

GEG S6 04 (M)
Exam Code: ENM6D

INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

SEMESTER VI

ENGLISH

BLOCK- 1



KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Subject Experts

1. **Professor Pona Mahanta**, Former Head, Department of English, Dibrugarh University
2. **Professor Pradip Acharya**, Former Head, Cotton College
3. **Professor Bibhash Choudhury**, Department of English, Gauhati University

Course Co-ordinator (s) : Chayanika Roy, Assistant Professor, KKHSOU and
Pallavi Gogoi, Assistant Professor, KKHSOU

SLM Preparation Team

UNITS	CONTRIBUTORS
1	Sanjeeb Kalita , Research Scholar, KKHSOU
2	Chayanika Roy , KKHSOU
3 & 5	Pallavi Gogoi , KKHSOU
4	Dr. Tapati Baruah Kashyap , Lecturer, Beltola Mahavidyalaya Junior College
6 & 7	Dr. Chandrima Goswami , Assistant Professor, Cotton University

Editorial Team

Content	: In-house editing
Language	: Chayanika Roy , Assistant Professor Pallavi Gogoi , Assistant Professor
Structure, Format & Graphics	: Chayanika Roy , Assistant Professor and Pallavi Gogoi , Assistant Professor, KKHSOU

November, 2019

ISBN No.



This Self Learning Material (SLM) of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 License (international): <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Printed and published by Registrar on behalf of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University.

Head Office : Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati - 781017; Web : www.kkhsou.in / web_new
City Office : Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati-781006

The University acknowledges with thanks the financial support provided by the Distance Education Bureau, UGC, New Delhi, for the preparation of this study material.
--

CONTENTS

	Pages
Unit 1: Toru Dutt : “Our Casuarina Tree”	5–19
Toru Dutt: The Poet, Her Life, Her Works, Text of the Poem, Explanation of the Poem, Major Themes, Style and Language, Critical Reception	
Unit 2: Sarojini Naidu: “To Youth”	20–36
Sarojini Naidu: The Poet, Her Life, Her Works, Text of the Poem, Explanation of the Poem, Major Themes, Style and Language, Critical Reception	
Unit 3: A. K.Ramanujan: “Self Portrait”	37–60
A.K.Ramanujan: The Poet, His Life, His Works, Text of the Poem, Explanation of the Poem, Major Themes, Style and Language, Critical Reception	
Unit 4: Eunice d’Souza: “Women in Dutch Painting”	61–79
Eunice d’Souza: The Poet, Her Life, Her Works, Text of the Poem, Explanation of the Poem, Major Themes, Style and Language, Critical Reception	
Unit 5: Keki N. Daruwalla: “Chinar”	80–96
Keki N. Daruwalla: The Poet, His Life, His Works, Text of the Poem, Context and Explanation of the Poem, Major Themes, Style and Language, Critical Reception	
Unit 6: Rabindranath Tagore: “The Hungry Stones” I	97–112
Introduction, Rabindranath Tagore: His Life and Works, Background of the Short Story, Explanation of the Short Story	
Unit 7: Rabindranath Tagore: “The Hungry Stones” II	113–122
Introduction, Major Themes, Major Characters, Critical Reception	

COURSE INTRODUCTION

The Course titled “Indian English Literature” is an optional paper encompassing several of the representative literary genres such as poetry, short-story, fiction and drama by distinguished Indian writers. It contains a total of fifteen units aiming to provide a fair idea to the learners on pre-independent as well as post-independent Indian English literature, social changes in the Indian society, as well as issues pertaining to the contemporary society. The Course is divided into two blocks for the convenience of study.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

The first block of the Course consists of seven units. The first unit introduces the learner to Toru Dutt’s poem “Our Casuarina Tree” which is a recollection of her childhood memories and an attempt to immortalise her happy past spent with her siblings. The second unit deals with Sarojini Naidu’s poem “To Youth”, that revolves around the idea of ‘youth’ and reflects her poetic sensibility. The third unit explores A.K. Ramanujan’s poem “Self Portrait” which sensitises one’s memory and imagination and almost delves into the depths of our being, taking us from the everyday crowds to our inner worlds, where we find ourselves confronting the feelings of alienation, disorientation, loneliness, crisis of identity and longing for roots. The fourth unit takes up Eunice de Souza’s poem “Women in Dutch Painting” that deals with triggering issues on the social and sexual inequalities, norms of patriarchy and gender prejudices, inner turmoil and complexities in the female psyche. The essence of her poetry reveals the challenges and triumphs of the Indian woman through a brevity of creative expression. The fifth unit deals with Keki N. Daruwalla’s poem “Chinar” which captures the central image of the Chinar tree which is native to Kashmir and aesthetically presents all the elements of nature, that is, water, wind, fire and earth. The sixth and seventh units deal with Rabindranath Tagore’s story “The Hungry Stones” which is based on a seemingly bizarre and supernatural experience. It depicts the strange encounter of a man with some ghostlike and eerie characters from the distant past inside a deserted Mughal palace.

