UNIT 10: APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction to Indian English Literature

10.3 Major Literary Forms and Works

10.3.1 Indian English Fiction

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10.3.3 Indian English Drama

10.4 Some of the Prominent Indian English Writers

10.5 Let us Sum up

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10.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.8 Model Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- gain an overview on the development of Indian English Literature
- identify some of the major writers as well as their contribution to Indian English Literature
- find out the major literary forms in Indian English Literature
- develop further interest in exploring Indian English Literature

10.2 INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

The present unit briefly traces the development of Indian English Literature and highlights some of the important literary practices, as well as, some of the representative Indian English writers. The relatively new domain of Indian English Literature has just seen only a century and a half

in terms of its growth and development. But it is interesting to note the way in which it has undergone remarkable changes in relation to narratives, stylistic techniques and literary trends. The learner will be interested to know that the term 'Indian English Literature' has witnessed lot of debates among critics and intellectual thinkers before it came to be used widely. In an introduction to *Indian Writing in English* (2007), A.K. Srinivasan takes up the difficulty that lies in the usage of certain terms such as 'Anglo-Indian' Literature which might strike many as a rather "racial connotation" (2) or another term namely "Indo-Anglican Literature" which "strikes many as a not altogether happy expression" (3). However, the terms Indian Writing in English (IWE) or Indian English Literature (IEL) are more readily accepted terms and shall be referred to in the present unit.

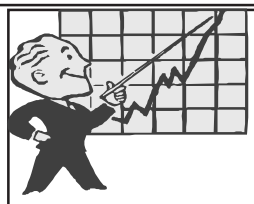
It is important to note that the first published literary work in the history of Indian English Literature is considered to have been Sake Dean Mahomet's *Travels of Dean Mahomet* in 1793 which was based on his travel experiences. Some of the early crop of Indian English writers and poets are namely Ram Mohan Roy, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Kisari Mohan Ganguli, Dhan Gopal Mukherji, Romesh Chunder Dutt, Manmohan Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Henry Loius Vivian Derozio, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Das and Manohar Malgonkar among others. These writers had variously enriched the treasures of Indian English writings through their foresight, intellectual engagements and literary contributions. Most of their works encompassed themes of nation and nationalism, individualism and patriotism, nostalgic memories and multiplicity of experiences in their own cultural milieu. Those were the early beginnings of Indian English Literature and in addition to that the movement of Bengal Renaissance had a shaping influence on it. The Bengal Renaissance took place in the late 19th century and the early 20th century when India was still struggling for independence.

The privileged noble or aristocratic families of the nineteenth century were exposed to both the Eastern and Western worlds in terms of education

which also explains their exposure to Indian English Literature. It is significant to note that the Renaissance that first took place in Bengal had brought a wave of change in the socio-cultural and intellectual perspectives of the privileged and elite classes of Bengal who had access to education, opportunities and the keys to the outer world. The word Renaissance (*Rinascimento* in Italian), means "rebirth" or "to be reborn" and it refers to the rebirth of learning. It also refers to the concept of "enlightenment" in a particular period of history or rather the flowering of new knowledge. The period of intellectual 'enlightenment' was defined by great Indian figures such as Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee among several other leading figures.

The movement characterised significant changes in the older modes of practices, conventions and traditions which were replaced by enlightened consciousness. Thus, the Renaissance was both 'reformist' and 'revisionist' in spirit and during this period certain practices were completely abolished. The practice of 'polygamy' was prevalent in the Indian society in which a man was entitled to marry several women, along with the 'dowry system' in place which involved a customary 'bride-price' or financial offers from the bride's side of the family to the groom. To make it worse, there was no protest against the prevalent practices of 'Sati', a social custom in which widows were to walk into their husband's pyre. That was when leading figures such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated against such practices in the name of social customs and introduced social reformation that uprooted these ill-practices from the society.

Thus, in time, changes had swept across all sections of Indian society, starting with the intellectuals of Bengal whose ideals literally defined the spirit of the movement. As an offshoot of the Renaissance, the socio-religious movement of the 'Brahmo Samaj' had developed significantly which was led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy with its unique confluence of spiritual and intellectual thought. Finally, the major contribution of the Bengal Renaissance was the growth and development in Indian Writings in English. The surge of enlightenment that took place in Bengal during this period had greatly enriched Indian English Literature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Who is considered to be the first Indian English writer? Name his work.

Q2. When did the Bengal Renaissance take place?

Q3. What did the movement of Bengal Renaissance characterise?

10.3 SOME OF THE IMPORTANT LITERARY FORMS AND WORKS

The following subsection will provide you with a glimpse of some of the important literary forms in Indian English Literature such as fiction, poetry and drama. Although, it is not covered in the present unit, Indian English Literature is also enriched with various significant literary forms such as non-fictional prose, essays, short stories, children's literature and biographies among various other genres which the learner may further explore.

