial set-up of Malgudi reflected the time of the colonial rule then and came to develop itself on equal footing with the real Indian society. It reflected the growth of our society and culture.

In 1933, he fell in love with a fifteen-year-old girl Rajam and married her. He was a staunch believer in humanity. He wanted to feel equal with people of other castes. His strict rebellion against the caste-difference in India, especially that between a Brahmin and a non-Brahmin was displayed in *Justice*, a newspaper, dedicated to the rights of non-Brahmins. It was his first novel, *Swami and Friends*, which brought him into Graham Greene's contact. The first novel of Narayan was published again in 1935 under Greene's care in England. Soon, *The Dark Room* (1938) was published, which dealt with the theme of domestic disharmony. In his first novel, he attempted to be a realist and used his own experiences in the form of a story. It was categorized as a novel with autobiographical touches. In his third

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book, he wrote about a dominating husband whose wife was a victim of his oppression. In 1937, after his father's death, he accepted a commission from the government of Mysore which was a proposal to write a book to promote tourism in the state.

His next novel was *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), which painted the picture of his own college life and experiences. In this book, Narayan described how marriages in India are finalized based on horoscopes and how a wife bears all animosities of her husband in the social contract of marriage. His wife died of typhoid in 1939. They had a daughter called Hema. The death of Rajam caused a serious setback to the author. This emotional change and taking care of a daughter of three years without his wife, along with other circumstances are depicted in the autobiographical novel, *The English Teacher*. It is a trilogy along with *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts*. Narayan attained some renown encouraged by which he began to publish a journal called *Indian Thought.* It was unsuccessful because the author was unable to manage it properly and ended untimely within a year. His first collection of short stories, *Malgudi Days*, was published in 1942, followed by his novel, *The English Teacher* (1945). Till then, he had been publishing books from England only. But the Second World War brought a change and he began his own publishing company called 'Indian Thought Publications.' The company was a success and is still being run and managed by his granddaughter.

Due to his desire to contribute to the society and literature, he became very popular and respected. After England, he became famous in America and then, in the whole world. In his next novel, *Mr. Sampath* (1948), we can notice how he overcame his autobiographical overtones. It was a changed and modified manner adopted by the author. *The Financial Expert* (1952) is considered his masterpiece, which is based on a true story about a financial genius called Margayya whom he knew by the reference of his brother, R.K. Laxman, a famous cartoonist. His next novel, *Waiting for Mahatma* (1955), depicts a fictional visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Malgudi, where the protagonist falls in love with a woman, who was attending the discourses of the visiting Mahatma. The woman was called Bharti. The character of Bharti is the personification of India and also, it is the soul of Gandhiji's discourses. This novel has portrayed the Indian freedom struggle. Here also, Narayan focuses on the life of the common man as Eugene O' Neill did in his dramas.

In the year 1953, Narayan came to be acknowledged globally as a brilliant Indian writer of English novels and stories; his works were being published in the US for the first time by Michigan State University Press. Narayan was a mixture of the modern and the traditional. In early 1956, he arranged his daughter's wedding. It was during this period that he wrote, *The Guide* (1958), while he was visiting the United States in 1956 on a Rockefeller Fellowship. During this time when he was in the United States, Narayan maintained a daily journal and record of events which was later published as 'My Dateless Diary' (1960). This was the period when he visited England and met Graham Greene for the first time. Narayan considered Greene a friend and mentor as he was the person, who recommended him to change his name. After his return from America and England, *The Guide*

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was published. This was Narayan's greatest achievement. In this novel, realism, naturalism, philosophy, stream of consciousness and mysticism are combined very beautifully. It is a mixture of Indian philosophy and the day-to-day needs of mundane human life besides being an interesting picture of the protagonist, an ordinary man. *The Guide* won him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1958.

He also wrote many philosophical essays. 'Next Sunday' (1960) was his one such collection of conversational essays. His 'My Dateless Diary' includes an essay which may be called a prelude to the composition of *The Guide.* Narayan's next publication was *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1961), a comedy and an example of deft handling. Narayan not only experimented with the themes of social realism, humanitarianism, religion and metaphysics, but also tried his hand in dealing with the subjects like man's philosophical journey. He made a clever use of the dramatic devices and experimented by applying irony, psychological analysis of characters, the stream-of-consciousness (as in his masterpiece, *The Guide*), ordinary life speech and classical comedy.

Narayan, by now, had become famous and travelled extensively delivering lectures on Indian literature. He owned a luxurious house in Mysore and lived a comfortable life. He regularly contributed write-ups to *The Hindu* and *The Atlantic*, the leading two journals. Narayan explored the depths of mythical existence of Hinduism and spiritualism and criticized the blind following of religion at the same time. He scrutinized the age old customs in his works. An example can be found in *The Guide,* where Raju feigns to be a saint. *Gods, Demons and others*, (1964) was a collection of translated short stories from Hindu epics. His brother, R. K. Laxman illustrated his novels and stories. The stories selected for the translation were chosen singularly for having heroes, which are famous for their exploits and great deeds.