After going through these units, you will be able to analyse the poems with a proper comprehension of its theme, structure and poetic techniques besides appreciating the various facets of the short story. 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 some relevant ideas and concepts in “Let Us Know” along the text. We have kept “Check Your Progress” questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study.

UNIT 1: TORU DUTT: “OUR CASUARINA TREE”

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 1.1 Learning Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Toru Dutt: The Poet
 - 1.3.1 Her Life
 - 1.3.2 Her Works
- 1.4 Text of the Poem
 - 1.4.1 Explanation of the Poem
- 1.5 Major Themes
- 1.6 Style and Technique
- 1.7 Critical Reception
- 1.8 Let us Sum up
- 1.9 Further Reading
- 1.10 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 1.11 Model Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the social and intellectual forces that shaped Toru Dutt as a poet
- locate Toru Dutt as an early Indian English poet
- explain Toru Dutt's poem “Our Casuarina Tree”
- describe Toru Dutt's love for nature and her interest in romantic poetry
- appreciate the poet's endeavour to immortalise her happy childhood by sanctifying the Casuarina tree.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the block. Here we shall deal with one of the finest women poets who contributed to Indian Writing in English,

namely, Toru Dutt. The implementation of western education in India paved the way for many indigenous people to taste the rich culture and literature of western society. The advent of the new education provided a sense of new awareness especially among women about their identities and an opportunity for them to explore new horizons of knowledge. And Toru Dutt was one of the first Indian women to receive western education because her family believed in it and cherished the western ideal of free womanhood. Her stay in western countries like France and England enabled her to have direct contact with the rich western tradition of literature. She was one of the first Indian English poets to realise the importance of connecting western and eastern temperament. Let us gain an idea on her life and works in the following section.

1.3 TORU DUTT : THE POET

Toru Dutt is often considered to be a major voice in Indian English poetry because she depicted the ancient Indian beliefs and compared them with the present. Her famous poems are centred around Indian mythology where she attempts to highlight the importance of studying Indian mythology. Despite her physical sufferings, she continued writing and her stay in foreign countries helped her acquire a fair idea of the vast treasures of foreign literature. Thus, Toru Dutt is a poet who defied all odds by inclining towards the simplicities of nature and responding well to its sounds and sights. Her love for nature is very well presented in her poem "Our Casuarina Tree". Toru Dutt was a linguist who studied various languages like Bengali, French, English and Sanskrit, and wrote in different languages. Due to her massive contribution to Bengali poetry, she is often considered a prominent Bengali poet who played a decisive part in enriching Bengali poetry along with Michael Madhusudhan Dutt. She belonged to a culturally affluent family and her father Govin Chunder Dutt was a Bengali poet and supported her immensely when she suffered from tuberculosis. In fact, he took the responsibility for her posthumous publications.

1.3.1 Her Life

Born in 1856, Toru Dutt was one of the first Indian women

poets to write in English and her family was converted to Christianity when she was just six years old. She had to experience the tragic death of her brother Abju while she was just ten years old. Later on, her father took her along with her sister Aru to France in 1869. Her stay in France provided her a scope to get in touch with the richness of western literature. When the family moved from France to England, Toru Dutt got another chance to master the English language and literature. Besides, she was a voracious reader and acquired knowledge through the books of many eminent writers. Her horizon also expanded after attending the lecture in Cambridge.

Her family returned to Calcutta in 1873 but one year later she had to witness the tragic death of her sister Aru. The two deaths of her near and dear ones completely shattered her. However, it was only the jolliness of her father and the company of books that provided her relief from the pain. Infact, books provided her the necessary impetus to continue living in this world until she was infected by the same disease, that is, tuberculosis that took the lives of her brother and sister. Toru Dutt went for her heavenly abode in 1877. Signification, her early death did not prevent her from gaining popularity. In her poems one could find a mixture of both the eastern and the western cultures.