10.3.1 Indian English Fiction

Fiction is one of the most prominent literary genres in the area of Indian English Literature, given the fact that the nineteenth century western influences had stirred the interests of Indian English writers to explore and also to come up with their own original works in English. With the translation of world classics, the growing readership and the influence of intellectual movements such as the 'Bengal Renaissance', English fiction came to be accorded as much importance, as the well-established literary practices which were in the form of the regional novels written in a wide variety of Indian vernacular languages. Some of the famous early names in novel writing were Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore while the trio- Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao are recognized as the most prominent novelists of the 19th century.

Some of the renowned novelists of the twentieth and twenty first century are Kamala Markandaya, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Aravind Adiga, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Namita Gokhale, Anjum Hassan, Bharati Mukherjee, Sudha Murthy, Amish Tripathy, Amit Chaudhuri, Rohinton Mistry, Romila Thapar, Shashi Tharoor among several others. While the early narratives included themes on the nation, nationalism, social realism and portrayal of everyday Indian experiences, the modern novels introduced themes of multiculturalism, individualism, alienation, marginal discourses, gender discourses, eco critical perspectives and experiences of modern life.

Here, you may also note that two of the Indian Nobel Laureates in the field of Literature were Rabindranath Tagore in 1913 "because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West" and V.S. Naipaul in 2001 "for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories" as mentioned in their citations.

10.3.2 Modern Indian English Poetry

The growth or development of Modern Indian English poetry or Indo-English poetry opens up fresh perspectives on both the collective commonalties and differences of everyday experiences in the Indian cultural milieu. Modern Indian English poetry encompasses a variety of Indian themes and aspects of the modern Indian mindscape that finds itself at the crossroads of change and experience of cultural shifts. A glimpse of the multiple-facets of Indian life and the Indian experience is reflected through the creative chips of distinct 'poetical expressions' that are put together in the form of an interesting mosaic. Also, this mosaic is well inclusive of the Indian diaspora which experience the tug and pull of 'longing' and 'belonging'

as we find in the poetry of Indian poets such as A.K Ramanujan, Agha Shahid Ali or Vikram Seth among others.

Some of the well-known nineteenth century poets who had emerged from Bengal were Aurobindo Ghose (better known as Sri Aurobindo), Rabindranath Tagore (referred to as 'Gurudev') and Sarojini Naidu (popularly known as the 'Nightingale of India'). The early poetical writings developed in the hands of several other poets from Bengal such as Kashi Prosad Ghosh, Nobo Kissen Ghosh, Harindranath Chattopadhyay, Romesh Chunder Dutt and Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Toru Dutt was yet another promising talent from Bengal who suffered an untimely demise at a very young age. In its initial stages of development, Indian English Poetry reflected historical and mythological themes but it also came to embody a nationalistic spirit, charged with a patriotic fervour during the period of pre-independence.

One of the leading poets of the early 19th century was the Anglo-Indian poet Henry Louis Vivian Derozio who was influential in leading the 'Young Bengal Movement.' It comprised a group of radical intellectuals charged with patriotism and intellectual fervour, many of whom also included Derozio's college students notoriously known as 'Derozians.' Some of the prominent 20th century poets are A. K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, Keki N. Daruwalla, Kamala Das, Eunice De Souza, Dom Moraes, R. Parthasarathy, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Adil Jussawala, Vikram Seth and Gieve Patel. Several of these poets wrote/write poetry in two or more languages besides being involved in translation.

Some of the Indian English poets to have received the Sahitya Akademi Award are: Jayanta Mahapatra for his anthology titled *Relationship* (1981), Nissim Ezekiel for *Latter Day Psalms* (1983), Keki N. Daruwalla for *The Keeper of the Dead* (1984), Kamala Das for *Collected Poems* (1985), Dom Moraes for *Serendip* (1994) and A.K Ramanujan for *Collected Poems* (1999). Also, Rabindranath Tagore was one of the first Indian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, for his collection of poetry titled *Gitanjali* (1910) translated from Bengali into English as *Song Offerings.* You may

consider reading some of these anthologies or select poems based on your interest and subjective choice.

10.3.3 Indian English Drama

Indian English Drama draws heavily from the rich Indian dramatic traditions that were well-defined in the Indian treatise of dance and drama also known as the *Natyashastra*, written by Bharata Muni between 200 BCE to 200 CE. Although, the Sanskrit dramatic traditions saw wide practices in the 15th century, yet it was interrupted by several invasions that took place in India following that period. However, an interest in regional theatre came to be developed and the 17th century saw the rise of the 'folk theatre' which were mostly located in a wide variety of cultures across various states of India in the form of colourful and dramatic performances.

