GEG S5 01(M/P)

Exam Code : ENP 5A

Short Story

SEMESTER V

ENGLISH

BLOCK 2

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

The Block contains a total of seven units. In this block the learners will be acquainted with several other short story writers, dealing with varied subject matters. The ninth unit deals with Arthur Clarke's short story "Nine Billion Names of God" wonderfully written with several layers of thought which resembles science fiction and explores the notion of God and beyond. The tenth unit discusses an interesting piece by one of the famous Sri Lankan short story writers and novelists, Punyakante Wijenaike titled "Monkeys" which deals with a little monk and his perception of life revolving around the themes of love, compassion and one's self-control. The eleventh unit contains Alphonse Daudet's short story "The Last Lesson" set during the Franco-Prussian war which deals with themes like linguistic chauvinism, patriotism, etc.
The twelfth unit deals with Amrita Pritam's short story "The Weed" based on the author's reflection on the stereotypes of the Indian rural society, its customs and traditions and portrays women's subjugated status in the rural Indian society. The thirteenth unit titled "The Doctor's Word" written by R.K. Narayan is a short story infused with a comical twist and is centered on the diagnostic acumen of Dr. Raman who infuses in his patient-friend a renewed hope of survival. The fourteenth unit deals with the short story titled "River Woman" penned down by Mamang Dai which appear in her famous work *The Legends of Pensam.* The fifteenth unit includes the most popular writer of children's literature namely Ruskin Bond and the piece titled "The Blue Umbrella" which deals with themes such as fascination, envy, empathy, kindness and the importance of goodness in one's nature.

While going through these units, you will be able to appreciate the various issues highlighted in the different short stories. The life and works of each of these writers have been discussed to provide a better idea about their contribution to the genre. 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. In each unit we have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions. It is important to note that the Self Learning Material (SLM) is not an end in itself and the learners are strongly advised to consult the references and other resources recommended for reading.

UNIT 9: ARTHUR C. CLARKE: “NINE BILLION NAMES OF GOD”

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Arthur C. Clarke: His Life and Works

9.4 Explanation of the Short Story

9.5 Major Theme

9.6 Style and Language

9.7 Let us Sum up

9.8 Further Reading

9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.10 Model Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the life and works of the science fiction writer Arthur Clarke
- explain the text of the short story “Nine Billion Names of God”
- gain an insight into some of the relevant themes pertaining to the story
- note the style and language employed in the piece of writing
- engage your thoughts along the interesting story line
- appreciate the creativity in the representation of ideas by the writer
- explore other interesting works by Arthur Clarke

9.2 INTRODUCTION

The unit introduces you to one of the widely read and critically acclaimed English science fiction writers Arthur Clarke who was also an inventor, a space enthusiast and a sea explorer in his own right. His short story titled “Nine Billion Names of God” is an interesting text which has an engaging plot that explores the realms of science, the notions of God and beyond. Before we explore the text of the short story, let us first familiarise

ourselves with a brief biography of Arthur Clarke who was also considered the Prophet of Science Age for his lifetime contribution and achievements.

9.3 ARTHUR C. CLARKE: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Arthur Clarke (1917-2008) is also known as Sri Lankabhimanya after having received the highest Sri Lankan Civil Honour in the year 2005. Although he had spent his final years in Sri Lanka, he was British by birth and was born in England. He was counted among the three great science fiction writers namely Issac Asimov and Robert Heinlein. Clarke had cultivated an interest in reading science fiction right from his boyhood days. If one traces his interest in the realm of science, it goes back to his younger days when he had published science articles and was actively involved with the Junior Astronomical Association.

Having grown up in a farm, Clarke had received his early education at the Huish Grammar School, Taunton and later graduated from King's College, London in the subjects Mathematics and Physics. The trajectory of his career began with his service as an auditor for the Board of Education, radar specialist and flying officer in the Second World War, Assistant editor of *Physics Abstracts*, Chairman of the British Interplanetary Society, and twice the Chancellor of International Space University and Moratuwa University, Sri Lanka. Some of his best known works are: *Against the Fall of Night* (1948, 1953), *The Sands of Mars* (1951), *Childhood's End* (1953), *The City and the Stars* (1956), *The Deep Range* (1957), *A Fall of Moondust* (1961), *Dolphin Island - A Story of the People of the Sea* (1963), *2000: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Rendezvous with Rama* (1972), *Imperial Earth* (1976), *The Fountains of Paradise* (1979), *2010: Odyssey Two* (1982), *The Songs of Distant Earth* (1986), *2061: Odyssey Three* (1987), 3001: *The Final Odyssey* (1997) and a series titled *A Time Odyssey* (2003, 2005, 2007).

The popular short stories by Clarke are: "Expedition to Earth", "Reach for Tomorrow", "Tales from the White Hart", "The Other Side of the Sky", "Tales of Ten Worlds", "The Wind from the Sun", "The Sentinel" (1983), "Tales From Planet Earth" (2001), most of which can be found in *The*

Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke (2001). You may be interested to pick some of his non-fiction works such as: *Interplanetary Flight: An Introduction to Astronautics* (1950), *The Exploration of Space* (1951), *The Exploration of the Moon* (1954), *The Coast of Coral* (1955), *Boy Beneath the Sea* (1958), *Voice Across the Sea* (1958), *Profiles of the Future* (1962), *The Treasure of the Great Reef* (1964) etc. among a few others. During his lifetime, he had also kept personal memoirs which are yet to be published. He also has to his credit a novel titled *Glide Path* which was semi-autobiographical. Clarke was also popular for his television programmes titled 'Arthur Clarke's Mysterious World', 'Arthur C. Clarke's World of Strange Powers' and 'Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious Universe.'

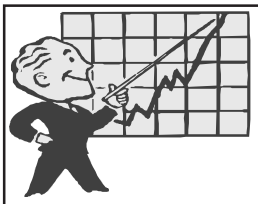
Clarke had lived well over fifty years in Sri Lanka where he had received Guest status in the year 1975. He received knight bachelor for his contribution to literature followed by Knighthood in the year 2000 and was declared the seventh "Grand Master" of the association by the Science Fiction Writers of America. His demise in 2008 was owing to complications that arose from his long-suffering post-polio syndrome. You would be interested to know that a gamma ray burst, a rare phenomenon that occurred after approximately 7.5 billion years was visible on the day of Clarke's demise and later named in his honour as "The Clarke event." The prestigious Kalinga Prize was awarded to him by UNESCO in the year 1961, the Stuart Ballantine Medal in 1963 and an honorary degree by the University of Bath in 1988. The contributions of Arthur Clarke speak of a brilliant mind indeed, the glimpse which we receive from the best of his literary works.



LET US KNOW

Arthur Clarke had a deep romance with the skies as much as the seas. Clarke was not only an astronomy enthusiast but also a lover of the deep seas which is why he had opened his own diving school in Sri Lanka. The school had been affected by the rage of the 2004 Tsunami but was re-built as the 'Arthur C. Clarke Diving School.' Clarke also had an Underwater Explorer Club for enthusiasts. In an interesting event, during one of his sea diving

adventures, he had accidently discovered the ruins of the sunken Koneswaram temple of Sri Lanka that included carvings to other architectural ruins. These descriptions may be found in Clarke's work titled *The Reefs of Taprobone* (1957).This is another reflection of the exciting and eventful life that he had lived, filled with the questing spirit in search of new possibilities.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who was counted among the three great science fiction writers? What were their names?

Q 2: Name some of the popular stories by Arthur Clarke.

Q 3: When did Arthur Clarke receive the knight bachelor and knighthood?

Q 4: What was the Clarke event all about?

Q 5: Mention one of the significant discoveries during a deep sea drive undertaken by Arthur Clarke.

9.4 EXPLANATION OF THE SHORT STORY

Dr. Wagner reveals that for the first time, someone is interested in availing an automatic sequence computer in the Tibetan monastery. He politely questions the Lama regarding the reasons for their interest in such an equipment as it was quite unexpected to find monks inclined towards such interests.The Lama explains their interest in availing the Mark Computer for a project that they had been working on for the last three centuries, since the establishment of their lamasery. But instead of numerical computations, they were interested in printed letters for which the Lama required Dr. Wagner to alternate and modify the out circuits of the computer. In fact, thinking that the scientist would find it difficult to comprehend their nature of work, he begins to elaborate on their project. The Lama reveals that they had been compiling all the possible names of God, which had taken them centuries and would take around another fifteen thousand years to complete. They had devised a method through which they would be able

to write such names with not more than nine letters in an alphabet. Thus, they required this special equipment to complete their task.

The Lama states that it was a part of their belief system that all such names of God were only man made constructs which had posed a philosophical problem. Also, in the possible permutation and combination of the devised letters were hidden the real names of God. And thus, the Lamas had been in search of those names through mathematical permutations of their own special alphabet. Thus, the modification of the electric typewriters which bore those letters were not competent for such a mammoth task and all that they needed to do was work more intelligently towards avoiding strange combinations. This showed that they had some kind of method in their madness. For this purpose, the automatic computers would be perfect once they were modified to permute numbers in a systematic sequence, producing the right combination of names. Also, it would reduce the estimated time of five thousand years to just about a few thousand days i.e., three years time. Suddenly, Dr. Wagner realised that he was in a different world, surrounded by nature high up in the mountains and faraway from the noisy Manhattan streets. Here the monks had patiently worked on the project that had been handed down the centuries, compiling lists of meaningless words. The task was indeed a difficult one and more tedious than challenging. Dr. Wagner did not know the validity of their claims of finding the correct names of God but his duty was to provide customer service and so he did. He assured that he would certainly modify the Mark Computer but he was worried about the installation and maintenance of the machine as it would have to be transported all the way to Tibet. But the Lama assured that it would be no problem as the components were small enough to travel by air and could be easily transported to Tibet via India.

The Lama wanted to hire two engineers for a time period of three months which Dr. Wagner took a note of. At this, the Lama produced a certified credit balance as a customer of the Asiatic bank which suffices for the payment. Regarding the electrical power used at the lamasery, the Lama specified the electrical energy used in units. A generator had been installed there to run the motors driving the Buddhist prayer wheels. The next thing

that we get to know is that George Henley, one of the engineers sent to the lamasery is not very happy to be around the place. It almost felt dizzy to be so high up in the mountains and find the rest of the world below distant and tiny. He looked gloomily into the distant mountains, thinking how the project "Shangri La" was one of the craziest things that he had taken up. Someone in the lab had come up with the name and now they were all buried in the heap of work, of having to find out rolls and rolls of possible combinations of printed letters. The monks in turn pasted those sheets into enormous books, almost at the tether end of completing the project in a few weeks.

George failed to comprehend what had made the monks decide on devising such a limited framework for unlimited possibilities. He even suffered the nightmare that the High Lama might suddenly decide on extending the project for longer. We find that George is interrupted from his thoughts when Chuck enters. Chuck was smoking a cigar in his casual style that made him popular with the other monks in the lamasery. The monks were open to accepting all the pleasures of life and breaking away from the monotony of their existence. There were even times when they would take a break to the village below. Chuck tells George that he had found something that spelled trouble. George gets worried that the machine might have given up working because he longed to go home after having completed the project.

Chuck reveals that he came to understand that they knew what the monks had been trying to do but not the reasons for the same. Thus, he reveals that the High Lama, old Sam had disclosed everything to Chuck who would drop in every afternoon to check the progress of their work. And when Chuck had told Sam that they were almost on the last cycle of the project, he had revealed their goals. According to the High Lama, with the estimated list of nine billion names of God, God's purpose would be completed as the human race would have completed what it was created for and having conquered it all, there would be nothing left to do. To Chuck this idea itself was blasphemous, against religious doctrines and suicidal for mankind. Thus, it would spell doomsday or the end of the world with the end of all human efforts and endeavours. The moment they would complete

the list of names, God would step in to wrap up the world and human existence.

But, it was not as simple as that according to old Sam and he thought that Chuck's view was what he would call "taking the Wide View". Chuck was worried both about the risks of not being able to complete the last cycle of their project and also the result if they did. After all, it was their machine and they were responsible for it in so many ways. But George is not hassled about this as he reasons that once in his childhood, he had known of a crazy preacher in Louisana who talked about the end of the world and had hundreds of people believing him. Many people in their belief had sold their homes and even when nothing of that sort had occurred, they reasoned that it must have been a slight error of calculation, continuing in their belief of doomsday, sooner or later. But Chuck feels that the case was different for the hundreds of monks and the Old Lama if the work of their lifetime met with disaster just at its tail end. Yet, there was nothing that they could do until they finished the term of their contract. They would be transported out of the place only when they had finished their bit of work. Chuck suggested in a light vein that they could resort to some kind of sabotage or protest against their contract but George knew that this would only make things worse for them.

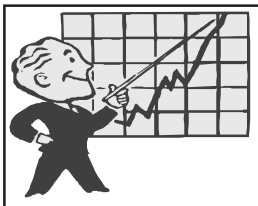
The machine was to complete this rigorous work in a matter of four days but their transport would arrive after about a week. Thus, there would be a gap of three days before they could leave the place. Therefore, Chuck suggests that they would extend the work for those few days, so that they would complete it just at the time of their departure. Chuck thus says that "We'll fix it, of course but not too quickly" and he suggests that the moment the last name pops out on the rolls, they would escape to the air field. George remains unconvinced with the idea but Chuck has his way. Thus, the two engineers leave the lamasery, which the High Lama does not object to in anyway. While leaving on pony-back down the mountains, George feels sorry about the monks, not wanting to be near them when they realise their folly and find out about their meaningless piece of work. But according to Chuck, Old Sam knew that they were walking out on them and yet had

no signs of worry because the machines had been running smoothly which meant that their project would end soon with or without them. And for him, nothing else mattered because the end of the project in itself was an end forever.

As they reached the last point from where they could have a clear view of the lamasery, George noticed the angular buildings against the backdrop of the setting skies with tiny specks of light just like an ocean liner. Those were the same lights that shared the same circuits as that of the Mark Computer. George wondered if the monks would destroy the computer in their rage and frustration as they neared the end of their work or if they would simply sit down and restart their calculations all over again.In all probability, the High Lama and his assistant monks would sit, looking into the rolls of names with junior monks pasting them in the enormous books as usual. There would probably be no dissent or anger around the place. Perhaps, the only sound that would be heard would be the endless rainstorm, the typewriter keys typing on paper just as the silent Mark Computer that functioned silently even as it exhausted its capacity, having produced endless rolls of combinations. To George anyone who would just about work for around three months in that lamasery would go crazy enough to continue.

Chuck points to the end of the valley where stood the old battered DC at the end of the runaway, in which they would fly off to their freedom, to home, to their sane spaces far away from the world of the monks. The thought itself was as good as a great drink. This was all that George thought of while sitting on his patient pony. It was already night time and the Himalayas were now just in view. Luckily enough the roads were in very good condition and they had carried their torches along with them. They sensed no danger, but they only felt the chill and even the skies seemed friendly with the twinkling stars above. Because good weather meant that the pilot would be able to take off without any problem. But suddenly the arena of mountains seemed to appear like haunting ghosts almost discouraging such high spirits. George stopped singing. George wonders if the machine had ended its cycle as it was already time and checked the

time. Chuck shows no sign of worry, he looks up heaven wards and says "[t]here is always a last time for everything" noticing how the stars were going about their natural process.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What are the aims of the High Lama as Chuck reveals to George?

Q 7: Why was Old Sam free of worry even as the two engineers were about to leave?

Q 8: What were the final thoughts of both George and Chuck?

9.5 MAJOR THEME

God, mankind and its purpose: One of the most amazing aspects of the short story is that although it is a fragment of the writer's imagination, it brings up certain important questions of mankind like that of doomsday or the end of the world, the purpose of existence, philosophical and metaphysical speculations of this universe and beyond. Even as an ardent practitioner of humanism, Arthur Clarke was inclined towards the notions of God and infinity. Here, in the short story, we receive a glimpse of that same curiosity which begins with man's quest of knowledge that leads to God and the realm of the unknown, of which mankind has no idea.

Through the characters of the story, we find varied perspectives such as that of Dr. Wagner who has a rational approach towards such experimentation, the High Lama who has full confidence in their collective quest, the monks who would never dissent against the handed down traditions, George who was emotionally sensitive to everything around him and Chuck who was practical at all times, despite the challenges in their way. Somehow the imaginary Mark Computer takes us to another world, just as the imagination of time machines that we may have read about in many science fiction works. Although, there is no direct reference to themes of religion or science, they somehow stir in our minds the notions of God or the penultimate level of human quest (even with all their folly).

Perhaps, it is our fear of the unknown that we chose paths of discovering the world and beyond through the lens of religion or science. Our folly lies in the fact that we try to reach for the unknown often forgetting the limits of both religion and science which are designed by mankind to understand a fragment of that infinity. This explains the mindless activity of the monks down the centuries of carrying forward the centuries of quest just like that of the human race in its endless race to conquer all domains of knowledge. In the story, the monks work just as the Mark machine counting on probabilities and possibilities of their purpose. The monks desire to be at peace and enjoy life in the real sense, breaking away from the monotony of life, but there is a hierarchy in their working order which they are unable to break. Thus, they work like the machines in silence, working towards their own doomsday. The monks behave themselves just as the machines do. The system was such that everyone was tied to the one quest at the cost of their own life.