1.3.2 Her Works

Toru Dutt's first significant publication was the translation of a few French poems into English under the title *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. She was a linguist and accomplished herself with many languages including French, English as well as Sanskrit. Her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* was a translation from Sanskrit to English which was published posthumously. There are two more posthumous works of Dutt, one is a novel in French *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d' Arvers* and the unfinished novel in English *Bianca* or *Young Spanish Maiden*. Her major works in poetry are in the form of translation.

A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields is the only book that was published in her lifetime and the book brought to her very well-

deserved international acclaim. The famous English poet, author and critic Sir Edmund Gosse in his Introductory Memoir to Dutt's posthumous work *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* mentioned that 'to the end of her days, Toru was a better French than English scholar'. The importance of this work rests on the fact that the ballads can be read and enjoyed by the people across generations. The ballads of this poetic volume represented Hindu mythologies and different Hindu myths like that of Savitri, Lakhsman, Dhruva, Sita, Prahlad, etc. among others. Toru Dutt successfully used the ancient myths to address the contemporary social problems.

"Savitri" is one of the poetic creation of Toru Dutt that is a part of the *Ancient Ballads*. It is not only a retelling of the familiar story of Savitri but also a presentation of the poet's feminist bent of mind. She recreated the myth at a time when women were victimised with bride-burning and child-marriage. The poem is not just the presentation of eternal love but also a discussion of women in her age. Perhaps Toru Dutt is the only Indian English poet to put 'love' and 'grace' in the eyes of Death (Yama). However, it is paradoxical to present 'Yama' gracefully because death is merciless with Savitri.

"His vehement scarlet reached low down,
His waist, a golden girdle tight,
His skim was dark as bronze; his face
Irradiate, and yet severe;
His eyes had much of love and grace,
But glowed so bright, they filled with fear."

One can easily see the different features that are at work in the poem. The interaction between Savitri and Yama represents the positive and negative forces of the society, the positive aspect of the demand for liberty for women and the subjugation of their freedom and rights. "Savitri" is one of the best ballads by Toru Dutt which depict her narrative power and lyricism encompassing energetic and spirited verses.

Apart from this mythical poem, she also wrote on the loyalty of Lakhsman in the poem named after him. Lakhsman was the brother of mythological character Rama and was the perfect example

of self control and chivalry. However, Toru Dutt's feminist bent of mind has come to the fore and Sita, the wife of Rama, became the prominent character of the poem.

Her "Sita" is another example of her interest in the ancient Indian myths. The poem embodied her poignant sense of imagination and the remembrance to her lost siblings.

When shall those children

By their mother's side

Gather, ah me! as esrt at eventide?

In her poem "France 1870", Toru Dutt brought forward her passionate love for France and she became sad at the lost glory of France.

Head of the human column, thus

Ever in swoon wilt thou remain?

Thought, freedom, truth, quenched ominous,

Whence then shall hope arise for us,

Plunged in the darkness all again?

Although France had fallen in bad hands yet she believed that France would overcome them all to bring back the ancient glory to the nation.

"...Bow nations, bow,

Let her again lead on the way!"

The poet's allegiance to her native land has been shown in her *Ancient Ballads*. Her success lies in her ability to mingle Indian mythology with the most contemporary issues and that added charm and grace to her poetry. Basically, she was born in the age of Romanticism and she was a poet full of feelings. She wrote poems on themes like love, loyalty, courage, patience, pity, etc. Her frail health could not overshadow her creativity.

1.4 TEXT OF THE POEM

Like a huge Python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars,
Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound

No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.

When first my casement is wide open thrown
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
Sometimes, and most in winter, — on its crest
A gray baboon sits statue-like alone
Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play;
And far and near Kokilas hail the day;
And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear.
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!

Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith
And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,
When earth lay trancèd in a dreamless swoon:
And every time the music rose — before
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay
Unto thy honor, Tree, beloved of those
Who now in blessed sleep, for aye, repose —
Dearer than life to me, alas! were they!
Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done
With deathless trees — like those in Borrowdale,
Under whose awful branches lingered pale
"Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,
And Time, the shadow;" and though weak the verse
That would thy beauty fain, oh, fain rehearse,
May Love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.