The Vendor of Sweets was written in 1967 inspired by his last American tour. The novel describes the cultural differences between an Indian and American in a comic way. The same year, he visited England to receive his honorary doctorates from the University of Leeds. His next work was a collection of short stories, *A Horse and Two Goats,* that was published in 1970. The translation of Tamil epic, Ramavataram or Kamba Ramayana, was published as a result of his promise to his dying uncle in 1938. It was translated into English in 1973. It took five years of his constant labour. He then translated the other Sanskrit epic, *Mahabharata,* which was finally published in 1980. Another work in this time was *The Painter of Signs* (1977). In all of his works, the development of the hero's character is a major part of the narrative's plot-construction.

Narayan was commissioned by the Karnataka Government to write a book to promote tourism in the state, in his later years. He met the demands of the government and wrote a book published as a part of a larger government publication during the late 1970s. He published it in his own press with a fresh name called *The Emerald Route* (1980). This book contains his personal views on the local history and heritage of Karnataka. It was not as interesting as his other humorous tales but it served the purpose. In the same year, he was honoured as an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and won the AC Benson Medal from the Royal Society of literature. He had gained so

much popularity worldwide that his novels and stories were translated into Chinese and many other foreign languages.

A Tiger of Malgudi followed in 1983. This novel deals with a strange theme of a tiger having a cordial relationship with human beings. His next novel was *Talkative Man* (1986), which is the story of a journalist from Malgudi. In between, he had also published two short stories: *Malgudi Days* (1982), a revised edition including the original book containing some other stories and *Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories*, a new collection of tales. *A Writer's Nightmare,* a collection of essays dealing with a wide range of subjects from the Nobel Prize winners to the caste-system, monkeys, love, etc. was published in 1983. It also contained many of his write-ups for the newspapers and magazines since 1958 collectively. Narayan never married again. It shows how resolute was he to give love to his only child after his beloved wife expired. Also, he had settled in Mysore which was not his state. These qualities show that he was a strong man and believed in what he did. While staying alone, he had developed a taste for agriculture. He bought land and started farming. He also liked to go for a walk and loved to interact with local people. He was very fond of reading human characters and their behaviour. In all of his books, there are interesting local incidents, engaging petty shopkeepers, vendors, hawkers, street people, villagers and the likes.

His growth as a writer brought him further honour as a Rajya Sabha Member of the Indian Parliament of the Upper House. Using this platform, he worked for the upliftment of the society openly. He made some suggestions to alter the education system by recommending some changes to it. *The World of Nagaraj* was published in 1990. All of Narayan's creations had a uniform setting of Malgudi. After this work, he fell ill and moved to Madras so that he could stay close to his daughter. It was in 1994 that his daughter died of cancer and his grand-daughter Bhuvaneswari began to run his publication called 'Indian Thought publications' and took care of him as well. Here, Narayan published his final work, *Grandmother's Tale*. It was also autobiographical in nature written in the form of novella, which relates how his great-grandmother travelled to many places in search of her runaway husband shortly after their marriage. This tale was narrated to a young child Narayan by his grandmother under whose care he grew. R.K. Narayan was a man who loved to know people and talked with them without any inhibition even when he was too busy. He loved to share his feelings with his friends. In his last years, his evenings were spent with N. Ram, the publisher of *The Hindu* and the notable Indian journalist. Although he loved meeting people, he had stopped giving interviews by this time. He was averse to it because once his interview with *The Times* gave a severe physical and mental jolt, hospitalizing him. In May 2001, Narayan was hospitalized. On 13 May 2001 he expired in Chennai at the age of ninety-four.

5.3.1 Narayan's Style of Writing

Narayan was fond of simple prose. His style remained simple and precise. His narrative style is a descriptive type of prose. He looked deep into human life with sympathy and dedication and yet kept himself aloof while rendering his descriptions. His satires are mild and appealing to the readers.

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Simplicity of prose

R. K. Narayan's wide range of representation of human life and society brought him fame both in India and abroad. He was a very keen observer of society and lover of human nature. He used simple language for his works which reflected an unaffected prose accompanied with humour. Throughout his life, he endeavoured to focus on the society through all his works. He portrayed the life of common man. His readers always saw his works as if it were their own life and society. His focus remained on ordinary life and people in everything that he created. He portrays the daily life of the Indian people with a psychological insight into their character and activities very intricately. He often used the contemporary description of the Tamil lifestyle. In fact, his stories focus on the life and culture of Tamil Nadu. But all the same, simplicity has the greatest part in the delineation of his characters which are universal types. Graham Greene compared him to Anton Chekhov because of his simplicity and lustre of prose, its gentle beauty, ironical portrayal of tragic situations interspersed with humour and vivid characterisation.

