UNIT 3 : DANIEL DEFOE: *ROBINSON CRUSOE* II

UNIT STRUCTURE

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3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- receive a concise summary and outline of the novel
- read into the major themes pertaining to the novel
- gain an insight into some of the important and memorable characters
- form an analysis on the narrative style
- receive a critical reception of Defoe's work

3.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you have read about the life and works of Daniel Defoe along with the background and the summary of the novel *Robinson Crusoe.* In this unit, you will receive a critical insight into the novel, as the main focus will be on the various important areas and aspects pertaining to the novel. At the same time, you are advised to read the text thoroughly with an eye for the details. It is 'best' to read the novel from cover-to-cover in order to enjoy Crusoe's sense of adventure and excitement. Such a reading will also bring alive (almost like a lived experience) your imagination as a reader, while going through Crusoe's varied adventures and engrossing experiences of struggle for survival on an island, lurking with unforeseen

dangers and an uncertain future. A complete reading will also provide you with a better comprehension of the unit.

3.3 READING THE NOVEL

In the following subsections, you will gain a critical insight into various important aspects pertaining to the novel *Robinson Crusoe* such as the major themes, major characters and narrative style. These detailed discussions will also supplement your reading of the text of the novel.

3.3.1 Major Themes

Spirit of Travel and Adventure :

Even after having received the wise counsel of his father, being well-provided for with all the prospects of excelling at their trade and despite courting near death like situations, there was a continuous stirring in the restless mind of Crusoe to sail the seas on adventures. It was almost as though only the seas were his true calling. Crusoe through both his adventures and misadventures underwent tremendous challenges to emerge a survivor. He was well-travelled and had grown wiser for his experiences which he would not have had, had he remained confined to his father's estates.

The very feeling of losing a sense of time and place on a boat, without being equipped with nautical instruments, rolls of map, idea of latitude or sailor's advice can be grasped in Crusoe's own words in which he says: "…*so I ventur'd to make to the coast, and came to an anchor in the mouth of a little river, I knew not what, or where; neither what latitude, country, what nations, or what river…*" (20). And whatever be the risk or threat, he always took it in his stride to tackle and employ his stratagems in time to overcome it all. Crusoe also took to killing for sport like in the instance of escaping the clutches of the Turkish rovers; Crusoe had shot and killed a lion at a harmless distance from his boat just for game rather than necessity. All things taken into consideration, Crusoe's spirit was truly imbued with a sense of fun and adventure, which is why he left home at the age of nineteen

to return home only as a seasoned and a well-travelled middle-aged man. In a broader sense, it is also an account that presents the degrees of struggle and balance between man and his nature.

Colonisation :

The theme of 'colonisation' is evident in the wider context of the novel. By the term colonisation, we understand the domination of the native colonies and its people by the Europeans and the English alike. The process of colonisation can also be related to cultural domination in which the culture and traditions of the natives is rendered inferior to that of the colonisers.

As a prosperous gentleman's son who was but attracted towards the life of a sea-farer, Crusoe was reminded by his father "*that the calamities of life were shared among the upper and lower part of mankind; but the middle station had the fewest disasters*" (4-5). Although, Crusoe had settled to a more humble life on the stranded island, he carried the cultural burden of superiority as an English man. Crusoe considered his culture, religion and beliefs superior to that of Friday, so much so, that he had initiated Friday's into his religion, taught him his language and even refashioned his ways. After all, he was "master" to Friday and all the others who later joined him on the island. He acted as the sole owner of the island (his 'colony') with his own set of terms and conditions. But it is not as though, Crusoe was the complete figure of the English coloniser because it must be said that he also had a personality of his own. He even considered how cannibalism was a natural practice of the natives, just as it was a common practice of people to kill animals for food. And further, he even made a relative comparison and felt that the 'ignorant natives' were lesser criminals than that of the 'conscious Spaniards' who destroyed millions of native Americans and displaced them from their homes.