The project was ironically named 'Shangri La' which really means a place of eternal joy and happiness. But it was all a far cry because the monks at the Lamasery always had to break away from their routine life to embrace the forbidden pleasures that life had to offer. Even the two engineers from Manhattan longed to return from the lamasery to their homes. The one thing that ruptures their interest in the project is their knowledge that whether it was toiling at the lamasery or reaching the end of their project, either way they would have to suffer. Also, one of the ironies in the story is the fact that how the purpose of mankind is designed by the same God who is to end the world once that purpose is achieved. Thus, the story is a creative take on the varied possibilities of the world and beyond.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What are the varied perspectives that we receive in the characters of the story?

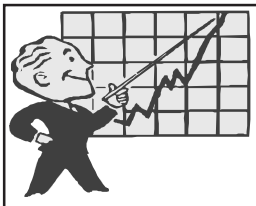
9.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The opening line of the short story itself captures our interest in the story. It begins with an unusual way, somewhat removed from our immediate reality. All through the story we find ourselves absorbed in the bits of information that we discover as we read along the story. Arthur Clarke who is considered one of the finest story tellers particularly in the field of science fiction is at his best in terms of his fine storytelling skill. Although, the story can be easily understood once it is read, it is layered with several meanings which has to be deciphered. Hence, it is important to read the text several times, first for pleasure of reading and the subsequent readings to decipher the represented ideas or meanings. It has an open-ending which gives rise to multiple possibilities, leaving the reader with several strands of possibilities.

Also, it can be easily noted that the shift in the background or the switching of dialogues among the characters are swift without any elaboration. While reading this story, we may not necessarily feel like it is an obvious science fiction sort of a story. It is written in an excellent literary style, which is both crisp and interesting. The characters in the story are well represented and introduced to the reader through the medium of their dialogues. Although the philosophical problems such as the labels or naming of God are left unresolved at the end of the story, it leaves the reader with questions on the mystery of this world and beyond. Thus, "Nine Billion Names of God" is much thought provoking and the ideas floated in it are wonderfully represented through the characterisation of the story.

Some of the memorable images in the story are the automatic sequence computer, silk robe of the Lama, the systematic permutations of alphabets, the electromatic typewriters, the "angular buildings" of the lamasery "silhouetted against the afterglow of the sunset", the motor-run Buddhist prayer wheels, the lights gleaming from the lamasery like an ocean liner, the runway in valley like a tiny silver cross, the patient mountain ponies trudging through the mountains, the "vast arena of mountains" like "white hooded ghosts" and "the stars going out" like lamps. These images

bring alive the story through which we are transported from our everyday world to the mysterious abode of the Himalayas hidden in a veil of clouds, the disciplined lamasery with the active monks and the trip down the mountain to the valley below.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How are the characters introduced in the story?

Q 11: What is the function of the images in the story?



9.7 LET US SUM UP

After reading the unit, you will get an idea of one of the best science fiction writers in the world namely, Arthur Clarke along with his contribution as a writer. Also, you will gain an insight into the emergent themes in the text of the story "Nine Billion Names of God." The discussion on the short story reveals not only the style and language of the writer but also reflects his notion of God and infinity. The unit aims to stir your interest in exploring the interesting and widely popular genre of science fiction writing that will leave you wanting to explore more of the author's works.



9.8 FURTHER READING

1) Clarke, Arthur C. (1974). *The Nine Billion Names of God: The Best Short Stories of Arthur C. Clarke*. Penguin Publishing Group.

Website:

www.clarkefoundation.org

9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Clarke was counted among the three great science fiction writers namely Issac Asimov and Robert Heinlein.

Ans to Q No 2: The popular short stories by Clarke are: "Expedition to Earth", "Reach for Tomorrow", "Tales from the White Hart", "The Other Side of the Sky", "Tales of Ten Worlds", "The Wind from the Sun", "The Sentinel" (1983), "Tales From Planet Earth" (2001), most of which can be found in *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke* (2001).

Ans to Q No 3: Arthur Clarke had received knight bachelor for his contribution to literature followed by Knighthood in the year 2000.

Ans to Q No 4: The Clarke event was named after Arthur Clarke. The event was a gamma ray burst, a rare phenomenon that occurred after approximately 7.5 billion years was visible on the day of Clarke's demise and later named in his honour.

Ans to Q No 5: In an interesting event, during one of his sea diving adventures, he had accidently discovered the ruins of the sunken Koneswaram temple of Sri Lanka that included carvings to other architectural ruins.

Ans to Q No 6: Chuck reveals that he came to understand that they knew what the monks had been trying to do but not the reasons for the same. Thus, he reveals that the High Lama, old Sam had disclosed everything to Chuck who would drop in every afternoon to check the progress of their work. And when Chuck had told Sam that they were almost on the last cycle of the project, he had revealed their goals. According to the High Lama, with the estimated list of nine billion names of God, God's purpose would be completed as the human race would have completed what it was created for and having conquered it all, there would be nothing left to do.

Ans to Q No 7: Old Sam knew that they were walking out on them and yet had no signs of worry because the machines had been running smoothly which meant that their project would end soon with or without them.

Ans to Q No 8: George wonders if the machine had ended its cycle as it was already time and checked the time. Chuck shows no sign of worry, he looks up heaven wards and says "[t]here is always a last time for everything" noticing how the stars were going about their natural process.

Ans to Q No 9: Through the characters of the story, we find varied perspectives such as that of Dr. Wagner who has a rational approach towards such experimentation, the High Lama who has full confidence in their collective quest, the monks who would never dissent against the handed down traditions, George who was emotionally sensitive to everything around him and Chuck who was practical at all times, despite the challenges in their way.

Ans to Q No 10: The characters in the story are well represented and introduced to the reader through the medium of their dialogues.

Ans to Q No 11: These images bring alive the story through which we are transported from our everyday world to the mysterious abode of the Himalayas hidden in a veil of clouds, the disciplined lamasery with the active monks and the trip down the mountain to the valley below.



9.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Briefly discuss the life and works of the science fiction writer Arthur Clarke.

Q 2: Explain the content of the story titled "Nine Billion Names of God."

Q 3: Discuss some of the major themes of the short story "Nine Billion Names of God."

Q 4: Analyse the style and language of the short story by Arthur Clarke.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 10: PUNYAKANTE WIJENAIKE: “MONKEYS”

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Punyakante Wijenaike: Her Life and Works

10.4 Explanation of the Short Story

10.5 Major Themes

10.6 Style and Language

10.7 Let us Sum up

10.8 Further Reading

10.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.10 Model Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

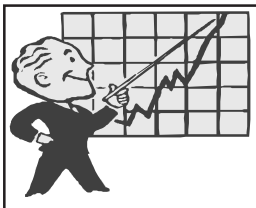
- gain an idea of the Sri Lankan short story writer Punyakante Wijenaike
- explain the short story “Monkeys” and its themes
- discuss the style of the short story
- analyse the text and identify the major characters
- develop an interest for other prominent works of this writer

10.2 INTRODUCTION

The unit deals with the short story “Monkeys” by one of the famous Sri Lankan short story writers and novelist, Punyakante Wijenaike. It is the story of a young monk Samanera and his reflection on life. In the unit, you will be introduced to the writer as well as her significant literay works. Also, the analysis of the short story “Monkeys” have been provided to acquaint you with the issues reflected in the text. Moreover, we shall also lay emphasis on the style and language of the writer in this unit. For our discussion, let us begin by reflecting upon the life and works of Punyakante Wijenaike and then move on to other aspects of the text of the short story titled “Monkeys”.

10.3 PUNYAKANTE WIJENAIKE: HER LIFE AND WORKS

Born in Colombo in 1933, Punyakante Wijenaike is a renowned novelist and short story writer from Sri Lanka. Encouraged by her mother, Punyakante Wijenaike developed a love for books and was a voracious reader. Her literary imagination was therefore enriched by her vast reading. Her first published work was *The Third Woman* (1963), a collection of short stories.*The Waiting Earth* was her first novel and it was published in 1966. Writing primarily in English, Punyakante Wijenaike contributed to Sri Lankan literature with her novel titled *Amulet* (1994), a novella titled *Giraya* (1971), *The Betel Vine* (1972), *The Rebel* (1979), *A Way of Life* (1987), *An Enemy Within* (1998), *That Deep Silence* (2009), etc. Born and brought up in Colombo, her works exhibit a deep social concern over issues like ethnic conflicts and subjugation of the minority people. Although she grew up in Colombo, much of her works revolved around themes associated with rural life. However, in her later works, she took up urban themes as well as setting. The short story "Anoma" won her the Commonwealth Short Story Competition for radio in 1996. She was also the winner of one of the most prestigious awards of Sri Lanka, that is,the Gratien Award in 1994 for her novel *Amulet*.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In which country was Punyakante Wijenaike born?

Q 2: Give a list of the works by Punyakante Wijenaike.

10.4 EXPLANATION OF THE SHORT STORY

Punyakante Wijenaike's short story "Monkeys" is an interesting piece which begins with the description of a boy- a very young monk, and his desire to have a glimpse of the monkeys. Although there were difficulties in climbing the rock yet the boy managed to see the monkeys that were jumping, running and playing together. The boy noticed that the younger monkeys, unhindered by the hot weather were playing happily under the

observation of their fathers and mothers. He had hidden a begging bowl in the folds of his dress- a yellow robe that he was wearing- and brought it out to offer the baby monkeys the left over food. Being a samanera was not easy. He was allowed to have meal once in a day which he had to beg through the day in the company of other, older monks. At night, samaneras did not eat. All that he could offer the baby monkeys were "two slices of bread and a plantain". He enjoyed the sight of the baby monkeys nibbling the pulp of the plantain. In a world of loneliness and discipline, they were his "playmates, his sole toys". He felt at ease when he saw the love among the monkeys and tried to find his own reflection on them.

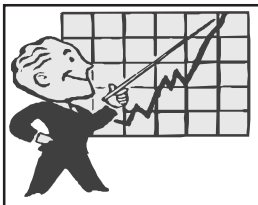
At the hermitage, no one was aware of his secret outing. He always waited for his leisure hour, that is, between twelve o'clock to one o'clock, to embark upon his secret plan of meeting his friends, the monkeys. As soon as he got his leisure, he moved out to meet the baby monkeys that surrounded him and "clambered all over him" tickling and pulling. The little boy often thought if he were a baby monkey he could have got the love and protection from the mother monkey. The thought of his own mother made him sad because she died while giving birth to him. He had been told by the Head Priest that he was gifted to the hermitage by his father when he was only a baby.

As such, he grew up at the hermitage with the monks until his present age, that is, six years old. At first, life seemed to be what he had been living since six years until he developed a friendship with the monkeys. But as soon as he got into touch with the monkeys, he ceased to be a priest and behaves like a child.He sensed 'love' whenever he had physical contact with the monkeys. The tender and gentle touch of the monkeys created a feeling of love which he had never experienced before. He had been bestowed with 'compassion and understanding' at the hermitage and not with love. Hence, up till this point in the story we see how the young priest craved for love and befriended the monkeys. We also get to know about his secret outing at leisure to meet the monkeys.

He would then return to his hermitage feeling disheartened because he had to part with the monkeys. He wished that if he were a monkey he

could have stayed with them and climbed from branch to branch and would have treetops as his home. But reality strikes back and adjusting his robe, he hurried back to his hermit quite disappointingly.

Tired from the daily routine which compelled him to get up early at 4 am in the hermitage, the little samanera would fall asleep. It was the rule of the hermitage to get up early and all the monks were to abide by the rules. Hence like the other monks, the little boy would wake up early and used to wash his face with the chilling water of the stream which would leave him energised. However, the hard work throughout the day would make him sleepy. Fighting to overcome sleep would lessen his concentration on meditation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Why did the young monk hide a begging bowl in the folds of his robe?

Q 4: At what time of the day did the little boy go to have a glimpse of the monkeys?

Q 5: Narrate the circumstances that led the young boy live in the hermitage?

Q 6: What happened when the young boy first touched the monkeys?

Q 7: Why did the monks at the hermitage get up early in the morning?

The temple bell rang again the following day to wake him up and he memorised the stanzas for the day. He could not concentrate fully on his meditation because of his excitement to see the sun rising over the hills in a little while. The chirping of the birds was an indication of the rising sun. Partly trying to meditate and partly trying to have a glimpse of the rising sun, the little samanera would open his eyes to see the "first pink streaks of light growing longer and then turning gold in colour." The young boy would steal a moment from his meditation to see the rising sun and once he saw it, he would again concentrate on meditation. However, the temple bells rang indicating him to carry out his everyday chores.

Being the youngest monk, he was expected to keep the altar of the Buddha clean. His duty was to clean the slab, remove the stale flowers and

decorate it with fresh flowers, pour clear oil into the clay lamps and keep the air fragranced with sweet scented incense sticks. Only after finishing these tasks he gulped his breakfast that was a thin porridge made from "boiled rice, coconut milk, mixed with green leaves of the Hathavariya creeper that grew on the hermitage wall."

After breakfast, the boy went to the Head Priest- his guru to educate himself. Then, he had to help the older monks to clean up their spittoons and get the drinking water ready. After these duties, the young monk would again learn his lessons of religious verses from the head priest until noon. At noon, along with the other monks, he sat out for begging. The monks went begging from house to house down into the valley. While they are back to the hermitage, the young monk felt that the monkeys were calling for him from the treetops. He, however, did not raise his eyes in fear of being caught up by the other monks.

At noon, when all the monks rested, the little monk would go out into the woods to feed the monkeys. This time he had sweetmeats in his bowl that he had collected from begging. Though tired due to getting up early in the morning, his exhaustion neutralised as soon as he watched the monkeys. The path leading to the monkeys was not at all easy; the uneven surface of the rock which he climbed was filled with cactuses. But ignoring the uneasiness, the boy fell into sleep and was surrounded by monkeys that climbed all over him.

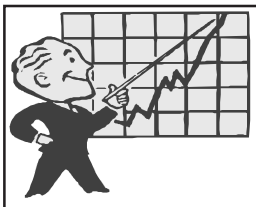
The little samanera had the mercy of the head priest who tolerated him when he dozed in the afternoon meditation. That evening, the boy was terrified to see the image of a monkey on seeing his own reflection in the water. Stirring the water at once, he saw that the monkey vanished. However, the boy was so much attracted towards nature that the view of the sunset too mesmerised him. As darkness unveiled, he sensed "dark shapes in the treetops– small mischievous eyes blinking and looking down at him". The young monk, however, did not look up to see the monkeys. He was scared to find that the monkeys had followed him to the hermitage. Hence he did not look towards them in fear of their entrance in the temple compound.

In the morning, he found that the monkeys crowded the hermitage. They came down from the treetops to create chaos in the meditation of the

priests. The little samanera was finding it hard to believe that his secret had been revealed. He was sad to be discovered that his desire to find love in the monkeys was known to all the priests. Although many of the monks enjoyed the mischievous deeds of the monkeys at the temple, the head priest seemed serious.

After the situation became normal at the temple with the monkeys gone, the head priest talked to the little monk in an inner room and locked it. Very caringly, the chief priest made the little boy understand that he must not follow the monkeys or either feed them. Because once they follow him, he would not be spared by the monkeys. He also advised him to keep distance from the monkeys and not to play with them because they will follow him and bring about a chaotic situation in the temple campus. The head priest was well aware that for a child like the little samanera, attraction towards nature is obvious. But still he advised him to avoid watching sunrise and sunset. In a concerned tone, the head priest explained him that the monks strive to "withdraw from life itself, not to be born again" and expressed his strong belief that the little monk would one day become "a true son of the Buddha" by being an obedient monk. He also added that the monkeys can never be his family. He gave effort to make the little boy realise that his true family consist of the monks at the temple and not the mindless creatures like the 'chattering monkeys'. The head priest explained to him the difference between being a human and an animal. As a human, he was able to think, react and act in a sensible way unlike the monkeys that climbed from tree to tree or behave insensibly. The head priest asked the young boy to put in effort to forget about the monkeys and analyse the difference between him and the monkeys. He tried to infuse the feeling into the little boy's mind that he was fortunate to be born a man.

After learning such a lesson from the head priest, the little monk did not meet the monkeys that day as well as the following day. Though the distant cry of the monkeys from the treetops could be heard, he decided to listen to the head priest. He realised that if he spend time with the monkeys, they will come haunting him and he will not have the privilege of being a man. Finally, with a sense of dejection, the little samanera withdrew from the objects and grace of nature trying to remember his destiny as a man.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What was the duty of the little boy as the youngest monk?

Q 9: What were the other tasks allotted to the young monk?

Q 10: What happened when the monkeys entered the temple premises?

Q 11: What were the two other things that the little monk enjoyed apart from watching the monkeys?

Q 12: What was the advantage of being born a man?

Q 13: Did the little monk abide by the advice of the head priest?

10.5 MAJOR THEMES

Love and compassion: This is the story of a young boy whose mother died while giving birth to him. He was gifted to the hermitage by his father to be brought up nicely and lead a disciplined life. However, on reading the story, the theme of love and compassion becomes predominant. A boy who is six years old will naturally be fond of parental love. At the hermitage, he had been treated with 'compassion' and 'understanding' but not with love. Therefore, he gets attracted to the monkeys that he goes to see everyday in his leisure. He finds among the monkeys a strong bond of love which he so desires. Very often, he thinks of becoming a baby monkey so that he would get the love and affection that they were getting from their parents. He is reminded of his mother when he sees the mother monkey caressing and protecting her child. Desiring love from them, he wanted to climb and swing from tree to tree like them. He fills at home with the monkeys. Even their touch is so loving and tender that he wishes to become one of them. Human beings need to be loved and love others including animals and this is beautifully portrayed in the character of the little monk.