Realism

Narayan used realism for all his narratives. He described what he saw around him. His novels and short stories tell the tales of men and women from our society. Malgudi, the backdrop of his novels is a fictionalized setting like any south Indian village. Malgudi acquainted the Indian readers with the local Tamil society where they could feel at home and relate to the incidents, people and their lives. It described the daily life of Indians in a small town. Anthony West of the New Yorker considered Narayan's style of writing full of realism and variety and likened it to Nikolai Gogol's art of storytelling.

Transparency of vision

Narayan was a keen observer of people and society and he used the minute details of our lives with simplicity in his books. He was detailed and his language is easily understood by everyone. He had studied the life of ordinary man very closely. The conversation between Raju and the villagers in *The Guide* is an example. Jhumpa Lahiri, the Pulitzer Prize winner Indian author, says that Narayan's short stories have the same captivating feelings as his novels. They are short but they are very interesting and engrossing because of their complete expression and this is where the greatest reward of a storyteller lies. People take lot of time to enjoy its short length and simplicity. According to her, what Narayan encapsulates from the beginning till the end of a short story, others strive to achieve in more than hundreds of pages. In fact, his insight, presentation, full expression of the lives of characters in their entirety is all matchless. The depiction of life and characters with full and minute details are a gift of keen insight, sharp observation and the capacity to read life closely. It is because of these characteristics that he has been compared with O Henry, Frank O'Connor, and Flannery O'Connor. Lahiri also compares him to Guy de Maupassant for his ability of precision without losing lustre and interest in the narrative. Like Maupassant, the great French writer, Narayan also sketches commonplace characters of the middle class life and watches them as a silent spectator.

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Descriptive narrative

R.K Narayan's style of prose is descriptive and not analytical. His style is objective where the author is expected to create his characters without involving his personal sentiments and emotions into their actions. He puts them in the story as they are in their real lives. But he takes full interest in describing his characters with a mild touch of humour. His works, on the whole, show that he was an avid reader of human life. His commonplace incidents are arranged so peculiarly in all their native simplicity that the readers attach their sentiments with them so naturally. The most important part of his style is his capacity of being imaginative. His Malgudi is its greatest example. It is a sketch of a local small town where people still take pride in a traditional outlook towards life. They hold superstition in great awe and flinch from accepting anything new or modern. He chose this set-up as a background to show also how modernity had been making inroads into Indian society. The world of Malgudi has a wide range of characters.

Humour and irony

Narayan's writings are interspersed with a soft touch of humour and irony. In his *The Guide,* he chooses an ordinary man Raju who is mean and petty; but the author views him with indulgence. Narayan describes incidents related to him with mild humour and sarcasm adding colour to the portrayal of his character and story. The undercurrent of humour and irony are in the texture of the novel. For example, there is a description in the beginning when Raju takes refuge in a temple by the river and poses as a sage. The writer has given the intricate details of the behaviour of Raju and the villagers with the touch of humour and irony. But there is pathos also in his stories which he handles with great care. It is pity that a man who has been jailed as Raju had done, comes out in the society to cheat people as a pretended sadhu.

Humour and irony walk side by side in his works supporting each other. Humour is used to enliven an incident or a character-sketch whereas there is pathos, pity and irony to highlight the atmosphere of the situation. In this manner, Narayan's writing style can be compared to that of William Faulkner. Both of them were humanists. They picked up an individual to describe the whole society through them. The juxtaposition of the conflict between man and society is a part of the works of Narayan. Though there is similarity between their subjects, especially their vision for humanity. Faulkner used rhetorical prose and illustrated his points with extraordinary descriptions whereas Narayan used simple language and realistic situations.

Humanism

R. K. Narayan's works display a dedication to the cause of humanity. It is not patriotic or religious. But his descriptions touch the heart of his readers. His characters are chosen from ordinary life and the details about them are also commonplace but the beauty lies in their description. Man and his behaviour are his prime interests. For instance, he depicts the character of Raju, the protagonist of his famous novel *The Guide,* from his journey as man of very ordinary and sordid interests to a man who is salvaged by supreme spirituality. Narayan feels that common man is born with qualities which can lead him to the supreme goal of

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life. But a man has his shortcomings and to overcome those is not easy. He deals with the life of a human being with details but his point of view remains humanitarian. All his works display a basic love towards mankind. He deals with even smaller incidents of a human life or a human character with neatness and objectivity to add charm and completeness to the characters.

5.3.2 Text, Summary and Critical Analysis

Text

PUNCTUALLY at midday he opened his bag and spread out his professional equipment, which consisted of a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a notebook, and a bundle of palmyra writing. His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion, and his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, but which his simple clients took to be a prophetic light and felt comforted. The power of his eyes was considerably enhanced by their position placed as they were between the painted forehead and the dark whiskers which streamed down his cheeks : even a half-wit's eyes would sparkle in such a setting. To crown the effect he wound a saffron-coloured turban around his head. This colour scheme never failed.

