UNIT 3: FRANCIS BACON: “OF GARDEN”

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Explanation of the Essay

3.4 Major Themes

3.5 Style and Language

3.6 Let us Sum up

3.7 Further Reading

3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.9 Model Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the text of the essay in details
- explain the themes that emerge from the text
- discuss the style and language of the essay
- appreciate the message evident in the essay

3.2 INTRODUCTION

A world without trees and plants would be a very dull and desolate place to live in. Indeed,Nature and its giftssustain humanity in more ways that we can imagine. In this unit, the essay titled “Of Garden” by Francis Baconprovides a detailed insight into the ways in which we could develop our interest in gardening, mix and match with our flowering plants, fruit trees, shrubs, herbs and hedges all round the year, in keeping with our climate and seasonal calendar.

Bacon inspires in us the joy of gardening, as well as, garden landscaping which is an interesting pastime or a hobby worth cultivating. As it is rightly said, “When gardeners garden it is not the plants that grow, but the gardeners themselves”, there is certainly a sense of magic in what gardens and gardening can inspire in us. Another famous quotation by the

English writer Rudyard Kipling goes, "gardens are not made by sitting in the shade", so let us be inspired and also inspire others to go out in the sun, take our watering cans along, dig into the dampness of soil, plant little seedlings and nurture saplings into life.

In the following sub section, the essay "Of Garden" has been explained in details for the ease of your reading and comprehension.Some of the names of the flowering plants and trees may be new to you as Bacon talks about several varieties, most of which are not native to our geographical location; nevertheless, you could make an effort to expand your knowledge about these varieties and even try to find out what they look like. So let us begin!

3.3 EXPLANATION OF THE ESSAY

The essay starts with the words that Almighty God was the first to have planted a garden. A garden is a retreat, a refuge for the human soul and also one of "the purest of human pleasures" as Bacon writes. We can very well imagine how desolate the world would be without plant-life or flora which is not only a source of human sustenance but is also essential for human well-being. If only skyscrapers and concrete constructions stood tall all around us, without any greenery, we as human beings would be very lonely and barely survive on this planet. Could you imagine a world without birds, bees, butterflies, little creatures and in fact the varied forms of animal-life that is dependent on the flora? Bacon opines that there should be beautiful gardens with plants and seasonal blooms all round the year and then he goes on to describe a list of various fruits and ornamental plants that are ideal for the changing seasons in the calendar.

Juniper, cypress-trees, yew, pine-apple trees, fir trees, orange-trees, lemon-trees, holly, ivy, bays, rosemary, lavender, periwinkle (white, blue and purple), germander, flags, myrtles and sweet marjoram are best suited for the months of late November, December and January which stay green during the winter months. In the latter part of January and February, the mezereon tree blossoms along with crocus vernus (yellow and grey), primroses, anemones, tullippa, hyacinthusorientalis, chamiris and fritellaria.

For the month of March, the early blooms of blue violets, yellow daffodil, daisy, sweet briar, almond-tree, peach tree and cornelian tree followed by the April blooms of double-white violet, the wall flower, the stock-gilliflower, the cowslip, flower-de-lices, various lilies, rosemary, tulippa, double piony, daffodil, French honeysuckle, dammasin, cherry-tree, plum-tree, lilac tree and white thorn. The months of May and June find flowers such as bluish pink, all kinds of roses (except musk), honeysuckles, strawberries, bugloss, columbine, French marigold, flos Africanus, vine flowers, lavender, sweet satyrian, herba-muscaria, lilium convallium, cherry-tree, fig-tree, apple-tree, ribes and rasps.

In the month of July, varieties of gilliflowers, musk-roses, genitings, quadlings, lime-tree, pears and plum-trees can be grown followed by apricot-trees, barberries, filberds, musk-melons and monks-hoods (of all colours) in August. Then in September, poppies (of all colours), melocotones, nectarines, cornelians, wardens, quinces, grapes, apples and peaches can be grown and in the months of October and early November, are ideal for services, medlars, bullaces, holly oaks and the best time for rose cuttings. Although, Bacon specifies that these plants are ideal for the climate of London, yet he also wishes to get across his message that regardless of the geographical place to which we belong, all our gardens can bloom in "verperpetuum" (in the words of Virgil) or in other words eternal spring throughout the year if we follow the yearly roster of gardening and nurturing plants.