Some of these folk performances were: *Bhandya Thar* in Kashmir; *Bhangra* in Punjab; *Tamasha* in Maharashtra; *Nach* in Madhya Pradesh; *Videshiya* in Bihar; *Raas* and *Jhoomar* in Rajasthan; *Bhavai* in Gujarat; *Ram Leela* in Northern India; *Hari Katha* in Southern India, *Yakshagana* in Karnataka, *Kudiyattam* in Kerala; *Jatra* in Bengal; *Abhiyanat* and *Ankiyanat* in Assam; *Waari Leeba* in Manipur among other regional variations of folk theatre. However, Indian English Drama gained a formidable shape owing to the significant influence of the Bengal Renaissance as well as, the establishment of 'Rangmanch Theatre' by Prasanna Kumar Thakur at Calcutta in 1831 which staged several dramatic works including the plays of Rabindranath Tagore.

The learner may note that some of the leading Indian English dramatists of the 19th and 20th century were Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, Harindranath Chattopadhyay, A.S.P Ayyar, T.P. Kailasam, Bharati Sarabhai, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Asif Currimbhoy among others. The trio of contemporary Indian English drama – Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani and Vijay Tendulkar are considered to have taken modern Indian English Drama to newer heights. They not only began portraying significant social issues of contemporary times in their writings but also broadened the scope of dramatic and theatrical performances by introducing

unconventional subject and themes, innovative methods of performance and stagecraft derived widely from the practices of world theatre.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q4. Who were considered the most prominent trio of Indian English novelists?

Q5. Name the two Indian Nobel Laureates for Literature?

Q6. Make a list of some of the prominent Indian English poets of the 20th century.

Q7. Name the modern trio of Indian dramatists who took Indian English drama to newer heights.

10.4 SOME OF THE PROMINENT INDIAN ENGLISH WRITERS

The present subsection shall take up a few of the leading writers in Indian English Literature spanning several decades. The learner must note that within the scope of the unit, it is rather difficult to include many of the important writers, yet there is an attempt in this subsection to provide you with a brief glance into the representative works of some of the writers in the literary genres of short stories, novel, poetry and drama. It is suggested to the learner to explore the remarkable works of the other prominent writers in English.

Rabindranath Tagore (7 May 1861- 7 August 1941)

Rabindranath Tagore was raised in a prominent Zamindari family at the Jorasanko Mansion which was the patriarchal home of the Tagores in Calcutta. As a young boy, Tagore grew up in a cultural atmosphere enriched by his exposure to literature, music and theatre from an early age. Tagore was a man of multiple talent and abilities as a poet, author, philosopher, playwright, painter, music composer, educationist, and a social reformer. He believed in taking the best of both the eastern and the western worlds, embodying what is considered as some of the broadened ideals of the Renaissance.

He wrote his first set of poems at the tender age of eight under the pseudonym of “Bhanusingha”. It was in the year 1913 that he had received the ‘Nobel Prize for Literature’ for his anthology of poems titled *Gitanjali* translated from Bengali to English as *Song Offerings*. Also, Tagore wrote

both novellas and novels, some of his best works are *Kal Mrigaya* (1882), *Rajarshi* (1887), *Noukadubi* (1906), *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*) (1916), *Choker Bali* (*A Grain of Sand*) (1923), *Sravan Gatha* (1934), *Malancha* (1934), *Char Adhyay* (1934), *Shesher Kobita* (*Farewell My Friend*) (1929). In his novels, Tagore portrayed the Bengali society centering on themes of man and nature, traditions and social concerns, relations and emotions. Some of his well-known plays are *Dak Ghar* (*The Post Office*) (1912), *Phalguni* (1916), *Muktadhara* (1922), *Raktakarabi* (The Red Oleanders) (1926) and *Natir Puja* (1926) among others.

R. K. Narayan (10 October 1906 - 13 May 2001)

One of the most renowned figures in the realm of Indian English writings is R.K. Narayan. He is famed for his novels, short fiction and non-fiction writings which gave him world wide acclaim. His complete name is 'Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami.' Born in Madras, Narayan spent much of his childhood in the care of his maternal grandmother. From an early age, he developed a keen interest in observation and writing that had eventually led him to be discovered by his future mentor and guide, the English novelist Graham Greene. It was Greene who had first sent the manuscript of *Swami and Friends* (1935) for publication in London. It was in this novel that Narayan had first created the fictional town of 'Malgudi' with some of the most memorable characters in Indian English fiction.

To list a few of his best novelistic works, they are *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The English Teacher* (1945), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The Vendor of Sweets* and *Grandmother's Tale* (1992) among others. His short stories were as striking as his novels such as *Malgudi Days* (1942), *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* (1947), *Lawley Road and Other Stories* etc. Moreover, the non-fictional works such as *My Dateless Diary* (1960), *My Days* (1974), *The Story-Teller's World* (1989) provide some interesting glimpses on the writer's life. Narayan received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1958 and the Padma Bhushan in the year 1964.