People were attracted to him as bees are attracted to cosmos or dahlia stalks. He sat under the boughs of a spreading tamarind tree which flanked a path running through the Town Hall Park. It was a remarkable place in many ways: a surging crowd was always moving up and down this narrow road morning till night.

A variety of trades and occupations was represented all along its way: medicine sellers, sellers of stolen hardware and junk, magicians, and, above all, an auctioneer of cheap doth, who created enough din all day to attract the whole town. Next to him in vociferousness came a vendor of fried groundnut, who gave his ware a fancy name each day, calling it " Bombay Ice-Cream " one day, and on the next " Delhi Almond," and on the third " Raja's Delicacy," and so on and so forth, and people flocked to him. A considerable portion of this crowd dallied before the astrologer too. The astrologer transacted his business by the light of a flare which crackled and smoked up above the groundnut heap nearby. Half the enchantment of the place was due to the fact that it did not have the benefit of municipal lighting. The place was lit up by shop lights. One or two had hissing gaslights, some had naked flares stuck on poles, some were lit up by old cycle lamps, and one or two, like the astrologer's, managed without lights of their own. It was a bewildering criss-cross of light rays and moving shadows.

This suited the astrologer very well, for the simple reason that he had not in the least intended to be an astrologer when he began life; and he knew no more of what was going to happen to others than he knew what was going to happen to himself next minute. He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customers. Yet he said things which pleased and astonished everyone: that was more a matter of study, practice, and shrewd guesswork. All the same, it was as much an honest man's labour as any other, and he deserved the wages he carried home at the end of a day.

He had left his village without any previous thought or plan. If he had continued there he would have carried on the work of his forefathers namely, tilling the land, living, marrying, and ripening in his cornfield and ancestral home. But that was not to be. He had to leave home without telling anyone, and he could not rest till he left it behind a couple of hundred miles.

To a villager it is a great deal, as if an ocean flowed between. He had a working analysis of mankind's troubles: marriage, money, and the tangles of human ties. Long practice had sharpened his perception. Within five minutes he understood

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what was wrong. He charged three pies per question, never opened his mouth till the other had spoken for at least ten minutes, which provided him enough stuff for a dozen answers and advices. When he told the person before him, gazing at his palm, "In many ways you are not getting the fullest results for your efforts," nine out of ten were disposed to agree with him. Or he questioned: "Is there any woman in your family, maybe even a distant relative, who is not well disposed towards you?" Or he gave an analysis of character: "Most of your troubles are due to your nature. How can you be otherwise with Saturn where he is? You have an impetuous nature and a rough exterior." This endeared him to their hearts immediately, for; even the mildest of us loves to think that he has a forbidding exterior.

The nuts vendor blew out his flare and rose to go home. This was a signal for the astrologer to bundle up too, since it left him in darkness except for a little shaft of green light which strayed in from somewhere and touched the ground before him. He picked up his cowrie shells and paraphernalia and was putting them back into his bag when the green shaft of light was blotted out; he looked up and saw a man standing before him. He sensed a possible client and said: "You look so careworn. It will do you good to sit down for a while and chat with me." The other grumbled some reply vaguely. The astrologer pressed his invitation; whereupon the other thrust his palm under his nose, saying: "You call yourself an astrologer?" The astrologer felt challenged and said, tilting the other's palm towards the green shaft of light: "Yours is a nature . . ." "Oh, stop that," the other said. "Tell me something worthwhile. . . ."

Our friend felt piqued. "I charge only three pies per question, and what you get ought to be good enough for your money. . . ."At this the other withdrew his arm, took out an anna, and flung it out to him, saying: "I have some questions to ask. If I prove you are bluffing, you must return that anna to me with interest."

"If you find my answers satisfactory, will you give me five rupees? " "No."

" Or will you give me eight annas ? "

"All right, provided you give me twice as much if you are wrong," said the stranger. This pact was accepted after a little further argument. The astrologer sent up a prayer to heaven as the other lit a cheroot. The astrologer caught a glimpse of his face by the matchlight. There was a pause as cars hooted on the ro & djutka drivers swore at their horses, and the babble of the crowd agitated the semi-darkness of the park.

The other sat down, sucking his cheroot, puffing out, sat there ruthlessly. The astrologer felt very uncomfortable. "Here, take your anna back. I am not used to such challenges. It is late for me today. . . ."

He made preparations to bundle up. The other held his wrist and said: " You can't get out of it now. You dragged me in while I was passing." The astrologer shivered in his grip; and his voice shook and became faint. "Leave me today. I will speak to you tomorrow." The other thrust his palm in his face and said: "Challenge is challenge. Go on." The astrologer proceeded with his throat drying up: "There is a woman . . ."

"Stop," said the other. "I don't want all that. Shall I succeed in my present search or not? Answer this and go. Otherwise I will not let you go till you disgorge all your coins." The astrologer muttered a few incantations and replied: "All right. I will speak. But will you give me a rupee if what I say is convincing? Otherwise I will not open my mouth, and you may do what you like." After a good deal of haggling the other agreed. The astrologer said: "You were left for dead. Am I right? "

"Ah, tell me more."

