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(DSC)

FOUR YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE COURSE

(CBCS in Accordance with NEP 2020)

SEMESTER - III

POETRY

ENGLISH

Padmanath Gohainbaruah School of Humanities

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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POETRY

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course has been designed to acquaint the learners about the various ways poetry has been represented in English, American and Indian English literature. It contains three introductory units on English poetry, American poetry and Indian English poetry providing a brief overview to the learners about the history of poetry and varied styles adopted by the poets. Further, units on two British poets, two American poets and two Indian poets along with their well-known poems are included in this course. The Course tends to give a fair idea to the learners about poetry represented beautifully, with diverse themes as has been represented in English, American and Indian English literature.

Unit 1: This unit aims to introduce the learners to the history of English poetry and the various poetic styles since its beginning to the twentieth century.

Unit 2: This unit introduces the learners to English Romanticism and one of its pioneers, William Wordsworth and discusses the contribution of this popular 'nature' poet in the gamut of English poetry. Like the other romantic poets, Wordsworth's poetry reflects his appreciation of nature and use of simple language in poetry.

Unit 3: This unit contains William Wordsworth's poem "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge September 3, 1802" along with the idea about the sonnet form and the salient features of English Romanticism. The poem captures the poet's attraction of a quiet, sleepy city in the Westminster city, in the calm of the early morning.

Unit 4: This unit throws light on the remarkable poet William Butler Yeats in the light of modernism. The learners will receive a brief overview of the life and works of the poet in this unit.

Unit 5: This unit contains W. B. Yeats's memorable poem "Easter 1916". It is about the Easter Uprising of 1916, when the Irish Republican Brotherhood rebelled against the English on an Easter day. The poem expresses Yeats' disgust with the life that the Irish people had been leading and his joy at their valour and spirit of independence in participating in this national movement.

Unit 6: The unit traces the history of American poetry and discusses the major trends in their poetry. It introduces the major poetic voices of America and gives a brief idea of the history of American poetry.

Unit 7: This unit introduces you to one of the most popular American poets, Emily Dickinson and her works.

Unit 8: This unit deals with Emily Dickinson's poem "Because I Could Not Stop For Death", a poem about the individual effort in coming to terms with the certainty of death which mere mortals cannot escape. Death is personified in the poem as a suitor who romantically insists the lady to accompany Him along with Immortality, the Chaperone. The romantic overtones with regard to death as a kind of beau and the images employed to evoke the same, make the poem interesting.

Unit 9: This unit enables you to know about the life and works of Robert Frost who is a famous American poet.

Unit 10: This unit takes up Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" which is based on the familiar theme of making choices or choosing between two alternatives in the journey of life. The poet explores this theme with the description of a straight single grassy path, forking into two separate routes, with the traveller-poet having only one choice in rejecting the other.

Unit 11: This unit describes in short the history of Indian English poetry laying importance in the pre independence and post independence output of poetic works. It will also enable you to be familiarised with some of the great Indian English poets and their works.

Unit 12: This is an introductory unit on Kamala Das and focuses primarily on the contribution of the poet in the field of Indian Writing in English.

Unit 13: This unit contains the confessional poet Kamala Das' poem "An Introduction". The poem presents the themes of isolation and the self attempt to express itself in human terms. According to the poetess, the poem brings to the fore certain private experiences of a woman, with which any woman can identify with.

Unit 14: This unit deals with the poet, Jayanta Mahapatra highlighting his importance in Indian English poetry and discussing his major works.

Unit 15: This unit contains Jayanta Mahapatra's poem titled "Dawn at Puri". Mahapatra is disappointed with the hollowness of some of the Indian traditional practices and customs. Here, he depicts the holy city of Puri which is famous and also one of the most revered pilgrimage towns for the Hindus. Being born in Orissa, the poet's sensibility is totally moulded by Orissa's landscape and an Indian sensibility found in most of his poems.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the "FURTHER READING" which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred during the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the SLM. However, this SLM is not an end in itself and the learners are strongly advised to consult the books and other resources recommended for reading.

UNIT 1: INTRODUCING ENGLISH POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 A Brief History of English Poetry

1.4 English Poetry in the Twentieth Century

1.5 Let us Sum up

1.6 Further Reading

1.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.8 Model Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- trace the beginning of English poetry
- explain the various kinds of poetic style
- discuss the chief English poets and their works
- grasp an idea of English poetic tradition in the twentieth century

1.2 INTRODUCTION

In almost all languages of the world, verse came before prose. Poetry is considered more powerful than verse because the words a poem uses are often metaphors and they go beyond their meaning in the dictionary. Even though poetry began with religion, it accommodated all worldy concerns as it grew, from verse to poetic form and from them to philosophy of life. A poet chooses the best words and their best order and he gives them his personal meaning derived from his own experience of life and the world. You will find below an account of English poetry and a few significant examples which will show you what the above statements mean.

A brief overview of the developments in English poetry through the centuries is an important beginning point for learners of English literature. This section aims to acquaint you with the major periods of English

poetry and the major poets of each age. Important terms and names of poets and poems are highlighted and the learner is encouraged to further read up on these areas. A glossary of poetic forms and techniques is included at the end of this section as a ready-reference for the learners.

1.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF ENGLISH POETRY

Like most literatures, English literature too has its origins in poetry. Thus, the history of literature in English from the earliest point almost inadvertently becomes a history of poetry. The history of literature in English begins with the arrival of the Saxons to England around c.450. The Saxons were a group of Germanic tribes which settled in large parts of Britain and formed part of the merged group of Anglo-Saxons who eventually organised the first united Kingdom of England.

The earliest known English poem is a hymn on creation believed to be composed by Caedmon (cc. 658–680), who was, according to legend, an illiterate herdsman who was magically given the power of poetry. This is generally considered as the beginning of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, also known as Old English Poetry.

The poetry of this period is very difficult to date or to arrange in a chronological manner as there are many competing claims with regard to their compositions. However, most Anglo-Saxon poetry is categorised by the manuscripts in which they survive, rather than its date of composition. The most important are the four great surviving manuscripts of the late 10th and early 11th centuries, known as the *Caedmon* manuscript, the *Vercelli* Book, the *Exeter* Book, and the *Beowulf* manuscript which includes the most famous epic poem “Beowulf.”

“Beowulf” is probably the greatest known Anglo-Saxon poem and is considered the first great work of English literature. The estimated date of the composition of this great epic range from AD 608 to AD 1000.

While the poetry that has survived is limited in volume, *Beowulf* is the only heroic epic to have survived in its entirety and others mostly in fragments such as *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Battle of Brunaburh, The Battle of Maldon, Widsith, Waldere*. Other genres include much

religious verse, from devotional works to biblical paraphrase that included elegies such as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Ruin*, among other writings such as riddles and proverbs.

With the exception of the Rhyming Poem, Anglo-Saxon poetry depended mostly on alliterative verse for its structure.

England witnessed the Norman Conquest in 1066 and from around 1111 the Anglo-Saxon language rapidly diminished as a written literary language. The Normans were from a place called Normandy in France and thus they spoke predominantly Norman, and this became the standard language of the courts and the aristocracy. As the invaders integrated, their language and literature mingled with that of the natives and the dialect of the upper classes became Anglo-Norman and thus Anglo-Saxon gradually transformed into Middle English.

The Middle English period did not produce much works of literature in the language as it was Anglo-Norman or Latin that was preferred for high culture, however, English literature still did survive and a few important works show the development of the language. **Layamon** wrote his *Brut* just before the 13th century and it was based on Wace's 12th century Anglo-Norman epic of the same name. Layamon's language is recognisably Middle English, though it still had a strong Anglo-Saxon influence. Many other works from this period included a variety of romances and lyrics that have been preserved as evidence of popular culture. With time, the English language regained prestige, and in 1362 it replaced French and Latin in Parliament and courts of law.

The 14th century witnessed major works of English literature and these are widely read and these included the most famous English poet of the Middle Ages, **Geoffrey Chaucer**. His works included the most famous *The Canterbury Tales.* His other important works include *The Book of the Duchess*, *Parliament of Fowls*, *Troilus and Criseyde,* etc. Other important works from this age include the so-called Pearl Poet's *Pearl*, *Patience*, *Cleanness*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; Langland's *Piers Plowman*; Gower's *Confessio Amantis,* etc.

The Renaissance is a very important period in the history of European thinking, culture and literature as there was an emphasis on new ways of learning-combined with a return to the study of classical antiquity. England is said to have witnessed the Renaissance from about 1509 till the Restoration in 1660.

The introduction of the printing machine by William Caxton in 1474 helped rapidly disseminate new or recently rediscovered writers and thinkers. Caxton also printed the works of Chaucer and Gower and these books helped establish the idea of a native poetic tradition. In addition, the writings of English humanists like Thomas More (*Utopia)* helped bring the ideas and attitudes associated with the new learning to an English audience.

The early years of the 16th century did not produce much poetry of note. The most significant English poet of this period was **Thomas Wyatt** who was among the first poets to write sonnets in English.

It is with what is known as the Elizabethan Period (1558 to 1603) that English poetry really came into being during the Renaissance. There was a rapid development of poetry and many themes and verse forms were adapted from other European traditions and Classical Literature.

Songs were a popular genre in the Elizabethan Period and many poets, including **Thomas Nashe**, **Robert Southwell** and **Thomas Campion**, were probably the greatest songwriters of the age. The songs remain important due to the borrowing of classical forms from European tradition by the practitioners.

Most of the songs were printed in anthologies such as **Tottel's** *Miscellany* of 1557, also called *Songs and Sonnets,* which was the most famous anthology.

Elizabethan poems and plays were often written in iambic meters, based on a metrical foot of two syllables, one unstressed and one stressed. However, much metrical experimentation took place during the period, and many of the songs, in particular, departed widely from the iambic norm.

The gradual strengthening of Elizabeth's power produced a court

appreciative of poetry and the arts in general. This led to the emergence of a Courtly Poetry tradition aimed at and set in idealised versions of the Court. **Edmund Spenser**'s *The Faerie Queene* and **Philip Sidney**'s *Arcadia* are examples of poetry in this tradition. Sidney's *Arcadia* and Spenser's *Shephearde's Calender* are also important as they introduced the Classical Pastoral form in an English context. Love was a major theme in the courtly tradition and it can be found in the sonnets of **William Shakespeare** and the poetry of **Walter Raleigh** among others.



LET US KNOW

Spenserian stanza: The unit of Edmund Spenser's long poem "The Faerie Queene'', consisting of eight iambic-pentameter lines and a final alexandrine, with a rhyme scheme of ABABBCBCC. Later uses of this stanza form include John Keats' "The Eve of St. Agnes," Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Adonais," and Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lotos-Eaters."

The influence of classicism on Elizabethan poetry can be seen in poetry like *Shephearde's Calender,* plays such as Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and in the many metrical and verse experiments employed during the age that were borrowed from classical forms. Mythology and classicism remained favourite themes for poets to exploit. Examples include Shakespeare's' *"Venus and Adonis",* Christopher Marlowe's ''*Hero and Leander*'' etc. Translations of classical poetry also became popular and prevalent and the versions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by Arthur Golding (1565–67) and George Chapman's translations of Homer's *Iliad* (1611) and *Odyssey* (c.1615) are among the outstanding examples.

English Renaissance Poetry after the Elizabethan Period progressed in many ways with the two important strains being Metaphysical Poetry and the Cavalier Poets.

The Metaphysical poets emerged in the early part of the 17th century and the most famous practitioner of this form of poetry was John Donne; they wrote in a particularly peculiar way with wit and complexity. This

group of poets include Andrew Marvell, Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw and George Herbert amongst others. The learner must note that metaphysical poetry enjoys the status and importance it does today due to the restoration of interest in it in the Victorian age and in the 20th century particularly due to the efforts of T.S Eliot.

The Cavalier poets differed from the metaphysical in their style which was more refined and elegant than the metaphysical poets. The most famous name amongst them is Ben Jonson and included others such as Thomas Carew and Richard Lovelace.They are now widely considered the forerunners of the literary trend in the Augustan Age.

Paradise Lost, a story of fallen pride, was the first major poem to appear in England after the Restoration and its author John Milton is one of the most important poets of that age and in the history of English poetry.

Satire emerged as an important form during this age and all major poets of this age flourished in this genre. These include John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Johnson and Samuel Butler.

The 18th century is called the Augustan age because of the importance given to the classical world particularly during the reign of Augustus. Poets of this period sought to emulate the high polished style of the Romans in their poetry. Translations and imitations of Greek and Latin verses were prevalent. John Dryden translated many works of Virgil, and Pope produced versions of the two Homeric epics. Horace and Juvenal were also widely translated and imitated.

The end of the 18th century witnessed a move away from strict Augustan forms and ways in poetry and the subjective feelings and emotions of the poets were reflected in their poetry. The poets of this period include Thomas Gray, Oliver Goldsmith, Robert Burns and George Crabbe. These poets are considered the precursors to the Romantic poets especially due to their treatment of nature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. What marks the beginning of Old English Poetry?

Q2. Name the most important poem of the Anglo-Saxon period.

Q3. Who was Geoffrey Chaucer?

Q4. Who was the popular song writer in the Elizabethan age?

Q5. What is Courtly Poetry tradition?

Q6. Who were the Metaphysical poets?

Q7. Name the Cavalier poets.

Q8. What are the characteristics of poetry in the 18th century?

The Romantic Movement had at its backdrop a turbulent political scenario of the late 18th century with revolutions in France and America and others and it led to the development of a particular kind of poetry known as Romantic poetry. English Romanticism is believed to have begun in 1798 with the publication of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads.*The major poets besides these two were William Blake, P.B. Shelley, Lord Byron and John Keats.

Romantic poetry stressed upon the subjective feelings and expressions of the individual and paid a lot of importance to nature and the imagination. They were against the strict ideals of the 18th century poetry and sought to compose in a simple uncomplicated language.

In the Victorian age, great political, social and economic change combined with rapid economic expansion due to industrialisation and mechanisation characterises the Victorian Age. The Victorian poets were much influenced by their Romantic predecessors in their scepticism and interest in the mysterious but differed in terms of their more scientific convictions as compared to the Romantics' stress upon spirituality. The major Victorian poets were Lord Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Matthew Arnold and Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Tennyson was known for his rich imagery and rhythmic quality ("The Lady of Shallot", "Charge of the Light Brigade") while Browning's greatest

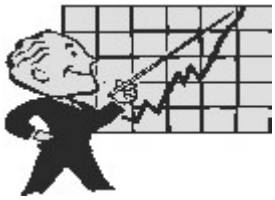
innovation was the **dramatic monologue** ("My Last Duchess", "Porphyria's Lover"). Elizabeth Barrett Browning remains an important figure in 19th century feminist literature.



LET US KNOW

Dramatic monologue: A poem in which an imagined speaker addresses a silent listener, usually not the reader. Examples include Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess", T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and Ai's "Killing Floor." A lyric may also be addressed to someone, but it is short and songlike and may appear to address either the reader or the poet.

Matthew Arnold inherited qualities of the Romantics and was much influenced by Wordsworth, although his poem "Dover Beach" is seen as anticipating Modernism. Hopkins wrote in relative obscurity and his work was not published until after his death but subsequently influenced many poets of the 1940s. Also worthy of mention here amongst the Victorian poets are the siblings Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti who belonged to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood which was primarily an arts movement.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q9. Which work led to the beginning of English Romanticism?

Q10. What are the features of Romantic Poetry?

Q11. In what context do the Victorian poets differ from the Romantic poets?

1.4 ENGLISH POETRY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Thomas Hardy and William Butler Yeats wrote on the cusp of the Victorian and the Modernist periods. While the former was a traditionalist in terms of technique, Yeats adapted to changing times by moving from traditional opulence and ornamentation to remarkable brevity.

The poetry of A.E. Housman struck a chord in the readers of war-sick England, with its lyrical and melancholy elicitation of doomed youth living in the countryside ("A Shropshire Lad"). The distinct, beautiful yet simple imagery of his poetry caught the fancy of the composers of that period who by setting it to music ensured its continued popularity.

Published in a series of five anthologies called *Georgian Poetry* by Harold Monro and edited by Edward Marsh, the Georgian Poets- Edmund Blunden, Rupert Brooke, Robert Graves, D. H. Lawrence, Walter de la Mare and Siegfried Sassoon- wrote poetry that was sentimental, romantic and decadent. Brooke and Sassoon went on to join the ranks of Isaac Rosenberg, Edward Thomas, Wilfred Owen, May Cannan and Rudyard Kipling in writing war poems, which, though socially relevant, never really experimented much with technique.

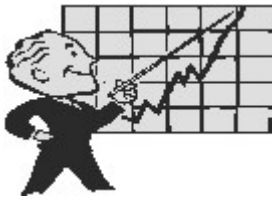
The American-born Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, H.D. and Ezra Pound were *avant garde* poets who spent a good part of their writing career in Europe. With Pound on the forefront, the Imagists- D. H. Lawrence, Richard Aldington, T.E. Hulme, F. S. Flint, Ford Madox Ford, Allen Upward and John Cournos- moved away from the sentimentality and traditional techniques (Romantic and Victorian) of their Georgian contemporaries towards a Classical style which was direct in its presentation and economic in its language. These Imagists experimented with free verse. Eliot's "The Waste Land" made him a sort of role model for other modernist poets of his time.



LET US KNOW

Free verse: Non-metrical, non-rhyming lines that closely follow the natural rhythms of speech. A regular pattern of sound or rhythm may emerge in free-verse lines, but the poet does not adhere to a metrical plan in their composition. Matthew Arnold and Walt Whitman explored the possibilities of non-metrical poetry in the 19th century. Since the early 20th century, the majority of published lyric poetry has been written in free verse. See the work of William Carlos Williams, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.

The 1930s were dominated by W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day-Lewis and Louis MacNeice who were politically active on the Left front. They wrote of socio-economic injustice in their poetry which in their style, sought to move away from the towering shadow of Eliot. David Gascoyne, Hugh Sykes Davies, George Barker, and Philip O'Connor were Surrealist poets who turned to French models for inspiration. Such writing relied on automatism- the poet gave up conscious control of his/her thoughts, and then put down -rapidly, without interrupting the stream of thought or vision, whatever came to mind.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

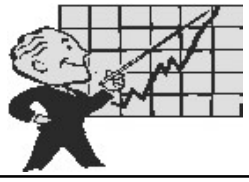
Q12. Who were the Georgian poets? What did they write?

Q13. Who were the Imagists?

Q14. What is Surrealist poetry?

They were succeeded by the New Romantic poets- Dylan Thomas, George Barker, W. S. Graham, Kathleen Raine, Henry Treece and J. F. Hendry- who viewed themselves as up in arms against the *New Country* classicist style of poets led by Michael Roberts. Gerard Manley Hopkins, Arthur Rimbaud and Hart Crane were their role models instead.

The Movement - a term coined by the literary editor of *The Spectator* in 1954 to describe a particular group of poets who sought to highlight the importance of English poetry over and above modernist verse. The Movement included Philip Larkin, Elizabeth Jennings, D. J. Enright, Kingsley Amis, Thom Gunn and Donald Davie whose poetry was essentially English in character in the sense that it was simple, intense in content and traditional, conventional and decorous in form. There is nostalgia over Britain's pastoral past and a lament over its present urban character in the poems of this group.



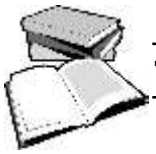
CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q15. Who were called the Movement poets?



1.5 LET US SUM UP

After you have finished reading the unit, you are acquainted with the history of English poetry in brief. The unit introduces you to the various poetic traditions since its beginning to the twentieth century. You are now familiar with the different kinds of poetry like metaphysical poetry, romantic poetry, etc. As a whole, you are able to discuss the history of English poetry since its inception to the present.



1.6 FURTHER READING

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6. Day, Aidan. *Romanticism*: *The New Critical Idiom.*
7. Legouis Emile. (1994) *A Short History of English Literature*. Calcutta: Oxford University.
8. Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook.*
9. Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature.*
10. Unterecker, John Eugene. *A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats.*



1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1 : The earliest known English poem is a hymn on creation believed to be composed by Caedmon (cc. 658–680), who was, according to legend, an illiterate herdsman who was magically given

the powers of poetry. This is generally taken as marking the beginning of Anglo-Saxon Poetry also known as Old English Poetry.

Ans to Q2 : "Beowulf" is probably the greatest known Anglo-Saxon poem.

Ans to Q3 : Geoffrey Chaucer was the most famous English poet of the Middle Ages. His works included the most famous "The Canterbury Tales". His other important works include "The Book of the Duchess", "Parliament of Fowls", "Troilus and Criseyde", etc. Other important works from this age include the so-called Pearl Poet's "Pearl", "Patience", "Cleanness", and "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"; Langland's Piers the Plowman; Gower's "Confessio Amantis", etc.

Ans to Q4 : Thomas Campion was probably the greatest songwriter of the Elizabethan age.

Ans to Q5 : The gradual strengthening Elizabeth's power produced a court appreciative of poetry and the arts in general. This led to the emergence of a Courtly Poetry tradition aimed at and set in idealised versions of the Court. Edmund Spenser's "The Faerie Queene" and Philip Sidney's "Arcadia" are examples of poetry of this tradition.

Ans to Q6 : Andrew Marvell, Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw and George Herbert amongst others.

Ans to Q7 : Ben Jonson, Thomas Carew and Richard Lovelace.

Ans to Q8 : Poets of this period sought to emulate the high polished style of the Romans in their poetry. Translations and imitations of Greek and Latin verse were prevalent.

Ans to Q9 : English Romanticism is believed to have begun in 1798 with the publication of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*.

Ans to Q10 : Romantic poetry stressed upon the subjective feelings and expressions of the individual and paid a lot of importance to nature and the imagination. They were against the strict ideals of the 18th century poetry and sought to compose in a simple uncomplicated language.

Ans to Q11 : The Victorian poets differed in terms of their more scientific convictions as compared to the Romantics' stress upon spirituality.

Ans to Q12 : Edmund Blunden, Rupert Brooke, Robert Graves, D. H. Lawrence, Walter de la Mare and Siegfried Sassoon were the Georgian poets who wrote poetry that was sentimental, romantic and decadent.

Ans to Q13 : D. H. Lawrence, Richard Aldington, T. E. Hulme, F. S. Flint, Ford Madox Ford, Allen Upward and John Cournos were the Imagists. They moved away from the sentimentality and traditional techniques (Romantic and Victorian) of their Georgian contemporaries towards a Classical style which was direct in its presentation and economic in its language. These Imagists experimented with free verse.

Ans to Q14 : Such writing relied on automatism- the poet gave up conscious control of his/her thoughts, and then put down -rapidly, without interrupting the stream of thought or vision, whatever came to mind.

Ans to Q15 : The Movement included Philip Larkin, Elizabeth Jennings, D. J. Enright, Kingsley Amis, Thom Gunn and Donald Davie whose poetry was essentially English in character in the sense that it was simple, intense in content and traditional, conventional and decorous in form. There is nostalgia over Britain's pastoral past and a lament over its present urban character in the poems of this group.



1.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Write a note on Romantic poetry.

Q2. "The history of literature in English from the earliest point almost inadvertently becomes a history of poetry." Discuss.

Q3. What are characteristics of metaphysical poetry?

Q4. Who was Geoffrey Chaucer? What were his major works?

Q5. Write short notes:

a. Imagist poets

b. Cavalier poets

c. English Poetry in the Renaissance

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UNIT 2: WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 William Wordsworth : The Poet

2.3.1 His Life

2.3.2 His Works

2.4 Let us Sum up

2.5 Further Reading

2.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.7 Model Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- gain an idea on the form of romanticism and romantic poetry
- describe the life of the poet William Wordsworth
- discuss the major works of Wordsworth

2.2 INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth (7th April, 1770 – 23rd April 1850) was a major English poet and one of the pioneers of English Romanticism. He was the Poet Laureate of Britain from 1843 until his death in 1850. Wordsworth published *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 along with his friend and fellow Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and this marked the beginning of the Romantic Age in English Literature.

It is important to contextualise a poet or a writer and study his or her poetry in the backdrop of the historical and social setting. Thus, here it is required to know about the Romantic Age in literature to better appreciate Wordsworth's life and works.