During the colonial times, slave trade was a common practice. In one such extract in the novel, Crusoe observes on how "buying negroes" or slave trade was a practice during his time, which

was carried on in public through obtained permission (*assiento's*) from the kings of Spain and Portugal, so that few but the best of the black slaves could be brought (32). With the sudden turn of events in the novel, English men (like Crusoe himself) were taken as slaves to serve the Moors (who were otherwise taken as slaves by European seafarers). You may note that like Crusoe there was another English slave who had served the Turkish rover at Sallee (17).Thus, in the process of colonisation, the coloniser is held superior to the colonised, the master to the slave and likewise the civilised to the savage.

Religion and Spiritual Transformation :

That providence plays a part in his destiny is presented in the form of Crusoe's dawning realisation of being the sole survivor of the wrecked ship, which again happened to be at an accessible distance for him to gather all the necessities for his own survival. Gradually, he learnt to look at the positive side of life, believing strongly that he was delivered by the divine grace of God alone. In his lonely hours several realisations had dawned on him and he thought to himself: "*I learn'd here again to observe, that it is very rare that the providence of God casts us into any condition of life so low, or any misery so great, but we may see something or other to be thankful for, and may see others in worse circumstances than our own*" (152).

One July morning, he had picked up his Bible and after a long time began to kneel and pray, also offering thanks for his deliverance from his illness. With time, he cultivated it as a regular habit and engaged himself in reading portions of the Bible every morning and night to his soul's content. Through prayer and confession, he gained strength and felt that "*a temper of peace, thankfulness, love and affection*" (133) was the proper frame of prayer and not a temper of distress or terror. In many ways he had turned philosophical in his approach towards life and had undergone a spiritual transformation as well. At all times, he acknowledged his sincerest gratitude to his great Preserver and learnt never to despair but to hope for the best.

Towards the end of the novel, while having considered his return to the Brasil plantations, Crusoe made a regretful confession that when he "*began to think of living and dying among them, I began to regret my having profess'd myself a Papist, and thought it might not be the best religion to die with*" (234). Only under certain circumstances, he had to profess himself to the religion of the country (Brasil) as a Catholic but it was not a natural choice as he was a Protestant Christian. In the end, he had upheld and preached his religion; he was a good Christian and faithful to the Lord which was all that mattered to him. In many ways the spiritual journey of Crusoe reminds one of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.*

ACTIVITY 3.1



There is a proverb that says, "No man is an island" which means that no man can live all by himself. However, imagine you were stranded all alone on an unknown island. If you had a choice what would be some of the most important things or provisions that you would rather have with you?

Also devise and jot down some of your own survival strategies on an island.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is the meaning of the term Colonisation?

Q 2: To what extent was Crusoe adventurous?

Q 3: How did Crusoe, during his stay in the island, come to know about his spiritual transformation?

3.3.2 Major Characters

The following are the important characters in the novel *Robinson Crusoe*.

Robinson Crusoe :

"But I that was born to be my own destroyer, could no more resist the offer than I could restrain my first rambling designs…"(33), this is what Crusoe felt as a young gentleman intent on embarking on sea adventures across continents. Having miraculously escaped death and surviving on the stranded island, Crusoe found ways of providing for his own sustenance, instead of waiting for things to look up. Although, he possessed an impulsive nature, he was seen ever ready to embark on sailing adventures and was also blessed with a presence of mind and resolution to tackle the worst of circumstances. Crusoe was also much foresighted as he says "I consider'd from the beginning how I would provide for the accidents that might happen" (52). Here, in his journey, you will observe how Crusoe applied his practical reasoning and rational judgment in every way in all situations. By the dint of his hard labour, he provided very well for his own sustenance and was by all means self-sufficient, so much so that his cave looked "like a general magazine of all necessary things" (56). Although he suffered a gamut of emotions he learnt not to despair of anything. Without wasting time he put in his best efforts and kept up with all the dreary work, so much so, that even when he fell sick several times, he never passed out of exhaustion.

Crusoe somehow followed his instincts of survival and with the passing of time became laborious and seasoned. He learnt optimism and struggle in the face of all odds and as he himself declared "…I seldom gave up anything over without accomplishing it, when I once had it in my head enough to begin it." He also learnt much by trial and error, for an instance, he lost one whole crop by sowing it during the dry season but on rectifying it later gained an abundance of harvest. We learn from Crusoe's character the qualities of fortitude, courage, hard work, perseverance, presence of mind, being self-determined or strong-willed and overall to be optimistic. It was not as though, it was easy for Crusoe to be hopeful at all times and as is obvious, he was not without his share of emotional turmoil, often in

remembrance of his father's counsel and musings on God. He often sat down all by himself and wept like a child.