Disciplined world versus natural world: The monkeys in the story represent the natural world that is lively and full of energy. Man's life is linked closely with nature. This is evident in the little boy's attraction towards the monkeys or the sunrise or the sunset. On the other hand, life at the

hermitage was meant to be a disciplined one. There were rules common to all. All the monks had to abide by the rules of the hermitage. As mentioned in the story, they had to get up early in the morning and sit for meditation. However, the little monk, being the youngest had duties assigned to him. Firstly, the cleaning and maintenance of the altar where the statue of Buddha was placed was to be done by him. Then after learning religious verses under the guidance of the head priest, he would have to help the older monks in cleaning their spittoons. He was also assigned the duty to get the drinking water ready for all. Then accompanied by the other monks, he would go for begging for his meal. Compared to this life which was monotonous and ruled by strict discipline was another life that offered him joy and love. He was able to find in nature the most important factor that he was missing in life– love. He was emotionally drawn towards nature.

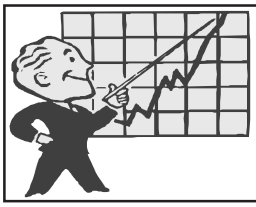
Being a six years old child, the little monk was torn between two states of mind. He was naturally drawn towards nature as a child of his age would have been. His playful nature is quite evident from his adventurous trips to the forests to play with the monkeys. However, he was left at the hermitage by his father to be made a disciplined and spiritually enlightened man. The little monk found it hard to resist the mesmerising nature while at the same time he had to maintain secrecy. This double role playing was hard for the young boy who had to hide his playful instinct as well as his love for freedom.The head priest made it clear to him that it was not the natural life that the Buddhist monks sought to achieve. In fact, they must try to "withdraw from life itself, not to be born again." That was the philosophy that the monks had to follow in order to attain spiritual advancement. As a resistance to this restricted life, the young monk's outing to the forest and seeking the company of monkeys can be justified. In the monkeys, he was able to find freedom and unrestricted pleasure.

The little monk's self-control: Though there was an immense desire on the part of the little boy to play with the monkeys and love their company yet he emerges as a strong character. Being a six year old boy, he maintains his monastic outlook by resisting the monkeys at the end of the story. He tries to curb his attention from them and also becomes aware of their

'mindlessness'. He finally realises the distinction between them and himself with the invasion of the monkeys in the hermitage. At the end, with utter disappointment, he parts with his monkeys and follows the path of spiritual enlightenment.

10.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

Punyakante Wijenaike's works are marked by simplicity. There is always a powerful undertone in her simplified use of language. In the short story "Monkeys", she has beautifully put words together to exemplify a dramatic tone. For example, while describing the sunset Wijenaike poetically writes "Brilliant hues fading into soft pastel shades which gave way to darkness." This short story is about a child and hence the writer maintains a simple tone throughout unveiling different aspects of childhood of the little monk. The writer carefully gives hints about the different lives led by a child in different situations through the short story.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 14: What was the head priest's notion of life?



10.7 LET US SUM UP

As you finish reading the unit, you will be familiar with one of the most popular Sri Lankan writers Punyakante Wijenaike and will be able to explain the short story "Monkeys". You have been acquainted with the summary of the short story and the main concern of the writer as well. This unit also deals with the themes highlighted in the short story such as love and compassion, nature versus discipline, etc. by giving you points to further analyse and find out the implication of the title of the story. The child like tone employed by the writer brings out the innocence of the little monk, equally reflecting the deep philosophical implications embedded in the text.



10.8 FURTHER READING

Websites:

1) https://www.scribd.com/doc/283939713/monkeys
2) https://srilankanwriters.wordpress.com



10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Ans to Q No 2: *Third Woman* (1963), *The Waiting Earth* (1966), *Amulet* (1994), a novella titled *Giraya* (1971), *The Betel Vine* (1972), *The Rebel* (1979) and *A Way of Life* (1987).

Ans to Q No 3: The young monk hid a begging bowl in the folds of his robe to offer the baby monkeys the left over food.

Ans to Q No 4: He always waited for his leisure hour, that is, between twelve o'clock to one o'clock, to embark upon his secret plan of meeting his friends, the monkeys.

Ans to Q No 5: The little boy's mother died while giving birth to him. He had been told by the Head Priest that he was gifted to the hermitage by his father when he was only a baby. That was how he began to live in the hermitage.

Ans to Q No 6: He sensed 'love' whenever he had physical contact with the monkeys. The tender and gentle touch of the monkeys created a feeling of love which he had never experienced before. He had been bestowed with 'compassion and understanding' at the hermitage and not with love.

Ans to Q No 7: It was the rule of the hermitage to get up early and all the monks were to abide by the rules. Washing their faces with the chilling water of the stream would leave them energised for meditation.

Ans to Q No 8: Being the youngest monk, he was expected to keep the altar of the Buddha clean. His duty was to clean the slab, remove the stale flowers and decorate it with fresh flowers, pour clear oil into the

clay lamps and keep the air fragranced with sweet scented incense sticks.

Ans to Q No 9: After breakfast, the boy went to the Head Priest- his guru to educate himself. Then, he had to help the older monks to clean up their spittoons and get the drinking water ready. After these duties are done, the young monk would again learn his lessons of religious verses from the head priest until noon. At noon, along with the other monks, he sat out for begging.

Ans to Q No 10: When the monkeys entered the temple premises from the treetops, they created chaos in the meditation of the priests. Although many of the monks enjoyed the mischievous deeds of the monkeys at the temple, the head priest seemed serious.

Ans to Q No 11: Sunrise and Sunset.

Ans to Q No 12: As a human, he was able to think, react and act in a sensible way unlike the monkeys that climbed from tree to tree or behave insensibly.



Ans to Q No 13: The little monk did not meet the monkeys that day as well as the following day as advised by the head priest. Though the distant cry of the monkeys from the treetops could be heard, he decided to listen to the head priest. He realised that if he spend time with the monkeys, they will come haunting him and he will not have the privilege of being a man.

Ans to Q No 14: The head priest made it clear to him that it was not the natural life that the Buddhist monks sought to achieve. In fact, they must try to "withdraw from life itself, not to be born again."

10.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a short note on the famous Sri Lankan story writer Punyakante Wijenaike.

Q 2: Describe in your own words the gist of the short story "Monkeys".

Q 3: How did the head priest react to the little samanera's love the monkeys?

Q 4: Describe the secret outings of the young monk from the hermitage throwing light on his love for the monkeys.

Q 5: What was the head priest's advice to the little monk? Did he follow the advice?

Q 6: Highlight the themes of the short story "Monkeys" and analyse the style and techniques of the writer.

Q 7: Give a character sketch of:

a. The little samanera

b. The head priest

Q 8: Why, according to you, was the little samanera fond of monkeys?

Q 9: Throw a light on the life led by the young boy at the hermitage. How is childhood reflected in the story?

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UNIT 11: ALPHONSE DAUDET: “THE LAST LESSON”

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Alphonse Daudet: His Life and Works

11.4 Explanation of the Short Story

11.5 Major Themes

11.6 Let us Sum up

11.7 Further Reading

11.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.9 Model Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- throw light on the life and works of the French writer Alphonse Daudet
- describe the role and importance of short story in understanding the society of a particular age
- discuss the impact of Franco-Prussian War on the French society
- explain the themes reflected through the story

11.2 INTRODUCTION

The story “The Last Lesson” written by Alphonse Daudet which we are going to deal with in this unit is set during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) in which France was defeated by the Prussians headed by Bismarck, the first Chancellor of the German Empire. Prussia then consisted of countries now known as Germany, Poland and parts of Austria. In the story, the aftermaths of War is depicted vividly. France had to surrender districts of Alsace and Lorraine into the hands of the Prussians as the war ransom. The world has always witnessed the bitter effects of the war down the ages. The people of Alsace and Lorraine too faced the effects of the

Franco-Prussian war as evident in the story. The German language was arbitrarily imposed upon them. With the onset of German rule in these two districts the medium of instruction in schools abruptly changed from French to German. The school children were forced to learn German from the very next day itself, and the teachers like M.Hamel, who had been teaching for the last forty years had to leave the school for good. Daudet's "The Last Lesson" helps the reader to explore the cultural subjugation at the time of the war and its effects on the people. The effects of the "The Franco-Prussian" war can be easily understood while considering the life of Little Franz who suddenly faced the aftermaths of the war. Little Franz, a school boy arriving late for the school is completely surprised to see so much of sudden change in the school atmosphere. Little Franz could not understand the situation of the school. But as the classes progressed he realised that all the changes in the class room was the direct result of the Franco-Prussian war. Its impact upon the school children is noteworthy. Little Franz, a child narrator of the story tells how different the classroom atmosphere was on that day. Everything was so quiet and peaceful, even M.Hamel behaved so kindly to Franz. He did not at first understand the words of the blacksmith Wachter who told him not be in hurry. He was also wandering to see people thronging near the bulletin-board on his way to school. Because for the last two years all the bad news came from there, the lost battles, the draft, the orders of the commanding officer, etc. The school atmosphere all the more surprised him. Franz was afraid that the teacher would ask him questions on participles and was in great dread of being punished for not preparing the lesson. In fact, Franz could not answer a word of the participles. However, M. Hamel did not punish him for not preparing the lesson. Instead he advised him to be sincere and love his mother tongue at any cost. "The Last Lesson" vividly reveals the fact that the wars have been used as the tool of domination. The defeat of France at the hands of the Prussians paved the way for the Germans to impose their culture and language upon the French people.

The story "The Last Lesson" provides multiple meanings and is a very relevant story. The aftermaths of war faced by the French people of Alsace and Lorraine is relevant to many other war ridden people who had faced cultural subjugation and colonial atrocities. Franz's imagination of

birds being forced to sing in Germans is very applicable to the victims of war settlements. The story is a very poigant depiction of the sufferings of war victims. The issues like linguistic chauvinism, cultural domination, use of language, etc. are some of the important concerns highlighted in this story.

11.3 ALPHONSE DAUDET: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897) was a well-known French novelist, dramatist and a short story writer. He served as a teacher before taking up writing. His collection of poems *Les Amoureuses* which gave him a fair reception was published in 1858. His literary works were mostly written in French language. He is known for his literary works like *L'Arlesienne*, *Adventures prodigieuses de Tartarin de Tarascon* and *Fromontjeuneet Risleraine.* Some of his well read translated novels are *Le Nabab*,1877 ["*The Nabob"* (1878)], *"Rios en exile"*,1879 [*Kings in Exile* (1896)] *Numa Roumestan*, 1880 [*Joy Abroad and Grief at Home* (1884)]. Translations of his works by George Gissing made him known amongst the English readers. His short story "The Last Lesson" is a very relevant one which exhibits the effects of warfare upon the society. Let us now discuss the story in details.

11.4 EXPLANATION OF THE SHORT STORY

In the story, Alphonse Daudet carefully highlights the evil effects of the Franco-Prussian War. The intensity of the war and its impact upon the then French society is made more significant by portraying it through the point of view of a child observer. Little Franz's observation about the German domination over France is best expressed through the statement- "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?" A careful analysis of the story reveals that it centres around many questions related to the effects of warfare on the society. It is not just about the French society but about the whole world where war ridden people suffer and lose their cultural, demographic and even linguistic identity. The predominant themes of the "The Last Lesson" are patriotism, freedom of language, importance of education and the love of one's mother tongue. There is a strong

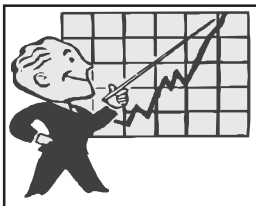
representation of patriotism through the character of the headmaster M.Hamel. He tirelessly tries to keep alive the sentiment of patriotism through the mechanism of Education. He very well understood that it is only through holding onto their linguistic identity that they can regain and retain their identity. Every French person should love his or her language. He vehemently believed that when people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language, it is as if they had the key to their prison. Hence, to make the French people conscious of this fact he proclaimed that French was the most beautiful language in the world- the clearest, the most logical, that they should guard it among them and never forget it. He loved his motherland France very much. He made his students write -France, Alsace, France, Alsace in writing copies. This indirectly enthused patriotism in the minds of the students. The spirit of patriotism is made all the more explicit when with all his emotions M.Hamel wrote "Vive la France" (*France long live*) on the black board.

The imposition of the German rule in the districts of Alsace and Lorraine has not only affected the demography of the land but also the social, cultural, economic and the political scenario of the land. Imposition of German language as the medium of instructions in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine completely changed the lifestyle of the students and the teachers. The condition of the students and M.Hamel along with the villagers is a universal phenomenon and is faced by the people of entire Alsace and Lorraine. One of the important issues raised by the headmaster M.Hamel is that of the usual habit of procrastination. He regrets that he himself had not been sincere with his teaching career and that the students are more prone to procrastination, they do not perform their daily works in time. As a result they are not able to read and write French properly. Hence he urges his students to pay attention to his words and love their mother tongue with all their heart and soul. Through his realisation, M. Hamel reveals the importance of inculcating the sense of belonging and responsibility among the French people. He also makes his student conscious of the fact that they are being denied the freedom of knowing their own language under colonialism. At the same time he also reveals that they themselves have

not paid enough attention to the French lessons. Little Franz's sense of loss is suggested with the mention of Prussian soldiers drilling in their land. Franz's realisation of his insincerity towards his French lesson by not learning it properly, M. Hamel's guilty feeling of not teaching the French lessons committedly, reveals their loosing freedom at one hand and the longing to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity on the other hand. This realisation of the sense of loss is a way to inculcate the feeling of love and respect for their mother tongue.

M. Hamel, the headmaster of the school, is very much conscious of the fact that Education can be used as a mechanism to keep alive the spirit of patriotism and that the love and loyalty towards one's language or mother tongue can be used as an instrument to gain back their freedom. Linguistic identity can help the French people to hold on to their cultural identity which can be used as a medium of French Nationalism. It can, therefore, be used as a key to their freedom when they are enslaved. The educational institutions can be used to spread the spirit of nationalism and patriotism by making the children aware of the importance of learning their lessons sincerely. M. Hamel's announcement that the Prussians have ordered only the teaching of German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine from the very next day devastated Franz. This made him realise that he hardly knows how to write in French and is terribly dejected that he should stop learning French altogether. He realises the importance of his mother tongue, the French language, only then when his way of life is threatened by the foreign invaders. M.Hamel attempts to give everything he knew to his students in the last lesson. Students also take active part in the process of learning. M. Hamel taught them one lesson after the other starting with Participles from Grammar, lessons on language, lessons on writing, lessons in history, etc. Little Franz admits that he had never listened in his class so attentively and understood them so well as he did on that day. He also says that his teacher had never explained their lessons with so much of patience and clarity. The expected amount of attention and participation is nowhere to be found in teaching and learning or in any other activity. Alphonse Daudet has presented this issue against the backdrop of irresponsible attitude of the

people in any given situation. Procrastination and insincerity on the part of learner and the teacher was the major cause of ignorance of Franz regarding his culture and language besides learning his lessons. This is a universal phenomenon in which people tend to lose their own identity like the people of Alsace and Lorraine. By means of the school teacher, M. Hamel, the writer thus points out the importance of education as a means of developing patriotic sentiments as well as a medium to be exposed to one's cultural identity, especially by way of cultivating and developing knowledge on one's mother tongue.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: When was the Franco-Prussian war fought?

Q 2: What was put up on the Bulletin board?

Q 3: Which are the countries then known as Prussia?

Q 4: Name the blacksmith who stopped Franz on his way to school?

Q 5: What is the English meaning of "Vive La France"?

Q 6: "When a people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they have the keys to their prison." Explain.

Q 7: "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?" Explain.

11.5 MAJOR THEMES

"The Last Lesson" very prominently raises the issue of linguistic and cultural hegemony as a result of the colonial and imperial powers and their imposition of cultures and identities upon the natives. Franz's worry - "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?" raises the question of immorality of imposing imperial languages and cultures upon the natives they colonise.

The people living in the regions of Alsace and Lorraine are the victims of aggressive linguistic chauvinism. By the term linguistic chauvinism is meant the strong belief that one particular language is the best language to learn, especially when this language is that of the ruling class. In other words, it is the belief that one's language is superior to others'. After the annexation of France by Germany, the Germans not only wanted to rule the

land geographically and politically but also wanted to impose their language on them. The imposition of German upon the people of Alsace and Lorraine is the clear sign of linguistic chauvinism that is in operation in the hands of the invaders. The struggle of the French people due to this linguistic chauvinism is clearly depicted through the participation of the common people in the last lesson. Little Franz's imagination of Germans making the pigeons sing in German is nothing but the effects of linguistic chauvinism, akin to the order from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. As stated earlier, linguistic chauvinism is the process of giving extravagant importance to one's language at the cost of other people's language. The Germans arbitrarily imposed their language upon the people of France. However, M.Hamel's love for his French language can not be termed as linguistic chauvinism. On the other hand, M.Hamel uses his love for his mother tongue to counter this linguistic chauvinism because it threatened his cultural and linguistic identity. Alphonse Daudet tries to counter this effects of linguistic chauvinism through the character like M.Hamel who loves his language sincerely and helps his student and the common people attending his class realise that in the time of adversity its only one's language that can be used as the key to their freedom. In order to draw the attention of his learners, M. Hamel equally takes the responsibility of their failure in learning of the language. He does not blame Franz alone for not learning his lessons. He says that the habit of postponing things for the next day, resulted in their lack of knowledge in every aspect of life, even learning their own language. M.Hamel depicts the French language not only as the marker of cultural identity but also as the essence of their very existence. Without language, those who are subjugated cannot hold on to their culture and identity and also their freedom. M. Hamel demonstrates that language is the central aspect of one's cultural identity. One cannot be French or even claim to be French without mastering the French language. His claim of French language as the most beautiful, clearest and the most logical is nothing but his love for his mother language. This claim of M.Hamel suggests his concern for the French language and it is evident in the story by his attempt to remind the French people of the importance of their native

language. Only holding on to their language and cultural identity, according to M.Hamel, can be the key to their freedom when they are enslaved. M. Hamel thus uses patriotism and love of French language to counter the aggravating forces of linguistic chauvinism in this story.