Romanticism was a pan European movement, that is, it spread throughout Europe and was not limited to a certain country or place. As

a movement sharing certain features, Romanticism was to be found mostly in Germany, France and England.It originated towards the end of the 18th century and flourished during the first part of the nineteenth century. It occurred as a result of and in reaction against the values, critical norms and standard literary practice of the preceding age. Although, it manifested itself mostly in the arts and literature, Romanticism has had a lasting impact on history and politics and has shaped prevalent modes of thinking. Many of our conventional views regarding the poet or the author as an isolated brooding figure away from society are a contribution of the Romantic Age. There have been many attempts to define Romanticism but there is no consensus amongst scholars as to a standard definition and thus it is important for the student to note that the Romantic period as a term is used generally to define the literature of roughly the end of the 18th century and the first third of the nineteenth century that share a common historical situation. It is when literature moved in directions that were in marked contrast to the standard literary practice and values of the eighteenth century. The Romantic period is generally considered to have come to an end by about 1850 or earlier when it paved the way for another movement, Realism.

The age that preceded the Romantic Age was the 18th century, also known as the Enlightenment or the Augustan Age. It was the age of reason and it advocated a rational and detached scientific approach to most human endeavours and dilemmas. The Enlightenment had developed and championed logic and reason above all other qualities and there was little room in this worldview for the emotion-based nature that would define Romanticism. According to the Enlightenment view, people and their relationships, roles, institutions, and indeed, their whole societies, could be understood best if organised and approached with a scientific perspective. During this time, it was believed that objectivity was not only desirable, but also achievable. Subjective emotions, contemplation of nature, and the creative impulse felt by individuals were denied any importance and only the Classical standards of order, harmony, proportion and objectivity were preferred.

Romanticism, then, emerged as a reaction against what was perceived to be a cultural climate that had been lacking in spontaneity, creativity, and individuality. It emphasised on emotional and subjective spontaneity and highlighted the importance of individual feeling and imagination. The Romantics believed the imagination to be a source of creative faculty. Another important aspect of Romanticism is its distrust in society. Unlike the Enlightenment philosophers, the Romantics sought a "return to nature". The Romantic Age viewed nature with reverence and assigned an important role to nature in individual development and imagination. They went against the 18th century standard of viewing Nature scientifically and regarded it as a vital, living force capable of stirring powerful emotions in humans.

Romantic Poetry

Romantic poetry is thus the poetry that emerged in the Romantic Age and that which differed significantly in form and content to the poetry of the preceding age. English Romantic poetry is known for its six major poets with Wordsworth as the most towering figure among them. The others are William Blake (1757-1827), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), P.B. Shelley (1792-1822), John Keats (1795-1821) and Lord Byron (1788-1824).

The Augustan Age was called so because the writers of the age imitated the literature and culture of the reign of Augustus (27 BCE – 14 CE). There was a revival of interest in the Classics and the authors sought to imitate classical forms. Their language was derivative and ordered and ornate and their relationship to nature was one of cautious imitation. They did not give in to the power of nature but sought to behold it through the lenses of reason and emphasized the importance of collective society rather than individualism. Emotion was subordinate to Reason, which was the prime source for inspiration.

The Romantics sought to lose the artificiality of that poetry and sought to communicate 'real events in simple language coloured by the imagination'. Nature was of prime importance and individual imagination was the prime creative faculty.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. What is the Romantic Movement?

Q2. Name the most famous Romantic poets along with Wordsworth.

Q3. What are the features of Romantic literature?

Q4. What is the age preceding the Romantic Age?

Q5. How does the literature of the Romantic Age differ from the preceding age?

2.3 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH : THE POET

Let us now discuss the life and works of this great Romantic poet.

2.3.1 His Life

William Wordsworth was born on April 7, 1770 in Cockermouth, Cumbria, a scenic region of England known as the Lake District. The magnificent surroundings created in him a sense of wonder and reverence for nature and kindled his poetic sensibilities and imagination. It is here amidst the simple country folk that Wordsworth spent much of his life and they had a lasting and profound influence on him as the common people was a major concern in his poetry. It is from them that he developed a faith in humanity and in the elemental things of life. He had four siblings but was closest to his sister, Dorothy, who played an important role throughout his life. Wordsworth was taught initially by his mother at home and his father too encouraged Wordsworth in his reading of Shakespeare and Milton. He then attended Hawkshead Grammar School and later went to St. John's College in Cambridge where he obtained his B.A in 1791. Towards the end of his final year, Wordsworth went on a walking tour through Europe and he came into contact with the French Revolution, an experience that influenced both his poetry and his political sensibilities. Wordsworth returned to France in late 1791 and resided there for about a period of thirteen months. It is here that he had a relationship with Anne Vallon, a French woman who

gave birth to their child, Caroline in 1792. Due to financial constraints and Britain's rising tensions with France, Wordsworth returned to England alone but continued to support Anne and Caroline throughout his life. He married Mary Hutchinson in 1802 and they had five children together.

Wordsworth's meeting with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1795 is an important event in Wordsworth's poetic life and in the development of the Romantic Age in England. It was with Coleridge that Wordsworth published the famous *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 which is considered the beginning of Romanticism in England. While the poems reflected the new direction that poetry and literature was about to take, it is the Preface to the Second Edition that makes the *Lyrical Ballads* so important to English Romanticism. In the Preface, Wordsworth outlines his theories of poetry which have come to be seen as the defining characteristics of the poetry of the Romantic period and the Preface can thus be seen as an unofficial manifesto of the Romantic Movement.

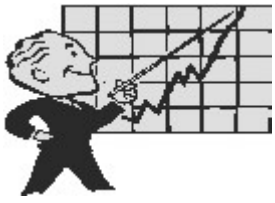
Wordsworth was made Poet Laureate of Britain in 1843 upon the death of Robert Southey. Wordsworth spent his final years settled at Rydal Mount in England where he died in 1850 on the 23rd of April.

2.3.2 His Works

It was in school at Hawkeshead that Wordsworth made his first attempts at poetry but he made his debut as a poet in 1787 when a sonnet by him was published in *The European Magazine.* His visits to France and the considerable time spent there resulted in his first collection of poems *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* in 1793. A legacy of 900 pounds left to him by a friend in 1795 enabled Wordsworth to dedicate his life to writing full time. The year 1795 also marks the year Wordsworth met with Coleridge and they went on to publish *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 and this year has been taken to mean the beginning of the Romantic Age in England. This book contained some of their most well known poems including "Tintern Abbey" by Wordsworth and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Coleridge. The edition published in 1802 contained Wordsworth's Preface which is considered

a central work of Romantic literary theory. 1795 is also the year when Wordsworth wrote his only play *The Borderers* and it was completed in 1797. However, it remained unpublished for a long time until it was finally published in 1842 with major revisions. Wordsworth travelled through Germany in 1798-99 with Dorothy and Coleridge and this trip resulted in many poems including his famous *Lucy* poems. Wordsworth's second collection of poems titled *Poems in Two Volumes* was published in 1807 and it contained his poetry written from 1787 to 1807 and also included the sonnet *Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802* which will be discussed here in the next unit.

Wordsworth's most famous work is considered to be *The Prelude* on which he worked throughout his life and was eventually published three months after his death by his wife Mary in 1850. Some of Wordsworth's poetical works are "An Evening Walk" (1793), "Descriptive Sketches" (1793), "Intimations of Immortality" (1806), "The Excursion" (1814), "The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind" (1850), etc. Among his prose works mention may be made of *Literary Criticism* (1966), *Letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth* (1967), *The Love Letters of William and Mary Wordsworth* (1981), *Essay Upon Epitaphs* (1810), etc. to name a few.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q6. Where was Wordsworth born?

Q7. Did his place of birth influence his poetry?

Q8. When did Wordsworth begin to write verses? Where was his first poem published?

Q9. When did Wordsworth meet Coleridge? Why is this important?



2.4 LET US SUM UP

We have discussed in detail Wordsworth's life and his contribution to English literature. While talking about Wordsworth and his poetry, we

have also discussed salient aspects of the Romantic Age in English literature and how it influenced the literature produced during the period.



2.5 FURTHER READING

1. Daiches, David. (2001) *A Critical History of English Literature*.Vol. 4. New Delhi : Allied Publishers.
2. Legouis Emile. (1994) *A Short History of English Literature*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press.
3. Sarkar, Sunil Kumar. (2003) *A Companion to William Wordsworth*. New Delhi : Atlantic.
4. Ousby Ian. (1992) *Companion to Literature in English*. London: Cambridge University Press.



2.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1 : Romanticism was a pan European movement. It originated towards the end of the 18th century and flourished during the first part of the nineteenth century. It occurred as a result of and in reaction against the values, critical norms and standard literary practice of the preceding age.

Ans to 2 : William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, P. B. Shelley, John Keats and Lord Byron.

Ans to Q3 : The Romantics sought to lose the artificiality of that poetry and sought to communicate 'real events in simple language coloured by the imagination'. Nature was of prime importance and individual imagination was the prime creative faculty.

Ans to Q4 : The Augustan Age.

Ans to Q5 : The Augustan Age saw the revival of interest in the Classics and the authors sought to imitate classical forms. Their language was derivative and ordered and ornate and their relationship to nature was one of cautious imitation. They did not give in to the

power of nature but sought to behold it through the lenses of reason and emphasised the importance of collective society rather than individualism. Emotion was subordinate to Reason, which was the prime source for inspiration but the Romantics sought to lose the artificiality of that poetry and sough to communicate 'real events in simple language coloured by the imagination'. Nature was of prime importance and individual imagination was the prime creative faculty.

Ans to Q6 : William Wordsworth was born on April 7, 1770 in Cockermouth, Cumbria, a scenic region of England known as the Lake District.

Ans to Q7 : Yes, the magnificent surroundings established in him a sense of wonder and reverence for nature and kindled his poetic sensibilities and imagination.

Ans to Q8 : It was in school at Hawkeshead that Wordsworth made his first attempts at poetry but he made his debut as a poet in 1787 when a sonnet by him was published in *The European Magazine*.

Ans to Q9 : Wordsworth's meeting with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1795 is an important event in Wordsworth's poetic life and in the development of the Romantic Age in England. It was with Coleridge that Wordsworth published the famous *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 which is considered the beginning of Romanticism in England.



2.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Does Wordsworth's poetry exemplify the features of Romantic poetry in contrast to the poetry of the preceding Age of Reason?

Q2. Why is the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* important to Romanticism in England?

Q3. What should poetic language be like according to Wordsworth and why?

Q4. What would you call the primary or the most important theme in Wordsworth's poetry?

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UNIT 3: WILLIAM WORDSWORTH : "COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE, SEPTEMBER 3, 1802"

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Text of the Poem

3.4 Context of the Poem

3.5 Explanation of the Poem

3.6 Poetic Techniques

3.7 Let us Sum up

3.8 Further Reading

3.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.10 Model Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- gain an idea of the context in which the poem was written
- grasp the content of the poem in a detailed manner
- analyse the style and language of the poet
- appreciate the reflective bent of the poet's mind as evident in the poem

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit is a continuation of the previous unit. We have already discussed the life and works of the poet William Wordsworth in the previous unit. In the present unit, we shall deal with his poem "Upon Westminster Bridge" and discuss the context and themes of the poem. You shall be further acquainted with the style and technique of the poet.

3.3 TEXT OF THE POEM

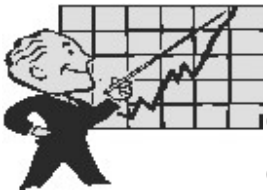
Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

3.4 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

"Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802" was written about an experience that took place in the summer of 1802 during a trip to Calais, France with Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy Wordsworth. The poem draws upon the experience of viewing the bustling city of London from Westminster Bridge early in the morning when it seemed to be "asleep". A diary entry dated July 31st, 1802 from Dorothy's journal speaks exactly of the same scene that Wordsworth describes in the poem and thus, it seems that Wordsworth mistook the date when the poem was published in 1807 as *Poems in Two Volumes*. However, the poem is remembered not for its objective description of a true biographical event but as a beautiful description of a sleepy London morning.

It is written in the form of a Petrarchan or Italian sonnet in iambic pentameter with ten syllables per line. It has the rhyme scheme abbaabbacdcdcd. A Petrarchan sonnet like other sonnets is composed of

fourteen lines and is usually divided into two parts, one with eight lines (an octave) and the other with six lines (a sestet). The ninth line is where the poem usually makes a turn and seeks to elaborate on the subject in a new way or to introduce something completely different. Wordsworth introduces the idea of beauty and describes the scene in the first eight lines and then in the last six lines, he returns to the idea of unparalleled beauty and goes on to compare the city to the country.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. What is the form of the poem?

Q2. What is a Petrarchan sonnet?

Q3. When was the poem written?

Q4. What is the poem about?

3.5 EXPLANATION OF THE POEM

The sonnet begins with a description by the speaker of the view he has of the city of London early one morning from Westminster Bridge. From lines 1 to 8, the speaker declares that he has found the most breathtaking sight on earth and that one had to be of a "dull" mind to not appreciate the beauty of that London morning. The speaker suggests that London is wrapped in the beauty of the morning as if it is a "garment" that the city is wearing. Everything seems silent in the early hours of the morning and all the sights of the city, its ships and domes and theatres are all magnified in the beauty of the morning. He mentions that the city in its morning slumber seems devoid of its usual pollution and the sights rise up in front of him in the "smokeless air" and city seems open "unto the fields, and to the sky".

In lines 9 to 14, the speaker reinforces the idea of unparalleled beauty and says the sun has never shone more beautifully anywhere and that the speaker has never felt such deep calm before. He goes on to personify the river and its movement as it glides along slowly and majestically. The poem ends in an exclamation and a burst of emotion

where he imagines the city as being asleep before preparing itself for another busy day.

Wordsworth's opening statement may seem strange coming from a Romantic poet as he praises and describes the beauty of the city instead of the country. The statement that suggests "earth has nothing to show more fair" than this sight of London in the morning seems at odds with the romantic poet's notions regarding the city's artificiality and the awesomeness of nature. It may be noted that there is no mention of nature or reference to it until line 7 where he views the city as being open "to field and sky". Whereas the poet of the romantic age sought to distinguish the city from the countryside to the distinct advantage of the country, it must be noted that the view of London on that morning sought to distinguish London from its usual characteristics of the city. It is a view of a city before it wakes up and starts being a city. Whereas the city is not a part of nature, it may be seen that it is not in conflict with it either and the city may be said to have a 'natural' air about it in the early morning which is elucidated further in the next line when the poet says the city shone bright in the "smokeless air". It is a rare glimpse of a sleeping, unpolluted city before it wakes up and gets busy turning into its usual self.

The poet continues surprising the reader when he goes on to say that the sun has never shone more beautifully anywhere, even on "valley, rock or hill" and that he has never felt so calm and deep as he feels then at the sight of the London morning. He then proceeds to personify the river that flows according to its own "sweet will" and says that it feels like the heart of the city was lying still while the houses seemed asleep and the entire city wore the beauty of the morning like a garment.

Let us now take a closer look at the poem and go through it in detail.

Earth has not anything to show more fair: (line 1)

The opening statement through which the speaker states that he has found the most beautiful sight on earth immediately draws in the reader's attention to the poem. Whereas the speaker says that he has found the most beautiful view and earth has nothing better to offer, what

he really wishes to stress on is the intense emotions felt at the moment of viewing the scene and the fact that the speaker at that moment felt like there could be nothing better than that. The focus is on the intensity of feeling that makes one believe that they are indeed viewing a truly majestic sight.

Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty (lines 2-3)

Instead of immediately revealing to the reader what this view is, the speaker says that a person who would not appreciate the beauty of the particular sight would have to be very dull in nature without a taste for beauty. The next line with its use of the words 'touching' and 'majesty' seem to portray a feeling of intimacy and that of grandeur. The speaker feels close to and yet awed by what he views.

This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare, (lines 4-5)

It is in these lines that the reader learns of the time of the day that the speaker seeks to describe. The poet says that the city wears the beauty of the morning like a "garment" and thus there is this implicit feeling that the beauty of the view lies in the morning that London wears as a garment and not in the city itself. It hints at the possibility of momentary, transient beauty of the city as against the more stable permanent beauty of nature. London looks beautiful in the morning, when it is calm and asleep and it will probably cease to be beautiful once the garment of the morning is lifted from it. "Silent" seeks to reinforce the time of the day, that is, early morning and hence the silence. "Bare" one feels could be in reference to the objects of the city in the next lines that seem to be bare under the cloak of the morning.

Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky; (lines 6-7)

The sights of the city, the man made structures of ships and towers and theatres all seem to stand out and are magnified in the beauty of the morning. These artificial structures seem and are indeed natural to the landscape of the city and the feeling is that of a mutual coexistence of

the city and of nature. These structures lie bare under the beauty of the morning and seem 'open to the fields and to the sky'.

All bright and glittering in the smokeless air. (line 8)

All the sights of the city seem to be glowing in the light of the morning sun. "Bright and glittering" seem to suggest an element of movement and may hint at the fact that the view is not a static one but constantly changes as the morning spreads over the city and the sun shines brighter. Also, the learner must remember that the view the poet describes is from the coach of a train while it stopped over Westminster Bridge in London. While the poet may have viewed the sight from a stationary carriage, the train eventually moved towards its destination and the poet had to leave behind the sight and move away reinforcing suggestions of movement although the word "glittering" here probably only refers to the changing colours of the morning.

"Smokeless air" is important here as it describes a rare moment in the city when it was not shrouded in smoke from chimneys or industries. This line ends the octave of the sonnet. It may be noted that lines 1 to 8 read as one sentence.

Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill; (lines 9-10)

The speaker reverts to his claims in the beginning of the poem and goes on to say how the sun "in his first splendour" has never shone this beautifully even on valleys and rocks and hills as it does on the city this morning. First splendour basically means the sun's first rays in the morning.

Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will: (lines 11-12)

The speaker continues describing the effects the magnificent scene has had on him and says that he has never felt that sense of intense calm. It is surprising that a huge bustling city makes him feel that way but we have to remember that the view of the city in the poem is that of the city while it lies sleeping, that is, still and quiet and unlike its busy self. Also, the fact that Wordsworth who lived in the most scenic regions of

England found this to be the most magnificent sight could be explained by the fact that the unusual or the alien, impresses upon our senses more acutely that the everyday and the regular. The speaker then goes on to personify the river and describes it as taking her own sweet time flowing through the city. This personification perhaps gives us a sense of intimacy regarding the view which till now was just the poet’s description of the view in sight.

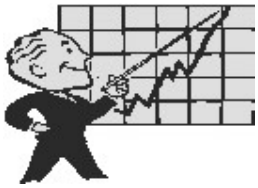
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still! (lines 13-14)

The poem seems to end in an exclamation and burst of emotion and the personification of the river in the earlier line continues as he describes the houses as being asleep and the entire city looks like a sleeping body wearing the morning’s beauty like a blanket or a shirt. “Mighty heart” probably refers to the energy and bustling vitality of a city like London which seems to be lying still in the city’s morning slumber. One may notice that there is a rising of emotions throughout the poem which comes to a peak in the end with an exclamation to God.

3.6 POETIC TECHNIQUES

Taking inspiration from the French Revolution and the changes that it brings about in society, Wordsworth sought to write poetry in the language of the common man. By and large, he stuck to the rules laid down by himself in his 1802 Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads,* believing that poetry should stick to the language of common speech instead of adhering to stilted and structured forms that characterised poetic diction. Recovering “the naked and native dignity of man” forms part of his poetic project and even today, his style remains plain-spoken and easy to understand, notwithstanding changes in the rhythms and idioms of common English since the early nineteenth century. For him, spiritual delight was discoverable only through nature and the imaginative innocence that is synonymous with childhood. His unrestrained reverence for nature takes on a more sombre tone and becomes less

starry-eyed as he grows more orthodox in his perspective on the relations between man, nature and God. His *Immortality Ode* laments this loss of naïveté. But memory plays an important role in preserving that which is lost. Wordsworth's images and metaphors mix natural scenery, religious symbolism and relics of his rustic childhood. Emotions take centre stage in Wordsworth's poetry, belonging as it does to the Romantic era. This emphasis on subjective feelings and experience is highlighted in his very own definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings from emotions recollected in tranquillity". The key words here are 'spontaneous', 'emotions' and 'recollected'.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q5. Explain the line: "All bright and glittering in the smokeless air."

Q6. Write a note on Wordsworth's use of language.



3.7 LET US SUM UP

A brief description of Wordsworth's poetic techniques paved the way for our discussion of the prescribed poem by Wordsworth included in the course. We have seen how Wordsworth employs the form of the sonnet to speak of a certain London morning and having studied the features of Romanticism and Romantic poetry, we can better evaluate and comment upon the portrayal of nature in the poem in relation to the depiction of the city of London. Learners are further encouraged to read more of Wordsworth and the other poets of that age to further substantiate their study of Wordsworth and of Romanticism in general. Also they are encouraged to read on the French Revolution and how it had impacted the Romantic Age.



3.8 FURTHER READING

1. Daiches David. (2001). *A Critical History of English Literature*.Vol. 4. New Delhi : Allied Publishers.
2. Legouis Emile. (1994). *A Short History of English Literature*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press.
3. Sarkar, Sunil Kumar. (2003). *A Companion to William Wordsworth*. New Delhi : Atlantic.
4. Ousby Ian. (1992). *Companion to Literature in English*. London : Cambridge University Press.



3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1 : The poem is written in the form of a Petrarchan or Italian sonnet in iambic pentameter with ten syllables per line.

Ans to Q2 : A Petrarchan sonnet is composed of fourteen lines and is usually divided into two parts, one with eight lines (an octave) and the other with six lines (a sestet). The ninth line is where the poem usually makes a turn and seeks to elaborate on the subject in a new way or to introduce something completely different.

Ans to Q3 : The poem was written in the summer of 1802 during a trip to Calais, France with Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy Wordsworth.

Ans to Q4 : The poem draws upon the experience of viewing the bustling city of London from Westminster Bridge early in the morning when it seemed to be "asleep".

Ans to Q5 : All the sights of the city seem to be glowing in the light of the morning sun."Bright and glittering" seem to suggest an element of movement and may hint at the fact that the view is not a static one but is constantly changing as the morning spreads over the city and the sun shines brighter.

Ans to Q6 : Wordsworth sought to write poetry in the language of the common man. Wordsworth by and large, stuck to the rules laid down by himself in his 1802 Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads,* believing that poetry should stick to the language of common speech instead of adhering to stilted and structured forms that characterise poetic diction. Recovering "the naked and native dignity of man" forms part of his poetic project and even today, his style remains plain-spoken and easy to understand, notwithstanding changes in the rhythms and idioms of common English since the early nineteenth century.



3.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Give an account of the early morning scene of the London society from the Westminster Bridge as described by William Wordsworth.

Q2. Write a critical appreciation of the poem "Upon Westminster Bridge".

Q3. Comment on Wordsworth's language and poetic style.

Q4. Explain with reference to the context:

"Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty"

Q5. Explain with reference to the context:

"Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air"

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UNIT 4: W.B. YEATS: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 W.B. Yeats : The Poet

4.3.1 His Life

4.3.2 His Works

4.4 Let us Sum up

4.5 Further Reading

4.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.7 Model Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the life and works of the great Irish poet William Butler Yeats
- gain an idea on the concept of modernism

4.2 INTRODUCTION

William Butler Yeats (13 June 1865 – 28 January 1939) was an Irish poet and dramatist and is considered one of the most important figures of 20th century literature. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1923 and was the first Irishman to be honoured with the prize. Yeats being a modern poet, has to be read with reference to the movement.

In Literature, modernism was marked by sudden and unexpected breaks with traditional ways of dallying with the world. Works became more experimental and individualistic- something that would have been frowned upon a decade or two ago. Importance began to be given to the inner self and consciousness (Psychology as a growing science and Freud's rising popularity might have contributed to this). Nature took a backseat and the physical surroundings of man was worthy of attention to the writers and poets of that time only so far as it affected the psyche

of the individual. The First World War did much to alter the rose-tinted view that artists might have had of the world. Just as the familiar social, economic and political structures that Victorian England was used to, broke down with the onset of the War, so was it with poetry that the lyrical, flowery and nature-loving imagery of the Romantics and Victorians gave way to the growing significance of Imagism. Shorter in length and written in free verse, Imagist poetry with its minimalist language and lesser structural rigidity stood in stark contrast to the sentimentality of Romantic poetry and its preoccupation with beauty. William Butler Yeats too rode on this wave of change. Beginning his literary career with poems drawn from Irish folklore, he gradually moved to more contemporary political themes. For this he was indebted to Ezra Pound– one of the pioneers of Imagism. Abandoning the conventional poetic diction of his earlier work, he went on to write verse that was less ornate and more concise and direct in style and content.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. In which year was W. B. Yeats awarded the Nobel Prize?