Often, he felt like a prisoner on the island which made him lose his composure. Although, he was much self-contained and pre-occupied with himself, he desperately longed for company. During his lonely years only his pet parrot, pet dogs and goats provided him with a sense of attachment. He repented at times, made confessions, while also praying and acknowledging God's judgment on himself. In his own words he says, "I was removed from all the wickedness of the world here. I had neither the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life"(105).

But, we can also find a sense of arrogance or indulgence in the character of Crusoe, when he finds new company on the island, "[m]y island was now peopled, and I thought myself very rich in subjects; and it was a merry reflection which I frequently made, how like a king I look'd" and that he was "absolute Lord and law giver" on the island (196). As a white gentleman, he also had certain inbuilt biases against the savages but these were dispelled when he learnt from Friday that their people were not necessarily violent or hostile at all times. He considered himself 'generalissimo' with Friday as his 'lieutenant'. Above all, he had emerged as a survivor in his own right and grew all the wiser through this self-journey or journey within.

Friday :

In Crusoe's description, Friday was a tall, straight, shapely and a strong limbed man with long black hair, bright dun olive colour skin and a good physique. He was probably 26 years of age and had a good countenance which Crusoe described as "all the sweetness and softness of an European in his countenance" and always bore a pleasant smile with a "sparkling sharpness in his eyes" and a humbleness in his approach.

As Crusoe had saved Friday from his death, he promised his servitude and submission to him. Although, initially both of them could not comprehend the other's language, yet they understood each

other in many things. Friday was an amiable person and a fast learner of all things, being amazed at the way things worked like the functioning of guns and shots, learning his master's language which was very new to him. He was a good companion and help to Crusoe and bore an extraordinary love for his master, his own father, and also his nation that was reflected through his words. Friday was a sight when his emotional side had surfaced and he was reunited with his father on the island. In his "filial affection" (194), he was jumping and dancing, laughing and crying, embracing and overwhelmed and simply rejoicing that special moment. He was also very loyal and faithful by nature and such was his loyalty that he expressed his lifelong gratitude to Crusoe saying: "Me die, when you bid die, master" (188).

Friday thus accompanies Crusoe for the rest of his adventures from his share of being frightened of snow mountains to fighting wolves in Pampeluna. All in all, Friday has been an interesting and a rounded portrayal in Defoe's characterisation and also one of the most endearing and memorable characters in fiction.

Xury :

Xury, the innocent and endearing boy had accompanied Crusoe on his fishing trip which Crusoe had planned to turn into his final escape from the rover's captivity. Xury was unaware of Crusoe's plans of escape on the fishing trip but nevertheless, on being demanded to swear his loyalty, he had innocently smiled and promised to be faithful and travel the world with him. It was the little boy's cheerfulness that had kept Crusoe's spirits high. He also seemed to have a sound sense of place and survival, being alert and awake to all the lurking dangers, often suggesting Crusoe on the 'do's and don'ts' as if he were a "councellor"(24). And it is he who notices the ship near Cape de Verd which had become their ultimate rescuer.

In one such situation, in which they had taken the risk to anchor on an unknown shore, Xury had voluntarily requested Crusoe to allow him to look ashore for fresh water. When Crusoe asked him the reason as to why he should not go instead and Xury stay back,

this is what the boy had said: "If wild mans come, they eat me, you go wey" and it was the boy's affectionate answer, which made Crusoe "love him ever after" (21). He was a brave and independent boy, skilled at hunting and also skinning (he skins a lion that Crusoe had shot). Later, the boy decided to serve the captain of the ship who had rescued them and promised him his freedom after ten years.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What do we learn from the character of Crusoe?

Q 5: What was Friday's appearance like in Crusoe's description?

Q 6: Who had kept Crusoe's spirits high while escaping the pirates of Sallee?