11.6 LET US SUM UP

Alphonse Daudet's "The Last Lesson", a short story set during the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871), centres around the story of a young boy named Franz, who is supposed to come prepared with his lesson on participles. Through the use of simple words and narrative technique, the child narrator reveals many evil effects of wars in general and of the Franco-Prussian war in particular. At the end of the "The Franco-Prussian war", after the defeat, France had to surrender Alsace and Lorraine to Germany. As a result, the people of Alsace and Lorraine suffered a lot. They lost their cultural and linguistic freedom and identity at once. The order from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine reveals the linguistic subjugation of the French people by the Germans. This is the result of any warfare. Any war ridden nation can face this problem of linguistic chauvinism and cultural domination. The aftermath of the war affected M.Hamel, the headmaster very badly. In his last French lesson, M. Hamel reveals many aspects of the French people. The procrastinating attitude of the students and the people in general and his own irresponsible behaviour in teaching, etc. are depicted in this story. Demonstrations of his patriotism and love for his French language is noteworthy. His reflection on the importance of upholding language as the cultural identity is very much applicable in all respects. M. Hamel asserts that language can be used as the key to freedom if they are enslaved. Hence, he urges his students to give priority to their language and never to abandon it. His claim of French language as the most beautiful, the clearest and the most logical reveals his patriotism and his concerns for the French language. In communicating the principles of French language so effectively he equips his children not only to grasp the French language but he also equips them to draw the link between the French language and their cultural identity.

The realisation of Franz with regard to his insincerity towards learning his lesson provides the space for the readers to reflect upon their role in learning process and in their day to day activity. M.Hamel decries the habit of procrastination which acts as the hindrance to the path of progress in the life of the students and the French people in general. This is very much relevant for it has universal implication of putting stress on the importance of punctuality in students to achieve their priorities.



11.7 FURTHER READING

1) NCERT, "The Last Lesson", 5th edn, 2016.

2) Baldick, Dinah, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2008.

3) R.H. Sherad, *Alphonse Daudet : A Biographical and Critical Study*, 1894.

4) Murray, Sach, *The Career of Alphonse Daudet: A Critical Study*, 1965.



11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The Franco-Prussian war was fought between France and Prussia in 1870-1871.

Ans to Q No 2: The Order from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine was put up on the bulletin board.

Ans to Q No 3: Germany, Poland and some parts of Austria were known as Prussia.

Ans to Q No 4: The name of the blacksmith was Wachter.

Ans to Q No 5: The English meaning of *"Vive La France"* is *"Long Live France"*.

Ans to Q No 6: Language is an important instrument of upholding one's cultural identity. As long as one preserves one's language the society can claim and fight for their identity.

Ans to Q No 7: This line explains Franz's fear of linguistic subjugation. The Germans imposed their language upon the French people by an order

that came from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine.



11.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Attempt a summary of the short story "The Last Lesson" by Alphonse Daudet.

Q 2: Write brief notes on the following:

a) Alphonse Daudet

b) Franco-Prussian war

Q 3: Critically examine the issue of linguistic and cultural hegemony of the colonial and imperial powers and their imposition of cultures and identities upon the natives as reflected in the story "The Last Lesson".

Q 4: Throw light on the major issues of the story "The Last Lesson".

Q 5: Describe the character of the Headmaster M. Hamel.

Q 6: Reflect upon how Alphonse Daudet deals with serious issues through the child narrator Franz in his story "The Last Lesson".

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UNIT 12: AMRITA PRITAM: “THE WEED”

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Amrita Pritam: Her Life and Works

12.4 The Background of the Story

12.4.1 Explanation of the Short Story

12.5 Major Themes

12.6 Major Characters

12.7 Let us Sum up

12.8 Further Reading

12.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.10 Model Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the life and works of Amrita Pritam
- explain the short story “The Weed”
- grasp the themes of the short story
- give a description sketch of the major characters
- value the story in its totality

12.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the short story “The Weed” by Amrita Pritam (1919-2005), an eminent Punjabi poet and a prolific short story writer. When you read the story “The Weed” you will learn about its characters, its themes and the techniques used in the story. Amrita Pritam is a prominent Punjabi poet, novelist and essayist. When the former British India was partitioned into India and Pakistan, she migrated to India in 1947.

After the Partition in 1947, Delhi became her home. Her talent blossomed in the capital of the newly independent India, and by writing in Punjabi, her mother tongue, she was to take the language to different places.

Besides poetry and her autobiography, *Rashidee Ticket*, she wrote essays, short stories and novels in Punjabi and Hindi. Her work has been translated into thirty Indian and foreign languages.

Amrita Pritam lived a life of amazing courage, resilience and achievement. What set her apart was her search for freedom and desire to live life on her own terms. She was reared in an orthodox environment yet she dared to write about such controversial topics as love. In fact, she walked out of her loveless marriage and made her home with Imroz and their relationship lasted till her death. Although she was vocal about the rights of women and had portrayed the sorrows they face in a male-dominated world, Amrita always felt that men and women complete themselves in a meeting of the body and soul.Her attitude to worn out social norms and traditions was so candid that she earned the wrath of many an established institution. But she had never faltered from the path she chose. She rose to be the voice of the entire Indian womanhood and sowed the seeds of rebellion in the minds of her readers against values that she thought were wrong and unjust.

In this unit, you will be acquainted with the life and works of Amrita Pritam. You will also learn more about the story, the characters and also the themes of the story. Since it is a translated story, the language used here is not the language used by the author.

12.3 AMRITA PRITAM: HER LIFE AND WORKS

As you may already know, Amrita Pritam is the first most prominent woman Punjabi poet, a novelist and a short story writer of great eminence in India. She was a recipient of the Sahitya Akademy Award and the first Punjabi poet to receive Padmashree and Padma Vibhusan from the President of India. She won Jnanpith Award in 1982 for her work *Kagaj ked Canvas.* She won three D.Litt degrees from Delhi University, Jabalpur University and Vishwa Bharati University . These laurels came her way as a recognition of her immense contribution to Indian literature. As a storyteller she has few peers, in terms of both themes and technique. Let us now go into the life and works of Amrita Pritam in more detail.

Amrita Pritam was born in 1919 in Gujranwala, Punjab, now in Pakistan. She was the only child of a school teacher and a poet. Her father Karter Singh Ha Hitkari was a *Pracharak* — a preacher of the Sikh faith. Amrita's mother died when she was only eleven. Soon after, she and her father moved to Lahore. Confronting adult responsibilities, she began to write at an early age. The young, sensitive Amrita was fascinated first by folk songs and in her earlier poetry she profusely used lines from these songs . Her romantic poetry was not liked by her father who had a strong religious bent of mind. He tried to train her, but it did not work. Her first collection of poems was published when she was only sixteen years old, the year she married Pritam Singh, an editor, to whom she was engaged in early childhood.

Amrita showed keen interest in dance and music. She set out to learn both the arts, but when it came to public performance her father did not allow her to perform on the stage. However, she was allowed to sing for the newly established All India Radio, Lahore. Here she recorded many popular folk songs in pursuit of a passion for singing that was another facet of her many- sided talents. At the time of partition in 1947, Amrita migrated to Delhi. Life was thrown out of gear by the Partition of the country. So fierce was the trauma of the Partition and its tragic fall out in her poetic mind that she had to find out an entirely new path for herself and her people embracing the sorrows of the community as a whole. After migration, she started writing primarily in Hindi, instead of her native Punjabi. She got a job in the Punjabi service of All India Radio. It was about that time that she decided for a divorce from her husband and took the custody of their kids. Since then her works have become explicitly feminist, drawing on her unhappy marriage in many of her stories and poems. She now builds up a warm nest of personal memories to soften the blows and terrors of advancing age. Amrita Pritam lived the last forty years of her life with the renowned artist Imroz. It must be noted that Imroz painted her eyes on doors and walls, designed book-jackets for her but in the last few years of her life when she was unable to move, he was looking after her to the last. Together with Imroz, she published a literary magazine *Nagmani* for a long

time. The magazine was profusely illustrated by Imroz. Amrita's life came to an end on 31st October, 2005 at the age of 86, after a long illness. She was survived by her daughter Kundala, her son Navraj; and her grandson Aman. Amrita's story cannot be completed without the name of Shahir Ludhianvi, whom she dearly loved. He used to visit her and she thought of marrying him. But Shahir deserted her. Amrita grew closer to Imroz after that, whom she had known for many years. Amrita Pritam did not confine herself to the limits and boundaries of Punjab. She did not belong to either side of the Wagah Border or even both sides put together. She was the voice of the passions and sorrows of all men and women all over the world and hence they can feel it is the voice of humanity.

As you all know that Amrita Pritam had contributed to all forms of literature like short stories, novels, autobiographies, even though she is primarily regarded as a poet. She wrote the first volume of poems *Thandian Kiranan* in 1935 when she was only sixteen years old. The next volume, *Amrit Leheran* came up in 1936. These two volumes revealed a conformist ethics and traditional bent of mind of the poet. The next few volumes such as *Jeonda Jewan (1939), Trel Dhote Phool (1941), O Gitan Waliya (1942), Badlan De Palle Wich (1943), Sanjh Di Lali (1943), Nikki Jehi Sugat (1944), and Lok Peed (1944)* are progressively more authentic in feeling and sentiment. They are more rooted in social consciousness depicting certain social issues. With the volume *Patthar Giti (1946)*, she became more aware of the women issues and we hear the typical feminist voice of Amrita Pritam; we hear the sharp accents of self pity and protest of the 'woman' in her. In 1947, after witnessing the horrors of Partition, Amrita Pritam penned down the most remarkable poem "Aaj Aakhaan Waris Shah Noo", addressed to the Sufi poet Waris Shah, author of the most famous tragic Punjabi saga of Heer Ranjha. The poem became a symbol of the catastrophe on both sides of the border. The poem is engraved on a memorial to1947 at the Indo-Pakistan border at Wagah along with another poem by the Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz. So heart rending was her cry in this poem that she earned the title of *The Voice of Punjab.* From 1948 onwards she wrote many volumes of poems such as *Lamian Vatan (1948), Main Twarikh Han Hind*

Di (1949), Sarghi Vela (1952), Sunehre (1955), Ashoka-Chetri (1957), Kasturi (1959), Nagmani (1964), Kagaz Ke Canvas (1973). In all these volumes of poems, the woman's lyric cry against her existential fate and societal abuse in one form or other is heard. This has lent a rare charm and vitality to her poems.

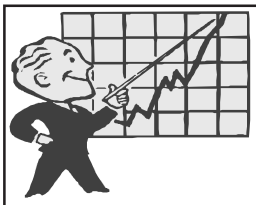
Amrita Pritam has to her credit twenty four novels also, the most prominent ones being *Pinjar*, *Doctor Dev, Sagaraur Seepian, Rang Ka Patta, Dilli Ki Galiyan, Terahwan Suraj, Yaatri,* etc. Her autobiography *Rashidee Ticket* (1976) was an instant success. Another autobiographical work is *Aksharon Kay Saayee.* Two most prominent volumes among her fifteen collections of short stories are *Kahaniyan to Kahaniyan nahi* and *Kahaniyanke Anganmein.*

In 1966 Amrita started the monthly Punjabi journal *Nagmani* which ran for 36 years. She won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1956 for *Sunehre*. Amrita Pritam, throughout her life, had been a symbol of liberation for the contemporary women writer. She had succeeded in presenting the complexities of a man-woman relationship in a male-dominated society. We can see for ourselves that women have always been granted a secondary role in our family and social life. Amrita Pritam was not a die-hard feminist, but she was striving to highlight women's problems through her writings.



LET US KNOW

Amrita Pritam's novel *Pinjar* (1950) was made into a Bollywood film by director Chandra Prakash Dwivedi, by the same name. The film adaptation of this novel received many awards. The French translation of this novel received the La Route des Indes Literary Prize in France.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: State true or false:

a) Amrita Pritam was born in Punjab before the Partition.

b) Her father encouraged her to compose romantic poetry.

c) She migrated to Delhi in1947.

d) Partition was a traumatic experience for her.

Q2: For which work has Amrita Pritam earned the title 'The Voice of Punjab'?

Q3: Name the autobiography of Amrita Pritam.

Q4: For which work did Amrita Pritam win the Sahitya Akademi award?

12.4 THE BACKGROUND OF THE STORY

"The Weed" is a short story written by Amrita Pritam. It is based on the author's own observation of the typical Indian rural society and the customs and traditions associated with it. Through the character of Angoori the author has portrayed the position of a common woman in an Indian society. Amrita Pritam has exposed the age old customs, traditions, superstitious beliefs associated with the lives of people in rural India. Women's subjugated status is another area where the author has thrown ample light. Even women have internalised the social constraints and carries it forward themselves. Through the story, Amrita Pritam has shown how women are made to believe that the natural instincts like love, companionship, etc. are the result of some magical power and not a human attribute.

12.4.1 Explanation of the Short Story

The story "The Weed" revolves around the character of Angoori. The author Amrita Pritam introduces Angoori as the second wife of Prabhati who is a servant of the author's neighbour's neighbour. After the death of Prabhati's first wife he visited his village for his wife's funeral. Angoori's father approached him and offered him Angoori's hand. Thus Angoori got married to Prabhati. However, they had to wait for six years to consummate their marriage. There are two reasons- firstly Angoori's tender age and secondly, Angoori's mother's paralytic attack. Finally when Prabhati was invited to take away his bride away, his employer protested as they would not make

arrangement for Angoori's food. Prabhati assured that Angoori would manage her own house.

Angoori's new life in city started. Initially she kept purdah from both men and women. But as time passed by, the veil started to shrink. As a young lady she was very fond of wearing jewellery and showing them off. Amrita Pritam used to talk to her and through their conversation the readers come to know about Angoori- her love for jewellery, her anklet with hundreds of bells, etc.

Initially, Angoori used to stay indoors, but as the weather became hot, she could not keep herself inside her hut. She started staying outside near the house of the author under the neem tree. One day Amrita Pritam was reading when Angoori came and asked her what she was reading. When the author asked her if she knew how to read and if she would like to learn how to read, Angoori replied in the negative. When Amrita Pritam wanted to know the reason, Angoori replied that it was a sin for women to read. Then the author told her,

"I read. I must be sinning". To this Angoori replied*, "For city women, it's no sin. It is for village women".* At this both of them laughed. Amrita Pritam did not want to disturb the peaceful conviction of Angoori and so went away.

Angoori was a sweet young lady with a dark complexion. Her body irradiated an intense sense of ecstasy. She had a perfect, healthy body that any woman would love to possess. But Prabhati was just the opposite— old, short, loose-jawed. There was no parity between them.

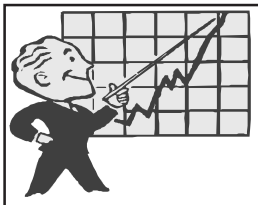
One day Amrita Pritam asked Angoori how marriages were fixed in her village. Angoori replied that a girl, when five or six adores someone's feet. He becomes her husband. When asked how the girls knew whose feet she should adore, Angoori replied, "Her father takes money and flowers and puts them at his feet". The author found it strange and asked if no girl has ever seen her future husband. Angoori said *'no'* in a pensive mood and said *"those in*

love…..they see them". To this Amrita Pritam asked if girls had love-affairs in village and didn't they sin for being in love? Angoori replied, *"They don't. See, what happens is that a man makes the girls eat the weed and then she starts loving him."* Angoori has seen her friend falling in love who finally ran away with the boy. The girls in love go crazy, sing songs and cry too. Angoori is convinced that love cannot come in any other way. Her mother asked her not to take *paan* or sweets from anyone.

One day Amrita Pritam found Angoori sitting under a neem tree in a melancholic mood in the afternoon. When asked, Angoori told her to teach her how to read. The author asked her what she wanted to write and also won't she be sinning if she learnt writing. Angoori did not reply and again got lost in her thought. Amrita Pritam did not want to disturb her. So she went inside to take an afternoon nap. In the evening, when the author came out, she found Angoori still sitting there, singing a song and crying too. Angoori stopped singing once she saw Amrita approaching towards her. When the author praised her singing, Angoori said that she did not know how to sing. Then she said that she heard her friend singing the song. Amrita Pritam again made her sing the song. It was a song sung by a love-sick person!

Then Amrita Pritam asked Angoori if she had cooked her food she found that Angoori did not even have her tea. The night watchman, Ram Tara, who used to fetch milk for her did not bring it. Now the author remembered that Ram Tara had gone to his village for the past three days. He was the young, energetic night watchman. Earlier he used to have his cup of tea with the author after finishing his duty. But since Angoori came, he started taking his cup of tea with Angoori and Prabhati. So the author asked Angoori if she did not eat for the past three days and got a vague reply from Angoori. Now Amrita Pritam asked her, *"Angoori, could it be the weed?"* At this tears rolled down Angoori's face and she cried bitterly, accepting what the author had said. The story ends at this point with Angoori

crying :*"Curse on me!'" she started in a voice trembling with tears, "I never took sweets from him…not a betel even….but tea…" She could not finish. Her words were drowned in a fast stream of tears.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q5: What is the name of Angoori's husband?