"A knife has passed through you once?" said the astrologer.

"Good fellow!" He bared his chest to show the scar. "What else?"

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"And then you were pushed into a well nearby in the field. You were left for dead."

"I should have been dead if some passer-by had not chanced to peep into the well," exclaimed the other, overwhelmed by enthusiasm. "When shall I get at him?" he asked, clenching his fist.

"In the next world," answered the astrologer. "He died four months ago in a far-off town. You will never see any more of him." The other groaned on hearing it. The astrologer proceeded:

"Guru Nayak"

"You know my name! " the other said, taken aback.

"As I know all other things. Guru Nayak, listen carefully to what I have to say. Your village is two day's journey due north of this town. Take the next train and be gone. I see once again great danger to your life if you go from home." He took out a pinch of sacred ash and held it to him. "Rub it on your forehead and go home. Never travel southward again, and you will live to be a hundred."

"Why should I leave home again?" the other said reflectively. "I was only going away now and then to look for him and to choke out his life if I met him." He shook his head regretfully. "He has escaped my hands. I hope at least he died as he deserved."

"Yes," said the astrologer. "He was crushed under a lorry." The other looked gratified to hear it. The place was deserted by the time the astrologer picked up his articles and put them into his bag. The green shaft was also gone, leaving the place in darkness and silence. The stranger had gone off into the night, after giving the astrologer a handful of coins.

It was nearly midnight when the astrologer reached home. His wife was waiting for him at the door and demanded an explanation. He flung the coins at her and said: "Count them. One man gave all that."

"Twelve and a half annas," she said, counting. She was overjoyed. "I can buy some jaggery and coconut tomorrow. The child has been asking for sweets for so many days now. I will prepare some nice stuff for her."

"The swine has cheated me! He promised me a rupee," said the astrologer. She looked up at him. "You look worried. What is wrong? "

"Nothing."

After dinner, sitting on the pyol, he told her: "Do you know a great load is gone from me today? I thought I had the blood of a man on my hands all these years. That was the reason why I ran away from home, settled here, and married you. He is alive."

She gasped. "You tried to kill!"

"Yes, in our village, when I was a silly youngster. We drank, gambled, and quarrelled badly one day why think of it now? Time to sleep," he said, yawning, and stretched himself on the pyol.

An Astrologer's Day and other Stories is a short story collection of stories written by R.K. Narayan. The first story in this collection is *An Astrologer's Day*. The story is about an astrologer who has taken up this profession, it appears, due to his family circumstances and not because he knows the craft or that it runs in his family. Therefore, he is a stranger to astrology just like the clients who seek his advice. However, he is glib and very good at putting on a perfect show that goes well with the profession of an astrologer. While all through the story the astrologer happily fools his clients with generic comments, the reader is mystified and taken aback when this astrologer accurately tells a client about his past and then gives

advice for the future. He even addresses the client by his actual name. At this point, the reader is forced to wonder if the 'astrologer' was actually well-versed in astrology or if he possessed some special abilities and powers.

Summary

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The author begins the story with a description of the protagonist— the astrologer. There is a detailed description of the attire worn by the astrologer and the tools he uses for his trade and the environment and aura that he creates to give himself the perfect appearance of an astrologer. The astrologer has not been given any name and is shown to be just like one of the many street vendors that are seen all across India—sitting in the shade of a tree or a temporary canopy for protection and touting all things imaginable like fruits, vegetables, spices, gems, groundnut and even newspapers. While the astrologer is just one of the various such vendors, it is the nature of his trade that requires him to be dressed in a particular way and behave in a prescribed manner. He very effectively portrays himself as an astrologer through the impression he gives of being a holy man possessing special powers that give him the power to function as an astrologer.

With no background drama, the astrologer's environment and surroundings slowly start taking shape. Though the author makes no pointed reference to a specific city or town, due to the fact that the fictional city of Malgudi consistently features in the stories of R.K. Narayan, it can be assumed that this story, too, is set in Malgudi. The story portrays a rural city and not an urban one. The author mentions the use of 'municipal lighting' so that the reader is provided with a feel of the milieu. Also, the author mentions the various other vendors present there who are selling various other goods. All this gives a feeling the astrologer is actually located at a place which is full of hustle and bustle.

In the story's first part, the reader gets a sense of the background and of the setting even though at this point the author has not provided any actual information with respect to the astrologer himself. The activities of the astrologer that he performs every day are described in broad terms. It is made clear by the narrator that the astrologer does not really know how to tell the future and is a charlatan, and is also an exceptional judge of character: 'He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customers. But it didn't seem to matter at all. He said things which pleased and astonished everyone: that was more a matter of study, practice and shrewd guesswork.'