LET US KNOW

The learner shall find several words spelled differently in the text of the novel. It must be noted that you are to use the correct form of the words (as provided within brackets) while writing answers. A complete list of the variation in the spellings of words in the text is provided below:

Perswasions (persuasions), Collonel (Colonel), wandring (wandering), entred (entered), vertues (virtues), harrast (harassed), prophetick (prophetic), ruine (ruin), cabbin (cabin), imprest (impressed), lookt (looked), cloaths (clothes), quallified (qualified), mathematicks (mathematics), compleated (completed), suddain (sudden), extasies (ecstasies), firr (fir), tyde (tide), roused (rouz'd), barly (barley), dipt (dipped), cargoe (cargo), linen (linen), skrew jack (screw jack), canvass (canvas), sizzers (scissors), cabbin (cabin), wholesom (wholesome), terras (terrace), fewel (fuel), subtile (subtle), tollerable (tolerable), kalender (calendar), mechanick (mechanic), ryce (rice), politicks (politics), head ach (head ache), desart (desert), burthen (burden), feaver (fever), meer (mere), immediatly (immediately), accompt (account), mannor (manor), straitned (straightened), humane (human), murther (murder), hazey

(hazy), journies (journeys), hamock (hammock), taylering (tailoring), sprye (spray), victuall'd (visualised), auning (awning), chearfully (cheerfully), easyer (easier), chace(chase), stopt (stopped), stoick (stoic), troublesom (troublesome), joyn'd (joined), adjoyning (adjoining), subtilty (subtlety), thickened (thickened), loth (loath), wast (waste), thorow (thorough), haled (hailed), rendred (rendered), corps (corpse), jaum'd (jammed), fastned (fastened), poring (pouring), encrease (increase), thorow-fare (thorough fare), tranquillity (tranquility), Governour (governor), enclin'd (inclined), antick (antique), soverainty (sovereignity), schollar (scholar), embraceing (embracing), satisfie (satisfy), joyn (join), waryness (weariness), skreaming (screaming), extream (extreme), handsom (handsome), comerades (comrades), traffick (traffic), cutlash (cutlass), parlying (parleying), staid (stayed), wakned (wakened), bad (bade), inchanted (enchanted), pease (peas).

3.3.3 Narrative Style

"Thanks to Defoe, the novel defines itself as art in a new mode…" (*Cassell's History* 334)

The narration of the novel is very interesting; in the way it alternates with events and shapes up in form and content. The novel *Robinson Crusoe* is woven with varied adventures both on land and at sea but remains not only an adventure novel but also, a work that delves into the human psyche and his inner journey towards transformation. The narrative in the novel is in the first person in which Crusoe narrates his experiences in a conversational style. When he says, "tho' I have not given the reader the trouble of so particular account of my works this year as the first…" (93), it gives the impression that Crusoe as a narrator is consciously aware of his readers, reading into his narration. Within the fictional narrative, Defoe also uses the journal form as a suitable mode to record the vivid details or the particulars of his long stay on the island. Also he mentions his maintenance of not only land journals but 'sea journals' as well (235).

If you notice, the form of English dialect used in the novel, you will find slight variations of language usage. But, it does not really pose as much of a problem as the implied meaning of the words (in relation to the sentences) can be easily grasped with just a little effort such as: 'be thought' (I thought), 'durst not' (did not/does not), 'why wert thou' (why were you), tho'mixt with (although mixed with), 'I durst to believe' (I had to believe), wakned (awakened), often times (often), from whence they came (from where they came) etc. Friday's dialogues are presented in broken English as he is a new learner of the language and his usage of words is often amusing to the reader. Apart from this, the narration is serialised or episodic and alternates from one account to the other. Both the land and sea adventures are accounted alternately with an attention to details. The narration is lively and stirs the imagination through a wide range of challenging adventures and interesting experiences.

In the lay-out of the novel's title page, the learner will find a few crisp lines on what to expect in the novel's narrative structure. These short lines presented here in the form of a paragraph, read exactly as follows:

"The life and strange surprizing adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: who lived eight and twenty years, all alone in an un-inhabited island on the coast of America, near the mouth of the great river of Oroonoque; having been cast on shore by shipwreck, wherein all the men perished but himself with an account how he was at last as strangely deliver'dby pyrates. Written by himself."

These expository lines subtly hint at the course of events in the narrative.