Q6: Why did not Angoori want to read initially?

Q7: How do girls fall in love according to Angoori?

Q8: With whom does Angoori fall in love at the end?



ACTIVITY 12.1

1. Have you experienced any incident where you came across superstitious beliefs and customs of society?

2. Mention some of the evil practices of the society which you are aware of and want to change.

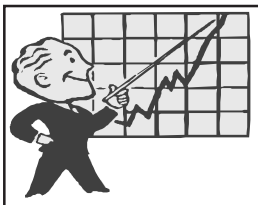
12.5 MAJOR THEMES

The story "The Weed" portrays a small sketch of the rural Indian society which is full of superstitious customs and patriarchal values. The father is the head of the family and takes all decisions. In such a society men can marry at any age. Education for men is no bar. The father is entitled to choose the future husband for his daughter. The girl do not have the access to see her future husband. The father selects her husband when she is just five or six. She is given to adore the feet and not the person as a whole. The girls are married off at a tender age. She stays at her father's house until she becomes old enough to go to her husband . Often the husband is too old for the young bride because the men's age is of no concern. Hence the tender Angoori is married off to old Prabhati.

Another important aspect of the story is the patriarchal values that are imbibed in the girls as they grow up. They are made to accept the future husbands chosen by their father. They are never given the opportunity to

get education. They are made to believe that reading is a sin for the rural women and not for men and for the city women. In respect of love too, they are made to believe that it is not a natural feeling. The men mix a wild weed in a paan or sweet and give it to the girls. Because of the weed they fall in love. The girls, like Angoori, are fully convinced with these ideas. Hence, the values of the society are made in such a way that the girls are made to accept their lower status and accept all these beliefs with resignation.

Thus, Amrita Pritam has been really successful in presenting a typical rural society which is full of age old conventions and rituals that stand as obstacles to the progress of the society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: According to the story, what ideas are given to girls regarding love?

Q 10: What kind of society does Amrita Pritam portray in the story?

Q 11: Fill in the blanks :

a) Angoori came to the city after .....years of her marriage.

b) Angoori thinks that the weed was mixed with .....

12.6 MAJOR CHARACTERS

The story is narrated in the first person narration by the author Amrita Pritam. So the character of the narrator is not portrayed vividly. The narrator simply takes the plot forward through her observation and conversation with Angoori.

The only character who actually appears before us is Angoori, the protagonist. She is born and brought up in a rural area. She has been imbibed with all the traditional superstitious beliefs while growing up. She is a girl of tender age and has been married off to Prabhati, an old man. After six years of their marriage she comes to the city where Prabhati works as a servant and starts her new married life.

Angoori is a young lady who is very fond of and proud too of her jewellery. Initially she used to cover herself with a veil but gradually the veil

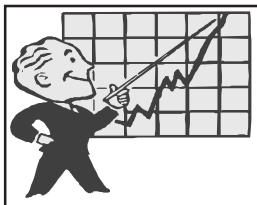
shrank. She gradually became used to the city life. She started conversing freely with Amrita Pritam, her neighbour. From their conversation we know that she is brought up with the belief that if the father chooses the future husband for his daughter, it invariably is the choice of the daughter too. In this way she had chosen her husband Prabhati.

Angoori's mind is full of the age old traditional superstitious beliefs regarding women's realities. This is reflected in her view regarding women's education. Reading is a sin for a rural woman and not for the women in cities. Though it sounds strange, she is pretty convinced about these sort of beliefs.

Another belief that she has is about love. She is taught to believe that girls fall in love only because of a wild weed: *"... he gives it to her in a paan. After that nothing satisfies her, but to be with him, her man. I know. I've seen it with my own eyes."* She says this to the author while telling about her friend who fell in love and ran away from home with a boy. She is convinced that love cannot come in any other way and that is why she had never taken any paan or sweets from any boy. Finally, when she falls in love with Ram Tara, she cannot accept it as a natural feeling. Torn between the natural attraction towards Ram Tara and her deep- rooted conviction, she cries bitterly. She is convinced that Ram Tara has mixed the weed with tea, which they used to take together.

Thus, Angoori is portrayed as an innocent, simple rural girl. She is quite young and physically appealing. Being married to Prabhati who is much older than her there is no parity between her and her husband : "*Angoori was the doung covered by Prabhati. He was her napkin, not her taster…"* Prabhati can hardly satisfy her mental and physical needs. This disparity makes her feel attracted towards Ram Tara at the end. Her simplicity, her innocence makes her a really lovable character.

The other minor characters like, Angoori's father, Prabhati, Ram Tara, etc. are also mentioned in the story. They do not appear physically in the story. Through the minor characters the author presents the various shades of Angoori's life.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q12: Who is the narrator of the story?

Q13: What makes Angoori's character lovable?

Q14: Why did Angoori want to write her name ?



12.7 LET US SUM UP

The short story, "The Weed" is one of the best stories written by Amrita Pritam. Through the story Amrita Pritam has tried to make us aware of the age old conventions and customs of the society which need to be uprooted. Amrita Pritam's deep understanding of human mind, especially the female nature, is reflected in the story . The story tells us about the inevitable consequences of the marriage between an old man Prabhati and a tender aged girl, Angoori. The story, though a translated one, still has the humour and sensitivity of Amrita Pritam's writing. Her craft of weaving the plot and creating motivating characters is perfectly portrayed here. Thus, the unit gives you an idea about Amrita Pritam as a person and as a writer of great eminence. You have noted in the discussion of the story how the simple village girl is attached to the traditional ideas so as not to understand her natural feelings of love towards Ram Tara.



12.8 FURTHER READING

1) Pritam, Amrita. (1978).*The Aerial and Other Stories/ Amrita Pritam.* (Trans. from Punjabi). Calcutta: United Writers.

12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ansto Q No 1: a) True, b) False, c) True, d) True

Ans to Q No 2: *Aaj Aakhan Waris Shah.*

Ans to Q No 3: *Rashidee Ticket* (1976).

Ans to Q No 4: *Sunehre* in 1956.

Ans to Q No 5: Prabhati.

Ans to Q No 6: She was taught to believe that reading was a sin.

Ans to Q No 7: According to Angoori, girls fall in love only when men or their suitors make them eat the weed secretly along with *paan*, sweets or tea.

Ans to Q No 8: Ram Tara, the night watchman.

Ans to Q No 9: Refer to section 12.5

Ans to Q No 10: Punjabi.

Ans to Q No 11: a) six years**,** b) *paan*, sweet or tea.

Ans to Q No 12: Amrita Pritam.

Ans to Q No 13: Her innocence, simplicity as a rural girl makes her character endearing to the readers.

Ans to Q No 14: Refer to Section 12.6



12.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: How and to whom was Angoori married? Do you find anything incompatible in the marriage?

Q 2: Attempt a character- sketch of Angoori highlighting her innocence and simplicity.

Q 3: What are the various aspects of the rural Indian society that Amrita Pritam presents through the story? Discuss.

Q 4: Examine the appropriateness of the title of the story "The Weed".

Q 5: "I never take sweets from him…..not a betel even…but tea." Who said this and why? Examine the significance of this statement in the light of the speaker's beliefs and convictions.

Q 6: What does Angoori say about her friend who has fallen in love?

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UNIT 13: R.K. NARAYAN: "THE DOCTOR'S WORD"

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 R.K. Narayan: His Life and Works

13.4 Explanation of the Short Story

13.5 Style and Language

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:

- discuss the life and works of R.K. Narayan
- explain the summary of the text
- gain an idea about Narayan's use of language and style
- appreciate the optimism in the short story "The Doctor's Word"

13.2 INTRODUCTION

R.K. Narayan is one of the finest writers in Indian Writing in English (IWE). You must surely have heard or read about the great cartoonist R.K. Laxman, who is R.K. Narayan's younger brother. Narayan occupies a remarkable position among the top ranking Indian novelists in English for his great achievement.

Beginning his career as a contemporary of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, Narayan chose the mundane concerns of the middle class Indian life for his works. His works have been translated into several European languages, and he had considerable readers both in India and abroad. He presents the struggle of the individual for survival in the society which is highly dominated by evils. Critics often compare Narayan to Chekhov in his

celebration of the simple folk. But he has also been criticised—especially by writers of Indian origin —as a provincial and simplistic writer, blind to India's vast struggles. V. S. Naipaul called Narayan "the Gandhi of modern Indian literature" for his mystical, community-oriented themes.

In this unit, you will be acquainted with Narayan's short story "The Doctor's Word" taken from *Malgudi Days* which tackles truthfulness in the physician-patient relationship as well as their intricate association with truth, prognosis and hope.

13.3 R. K. NARAYAN: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

R. K. Narayan is widely regarded as India's greatest writer in English of the 20th century and mostly remembered because of his splendid creation of the fictional town of 'Malgudi'. It is a splendid creation of his imagination drawn from real life. His characters are mostly humble men and women living their daily lives, who through his stories have come alive.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami popularly known as R.K Narayan was born in Madras (Chennai) on October 10, 1906. His father, Rasipuram Venkatarama Krishnaswami Iyer, was a provincial head-master. You will find it interesting to know that he was the third of eight surviving children and an elder brother to the popular Indian cartoonist R.K Laxman. He spent his childhood with his maternal grandmother with whom he was very close and one of his uncles, T.N. Seshachalam, until he was a teenager because his mother remained quite ill after his birth. He could only spent few weeks each summer, visiting his parents and siblings. Narayan grew up speaking Tamil and learned English only at school. His mother tongue was Tamil.

Narayan was not a brilliant student during his academic career. After completing eight years of education at the Lutheran Mission School near his grandmother's house in Madras, he studied for a short time at the CRC High School. When his father was appointed headmaster of the Maharaja's High School in Mysore, Narayan moved back in with his parents. After graduating from high school, he failed the college entrance exam in English because he found the primary textbook too boring to read. He failed several

times in his intermediate and degree examinations. But he finally, obtained his Bachelor's degree from the University of Mysore in 1930 at the age of 24 from Maharaja's College, Mysore.

Narayan worked in the Mysore Secretariat and then in a village school. But all this could not give him the career he was destined for. He was pressed to take up a teaching or government job. But Narayan had already made up his mind that he was going to be a writer. He managed to get several contributions accepted by *The Merry Magazine* (a short-lived offshoot of *Ananda Vikatan* in English), and by *The Hindu*, where he eventually obtained a weekly slot in the Sunday edition. As a bachelor, his needs were few and could be met with an income of a rupee a day.

In July 1933, Narayan fell in love while he was staying in Coimbatore with a sister. One day he "saw a girl drawing water from the street tap and immediately fell in love with her." This was Rajam, who was fifteen years old at the time, tall (taller than R.K. Narayana by a couple of inches), slim and good-looking. He cultivated the friendship of Rajam's book-loving father, Nageswara Iyer who was a head master and one day he came out declaring, "Sir I want to marry your daughter." Initially, here were all kinds of obstacles, including the problem of matching the horoscopes (R.K.'s horoscope had "sevvaidosham"), and the problem was of earning enough to support a wife. But, as the Latin proverb goes, "Love conquers all", and Narayan finally married Rajam in Coimbatore on July 1, 1934. Their only daughter Hemavati (name of a Carnatic raga) lovingly called Hema for short, was born in March, 1936.

The greatest personal tragedy of Narayan's life came in May-June 1939, when Rajam passed away following an attack of the dreaded typhoid. She died around midnight on Tuesday June 6, 1939. Perhaps, she could have been saved with earlier diagnosis and proper treatment. In any case, it was before the days of the antibiotics or chloramphenicol. The next few months were Narayan's darkest days. That he survived this ordeal, and was eventually able to resume his writing, is an epic of courage and determination. At that time little Hema was a source of love and affection for him. Rajam was Narayan's one and only love and "Narayan's loyalty to his

wife was such that it would outlive her and prove lifelong". You can have a full picture of his suffering and eventual recovery by also reading his highly autobiographical novel, *The English Teacher*.

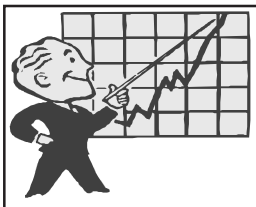
It may be noted in passing that, during his dark days, music was a source of solace to him. Narayan was a self-taught veena player and was good enough to earn the commendation of the veena maestro of Mysore Palace, Vidwan Doreswamy Iyengar. They spent many hours together, and Narayan proved himself to be quite good in the "alapana" and "kirtana" musical rendering. In return, Narayan became Doreswamy Iyengar's English teacher, and helped him to obtain his B.A. degree. In the early 1990s, Narayan left his home in Yadavagiri, Mysore, and settled down in Chennai. One reason for this might have been his desire to see his great-grandchildren more often. Hema and Chandru had a daughter and son - Minnie and Chinni (Srinivasan, who pursued his higher studies in the USA). His grand daughter, Minnie went on to marry Srinivasamurthi, a grandson of veteran freedom fighter and one of the great orators of his time, S. Satyamurti. They have a son and a daughter.

In 1994, tragedy struck Narayan a second time when his beloved daughter Hema passed away. He had to bear this misfortune with great fortitude. Hema's husband, Chandru, stayed on with Narayan and looked after him with the utmost devotion until the end of his days. Ram was a daily visitor, usually late at night which Narayan called as meetings, "Our Night Club". Narayan passed away on May 13, 2001 at the age of 94. Until his very last days, he remained an avid reader and also an ardent critic of the changes occurring around his Alwarpet apartment in Chennai.



LET US KNOW

In his early years R.K.Narayan signed his name as R. K. Narayanaswami, but apparently at the time of the publication of *Swami and Friends*, he shortened it to R. K. Narayan following the advice of his friend and mentor, Graham Greene.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who was known as "the Gandhi of modern Indian literature" and why?

Q 2: Briefly mention Narayan's student life.

Q 3: Who was Rajam? What was the personal tragedy related with her?

Now let us delve into the works of R.K. Narayan:

R.K. Narayan's literary output in his long career as a novelist is very interesting. Narayan's first published work was the review of a book titled *Development of Maritime Laws of 17th-Century England*. He began his literary career with short stories which appeared in *The Hindu*, and also worked for some time as the Mysore correspondent of *Justice*, a Madras-based newspaper. It is however, time to get back to Narayan's writing career. He had completed a full length novel, *Swami and Friends*, in the latter half of 1932. A young friend of his, Kittu Purna, was an undergraduate at Oxford at that time. And Narayan had sent the manuscript to him, and Kittu was eventually able to meet the already well-known author, Graham Greene, who had a home at Oxford, to take an interest in getting thisnovel published. Narayan's work was indeed destined to be accepted and published. Greene became Narayan's mentor and friend and eventually *Swami and Friends* was published by Hamish Hamilton on October 24, 1935.

From then on, Greene took upon himself the responsibility for getting Narayan's next novel, *The Bachelor of Arts,* published. It was eventually published on March 15, 1937. Like *Swami and Friends*, the second novel was a critical success, although by no means a best-seller. His next novel, *The Dark Room*, was not as autobiographical as his two previous novels were, but a feminist view of middle-class family life in South India. It was published on October 11, 1938, and received good reviews from Western writers. One reviewer referred to it as "the Chekhovian simplicity of the plot".

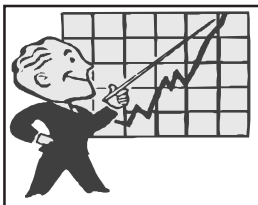
We now come to 1939, the year of Narayan's ordeal, when Rajam left him. The poignancy of his suffering, and his ultimate return to the

mundane world, are graphically described in *The English Teacher*, which was finally published in late September 1945. By then Narayan had "fully emerged from the period of darkness" after which his works "would take a distinctly new road." Some of his best works belong to this period. And also several of his short stories, collected under such titles as *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories (1947), Lawley Road (1956), A Horse and Two Goats (1970), Malgudi Days (1982)* and *Under The Banyan Tree and Other Stories (1985),* were published.

But it was his novels that took the readers by storm. *The Financial Expert* came out in 1952 and *Waiting for Mahatma* in *1955, The Guide* probably his greatest novel in 1958, *The Man-eater of Malgudi* in *1961, The Vendor of Sweets* in *1967* and *The Painter of Signs* in *1976*. He wrote *My Dateless Diary* in 1960. His literary genius was in full bloom.

His publisher wanted him to draw on the rich store of Hindu mythology. Narayan obliged, and wrote two fine books *Gods, Demons and others,* and a popular version of *The Mahabharata*. During the period 1985-1991, Narayan was a nominated Member of the Rajya Sabha. Even in his ninth decade "his creativity remained undiminished". This was followed by *A Writer's Nightmare in 1988*. Following these two novels, *Talkative Man (1986)* and *The World of Nagaraj (1990*) were published during this period. In fact, just hours before he went on a ventilator in hospital, he outlined to N. Ram and Mariam Ram his plot for a new novel. He wanted Ram to bring him a 2000 (last year's) diary, to enable him to start writing, such was his passion for writing.

Narayan's honours included the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Royal Society of Literature's Christopher Benson Award, and the Padma Bhushan in 1964, elevated to the Padma Vibhushan, India's second highest civilian award, in 2000. Thus, you can see that R.K. Narayan's career as a writer spans a long period. His work is of a remarkable standard. It is owing to the contribution of his works that he has been widely recognised as a modern Indo Anglican poet.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Mention R.K. Narayan's autobiographical novels?