Moreover, natural air is best perfumed with the sweet fragrance or "breath of flowers" which is as delightful as the flow of soft music in the air and therefore, it is necessary for enthusiasts to know the best of fragrant flowers and plants for a pleasant environment. Flowery blooms are always better in the garden than plucked in our hands. The sweet fragrance of flowers like roses and damasks are quickly dispelled without any traces, so much so, that one may walk across a row of these flowers and yet find no traces of fragrance, even if they are fresh in the morning dew. Although, perfumes are made from the extracts of these flowers, yet they have fast evaporating fragrances. Similarly, even as we use bay leaves for culinary

purposes, they do not have any smell as they grow just like rosemary and sweet marjoram. The most sweet smelling flower that are violets bloom twice a year, in April and in late August during the festival of St. Bartholomew. Another flower that stands second in the sweetness of its smell is musk-rose, followed by the dying leaves of strawberry that yield a very pleasant fragrance and the flowers of vines. This is followed by sweet-briar and wall-flowers that are ideal to be grown under a parlour or lower chamber window, pinks and pink clove variety of gilliflowers, flowers of lime-tree and honeysuckles.

Although, Bacon skips talking about bean flowers as they are ideal as field flowers, yet he considers the other sweet smelling flowers that not only go unnoticed but are also mostly ignored. One not only passes by these sweet-smelling flowers but also crushes them under their feet without noticing such as the burnet, wild thyme and water-mints. Therefore, one must plant these in alleys to experience the pleasure of their smell when one happens to walk past these.

This is followed by Bacon's description of fountains which are not only beautiful in the artistic sense but are also refreshing unlike pools which often tend to have flies and frogs. There are two types of fountains; one is often carved of marble that spouts or sprinkles water and the other is carved and embellished like a basin free of any fish, slime or mud. The spouting or sprinkling fountains must be cleaned regularly by hand in order to avoid growth of moss or decaying matter and the basin-like bathing pools must also have water that is in motion and not stagnated. These water fountains add to the aesthetic beauty of the gardens but do not have much to contribute to our health.

Then the portion of heath must be framed to appear neat and natural with thickets of sweet briar, honey-suckle and wild vine. Flowers like violets, primroses and strawberries that are not only sweet but also grow well in shade can be grown at the base in an inter-mixed pattern. Bacon also prefers little heaps with growth of wild thyme, pinks, germander, periwinkle, violets, strawberries, cowslips, daisies, red roses, lilium, convallium, red sweet-williams, bear's-foot and such flowers that are both pleasant in appearance

and fragrance. Some of the shrubs that must be grown along with these heaps of flowers are roses, juniper, holly, barberries, red currants, goose-berries, rosemary, bays and sweet briar among others which must be pruned from time to time. Thus, Bacon ends the essay with his brief plan and idea of a "princely garden" to the best of his preferences and ability. For the part of princes, they depend on the advice of workmen, bearing great expenses, adding unnecessary statuettes or other ornamental things for "state and magnificence", missing the real joy of planned gardening.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How does Francis Bacon begin the essay "Of Garden"?

.....

.....

Q 2: What are the varieties of flowers found in the months of July to August?

.....

.....

Q 3: Why is it necessary for gardening enthusiasts to know the best of fragrant flowers and plants?

.....

.....

Q 4: What are the two types of fountain described by Bacon?

.....

.....

3.4 MAJOR THEMES

Some of the significant themes of the essay are as discussed below:

Gardening as an Enriching Experience: The beauty of Bacon's essay "Of Garden" is in the importance that it accords to gardens which most often does not find a place of discussion in many essay volumes by writers. In the daily humdrum of life, a well-tended Garden could be little

haven for our weary souls, a place to breathe in fresh air and a repose of delight that reminds us to celebrate God's little creations.

The discussion on gardens stems from Bacons own interest in gardens and garden planning. His insights into garden planning can be read as an extension of French gardening practices during the Renaissance period. Some of the important aspects of French gardens were water fountains, menageries for exotic animals and aviaries for birds. However, Bacon seems to like his garden to be tidy and peaceful, which is why he only suggests water fountains in his garden plan. The English and the French are well-known to have cultivated the art of geometrical garden landscaping. Moreover, the French were themselves very much inspired by Chinese and Italian garden landscaping.If we are to discuss some of the most beautiful Renaissance French gardens of the world the names would be: Chateau de Ambroise, Chateau de Fountainebleau, Chateau de Villandry, Tuileries Gardens or Luxembourg Garden among others.