Q2. How did the World War affect poetry?

Q3. Mention one writer who influenced W. B. Yeats.

4.3 W.B. YEATS: THE POET

Let us now move on to the discussion of the life and works of one of the famous modern poets, W.B. Yeats.

4.3.1 His Life

W.B. Yeats was born in County Dublin on June 13, 1865. His father trained as a lawyer and later pursued a career as an artist due to which he moved with his family to London at a young age, but he spent summers in County Sligo, in Western Ireland. This was his mother's home and this place held an important place throughout his life and he claimed this place to be his "home of the heart". His family moved back

to Dublin when Yeats was about sixteen years old and here he attended the Metropolitan School of Art.

Yeats developed an interest in the occult and mysticism at an early age. He associated himself with a famous theosophist, Madame Blatavsky, and joined a Theosophy Society. Theosophy holds that all beliefs make up a larger system of religions, and all hold some measure of the truth. Yeats attended many **séances**, starting from the year, 1886.



Séances: a meeting of spiritualists.

In 1889, Yeats met an Irish revolutionary named Maude Gonne (1866-1953) who was to play a very important part in his life. Yeats fell in love with her and most of his poetry was addressed to her throughout his life. Unfortunately, Maude did not return his feelings, and after refusing his marriage proposals three times, she married Major John MacBride in 1903 who is mentioned in the poem "Easter 1916" as discussed in the next unit. Collections of poetry from this time include *The Rose* (1893) and "The Wind Among the Reeds" (1899).

4.3.2 His Works

Yeats' first work was published in the *Dublin University Review* in 1885 and *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Works,* which is considered his first major work, came out in 1893. Yeats' early poetry focuses on ancient Irish epics as well as the contemporary nationalist movement that was gaining force in Ireland.

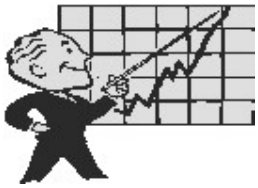
Yeats was fascinated by folktales and by Irish folk history and under the guidance of George Russell and Thomas Hyde, he published *Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry* in 1888. In 1897, Yeats met Lady Gregory and she convinced him to start writing drama with Irish subject matter. Together with George Moore and Edward Martyn, the two set up The Abbey Theatre, Ireland's national theater, in Dublin in 1904. Yeats'*Cathleen ni Houlihan*, a nationalist play personifying Ireland as a woman, was performed on the opening night.

In 1917, Yeats bought Thoor Ballylee, a Norman stone tower in County Sligo, near Coole Park. Characteristically, the poet chose to live inside his symbol. He spent the following summer with Maude Gonne's

family, and proposed to her daughter, Iseult, but was turned down. The same year, he married Georgie Hyde-Lee. His wife shared his interest in the occult and claimed a gift of "automatic writing," in which her hand was directed by a divine force. Together, the two produced *The Vision*, a notebook of spiritual thoughts, in 1933.

While writing poetry and plays, as well as, continuing to serve on the artistic board of the Abbey Theatre, Yeats became a member of the Seanad, the Irish senate, from 1922-25. He served on the committees that helped to create coinage for the new state. He left in disgust when the governmental organisation was split in the aftermath of the Irish Civil War (1923-24).

As Yeats grew older, he developed a friendship with Ezra Pound, a poet who drew him away from his mystical, lyrical style into something drier and sparer. Arguably his most famous collection, *The Tower* (1928) contains political poems, as well as, a more modernist return to mythological topics like "Leda and the Swan." Yeats became increasingly political in his old age, publishing a collection called *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* in 1921, which includes his famous "Easter, 1916" in which he describes the birth of modern Irish nationalism with the famous phrase, "a terrible beauty is born." *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933) contain poems that focus on Yeats' own estate at Coole Park—the winding stair being the stair at Thoor Ballylee. His later poems, especially "Under Ben Bulben," express his desire to be buried there. After his death, he was buried in Sligo. His epitaph reads "Cast a cold eye on life, on death; horsemen, pass by!"



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q4. Name the place that was close to William Butler's heart.

Q5. What is Theosophy?

Q6. Who was Maude Gonne?

Q7. Name Yeats' first major work.

Q8. Who were the founders of the Abbey Theatre?

Q9. What is automatic writing?

Q10. In which collection of poetry does "Easter, 1916" appear?



4.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the poet William Butler Yeats and his contribution in the literature of the twentieth century. Being a poet, he mainly draws his themes from Irish folklore. You have come to know that he was influenced by mysticism and occult and his poetry reflects his interests. However, we cannot forget Yeats' contribution as a dramatist who went on to be one the founders of the Abbey Theatre. It has to be remembered that much of Yeats' early poetry bloomed out of his unrequited love for Maude Gonne whereas his later poems show him as a man who is keen on writing political poems.



4.5 FURTHER READING

1. Dattatreya, Poduri. (2000). *W. B. Yeats Poet and Dramatist.* Jaipur: Pointer Publisher.
2. Larrisy, Edward. (1998). *W. B. Yeats.* United Kingdom: NorthCote House.
3. Singh, M. P. (2003). *W. B. Yeats: His Poetry and Politics.* Atlantic: U.K.



4.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1 : He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1923.

Ans to Q2 : With the onset of the War, poetry gave way to the growing signifance of Imagism. Shorter in length and written in free verse, Imagist poetry with its minimalist language and lesser structural

rigidity stood in stark contrast to the sentimentality of Romantic poetry with its preoccupation with beauty.

Ans to Q3 : Ezra Pound.

Ans to Q4 : His mother's home was in County Sligo, in Western Ireland and this place held an important place throughout his life and he claimed this place to be his "home of the heart".

Ans to Q5 : Theosophy holds that all beliefs make up a larger system of religions, and all hold some measure of the truth.

Ans to Q6 : Maude Gonne was an Irish revolutionary who was to play a very important part in Yeats' life. Yeats fell in love with her and most of his poetry was addressed to her throughout his life.

Ans to Q7 : *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Works* is considered his first major work and it came out in 1893.

Ans to Q8 : Lady Gregory, W. B. Yeats, George Moore and Edward Martyn set up The Abbey Theatre, Ireland's national theatre, in Dublin in 1904.

Ans to Q9 : "Automatic writing," is considered as a form of writing that is directed by a divine force.

Ans to Q10 : *Michael Robartes and the Dancer.*



4.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Write a short note on modernism.

Q2. Discuss William Butler Yeats as a modern poet.

Q3. Describe in brief the influence of Irish folk culture in Yeats' poetry.

Q4. Write a short note on the poetic output of William Butler Yeats.

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UNIT 5: W.B. YEATS: “EASTER 1916”

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Text of the Poem

5.4 Context of the Poem

5.5 Explanation of the Poem

5.6 Poetic Techniques

5.7 Let us Sum up

5.8 Further Reading

5.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

5.10 Model Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- give a detailed summary of the poem “Easter 1916”
- explain the context of the poem
- describe the poetic technique employed by W.B. Yeats
- analyse the poem critically

5.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall deal with the poem “Easter 1916” by W. B. Yeats. We are familiar with the poet from our reading of the previous unit. Therefore, here the poem “Easter 1916 will be discussed in broad details so as to enable you to appreciate the text of the poem.

5.3 TEXT OF THE POEM

I have met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth-century houses.
I have passed with a nod of the head

Or polite meaningless words,
Or have lingered awhile and said
Polite meaningless words,
And thought before I had done
Of a mocking tale or a gibe
To please a companion
Around the fire at the club,
Being certain that they and I
But lived where motley is worn:
All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.
That woman's days were spent
In ignorant good-will,
Her nights in argument
Until her voice grew shrill.
What voice more sweet than hers
When, young and beautiful,
She rode to harriers?
This man had kept a school
And rode our winged horse;
This other his helper and friend
Was coming into his force;
He might have won fame in the end,
So sensitive his nature seemed,
So daring and sweet his thought.
This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vain glorious lout.
He had done most bitter wrong
To some who are near my heart,
Yet I number him in the song;
He, too, has resigned his part
In the casual comedy;
He, too, has been changed in his turn,

Transformed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.
Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream.
The horse that comes from the road.
The rider, the birds that range
From cloud to tumbling cloud,
Minute by minute they change;
A shadow of cloud on the stream
Changes minute by minute;
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
And a horse plashes within it;
The long-legged moor-hens dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call;
Minute by minute they live:
The stone’s in the midst of all.
Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?
That is Heaven’s part, our part
To murmur name upon name,
As a mother names her child
When sleep at last has come
On limbs that had run wild.
What is it but nightfall?
No, no, not night but death;
Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all that is done and said.
We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead;

And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?
I write it out in a verse -
MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born

5.4 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

The poem "Easter 1916" was written sometime between May and September 1916 and depicts Yeats' mixed emotions towards the Easter Uprising in Ireland against British rule on 24th April, 1916. The Uprising was unsuccessful and the Irish revolutionaries involved with the movement were executed for treason by the British government. Although a staunch and committed nationalist, Yeats was a little wary of violent uprisings and the poem describes very well Yeats' torn emotions regarding the entire event of the uprising. While Yeats does not seem to be completely supportive of the violence of the movement and initially in the first paragraphs tries to distance himself from the revolutionaries and the movement, he gradually seems to change his mind as the poem progresses and believes that even though the uprising was unsuccessful it led to the birth of a "terrible beauty". There is an ambiguous feeling throughout the poem where Yeats seems to be trying to figure out how he feels about the entire event exactly. There is a feeling that even though Yeats was not completely one with the event, he believes that it was an important event in the history of Irish nationalism that will always be remembered.

The poem first appeared almost five years after it was composed in Yeats' poetry collection *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* in 1921.

Yeats for the most part in the poem sticks to the form of iambic tetrameter with a simple abab rhyme scheme with occasional switches

to iambic trimeter. The learners are encouraged to read up on the meters and forms and identify them in relation to the poem.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. What did the poet try to depict through his poem?

Q2. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem?

5.5 EXPLANATION OF THE POEM

The poem begins by a description of the people who he would randomly meet at the "end of day" with whom he had a very superficial relationship. He would make small talk and exchange "polite meaningless words" without paying much attention or importance to these conversations or to these people. Yeats then goes on to describe specific people involved with the event and even here the ambiguous unsure tone of the poet is not abandoned, however, there seems to be a change in tone from the first stanza where he totally dismisses the people with "polite meaningless words".

Yeats continues into the third stanza and compares these revolutionaries and their dedication to an unmoving rock at the bottom of a stream. The stream is constantly moving and the nature around it everywhere too keeps changing while the rock stays put in its place, with a strong will and unchanging dedication, like the revolutionaries and their unmoving dedication towards the cause of Irish independence. Towards the end, it seems Yeats is not exactly sure how much he admires the people he mentions together with their sacrifice for a lost cause. However, he definitely has learned to respect them and their sense of conviction in what they believed in.

Yeats closes the poem with the phrase "A terrible beauty is born," which he has repeated several times in the poem. The phrase serves as a refrain and it helps reconnect to the title of the poem in every stanza. It also closes the poem by suggesting that even though the deaths of the

"Easter Uprising" are terrible, history tends to remember bloody battles and self-sacrifice more than anything else. So with regard to being remembered, there is kind of a terrible beauty in the death that came out of Easter, 1916.

Let us go through the poem in detail, one stanza at a time, to understand it better.

STANZA 1

I have met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth-century houses.
I have passed with a nod of the head
Or polite meaningless words,
Or have lingered awhile and said
Polite meaningless words,
And thought before I had done
Of a mocking tale or a gibe
To please a companion
Around the fire at the club,
Being certain that they and I
But lived where motley is worn:
All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

Yeats begins the poem by talking about the people he would usually meet at "close of day", that is, the end of a working day, towards the evening from wherever they worked be it behind counters and desks or stores and offices amidst old houses. Their vivid faces must be a result of their finishing work for the day. He then goes on to describe his usual exchanges of conversation with these people that do not consist of anything more than polite greetings exchanged as a matter of social courtesy. The repetition of the phrase "polite meaningless words" in this stanza seeks to reinforce the idea that Yeats does not think much of

these people or his meetings with them although he would sometime linger around and crack a joke or tell a funny story sitting at the club. What the poet wishes to stress on, is the absolute superficiality with which he would associate with these people and the unimportance he attaches to his associations with them. The student would probably notice that till now Yeats does not mention who these people are or what their connection is to the title of the poem. That can be seen as intentional on the part of the poet as he wishes to reveal what the poem is all about slowly and gradually. This ambiguity can also be seen as reflecting the poet's unsure mind regarding the events that he wishes to describe in the poem. The reference to "motley" by Yeats seeks to reinforce the ideas of silly and clownish superficiality. Motley refers to the patchwork of colours that would traditionally be worn by a jester or an old fashioned clown. He seems to describe his social life as being funny, silly and unimportant.

The last two lines seem to have a change in tone from the silly and superficial towards something dark and realistic. It is only after Yeats writes "*All changed, changed utterly*," that one can guess that Yeats now will somehow connect to the title of the poem and talk about the violent Easter Uprising and hence the line that says that everything had changed from the previous order of superficial social life. With the final line in the stanza which is repeated throughout the poem, Yeats uses a technique called foreshadowing which is a term used for hints that a text offers us as to what might be expected soon. Yeats keeps us in suspense by saying that "a terrible beauty is born" because we are not sure of what it exactly means but we can guess as to the fact that it refers to the bloody battle of 1916 and we can expect a change in the narrative or a twist in the sequence of events.

STANZA 2

That woman's days were spent
In ignorant good-will,
Her nights in argument

Until her voice grew shrill.
What voice more sweet than hers
When, young and beautiful,
She rode to harriers?
This man had kept a school
And rode our winged horse;
This other his helper and friend
Was coming into his force;
He might have won fame in the end,
So sensitive his nature seemed,
So daring and sweet his thought.
This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vain glorious lout.
He had done most bitter wrong
To some who are near my heart,
Yet I number him in the song;
He, too, has resigned his part
In the casual comedy;
He, too, has been changed in his turn,
Transformed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

Yeats in this stanza goes on to talk about specific people rather than the generalised ones from the first stanza. He first goes on to talk about a woman who he does not name but reading the poem and its context will reveal that here he is probably referring to Countess Constance Markievicz, one of the most important people behind the Easter Uprising. She was arrested after the Uprising and was sentenced to death however she was not executed but served a life sentence. The ambivalence felt by Yeats towards the Revolt is apparent in these lines as we do not see him showering praises on the woman who gave up her life for this cause. "Ignorant good will" seems to suggest that her dedication to the cause was naïve and uninformed. Yeats also seems to

make a case for what ideal femininity must be like. He seems to suggest that her political activities led her astray from her ideal feminine virtues and led her to the violent path of revolutions when he says “her voice grew shrill” from how sweet and feminine it was earlier when she lived an ideal feminine aristocratic life. “Rode to harriers” is a typical English phrase which means a woman riding a horse on a hunt for rabbits. It was a typically aristocratic thing to do and serves here as a symbol for rich beauty. Yeats seems to suggest that that was what was ideal for women and not taking part in bloody revolutions. Yeats does not exactly espouse any power to women here and reinforces old traditional homely virtues for women.

Yeats now mentions a person who kept a school and “rode our winged horse”. It must be noted here that Yeats expected people to get his references when the poem was published as the memory of the Easter Uprising was still fresh in the minds of people in Ireland. However, for us reading the poem in entirely different times and contexts, a little bit of research into who these people were, seems necessary. Reading up on this reveals to us that the person referred to here is probably Padraic Pearse who was also one of the leaders of the Revolt. He had founded a boys’ school in Dublin and was a poet. The phrase “winged horse” refers to the mythical beast Pegasus who was the ancient symbol for poet in Greek myths. Thus by referring to the man being a poet by using a phrase like “winged horse”, Yeats is using a technique called Symbolism. Yeats then goes on to speak in a similar vein about another person who may be identified as Thomas Macdonagh. He too was a poet and a dramatist involved with the Uprising. Yeats feels sorry for him as he had a future in writing (“Was coming into his force; He might have won fame in the end,”) and his associations with the Uprising cut short his talent and life as a poet.

The next person Yeats mentions is Major MacBride who was a leader with the Revolution. Yeats had a personal association with him as he was the man Maud Gonne married and later separated from after having rejected Yeats’ marriage proposal. Yeats was naturally not fond of

this man and he seems to use the harshest phrase in the entire poem to describe him, "drunken vain glorious lout". "He had done most bitter wrong, To some who are near my heart," clearly reveals to us the context and the people as being MacBride and Maud Gonne. However, Yeats seems to overcome his personal animosity with the man to mention him in his poem when he says "Yet I number him in the song;".Yeats seems to suggest that having died for the cause of the Revolt seems to have changed him utterly as future generations would view him as important and as a hero, however the way Yeats finishes the poem by saying that "He, too, has resigned his part/ In the casual comedy;" seems to reinforce Yeats' ambivalence about the entire event. "Casual Comedy" seems to suggest almost an element of silliness around the entire event although he again stresses on the fact that no matter what he thinks or believes, the events surrounding the Uprising had changed everything and it indeed gave birth to "a terrible beauty".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3. Describe in brief the technique of foreshadowing by Yeats in the poem.

Q4. Whom does Yeats refer to as the "drunken vainglorious lout"?

STANZA 3

Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream.
The horse that comes from the road.
The rider, the birds that range
From cloud to tumbling cloud,
Minute by minute they change;
A shadow of cloud on the stream
Changes minute by minute;
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,

And a horse plashes within it;
The long-legged moor-hens dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call;
Minute by minute they live:
The stone's in the midst of all.

There is a noticeable change in tone in this stanza as Yeats seems to adopt a more serious voice. Yeats compares here the hearts of the Irish revolutionaries to a stone. Although, it may seem to have connotations of being cold and ruthless but what Yeats wants to portray with the imagery of the stone is unmoving unchanging dedication. He suggests that the cause and dedication of the revolutionaries is unchanging and tireless. He says the revolutionaries' hearts are filled with an intense passion and are dedicated to a single cause unchanging with the seasons and are the same through summer and winter although the world around them and all its surroundings may keep changing. The change in voice and tone can be gauged by the fact that by comparing their dedication to an unmoving stone, gives the Uprising and its revolutionaries a certain importance and respect that had been missing in the earlier stanzas.

Yeats then goes on to describe all that changes in nature with a lot of imagery drawn from nature. He talks of horses and riders, clouds and birds that all keep changing by the minute in contrast to the dedication of the revolutionaries symbolised by a rock at the bottom of a stream. The stream keeps flowing and changing but the rock remains unmoved. He seems to say that the world goes on and changes but nothing can change the dedication of the fighters of the revolution as they died for a cause.

STANZA 4

Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?
That is Heaven's part, our part

To murmur name upon name,
As a mother names her child
When sleep at last has come
On limbs that had run wild.
What is it but nightfall?
No, no, not night but death;
Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all that is done and said.
We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead;
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?
I write it out in a verse -
MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born

Yeats adopts a meditative tone and wishes to reflect upon the entire event. He had been stressing upon the dedicated unchanging stone like quality of the revolutionaries but now he seems to wonder if all that sacrifice would be enough when he says "Too long a sacrifice/ Can make a stone of the heart./ O when may it suffice?"

Yeats seems to say that it is not up to him or the people to decide what may "suffice" but that it is "heaven's part". He suggests only fate and history shall decide when true independence may be achieved and when all will sacrifice be enough. The best that people can do is to *"murmur name upon name"*, i.e., mourn the people who have died for the cause as mothers would weep for children who finally "sleep" after having "run wild". In other words, he suggests that we can do nothing to

stop the bloody cycle of history but the only power we have is to mourn the dead who died for this.

Yeats now goes on to talk about death and asks if this was "needless death after all". England had promised Ireland freedom but went back on their word when the World War started. However, they had still promised them freedom after the War. The Revolution seems less glorious now seen in this light that had Ireland waited two more years they might have received independence but they decided to win freedom through violent uprising in 1916 which was thwarted and the revolutionaries tried and sentenced for treason.

Yeats now says that despite the doubts about the Uprising and its requirement or consequences, the one thing that is for certain is "their dream" to win independence and the cause that they were willing to die for and this itself is praiseworthy. Yeats reverts back to his ambiguity regarding the entire event when he suggests that it is "excess love" for their country that "bewildered" them and perhaps led them astray on the violent path.

Finally, it seems the best the poet Yeats could do about his entire dilemma regarding the Uprising is to commit it to verse, I write it out in a verse – "It" here refers to Yeats' entire thought process regarding the Uprising that has been evolving throughout the poem. He then goes on to name in a list the main people behind the Uprising and says that these people have been transformed by their selfless sacrifice for their country and its independence because of which they will be remembered forever in Ireland's history. This is something Yeats knows he is not a part of, and he does not totally know how to feel about that. Yeats finishes the poem with the same refrain and a certain amount of uncertainty regarding the entire event where he refrains from unabashedly calling the Uprising a glorious success but also claims that the revolutionaries did not die for nothing as their contributions to Irish independence will go down in history.

5.6 POETIC TECHNIQUES

Yeats' poetry is symbolic in the sense that the images and structures that he uses in them allude to symbols and thoughts well beyond what is conveyed literally. While his Modernist contemporaries experimented with free verse, Yeats stuck to more traditional forms. That is not to say that he was wary of change. His style evolved from the conventional form of poetic diction to one more ascetic in language and direct in its approach to themes. The young Yeats' poetry borrowed unabashedly from Irish folklore and critics uncharitably agree that it is stilted and over-elaborative in its deployment of words. The Yeats of the middle period wrote poetry that was pithier in diction, realistic and more open to the use of colloquial speech. Some see the pithiness as a bad thing and do not take kindly to the sparseness that characterised this middle period's verse, seeing it as barren. Having lived through turbulent times, the mature Yeats searches for anchorage in poems like "Sailing to Byzantium". But his zest for life continues to exist alongside it, therefore leading to an inner conflict expressed in the poems of the later period. His later works grow increasingly personal and the Yeats of the later period contemplates on the ageing self. Structural succinctness, the complex nature and variety of the moods expressed, rhythmic mastery and a remarkable use of common poetic diction to connote complex ideas- all point to William Butler Yeats' maturity as a poet.



LET US KNOW

Myth and history constitute an important aspect of Yeats' poetry. "Easter 1916", "The Second Coming", "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" and "Leda and Swan" are all based on myth and history.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q5. How does Yeats react to the Uprising as seen in the poem?

Q6. What do Yeats' early poems reflect?



5.7 LET US SUM UP

We have learnt about the important figure of English literature namely, W.B. Yeats by reading about his life and works and the context in which he wrote. We have discussed Yeats' influences and interests and his contributions to English poetry. The unit also discussed his style of writing and his major works. His poem "Easter 1916" has been broadly explained in the unit, which shall further stir your interest in exploring Yeats' poetry.



5.8 FURTHER READING

1. Dattatreya, Poduri. (2000). *W. B. Yeats: Poet and Dramatist.* Jaipur: Pointer Publisher.
2. Larrisy, Edward. (1998). *W. B. Yeats.* United Kingdom: NorthCote House.
3. Singh, M. P. (2003). *W. B. Yeats: His Poetry and Politics.* Atlantic: U.K.



5.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1 : The poem "Easter 1916" depicts Yeats' mixed emotions towards the Easter Uprising in Ireland against British rule on 24th April, 1916.

Ans to Q2 : abab rhyme scheme.

Ans to Q3 : Yeats uses a technique called foreshadowing which is a term used for hints that a text offers us as to what might be expected soon. Yeats keeps us in suspense by saying that "a terrible beauty is born" because we are not sure of what it exactly means but we can guess as to the fact that it refers to the bloody battle of 1916.

Ans to Q4 : Yeats refers to Major MacBride, a leader with the Revolution as the "drunken vain glorious lout. Maud Gonne, Yeats' unrequited love, was married to MacBride and thereforeYeats uses the harshest phrase in the entire poem to describe him.

Ans to Q5 : The best the poet Yeats could do about his entire dilemma regarding the Uprising is to commit it to verse, I write it out in a verse – "It" here refers to Yeats' entire thought process regarding the Uprising. He then goes on to name the main people behind the Uprising who have been transformed by their selfless sacrifice for their country and its independence and will be remembered forever in Ireland's history. Yeats finishes the poem with the same refrain and a certain amount of uncertainty regarding the entire event where he refrains from unabashedly calling the Uprising a glorious success but also claims that the revolutionaries did not die for nothing as their contributions to Irish independence will go down in history.