Q 5: Name Narayan's short story collections.

Q 6: Who was Narayan's mentor?

Q 7: What were the awards that Narayan had received in his lifetime?



LET US KNOW

The Guide was developed into a film in both English and Hindi by Dev Anand. It was commercially a most successful movie, but Narayan was not happy with the screen adaptation of his novel. His another novel *Mr.Sampath* was also developed into a film by S.S. Vasan of Gemini Films. Another novel, *The Financial Expert* was made into the Kannada movie titled *Banker Margayya*.

Swami and Friends, *The Vendor of Sweets* and some of Narayan's short stories were adapted by the late actor-director Shankar Nag into a television series *Malgudi Days*. It was shot in the village of 'Agumbe' in Karnataka. This village served as the backdrop for Malgudi, complete with a statue of the British personage. It was serialised and telecasted on Doordarshan, the Indian National Television network.

13.4 EXPLANATION OF THE SHORT STORY

"The Doctor's Word" is a very interesting short story, the title of which highlights the value and also the positive effect of a doctor's word on the life of a dying patient. In the story, the character of Dr. Raman, who is a physician in the town of Malgudi, is renowned for his diagnostic acumen and "certain curt truthfulness" which made his opinion much valued. Usually, as a doctor he was very objective in the treatment of his patients who took his word as final, as they believed that their lives hung on his expert word. To the patients he was not a mere doctor but like a judge pronouncing a verdict. The story is centered on the Doctor who is supposed to have the last word on a patient's condition i.e. life or death and also how there are

certain considerations on his counted opinion based on time and situation. When Dr. Raman is called upon to a professional visit at home and to perform subsequent operation on his dearest friend Gopal, he for the first time faces a professional and an ethical dilemma.

As his friend Gopal was very sick ('dying' in Dr. Raman's judgment), he requested a truthful opinion from Dr. Raman, in order to settle his 'will' if in case he was nearing his death. This was because Gopal was foresighted and did not want his wife and children to lead a miserable life due to an unsettled will. He felt it would certainly spell trouble because he felt threatened by the presence of Subbiah and his gang. But, at this point the doctor had to delicately handle the situation because if he allowed Gopal to sign the will, it would mean that he also confirmed his chances of dying and destroy the little chances of survival that he had.

Dr. Raman had almost revealed his pessimistic opinion on Gopal's chances of survival to his assistant (that Gopal would not survive the night). But, for the first time in his life, Dr. Raman does "a piece of acting" and instead assures his patient-friend that he was to live. On hearing his friend's opinion, Gopal took him, for his word and expressed his gratitude saying, "if it comes from your lips it must be true." As a result, Gopal's condition improves and he survives his difficult hours. Thus, Dr. Raman on being happily amazed with the effect of his word on his friend's health, he remarks to his assistant saying, "How he has survived this attack will be a puzzle to me all my life."

You will find, that the decision taken by the doctor and his make-belief word results in the improvement of his friend's health, hope and finally his survival. It is definitely a crucial moment when the doctor fulfills his "Hippocratic Oath," and playing a significant role in "reducing patient harm by not revealing upsetting conditions." The story highlights that 'trust' is an important belief or faith in a reliable person, who is honest and will never cause harm. And it is this conviction with which patients like Gopal always confide in doctors and seek advice. A treatment is more likely to work like 'a placebo effect' (which is a therapeutic effect) and heal a patient if he or she believes in a doctor's word or medication. In medical science a placebo

effect is more of a psychological effect which in turn has a positive physiological effect on a suffering patient. Thus, the brain plays a major role in physical health as we notice how Gopal's health shows a sudden improvement when his mind is infused with hope. This shows that when there is a sense of trust or faith in the doctor and the prescribed medication it can have a positive effect on the patient's health. Therefore, 'trust' in a reliable physician or doctor does play a role in a patient's well-being and this is what is reflected through Narayan's simple and optimistic story.



LET US KNOW

In one common placebo procedure, however, a patient is given an inert pill, told that it may improve his/her condition, but not told that it is in fact inert. Such an intervention may cause the patient to believe the treatment will change his/her condition; and this belief may produce a subjective perception of a therapeutic effect, causing the patient to feel their condition has improved — or an actual improvement in their condition. This phenomenon is known as the placebo effect.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Placebo

13.5 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

Narayan is one of the three pioneers of Indian writing in English. He is remarkable not only for his outstanding and grand qualities of humour, characterisation, and descriptive narration but also for his simple and conversational language combined with an unaffected and elegant prose style. He uses the language of common man in his novels and short stories. Narayan's stories are characterised by a Chekhovian simplicity and a gentle humour. He narrated stories of simple folks with an attempt to recreate their simple lives in a changing world. His style have also been compared to the French short story writer Guy de Maupassant, due to their ability to "compress the narrative without losing out on elements of the story."

The characters in his stories are memorable with interesting personality traits and mostly down-to-earth people trying to blend tradition

with modernisation, which often result in tragi-comic situations. You will find, that in this story his writing style is simple, unpretentious and witty, with a distinct character, as if he were writing in the native tongue. The use of the words and phrases are clear and self explanatory. His writing reflects precision, clarity and a conversational style and these are the basic qualities particularly in his short stories. Often Narayan has received criticism for his simplistic diction and prose.

Thus, his use of words comes closer to the pattern of the normal conversation of an educated Indian. However, it will be wrong to say that his style is completely devoid of irony and satire. Though, apparently transparent, there are levels of irony in his easy style. An irony is the difference between what is said and what is intended to be said. What makes Narayan's style of writing unique is the sense of humour that he infuses in it. His simple language and remarkable style imparts his characteristic wit and wisdom that makes his works an enjoyable read.

Today, Narayan is remembered as a remarkable story teller and is also compared to the American writer William Faulkner who too created a fictional town named 'Yoknapatawpha County'. Narayan's imaginary town named 'Malgudi' is very interesting and he almost made it come alive with the interesting characters of his creation. Narayan drew much from the everyday situations and closely observed people everyday because of which readers can easily associate with his works till today. Almost all of his works and not just short stories, are incredibly easy to read because of their simplicity. It is important to note that Narayan almost always wrote about India in some way or the other, and usually infused cultural influences of Indian life in most of his literary works.



13.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have got an idea of R. K Narayan's life and works. Narayan had an eventful life as reflected in his autobiography *My Days* which was illustrated by his cartoonist-brother R.K Laxman. The range of his works provides a broader glimpse of his contribution to early Indian

English writing and highlights his credibility as a remarkable story teller. The summary of the short story "The Doctor's Word" will help you gain a better understanding of the text.Narayan's story ends in a positive note. It reflects a doctor's dilemma in the diagnosis of his friend, who trusts his opinion and final word. If the friend's condition does not deteriorate over the night, the doctor opines that his friend has a good chance of recovery. The crisis in the story relates to whether the doctor ought to disclose the patient's critical condition and break his chances of survival, or make an optimistic statement to psychologically improve his hopes of survival. At the end of the unit, you will also gain an idea about the style and language that Narayan employed in his writings. The unit will stir your interest in the short story "The Doctor's Word" and also you will appreciate the message of hope and optimism reflected in the story.



13.7 FURTHER READING

1) Abrams, M.H. (2007). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Delhi: Thomson Wadsworth.

2) Dutta, Kalyannath. (1967). *Some Aspects of the Study of Literature*. Calcutta: Sribhumi Publishing Company.

3) Singh, Krishna K. (2002). *Social Perspectives in R.K. Narayan's Novels*. Jaipur: Book Enclave.

4) Singh, R. A. (2002). *Critical Essays on R. K. Narayan's Novels*. Jaipur: Book Enclave.

13.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: V. S. Naipaul called R. K. Narayan "the Gandhi of modern Indian literature" …mystical, community-oriented themes….India's greatest writer in English…. splendid creation of the fictional town of 'Malgudi'.

Ans to Q No 2: Not a brilliant student….eight years…at the Lutheran Mission School…CRC High School…moved back in with his parents…failed

the college entrance exam in English… failed in intermediate and degree examinations…bachelor's degree…University of Mysore.

Ans to Q No 3: July 1933, Narayan fell in love…Coimbatore…saw a girl drawing water…this was Rajam, who was fifteen years old at the time, tall (taller than R.K. by a couple of inches), slim and good-looking…personal tragedy…May-June 1939, when Rajam passed away… typhoid…midnight…June 6, 1939…could have been saved with earlier diagnosis…before the days of the antibiotics.

Ans to Q No 4: *Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts.*

Ans to Q No 5: *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* (1947), *Lawley Road* (1956), *A Horse and Two Goats* (1970), *Malgudi Days* (1982), *Under The Banyan Tree and Other Stories* (1985).

Ans to Q No 6: Graham Greene.

Ans to Q No 7: Sahitya Akademi Award, the Royal Society of Literature's Christopher Benson Award, the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan.



13.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a note on R. K Narayan's literary output and contribution to Indian English Literature.

Q 2: Describe the character of the Dr. Raman as a doctor.

Q 3: Why was Dr. Raman's word valuable to the patient?

Q 4: Why did Gopal seek a truthful opinion from Dr. Raman?

Q 5: What dilemma does Dr. Raman face as a result of Gopal's question?

Q 6: Explain the probable reason for the improvement in Gopal's health condition.

Q 7: Do you think that the Doctor's word has a therapeutic effect on Gopal? Elaborate.

Q 8: Analyse the language and style that R. K Narayan employs in his works.

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UNIT 14: MAMANG DAI: "THE RIVER WOMAN"

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Mamang Dai: Her Life and Works

14.4 Introducing *The Legends of Pensam*

14.5 Explanation of the Short Story

14.6 Major Themes

14.7 Major Characters

14.8 Style and Language

14.9 Let us Sum up

14.10 Further Reading

14.11 Answers to Check your Progress

14.12 Model Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- form an idea regarding the literature from North East India, focusing on the writer Mamang Dai and the text "The River Woman" from *The Legends of Pensam*
- explore the thematic concerns in her works
- discuss the representation of the existing realities and traditional oral literature in the works of Mamang Dai
- examine the language and writing style of the author.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

We are all aware that the North East comprises the seven states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The image that the word North East conjures up for most Indians is of an entity distinct from the mainland and populated by people equally dissimilar – geographically, historically, racially and linguistically. The first thing that needs to be acknowledged while speaking of the North East is

that it is a mosaic of cultures. Homogenization of the region within a single identity is not feasible as the culture lacks homogeneity. As such, a significant amount of variation can be seen in terms of the subjects the writers are dealing with, the description of cultural artifacts and symbols, colloquial words used, etc.

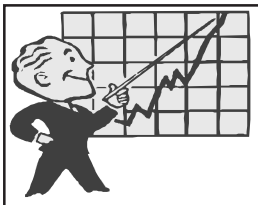
14.3 MAMANG DAI: HER LIFE AND WORKS

Born on February 23, 1957 Mamang Dai is a poet, novelist and freelance journalist. She is considered one of the most prominent voices from North East India along with other contemporary writers like Temsula Ao, Anjum Hasan, Jahnavi Barua among others. She has worked for various dailies like *Sentinel*, *The Telegraph* and *Hindustan Times*. She was the Project Officer in the Biodiversity Hotspots Conservation Programme of the WWF in Arunachal Pradesh. Dai, who was conferred the Padmashree in 2011 for Literature and Education, has also been associated with the Arunachal Pradesh Literary Society, Sahitya and Sangeet Natak Akademi, Raja Ram Mohun Roy Library Foundation and the North East Writers' Forum in various capacities. However, Dai is principally known as a creative writer and a historian who writes about Arunachal Pradesh. She worked as a civil servant but quit her job to devote herself to writing and become a full time writer. She is noted for the work *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land*, a documentation of the culture and tradition of a state about which not much is known, and *Mountain Harvest: The Food of Arunachal Pradesh*. Her works include two novels, *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) and *Stupid Cupid* (2009), two volumes of poetry titled *The River Poems* (2004) and *El bálsamo del tiempo* (*The Balm of Time*, bilingual edition, 2008), and two illustrated books of folktales for children titled *Sky Queen* (2005) and *Once Upon a Moon Time* (2005).

14.4 INTRODUCING *THE LEGENDS OF PENSAM*

The Legends of Pensam (2006) was the first novel written by Mamang Dai. The text does not follow the traditional structure associated with a novel. Instead it comprises four parts containing different stories or

legends of a village called Pensam in Siang Valley. Unlike the conventional novel where the story revolves around a single protagonist, the focus here is on an entire community, the Adi. The Adis are concentrated in East and West Siang Valley. There is a shift of focus from individual to community which is also part of the attempt to posit the text in a liminal space as the name Pensam itself means an in-between land. The author's goal is to chronicle how an entire way of life changed when it came in contact with the colonisers in the late nineteenth century. The stories relate not just to the location called Pensam, but also symbolically to the issue of how the Adi tribe attempted to negotiate with the changes, and how they are in an "in-between" position. The book begins with a description of the narrator's return to Gurdum town, where she lived before she moved to a big city. From there she, along with her friend Mona, travelled together to the ancestral village of the narrator's mother. They have maintained cordial relationship with a man called Hoxo who was married to Losi, the daughter of Nenem, the "River Woman".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In which year was *The Legends of Pensam* published?

Q 2: "The River Woman" centres around which tribe of Arunachal Pradesh?

14.5 EXPLANATION OF THE SHORT STORY

The short story "River Woman" is a part of the section titled "daughters of the village" from *The Legends of Pensam*. The section called "daughters of the village" comprises five stories. The first two "the words of women" and "a homecoming" describe how the narrator, who had left her village and settled down far away, eventually comes back and settles down in Gurdum town. The section discusses her relationship with her mother, her experiences of love and the lives of the village women in general.The other stories in the third section – "river woman", "the scent of orange blossom" and "rites of love" – deal with story of Nenem and her daughter Losi. The titular "river woman" is Nenem, the beautiful and self assured

daughter of the village headman. Nenem had a quite nature but she had an impulsive streak which made the villagers compare her to the river.

The story commences with Mona asking Losi if she has an old family photograph such as that of her father-in-law or her parents. Mona, evidently, the outsider here, was inquisitive and wished to know more about the village in Siang Valley for which she came three or four times every year. Losi laughed and said that she knows about people only through the stories that she heard from her husband and other people. However, after some rummaging and struggle with a few tins, she found an old photograph of her mother.

The woman in the picture was an exquisite young woman standing beside a handsome British officer in uniform. The woman was Nenem, the legendary beauty of the place and Losi's mother. The narrator and Mona come to know that she was not only beautiful but also extraordinarily brave and impulsive. She was seen frequenting the officer's bungalow every now and then when she was young. This created many gossip arround her but her impulsive streak could never bow down to any fear.

The village had witnessed the arrival of white strangers or migluns during the last part of nineteenth century but later there were other soldiers too who arrived from the east. It was the Japanese soldiers during the World War against whom the British had to fight. The village came to be known to the outside world after the Abor expedition that opened up the Siang valley for exploration. This also led to a violent tussle between the British or the migluns and the villagers. The latter had to surrender and accept defeat and the British began to set up camp near the banks of river Pigo. The villagers accepted the bargain offered by the British to give away a small part of the territory for construction of buildings for the political agent, policeman and the doctor. In return the villagers would get back their villages. The small portion of land later paved the way for fresh convoys and the entire area came under the control of the British.

The banks of Pigo became an area for free trade as people from Duyang gathered to the market in Pigo. The native villagers bargained their fruits in return of tobacco, molasses and paraffin. The market place also

had plainsmen who knew the local language and they were permitted to open wooden shops for selling rice, cloth, beads and salt. The tribes were also permitted to sit on the river banks and sell a large variety of vegetables, herbs and hand woven clothes by the women. It was on such a day that Nenem met the miglun, David Ferguson. He showed friendliness towards her and her companions, willing to buy the oranges that she brought for the market. Before they parted David introduced himself and asked her about where she lived to which she shyly answered by pointing towards the hills. The young officer was smitten by the beauty of Nenem who wondered if it was appropriate for a miglun to show interest in a local tribeswoman.

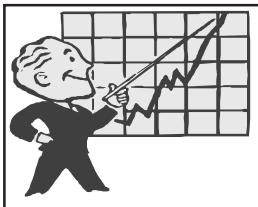
Nenem, who was nineteen at that time, was the only child of Sogong, the headman of the village. Her father wished to give her education in a girls' mission school that was opened in the town. However, she was dismayed by the constrictions of the Western school system which was completely different from her earlier village school. The village school offered her the liberty to stay close to nature, something which she could not find in the town school. Consequently, she fell ill and her father gave up the idea of sending her back to the missionary school. After her return, she confessed to her friends that she was afraid of losing her soul because of her distance from the river. When she saw David, she was reminded of the fair school matrons but unlike them, the young officer had kind and tender eyes.

Nenem found herself to have become the object of attention for David who followed her wherever she went. Her friends, Yasam and Neyang teased her saying that she should hide since the officer was in the market again to purchase oranges. Nenem believed that she can never hope to be together with David due to their difference in languages and cultures. However, David made every attempt to learn the local language and humouring Nenem's friends in the process. The two were attracted to one another and began to walk around the country together, inviting the attention of the villagers who saw them together. David explained to her in his newly acquired language that his father had been a frontiersman who travelled widely throughout India and he believed in following his footsteps. This allowed Nenem to get a new perspective about David. He was not only in

love with Nenem but also the river and the land in which he discovered new meaning of life. However, their relationship did not please Nenem's father who was scandalised by the rumours about his daughter and the miglun, David. And so he went to David's senior to complain. David's senior attempted to chastise him for becoming engaged with Nenem but realised that David was in love with her.