In the context of modern times, the beautiful 'Dubai Miracle Garden' in the United Arab Emirates has to be seen to be believed for it is not only aesthetically captivating but it also happens to be the world's largest natural flower garden with a million variety of garden blooms. In India, the 'Zakir Hussain Rose Garden' in Chandigarh is one of the largest Rose gardens in Asia that not only houses a variety of roses (almost 1600 species) but also medicinal plants. Closer home, we have protected spaces where orchids are cultivated like the Sessa Orchid Sanctuary and Orchid Research Centres at Tipi in Arunachal Pradesh. You could very well imagine the wonder of seeing tens of thousands of orchid plants growing inside a regulated glass house.

Landscape Gardening: In the essay "Of Garden", Bacon makes it a point to express his sense of aesthetics or rather his sense of artistic beauty that can be derived from a planned garden or garden landscaping. This is precisely to enhance the aesthetic pleasure of gardening enthusiasts as he himself was in his time.Thus,Bacon moves on to discuss the "prince-like" gardens which must be ideally thirty acres of land which are divided

into three segments i.e., green entrance leading to a heath and then the main garden which would be flanked by alleys on either sides. A well-trimmed green entrance is a delight to the eyes and a "stately" hedge that encloses the main garden is a surprise to the visitor. The long stretch of alleys must be shaded from the sun with knotted plants such as vines or climbers growing on supporting frames (trellises) or pillars of at least twelve feet in height with the help of skilled carpenters. Herbs could also be planted in various patterns with the use of coloured sands.

According to Bacon, it is best for the main garden to be square-shaped and to be surrounded by arched hedges which are to be further surrounded by a gentle slope set with flowers according to the specifications that he provides inside. It must also be flanked by side alleys that lead from the 'shaded alleys' to the core of the garden as described above. The enclosed space of the main garden is left to our own diverse preferences; although Bacon does advice that the garden must not be choked with cut-out shapes on juniper or other ornamental trees (such creations are only perfect for children or children parks). He prefers low ornamental hedges, columns upon carpenter's frames, spacious alleys with a central mount (thirty foot high) with three paths that provides a perfect view of the entire garden and a banquet house for light meals.

The side-grounds must have a variety of alleys which must be shaded in parts from the sun. These alleys like shaded galleries would also provide shelter from sharp winds. The shaded alleys must have edges on both sides; have fine gravel in place of grass (that tends to be soggy), with little flowers and a few fruit trees. The ends of the alleys would have little mounds providing a breast-high view of the enclosed garden from the walls of the tall hedges. It would do well for the main garden to have fruit-trees or tufts, with little garden arbours or shelters and seats. Above all, the main garden must be airy and spacious and not choked with plants and ornamental decorations. The shaded alleys are perfect covers of protection from excessive heat or winds and the best time to be in the main garden is during mornings and evenings (particularly in summers) or during cloudy

weather. Bacon does not prefer 'aviaries' (that houses birds) unless they are large, clean , not covered with grass and have living plants for birds to nestle and have a little space to themselves. Thus, we find that Bacon provides a geometrically divided and a clearly outlined garden plan to his readers through his informative essay.

3.5 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The volume of essays by Bacon took shape over a long period of time during which he read, re-read and revised his writing drafts several times to provide his succinct observations and significant reflections on various aspects of human lives. The first edition of *Essays* comprising ten essays was dedicated to his brother Anthony and was published in 1597, which was followed by another publication comprising thirty-eight essays, published in 1612. A second edition of *Essays* comprising fifty-eight essays and collectively titled *Essays or Counsels, Civil or Moral* was published in 1625. In the introduction to *The Essays of Francis Bacon* (1908), Mary Augusta Scott writes thus, "[i]n the *Essayes or Counsells, Civill and Morall*, the method is ever to reduce reflection to its lowest terms, to try discover the fundamental principle of conduct that influence the actions of men", thereby highlighting the significance of the essays written by Bacon.

An introduction to the work titled *Bacon's Essays: A Selection* (1977) discusses how Bacon's work differs from that of the French essayist Michel de Montaigne in the sense that although both the writers developed their notes from commonplace books, the former did not prefer to infuse a personal element in his essays while the latter did. Elsewhere, it also notes the wide-ranging aspects or rather wide-variety of matter contained in the precise format of his essays. In the introduction to the work *Francis Bacon* (1996), the essayist and his works are reviewed thus,

> "Bacon's place in English imaginative literature, we can argue, has been earned by his unceasing experimentation with so many different genres, from aphorisms and apothegms to dialogues and speeches,

essays and treatises, fables and masques. But it also derives from his excellence as a writer within these often hybrid works" (xxx)

In the present unit, we get a reflection of Bacon's keen sense of aesthetics which he presents in a clear and crisp style of writing. The text of the essay that we discussed is an English translation from the Latin version in which it had been written. The essay like most of his reflective essays reminds the readers of the writings by famous other essayists like Montaigne or Plutarch. Bacon was a voracious reader of the classical masters who had inspired his individual style of writing. The learner may also note the use of old archaic words in his writings but the prescribed essay is easily comprehensible.