1.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

"Our Casuarina Tree" is one of the most beautiful poems by Toru Dutt. The poem is a recollection of Toru Dutt's childhood memories which she describes in a delicate tone that makes us remember our own childhood days. The poem is a part of her posthumous publication *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. Most of Toru Dutt's prominent works were published posthumously by her father whose efforts resulted in the recognition of her works and subsequently her fame as a poet. Indeed, Toru Dutt is well known for her representation of nature along with Indian mythology.

The poet has majestically described the Casuarina tree that

was associated with her childhood; her brother Abju along with her sister Aru used to play along the tree. The tree provided them shelter and space and they gleefully enjoyed their childhood. The untimely death of her siblings aggrieved her but the touch of the tree refreshed her happy memory and thus the splendid description of the tree reminds the reader about the poet's desire to immortalise both her heydays and the tree. The remembrance of the happy days provided her the much needed impetus to fight against tuberculosis, the same disease that took her siblings away from her. The reference to the 'huge python' symbolises her present burden.

The poet is very delicate in combining the happy past with her present. The poem has a close resemblance with John Keats' poetry and like the Romantic poet, she was very imaginative and sensuous. The first two stanzas testify such a statement. Both the stanzas are full of nature imagery.

The third stanza strikes a melancholic note as the poet remembers the untimely death of her brother and sister who were very dear to her. To her, the tree symbolises happy moments as it provided the necessary shade and shelter during her childhood days. The appeal of the tree is more acute from the fourth stanza as she mentions that she hears the sound of the tree wherever she goes because the memory of her brother and sister is still afresh in her mind. Her philosophical bent of mind is visible in this stanza as she observes "Unknown yet well-known to the eyes of faith". Through the word 'unknown' she refers not only to her native home but also the world of the departed souls.

The fifth stanza represents her triumph over death and destiny as she tries to impose immortality on the tree. She suggests that the deaths and fate could not even kill her joyous days that she passed with her brother and sister. The poet mentions that her love and affection for them will protect her joyous days from 'oblivion's curse.'

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



Q 1: Do you think the poem "Our Casuarina Tree" has an autobiographical tone?

.....

Q 2: State the significance of the casuarina tree in the poem.

.....

1.5 MAJOR THEMES

The major themes of the poem are as follows :

Death

The theme of death dominates the poem 'Our Casuarina Tree'. It is autobiographical in nature as it deals with the loss of her brother and sister. The untimely deaths of her siblings are presented through the poem. The tree was dear to her not because of its grandeur but the happy memories attached with it. The deaths of her siblings haunted her in France and England but the reminiscence of her happy moments that was associated with the tree provided her the much-needed relief. The tree also represents her willingness to live in this world despite the 'python' like disease that continuously enfeebled her. The spectre of death haunted her because she was suffering from the same disease that took her siblings away from her.

Time and Eternity

Toru Dutt was influenced by the Romantic poets and the poem is a testimony of such an observation. Just like the Romantic poet, Keats who linked the temporary with the eternity, Toru Dutt also endeavours to sanctify a tree defying the flow of time by making a connection between the temporary with the eternal. The poem weaves together the past and present of the poet as it reflects the happy moments passed with her brother and sister. The tree establishes the necessary link between her past and present. The Casuarina tree is very dear to her not only because

of its greatness but also for shade it provided. The happy days that are associated with the tree propelled her to love the casuarina tree.

"But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played ; though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with, love intense,
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear!"

She loved the tree because it always reminded her happy days with her soul mates Abju and Aru. Her brother and sister were an integral part of her life even after their deaths and through the tree, she immortalises not only her siblings but also their happy memories. Therefore, she says:

"O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear!"

She wants the eternal presence of the tree so that her happy past can always be recollected.

Nature and Culture

India is a conglomeration of different cultures and it is among the world's oldest culture. Different foreign cultures have intruded on the Indian soil and it is visible in the field of art, culture and literature and as an Indian poet Toru Dutt acutely observed such growing trends. The python that engulfing the tree round and round is a symbolic representation of the foreign invasion into the Indian culture. But she feels that no other tree could resist the forceful attack but the Casuarina tree is so powerful that it easily diluted and ignored the presence of the creeper tree as it is too strong to withstand the power of a creeper tree. The tenacity of the Casuarina tree in a way, reflects the determination of the Indians to hold on to their culture.

"A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live."