One day when the astrologer is about to return home from his work, he is stopped by an individual. The astrologer and the individual engage in a discussion. This client is treated by the astrologer in the same manner as he treats his other clients – using the same platitudes to open conversation and making the very same comments as he does with his other clients. However, this client turns out to be of an unusually mean spirit and more aggressive than his previous clients. He is bent upon getting his money's worth and remarks that if the astrologer fails to tell him the truth, then the astrologer will have to return all his money along with a penalty amount. Realizing that the situation is one in which he most probably will be exposed, the astrologer becomes nervous and he tries to get out of the deal with this client. He even goes on to say: 'Leave me today. I will speak to you tomorrow.' Nevertheless, the client is persistent and will not let the astrologer back out since,

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according to him, 'Challenge is challenge.' The astrologer is left with just one choice—to accept the terms of the agreement.

At this point, the author makes the reader feel that the astrologer might be exposed as possessing no real skill of telling the future. However, the author introduces a new twist in the story. The astrologer starts to tell about the past of the client and talks about a long time ago. He begins by relating the story of the client's past and describes how a long time back someone had stabbed him and then thrown him into a well to die. The astrologer also tells his client that it was with the help of a passer-by that his life had been saved. The client is already impressed by the accurate story of his past and when the astrologer even takes his name, Guru Nayak, the client is stunned. The astrologer goes on to give him some advice. He tells Nayak to return home and stop his search for the person who had tried to kill him. The astrologer further says that the man who tried to kill Nayak has met with an accident that has left him dead. The astrologer goes on to tell Nayak not to leave his village again, as doing so will put him in huge danger. The author had built the story in such a manner that the reader begins to believe that the astrologer actually possesses some magical powers.

Guru Nayak, who has been awestricken by the astrologer, pays him his due amount and goes away. The astrologer, who has been delayed by the client, also sets off to his home. He finds his wife waiting at the door for him. She demands to know the reason for his delayed return. The astrologer tells her of the wager he won and gives her that extra money. He also tells her that he has been relieved of a guilty feeling which had been weighing on his mind for quite some time. He adds that for several years he was living with the guilt of having killed a man. It was due to this that he had left his village. But, today he got to know that the man he thought he had killed was actually alive. Revealing the past, he tells his wife that on one occasion when he was gambling in a state of drunkenness, he entered into a quarrel with another man and stabbed him with a knife and thought him to be dead. The astrologer does not give any more explanation, yet for the reader all parts of the jigsaw puzzle fall in place. It becomes apparent that the client was the man that the astrologer had stabbed.

Significant features of *An Astrologer's Day*

Let us go through the significant features of the short story, *An Astrologer's Day*.

1. **Exposition:** Right at the start of the story the astrologer is introduced to the reader. The author also describes the other vendors who are selling their goods along with the astrologer. This helps to build an environment which is gripping with life. The narrator provides an apt description of how the astrologer manages to fool his clients. 'He said things which pleased and astonished everyone: that was more a matter of study, practice and shrewd guesswork.'

   A perfect picture of an astrologer is depicted by the author that of a con artist likes of whom are found in all towns, cities and markets. Although people feel hesitant to approach the astrologers sitting by the roadside, yet they are tempted to seek their assistance in matter of trouble and to know what will happen in the future.

2. **Complication:** Suspension and uncertainty is created regarding the life and past of the astrologer. The reader is informed right at the start of the tale that the astrologer had not set out in life to become an astrologer. This leaves the reader with a feeling of suspense regarding how and why the protagonist became an astrologer.

   The astrologer had come away from his village furtively. Also, he started his life all over again at a safe distance from his village. The reader also gets to know that this man's family business does not deal in astrology. Had he remained in his village, much like his forefather, he too would have tended his cornfields and land. Such information makes the reader curious about what was there in his past that instigated the man to take the extreme step of leaving his ancestral village.

3. **Climax:** The story goes along at an expected pace but only till the astrologer encounters an unusual client. The client appears for consultation just when the astrologer is calling it a day, packing up his stuff and is ready to head back home. The client has come with pointed and specific queries and puts out a challenge to the astrologer to give answers that are equally specific.

4. **Scene that drives the plot:** The scene where the strange client lights his cheroot and the astrologer catches a glimpse of his face is the turning point in the story. As soon as the astrologer sees the face in the light from the match he becomes uncomfortable and desperately attempts to free himself of the challenge.

   The client is adamant and will not let the astrologer wriggle out of the deal. He says vehemently, 'Challenge is challenge'. Both the client and the reader are baffled by the revelations made by the astrologer. The astrologer reveals that in the past, the client had been stabbed to death and then pushed into a well close to a field. Excitement and suspense get heightened with the astrologer telling the client's name, Guru Nayak. This leaves the client stumped, yet he further wants to know about the man who had stabbed him and pushed him into the well. At this point, the astrologer tells him with great confidence to stop looking for the man as he was crushed to death by a lorry in a town far away. Then the astrologer warns Guru Nayak never to step out of home, especially not towards the south.