A.K. Ramanujan (16 March 1929 – 13 July 1993)

A. K. Ramanujan was brought up in a traditional Srivaishnava Brahmin family. Although, we know the poet by his abbreviated name, his complete name was Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan. He had first

developed his love for poetry during his college years when he read Kannada poetry and began to experiment with the form in Kannada, Tamil and English, for which he came to be considered as a talented tri-lingual poet. He was proficient in several languages such as Sanskrit, Kannada, Tamil, Telegu apart from English. The kind of knowledge he had acquired with his interests as a 'philologist' and a 'researcher', equipped him with an ability to write and experiment across these languages and a variety of literary forms.

Some of his major works are: *The Striders* (1966), *Relations* (1971), *Second Sight* (1986), *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (1967), *Speaking of Siva, Kannada Bhakti Poems by Virasaiva Saints* (1973), *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981), *Poems of Love and War* (1985), *Folktales From India*, *Oral Tales From Twenty Indian Languages* (1991) and *Samskara* (1976) among others. He received a Mac Arthur Fellowship and was also awarded the Padma Shri in the year 1976 by the Indian Government.

Kamala Das (31 March 1934-31 May 2009)

Kamala Das is one of the most prominent voices to have emerged in the history of English Literature. She was born in Thrissur, Kerala to a Malayali family and was mostly brought up in Calcutta and their ancestral home at Punnyurkulam. Kamala Surayya was her maiden name before her marriage and she wrote under the pen name of 'Madhavikutty'. She was a talented writer and a columnist who wrote in both Malayali and English. However, from her early years she was particularly drawn towards poetry and her creations revealed that she was a gifted poet. One of her inspirations was her poet-uncle, Nalapat Narayana Menon. Some of her most powerful writings are reflected in the volumes of her poetry. Owing to her bold and fearless writings, she is considered to be a 'confessional poet', often compared to women poets like Sylvia Plath and Margaret Dumas.

Some of her best literary works are *The Sirens* (1964), *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), *Yaa Allah* (2001), *Alphabet of Lust* (1977), *Tonight, This Savage Rite* (1979), *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* and her own autobiography *My Story* (1976). She was nominated and shortlisted for the

Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984. Her awards include Award of Asian PEN Anthology in 1964, Kerala Sahitya Academy Award in 1969, Sahitya Academy Award in 1985, Asian Poetry Prize in 1998 and Kent Award for English Writing from Asian Countries (1999) among a few others.

Girish Karnad (19 May 1938 present)

Girish Raghunath Karnad is a contemporary Indian playwright, writer, activist, director and actor who has received wide acclaim for his dramatic works, stagecraft and his theatrical performances. Karnad was born in Matheran, Maharashtra to a Brahmin family and spent his childhood days in Dharwad, Karnataka to where his family had shifted. From an early childhood, he was fascinated by the theatrical folk performances in the villages of Karnataka which were the shaping influences not only upon his dramatic personality but also the plays which he authored.

Karnad largely draws inspiration from Indian history and mythology while also raising significant issues through his works. Some of his major works are " *Tughlaq* (1964), *Hayavadana (The Transposed Heads)* (1971), *Naga Mandala* (*Play with Cobra*) (1988), *Agni Mattu Male* (*Fire and the Rain*) (2002). Karnad was conferred Padma Shri in 1974, Padma Bhushan (1992) and the Jyanpith Award in the year 1998.



10.5 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit, the learner will be able to gain a brief idea on some of the early developments in Indian English Literature. Through this unit, you are able to explore some of the major literary forms and trends. Also, the unit has familiarised you to some of the prominent Indian English writers and their selected literary works. Therefore, a detailed reading of the unit will enable you to gain an insight into both the historical and intellectual developments in the context of Indian English Literature.



10.6 FURTHER READING

1. Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa. (2007). *Indian Writing in English.* New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.

2. Naik, M.K and Shyamala A. Narayan. (2007). *Indian English Literature 1980-2000: A Critical Survey.* New Delhi: Pencraft International.

10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: Sake Dean Mahomet. His work titled *Travels of Dean Mahomet* in 1793.

Ans to Q2: It took place in the late 19th and the early 20th century.

Ans to Q3: It characterised significant changes in the older modes of practices which were replaced by enlightened consciousness.

Ans to Q4: Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao.

Ans to Q5: Rabindranath Tagore and V.S. Naipaul.

Ans to Q6: A. K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekial, Keki N. Daruwalla, Kamala Das, Eunice De Souza, Dom Moraes, R. Parthasarathy, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Adil Jussawala, Vikram Seth and Gieve Patel.

Ans to Q7: Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani and Vijay Tendulkar



10.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Give a detailed explanation of the major literary forms in Indian English Literature.