Ans to Q6 : The young Yeats' poetry borrowed unabashedly from Irish folklore and critics uncharitably agree that it is stilted and over-elaborative in its deployment of words.



5.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Give a critical appreciation of the poem "Easter 1916" by W. B. Yeats.

Q2. Write a note on Yeats' techniques as seen in the poem "Easter 1916".

Q3. Discuss the background of the poem "Easter 1916".

Q4. Write down the summary of the poem in your own words.

Q5. Explain the following extracts with reference to the context:

a) "That woman's days were spent
In ignorant good-will,
Her nights in argument
Until her voice grew shrill."

b) "Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?
That is Heaven's part"

c) "I write it out in a verse -
MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born"

****

UNIT 6: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 A Brief Overview of American Poetry

6.4 Major American Poets and their Works

6.5 Let us Sum up

6.6 Further Reading

6.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

6.8 Model Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- gain a brief overview of the tradition of American poetry
- discuss briefly the life sketches of the major American poets
- name the poetical works written by these poets
- develop an interest to explore the emerging trends in poetry
- further explore the life and works of several other important American poets

6.2 INTRODUCTION

The unit takes up and explores poetical pieces by a few select American poets and these calls for a brief idea about the history, tradition and trends practiced down the ages in America. Let us then quickly read through the ways in which American poetry has branched out in multiple forms of poetic expression from its early beginnings.

6.3 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF AMERICAN POETRY

American poetry existed mostly in the form of oral tradition until the late nineteenth century when poets like Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson had cast a new mould of poetical tradition and left a strong impact in the history of American poetry. If we trace the earliest recorded

works in the archives of American poetry, we shall come across the poetical works of early settlers in the American colonies such as Rev. William Morrell or Thomas Merton Edward Taylor and among the few women poets, Anne Bradstreet and Phillis Wheatley. In the eighteenth century, we shall find the works of poets like Philip Freneau and Rebecca Hammond Lard who had significantly captured reflections on nature and environment through her poetry.

The post colonial period that followed saw a significant development in American poetry through the works of poets like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Cullen Bryant, James Russell Lowell among a few others who also formed the group known as the 'Fireside poets'. By the mid nineteenth century, poets such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe and Henry David Thoreau sought to find new ways of poetic expression that defined the multiple facets of the American experience. But it was the poetic vision of Walt Whitman and later the soulful poetry of Emily Dickinson that gave American poetry a distinct character and significant direction which we shall study in the following subsection. Poets like Robert Frost, Stephen Crane and Carl Sandburg who captured real life impressions and experiences in their poetry. The high modern period and the *avant garde* movements of the early to mid twentieth century saw varied influences on poetry such as that of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1930s, Beat generation, the Confessional poets and Black Mountain poets of the 1950s to mention a few.

In this short frame of the historical overview of American poetry, some of the major poets to have emerged from the modern period and after were poets such as T.S Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, E.E. Cummings, Hart Crane, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Amiri Baraka and Jack Kerouac to name a few. Some of the major women poets who left an indelible mark in the traditions of American poetry were poets such as Gertrude Stein, Hilda Dolittle, Marianne Moore, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Gwendolyn Brooks, Maya Angelou and Adrienne Rich among others. Thus, further study and exploration of the poetry by some of these

significant poets shall certainly enhance the learner's appreciation of the range of poetical expressions in American poetry



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Mention the factor that gave a distinct character and significant new direction to American poetry.

Q2. Name some of the significant women poets in the American poetical tradition.

6.4 MAJOR AMERICAN POETS AND THEIR WORKS

In the present sub section, we shall focus our discussion on just a few major poets in the tradition of American poetry. At the same time, it is recommended that the learner widens his or her scope of study by exploring the lives and works of other American poets whose literary contribution to American literature remains invaluable. The six poets discussed in the subsection are Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882):

Longfellow was one of the most admired American poets who wrote wonderful pieces of lyrical poetry. He was born in the coastal city of Oregon. His parents were Stephen and Zilpah Longfellow of English ancestry. He was brought up among seven siblings and received his early education at the private Portland Academy and attended Bowdoin College, Maine that was founded by his grandfather. One can easily imagine a little boy spending the best of his early years at his grandfather's farm; that was Longfellow as a child at his grandfather's farm at Maine. He spent his college years engaged in various literary activities and joined literary societies which provided him ample opportunity to interact with American authors and intellectuals on contemporary writing. He even met Nathaniel Hawthorne at college, who was to become one of the best American writers.

Thus, at college he had received the stimulus to write from some of the leading intellectuals of the time and began contributing to the *Portland Advertiser*, *American Monthly Magazine* and *United States Literary Gazette*. His wrote his first literary piece at the age of thirteen which was a tributary poem titled “The Battle of Lovell’s Pond”. Having studied literature and modern languages for a year and graduated in 1825, he was offered to teach as a professor of modern languages by the authorities of Bowdoin College and to train himself in European languages in order to be more deserving of the same. Therefore, Longfellow as a young man had travelled all the way to Europe and in due time of his stay had mastered the French, Spanish, Portugese, Italian and German languages. On his return in 1829, he had joined the college as a young Professor. A prestigious Professorship of Modern Languages had provided him the opportunity to learn Scandinavian languages and had taken him on a second visit to Europe. Thus, he learnt and acquired Dutch, Danish, Swedish, Finnish and Icelandic languages.

Music is woven in Longfellow’s poetry. Some of his poetry collections were *Voices of the Night* (1839), *Ballads and Other Poems* (1841), *Tales of Wayside Inn* (1863), *The Masque of Pandora and Other Poems* (1875) and *Michelangelo: A Fragment* (1893) to name a few. He was a gifted translator owing to his command over languages and two of famous translations are *Coplas de Don Jorge Manrique* from Spanish (1833) and Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (1867). He also wrote a Travelogue titled *Outre–Mer: A Pilgrimage Beyond Sea* (1835) and a play titled *The Spanish Student: A Play in Three Acts* (1843). On the personal front, Longfellow was married twice after having lost his first wife Mary Potter and had six children. He breathed his last on March 24, 1882 surrounded by his family and was laid to rest at the Mount Auburn Cemetery.



LET US KNOW

You would be interested to know that Longfellow along with five poet friends namely Cornelius Conway Felton, Charles Summer and George

Stilman Hillard formed together the 'Five of Clubs'. He was also a member of the group of American poets which comprised William Cullen Bryant, James Russell, John Greenleaf Whittier and Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. They wrote lyrical poetry on everyday life and socio-political aspects which were well received among readers. Also, while writing for several years on Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, he almost ended up in forming a Dante Club with his friends and literary advisors who would visit and create discussion centered on his works.

Quote: "Lives of great men all remind us/ We can make our lives sublime/ And, departing, leave behind us/ Footprints in the sands of time."
H.W. Longfellow.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849):

Edgar Poe was one of the leading American writers and critic who is best remembered for his contributions to the literary genre of short stories and is considered to have introduced the genre of detective fiction in literature. We may associate him with the American Romantic Movement which was an intellectual, aristocratic and literary movement that called for the freedom of individualistic expression. Edgar Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts to Elizabeth and David Poe Jr. who were both in the profession of acting. Poe lost his mother when he was barely two years old and his father was estranged from the family leaving the three children to their fate. He was thus brought up by a couple named John and Frances Allan. Poe had received his early education at the Grammar School in Irvine and the Manor House School in North London. His foster family often faced financial crises and debts owing to which Poe discontinued his higher education at the University of Virginia, where he had studied ancient and modern languages for just one semester.

Following this phase of disappointment in his life, he had enlisted in the army in 1827 under the name of Edgar A. Perry and gradually made up his mind to be a poet and a writer. He then travelled to Boston to get

away from the set-backs in his life, dabbling in news writing and working in a clerical position. He had resided at Baltimore, Maryland for a brief period with his widowed aunt, cousin, elder brother and grandmother. It was a difficult time as he had fallen out with his foster family after John Allan's second marriage in 1830 and during this period the publishing business had suffered due to economic recession. Yet, he was determined to make a career as a writer even as he had suffered financial constraints throughout his career. He had secretly married his cousin Virginia Clemm in 1837 before making it socially known.

You will be interested to know that Poe was opposed to the lyrical or moralistic poetry and that had caused him to criticize the style of Wadsworth. Some of his works include poems such as "Al Araaf", "Annabel Lee", "The Bells", "The City in the Sea", "The Conqueror Worm", "A Dream Within a Dream", "Eldorado", "Eulalie", "The Haunted Palace", "To Helen", "Lenore", "Tamerlane", "The Raven" and "Ulalume." Some of his best short stories are "The Black Cat", "The Castle of Amontillado", "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Gold Bug", "The Murders in the Rue Morgue, "The Purloined Letter" and "The Tell-Tale Heart". Some of his essays are *The Philosophy of Composition, Eureka: A Prose Poem* (1848) and *The Poetic Principle* (1848). Poe's last incomplete work was "The Light-House" (1849).

Poe worked as an assistant editor of Brunton's *Gentleman's Magazine* and wrote for the *Evening Mirror* and editor of *Broadway Journal*. He then moved to Fordham, New York to a little house named "Poe Cottage" He had lost his wife in 1847 and had passed away with medical complications at the Washington Medical College. Today, Poe is considered as one of the precursors of modern literature.

> **Quote:** "Ah! What is not a dream by day/To him whose eyes are cast/ On things around him with a ray/ Turned back upon the past."
> Edgar Allan Poe

Walt Whitman (1819-1892):

Walt Whitman was one of the leading American poets who is best

remembered for his work *Leaves of Grass* (1855). He was born in Long Island to Walker and Louisa Van Velsor Whitman. He was the second eldest among nine siblings and theirs was a humble working class family. Owing to financial problems their family had moved several homes. As a child he loved crossing the East River to and fro, in ferries and amidst all difficulties in life, he found a way to cheer up with his visits to his grandparent's home at Long Island. It was at this stage that he had first felt the stirrings of poetry in him. Initially, he had attended the Brooklyn Public School but did not really enjoy formal schooling. Thus, he left school at the age of eleven and a year later was taken into apprenticeship in the printing establishment of the weekly *Patriot* where he learnt the technicalities of printing. He then went on to search for better prospects with a private printer named Erastus Worthington in Brooklyn and later with the weekly *Long Island Star*. This was an enriching experience to him as he was suddenly introduced to the world of books and joined a local debating society, indulging in writing.

During the late 1830s, Whitman had considerable problem in finding employment owing to the economic recession in America. He even had several stints as a teacher but true to his calling had started his own newspaper establishment known as the *Long Islander* in New York in the year 1838. This had made him proficient in all aspects of the profession but this venture was short lived following which he worked as a typesetter for the *Long Island Demon* in Jamaica, New York. He even took up writing a series of editorials, engaged in freelancing and therefore, he switched working for several newspapers before gaining the editorship of the *Aurora* and the weekly newspaper *Brooklyn Eagle*. Some of his best works are: *Franklyn Evans* (1842), *Drum Taps* (1865), *Democratic Vistas* (1871), *Memoranda During the War* (1876) and *Specimen Days* (1882). His early years as a child, his literary vision, philosophical perspectives and national pride are reflected through the body of his poetical works.

When the American Civil War had begun, Whitman was aggrieved to see the wounded soldiers that he had moved to Washington in 1862.

There he had found work in the army paymaster's office and volunteered to help as a nurse in the army hospitals. While struggling for a government post, on the family front, his brothers had their own share of problems and he had even lost one of his brothers to tuberculosis. He had finally landed a job in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1965. Whitman lost his mother in 1873 with whom he shared a close bonding and to add to his depression, he had also suffered a paralytic stroke. Having lived awhile with his brother, he had moved to his own home in Mickle Street. Gradually, he had begun to spend much of his time with his friend Mary Oakes Davis who was an animal lover. Thus, he had spent his last years at Camden, New Jersey and breathed his last on March 26, 1892. He was laid to rest at Harleigh Cemetary in Camden. In his honour, a postal stamp was released in the year 1940. Today, Walt Whitman is known as America's national poet and as the first 'poet of democracy'

Quote: "Vast and Starless, the pall of Heaven/ Laps on the trailing pall below;/ And forward, forward, in solemn darkness,/ As if sea of the lost we go."
Walt Whitman

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson (1830-1886):

Better known as Emily Dickinson, she was one of the leading American women poets who grew up in a reputed family in the small hometown of Amherst, Massachusetts. She was the daughter of Emily Norcross Dickinson and Edward Dickinson, a well known figure in their community. Among her siblings, she shared a special bonding with her younger sister Lavinia and her elder brother William Austin. Emily was mostly educated at home and first entered the Amherst Academy in the year 1840 along with her sister Lavinia, to graduate from there after a period of seven years. Although, she was an intelligent student, she was often given to frail health and emotional suffering. Following her graduation, she went on to study for a year at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. Partly owing to her longing for home and the flowering of her intellectual free-thinking, she left the Seminary to head home after a year.

But it was not long, before she began to distance herself from the circles of her immediate family and friends.

Gradually, Emily began to withdraw into her own space- the confines of her room. She turned detached and aloof, preferring to be on her own, or rather, being left alone. Emily spent most of her time reading extensively, writing poetry and jotting letters to her close friends, particularly to Benjamin F. Newton. In the year 1874, Emily lost her father, a year after which her mother suffered paralysis and these sad events of her life had completely distanced her from others. Although, she suffered a great setback after her father's demise, she took good care of her mother for a long seven years until her demise. She chose to never marry and despite being single, she lived a fulfilling life along with Lavinia.

The period from 1858–1865 saw some of her most creative years as a poet and she had produced wonderful poems during this phase of her life. Some of her best poems were: "I Robbed the Woods", "Frequently the Woods Are Pink", "Some Rainbow –Coming from the Fair", "Cocoon Above! Cocoon Below!", "Whose Are the Little Beds, I Asked", "Two Butterflies Went Out at Noon", "The Soul Selects Her Own Society", "I Tend My Flowers For Thee", "This is My Letter to the World", "I Started Early-Took My Dog", "To Hear An Oriole Sing", "I Measure Every Grief I Meet", "The Spider Holds a Silver Ball", "God Gave a Loaf to Every Bird", "Grief is A Mouse", "By My Window Have I For Scenery" and "The Earth Has Many Keys."

Through her lifetime as a poet only a handful of her poem had the fortune of being published. Emily breathed her last in the year 1886 at the young age of fifty-five, following a prolonged period of illness which had begun in the summer of 1884 when she had lost consciousness while baking. She was laid to rest in a white coffin at the West Cemetery where her ancestors along with her parents were buried.

Quote: "The soul should always stand ajar. Ready to welcome the ecstatic experience"
Emily Dickinson

Robert Frost (1874-1963):

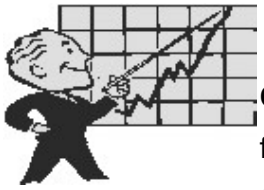
Born as Robert Lee, Frost was an American poet who had received four prestigious Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry from 1924 to 1943 and the Congressional Medal in 1960. Frost was born in San Francisco to William Prescott Frost Jr. and Isabelle Moodie. He had lost his father at the tender age of eleven and their family had to move to Massachusetts with his grandfather William Frost. He received his higher education at the Dartmouth College, New Hampshire but had left the college to join Harvard University, Boston although he did not acquire any formal degree. After his return home, he worked in a factory, delivered newspapers, helped his mother and published his first poem titled “My Butterfly: an Elegy” in 1984 in the *New York Independent*. After his marriage with Elinor White, the couple had settled in a farm in New Hampshire that Frost’s grandfather had brought for them.

As he had been raised at his grandfather’s farm he found sufficient time to work on his writings while also looking after the farm. He had gone ahead to join Tinkerton Academy, New Hampshire as a teacher from 1906 to 1911. Although, the couple had decided to settle down in London in 1912, they had returned home during the First World War in 1915. Having brought a new farm in New Hampshire itself, he settled down into writing again. During this phase, Frost also taught at the Amherst College, Massachusetts, Bread Loaf School of English Middlebury College and at the University of Michigan. His poetry collections include works like *A Boy’s Will* (1915), *North of Boston* (1914), *Mountain Interval* (1916), *New Hampshire* (1923), *West Running Brook* (1929), *A Witness Tree* (1942), *Come In, and Other Poems* (1943) to name a few. Some of his best known poems are “Mending Wall”, “Birches”, “The Road Not Taken” and “The Silken Tent.” A good compilation of his letters can also be found in the volume titled *The Letters of Robert Frost 1886- 1921* (2001).

Frost lost several of his family members which had brought him much grief through his lifetime as his father suffered from tuberculosis, his mother dies of cancer and he lost his sister too. Also, among his six children, he had lost four of them followed by his wife who had suffered

from breast cancer and heart ailments. Yet, amidst the difficulties of life, he emerged as a remarkable poet. He had won four Pulitzers for the works *New Hampshire: A Poem with Notes and Grace Notes* (1923), *Collected Poems* (1931), *A Further Range* (1937) and *A Witness Tree* (1943). He breathed his last on February 29, 1963. A stamp was issued in his memory in 1974.

Quote: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep/ But I have promises to keep/ And miles to go before I sleep, /And miles to go before I sleep." Robert Frost



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3. Which languages did Longfellow learn on his first trip to Europe?

Q4. Why did Poe discontinue his higher education?

Q5. Mention the great literary honour that was given to Walt Whitman.

Q6. Why did Emily Dickinson leave the Mount Holyoke Seminary?

Q7. What are some of the best known poems of Robert Frost?



6.5 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit, you will be able to trace the history of American poetry and gain an idea of its changing forms. The short entries on the select major American poets will enrich your knowledge and further encourage you to explore the life and works of other American poets together with reading some other famous poetical works of American literature. All things considered, the unit will prepare the learner to proceed with the poetry block with ease and enjoyment.



6.6 FURTHER READING

1. Alfred, Bendixen and Stephen Burt. (2014).*The Cambridge History of American Poetry.* Cambridge: CUP.



6.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q 1 : The poetic vision of Walt Whitman and later the soulful poetry of Emily Dickinson gave American poetry a distinct character and significant direction.

Ans to Q2 : Some of the significant women poets were poets like Gertrude Stein, Hilda Dolittle, Marianne Moore, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Gwendolyn Brooks, Maya Angelou and Adrienne Rich among others

Ans to Q3 : He learnt French, Spanish, Portugese, Italian and German languages on his first trip.

Ans to Q4 : His foster family often faced financial crises and debts owing to which Poe discontinued his higher education at the University of Virginia.

Ans to Q5 : Walt Whitman is known as America's national poet and as the first 'poet of democracy'.

Ans to Q6 : Partly owing to her longing for home and the flowering of her intellectual free-thinking, she left the Seminary

Ans to Q7 : Some of his best known poems are "Mending Wall", "Birches", "The Road Not Taken" and "The Silken Tent."



6.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Discuss the literary tradition of American poetry in your own words

Q2. Write a short note on the life and works of the following poets:

a. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
b. Edgar Allan Poe
c. Walt Whitman
d. Emily Dickinson
e. Robert Frost

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UNIT 7: EMILY DICKINSON: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Emily Dickinson : The Poet

7.3.1 Her Life

7.3.2 Her Works

7.4 Let us Sum up

7.5 Further Reading

7.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

7.7 Model Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- give the biographical sketch of the popular American poet, Emily Dickinson
- identify the works of Emily Dickinson
- discuss the contribution of the poet in the development of American literature

7.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to Emily Dickinson, one of the famous American poets of the nineteenth century. According to A. C. Ward she was, “perhaps next to Whitman, the greatest American poet of the last century.” Although, her share of fame came quite late in life, today she along with Walt Whitman, are considered as the pioneers of 19th century American poetry. Dickinson’s poetry is a poetry of ideas, and it requires of the reader, a point of view, which is not an opinion, but a deep-seated philosophy that is fundamental.

Dickinson was an intensely private poet without the slightest interest in the public. Because of her bold themes and experimentation, Dickinson is recognised as one of the greatest American poets who cast

an enormous influence on how writers think about the possibilities of the poetic craft. Living in her **ivory tower**, she wrote on a great variety of subjects like life, death, the contemporary social scenes, mortality and immortality, pain and pleasure, hope and fear, love, Nature, God, religion, and virtue– all seen through her Puritan eyes, or, as she described it, 'New Englandy'. Though disinterested, she was quite aware of the current events and drew on them for some of her poetry. Another striking quality about her poems is their originality. She did not belong to any school of poets and hardly cared to imitate anyone's style. It is sometimes possible to extract autobiographical elements from her poems, but she was not a confessional poet; rather, she invented first-person speakers to dramatise the various situations, moods, and perspectives that she explored in her lyrics.



Ivory Tower: The term Ivory Tower originates in the Biblical "Song of Solomon". In the nineteenth century, the term has been used to designate an environment of intellectual pursuit disconnected from the everyday life of practical concerns.

7.3 EMILY DICKINSON : THE POET

Emily Dickinson's poetry is not like any other poetry of her time, nor is it like any of the innumerable kinds of verse written today. It is, as mentioned earlier, a poetry of ideas; her poetry, characterised by startling imagery and extraordinary vocabulary, explored a wide range of subjects, including pain and joy, the relationship of self to nature, the intensely spiritual and the intensely ordinary. She wrote about the grim reality of death with a searing honesty, great humour and curiosity and above all, a refusal to be comforted. Taken individually, her poems are quite short; when collected in a volume though, her nearly eighteen hundred surviving poems have an epic feeling written by a woman who devoted her entire life to her art. Let us now have a look at the life and works of this great poet.

7.3.1 Her Life

The full name of Emily Dickinson is Emily Elizabeth Dickinson. She was born on December 10, 1870, in Amherst, Massachusetts and was one of the three children of Emily Norcross Dickinson and Edward Dickinson. Her father was a respected state legislator, US congressman and judge. Her family was one of Amherst's most prominent ones,

economically, politically and intellectually. But Emily turned out to be quite famous in her own right. She lived all her life in the spacious Dickinson family house in Amherst and attended Amherst Academy from 1840 through 1846 and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. During her stay in Mount Holyoke, she became intensely homesick and also faced a religious crisis. Emily's father helped found Amherst College and was its treasurer for thirty-six years. Her early years were spent being engaged in the normal social activities of the daughter of a leading citizen, and during her father's term in the national House of Representatives, Emily visited him in Washington and stayed for a brief period in Philadelphia on the way back. But travel of any kind was unusual for her and gradually she began to withdraw from the world outside her home. Her closest friends included her elder brother Austin, and her younger sister Lavinia. Both sisters never married and stayed with their parents, as was typical of the unmarried middle and upper class women of the time. Emily became a total recluse, never leaving her father's house and dressing completely in white. She maintained a very obscure lifestyle and received very few visitors, carrying on most of her friendships through a regular correspondence with people like the novelist Helen Hunt Jackson and the Reverend Charles Wadsworth.

After dropping out in less than a year from Mount Holyoke and returning home, Dickinson embarked on a lifelong course of reading. She was a voracious reader; the Bible and classic English authors, such as Shakespeare and Milton being among her favourites. She also became acquainted with the full range of the English and American literature of her time. The novels of Charles Dickens and the poems of Robert Browning and Tennyson greatly pleased her. However, Emily reserved her greatest affection for her contemporaries, the Bronte sisters, Anne, Charlotte and Emily, George Eliot, and above all, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning's wife. It is sometimes assumed that Elizabeth Browning may have helped Dickinson realise her vocation and become one of the greatest American poets.

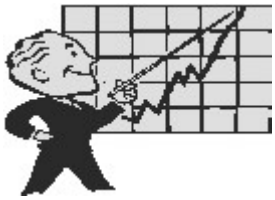
Dickinson had to put up with health-related problems during the latter

period of her life. She suffered from eye-pain and was concerned about losing her vision. She also suffered heavy personal losses; her father died after taking an injection of morphine for his pain, and one year later, her mother had a stroke and remained indisposed till her death in 1882. Her favourite nephew died from typhoid fever and her dear friend Helen Hunt Jackson also died suddenly. These tragic events may have led to her seclusion from public life. Emily Dickinson died on May 15, 1886, perhaps from a kidney disorder called “Bright’s Disease”, which was the official diagnosis, but it was just as likely that she died of hypertension.