Bacon's essays are written in an aphoristic and conversational style which relatively makes them reader-friendly. They are replete with aphorisms (general truth or principles), moral truisms and practical suggestions on various aspects such as human nature and philosophy, virtues and vices, society and state, reality and practices. The English writer and critic, Ben Jonson who was a friend and contemporary of Bacon appreciated his stylistic presentation of thoughts. Similarly, even the nineteenth century writers like William Hazlitt and the Romantics regarded the works of Bacon with much enthusiasm. His *Essays* had firmly established his literary credit that also finds an apt description in the introduction to *Francis Bacon: The Major Works* (1996) in the words,

"Bacon's writings have long enjoyed a firm place in English literature. The qualities that continue to attract readers are powerful intellectual grasp, analytical penetration, a mastery of the expressive resources of language, the ability to adapt style to subject-matter and purpose" (xx).

Thus, further exploration of Bacon's volume of essays shall provide you with a wider perspective on the reflections and meditations of the essayist which have a universal appeal and relevance to our own daily lives.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: How should a "prince like" garden be divided according to Bacon? Mention the three divisions.

.....

.....

Q 6: Give a brief description of the first and second edition of the essay volume by Francis Bacon.

.....



3.6 LET US SUM UP

A complete reading of the essay "Of Garden" will provide you with a detailed idea on the various kinds of flowering plants and trees that add to the beauty of gardens as also described by Francis Bacon. Apart from widening your knowledge of various seasonal plants suited to the English climate, it has also familiarised you to some of the innovative ways in which gardens can be planned, nurtured and developed irrespective of one's geographical location or climate. The unit also discusses some of the emergent themes along with the style and language of the essay.

Also, it will encourage you to read some of the other practical essays penned by Francis Bacon which are short and very informative. Moreover, it is hoped that the essay will enable you to appreciate the art of gardening and also inspire others towards cultivating their interest.



3.7 FURTHER READING

1. Chaudhuri, Sukanta. (ed.) (2006). *Bacon's Essays: A Selection*. Oxford University Press: New York.
2. Nandwani, Aditya. (ed.) (2009). *Bacon's Essays*. Anmol Publications. New Delhi.
3. Scott, Mary Augusta. (1908). *The Essays of Francis Bacon*. C. Scribner and Sons, Harvard University Collections.

4. Vickers, Brian. (ed.) (1996). *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*. Oxford University Press: New York.
5. Vickers, Brian. (ed.) (1968). *Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose*. Cambridge University Press.



3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The essay starts with the words that Almighty God was the first to have planted a garden. A garden is a retreat, a refuge for the human soul and also one of "the purest of human pleasures" as Bacon writes.

Ans to Q No 2: In the month of July, varieties of gilliflowers, musk-roses, genitings, quadlings, lime-tree, pears and plum-trees can be grown followed by apricot-trees, barberries, filberds, musk-melons and monks-hoods (of all colours) in August.

Ans to Q No 3: Natural air is best perfumed with the sweet fragrance or "breath of flowers" which is as delightful as the flow of soft music in the air and therefore, it is necessary for enthusiasts to know the best of fragrant flowers and plants for a pleasant environment.

Ans to Q No 4: There are two types of fountains; one is often carved of marble that spouts or sprinkles water and the other is carved and embellished like a basin free of any fish, slime or mud.

Ans to Q No 5: According to Bacon, "prince-like" gardens must ideally not be any less than thirty acres of land which must be further divided into three segments i.e., green entrance leading to a heath and then the main garden which would be flanked by alleys on either sides.

Ans to Q No 6: The first edition of *Essays* comprising ten essays was dedicated to his brother Anthony and was published in 1597, which was followed by another publication comprising thirty-eight essays, published in 1612. A second edition of *Essays* comprising fifty-eight essays and collectively titled *Essays or Counsels, Civil or Moral* was published in 1625.



3.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1: Explain the text of the essay "Of Garden" by Francis Bacon.

Q2: Discuss some of the emergent themes in the essay "Of Garden".

Q3: Analyse the style and language employed by Francis Bacon in his essay "Of Garden"

Q4: Describe the "prince-like" garden that Bacon discusses in his essay "Of Garden".

Q5: What are the important factors while creating a planned garden as discussed by Francis Bacon?

****