   The reader suddenly begins to admire the astrologer for having read the stranger's past accurately and for telling his name as well. Up till now the reader had believed that the astrologer was a fraud, but now the reader was dumbfounded with the fact that the astrologer actually possessed the skill of future telling.

5. **Characterization:** The writer has adopted a method of characterization which is a mix of the dramatic and expository. The story has three main characters which are as follows:

   (a) An Astrologer: The astrologer is the protagonist of the story but is not given any name. The author purposely does not give any name to the astrologer as it does not add any meaning to the story. The astrologer is show to be a 'round character' and several facets of his personality

are revealed as the plot gradually develops. The author creates an elaborate picture of the astrologer's appearance.

- 'His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion and his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam' which was a great comfort to the simple clients as they thought it was some sort of prophetic light.
- 'To crown the effect he wound a saffron-coloured turban around his head. This colour scheme never failed. People were attracted to him as bees are attracted to cosmos or dahlia stalks'.
- 'Half-wit's eyes would sparkle in such a setting'.
- The astrologer had no knowledge of 'astrology', yet he employed his crafty intelligence to aptly play the role of an astrologer. This man possessed a working analysis of mankind's troubles and he would provide information and advice to his client while he intently studied their palm:
- 'Most of your troubles are due to your nature ..... Saturn.....You have an impetuous nature and a rough exterior'.
- 'In many ways you are not getting the fullest results of your efforts'.

Such words seem instantly true for one's own self to almost all human beings and make them believe that the speaker of such words has read the events of life accurately.

The crafty astrologer would not open his mouth before at least ten minutes and used this time to gather information which would provide material for over 'a dozen answers and advices'.

b. **Prospective client for the astrologer:** The client has a focal role to play in the development of the plot of the story as well as its climax. This client turned out to be no other than the man whom the astrologer as a youngster had stabbed during a drunken quarrel and left him for dead. This incident in the past was the reason why the client was furious, restless and desperately hunting for that man to avenge himself. While the client was unable to recognize the astrologer as his assailant, in the light of a matchstick, the astrologer recognized him as the man he had supposedly left as dead. In the process of telling about the client's past, the astrologer addresses the client by his name 'Guru Nayak'.

c. Astrologer's wife: Despite the fact that the astrologer's wife has just a very minor role to play in the entire story, her role is of prime importance in the denouncement of the story. The astrologer reveals to his wife about the past incident and how he was feeling relieved of his guilt now. While it could have been possible to remove this character and have the astrologer talk with his conscience and give the same information to the reader, the presence of the wife adds life to the characters.

6. **Narrative technique:** In the technique used by the writer to build the story, suspense is constantly created for the reader. Suspense starting from whether the 'astrologer' will be able to get through even a single client with his lack of knowledge of the stars, to where the story is leading, to what the circumstances would have been that made this 'astrologer' suddenly run away from his village and become an astrologer in this town. Revealing various parts of the past slowly is the technique followed by the writer. The final revelation creates a clear picture, parts of which had been just hinted at through the rest of the story. The climax is both dramatic, in how it is reached, and logical.
7. **Figurative language:** Various figures of speech have been used in the short story, *An Astrologer's Day*. Some of them are as follows:
   a. **Simile:** Some of the similes used by the author are:
      - The distance that the astrologer covered when he left home so that he would be far away from his village is described with the following simile: 'To a villager it is a great deal, as if an ocean flowed between'.
      - The astrologer wears a saffron-coloured turban and people get attracted to it. The author writes: 'People were attracted to him as bees are attracted to cosmos or dahlia stalks.'
   b. **Irony:** Some of the irony laden comments made by the writer regarding the astrologer in the story are provided as follows:
      - 'He knew no more of what was going to happen to others than he knew what was going to happen to himself next minute.'
      - 'He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customers.'
      - '…his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, which his simple clients took to be a prophetic light and felt comforted.'

Check Your Progress

5. What was the name of R. K. Narayan's first book and when was it published?
6. In what way is R. K. Narayan compared to William Faulkner?
7. Who is the protagonist of the story *An Astrologer's Day*?
8. Why did the astrologer run away from his ancestral village?
9. What is the name of the prospective client with whom the astrologer enters into a deal?

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5.4 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Bond was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999 for his contributions to children's literature.
2. Bond was often known as the Charles Lamb of India.
3. After his father's remarriage, Kishen ran away from the house and survived by stealing from people in Haridwar. Kishen suffered from a sense of betrayal from his father and therefore, ends up as a notorious thief in Haridwar.
4. *Golgappas* and *aloo tikkis* were especially enjoyed by Rusty at the bazaar.
5. R. K. Narayan's first book was titled *Swami and Friends* and it was published in 1930.
6. Narayan's writing style can be compared to that of William Faulkner as both of them were humanists. By means of one individual they described the functioning of an entire society.
7. An astrologer belonging to a rural city is the protagonist of the story *An Astrologer's Day*.
8. The astrologer ran away from his ancestral village as he, in a drunken quarrel, had stabbed a man with a knife and thinking him to be dead, threw him in a well.
9. Guru Nayak is the prospective client with whom the astrologer enters into a deal.