LET US KNOW

We have already discussed that Emily Dickinson dropped out from Mount Holyoke without completing her studies. This was as much a result of her homesickness as it was of religious crisis. Much of her anxieties stems from her religious doubt as she could never conform to the orthodox religious faith of her friends and schoolmates. The school was presided over by Mary Lyon who very vigourously tried to develop women intellectually and spiritually so that they might at some time be able to serve as Christian missionaries. But Emily refused to bow to the demands of orthodoxy and dropped out from Mount Holyoke. But she asserted that her very failure to convert may have helped liberate her to think independently and have a mind of her own.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1 What did Emily Dickinson’s poems mostly deal with?

Q.2 What were the names of Emily’s siblings?

Q.3 What are the names of the two educational institutions that Emily attended?

Q.4 Why did Emily drop out of Mount Holyoke?

Q.5 Emily Dickinson married once during her life. True/False.

Q.6 List some of the authors whom Emily enjoyed reading.

Q.7 What, in your opinion, may have led to Emily's withdrawal from public life?

Q.8 Name the Bronte sisters.

7.3.2 Her Works

You can assume that Emily Dickinson became interested in the morbid aspects of life due to the sad incidents which marred her short life. We also discussed how she became a recluse and started living an intensely private life. She, however, sent some of her poems to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the minister, author and critic. Higginson encouraged Emily a lot and assumed the role of her mentor, and she has a lot to be thankful to him in the most intense and prolific period of her creative life. However, Higginson never tried to get her poems published. In fact, only around a dozen poems appeared during her lifetime, even though she wanted all her poems to be published. After Emily's death, her sister Lavinia found over a thousand poems in her room, all bound neatly in booklets. They were all mostly short lyrics, untitled and undated. Emily had developed a friendship with Mabel Todd, wife of the astronomer David Todd, and Mabel considered Emily to be a genius. After Dickinson's death, Mabel Todd transcribed many of her poems and persuaded Higginson to publish the first volumes of Dickinson's poetry in 1890 and 1891. However, the critical reception was not very favourable. Dickinson had written quite a collection of private letters which Mabel Todd went on to publish in 1894 and also a third volume of poems in 1896. Many of her poems were edited by Todd and Higginson as they violated the laws of metre so as to make them more conventional. Other volumes were edited by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson, and these were published in 1914, 1924, 1929, 1970, 1975 and 1977. Had Martha Dickinson Bianchi not resumed the publication of her aunt's poetry in 1914, as by 1900 or so, Dickinson's work might have fallen out of favour, her writings might never have achieved the popularity it enjoys today. The volume, *Bolts of Melody: New Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Todd and her daughter Millicent Todd Bingham, was published

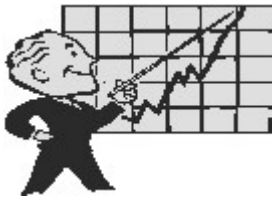
in 1945. Thomas H. Johnson's *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1955), containing all 175 known poems, is now accepted as the standard edition. Her massive correspondences, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, which appeared in 1958, were edited by Johnson and Theodora Ward. We will discuss the subjects and themes of Emily Dickinson in the following unit.

The editorial labours that Todd, Susan Dickinson, her sister-in-law and Bianchi, her niece undertook, helped to make Dickinson's poetry available to the public and establish her as one of the greatest American poets. They also made her poetry available to American modernist poets such as Hart Crane and Marianne Moore. And, as we can rightly say Dickinson's reputation was that of the most innovative of nineteenth century poets who exerted the greatest influence on American poetry.



LET US KNOW

Emily Dickinson wanted to get her poems published during her lifetime as she knew her prowess as a poet. She sent her poems to Samuel Bowles, one of the men she was supposedly involved with, hoping that he would publish it in the Springfield *Republican*, of which he was the editor. Although he did publish a few poems, he edited them into a more conventional form. Editor Josiah Holland at Scribner's, to whom she sent some poems, chose not to publish her poems. However, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* evinced interest in her poetry despite her so-called imperfections and he eventually became one of the editors of her posthumously published poetry.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.9 Who was Emily Dickinson's mentor?

Q.10 Who published the first volume of Dickinson's poetry?

Q.11 Who had a hand in reviving the interest in Dickinson's poetry in the 1900s?

Q.12 Which is the authoritative version of Dickinson's poems?

Q.13 Johnson and Theodora Ward edited the *Letters of Emily Dickinson*. True/False.

Q.14 Hart Crane and Marianne Moore are British modernist poets. True/False.



7.4 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have been acquainted with Emily Dickinson who is one of the famous American poets of the 19th century and along with Walt Whitman, is deemed as the pioneer of 19th century American poetry. You have learnt about the short life and numerous beautiful poems written by her. She wrote on a great variety of subjects like life, death, the contemporary social scenes, mortality and immortality, pain and pleasure, hope and fear, love, nature, God, religion, and virtue, seen through her Puritan perspective as she described it, 'New Englandy'. A very striking quality about her poetry is its originality.

Her poems are quite short and she has nearly eighteen hundred surviving poems which bear the stamp of being written by a woman who had devoted her entire life to her art. The theme of death and immortality is a common theme in Dickinson's poetry which was of a very new kind, with a distinctive voice and style. Her poetry is replete with startling figures of speech, familiar words in unfamiliar uses, learned expressions, sudden shifts of tone, metrical irregularities, deliberate imperfect rhymes and grammatical difficulties. Although earlier critical views regarding her poetry were not very encouraging, but all said and done, Dickinson remains one of America's and the world's best loved poets.



7.5 FURTHER READING

1. Baym, Nina. Ed. (2007). *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
2. Ousby, Ian. (1992). *Companion to Literature in English*. London: Cambridge University Press.

3. Narasimhaiah, C. D. Ed. (1997). *Indian Response to American Literature*. New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers.



7.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: She wrote on a great variety of subjects like life, death, contemporary social scenes, mortality and immortality, pain and pleasure, hope and fear, love, nature, God, religion and virtue.

Ans to Q No 2: Emily Norcross Dickinson and Edward Dickinson

Ans to Q No 3: Amherst Academy and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary.

Ans to Q No 4: Being homesick and facing a religious crisis.

Ans to Q No 5: False

Ans to Q No 6: Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, Tennyson, Bronte Sisters, George Eliot and Elizabeth Browning.

Ans to Q No 7: Her untimely loss of tragic events of her family members.

Ans to Q No 8: Anne, Charlotte and Emily Bronte

Ans to Q No 9: Thomas Wentworth Higginson

Ans to Q No 10: Her sister Lavinia who published her poems after Emily's death.

Ans to Q No 11: Mabel Todd, Higginson and Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

Ans to Q No 12: Thomas H. Johnson's *The Poems of Emily Dickinson.*

Ans to Q No 13: True.

Ans to Q No 14: False.



7.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q.1 Briefly discuss the reclusive or solitary life of Emily Dickinson.

Q.2 Who were Dickinson's favourite authors?

Q.3 Name the titles of some of Dickinson's poems.

Q.4 Discuss the life and works of Emily Dickinson.

Q.5 What are the main features and aspects of Emily Dickinson's poetry? Discuss.

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UNIT 8: EMILY DICKINSON: "BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH"

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Text of the Poem

8.4 Explanation of the Poem

8.5 Style and Language

8.6 Poetic Techniques

8.7 Let us Sum up

8.8 Further Reading

8.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.10 Model Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- grasp the content of the poem
- explain the poem in details
- discuss the themes of death and immortality in Dickinson's poems
- describe the poetic techniques and style of the poem

8.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the poem "Because I Could Not Stop For Death" written by Emily Dickinson. In the poem death is personified, and the idea of death is not portrayed as lonely or scared, but as more serene and contented. It may be noted that, every image is precise and connected with the central idea. They also extend and intensify each other. Dickinson's poetry is never didactic, and probably her lack of formal intellectual training contributed to her originality. She, along with Walt Whitman emerged as the nineteenth century poets who exerted the greatest influence on American poetry to come. In this unit, you will be

acquainted with the poem 'Because I Could Not Stop for Death', along with an explanation of the poem. Moreover, you will also get an elaboration on the poetic techniques and style and language used by the poet in the prescribed poem.

8.3 TEXT OF THE POEM

Because I could not stop for Death—
He kindly stopped for me—
The Carriage held but just Ourselves—
And Immortality.

We slowly drove— He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labour and my leisure too,
For His Civility—

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess- in the Ring—
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain—
We passed the Setting Sun—

Or rather—He passed Us—
The Dews drew quivering and Chill—
For only **Gossamer**, my Gown—
My **Tippet**—only **Tulle**—

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground—
The Roof was scarcely visible—
The **Cornice**—in the Ground—

Since then— 'tis Centuries—and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity—



Gossamer: delicate, light fabric.

Tippet: scarf for covering the neck and shoulders.

Tulle: thin silk.

Cornice: decorative moulding beneath a roof.

8.4 EXPLANATION OF THE POEM

In the poem "Because I Could Not Stop For Death", behind the apparent innocence of the statement, we can notice a concerted and individualistic attempt to come to terms with the certainty of death that we mortals can never escape from. Death is personified in the poem as a courtly beau or a suitor who insists that the speaker puts aside both "labour" and "leisure" and accompany Him along with a chaperone, i.e. Immortality. The general perception of Death is something dark, frightening and foreboding, but Dickinson seems to describe Death as a gentleman coming to take her away in a carriage to Eternity. She portrays Death as a journey, and not just a single event that concludes a life. Emily Dickinson, as said earlier, was a recluse who shunned public life, and her lonely hours were often permeated by thoughts of death. However, this did not turn into an obsession as she realised that death is a fact of life, and is inevitable.

In the poem, the journey to the grave begins in Stanza 1 when Death comes calling in a carriage with Immortality as a passenger. He is a kindly escort who will never think of hurrying a lady, and this journey with Him will lead her to Immortality and beyond. Most religious literature across the world has compared human life to a journey, but Emily Dickinson very hospitably accommodates death and immortality in the same dimension of reality. We may also note romantic overtones in the poem from the fact that death is a "kind" ***beau*** who very courteously escorts his lady on a romantic journey. Thus, this is not a routine death poem, but has a freshness which stems from her subscription to the tenets of transcendentalism.



Beau: boyfriend or male admirer.

As the trip continues "slowly" in Stanza 2 with an easy, unhurried pace- "We slowly drove- He knew no haste",- there is a suggestion that death has arrived in the form of a disease that takes its time to kill. This drive with death could symbolise that the speaker is slowly dying or perhaps is already dead, and is moving slowly in a coffin at the speed of a funeral procession.

Dickinson has intensely meditated on the tragic finality of the human spirit. The journey obviously begins in childhood and then the poet appears to review the stages of her life; moving into maturity and the descent into death as she passes on to the other side. Childhood is the time of innocent play, but even when the children "strove/ At Recess in the Ring", there is a hint of the circularity of time where there is no beginning or end. The next stage of her journey sees her passing through the "Fields of Gazing Grain" which symbolise maturation and the area of adult labour. With the introduction of the "Setting Sun" which symbolises old age, the "Chill" of death sets in, more so because she is not warmly dressed. In fact, her "Gossamer" gown is more suitable for a wedding. There is a hint of a heavenly union with Death here. The normal human journey would stop at death, but by now we know that her fate moves beyond death towards immortality and eternity. This is her central concern in the poem, and through her use of vibrant and exclusive images, she emphasises not only the reality of death, but also the equally vital possibility of overcoming it. Her gossamer gown and tulle veil cannot withstand the chill of the evening filled with dew drops:

"The Dews drew quivering and Chill—
For only Gossamer, my Gown—
My Tippet- only Tulle—"

Dickinson's calm acceptance of death and her comfort in talking about it can be seen in her description of the grave as the "House". From the beginning to the end, the chariot and the horse continue to dominate the scenes and the passage to the world of eternity is made logically clear. The poet calls the grave her house because this is where her body will rest for eternity. In eternal time, human division of times ceases to apply and what had happened centuries ago may feel shorter than a day- "Since then- 'tis Centuries- and yet/ Feels shorter than the Day". This is perhaps what the poet feels in her last moment in this world; and to her, this moment seems to last forever. Thus, by this analogy, she changes an individual premonition to a universal human experience.

The overall theme of the poem is centered on Death as it is not something to be feared owing to the inevitable and endless cycle of nature. Though the poem is only one of a series of death poems written by Emily Dickinson, it is one of the most significant poems as it underscores the possibility of an afterlife after death. Her view of death may also reflect her reclusive personality and religious beliefs. Moreover, her spirituality does not avoid death as a reality rather it makes her face it squarely.



LET US KNOW

Emily Dickinson like Donne, Cowley and other metaphysical poets before her combined thought and emotion in poetry and created a unified sensibility. John Donne's poem, "Death, Be Not Proud" also personifies death and creates a feeling that death is less powerful than we think. He does this by highlighting the idea of death as being bound to the rules of "fate, chance, kings and desperate men". Thus, the all-powerful and frightening experience of death is negated and a euphoric victory over death is asserted.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1 What is death compared to in the poem?

Q.2 Who was Death's companion in the carriage?

Q.3 What are the stages of life mentioned in the poem?

Q.4 What do the "Gazing Grain" and "Setting Sun" symbolise?

Q.5 Why does the poet call the grave her house?

Q.6 Gossamer is a heavy wedding gown. True/False.

Q.7 How does Dickinson treat death in the poem?

Death, "that lonesome glory", is one of the abiding themes of Emily Dickinson's poetry. It has been estimated that nearly a third of

Dickinson's poetry centres round the theme of death. Her treatment of death has attracted the largest critical response, and it is not only one of the most frequent themes, but also the one that occupies her lifelong attention. Death was a central problem of her life and she accepts it as a physical fact and a material truth. She had to suffer a lot of personal bereavements in life and this acquaintance with mortality may account for the fact that the theme of Death looms large in her poetry. We may say that her preoccupation with death may be due to her Puritan surroundings. In the Puritan doctrine of existence, death occupies a solemn place and as it is the end of the living process, it must be taken in a solemn way. Dickinson's treatment of death is characterised by a psychological insight and powerful observation.

Thomas Wellborn Ford has grouped her Death poems into four categories:

i. Poems dealing with death and immortality
ii. Poems dealing with the physical aspects of death
iii. Poems personifying death
iv. Poems with an **elegiac** tone



Elegiac: elegy is a mournful, melancholic or plaintive poem, especially a funeral song or a lament for the dead.

You will realise that 'Because I Could Not Stop for Death' belongs to the third category of poems. From her early poems, we can notice the personification of death, sometimes as a fairy or a ghost, sometimes as a despotic king and at times as a cultured, gentle and ever-accompanying suitor who escorts his beloved on a joy-ride. And it is as a suitor that death attracts the most attention from the reader. That Emily Dickinson could imagine death as a suitor and lover bears testimony to the fact that she was able to conquer her fear of death. The poem is remarkable for the restraint which gives a poignant feeling to the last ride of our mortal life. We have already seen that since death has shown her great "civility" in coming to take her away in a carriage, she must put aside her "labour" and "leisure" to be with him. She passes the children playing in the school, the ripe harvest in the fields, and finally the "Setting Sun", shivering in her light gown and scarf as the evening "Chill" begins to drop imperceptibly over the scenes. When they came to the grave,

she lost count of time, marking her transition from timeliness to timelessness as she realises:

"Since then- 'tis Centuries- and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity-"

Death, thus, becomes a gateway towards Immortality, and hence it is to be welcomed rather than shunned.

Emily Dickinson's interest in Death is often criticised as being morbid, but modern critics have appreciated her sensitive and imaginative treatment of this rather painful subject which reveals her deep understanding of human life.



LET US KNOW

Dickinson's obsession with death can be seen in her detailed and detached reproduction of situations where she imagines her own death. The best of the poems of this group is "I heard a Fly Buzz- When I Died". It combines the description of death from both the outside and the inside. She emphasises the background and notes the tense silence in the room resembling the lull before the storm. People are done with the crying and drying their tears, they wait for the moment when death, the "King", would appear. She assigns her keepsakes, and just then, a "Fly" butts in between her and the light. Let us read the poem now:

"I heard a Fly buzz- when I died-
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air-
Between the Heaves of Storm-

The Eyes around- had wrung them dry-
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset- when the King
Be witnessed- in the Room-

I willed my Keepsakes- Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable- and then it was
There interposed a Fly-

With Blue- uncertain- stumbling Buzz-
Between the light- and me-
And then the Windows failed- and then
I could not see to see-"



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.8 Describe, in about 50 words, how Emily Dickinson treats the concept of "Death" in her poem, "Because I Could Not Stop For Death".

Q.9 What are the four categories of death poems of Dickinson as specified by Thomas Ford?

Q.10 What does coming to the grave symbolise in the poem? Old age/end of the journey/ death of a person. Choose the right answer.

Q.11 Emily Dickinson never had to face bereavements in life. True/False.

Dickinson's poems, as we have understood, are concerned with the themes of mortality and immortality. Her preoccupation with death and immortality stems from her religious bent of mind and her Puritan upbringing. She was confident that love would endure beyond the grave and this supported her belief in immortality and the belief was that the soul cannot be lost. The idea that death is a threshold to an immortal existence is frequently expressed by Dickinson, and in one of her poems, death is compared to a pilot which takes the human soul to the land of eternity. Immortality is the reward that awaits human beings who face death with a calm and bold attitude. Our focus therefore, should be on immortality rather than death. Dickinson's most typical approach to the

problem of immortality can be seen in the poem, 'The World is Not Conclusion'.

"The World is not conclusion.
A Species stands beyond-
Invisible, as Music-
But positive, as Sound-
It beckons, and it baffles-
Philosophy, don't know-
And through a Riddle, at the last-
Sagacity, must go-
To guess it, puzzles scholars-
To gain it, Men have borne
Contempt of Generations
And Crucifixion, shown-
Faith slips- and laughs, and rallies-
Blushes, if any see-
Plucks at a twig of Evidence-
And asks a Vane, the way-
Much Gesture, from the Pulpit-
Strong Hallelujahs roll-
Narcotics cannot still the Tooth
That nibbles at the soul-"

There is a definite assertion of the belief that death is not the end of the road when she says "The World is Not Conclusion". It, however, also explores the perplexity of philosophers, saints and scholars in proving the truth of immortality. The opening lines are double-edged and the final lines satirise the empty gestures that orthodox religion substitutes for faith; a religion which is like a narcotic that "cannot still the Tooth/ That nibbles at the soul-". The question of immortality was embedded in her consciousness and her poems affirm her faith in the immortality of the soul. Her poems typified the moral earnestness of the old Puritans and she remained a mystic in the sense that she was forever trying to experience and perceive the Divine force.

In "Because I Could Not Stop for Death", Dickinson, like her contemporary, G. M. Hopkins made an attempt to sensuously apprehend the spiritual experience. Immortality creeps into the poem as the carriage with Death and Immortality as companions takes the poet through the country and finally to a house, and the empty "Centuries" of "Eternity". Her poems on the abstract concepts of Death, Immortality, etc. are vividly dramatised, and her firm belief in immortality had earlier sustained her in her love which could not be fulfilled on this earth. There always remains the eternal hope of its being fulfilled in the other life. The introspective Puritan conscience that Dickinson inherited may be found in her intense fixation with pain, death, and immortality. The idea of immortality saves her musings on death from becoming morbid.



LET US KNOW

Dickinson's poems on immortality, as we have already seen, records the progress of the poet's journey from doubts and questioning to an ultimate faith, i.e. immortality. Let us read the following poem:

"Behind Me- dips Eternity-
Before Me- Immortality-
Myself- the Term between-
Death but the Drift of Eastern Gray,
Dissolving into Dawn away,
Before the West begin-

'Tis Kingdoms- afterward- they say-
In perfect- pauseless Monarchy-
Whose Prince- is Son of None-
Himself- His Dateless Dynasty-
Himself- Himself diversify-
In Duplicate divine-

'Tis Miracle before Me- then-
'Tis Miracle behind- between-
A Crescent in the Sea-
With Midnight to the North of Her-
And Midnight to the South of Her-
And Maelstrom- in the Sky-"

You can see that the pristine light of immortality shines in the poem and this is one of the finest and most impressive poems dealing with the subject.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.12 Discuss within 50 words, Dickinson's belief in Immorality.

Q.13 Is it possible to prove the existence of an immortal life? Write your observations on the concept.

Q.14 G. M. Hopkins is a contemporary of Dickinson. True/ False.



ACTIVITY 8.1

Read more poems by Emily Dickinson in order to understand better her attitude towards death and immortality. Some notable ones are "A Clock Stopped", "I Felt a Funeral in my Brain", "Though the Great Waters Sleep", "My Cocoon Tightens", etc.

8.5 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

We have already noticed that Emily Dickinson's style and poetic techniques make her poems distinctly original and appealing to readers and critics throughout the ages. As mentioned earlier, her poetry is full of startling figures of speech, familiar words in unfamiliar uses, learned expressions, sudden shifts of tone, metrical irregularities, deliberately imperfect rhymes and grammatical difficulties. Some of the other

features of her style include her technical restraint, her bold imagery, her experimentation with words and her concern for ideas, her cryptic brevity and her rebellion against sentimentalism and poetic diction. Her poetry is peppered with sharp, intense images which are complex and functional, and are drawn from many diverse sources. Of these, "Nature" is paramount. Her "Nature" poems consist of sharp, precise observations, but they are as much about psychological and spiritual matters as about the specifics of Nature. Most of her images are drawn from Nature such as flowers, bees, spiders, wars, voyages of exploration, lightening and volcanoes, domestic activities, industry and warfare, law and economy. In extreme flights of imagination, her images become almost surrealistic in content. Her images sometimes create natural or social scenes, but are also more likely to create psychological landscapes, generalised or allegorical scenes. She can convey more meaning through her metaphors, symbols and images than through direct statement.

"We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess- in the Ring-
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain
We passed the Setting Sun-"

Dickinson's most impressive stylistic method is her quaint love of paradoxes which spring from her attempt to blend apparently incongruous modes of experience. Her lyricism also breaks new ground in modern American poetry. We find all the major qualities of the great Romantic lyrical poets in her poetry. Although she mostly wrote about death, the lyrical romanticism is evident, as can be seen in the poem, in which she compares death to a lover or suitor appears to take her for a ride.

Dickinson's private and at times eccentric style sometimes makes her poems difficult to read, but such a style is the result of her unusual and unorthodox treatment of themes. She had a curious habit of talking about divinity, soul, immortality, death and like concepts in the vocabulary of ordinary speech. She anticipates the modern poets in her boldness and experimentation. A blend of tradition and modernity, she is the

prophet and representative of cultural conflicts destined to contribute more and more to the problem and character of creative expression in America-

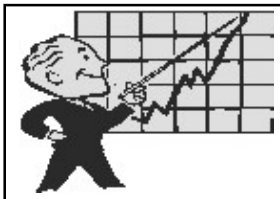
"Of all the souls that stand to create
I have elected one
When sense from spirit flies away
And subterfuge is done."

Critics in the twentieth century have been lavish in their praise for Emily Dickinson's style. R. P Blackmur and Allen Tate have found that she anticipates the modernist trend in poetry in its quality of irony, metaphor, symbols, etc. Thus, with the 20th century, Dickinson has enjoyed an ever-increasing critical reputation, and she is now widely regarded as one of America's best poets.



LET US KNOW

Emily Dickinson is very fond of using conceits like John Donne and her poetry possesses Donne's wit and **epigrammatic** quality. In her metres and broken rhythms, she resembles the metaphysical poets, and uses metaphysical paradox and poignancy. A metaphysical conceit makes an ingenious comparison between two apparently incongruous things or concepts. The term 'conceit' originates from the Italian "concetto", and it was developed by the metaphysical poets, particularly Donne, whose conceits are sometimes extended throughout an entire poem.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.15 Discuss in about 60 words, the basic features of Emily Dickinson's style.

Q.16 Write a small note on Emily Dickinson's Nature poems.

Q.17 Emily Dickinson can convey more meaning through direct statement than through images. True/False.



Epigrammatic: In the style of an epigram, which is a brief, interesting, memorable and sometimes surprising or satirical statement.

Q.18 How does Emily Dickinson anticipate modernity in her poetry?

Q.19 Write a few lines on conceit.

8.6 POETIC TECHNIQUES

Emily Dickinson's poetry is known for its notable irregularities, which were a cause of alarm for early editors and reviewers. Dickinson's poetry was of a very new kind, with a distinctive voice, style, and transformation of traditional form. A characteristic stanza in her poem consists of four lines, and most of her poems consist of just two stanzas. However, this poem has six stanzas.