This made the senior officer a bit worried because he knew that David and other young men like him working in India, would soon be called back to their homeland because of the ensuing revolution for India's Independence struggle and also changes that are to occur.

As such, David and Nenem could not remain together for a long time as he was called back to England with other officers. The socio-political changes in the Indian subcontinent affected their destinies. Nenem pretended to be unaffected in front of her friends and family after David's departure and kept to herself, by engaging with the daily chores. Her mother felt her sorrow and her father tried to humour her by telling amusing stories. She tried to remain stoic and celebrated when the occasion demanded it such as during the weddings of her friends, Neyang and Yasam. Everything seemed to move ahead with time. The men from the tribe such as Hexo and Rakut's father worked with the migluns to prevent the Japanese from invading their villages and came back after the war was over. Every other person had stories to share around the bonfire at night but Nenem merely spent her time gazing at the stars and wondering what had become of David.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Who is the legendary river woman?

Q 4: How were Losi and Nenem related?

Q 5: Who is a miglun?

Q 6: Where did David meet Nenem for the first time?

14.6 MAJOR THEMES

The major themes present in the short story "River Woman" include the following:

Significance of Oral Narratives: In her essay "Oral Narratives and Myth", Mamang Dai has asserted that "[t]he myth as primitive history expressed in poetic form is notable among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. This is an entirely non-script collection, sung or chanted as narrative ballads and epics about the origin of the world, the sky, the heavenly bodies and the mother earth, are recounted by professional rhapsodists on a variety of occasions, especially during the time of the great festivals". The unique identities of various tribes, which have their basis in ethnic difference and in their distinct cultures,have not yet been run over by the process of globalisation and its commodity culture that has erased the distinctive identities of many cultures. Though not completely untouched by these processes, the tribes' negotiation with the onward march of globalisation and its discontents are still in evidence. And it is the folklore and the folk-life of the region which is the repository of their unique identities. The importance of story-telling in the passing of history and legends has been significant. This is best exemplified through the legend of Nenem. The beautiful Nenem is given the soubriquet "river woman" due to her bold and impulsive nature. She almost acquires the stature of a goddess or celestial woman who captured the attention of a miglun. And it is her story that is passed on by Rakut to the narrator and Mona.

Community: In the story, the writer has represented the Adi tribe as well as the topographical features of the Siang valley that play a significant role in forming impressions about the tribal community. The Adi tribe seem to have a close affinity towards nature. The villagers are essentially shown as dependent on occupations close to nature. In the story, the writer asserts that while the plainsmen brought salt, beads, tobacco and molasses, the tribesmen sold fruits, vegetables and herbs. The tribesmen have been essentially depicted as gatherers who have a close relationship with the land they live in. They harbour deep love for their community and for one another.

Representation of Women: In the tribal villages of Northeast, men and women have their own given space in relation to their responsibilities. It is seen that in the socio-economic set up of most tribal communities of

Northeast, women have been playing a more dominant role than men and their status is much higher than women in other parts of the country. Women spend time in the kitchen preparing food and carry out tasks like cleaning and washing clothes, utensils, looking after children, weaving, etc. But they also engage in other activities which are normally associated with men such as gathering and cultivating. For example, in the story, we see that Nenem, her friends and other women sell fruits and textiles along with the men without any fear or inhibition and it is not considered unusual. But it can also be argued that these roles that women play in these communities only give them a false sense of participation. Structures of inequality are still in place in those communities and women do not have absolute control over decision making. Nenem's relationship with the miglun is subjected to scrutiny by the community and more particularly by her father. As much as the Sogong is a protective father, he was also concerned about providing a good school education to his daughter. Some women are shown to adhere more to their relational self and seem to draw their sense of meaning and happiness from association with others, from being part of, rather than apart from, a collective entity.

14.7 MAJOR CHARACTERS

Nenem: She is the daughter of the Sogong or the village headman. Nenem is described as a beautiful, quiet young woman. She becomes a legend as the "river woman" famed for her beauty and impulsive nature that attracted the attention of the miglun David. In spite of her quiet and unassuming nature, Nenem was headstrong when it came to decision making.It has been asserted in the narrative:

> She had no need to sell oranges or even visit the marketplace, she was the daughter of a revered village elder, she should go back. But she liked going to the market with her friends and she had no desire now to study or be married. (Dai, 98)

Nenem was also witness to the various changes that came in her village and the neighbouring town which was frequented by her and other members of her community. This, she accepted as a part of the social and temporal change.

David: David Ferguson was a twenty eight year old British man and apparently an intelligence officer recruited from the Bengal province to assist the political officer in the hills of Siang. David is described as an open and frank young man who was well versed in the Hindoostani language and managed to grasp other languages with ease. When he initially came across Nenem, he was unfamiliar with the language she spoke but soon learnt some of the words and began to communicate with her in her own tongue which led to their growing attachment towards one another. To the dismay of both Nenem and David, the latter was called for duty elsewhere and he had to leave the hills along with other officers. Although David wanted to be with Nenem, she could not think of leaving the hills.

14.8 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The story "River Woman" is rich in the use of vibrant natural imagery associated with the landscape of the Siang Valley. When David asked Nenem about her village, she laughs and waves her hand in the direction of the hills. Dai describes,

Hers was a village hidden by the trees and separated from this town by the stream with the iron bridge. It was the home of the Doying clans and was counted as one of the prettiest villages around because it was midway up a hill, sheltered from the hills that swirled and screamed down the river gorge. It was cool and shaded by old jackfruit trees. (Dai, 94)

Further,Mamang Dai has made use of words used by the tribesmen such as miglun and migom to render an authentic touch to the narrative. Customs of the village tribesmen are also incorporated within the narrative. For example, when David purchases the oranges from Nenem, he also puts a small piece of ginger in his pocket before he leaves. Nenem's friend Neyang wonders why he did that and came to the conclusion that he must be familiar with their customs.

Ginger was for protection. The wild ginger was a potent medicine against evil spirits. A piece of it was tied around the necks of young children to ward off illness and was always carried, out of sheer habit, when a person was travelling. (Dai, 94)



14.9 LET US SUM UP

To sum up, it is seen that Mamang Dai makes use of myths and tribal folklore to build up a framework of past historical events and contemporary reality. This is done so as to create a complex document that celebrates both the commonplace and the mystic in nature and life. Her description of the surroundings, the relationships and the lives of people belonging to the Adi tribe is lyrical and reflective of the culture of the region.



14.10 FURTHER READING

1) Dai, Mamang. (2006). *The Legends of Pensam*. New Delhi: Penguin.

2) Dai, Mamang. (2009). "Oral Narratives and Myth". *Glimpses from the North East*. New Delhi: National Knowledge Commission, pp. 1-8.



14.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: 2006.

Ans to Q No 2: The Adi tribe.

Ans to Q No 3: Nenem.

Ans to Q No 4: Nenem was Losi's mother.

Ans to Q No 5: The word miglun is used by the tribesmen to refer to the white man or British who colonised their lands.

Ans to Q No 6: David met Nenem at the market on the bank of the river at Pigo.



14.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write short notes on the following:

a. Mamang Dai

b. *The Legends of Pensam*

Q 2: Describe the legend of Nenem and her relationship with the miglun David.

Q3: How did the arrival of the British affect the people in Nenem's village? Illustrate with examples from the text.

Q 4: Discuss the themes reflected in the story "River Woman".

Q 5: Write an essay on the language and style of the story "River Woman".

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UNIT 15: RUSKIN BOND: "THE BLUE UMBRELLA"

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Ruskin Bond: His Life and Works

15.4 Explanation of the Text

15.5 Major Themes

15.6 Major Characters

15.7 Style and Language

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:

- discuss the life and works of the remarkable writer Ruskin Bond
- explain the summary of the novella- *The Blue Umbrella*
- highlight the major themes that emerge from the text
- describe the major characters
- analyse the style and language of the text
- further explore and appreciate the works of Ruskin Bond

15.2 INTRODUCTION

The present unit takes up the novella titled *The Blue Umbrella* written by Ruskin Bond, a renowned Indian English writer and also one of the most popular authors of children's literature. The element of childlike wonder, innocence and an old world charm forms the essence of his writings. Let us then gain a glimpse of his life and his literary works in the following section.

15.3 RUSKIN BOND: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Ruskin Bond grew up in the pleasant environment of Landour, Mussoorie which as you may know is a hill station and a popular tourist destination in India. He was born on May 19, 1934 to Aubrey Alexander Bond and Edith Clarke who were of British descent. Those were the days of the British Raj, the colonial period in India when his father served in the Royal Air Force and he was raised in the home of his maternal grandparents in Dehradun together with his sister Ellen. This explains his love and fascination for the locales of Dehradun and Mussoorie where he spent his formative years.

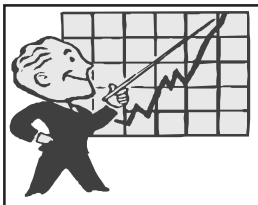
Bond received his formal education at a boarding school in Mussoorie and the prestigious Bishop Cotton School in Shimla. His parents had separated in 1942 and he lived with his father who was then posted in Delhi. At the tender age of ten, Bond had lost his father who passed away having suffered malaria. At this point of his life, Bond's father was posted in Calcutta and he was still a student at Bishop Cotton School. Following this tragic circumstance, Bond was taken in and brought up by his mother and his step father in Dehradun.

As a young boy, he completed his schooling in the year 1950, excelling in creative writing and literary activities, as well as, earning accolades like the Irwin Divinity Prize and Hailey Literature Prize which had certainly inspired him to pursue his love for writing. Early in his life, Bond began dabbling in creative writing and the book that he wrote while residing at his aunt's home in England, titled *The Room and the Roof*, had also earned him the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize (1957). The spur of his imagination, the sweetness of his expression and the humanitarian touch in his writings were the qualities that had spelled a bright future for the young man eager to pursue writing. To simply trace the beginnings of his journey as a writer, one of the first stories that he wrote in his teen years was titled "Untouchable" (1951).

Some of his literary works are namely: *Vagrants in the Valley* (1956) his second novel, anthology of non-fictional writings- *The Best of Ruskin*

Bond (1957), *Ghost Stories from the Raj*, *A Season of Ghosts*, *A Face in the Dark and Other Hauntings*, recent anthology of essays titled *The Lamp is Lit*, his autobiographies- *Scenes from a Writer's Life* and *Lone Fox Dancing* (2017). Through this journey as a writer and to his credit, Bond has over 500 short stories, several novels and novellas, poetry and non-fictional writings, apart from having written over fifty children's books. He is the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1992) for his anthology of short stories titled *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*; Padma Shri (1999), Padma Bhushan (2014) and the Lifetime Achievement Award (2017).

Ruskin Bond is a name to reckon with owing to his wonderful style of writing and his significant contributions particularly to the treasures of Children's Literature. The commitment to his work, his land and his people is evident in the credibility of his literary writings and his undying passion for writing more than anything else. Ruskin Bond continues to write in good health and resides in his hometown of Landour, Mussoorie where he is surrounded with the love and warmth of his foster family.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name the book that Ruskin Bond wrote while residing at his aunt's home in England.

Q 2: Mention the name of one of the first stories written by Ruskin Bond.

Q 3: What are the awards and recognitions that Ruskin Bond had received for his literary contributions?

15.4 EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT

The following subsection provides a detailed explanation of the content and summary of the text *The Blue Umbrella* that was first published in the year 1980. This short fictional piece finds a place in an anthology of short stories titled *Children's Omnibus* (1995) by Ruskin Bond.

The interesting story of a little girl named Binya and her fascination for her blue umbrella, begins with a scene where she is busy calling out for Neelu, her blue-grey cow and Gori the fair one that had grazed in the grassy

hills all day long. The natural surroundings of the Garhwal in the Himalayas were very pleasant with tall pine trees, flowing streams, lush green hills and vast valleys. Both Binya and her brother Bijju helped with the cows. However, for the time being, Bijju was preparing for his examinations for which Binya had to take charge of the cows and ensure that the cows returned home on time. The little girl was not very sure of her age as birthdays were not celebrated in their village but her mother had told her that she was born around ten winters earlier, on a snowy day. Her father had passed away two years after she was born but the family was self-sufficient, having their own small terrace fields in the mountainside where they grew vegetables like potatoes, onions, ginger, beans, maize and mustard.

Having heard of the tinkling sounds of the cow-bells, Binya had guessed that her cows were nearby. All of a sudden, she heard the laughter and the speaking voices of people nearby which distracted her. There was a group of picnickers just nearby who were from the plains and were there on a holiday. Binya silently stood in the shadow of the trees observing them, admiring their colourful clothes, looking at the food that was served and listening to their accent. However, the one thing that had struck her at once was her instant desire for the frilly blue umbrella that she had spotted there, laid open on the green grass near its owner.

This moment is beautifully captured by the writer where Binya is described to have seen many umbrellas before like the black one that her mother had possessed which had holes owing to the menace of the field rats. However, this was the first time in her life that she came across such a beautiful "dainty" umbrella. Her instant love for the umbrella is described thus, "the umbrella was like a flower, a great flower that had sprung up on the dry brown hillside" (2).

Only when Binya had stepped out of the shadows into the sunlight, simply awestruck by the umbrella and suddenly unconscious of the people around that the picnickers noticed her presence. They took pity on her torn clothes, calling her to come closer and trying to offer her some food. If it was not for her fascination for this blue umbrella, she would have certainly fled from the site given her shy nature. One of the women had noticed

Binya's claw pendant on her neck and when she was told by her husband that such pendants were believed to be lucky charms that kept away evil spirits, she compelled him to convince the child to sell it for a little money. When the man had made the offer of wanting to exchange her locket in return for money, Binya had showed no sign of agreement. On his final request asking her on what else he could offer in exchange, Binya had cleverly pointed to the blue umbrella that had captivated her heart once and for all. The man had thus quickly relented to the barter or rather the exchange of the blue umbrella for the pendant. The woman, his wife who had received the necklace had placed it around her neck and Binya, on the other hand to her heart's delight had picked up the open blue umbrella which was perfect in size for her. She twirled the umbrella and looked at the sun through the blue silk spread and then left the picnic spot towards the forest glade.

Binya was so fascinated with the beauty of the umbrella that she always kept it open even when indoors despite Bijju's complaint that it often got in the way. She was so obsessed with it that she carried her umbrella along wherever she went and in this way the blue umbrella came to be associated with her. She often took milk bottles from her home to sell to Ram Bharosa who owned a tea shop located a mile away. The first time that he had seen her umbrella, it had immediately caught his fascination as well. In fact, Ram Bharosa had made an attempt to offer Binya money in exchange for the umbrella and even bargain in the process but Binya had politely refused, buying a toffee and going her way. It was not just Ram Bharosa but also the other villagers who took notice of the bright blue umbrella that Binya carried.

One summer day, when Binya sat below a pine tree to take a moment's rest and fell asleep sitting there with her head resting on her lap, the breeze happened to blow her open umbrella almost six feet down a steep slope. It was precisely the noise of it being blown away that had woken her up. Oblivious of the risks in bringing back the umbrella, Binya leaped down the slope to get hold of it. The moment when she was almost close to getting hold of it, the wind had blown it further away. The playful wind was only short of carrying the umbrella down the cliff which was just twenty yards from the steep slope.

In fact, the umbrella reached the edge of the cliff and sitting there for a while, fell half-way down the cliff to be stuck in a wild cherry tree, roughly around eighty feet above a small stream with rock boulders. That it was risky for her to climb down the cliff did not even appear to Binya who managed to do the same holding onto the firm bilberry bushes, sure-footed and flexible as the mountain-goats. When she had managed to reach the cherry tree which jutted out at a right angle form the cliff, she crawled on its trunk to get hold of the umbrella which was left torn in a few places. As it would prove to be difficult to climb back and that too with the umbrella in tow, she decided to drop it and let it float down to settle in a ravine where it rested among nettle bushes. At this point, even as she felt dizzy, she focused on her umbrella and emerged triumphant rescuing her dear companion despite the nettle stings.

The author then mentions an old anecdote of around four years earlier when Bijju had been severely stung by bees after he knocked down a hive from an old oak tree owing to which he had literally turned immune to bee stings. Both the children enjoyed eating the Kingora berries and bilberries, especially while returning back with their cows every evening. One can imagine the sweetness with which the children relished these little joys; Bijju plucking a handful of berries for his sister and Binya handing the umbrella to him, while enjoying the little fruits. She would let him walk back home on evenings like these with her umbrella as a gesture of love. Again when it rained, Bijju would hold up the umbrella for his sister being the taller one and Binya would take hold of his school books, both helping each other at all times.

With the coming of the rainy season, the hills and valleys wore a fresh green appearance. However, it also spelled trouble for the family. The field rats and other little rodents which moved out of the water-filled underground holes now entered their home, eating away their stored rice and wheat flour, for which they had to be a little more careful. Along with, the changing season, the colour of the umbrella had begun to fade from its original bright blue colour to a pale blue. The school was closed on account of the monsoons but the children were engaged in helping their mother with her work.