5.5 SUMMARY

- Ruskin Bond, born 19 May 1934, is an Indian author of British descent. He is considered to be an icon among Indian writers and children's authors and a top novelist.
- He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999 for his contributions to children's literature. His stories reveal a deep love of nature and people, especially the flora and fauna of the Himalayas.
- His work has been adapted into various forms and media. *The Flight of Pigeons* has been adapted into the Merchant Ivory film, *Junoon.* Similarly, *The Room on the Roof* has been adapted by BBC into a TV series.
- His greatest success as a writer of the quintessential Indian experience lies in the fact that he has been introduced in school syllabi all across India. Stories like *The Night Train at Deoli*, *Time Stops at Shamli*, and *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* are now taught in schools.
- Nature plays an important role in his work. Even when it is not in the forefront, it is present in the background as the action unfolds. His trips with his father when they went on planting trips on the slopes of Dehradun mark the beginning of his fascination with nature.

- Writers like Dickens, Stevenson, Charles Lamb, Stephen Leacock and W. W. Jacobs were early influences. Later, when he was introduced to Indian writers, he found the works of Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan interesting.
- Bond presents his characters in a restrained manner and delineates them swiftly in a few words. The plot revolves from a revealing or defining episode. According to him the difference between a short story and essay is upon whose personality comes through more strongly, the author's or the characters he describes.
- His writing reveals his belief that a writer is responsible to society and man; his work should be full of human values and universal appeal. Though the characters of his short stories and novels struggle for survival, they are not disillusioned by life. His plots reveal his sympathetic attitude towards the human soul.
- Rusty, a teenager and an Anglo-Indian boy is the protagonist of *A Room on the Roof*, written by Ruskin Bond, which revolves around the life of Rusty as he revolts against his 'legal guardian', Mr. Harrison, to take his own course of action in his life and decide his future.
- An adolescent boy's journey of life in a small town of Dehra has been portrayed poetically in the novel, which makes the readers not only travel the nooks and corners of the town of Dehra, but also makes them experience the ways in which adolescent mind sees the world.
- Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami (1906 – 2001) is one of the most notable authors of India. He was born in Madras (now Tamil Nadu), India. He was one among the three authors who shaped Indian writing in English (especially in fiction).
- It was his first novel Swami and Friends which brought him into Graham Greene's contact. His next novel was The Bachelor of Arts (1937) which is a picture of his own college life and experiences. In this book, Narayan described how marriages in India are finalized based on horoscopes are important and how a wife bears all animosities of her husband in the social contract of marriage.
- In the year 1953, Narayan came to be acknowledged globally as a brilliant Indian writer of English novels and stories when his works were published in the US for the first time by Michigan State University Press.
- Narayan was commissioned by the Karnataka Government to write a book to promote tourism in the state, in his later years. He met the demands of the government and wrote a book published as a part of a larger government publication during the late 1970s.
- Narayan was fond of simple prose. His style remained simple and precise. His narrative style is a descriptive type of prose. He looked deep into human life with sympathy and dedication and yet kept himself aloof while rendering his descriptions.

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- Narayan's writings are interspersed with a soft touch of humour and irony. In his *The Guide*, he chooses an ordinary man Raju who is mean and petty; but the author views him with indulgence.
- R. K. Narayan's works display a dedication to the cause of humanity. It is not patriotic or religious. But his descriptions touch the heart of his readers.
- The story *An Astrologer's Day* is about an astrologer who has taken up this profession, it appears, due to his family circumstances and not because he knows the craft or that it runs in his family.

5.6 KEY TERMS

- **Colonialism:** It is the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.
- **Lineage:** It means a direct descent from an ancestor; ancestry or pedigree.
- **Irony:** It is a literary technique, originally used in Greek tragedy, by which the full significance of a character's words or actions is clear to the audience or reader although unknown to the character.
- **Simile:** It is a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid.
- **Untouchability:** It is the social-religious practice of ostracizing a minority group by segregating them from the mainstream by social custom. In India, according to the caste system, the higher class people used to think about scavengers as untouchables and would believe their touch would pollute the higher class people.

5.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What according to you are the autobiographical elements in Bond's work?
2. What is the significance of the festival, Holi, in Bond's *A Room on the Roof*.
3. Write a note on R. K. Narayan's simplicity of prose.
4. How has irony been used by Narayan in his short story, *An Astrologer's Day*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically analyze the journey of Rusty as an English adolescent in Bond's *A Room on the Roof*.

2. In what way are the Europeans in India in the post-independent India represented in the novel *The Room on the Roof*? Do you pity their existence? Why or why not? Explain.
3. Analyse the role of fate in *An Astrologer's Day* written by R. K. Narayan.
4. Discuss the climax of Narayan's story *An Astrologer's Day*.

5.8 FURTHER READING

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