As mentioned earlier, Dickinson wrote on a variety of topics ranging from religion, science, music, nature, books and contemporary events. Her poetic ideas were presented as terse, striking definitions or propositions, or dramatic narrative scenes, in moments which are highly abstract and in settings which are at the boundaries of life and death. The resultant poetry thus focused on the speaker's response to a situation rather than the details on the situation itself. In her poetry, she is aided by what may be called her eccentricities in her sporadic capitalisation of nouns and punctuations. Besides this, some of her technical irregularities include the frequent use of dashes, (as is evident from the poems you have read above), use of synonyms, use of broken metres and rhythms, off-rhymes her brevity and conciseness of expression, her use of colloquial expression, convoluted and ungrammatical phrasing, bold, unconventional and often startling metaphors, and her aphoristic wit. A critic commented that: "In her half-rhymes, her irregularities of speech and rhythm, her spasmodic quality, she mirrored the incongruities and frustrations of human experience."

In the poem, we can see the use of dashes and enigmatic expressions. Commonplace words come alive in new contexts and she packs the lines with cryptic meanings. She glorifies death and through the tight structure of the poem, she encompasses the whole range of

macroscopic experiences in her life. There is neither rhyme nor rhythm, but the emotion is recreated through the evocation of appropriate images.

Although, critics are divided in their views on the experimentation in poetic technique in her pursuit of truth, this technical imperfection of her verse has also contributed to her present-day popularity. It has greatly influenced 20th century poets and contributed to Dickinson's reputation as one of the greatest and most innovative poets of 19th century American literature.



LET US KNOW

Emily Dickinson is often bracketed with Walt Whitman as being one of the pioneers of nineteenth century American poetry. Although she is highly original in her writings, it is often said that she was influenced by Whitman's style. However, this is not quite true. One critic, while comparing her to Whitman, opined that both write as though no one had written poetry before. This is both a fair criticism and a great compliment. However, there is also a suggestion that her verse **smacks off** Emerson's poetry.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.20 Discuss, in about 50 words, the technical irregularities in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

Q.21 Mention some topics that Dickinson often wrote on.

Q.22 Emily Dickinson is a nineteenth century American poet. True/False.

Q.23 Dickinson never faced criticism because of her experimentation in poetic technique. True/ False.



Smacks off: to be reminiscent of something or to imply something.



8.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you will be acquainted with Emily Dickinson's poetry who is one of the famous American poets of the nineteenth century and along with Walt Whitman, is deemed as the pioneer of 19th century American poetry. You have learnt about the short life and numerous beautiful poems written by her. She wrote on a great variety of subjects like life, death, the contemporary social scenes, mortality and immortality, pain and pleasure, hope and fear, love, nature, God, religion, and virtue as seen through her Puritan perspective, or, as she described it, 'New Englandy'. A very striking quality about her poetry is its originality.

Her poems are quite short and she has nearly eighteen hundred surviving poems which looked at collectively, have an epic feeling and bear the stamp of being written by a woman who had devoted her entire life to her art. This is one of the most significant poems as it underscores the possibility of a life after death. The theme of death and immortality is a common theme in Dickinson's poetry which was of a very new kind, with a distinctive voice and style. Dickinson's poetry is full of startling figures of speech, familiar words in unfamiliar uses, learned expressions, sudden shifts of tone, metrical irregularities, deliberately imperfect rhymes and grammatical difficulties. Although, earlier critical views regarding her poetry were not very encouraging, Dickinson remains one of America's and the world's best loved poets.



8.8 FURTHER READING

1. Baym, Nina. Ed. (2008). *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
2. Ousby, Ian. (1992). *Companion to Literature in English*. London: Cambridge University Press.

3. Narasimhaiah, C. D. Ed. (1998). *Indian Response to American Literature*. New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers.



8.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q 1: Death is addressed as a courtly beau who courteously escorts his lady on a romantic journey

Ans to Q 2: Death's chaperone immortality.

Ans to Q 3: Childhood, moving into maturity and the descent into death

Ans to Q 4: "Gazing Grain" symbolises maturation and the area of adult labour "Setting sun"symbolises old age.

Ans to Q 5: Because this is where her body will be interred for eternity.

Ans to Q 6: False.

Ans to Q 7: As an endless cycle of nature.

Ans to Q 8: Attempt on your own.

Ans to Q 9:
i. poems dealing with death and immortality.
ii. poems dealing with physical aspects of death
iii. poems personifying death.
iv. poems with an elegiac tone.

Ans to Q 10: Death of person.

Ans to Q 11: False.

Ans to Q 12: Attempt on your own.

Ans to Q 13: Attempt on your own.

Ans to Q 14: True.

Ans to Q 15: Attempt on your own.

Ans to Q 16: Religious, science, music, nature, books and contemporary events.

Ans to Q 17: True.

Ans to Q 18: False.

Ans to Q 19: Her poetry is full of startling figures of speech, familiar words in unfamiliar uses, sudden shifts of tone, metrical irregularities, deliberate imperfect rhymes and grammatical difficulties.

Ans to Q No 20: Her nature poems consist of sharp precise observations but they are as much about psychological and spiritual matters as about the specifics of Nature.

Ans to Q No 21: False.

Ans to Q No 22: Her lyricism also breaks new ground in modern American poetry.

Ans to Q No 23: The term 'conceit' originates from the Italian "concetto" and it was developed by the metaphysical poets particularly, Donne whose conceits are sometimes extended throughout an entire poem.



8.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q.1 Write what you know about personification in Dickinson's poems.

Q.2 How does Dickinson portray death in her poems?

Q.3 What are some of the irregularities in Dickinson's poetry?

Q.4 Comment on the theme of death and immortality in Dickinson's poetry.

Q.5 Discuss the language, technique and style of Dickinson's poetry.

Q.6 Explain the following passages:

a. "The Carriage held but just Ourselves-
And Immortality."

b. "For only Gossamer, my Gown-
My Tippet- only Tulle-"

c. "Since then- 'tis Centuries- and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity-"

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UNIT 9: ROBERT FROST: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Robert Frost : The Poet

9.3.1 His Life

9.3.2 His Works

9.4 Let us Sum up

9.5 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.6 Further Reading

9.7 Model Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the life of Robert Frost
- locate the importance of Robert Frost in the American poetic tradition
- identify the poetic works by Frost

9.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit shall deal with another famous American poet, Robert Frost, who is the most influential poet writing within the American poetic tradition after **Walt Whitman**. A major poetic voice following Whitman, Frost appealed to the American reading public through his unpretentious and simple treatment of such central subjects as man and nature, love and isolation. The strength of his poetry lies in its simple lyrical expression of the subjects of universal significance. When he came to write there was no commanding voice in American poetry. Whitman was not as forceful as earlier, Emily Dickinson was not as famous, as she eventually became. Let us gain an idea on the biographical details of the poet.

9.3 ROBERT FROST : THE POET

Frost was a modern poet who represented the disillusionment of modern man through his poetry. He anticipated symbolism which was to become characteristic of modern poetry. It must, however, be remembered that his poetry does not have a modern style which we find in Eliot, Pound, Auden and Yeats. Let us now look at Frost's life and works in order to measure his status as a poet.

9.3.1 His Life

Robert Lee Frost was born in San Francisco in the year 1875. His father was a political journalist. A descendant of New England through many generations, Frost after the death of his father in 1885, moved eastwards to Massachusetts with his mother. He finished his high schooling from the mill town of Lawrence in 1892. He studied at Dartmouth College and later at the Harvard University. As a student, he took an active interest in his studies but was somehow unable to attune his creative abilities to a routine-based course of study. However, his stay in Harvard was significant because he came under the influence of **William James** and **George Santayana**. As a teacher, Frost had a natural taste for originality and developed a methodology for teaching which proved to be very successful. But, Frost was a person whose creative abilities could not be restrained by regulations and as such, his stint as a teacher too proved irksome for him. For eleven years from 1901 to 1912, Frost engaged himself in writing poetry as well as in working in a New Hampshire farm which he inherited from his grandfather. However, both these pursuits yielded mediocre results. Therefore, he sold his farm in the autumn of 1912 and left for England with his family. In England, he met Ezra Pound and Edward Thomas. From here he started his literary career. Despite exercising his creative potential at his own will in his poetic compositions, he could not, however, escape the calling of formal education. After returning from England, he was again reinstated in his position as a teacher when he was called

upon to teach in Amherst College from 1916 to 1919. After his resignation from that post, he was again summoned to serve at the University of Michigan in 1921-22. He died in 1969.



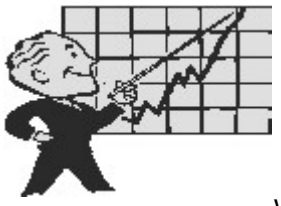
LET US KNOW

Walt Whitman : (1819-1892) American poet who wrote in a distinctively American idiom. E.g. *Leaves Of Grass*.

New England : The region consisting of six states of America, namely Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode island and Connecticut was called New England in 1616 by Captain John Smith. Frost wrote about New England in many poems, celebrating the spirit of optimism of the early settlers.

William James : (1842-1910) : A philosopher who founded pragmatism. His major works are *The Meaning of Truth*, *The Will to Believe* and *Essays in Radical Experience.*

George Santayana: (1863-1952) James's student at Harvard, remembered for his contribution to literature and philosophy.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Fill in the blanks:

a) Robert Frost is the most influential poet writing within the American poetic tradition after…….

b) Frost was a modern poet who showed the …….. of modern man.

Q2. What are the important subjects in Frost's poetry?

Q3. In what way was Frost's stay at Harvard significant?

Q4. Why did Frost leave his farm and move to England?

9.3.2 His Works

Let us now discuss the major works of Robert Frost. Frost settled in a village near London with his family and therein he planned the

composition of his first collection of poems titled *A Boy's Will*, published in London in 1919. A second collection of poems, *North of Boston* appeared in the spring of 1914. It was warmly appreciated by Ezra Pound who wrote an enthusiastic review of the poems for his fellow American countryman. Frost returned to America in 1915 and soon found himself warmly praised in *New Republic* by Amy Lowell, another poet who wrote free-verse. After returning to his country, Frost published his third collection titled *Mountain Interval* in 1916, which attracted national attention and he was awarded with numerous honours, the most prominent among them being his election to the National Academy of Arts and Letters.

In the following years, he published further collections of poetry which confirmed his reputation as the 'national poet' of America after Walt Whitman. They included *New Hampshire* (1929), *West-Running Brook* (1928), *Collected Poems* (1990), *A Further Range* (1996), *A Witness Tree* (1942), *A Steeple Bush* (1947) and *In the Clearing* (1962). They won him a total of four Pulitzer Prizes. He also wrote two dramatic poems in blank verse, titled "A Masque of Reason"(1945) and "A Masque of Mercy" (1947) in which he portrayed biblical characters and explored the relation of man to God in the modern world. His works earned him honorary degrees from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in 1957. Frost appealed to the American reading public through his unpretentious and simple treatment of such central subjects as man and nature, love and isolation.



LET US KNOW

Like T.S. Eliot, Robert Frost went to England where he found a publisher for his first book of verse *A Boy's Will* (1919). But, unlike Eliot who made England his home, Frost returned to America in 1915.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q5. Name the poetry collections of Frost which established his reputation as the National poet of America?

Q6. What are the two dramatic poems written by Robert Frost?



9.4 LET US SUM UP

After reading the unit, you have become familiar with the works of Robert Frost. You are now able to refer to the life of Robert Frost and relate your reading to the poetic tradition of American poetry. You are encouraged to explore the poetry of Frost which garnered a lot of attention and reputation in the literary field. In fact, America considers him to be her national poet right after Walt Whitman.



9.5 FURTHER READING

1. Boynton, Percy H. (1922). “American Authors of Today: II. Robert Frost”. *The English Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 8, pp 455-462.
2. Cox, James M. (ed.). (1962). *Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Eaglewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice Hall, Inc.
3. Isaacs, Elizabeth. (1962). *An Introduction to Robert Frost*. Allan Swallow.
4. Mc Phillips, Robert T. (1986). “Diverging and Converging Paths: Horizontal and Vertical Movement in Robert Frost’s Mountain Interval”. *American Literature*, Vol. 58 No. 1, pp 82-98.
5. Poirier, Richard. (1977). *Robert Frost : The Work of Knowing*. Oxford University Press.
6. *The Poems of Robert Frost*. (1946). New York: Modern library.



9.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1. a) Walt Whitman.

b) disillusionment.

Ans to Q2. Frost appealed to the American reading public through his unpretentious and simple treatment of such central subjects as man and nature, love and isolation.

Ans to Q3. His stay in Harvard was significant because he came under the influence of William James and George Santayana.

Ans to Q4. For eleven years from 1901 to 1912, Frost engaged himself in writing poetry as well as in working in a New Hampshire farm which he inherited from his grandfather. However, both these pursuits yielded mediocre results. Therefore, he sold his farm in the autumn of 1912 and left for England with his family.

Ans to Q5. *New Hampshire* (1929), *West-Running Brook* (1928), *Collected Poems* (1990), *A Further Range* (1996), *A Witness Tree* (1942), *A Steeple Bush* (1947) and *In the Clearing* (1962).

Ans to Q6. The two dramatic poems are “A Masque of Reason” (1945) and “A Masque of Mercy” (1947).



9.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Give a description of the life of Robert Frost.

Q2. Write a short note on Robert Frost’s poetry.

Q3. Discuss Robert Frost as a major American poet.

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UNIT 10: ROBERT FROST: “THE ROAD NOT TAKEN”

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Text of the Poem

10.4 Context of the Poem

10.5 Explanation of the Poem

10.6 Style and Language

10.7 Poetic Techniques

10.8 Let us Sum up

10.9 Further Reading

10.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.11 Model Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- explain the poem “The Road Not Taken”
- describe the context, the poetic devices and the language used by the poet
- value the poem in its totality

10.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we discussed the life and works of the poet Robert Frost. This unit makes an attempt to acquaint you with the poem “The Road Not Taken” composed by Robert Frost who is one of the most prominent American poets who wrote on the threshold of Modernism. You must have read some of his poems. One important poem titled “Mending Wall” is particularly worth mentioning because in it the poet laughs at the attempt made by man to create artificial barriers. In the poem ”The Road not Taken” Frost analyses the problem of choice and its resultant impact on the individual who makes the choice. A critical explanation of the poem

is also provided which will help you understand and appreciate the poem better.

After reading this unit you will be interested in reading this poem and also about the poet's eventful life.

10.3 TEXT OF THE POEM

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

10.4 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

"The Road Not Taken" is the opening poem in Robert Frost's third collection of poems titled *Mountain Interval*, published in 1916. The inspiration for writing the poem came to Frost in 1914 when he was with his friend Edward Thomas in Gloucestershire, England. During his stay,

he used to go for long walks in the countryside accompanied by Thomas. The latter was seriously interested in acquainting his American friend with the rarities and specialities of the area and as such always took a route that could serve his purpose. However, before the end of that walk, he would regret the choice he had made and wished that they had chosen the other available routes. Such a thing happened regularly and Frost took it as an occasion to jest at the expense of his friend's 'wasted regrets'. Frost sought to romanticise this notion of ruminating over what might have been and on his return to America in 1915, he incorporated this notion into the composition of a poem for his new volume of poetry.

10.5 EXPLANATION OF THE POEM

When we read the poem we become aware of a person who has two roads before him and can take only one road at a time. It is a common experience for a stranger in an unfamiliar place to find a crossroad before him and to decide which one he should prefer that would take him to his destination. At its literal level, the poem illustrates such a situation but on deeper reflection we discover a general truth regarding human situations where the problem of choice is one of the most difficult problems for man to solve.

Let us first read the poem to find its literal meaning. The poet takes up the metaphor of a road at the point of splitting into two separate routes. The poem opens with the traveller poet standing at the point of divergence. Since he is a lone traveller and cannot travel both ways, he has to make a conscious decision of choosing the right path. The poet has to make a choice whereby he can take one road but in the process would be required to forsake the other. This act of making the right choice is an ordinary experience in life. On an early morning the poet / speaker, while walking along a road reaches a point where the road goes in two directions. He is at a loss as to which direction he should take. One of the two roads seems to have been used more often by travellers but the other appears grassy and neglected. The poet is undecided for a moment because both the roads present him with equal prospects. He

has to make a choice between the two alternatives. Casting his glance at the roads for a while he finds that the wood is 'Yellow', that is, the leaves are all yellow and orange in colour, suggesting the autumn season. As he looks at one road he finds that it has taken a curve and is lost to sight because of thick growth of shrubs and other kinds of plants. He, however, decides to take the other road which is less frequented by travellers. To the poet / speaker, there is hardly any difference between the two roads. Both are lying unused on that particular morning and both are covered by yellow leaves. There is no sign of anyone trampling upon the roads so early. While deciding on the road he is to take now , the poet keeps the option open for using the other road another day. It appears to be a sudden decision taken impulsively without giving a serious thought. Besides, he has not seen any clear advantage or disadvantage in discarding one for the other.

Though the traveller poet expects to return to the spot some other day to go by the other road- the one he has rejected at the moment- there is an uncertainty about this happening in future because in life we take decisions which cannot be revised and taking one road means not turning back in order to start the journey anew. The following two lines make this point clear:

"Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back"

The poet / traveller would know about the results of his choice only in the future. He may even have to regret his decision. The choices in life may be either regretted or rejoiced later. There is always scope for doubt and uncertainty regarding our choice of action at a given moment. But this is a human predicament. We are incapable of foreseeing the consequences of our actions in a clear perspective. What really matters is the choice made at a particular moment. This choice will make all the difference in future.

It is thus a profound truth about human situations that has added to the poem's deeper meanings. The literal is merged into the symbolic. The traveller is not an individual but a representative of mankind. The two

roads acquire a deep symbolic significance as representations of choices in life about which human beings are so often confused, as the traveller in question.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: What is the season of the year suggested in the poem?

Q2: Where does the traveller find two roads laying equal claims on him?

Q3: How is one road different from the other?

Q4: Explain the implication of the phrase 'less travelled'.

10.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

As was said earlier, Frost made use of the language of the common people in the composition of his poetry. In this case his position as an American poet stands out in contrast with the modern European and English counterparts. He incorporated the speech patterns of New England into the process of versification, using and transforming them to create simple yet meaningful verses. He was more successful than most other poets in writing in a truly natural speech. Most of the colloquial rhythms were acquired during those years of farming in his Hampshire Farm. It is interesting again to observe that even in his manner of writing, Frost did not stick to any particular style of language. In his first collection of poetry *A Boy's Will*, Frost wrote in consonance with the established lyric tradition of Walt Whitman. In the poem under discussion, we can clearly perceive instances wherein the poet has applied elements of ordinary speech into the metrical pattern. It seems as if the poet is captured precisely in the moment of retrospection. The poet verbally recreates the entire situation when he finds himself at the crossroads speculating over the question of choosing the right way. The style is simple and attracts our immediate attention. Yet there is an element of colloquialism, particularly in the line "Oh! I kept the first for another day". It is written in a conversational style. It talks about the sudden decision

in favour of a particular road that offers no advantages or disadvantages to influence his choice. It is an involuntary, impulsive decision, so well suggested by the line. Another characteristic of Frost's style is that when he sets out to describe an object or to convey the impression of a natural scenery he writes in a straight-forward manner. "The Road Not Taken'" has a simple style so characteristic of Frost and is marked by his use of simple and straight forward language. What is further seen here is an emotional restraint that makes his statement of the profound truth about the human problem of choices so simple and easy to understand.



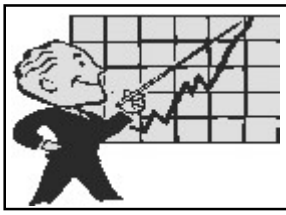
CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q5: Explain the metaphor of the crossroads.

10.7 POETIC TECHNIQUES

The most significant poetic technique applied here is that of symbolism. Added to that, the poet has also made a clever use of natural imagery. The metaphor of two roads represents the two possibilities of which only one could be entertained at a time. The central metaphor clearly suggests the external human problem of choices. But Frost has not dealt with the problem philosophically. He allows the situation to speak for itself and allows the deeper meaning to emerge naturally. This makes the poem easy to read. One of Frost's favourite modes is the dramatic mode in which a situation is depicted. In this poem, we can easily realise the situation in which a traveller is faced with the dilemma about selecting either of the two roads lying before him in a yellow wood. Robert Frost is known as a poet of "simplicity". His poems are usually short, seldom running over from one page to another. The verses are composed usually of brief forms such as the quatrain (4-line stanza).

In this poem, however, he has used 5 line stanzas with the rhyme scheme abaab, cdccd, dedde, efeef. Infact, he has enlarged the quatrain to the 5 line stanzas to offer variety.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q6: What is the rhyme scheme of this poem?



10.8 LET US SUM UP

Robert Frost began writing poetry as a farmer-poet and his poetry retained the fragrance of the New England soil. Writing this poem in the lap of nature, the poet's mind did not fail to notice the importance of those elements which affect human life. From nature, the poet moves into a general human situation where it is difficult to make a well-thought-out choice. The two roads stand for two choices which are indistinguishable in matter of particular advantages and disadvantages. Yet we make choices in life, at times impulsively and with irretrievable consequences.



10.9 FURTHER READING

1. Boynton, Percy H. (1922). "American Authors of Today: II. Robert Frost". *The English Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 8, pp 455-462.
2. Cox, James M. (ed.). (1962). *Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Eaglewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice Hall, Inc.
3. Isaacs, Elizabeth. (1962). *An Introduction to Robert Frost*. Allan Swallow.
4. Mc Phillips, Robert T. (1986). "Diverging and Converging Paths: Horizontal and Vertical Movement in Robert Frost's Mountain Interval". *American Literature*, Vol. 58 No. 1, pp 82-98.
5. Poirier, Richard. (1977). *Robert Frost : The Work of Knowing*. Oxford University Press.
6. *The Poems of Robert Frost*. (1946). New York: Modern library.



10.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: The season suggested is Autumn.

Ans to Q2: It is in the woods that the traveller finds the two roads ahead.

Ans to Q3: One road takes a curve and is lost to sight because of thick outgrowth of shrubs and plants and the other road is neglected

Ans to Q4: Less travelled means a path that has been hardly frequented or explored by travellers.

Ans to Q5: The metaphor of cross roads implies the two roads which represent the two possibilities of which only one could be entertained at a time.

Ans to Q6: The rhyme scheme of the poem is: abaab, dedde, efeef. He has enlarged the quatrain to the five line stanzas to offer variety.



10.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Where does the poet find two roads pointing to two directions? Which road does he select and why?

Q 2: Why has the poet titled the poem as "The Road Not Taken"? Would it have been more appropriate to use the title "Road Taken"? Explain the significance of the title.

Q 3: Explain the following with reference to the context:

(i) "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both…"

(ii) "And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black…"

(iii) "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –I took the one less traveled by/And that has made all the difference….."

Q4: What does the poet suggest in the poem about the problem of choice in human life?

Q5: Write a summary of the poem "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost.

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UNIT 11: INTRODUCING INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 A Brief Overview of Indian English Poetry

11.4 Major Indian English Poets and their Works

11.5 Let us Sum up

11.6 Further Reading

11.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.8 Model Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- provide an outline of Indian English poetry
- identify the important poets who have contributed to the development of Indian English poetry
- list the major practitioners of Indian English poetry and their important works
- discuss the scope and themes primarily dealt in the works of the various poets
- gain an idea of the emerging trends in Indian English poetry
- analyse the significance of Indian English poetry in the contemporary literary set up of Indian Writing in English

11.2 INTRODUCTION

The term Indian English poetry encompasses within its scope all such works of poets who are Indians writing in the English language. However, it must be noted that literature in English was produced in India much earlier. It dates back to second half of the eighteenth century. The poetry inspired by the Indian landscape and culture was called Anglo-Indian. These Anglo-Indian poets were British people who, through their

poems, had shared their experiences about India. It was in the later part of the nineteenth century that Indian poet like Henry Louis Vivian Derozio literally came out, taking English as their medium of expression. Since then there was no looking back and today Indian English poetry has reached a very high standard by works and concerns of the poets like Kamala Das, Nizzim Ezekiel, Jayanta Mahapatra and many others. This unit, while giving you an idea of the origin of Indian English poetry, also aims to discuss its new and emerging trends. Some of the major poets have been listed here with an aim to add to your knowledge about Indian English poetry in general. But that does not imply that the other poets are less relevant. The learners are advised to go through the books mentioned in the later part of the unit to acquire a detailed information on Indian English poetry. To make it easier and interesting for you, we have divided Indian English poetry into two phases: before Independence and after Independence. Let us now move into the discussion.