In the meantime, Ram Bharosa had grown more and more desirous of owning Binya's umbrella and in fact had blamed his illness on her for the same reason. When his aide in the tea shop, a little boy named Rajaram (also Bijju's schoolmate) learned of his employer's deep desire to own the umbrella, he proposes stealing it in exchange of three rupees. As per the deal, Rajaram manages to finally steal that umbrella from Binya while she is out looking for quills and Bijju busy collecting firewood to take back home. During the fight that ensues, Rajaram happens to let go of the umbrella which floats away in the stream downhill. However, when Bijju emerges victorious over his opponent, Rajaram confesses that he had stolen it for his employer adding a slightly twisted bit of a lie that in failing to do so he would otherwise lose his job.

The sixth section describes the arrival of the October month after the monsoons, with the siblings happy in their own little world, Bijju relishing on sweet corn after school and Binya as much as in love with her now faded milky blue umbrella as she was at first, always carrying it along with her. After the stealing incident that had taken place and everyone came to know that Ram Bharosa was not a man to be trusted, they stopped visiting his tea shop. This made the man all the more miserable and lonely. In fact, from "Ram the Trustworthy" he came to be known as "Trusty Umbrella Thief" (19).

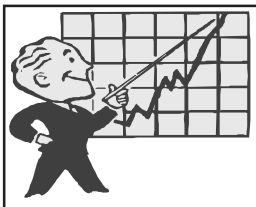
However, when the siblings happened to pass by the shop Binya always experienced a sense of guilt, looking away from the shop, considering herself the cause of the misery that had befallen him. It had been two weeks since any of his earlier customers had set foot into the tea shop and one day Binya decides to walks into the shop expressing her kind gesture of wanting to buy a toffee from the shop. Even at this point, Ram Bharosa could not resist the temptation of hiding the umbrella, thinking that she would not notice. However, Binya actually leaves the umbrella there on purpose so that Ram Bharosa could actually have it for himself.

In the seventh and the final section of the story, we find whenever asked about the umbrella, Ram Bharosa would mention that it was a gift from the little girl. One day a bear from the Himalayas comes down to his

shop to take away a pumpkin growing on the roof of his tea-shop. Later Ram Bharosa finds out that the bear happened to lose one of its claws on the rooftop. Interestingly, he decides not to sell this claw and keeps it for himself. Later he decides to visit the silversmith and turn it into a pendant as a gift for little Binya. In fact when Binya receives the new bear claw pendant she is overwhelmed with this wonderful gift from Ram Bharosa. Moreover, it was believed that a bear claw was even luckier than a leopard claw when worn as a pendant. Thus, the story of Binya and her blue umbrella ends on a beautiful note with her returning home to her mother and brother Bijju. The last lines of the story read thus,

"In the distance she could hear her mother and Bijju calling for her. She began to sing. They heard her singing, and knew she was safe and near. She walked home through the darkening glade, singing of the stars, and the trees stood still and listened to her, and the mountains were glad" (22).

This story is not only wonderful owing to the way the little children capture the reader's interest apart from the blue umbrella but also the beautiful message that it holds in its core.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What happened to the blue umbrella at the edge of the cliff? How did Binya act in that situation?

Q 5: What did the siblings Binya and Bijju enjoy doing on most evenings?

Q 6: Mention the title that Ram Bharosa received owing to his cheating ways?

Q 7: What was believed to be luckier than a leopard pendant?

15.5 MAJOR THEMES

Some of the emergent themes from the text are as discussed below:

Fascination and envy: Through the entire story of Binya and her umbrella, the innocent and childish fascination for little things is evident in her, as well

as, her younger brother Bijju, as is common in little children. While the one possession that Binya had a craze for was her pretty blue umbrella, for her brother who relished wild fruits always desired the sweets kept in glass jars in the tea shops. Similarly, some of his friends who were fond of those sweets often took sweets on credit from Ram Bharosa, having to part with "their most treasured possessions" (11) such as grass-cutting knives, small hand axe, pickle jars or earrings. It is Binya's child-like fascination that she would always keep the umbrella open even after the sunset, carrying her umbrella wherever she went.

However, the element of child-like fascination is not just limited to the children in the story but also the adults like the picnicking couple and others like Ram Bharosa. In fact, the author notes thus, "Most of the people in the village were a little envious of Binya's blue umbrella. No one else had ever possessed one like it" (12). Almost all the people fancied the umbrella to the point of being envious of her for example, the schoolmaster's wife finding it unsuitable for a poor cultivator's daughter to possess such a lovely umbrella while herself being a graduate, with an ordinary umbrella. The temple priest had also looked for a multi-coloured umbrella only to find that such umbrellas were available in Delhi. Others talked among themselves that her pretty umbrella would not shield her against the heavy rains, shrivel in the sun, fly away on a breezy day and even prove itself an ill omen in case there was lightening.

However, the truth was that they were all fascinated with this fine umbrella and envious of the fact that it belonged to Binya. Moreover, envy was at the cause of their pretentious behaviour towards her. These adults seemed more childish than the children given their silly notions. They knew that if they said nice things about the umbrella, the innocent Binya would let them hold it or take a good look at it for a while.

One day when it rained heavily, Binya had learned that her silk umbrella despite its brave attempt to shield her from the rain was not meant for rainy days. Her mother had sewed the torn bits of the umbrella that last time that she had almost lost it on the cliff but somehow the silky material was not waterproof in terms of quality. However, she did not love her umbrella

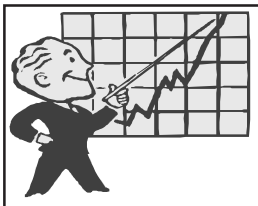
any less. In fact, she had not only fallen in love with the umbrella for its beautiful colour but continued to feel the same way even when the beauty and the former glory of the umbrella was lost and also to protect it at all times. On the other hand, Ram Bharosa's desperation for the umbrella was only because of its beauty; he was the kind of person who desired everything for its worth and if something did not serve his ends, he would probably get rid of it.

Empathy and kindness: The most wonderful message that is presented in the story is the importance of empathy and kindness in our lives. Binya knew that she had been wronged by Ram Bharosa given the unfair means that he had used to possess her umbrella. That Binya had dearly loved the umbrella can be understood from the fact that she had risked her life to protect the umbrella whenever she was at the verge of losing it; climbing down steep cliffs, crossing streams and braving all odds so that she did not lose her umbrella. Ram Bharosa had no idea regarding the extent to which Binya had gone to save her umbrella. Perhaps, due to the same reason, he could never imagine how precious it was for her and what it meant to her. The only thing that he knew was to possess it by any means.

However, instead of judging his selfish act towards her, this little girl empathises with the man to the point of questioning her own conscience on whether she was guilty of the same obsession with the umbrella as he probably was. It is this sense of empathy, a sensitive concern for the feelings of others and her self-consciousness that spoke about her matured thinking. This explains why she would never open the umbrella whenever she passed Ram Bharosa's shop and always make it a point to close it near his tea shop. Towards the end of the story, one finds that Binya willingly parts with her most prized possession, her umbrella. Owing to her self-reflection and given her inherent sense of goodness, she decides to indirectly give it to the shopkeeper leaving it in his shop. When Ram Bharosa realises that it had no utility for him as such, he makes an attempt to return the umbrella to her but Binya refuses to take it insisting that he should keep it. In his disbelief, he questions her as to why she had decided to give away the best umbrella in the village and Binya expresses a profound thought saying, "But an

umbrella isn't everything" (21) which is indeed a significant moment in the story.

Another surprising moment in the story is when Ram Bharosa who comes across a bear claw decides to turn it into a pendant and gift it with a silver chain to Binya. This sweet gesture brings out the best in Ram Bharosa who wins the hearts of the siblings yet again, turning kind and generous towards them. A sincere act of empathy and kindness that a little girl had expressed towards a grown-up had brought about a drastic change in his thought. Indeed, Ram Bharosa had turned into a new leaf, being more affectionate towards the children and considerate in his new approach to everything. As he now owned an umbrella, he felt obliged to step out in the sun and the rain which also had brought about a drastic change in his health and Binya on the other hand became the lucky one to have the best talisman that was meant to keep her in good stead.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What is the wonderful message presented in the story?

Q 9: How did Ram Bharosa turn into a new leaf or rather a new person altogether?

15.6 MAJOR CHARACTERS

The following subsection highlights some of the characteristics of the characters in the novella.

Binya and Bijju: One of the interesting characters of the story is Binyadevi referred to as Binya, a free-spirited girl who was around ten or eleven years of age. Binya cherished a certain sense of freedom when left all by herself and was loving towards her cows often allowing them to graze in the valleys for as long as they liked, sometimes exceeding the expected time of their return. She was a happy-go-lucky person whose heart belonged to the mountains; the kind of girl who held no fear of the deep forests and the hilltops even when she was on her own. Rather, it was the hustle-bustle of the crowded markets in the town where she felt disorientated.

In terms of her appearance, Binya had dark eyes and fair skin, pink cheeks and black hair that she wore in a pigtail. On her wrist were pretty glass bangles, a necklace of glass beads with a leopard claw pendant which was considered a good luck charm. Her brother Vijay better known as Bijju who was two years younger to her also had a similar locket which was tied to a string. Binya was an observant girl who had a strong presence of mind of what was happening in and around her surroundings. In many ways, she was very innocent and child-like as can be said from her longing to own the blue umbrella and her preoccupation with it.

Although, she was possessive about her umbrella, yet she was the kind of person who would lend her umbrella to anyone in need or in sadness. The reason that she had fallen in love with the umbrella was not only because it was so beautiful but also as it was a plaything for her. However, one of the striking quality of Binya was her sense of courage when faced with odds particularly in the instance when she climbs down the steep cliff that could have even spelled her death. She was adept at climbing trees and steep rocks, immune to the sting of nettles and in sync with the natural surroundings in which she had grown up in.

Binya was the curious child who would lift up rocks to disturb scorpions and even get in the way of venomous snakes, protecting herself with her blue umbrella. On the other hand, Bijju would carry a stick with him in case he came across snakes while bringing the cows home. The little girl was so carefree that she would enjoy the rain and the puddles, even as the cows were drenched in the rain. Although, Bijju equally enjoyed the rains yet when he had his schoolbooks in hand he preferred to take shelter from the rains. The common characteristic in the siblings were their sense of innocence and gullibility; apart from that they were quite opposite in nature. However, they were both obedient children and they always helped their mother to take care of the cows, milk them, deliver milk bottles to their customers, ploughing and transplanting rice seedlings. Also, they were very united as siblings as noted for an instance in the moment when Bijju chases Rajaram down the hill along with Binya to get hold of the stolen umbrella.

Ram Bharosa: Although, the name Ram Bharosa means the trustworthy one, he was in reality quite the opposite. He owned a tea shop by the dusty Tehri road where the passengers of the Tehri bus would get down for some light refreshments. When he first sees Binya with her blue umbrella, he tries to discourage her carrying the umbrella saying such pretty umbrellas were meant to serve rich ladies as luxury or rather playthings. Ram Bharosa who was probably the richest man in the village seemed to believe that it was more suitable for him to own that umbrella than a poor little girl like Binya. The man's sense of greed and obsession comes across in the following lines: "Not a day passed without his getting a glimpse of Binya and the umbrella; and the more he saw the umbrella, the more he wanted it" (16). It is evident that apart from being a man who was selfish by nature, he was also very manipulative. When he finds that Rajaram, his aide is keen on stealing it for a small sum of money, instead of dissuading the child from the act, he encourages him into it which is immoral.

He was the kind of person who would take advantage of innocent little children for an instance, his concern was not the safety of a child out alone in the hills during the monsoons, rather a desire to obtain the porcupine quills that Binya brought from the forest glade for a tiny sum of money. He sold these quills to the prospective traders for a tidy profit. One day when Binya was engrossed in her search for those quills, Rajaram took his chance of stealing the umbrella and running away with it. This was the first time that the umbrella was closed and that too by a thief. If one notices, Ram Bharosa not only set a bad example himself but was also an unhappy man unlike the innocent and joyful siblings. The difference between him and the children was that in a bid to own more and more than he already had, he could never be happy but the little children enjoyed their little blessings and always made the most of whatever little they had. However, in the end Ram Bharosa turns a new leaf and becomes a good person with a new approach to life.

15.7 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The learner will certainly be interested to know that *The Blue Umbrella* was also adapted for a Hindi film with the same title, directed by Vishal Bhardwaj in the year 2005. Written in Ruskin Bond's simple and crisp style, the vivid descriptions and the captivating narrative of the writer instantly stirs the reader's interest. The one striking aspect of Bond's writing is the kind of deep insight that his narratives has to offer into the minute aspects of human thoughts, emotions and experiences. His stories almost always take into account the intricacies of human relationships and the essence of human experiences to which everyone can easily relate to. This novella which takes a child's perspective into consideration, captures the innocent and gullible minds of little children which comes across through the dialogues woven in the narration of the story. Although, the prescribed text was published as a novella with the story divided into six short parts yet it can easily pass for a short story, given its structure, length and presentation.

The writings of Ruskin Bond even in its simplicity has a remarkable flow of expression and way with words that almost at once stir one's imagination and brings alive the presented imageries, the situated context and the significance of the characters in his stories. For an instance, one may note the striking imagery of Binya with her open blue umbrella out in the rain in the following lines extracted from the text: "And then there was a cloudburst, and it was like standing under a waterfall. The umbrella wasn't really a rain-umbrella, but it held up bravely. Only Binya's feet got wet. Rods of rain feel around her in a curtain of shivered glass" (12).

In fact, the central image of the story is that of the open blue umbrella that almost stands out distinctly as a symbol of fancy and fascination. Another aspect that may be noted in the narration is the romantic essence in it, which at once brings alive the reader's senses and even personifies nature in its best, for an instance, one may take note of the following description: "The rains set in and the sun only made brief appearances. The hills turned a lush green. Ferns sprang up on walls and tree-trunks. Giant lilies reared up like leopards from the tall grass. A white mist coiled and uncoiled as it

floated up from the valley. It was a beautiful season, except for the leeches". (15)



15.8 LET US SUM UP

After going through the details of the unit on *The Blue Umbrella*, the learner will be able to discuss the life and literary contributions of Ruskin Bond, as well as, explain the summary of the text. Apart from having received an idea on the form of children's writing or literature, the learner will also appreciate the significant message that the story holds. The learner will be able to discuss the major themes that emerge from the text of the story together with the style and language used by the author. All in all, the unit will stir the imagination of the learners as most other creative writings and works of Ruskin Bond does and also inspire the learners to explore more of the author's literary works.



15.9 FURTHER READING

1) Bond, Ruskin. (1992). *The Blue Umbrella*. Rupa Publications: New Delhi.

15.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The book that he wrote while residing at his aunt's home in England, titled *The Room and the Roof*, had also earned him the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize (1957).

Ans to Q No 2: One of the first stories that he wrote in his teen years was titled "Untouchable" (1951).

Ans to Q No 3: Ruskin Bond is the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1992) for his anthology of short stories titled *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*; Padma Shri (1999), Padma Bhushan (2014) and the Lifetime Achievement Award (2017).

Ans to Q No 4: The umbrella reached the edge of the cliff and sitting there for a while, fell half-way down the cliff to be stuck in a wild cherry tree, roughly around eighty feet above a small stream with rock boulders. That it was risky for her to climb down the cliff did not even appear to Binya who managed to do the same holding onto the firm bilberry bushes, sure-footed and flexible as the mountain-goats.

Ans to Q No 5: Both the children enjoyed eating the Kingora berries and bilberries, especially while returning back with their cows every evening.

Ans to Q No 6: From "Ram the Trustworthy" he came to known as "Trusty Umbrella Thief" (19).

Ans to Q No 7: It was believed that a bear claw was even luckier than a leopard claw when worn as a pendant.

Ans to Q No 8: The most wonderful message that is presented in the story is the importance of empathy and kindness in our lives.

Ans to Q No 9: Ram Bharosa had turned into a new leaf being more affectionate towards the children and considerate in his new approach to everything.



15.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Describe the life and works of the author Ruskin Bond.

Q 2: Give a detailed summary of the novella *The Blue Umbrella* by Ruskin Bond.

Q 3: Describe the characters of Binya, Bijju and Ram Bharosa with reference to Ruskin Bond's novella, *The Blue Umbrella*.

Q 4: Explain the major themes that emerge from the story of "The Blue Umbrella".

Q 5: Discuss the style and language employed in the text of "The Blue Umbrella".

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Learner's Feedback on Course

Dear Learner,

Regarding the course as mentioned above, we would like to know your opinions and comments so as to improve the quality of self learning materials in future. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the number you feel most reflect your opinion. After completion of the additional comments, please detach the page and send/mail the same to us at the address given below.

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(E-mail id: ciqa@kkhsou.in)

1. Approximately how many hours did you spend for studying the units in the course? | | | |
2. Please give your opinions (by √ mark) to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I.	The SLMs of the course fulfil the learning objectives set out in the beginning of each unit					
II.	The units of the SLM could satisfy my academic needs and expectations					
III.	The Unit writers have excellent knowledge about the course contents					
IV.	Language and contents of the units were presented at a level which I could readily understand					
V.	Ample opportunity for participation in the activities provided in the units					
VI.	Used enough Illustrations (Diagrams, tables etc.) for conceptual clarity					
VII.	Quality of content is engaging, relevant, and up-to-date					
VIII.	The self check questions are very helpful					
IX.	The Possible/model questions and the answers to check my progress have benefited me a lot					

Additional Comments: *(Please feel free to provide your open comments)*

1. Which aspects of the SLM, according to you, worked well?

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2. What sort of changes/improvements do you feel KKHSOU could implement to improve the overall quality of the SLM?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.

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