3.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

The biographer Jean Jacques Rousseau in *Emile, ou de l'education* (1762) had celebrated Crusoe's work saying: "What is this wonderful book, then? Is it Aristotle, or Pliny, or Buffon? No- it is Robinson Crusoe". Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* had discussed the socio-economical relevance of the

work with his analysis on Crusoe: "[s]ince Robinson Crusoe's experiences are a favourite theme with political economists, let us take a look at him on his island." Also, Defoe's "Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe" (1720) is a significant essay based on his own work. Following the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), he had also written two more sequels titled *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Robinson Crusoe*: *With His Vision of the Angelick World* (1720). Some critics have also emphasised on the spiritual significance of this work.

While there have been some critics who have both under-valued and over looked Defoe's works as "fit only for the kitchen…" (Long 346), the continued significance and the popularity of his works, considering also his literary contribution he had undoubtedly carved a place for himself in the development and history of English literature. The novel has been adapted in the form of several plays, films and opera. Defoe had inspired a trend that came to be known as the 'Robinsonads' which was used for similar island-castaway stories which has drawn a significant crowd and readership over the years. In the words of John Man: "The book's literary significance as 'the first great English novel' and its international success makes it a wonder."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q7. What is the suitable mode or form that Defoe employs to record Crusoe's activities?

Q8. Name the two sequels after *Robinson Crusoe*.

Q9. What do you find most interesting in the style of Crusoe's narration?



3.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, you will receive a substantial idea of how to place the novel *Robinson Crusoe* in its relevant context by highlighting the relevant themes and the significant characters in the novel. The

supplemented discussons is the unit will also enable you to form a critical analysis on the narrative style and also receive a critical reception of Defoe's work. The unit is prepared to enrich the learner's insight and interest into the experiences and adventures of Robinson Crusoe. The novel also contains significant aspects of the moral and the spiritual which is retained throughout the course of the novel. It aims to draw the learner's interest towards the larger narrative of the text and also encourages him/her to further explore the two sequels followed by the all time adventure classic *Robinson Crusoe*.



3.6 FURTHER READING

1) Conrad, Peter. (2006). *Cassell's History of English Literature.* London: Weidenfield and Nicolson.
2) Long, William J. (2007). *English Literature: Its History and Its Significance.* New Delhi: Surjeet Publications.
3) Man, John. (ed). (1998). *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. London: Everymen
4) Sanyal, Lopa. (2006). *English Literature in Eighteenth Century*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House.



3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The domination of the native colonies and its people by the Europeans and the English alike. Colonisation can also be related to cultural domination in which the culture and traditions of the natives is rendered inferior to that of the colonisers.

Ans to Q No 2: Crusoe was highly adventurous following which he left home at the age of nineteen only to return as a well-travelled middle-aged man.

Ans to Q No 3: Crusoe learnt to look at the positive side of life and believing strongly that he was delivered in the island by the divine grace of God alone.

Ans to Q No 4: We learn from Crusoe's character the qualities of fortitude, courage, hard work, perseverance, presence of mind, being self-determined or strong-willed and overall to be optimistic.

Ans to Q No 5: In Crusoe's description, Friday was a tall, straight, shapely and a strong limbed man with long black hair and a good physique. He was probably 26 years of age and had a good countenance which Crusoe described as "all the sweetness and softness of an European in his countenance" and he always bore a pleasant smile with a "sparkling sharpness in his eyes" and a humbleness in his approach.

Ans to Q No 6: The cheerfulness of the little boy Xury had kept Crusoe's spirits high.

Ans to Q No 7: Defoe also uses the journal form as a suitable mode to record the vivid details or the particulars of his long stay on the island.

Ans to Q No 8: *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Robinson Crusoe: With His Vision of the Angelick World* (1720).

Ans to Q No 9: To attempt on your own.



3.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the varied activities that Crusoe engages himself in, for his own sustenance.

Q 2: Analyse the relationship between Robinson Crusoe and Friday.

Q 3: Discuss Robinson Crusoe's emotional and spiritual journey.

Q 4: Critically analyse the novel in the light of its critical reception.

Q 5: Draw a character sketch of

(a) Robinson Crusoe

(b) Friday.

Q 6: What is the meaning of the term colonisation? Do you agree that *Robinson Crusoe* reflects different aspects of colonisation?

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