11.3 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY

To begin with, let us first look into the poetry produced before independence. Earlier termed as Indo-Anglian to mark the Indian writing in English, Indian English poetry can be best understood by dividing the works of poets as pre-independence and post-independence poetry. You must note that even before independence, there were writers like **Henry Louis Vivian Derozio** who had composed poems on various Indian sentiments, establishing himself as the first Indian English poet. He initially served as a lecturer at Hindu College of Calcutta but was later dismissed from service on grounds of misleading the students with his sceptical nature and reformist ideas. Within the short span of his poetic career, he contributed two poetry collections which were named as *Poems*, published in 1827 and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems*, published in 1828 respectively. It was seen that Derozio was much influenced by Byron and the romantics. The relevant themes found in his poetry were patriotism, love for Indian myths and

legends and a strong Indian sentiment.

Other significant poets of pre-independent India include **Kasiprasad Ghose, Michael Madhusudhan Dutt, Govin Chunder Dutt, Hur Chunder Dutt** and **Girish Chunder Dutt.** However, it was **Toru Dutt** who has been given the credit of raising the stature of Indian English poetry with her authentic flavour. One can see a strong influence of English romanticism in her works. Toru Dutt's *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Field*, published in between 1856-57 became very popular. Her poetry like "Our Casuarina Tree", "The Lotus", etc. showed a strong resemblance to the poetry of English romantic poets. Her themes, therefore, mostly include love, nature, longing for the past, etc. It is important for us to remember her as the first Indian woman poet who could make a mark in the field of poetry with her distinguished sense of simplicity and sincerity by writing in a foreign language, that is, English.

Next, in the history of Indian English poetry, the contribution of **Sri Aurobindo** was remarkable. Some of his poems are "Love and Death", "Ahana", "Baji Prabhou", etc. He has to his credit numerous translated works like "The Hero and the Nymph", "Songs of the Sea", etc. His most popular work is "Savitri", a narrative poem consisting of about 24000 lines.

We must note the first woman poet of India, **Sarojini Naidu** who had made her mark through her poetry. Her first published work of poetry was *The Golden Threshhold* which appeared in 1905. *The Bird of Time* (1912) is her second collection of poetry. She had penned down many songs and was considered the "Nightingale of Indian Song" (Iyengar). She matured as a poet with each poetry collection and her last collection titled *The Broken Wing* had seriousness of tone. Actively participating in the then politics of the country, as well as, fighting for women's causes, Sarojini Naidu was a gifted speaker. She had dedicated poems to Gandhi and Jinnah also. They were some of the notable poets who wrote before Independence.

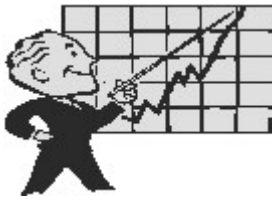
After Independence, the poets who had contributed towards the development of Indian English poetry are **Keki N. Daruwalla, Nissim**

Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, Kamala Das, A. K. Ramanujan, Arun Kolatkar, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Jayanta Mahapatra, Adil Jussawalla, Vikram Seth, etc. to name a few. It must be noted that: "The English poetic tradition came to India on the path laid down by Macaulay's 'Minute' of 1835, trailing clouds of literary glory" (Mehrotra 276) Unlike the earlier poetry which was more dependent on western themes and was imitative, the poetry after Independence was modern in its outlook. With his poetry volumes like *A Beginning* (1957), *Poems* (1960), *The Brass Serpent*, etc., **Dom Moraes** was one of the first poets to have made a mark. His poetry was confessional, as well as, realistic.

Jayanta Mahapatra was one of the Indian poets who became popular both in India and outside. Winner of many international and national awards, Mahapatra was a teacher of Physics. It is significant that he wrote and published poetry at a very later age in his life. You must know that his poetry reflects his inner self which is very much rooted in India, more particularly in Orissa. His poetry shows influence of the West, especially the twentieth century poets like G. M. Hopkins, Ezra Pound, etc. However, the most important feature of his poetry that distinguishes his works from the earlier poets is the diversion of themes. Unlike earlier poetry, his works bear a strong personal voice. Themes like love, lust, discontentment with prevailing customs, vision of Indianness, reflection of stark realities, etc. mark his poetry as modern. His poetry is rooted to the Indian tradition and hence, they are difficult to be read in isolation; his works are chiefly written in a particular social and cultural context. He is credited with seven books written in Oriya and twenty books in the English language. It must be noted that he was one of the Indian poets who received Sahitya Akademi award for poetry written in English language. Some of his works are *Svayaamvaraa and Other Poems, Close the Sky, Ten By Ten, A Father's Hours, A Rain of Rites, Relationship*, etc. to name a few. You can acquire more details about his life and career in Unit 14.

Kamala Das, another bilingual poet, has greatly contributed to the changing trends in Indian English poetry with her confessional poems.

Her poems are an echo of her individuality and an expression of her feminine sensibility. You will read in greater details about her in the unit that follows. The most notable work by another famous poet, **Vikram Seth** is *The Golden Gate* (1986). **Keki N. Daruwalla**'s *Relationship* and *Temple* are worth mentioning in the context of modern poetry in English. Hence, it can be said that these poets with their originality and confessional mode broke the stereotype and garnered the future of Indian English poetry in a fruitful manner.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Name the first notable Indian poet writing in English. Name his two poetry collections.

Q2. Name some of the significant poets of pre-independent India.

Q3. What are the common themes in Toru Dutt's poems?

Q4. Name the longest poem written by Sri Aurobindo.

Q5. Write the names of a few modern poets in Indian English poetry.

11.4 MAJOR INDIAN ENGLISH POETS AND THEIR WORKS

Some of the Indian English poets are discussed below in order to give you a brief idea of the development, themes and poetic output of Indian English poetry in general.

Nissim Ezekiel: One of the most notable Indian poets writing in English is Nissim Ezekiel. Emerging as one of the first poets to have a voice of his own in poetry, Ezekiel wrote in an age when patriotism and nationalism were intensified in the society. However, this poet broke those shackles and focussed on urban themes and urban life. He showed the other emerging Indian poets their way through his mass involvement with printing, starting magazines, promoting new poets and so on. The most significant aspect of his poetry is his expression of

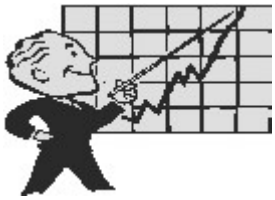
personal feelings in a diction that is precise and overt. His poems are a record of his struggles to come to terms with his own self. Professionally, he served as a Reader in the university of Bombay and has authored several collections like *A Time to Change, Sixty Poems, The Unfinished Man, The Exact Name, Hymns in Darkness and Poster Poems* to name a few. Besides this, he has written poems for *The Illustrated Weekly of India, Encounter, London Magazine* and *The Spectator*. Padma Shri Nissim Ezekiel was also the recipient of Sahitya Akademi Cultural Award.

Eunice D'souza: One of the representatives of women poets in Indian English literature is Eunice D'souza who belongs to a Goan family. Her poetry depicts the Goan way of life with utter sincerity. She served as a teacher at St. Xavier's College in Mumbai and was widely involved in literary activities of the college. Her published works are *Fix* (1979), *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988), *Ways of Belonging* (1990) and *Selected and New Poems* (1994). Her poetic mode is also confessional in tone. But what is significant is the way she draws materials from her personal experiences and merges them to a general cause. Her poetic brilliance lies in transporting the readers from a particular to a general context. The language she uses is colloquial and depicts her emotions vividly. Like Kamala Das, D'souza also uses poetry as a medium of expression of her inner turmoil and frustration.

A.K. Ramanujan: Known for his poetry collections titled *The Striders* (1966), *Relations* (1971), *Second Sight* (1987) etc., he established himself as one of the finer poets and carved a significant place in Indian English literature. He writes both in Kannada and English. He served as a teacher of English Literature in various Indian universities as well as International universities. Apart from being a poet, Ramanujan was a translator. It was through his translations from Tamil and Kannada languages to English language that opened to the readers from the West an idea about Indian sensibilities and provided a fascinating retreat to the traditions of India. Ramanujan's poetry is known for his art of craftsmanship. Poetically, his works are rich in imagery and ironic in tone. His uniqueness lies in his artistic balance, his "quest for the self"

and the juxtaposition of traditional with the modern. Few of his poems are "Love Poem for a Wife I", "The Hindoo", "Self-Portrait", etc.

Apart from them, there are other major poets as mentioned in the previous section. You are advised to collect information about a few other Indian poets and expand your knowledge on the same.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q6. Write a note on Nissim Ezekiel.

Q7. Mention any two works by Eunice D'souza.



11.5 LET US SUM UP

To sum up, it must be noted that Indian English poetry has been emerging ever since its beginning in the late eighteenth century. From Anglo-Indian poets to poets of Indian origin, Indian English poetry has seen tremendous growth in its output. Earlier it was imitative of the West but gradually it has strengthened its base by producing many authentic works. Among the pre independence poets, a few names like Derozio, Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, etc. are worth mentioning. However, you are now familiar with the post independence poets also who have contributed a lot towards the growth of Indian English poetry through their experimental attitude and newer techniques. Chief among them are A.K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Kamala Das, Nizzim Ezekiel, etc. to name a few. By reading this unit, you have become familiar with the origin of Indian English poetry as well as the major poets.



11.6 FURTHER READING

1. Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa. (2013 rpt.). *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

2. Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna. (ed.). (2010). *A Concise History of Indian Literature in English*. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
3. Singh, Kanwar Dinesh. (2008). *Contemporary Indian English Poetry: Comparing Male and Female Voices*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors Pvt Ltd.



11.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. He contributed two poetry collections which were named as *Poems*, published in 1827 and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems*, published in 1828 respectively.

Ans to Q2. Kasiprasad Ghose, Michael Madhusudhan Dutt, Govin Chunder Dutt, Hur Chunder Dutt and Girish Chunder Dutt, Toru Dutt.

Ans to Q3. Her poems mostly included love, nature, longing for the past, etc.

Ans to Q4. "Savitri".

Ans to Q5. Keki N. Daruwalla, Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, Kamala Das, A. K. Ramanujan, Arun Kolatkar, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Jayanta Mahapatra, Adil Jussawalla, Vikram Seth, etc.

Ans to Q6. One of the most notable Indian poets writing in English is Nissim Ezekiel. He served as a Reader at the university of Bombay and has authored several collections like *A Time to Change, Sixty Poems, The Unfinished Man, The Exact Name, Hymns in Darkness and Poster Poems* to name a few. Besides this, he has written poems for *The Illustrated Weekly of India, Encounter, London Magazine and The Spectator*. Padma Shri Nissim Ezekiel was also the recipient of Sahitya Akademi Cultural Award.

Ans to Q7. *Fix* (1979), *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988),*Ways of Belonging* (1990) and *Selected and New Poems* (1994).



11.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Write in detail about Indian poetry in English before independence highlighting the important contribution of the major poets.

Q2. Who were the modern or new poets of Indian English poetry? Discuss in detail.

Q3. What are the distinctive features of post independence Indian English poetry? How is it different from its earlier output?

Q4. Write short notes on:

(a) Derozio and his contribution to Indian English poetry

(b) Modern Indian English poetry

Q5. What are the themes mostly dealt with by the modern poets of Indian English poetry?

Q6. Give a detailed explanation of the history of Indian English poetry.

Q7. Highlight the works of the major poets who have contributed towards the development of Indian English poetry.

Q8. Comment on the present status of Indian English poetry.

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UNIT 12: KAMALA DAS: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Kamala Das : The Poet

12.3.1 Her Life

12.3.2 Her Works

12.4 Let us Sum up

12.5 Further Reading

12.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.7 Model Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- appreciate Kamala Das' as an Indian English poet
- discuss the life and works of the poet
- assess the significance of Kamala Das' poetry

12.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we discussed the major Indian English poets and their works apart from receiving a brief overview on Indian English poetry. This unit intends to introduce you to one of the woman poets of India whose name is Kamala Das and who has immensely contributed to the development of Indian English poetry over the years. A significant aspect of her poetry is the range of subjects that include her own womanly response to a male dominated society with her unique poetic style. She occupies an important place among the poets of modern Indian poetry written in English.

12.3 KAMALA DAS : THE POET

Kamala Das was an Indian writer who wrote both in English and Malayalam, which is also her mother tongue. She has written under

pseudonyms like Madhavikutty and Kamala Suraiyya. However, she is better known as an Indian English poet, a short story writer, a novelist, a playwright, an essayist, a nonfiction writer, a children's writer, and an auto-biographer. Do you feel like knowing more about this great woman poet from India? Let us then learn about her life and works in the following sections.

12.3.1 Her Life

Kamala Das was born on 31st March in 1934 at Punnayurkulam in Southern Malabar in Kerala. It is interesting to note that she received her education mainly at home. Her father's name was V. M. Nair and her mother's name was Nalappatt Balamani Amma, who was a renowned Malayali poetess. So, naturally Kamala **inherited** her talent as a writer from her mother. However, it is to be noted that she did not start writing professionally until she got married at an early age and became a mother.

Kamala Das' first book, *Summer In Calcutta* was a promising start. She wrote mainly of love, its betrayal, and the consequent suffering. At the age of 42, she published her autobiography *My Story*, which is a source of information regarding the facts of her life. In this autobiography she has discussed the tightly knit Kerala society from where she was uprooted when her father was tansferred to Calcutta. For some time she attended a Catholic boarding school but suddenly, at the young age of 16, she married a cousin for whom she had little affection. This led her to serious troubles in her married life as her husband was busy more with his career than with her emotional needs. This came as a blow to her womanly ego as she felt that her expectations of life would not be fulfilled. Naturally, Das turned towards other thoughts like pursuing a career in writing that would enable her to express her hidden feelings. It is interesting to note that so many of her poems are about the memories of her childhood and her family home at Kerala. In her poems there has always been an idealised vision of childhood as reflected in her famous poem "My Grandmother's House".



Inherit: derive qualities from parents or ancestors

Embrace: accept and take an idea or religion willingly

Controversial: causing controversy which means angry discussion or arguments about something which many people disagree with

She was born in a conservative Hindu Nair family having Royal ancestry. But, she **embraced** Islam in 1999 at the age of 65 and assumed the name Kamala Suraiyya. Her conversion was somewhat **controversial** among the social and literary circles both inside and outside Kerala. Kamala Das died on May 31, 2009 at the age of 75.

12.3.2 Her Works

After you have read briefly about the life of Kamala Das, you should have some more idea about her works which include a number of genres like poetry, short story, novel, autobiography, etc. But, it is primarily as a poet that she enjoys a national as well as international reputation. In this connection it is worthwhile to mention what she felt like being a poet. She felt that a poet should always try to capture the moments of deeply personal experience in all its uniqueness and immediacy. As a bilingual writer, Kamala Das has published extensively both in English and Malayalam. Some of her best known works in English include a novel entitled *Alphabet of Lust* (1977) and a collection of short stories called *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* (1992). In addition to these, she has written five books of poetry: *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *The Anamalai Poems* (1985), *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (1996) which is a collection of poetry with Pritish Nandy (1990), and her famous autobiography, *My Story* (1976).

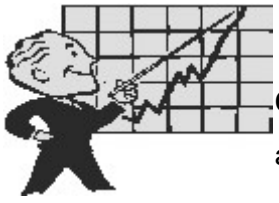
Her poetry collection *Summer in Calcutta* marks a new beginning in Indian English poetry. Das' contemporary Indian poets wrote mainly about British Colonialism, about Indian traditions and legends, and about the peasants in the villages. But deviating from this tradition, Kamala Das moved towards writing more about personal experiences and feelings. This collection also marks a significant development in the life of the poet. The period between 1968 and 1973 seemed to be less productive poetically as Das devoted much of her time to prose-writings. It is interesting to note that almost all her prose works are autobiographical. Hence, you will never find them difficult to understand once you start

reading them in detail. One of her short stories, “Frigidity and the Sepia Tainted Photograph” clearly expresses her feelings for love and emotional discontent. Her other powerful writings are available in the form of essays such as, “I Studied all Men”, “What Women Expect out of Marriage and What They Get”, “Why Not More than One Husband?”. But, these essays only led to more controversies. Yet these works established Kamala Das as a writer who was unconventional but honest. *My Story*, her autobiography was serialised in *The Current Weekly* from January to December, 1974. Similar autobiographical prose pieces like “I Study All Men” were published in the reputed magazine *Illustrated Weekly of India* in 1971.



LET US KNOW

Kamala Das’ work in English has been widely anthologised in India, Australia, and the West, and she has won various prestigious awards in recognition of her talent as a poet. She was given the Philippines Asian Poetry Prize (1963), the Poetry Award of The Asian PEN Anthology in 1964, Chiman Lal Award for fearless journalism (1971), the ASAN World Prize (1985), and the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 1969 for *Cold*, a collection of short stories in Malayalam. Her poems have been published in *Opinion*, *New Writing in India* (Penguin Books, 1974) and *Young Commonwealth Poets* (Heinemann, 1965)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Mention True or False :

a. Kamala Das inherited her poetic talents from her father. (True/False)

b. *Summer In Calcutta* is her first important poetry collection. (True/False)

c. Many of her poems refer to her childhood days. (True/False)

d. Kamala Das has never won any awards. (True/False)

Q2: Fill in the gaps :

a. Kamala Das has written extensively in .....
and .....

b. All her prose works are .....

c. Das has written more about .....

d. The name of her autobiography is .....

Q3: Name the best known works in English by Kamala Das.



12.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have read about one of the important Indian poets writing in English. We have also read about the life and works of the poet. We need to refer to our reading on the poet's life because her poetic works are personal and confessional in nature.



12.5 FURTHER READING

1. Paniker, K. Ayyappa (ed.). (1991). *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. Sahitya Akademi: New Delhi, 1991.
2. Parthasarathy R. (ed.). (1976). *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*. OUP: New Delhi, 1976.
3. King, Bruce. (1987). *Modern Indian Poetry in English.* New Delhi: OUP, 1987.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamala_Surayya



12.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: a. False b. True
c. True d. False

Ans to Q2: a. English and Malayalam
b. Autobiographical

c. Personal Experiences and Feelings

d. *My Story*

Ans to Q3: *Alphabet of Lust* (1977), *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* (1992), *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *The Anamalai Poems* (1985), *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (1996).



12.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Assess the significance of Kamala Das as an 'Indian' poet?

Q 2: Discuss the life and works of Kamala Das.

Q 3: Do you think Kamala Das' writing was inspired by her troubled marriage? Discuss.

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UNIT 13: KAMALA DAS: “AN INTRODUCTION”

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Text of the Poem

13.4 Explanation of the Poem

13.5 Poetic Techniques

13.6 Let us Sum up

13.7 Further Reading

13.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

13.9 Model Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- explain the poem “An Introduction”
- write on the poetic techniques of Kamala Das
- appreciate the poem in its totality

13.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have discussed the life and literary contributions of one of the most prominent Indian English woman poets. This unit deals with Kamala Das’ poem “An Introduction”. How many of you feel that in our society women are oppressed and suppressed by men? Her poem “An Introduction” will be an interesting poem to read in this regard. Kamala Das often speaks with honesty and courage about the difficulties and problems of being a woman and a wife in a male-dominated Indian society. By the time you finish reading the poem “An Introduction”, you will be able to discuss these issues thoroughly. The poem “An Introduction” has been taken from the collection of poems *Summer in Calcutta* published in 1965. It is always better if you can read the other poems of Kamala Das and try to know the main themes and issues of Das as a poet.

13.3 TEXT OF THE POEM

You have already read in the previous unit that this poem, "An Introduction" has been taken from her poetry collection *Summer in Calcutta.* This poem has 58 lines and is often considered to be one of her best known English poems. Please read the poem as it appears below and try to comprehend what the poet wants to say.

"An Introduction"

I don't know politics but I know the names
Of those in power, and can repeat them like
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with
Nehru. I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your **mother tongue**. Why not leave
Me alone, **critics**, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its **distortions**, its **queernesses**
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as **cawing**
Is to crows or roaring is to lions, it
Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware. Not the **deaf**, **blind** speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing



Mother Tongue: the language that one first learn to speak as a child.

Critics: commonly refers to persons who express opinions about good and bad qualities of books, music, movies, etc.

Distort: to change the shape.

Queerness: state of being strange or unusual.

Cawing: loud, unpleasant sound made by crows.

Deaf: unable to hear anything or hear very well.

Blind: being unable to see.

Incoherent: unable to express oneself clearly.

Mutterings: complaints expressed privately rather than openly.



Funeral Pyre: Funeral or cremation ceremony.

Shrink: to become smaller.

Nympho: a woman who has, or wants to have, sex very often.

Sheath: any covering that fits closely over the blade of a knife/sword.

Funeral Pyre: Funeral or cremation ceremony.

Schizophrenia: a mental illness in which a person becomes unable to link thought, emotion and behaviour.

Nympho: a woman who has, or wants to have, sex very often.

Sheath: any covering that fits closely over the blade of a knife/sword.

Funeral pyre. I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. When
I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I **shrank**
Pitifully. Then… I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.
Be Army, or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
Chose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.
Don't play at **schizophrenia** or be a
Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when
Jilted in love… I met a man, loved him. Call
Him not by any name, he is every man
Who wants a woman who seeks love. In him… the hungry haste
Of rivers, in me… the ocean's tireless
Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,
The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and,
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself
If in this world, he is tightly packed like the
Sword in its **sheath**. It is I who drink lonely

Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a **rattle** in my throat. I am sinner, 55
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I 58



Rattle: make short sharp sounds quickly.

Betray: to hurt somebody who trusts you, especially by not being loyal or faithful to them.

Aches: pains.

13.4 EXPLANATION OF THE POEM

It is important to note that the poem "An Introduction" is one of the best remembered poems of Kamala Das. You will note that this poem presents two very significant themes of her poetry—the theme of isolation of the self and the attempt of the self to express itself in human terms. The poem begins with a statement that shows her frank distaste for politics, especially in the post-independence India. The irony is that in such a 'free' India, women have little importance and are not allowed to play any significant role in family, as well as, in society.

From the very beginning, the poet speaks for her 'Indian' self by asserting that she is an Indian by birth and in heart, as she says:

"I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one." (Lines: 4-6)

You will also be interested to note that the poem "An Introduction" is cited as a powerful argument of an Indian writer who wants to write in the English language. This is because, when the Indian poets began to write in English, there were questions raised against their use of English as a medium of expression. Self-made critics felt that poets born and brought up in India are not in a position to express themselves clearly in the English language because English is not their native language. She writes:

"Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother tongue" (Lines: 6-8)

Kamala Das does not listen to them and she instead argues:

"Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone.
It is half English, half
India, funny perhaps, but is honest,
It is as human as I am human" (Lines: 9-14).

In these lines the poet not only asserts her right to speak any of the three languages but also defends her choice to write in English. She does not like to be advised in this matter by any guardians, friends, relatives or anybody. This shows that Kamala Das is a bold writer and she is not afraid of anything. She further tells that she seeks freedom while using English because just like her mother tongue Malayalam, English is just another language. She further writes that English—

"Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware." (Lines: 18-20)

Many of Kamala Das' poems are famous for autobiographical elements. It is because she borrows her materials from her own life. "An Introduction" is also a poem where the autobiographical strain draws attention of the serious readers. The poem throws light on the growth and development of the poet in her family. As she gradually became older, her experiences led her to write poetry. As a child she lived a happy life with all her family members but the paradise of childhood was lost when she became a grown up girl and had to face the problems of life. As we find her saying:

"I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair." (Lines: 23-25)

Kamala Das is a poet well known for her individuality and self-exploration. With honesty and candour she asserts her right to live like a true individual with a distinctive identity of her own. She does not want

the traditional role of a housewife who is always busy with family matters. She raises her voice against the senseless traditions of **patriarchy** that would indict women as inferior and confined to domesticity. This idea is broadly indicated when she says:

"…Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in, Oh
Belong, cried the categorizers." (Lines: 33-36).

But, Kamala Das is fed up with such traditional roles of a woman. She is not ready to resign herself to such traditional roles that will disregard her individuality. Instead she chooses the role of an 'army' and also asks the same from the other fellow women. She therefore argues:

"Be Any, or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
Chose a name, a role." (Lines: 38-40)

In this way, Das has always challenged the traditional ideas and notions of society. On the one hand she is asserting her own identity, and on the other, she is attacking the domination of the male both in family and society. Such a stand in her poetry adds to her uniqueness as a poet and to the richness of her poetry.