Q2. Write short notes on the following:

a. Bengal Renaissance

b. Indian English Novel

c. Indian English Poetry

d. Indian English Drama

Q3. Write a detailed note on some of the prominent Indian English writers as prescribed in your course.

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UNIT 11: INTERPRETING POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 What is Poetry?

11.4 Language and Syntax in Poetry

11.5 Use of Words in Poetry

11.6 Interpretation of a Poem

11.7 Let us Sum up

11.8 Further Reading

11.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.10 Model Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- identify poetry as a major literary genre
- discuss the art of writing and receiving poetry
- analyse the language of poetry
- interpret a poem

11.2 INTRODUCTION

The response to poetry as the impulse to write it, is often innate. That is perhaps not surprising. After all, even the most significant scientific discoveries are ultimately intuitive. So why not get to know what it is all about? But why poetry? Can't we do it all with good old prose? The answer, history tells us, is a definitive 'no'. Our earliest extant literature is poetry, be it the *Ramayana* or the *Illiad*. It would not do either to ignore the centuries of oral literature before the first word came to be written. Poetry gives us pleasure and an insight into reality. It enriches our understanding of life.

Poetry, as W. B. Yeats says, is the social act of the solitary man. It is about man in society. A poem is 'an answering look' given back by the poet to life:

"Life fixed him, wandering on the stair of glass,
With its attentive eyes….
A hatching that stared and demanded an answering look."
(Wallace Stevens)

The best way to know poetry and to equip ourselves to receive it is by studying its history and evolution. Not every one can be a musician but an idea of its elements makes our response richer. Poetry is written with words and it is, therefore, limited. It is limited because the words belong to a particular language. Poetic language and the special use of words in poetry are crucial areas of our study. A word in a poem is different from a lexical entry. It has an emotional hinterland. Poetry extends the significance of words.

No theme is inherently poetic. There is, in fact, a movement in poetry from the Romantics till our day against the conventionally poetic. Poetic images and expressions are allowed to harden to bring them closer to the struggles of life. Life in the country is different from life in the city as Romantic poetry, written with the ease and assurance of the countryside is different from modern poetry reflecting contemporary urban disillusion. The locale or setting of poetry also determines its character. City poetry is often more celebratory. We will also familiarise ourselves with the 'grammar' or technicalities of poetry and its vitally metaphoric language. We shall look at some poets at work to see how practitioners revise and rework their material. In the end, it is an invitation to pleasure or else why bother with it at all.

11.3 WHAT IS POETRY?



Genre: A literary type like epic, drama, satire, novel etc.

Poetry is a major **genre** or branch of imaginative literature. It is the most concentrated and intense form of communication. With a poem, we want to communicate something to someone, or to many. A successful communication is that where meanings are mutually available. We have, therefore, to underline the primacy of meaning in poetry. A paraphrase of a

poem may give us some idea about the poem but it is not the poem. A close reading or critical appreciation may make the poem more immediately available to us but nothing can be a substitute for the poem. Let us consider the last of Wordsworth's *Lucy Poems*, 'A Slumber did my Spirit Seal', called the 'sublime epitaph' by Coleridge.

"A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.
No motion has she now, no farce;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round is earth's diurnal course,
With rocks and stones and trees. "

The structural basis of the poem is clearly the contrast between the two verses. Verse one deals with the past (there are no less than four verbs in the past tense- *did*, *had*, *seemed*, *could*). Lucy had been such a vital person that the possibility of her growing old or dying had not crossed Wordsworth's mind. Verse two concerns the present (in addition to the 'now' in the first line, there are three main verbs in the present tense- *has*, *hears*, *sees*). Lucy is dead. The invulnerable creature is now as lifeless and immobile as rocks and stones. The contrast is emphasized by the repetition of 'earth'. Lucy, who had seemed immune from the passage of 'earthly years', must now, submit to 'earth's diurnal course'. So, far from escaping the 'touch' of years, she is now undergoing a daily contact with the earth. The use of the solemn Latinism 'diurnal', the only three-syllable word in this mainly monosyllabic poem, completes the contrast. But the final impression the poem leaves is not of two contrasting moods, but of a single mood mounting to a climax in the pantheistic magnificence of the last two lines. The identity of the metrical pattern in the two verses is paralleled by the virtual identity of the word-order, helping to reconcile the moods. The gap between the two verses is also bridged by the negatives. As the first line really means 'I was not mentally awake', all the sentences are essentially negative propositions, until we reach the tremendous positive of the last

two lines. The **alliteration** in the last two lines implies that the **pantheistic** universe is solidly one. The all importance of meaning and the comparative insignificance of sound may be seen from the above analysis.

Pantheism- belief that God is in everything. Pan- all, theism- belief in one God as creator

Alliteration- repetition of initial consonant sounds



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Can poetry be considered a form of communication?

Q2. Who holds the view that a poem is 'an answering look' given back by the poet to life?

On the other hand, Pope demanded that 'the sound must seem an echo to the sense', and we can see that when Coleridge writes of ice:

"It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swond."

The sounds, likewise, support the meaning in the following lines from Tennyson:

"The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees."

A similar function of sound and internal rhyme is noticeable in the following poem by Louis MacNeice:

"The sunlight on the garden
Hardens and grows cold,
We cannot cage the minute
Within its nets of gold,
When all is told
We cannot beg for pardon.

Our freedom as free lances
Advances towards its end;
The earth compels, upon it
Sonnets and birds descend;
And soon, my friend,
We shall have no time for dances.

The sky was good for flying
Defying the church bells
And every evil iron
Siren and what it tells:
The earth compels,
We are dying, Egypt, dying

And not expecting pardon,
Hardened in heart anew,
But glad to have sat under
Thunder and rain with you,
And grateful too
For sunlight on the garden."

Rhyme, which is repetition of terminal sounds, adds to the cohesion of a poem. This poem was written in the late 1930s under the shadow of the impending war. MacNeice makes his limited but compelling affirmation in the face of chaos. Whatever lies ahead, the part has been good. The very achievement of pattern is itself a kind of affirmation in the face of chaos.

Shelley, in "The Cloud", exploits sounds and internal rhymes for pure, simple description. His descriptions, however, are also scientifically exact.

"I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers
From the seas and the streams;
I bear light shade for the leaves when laid
In their noonday dreams.
From my wings are shaken the dews that waken
The sweet birds everyone,
When rocked to rest on their mother's breast,
As she dances about the sun.
I wield the flail of the lashing hail,
And whiten the green plains under,
And then again I dissolve it in rain
And laugh as I pass in thunder."

Such rhyming lines may attract too much attention to themselves and they appear mechanical. It can be used unexpectedly to add emphasis

and cohesion. Shakespeare's "Sonnet 86" and Eliot's "The Dry Salvages" will serve to illustrate the point.

"Was it the proud full saile of his great verse,
Bound for the prize of (all too precious) you,
That did my ripe thoughts in my braine inhearce,
Making their tombe the wombe wherein they grew?"

'Tomb' and 'Womb' are tied together by the rhyme emphasizing them as important concepts in the statement. There is a more complex use in Eliot's 'The Dry Salvages':

"Also pray for those who were in ships, and
Ended their voyage on the sand, in the sea's lips
Or in the dark throat which will not reject them……"

Rhyme, rhythm, metre, music are used and exploited in poems for different purposes. The examples above are serious, even too serious. But it is not necessary to be solemn to be serious. Chaucer (1340- 1400), in the late Middle Ages, writes in rhyme, and rhyme adds to the surprise element of his lines and underscore their humour:

"She was a worthy womman all her lyve,
Housebonds at churche- dore she hadde fyve."

W. H. Auden's rhymes, unexpected as they often are, highlight his irony and use of paradox, as in the poem "The Unknown Citizen (To JS/ 07/ M/ 378 This Marble Monument Is Erected by the State)" which is a satire on a bureaucratic and mechanistic society and uses clichés to clinch an argument against such a society.



LET US KNOW

Poems are different from prose pieces. It is more formal and its look on the page is different. What Auden or MacNeice says in verse cannot be said in prose and never so effectively. Poems have their own grammar and a familiarity with it improves understanding and appreciation and should help one with the impulse to write poetry. You can pick your choice and have your own preferences. Only the auctioneer is equally enthusiastic about all the products. But who on earth would dislike the following piece by Ogden Nash:

'The Turtle'

The turtle lives 'twixt plated decks
Which practically conceal its sex,
I think it clever of the turtle
In such a fix to be so fertile.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3. What is rhyme? Show its uses.

Q4. What does "The Unknown Citizen" satirize?

11.4 LANGUAGE AND SYNTAX IN POETRY

In this section, we will discuss the question of language and syntax in poetry. Let us begin with the question: 'Why do poets write in verse?' It may be because that is the way they are, which is to say that what they say is not different from how they say it. Coleridge said: 'I write in metre because I am about to use a language different from that of prose." Wordsworth is not too keen to agree. Both of them wrote poetry as well as prose and should know the difference. Poetry and prose are different though both draw from the same resource base- the language of the community. Metre makes poetry purposely formal and the reader is invited to and warned about a different kind of writing than prose. When we try to reduce a poem to a prose statement or make a paraphrase of it, we tend to separate the form from its content. Cleanth Brooks calls it the 'heresy of paraphrase'. In poetry and the arts in general, intuition and expression are not separate. It is through the medium that the poet intuits and expresses. A paraphrase also ignores metre and misconceives metaphor.