The idea of choosing a role leads us to another theme in her poetry—**the theme of womanhood**. For Kamala Das, womanhood involves certain collective experiences of both male and female. Indian women, however, do not discuss these experiences, as they are afraid of the **taboos** of their society. She is very out-spoken and straightforward. This is implied in these lines:

"I met a man, loved him. Call
Him not by any name, he is every man
Who wants a woman who seeks love. In him…the hungry haste
Of rivers, in me…the ocean's tireless
Waiting." (Lines: 43-47)

If you read the poems of some of the Indian English poets, you will notice that the idea of Romantic love is treated without any such depth,



Patriarchy: system of society or country often controlled by the male head.

Taboos: prohibition on something that is regarded for religious or other reasons as not to be done, touched and used.

complexity and interest. Her poetry is filled with an unsurpassable openness about self expression that is evoked by her deeply personal poems. Her feelings of isolation and suffering are part of her larger-than-life personality. This is best reflected in these concluding lines of the poem:

"It is I who drink lonely
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner, I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I" (Lines: 51-58).

In such lines, Kamala Das emerges as a deeply personal poet who is aware of her own life in the fullest possible sense.

You must have seen in the above discussion that this poem, "An Introduction" reflects some of the most important ideas and themes of Kamala Das' poetry. From the very beginning, the 'I' persona dominates the poem. This is another way to assert her identity in a male dominated society. You can feel the presence of an unusual candour on the part of the poet to talk about herself and bring the readers to share her experiences as a woman victimised by a male dominated society, as an individual who will lead her life in her own terms. The poem "An Introduction" thus brings to the limelight the private experiences of a woman and suggests that her feelings of longing and loss of self identity are part of the experience of an Indian woman anywhere in India. That is why perhaps, critics have defined Kamala Das as a "confessional" poet.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Chose the correct answer :

a. The Poem "An Introduction" is–

1. Autobiographical
2. Political
3. Religious

b. The Poem "An Introduction" talks about

1. The Isolation of the Self
2. The womanhood of the poet
3. The individuality of the poet
4. Identity of a female poet in a male dominated world

Q2: Briefly discuss Kamala Das' sense of identity and self exploration? (60 words)

13.5 POETIC TECHNIQUES

Kamala Das' great achievements are seen in her particular use of a poetic style filled with idioms and her choice of verbs and syntax. This is a great accomplishment. There is a realistic overtone in whatever Das writes and this becomes clear from the graphic descriptions of her feelings for different people at different stages of her life in her poetry. Kamala Das' poetic style is seen through her use of images and symbols. However, unlike Das' other poems, which are significant for the use of imagery and symbols, this poem "An Introduction" is quite descriptive and explanatory in nature. Written in the style of 'free verse' this poem tells a basic story. However, while telling the story, the poet uses words and phrases, which are very easy to understand in the context of India. From the very beginning, Das stresses the point that she is an Indian and she should be given freedom while using English as a language of self expression. But, it is interesting to note how she extends her concerns from being a writer to being a woman and a wife in a male centric world. In order to express her exact feelings she has used images like "trees in storm", "monsoon clouds" or "blazing funeral pyre."

These are clearly symbolic of the helplessness and sufferings of a woman in her society. The atrocities and tortures done on the women are further intensified by the use of the image of a 'shrinking' woman who is unable to bear the weight of her own body. So, she decides not to remain submissive like other women. Nor does she like to be a "schizophrenic" or a "nympho" and is desperate to fulfill her physical and emotional needs.

Kamala Das is expert in using opposite ideas. She compares male "haste" with female "tirelessness" as she writes in the lines: "In him… the hungry haste/Of rivers, in me… the ocean's tireless/Waiting." (Lines: 45-47). This is also a striking example of Das' use of contradictions in her poems. Her use of metaphors and similes becomes explicit when she terms her husband/lover as tightly packed like a "the Sword in its sheath."(Line: 51) This is a beautiful way to symbolise the stubborn and dominating nature of the males she has met in her life as reflected in her poem. Like the sword inside the sheath all the male in our society like to remain rigid and stubborn. They will never change their place in society. Such a style of writing or use of words is an attempt made by the Indian writers to free themselves from the influences of the English poets. Kamala Das, by using such expressions, has tried to create a literary trend based on local speech in India. This has been a great achievement on the part of Kamala Das as a poet. Her poetry has less variety but her poetry is filled with intensity and emotional honesty.



13.6 LET US SUM UP



Feminine: of or like women or having the qualities or appearance considered to be characteristic of women.

You have just finished reading about the poem "An Introduction" by Kamala Das who has gained international fame by virtue of her bold expression of self identity and **feminine** urges. By this time, you find that Kamala Das has been a very significant Indian poet and her poem "An Introduction" is based on her own personal experiences as a woman, as a wife and as a writer. You have also gained necessary information

regarding her life and works. Her early poems are primarily concerned with her marriage, love life and desire for intimacy. There has always been a basic story which Kamala Das wants to tell in all her poetry. This is what is very obvious in her poem "An Introduction". The poem focuses on her life history as an Indian woman, as a mother and as a writer. You must have gained enough ideas regarding the point that by writing such a poem, Kamala Das tried to liberate the women from the bondage of slavery in a male dominated society.



13.7 FURTHER READING

1. Paniker, K. Ayyappa. (ed.). (1991). *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. Sahitya Akademi: New Delhi, 1991.
2. Parthasarathy R. (ed.). (1976). *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*. OUP: New Delhi, 1976.
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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamala_Surayya



13.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: a. Autobiographical.

b. All are correct.

Ans to Q2: Kamala Das is a poet well known for her individuality and self-exploration. Because she asserts her right to live like a true individual with a distinctive identity of her own. She does not like the traditional role of a house maker always busy with family matters. Instead she chooses to be a woman who should always challenge traditional ideas and notions of society.



13.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1: Give a summary of the poem "An Introduction".

Q2: Discuss the theme of isolation and womanhood that Kamala Das expresses in the poem "An Introduction".

Q3: Discuss the poetic style of Kamala Das as reflected in the poem "An Introduction".

Q4: How does Kamala Das criticise the male in her society in the poem?

Q5: Find out the autobiographical elements in the poem "An Introduction."

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UNIT 14: JAYANTA MAHAPATRA: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Jayanta Mahapatra : The Poet

14.3.1 His Life

14.3.2 His Works

14.4 Let us Sum up

14.5 Further Reading

14.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.7 Model Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- identify the poet Jayanta Mahapatra and write about his life
- name the poems written by Mahapatra
- assess the importance of Mahapatra as a poet

14.2 INTRODUCTION

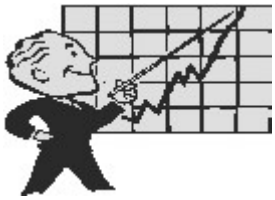
This unit deals with another Indian poet, Jayanta Mahapatra whose poetry draws upon his experiences and the cultural landscape of India, particularly his home state of Orissa. Here, we shall be discussing the life of the poet and reflect upon the major works that has established his reputation as one of the most popular poets in Indian English literature.

14.3 JAYANTA MAHAPATRA : THE POET

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the most celebrated Indian poets. His poetry is closely associated and identified with the place, Orissa. He is the first Indian poet to receive the Sahitya Akademi award for English poetry. He was also awarded the Padmashree. Now let us discuss his life and works of the poet.

14.3.1 His Life

Jayanta Mahapatra, was born on 22nd October 1928 in Cuttack, Orissa and he received his early education in English medium at Stewart school, Cuttack. Mahapatra comes from a Christian family. This piece of information is hardly known to the critics. His grandfather could be called the 'rice christian' because in the time of famine and starvation he sought refuge from a Christian mission and in the process adopted a new faith for himself and his family. After his Master's Degree in Physics, he joined as a teacher in 1949 and served in different Government colleges of Orissa. He retired in 1986 as a Professor of Physics at Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. Jayanta Mahapatra began writing poems rather late in comparison with his contemporaries but this late beginning does not in any way pose as a setback for him to emerge as a leading Indian English poet today.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Who is called a 'rice Christian '?

Q2: Does Mahapatra's late beginning affect his poetic career ?

Q3: When did Mahapatra retire and as what?

14.3.2 His Works

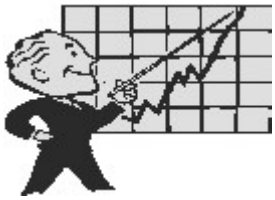
Jayanta Mahapatra began his literary career as a writer of short stories but very soon he turned to poetry and came to be recognised as one of the eminent Indo English poets. He has published about seventeen volumes of poetry. A selection of his best poems was published as a collection entitled *The Best of Jayanta Mahapatra* in 1995 edited by Dr. P. P. Raveendrawn. This collection covers the poetry written by him from 1971 to 2005. His seventeen volumes of verse are : *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten (1971); Swayamvara and other poems (1971) ; A Father's Hours (1976); A Rain of Rites (1976); Waiting (1979); The False*

Start (1980); Relationship (1980); Life Signs (1983); Dispossessed Nests (1986); Selected Poems (1987); Burden of Waves and Fruit (1988); Temple (1989); A Whiteners of Bone (1992); The Best Of Jayanta Mohapatra (1995); Shadow Space (1997); Bore Face (2001), and Random Descent (2005). It can be seen from the above mentioned titles that Jayanta Mahapatra has produced an impressive amount of poetry. A wide range and varieties of themes, style and technique mark his poetry from the beginning. For instance, his concerns with earth, life and language are found in his early poetry with fear and despair being the leitmotif. The first volume of poems *Close the Sky,Ten by Ten* has forty nine short lyrics which express love and loneliness as a dominant theme. The second volume of poems *Svayamvara & Other Poems* which includes thirty nine poems deals with fear of death, loneliness and human sufferings. The third volume *A Father's Hours* is about the relationship with a father. According to Bruce King (*The Shapes of Solitude: The poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra*,1986), Mahapatra's early poetry reflects his sense of belonging to his native Orissa .

The four volumes viz *Rain of Rites*, *Waiting*, *The False Start* and *Relationship* constitute his middle phase as a poet . The poems included in these volumes deal with his consciousness of tradition and change. They also reflect his moods of despair. Mahapatra himself writes in the blurb of the collection *Rain of Rites* that poems are "from a land where everything endures while everything changes". We encounter here poems dealing with a variety of subjects such as the year's first rains, rivers and villages, the poet's attachment to his land of birth (Orissa).

The later volumes reveal Mahapatra's meditative tone and experimentation with different images of the land. *The False Start* for example, goes back to the earlier themes of death, pain, place and race while the more memorable verse collection *Relationship* deals with the poet's relation with his native place, Orissa and its

history. It has been said that in this phase Jayanta Mahapatra's poetic style saw a new development and he changed from a romantic to a modernist. Some of the themes treated in the last eight volumes are: Hinduism, temples and their mythical structures, rituals of love and hope and even contemporary events such as the Bhopal gas tragedy. In the volume *Dispossessed Nests,* the poet is acutely aware of the chaotic situations surrounding us. Two more collections viz. *Shadow Space* (1997) and *Bare Face* (2001) followed the volume *The Best of Jayanta Mahapatra* and here Mahapatra's language seems to be more refined. In 2005, he published a collection of forty nine poems in a volume entitled *Random Descent*. The poems are divided into three sections. True to the title of the collection, the poems have a random selection of themes and images he has so far concerned himself within his illustrious poetic career. A significant feature in Jayanta's Mahapatra's recent poetry is the mystical tone striving to find a definite meaning in life.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q4: Name some of the famous collections of poetry by Mahapatra?

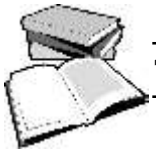
Q5: Which volumes constitute his middle phase?

Q6: What is the theme of Mahapatra's poetry collection *The False Start*?



14.4 LET US SUM UP

This unit discussed the life and works of the poet, Jayanta Mahapatra. As you have finished reading the unit, you are now able to list down the various poems and collections of poetry by the poet. Also, after a thorough reading of the unit you will be able to discuss the life and works of the poet in a detailed manner.



14.5 FURTHER READING

1. Pandey, Mithilesh K. (1999). *Contemporary Indian Literature*: A *Humanistic Perspective*. Kalyani Publishers : New Delhi.
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14.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: He, who in the time of famine and starvation, seeks refuge from a Christian mission and adopts this new faith can be called a "rice Christian".

Ans to Q2: No, the late beginning does not in any way pose as a setback for him to emerge as a leading Indo-Anglican poet today.

Ans to Q3: Mahapatra retired as a Professor of Physics at Ravenshaw College Cuttack in 1986.

Ans to Q4: *Close The Sky, Ten By Ten, Swayamvara and Other Poems, A Father's House, A Rain of Rites, Waiting, The False Start, Relationship, Life Signs, Dispossessed Nests* among other volumes of Mahapatra.

Ans to Q5: The four volumes viz. *Rain of Rites, Waiting, The False Start, Relationship* constitute his middle phase as a poet.

Ans to Q6: "The False Start" goes back to the earlier themes of death, rain, place and race.



14.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a short note on the poetic works of Jayanta Mahapatra.

Q 2: What are the common features of Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry?

Q 3: Give a detailed analysis of Jayanta Mahapatra as an Indian English poet.

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UNIT 15: JAYANTA MAHAPATRA: "DAWN AT PURI"

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Text of the Poem

15.4 Context of the Poem

15.5 Explanation of the Poem

15.6 Style and Language

15.7 Poetic Techniques

15.8 Let us Sum up

15.9 Further Reading

15.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

15.11 Model Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- explain the poem "Dawn at Puri"
- explain the context of the poem
- describe the poetic devices and the language employed by the poet
- evaluate and appreciate the poem in its totality

15.2 INTRODUCTION

After a discussion on the life and works of Jayanta Mahapatra in Unit 14, this unit makes an attempt to acquaint you with the poem "Dawn at Puri" composed by Jayanta Mahapatra who has occupied a prominent place among the Indian poets writing in English. You may have read some of his important poems like "Again, One Day", "Walking by the River", "Indian Summer", "Hunger", etc. Mahapatra, in his poems, writes more about Orissa than about India as a whole. You must have certainly heard about or visited Puri sometime in your life and here

visit Puri through the eyes of Mahapatra. In the poem under discussion, Mahapatra attacks age-old traditions and practices which make people suffer rather than give peace and solace.

We will discuss in detail the stated issues in the following sub-units. We will also analyse the poem in a critical fashion which will help you make sense of the intention of the poet behind writing this poem. After reading this unit, you will be interested in reading his poems and also about his eventful life.

15.3 TEXT OF THE POEM

Endless crow noises.

A skull on the **holy sands**

Tilts its **empty *country*** towards hunger.

White –clad **widowed women**

Past the centres of their lives

Are waiting to enter the great temple.

Their austere eyes

Stare like those caught in a net,

Hanging by the dawn's shining **strands of faith**

The frail early light catches

Ruined , leprous shells leaning against one another ,

A mass of crouched faces without names,

And suddenly breaks out of my hide

Into the smoky blaze of a sullen solitary pyre

That fills my aging mother:

Her last wish to be cremated here

Twisting uncertainty like light

On the ***shifting sands***.

Glossary :

Holy sands: The sun bathed beach of Puri.

Empty Hunger: It is the back of the skull which is empty. Also represents bowl of a beggar. Here it talks about the material hunger of people who throng the temple premises.

Widowed Women: Widows who live a life of austerity in temple premises.

Strands of faith: Here the poet talks about cruelty in customs. Widows live a self imprisoning, austere life which reflects in-humanity in customs.

***Twisting uncertainity* :** It means that rational explanation of customs and traditions cannot justify the faith of custom – ridden devotees.

***Shifting sands* :** It refers to time.

15.4 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

"Dawn at Puri" is taken from the collection *A Rain of Rites* . The poem is set in Puri in Orissa which is the holy city of Lord Jagannath. *A Rain of Rites* is a collection of poems which Jayanta Mahapatra wrote in the middle phase of his poetic career and is shaped by the cultural heritage of Orissa in particular and India in general. *The rain*, as suggested by the title is the dominant metaphor in this volume of poetry. The rites and rituals here are concerned with priests and temples, widows, cremations, even the fate of Indian women is symbolised here through various images. Jayanta Mahapatra, like **Arun Kolatkar** in *Jejuri,* is disappointed with the hollowness of traditional practices and customs. Here in this poem Mahapatra depicts the holy city Puri which is famous as one of the most revered pilgrimage towns for Hindus.

15.5 EXPLANATION OF THE POEM

The poem "Dawn at Puri" describes the familiar landscape in the holy city of Puri. Before we begin to discuss the poem, let us note that

Mahapatra is deeply rooted in India and he cannot forget his culture and ethos in which he was born. Though the language of expression is English but his sensibility is 'Oriya'. We repeat this point because in order to comprehend the prescribed poem it is important to understand his philosophy while he wrote this poem. Here in the poem under discussion, Puri is the living 'protagonist' for him. Puri is not only a setting but also a protagonist because he presents a graphic description of Puri as a central character. Here Puri is personified.

In Puri, we find a stretch of beach called Swargadwara or 'Gateway to heaven' where the dead are cremated. Many pious Hindus and widows consider it possible to attain salvation by dying at Puri. Mahapatra states: "Her last wish to be cremated here/ twisting uncertainly like light/ on the shifting sands."

Puri is not only famous as a place for four ' dhams' or 'sacred cities' but also for the 'math' or the monastery set up by Shankaracharya. Lord Jaggannath is the main deity in Puri who is in the form of Lord Vishnu. The way Mahapatra delineates the events and incidents in the poem shows us that he disapproves of what is going on under the cover of tradition and practices. You will notice how life "lies like a mass of crouched faces without names *"*and you can also see that how people are trapped by faith underlined in the expression "caught in a net". The shells on the sand are "ruined", "leprous" is suggestive of decadence and infirmity. The poem evokes loss of identity, anonymity, death, disease and decadence. As I have mentioned above, most of the Hindus wished to be cremated in the land of Lord Vishnu. The speaker's mother also had such a last wish, the wish to be cremated in Puri. This is fulfilled by the effort of her son in the blazing funeral pyre which is seen as "sullen*"* and "solitary*".* The poem winds up on an uncertain note like the corpse of his dead mother.

Don't you think that the title evokes many interpretations? The title of the poem is very suggestive as it does not talk about only one particular dawn which might have been particularly unpleasant because one's mother is not cremated everyday. The poet is suggesting that all

dawns at Puri are more or less similar with dead mothers being cremated everyday and crows' cawing along with skulls and hunger indicating poverty ridden India which shows absolute "Indianness". The poem is about feelings and compassion for the people who suffer. Thus the poem is really a scathing attack on tradition and traditional practices which are mostly ruthless and biased. The poet bears no sympathy for rituals and hollow traditions. What we notice in the poem is basically ruthlessness of tradition, the indifference of the society and fossilled Hindu culture.



LET US KNOW

Jayanta Mahapatra like other Indian English poets writes many poems with specific Indian titles, "Indian Summer", "Evening in an Orissa Village", "The Orissa Poems", etc. Many of his poems like "Indian Summer" portrays the Indian landscape and the changing seasons.



ACTIVITY 15.1

1. Can you think of some other poem where the title depicts a landscape of India?
2. Do you feel that you have now understood the poem better? Try to explain it to another friend of yours with a different perspective and see how well you have understood it.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: What is the poet trying to convey about the rituals connected with Puri through the poem "Dawn at Puri"?

Q2: What is the significance of the title 'Dawn at Puri'?

15.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

This is a short poem of 18 lines consisting of six stanzas of three lines each. A distinctive feature of Jayanta Mahapatra's style in general is the symbolic and opaque manner of speech in place of a direct, descriptive mode. Symbols have a functional use in his poems for expressing what cannot be easily expressed. His choice of diction is generally simple. The language of Jayanta Mahapatra is descriptive. Language is so wonderfully knitted that it presents a graphic description of Puri. The language is intricate yet free-flowing. The craftsmanship of the poet is revealed through his style and the way he plays with the language. The free verse used by him gives to the poem a certain ease and fluency. His choice of diction is generaly complex. He uses abstractions like love, solitude, death, etc. In "Dawn At Puri'", the dawn itself is a metaphor for diverse human activities, in the beach and near the temple. The "widowed women" with "austere eyes" is a fine imagery to suggest the emptiness of the lives of the widows who line up early in the morning near the temple door.



LET US KNOW

In the poem "Taste For Tomorrow" from the volume *Waiting,* we find a vignette of Puri with many symbols and images of reality.

At Puri, the crows
The one wide steet
Lolls out like a giant tongue.
Five faceless lepers move aside
As a priest passes by.
And at the street's end
The crowds thronging the temple door.
A huge holy flower.

15.7 POETIC TECHNIQUES

"Dawn at Puri" is a beautiful poem giving full play to images that are vivid and hard hitting. The sentences are purely descriptive and you can notice that whatever the poet has described we feel as though it is happening before our eyes. Are you able to literally visualise Puri? The poet beautifully creates the mood leading from one imagery to the other. The "skull on the holy sands/tilts its empty country towards hunger" suggests the hunger of the entire nation. The images are mostly negative and critical. "Ruined, leprous" suggests decay and sickness. The image of blazing funeral pyre is suggestive of death that keeps happening every moment, everyday, everywhere. The images reflect, anger and a sense of decadence; images are realistic and they capture the contours of the temple environment. "Dawn at Puri" exemplifies the fact that the poet opens up questions beyond the temple without supplying answers. The title of the poem is also very suggestive. In this connection we can say that Mahapatra's images are drawn from a) the external world of phenomena, b) the surrealistic world. The image for him is his typical way of responding to experiences. In the poem "Dawn at Puri" the external reality of the natural landscape, be it the long stretching beach or the temple scene ("white clad, widowed women……. Waiting to enter the temple") as such does not seem to be important. Nature is simply a metaphor for human conditions. Therefore, the "beach" image acquires a universal significance for death. ("Ruined, leprous shells leaning against one another, mass of Ruined, leprous shells leaning against one another, mass of crouched faces; sullen solitary pyre".



LET US KNOW

Mahapatra says: "Today's poem utilises a number of images and symbols to form a whole leaving the reader to extricate himself with the valid meaning and argument from them. This is true of much of the poetry that has been written.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3: Comment on the poetic techniques used by the poet?

Q4: Explain "Ruined , leprous"?



15.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have read about the great Indian English poet Jayanta Mahapatra and his poem "Dawn at Puri". By now you must have understood that Mahapatra's poetry is shaped by Oriyan sensibility. "Dawn at Puri" captures the curves of a morning landscape on the beach of Puri. Mahapatra's depiction of the temple environment is both absorbing and realistic. In fact, this presentation of the temple ambience reminds us of Arun Kolatkar's "Jejuri". The images of crows, the skull, the widows, the lepers, etc. raise important questions beyond the temple. You must have noticed how Mahapatra in this poem juxtaposes memory, faith and metaphysical belief. You have then learnt about the various poetic techniques employed by the poet. An explanation of the poem will enable you with deeper understanding and also a short note on the style and language. You should now be able to illustrate, explain and appreciate Jayanta Mahaptra's poetry in general and the poem in particular effectively. The learner can read more to appreciate other Indian English poets.



15.9 FURTHER READING

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15.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: The poet tries to convey a scathing attack on tradition and traditional practices which are mostly ruthless and biased, the indifference of the society and the fossilised Hindu culture.

Ans to Q2: With the title of the poem, the poet suggests that all the dawns in Puri are more or less similar with dead mothers being cremated everyday and not just one particular dawn which might have been particularly unpleasant.

Ans to Q3: Mahapatra uses visualisation and images through words drawn from the external world of phenomena and the surrealistic world. Also the title of the poem is itself very suggestive.

Ans to Q4: The meaning suggests the mass of broken remnants of shells which is compared symbolically to death and sickness.



15.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1: What is the central idea of the poem "Dawn at Puri"?

Q2: In the poem "Dawn at Puri" what are the images you can find?

Q3: Give a detailed analysis of Jayanta Mahapatra as an Indian English poet.

Q4: What is the significance of the following lines:

"Endless crow noises.
A skull on the holy sands"
Tilts its empty country towards hunger.
White –clad widowed women
Past the centres of their lives
Are waiting to enter the great temple

Q5: How does an evening end in Puri ? Comment.

Q6: "Her last wish …..shifting sands". Explain these lines.

*** ***** ***



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