Let us now look at the paraphrase of a very well known poem by Wordsworth. ('Upon Westminster Bridge')

The earth has nothing more fair to show. He who could pass by a night so moving in its majesty must be dull of soul. The city now wears the beauty of the morning like a garment. It is silent and bare. Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie open unto the fields and unto the sky. All of them lie bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

The sun never stopped valley, rock, or hill more beautifully in his first splendor. I never saw, never felt so deep a calm! The river glides at his own sweet will. Dear God! The very houses seem asleep. The mighty heart of the city is lying still.

If this is all Wordsworth meant, he would have said so in the first place and in good old prose. Even when we retain almost all the original words, the effect is entirely different and nowhere near so compelling as in the poem which follows:

Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802

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 splendor, 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!

Hopkins, in his 'Spring and Fall', seems to throw a challenge to the heretics of paraphrasing. He, in effect, says, "Now try and paraphrase this!"

Spring and Fall:
to a young child

Margaret, are you grieving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leaves, like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Ah! as the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh

Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you will weep and know why.
Now no matter child, the name:
Sorrow's springs are the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor wind, expressed
What a heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

It definitely is a syntactically complex poem, but it is further complicated by a few individual words coined by compounding: "Goldengrove", "unleaving", "wanwood", "leafmeal". "Goldengrove" with a capital "G" may simply be a proper name. But we happen to know that the stages of man's life are often compared to the seasons. The title refers to 'Spring' and 'Fall' (Autumn) and is addressed to a 'young child'. Spring is the golden period of life and in Fall or Autumn, leaves grow yellow or golden. The compounding is justified and not just a gratuitous invention. But another **'neologism'** "unleaving" immediately follows it and the unleaving of Goldengrove does not remain a mere fact of nature. Now, as the poem develops, we come across two lines which could be meaningful independently or in isolation. But in the context of the development of the poem, the lines also qualify the 'Fall' of the title and the fall of man is implied unobtrusively. When it does that, "Goldengrove" gains a general significance while remaining a proper name. It could very well be Eden. As a young girl, Margaret can well grieve for the unleaving of Goldengrove, because for her, the leaves are like "the things of man". But,



Neologism- a word coined to express the poet's exact feelings

"Now no matter child, the name:
Sorrow's springs are the same."

What Margaret weeps for is the inescapable process of ageing, decay, and dying. That is the "blight man was born for".

Poetry uses language precisely and exploits all its resources. Some words lose their contours because of constant and varied use. Poets often have to create words to express their ideas and feelings.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q5. What is implied by the term 'heresy of paraphrase'?

11.5 USE OF WORDS IN POETRY

It is a cliché to say that poetry is written with words. We use it because rejecting everything as old fashioned would rule out the sunshine. But everything is written in words. Words in a poem are different because they exploit many areas of meaning and are more suggestive. This we get to know by reading varieties of poetry. Each individual poet has his/ her own idiom. S/he must be placed in the historical context to bring us closer to the poem. The poem looks different on the page and that is deliberate. This is added to by rhythm and music.

In oral or folk literature, the poet was often anonymous and verses were made up instantly. Since they were transmitted only by word of mouth, there were many versions of the same poem or song or story. Whatever a singer or story teller said was immediately understood by the community. There was a strong sense of community then that the Romantic poets (19th century) feel nostalgic about. The Romantics of the nineteenth century and the earlier sixteenth- seventeenth century Romantic Movement were more individualistic. That subjective emphasis not only continued but became more intense in the modern age. No one seems to speak for the community. Everyone speaks for himself/ herself. Consequently, poetry could no longer communicate so easily. It became increasingly more complex and difficult, even obscure. We have shown that if we know the history and development of poetry down the ages, we can receive poetry better and that is a necessary step in learning to write poetry. We have also said that the faculty of writing poetry is often intimate. But even those who are 'born' poets have to learn. A person who can sing has to learn music to be a musician or even a singer. If one is sensitive and observant there is much poetry to be gathered from the life around us. This is what Wallace

Stevens seems to imply when he calls poetry an 'answering look'; Marianne Moore is deliberately 'prosaic' in her "poetry' to underline the fact that nothing is inherently 'poetic' or 'unpoetic'. The poet purifies the language of the tribe and leaves it richer. That is primarily because of the use of metaphoric language. Like poetry, its medium, that is language, too changes. But the roots in speech, especially in the spoken language of the rural folk, must never be forgotten. Folk language is vitally metaphoric. This is evident in expressions like 'her face clouded over'. Poetry tries to be consciously metaphoric. Not that there are no attempts to the contrary. In fact, however inspired a poet may be, s/he must learn his craft and must master his language in such a way that he can make the 'traditional' into something 'novel'. It also, at the same time, must be personal, i.e. the poet creates his own idiom. It is not necessarily a question of coining new words. It is a fresh way of saying things that we find in the poetry of Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, Ogden Mash and others.

The eighteenth century English poets-- the neo- classicists, as they are called, underlined this craft or rhetoric of poetry. Alexander Pope had in fact defined poetry as "what oft was thought but never so well expresst". The Romantics did not quite agree. Attitudes to poetry and its definitions continue to change and because it changes and grows, it remains so vitally alive and interesting.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q6. What is the significance of 'words' of a poem?

11.6 INTERPRETATION OF A POEM

The subject of poetry and its nature and function will be found addressed in the following poem by W. H. Auden on W. B. Yeats' death:

In Memory of W. B. Yeats (d. Jan 1939)

"He disappeared in the dead of winter

The brooks were frozen, the airports almost deserted,

And snow disfigured the public statues;
The mercury sunk in the mouth of the dying day.
What instruments we have agree
The day of his death was a dark cold day."

As Elizabeth Drew (Drew, 1959) says, the beginning of the first part of the poem, besides evoking the natural and cultural weather of the time of Yeats' death uses a metaphoric language where landscape is symbolic of inner qualities. While the first part concerns the man and his environs, the second distinguishes between the man and the poet. Yeats was also quite fallibly human and the death of the man is not the important part. What is important is that the poetry survives:

"You were silly like us: you survived it all;
……..it survives
In the valley of its making where executives
Would never want to tamper; flows on south
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
A way of happening, a mouth."

Poetry can make nothing happen in the world of political and bureaucratic action but it survives language, in the words in which it is said.

The concluding part of the poem is positive, even celebratory. He, therefore, exploits the use of rhyme and the assurance of a simple, traditional pattern. What Auden does with it is something forceful, urgent and concentrated:

"Earth, receive an honoured guest;
William Butler Yeats is laid to rest:
Let the Irish vessel lie
Emptied of its poetry.
…….
Follow, poet, follow right
To the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a verse
Make a vineyard of the curse,
Sing of human unsuccess
In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountains start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise."

The metaphoric language and the exploitation of the landscape symbolically is sustained. The abiding values of poetry are contrasted to the contemporary situation. The creative, affirmative voice of the poet which liberates us from the dark confusion of the war and its violence will strive against all odds. Poetry can grow out of even the tragic and human failures are celebrated as all too human. The dark cold day of the poets' death is transfigured into joy and freedom and human achievement.



1.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have been acquainted with the three basic aspects of poetry, viz., 'writing and receiving poetry', language of poetry' and the 'nature of poetry'. All these topics under discussion in the unit have been dealt with in detail. The best way to know and receive poetry is studying its history and evolution. Poetry is written in words, and words belong to particular language. But in poetry, the use of words is rather special. We may call it 'poetic language'. Images and expressions used in poetry bring it closer to us, just as the poetry on the countryside is different from the poetry of the urban realties. The unit goes into the fundamentals of poetry by asking the question 'what poetry is'. A major genre of imaginative literature, poetry can be called a communication of something to someone or to many. We have illustrated profusely from the poetry of Wordsworth, Louis MacNeice, Shelley, Shakespeare and T. S. Eliot to buttress the point that the primacy of meaning is an important element of poetry, but a

paraphrase may give us some idea of a poem, but it is not the poem. Finally in the unit, you have come across a discussion on the use of words in poetry for which a number of illustrations are given from many a celebrated poet of the English language.



11.8 FURTHER READING

1. Sanders, Andrew. (1994). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
2. Beaty, Jerome and Matchett, William H. (1965). *Poetry from Statement to Meaning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3. James, R. A. Scott. (1973). *The Making of Literature*.
4. Scholes, Robert E. et al. (1982). *Elements of Literature*. Oxford University Press.

11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1. Yes, being a major genre or branch of imaginative literature, poetry is the most concentrated and intense form of communication.

Ans to Q2. Wallace Stevens.

Ans to Q3. Rhyme is a repetition of terminal sounds. Basically, it adds to the cohesion of a poem.

Ans to Q4. "The Unknown Citizen" by W.H. Auden satirizes a bureaucratic and mechanistic society.

Ans to Q5. Metre makes poetry purposely formal and the reader is invited to and warned about a different kind of writing than prose. But while trying to reduce a poem to a prose statement or make a paraphrase of it, we tend to separate the form from its content. This is called the 'heresy of paraphrase' by Cleanth Brooks. A paraphrase also ignores metre and misconceives metaphor.

Ans to Q6. Words in a poem are different because they exploit many areas of meaning and are more suggestive. Each individual

poet has his/ her own idiom and must be placed in the historical context to bring us closer to the poem. This is added to by rhythm and music.



11.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Considering its variety, is a comprehensive definition of poetry possible? Discuss with reference to what you have read above.

Q2. How are words used differently in a poem? How does context change the character of poetry?

Q3. Contextualize the lines quoted form Chaucer in the text and consider him as a satirist.

Q4. Analyze a poem of your choice to illustrate the point that a poem has meaning.

Q5. Write what you understand of the poem 'Spring and Fall' in about 50 words.

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