The tree is presented as an Indian woman who wears a scarf that shows her modesty, the tree maintains its grandeur and magnificence as it has not fallen down due to the forceful attack of the creeper tree that

is like a huge python. The poem is a reminder to the Indians that we should never be carried away by the foreign cultures because there is a vast treasure in Indian culture that is always precious and beautiful. The 'scarf' also refers to the modesty of Indian woman and thus the tree has feminine aspect in it. The poem also portrays the never ending charm of Indian culture:

"With one sweet song that seems
To have no close"

Thus the poem not only presents the memory of the poet's childhood but also presents the rich culture which is linked with nature and its elements.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS
Q 3: What are the central themes of the poem?
.....
.....

1.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The poem is a representation of the poet's rich sense of imagination. Toru Dutt is able to capture the readers' attention with the subtle details of the tree and her childhood. The delicate presentation of the tree along with the minute detail of birds and animals added charm to her poetry. The comparison between 'water lilies' and 'sheet of snow' is indicative of the poet's romantic bent of mind. The tree has a symbolic significance in the poem.

The tree is, in fact, a symbol that embodies the poet's desire to immortalise her happy past. The tree is a conduit of communication between the poet's past and the present. The poem is centred round the tree because the first stanza objectively describes the tree and enhances our imagination and the second stanza relates the poet's childhood with the tree, the third is a presentation of poet's melancholy over the deaths of her siblings, the fourth stanza represents her haunted days after their untimely death that leads her to sanctify the tree because the tree is the

solitary link between her happy past and the haunting present. However, she symbolically presents that the tree is like the vast Indian culture and tradition that will combat any foreign encroachment.

The poet used many figures of speech in the poem that has enhanced its beauty. The first line of the poem "Like a huge Python, winding round and round" is an example of zoomorphism as it describes the vine in animal terms (as a python). The poet is expert in using various other figures of speech and the use of 'scarf' by the tree is an example of personification because the tree has been presented as a woman. Her use of simile is visible in the last line of the second stanza when she says that the water-lillies are like "snow enmassed."

Her desire to immortalise the tree refers to her intention to keep her memories alive because nothing was pleasurable for her than to recollect the past happiness that she spent with her siblings under the tree and the death of the tree would definitely enfeeble her happy memories. She does not want to forget the past memories because the present was very painful for her as she was heading towards death. The severity of her disease continued to enfeeble her and she found strength only by recollecting her happy past. Thus, the tree symbolically connects her happy past with the unhappy present.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS
Q 4: How did Toru Dutt personify the Casuarina tree?
.....
.....

1.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Toru Dutt is an internationally acclaimed poet because of her originality and ingenuity. There were many prominent Indian English poets who wrote before Toru Dutt like Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Nobe Kishan Ghose, etc. But most of their works did not highlight the

Indian sensibility and the rich Indian culture; they echoed the English euphemism. It was Toru Dutt, the young Indian poet, who laid the foundation stone for the Indian English poetry. Her works are very few in numbers but she secured her place in the annals of the Indian English poetry.

In his Introductory Memoir of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, Sir Edmund Gosse praised her ability to lucidly translate French poetry and mentioned that she had a rare quality of 'unaffected exactness' but he found problems with her flawed technique.

In her "The Englishwoman in India", Katharine Helen Maud Diver wrote few pages on Toru Dutt. Maud Diver mentioned that her first work was not a polished work but interesting because she overcame all obstacles through her 'power of genius'. Harihar Das provides us a complete picture in *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* and praised her devotion for poetry.

In his *India Writing in English*, the noted Indian literary critic K. R. Srinivasa Iyenger mentions that "Our Casuarina Tree is more than the poetic evocation of a tree; it is recapturing the past, and immortalizing the moments of time so recaptured. The tree is both tree and symbol, and in it implicated both time and eternity." He is definitely right in his analysis of the poem because the tree along with her past memories are common throughout the poem.



1.8 LET US SUM UP

After you have finished reading the unit, you have gained an idea on Toru Dutt and her poetic greatness through one of the poem's "Our Casuarina Tree". The poem immortalises her happy past that she spent with her siblings. You have also come to know that the poem is more than a reminiscence of her happy past because she skillfully presents the ability of the Indians to withstand the power of foreign culture. The reference to the creeper tree and its presentation as a huge python suggests the powerful

invasion of foreigners into the Indian soil. You have also identified the poet's romantic bent of mind as she tried to make a link between the temporary with the eternity. Literally, the tree is not going to stay forever although she wanted it to but her desire to immortalise the tree asserts her love for nature and her ability to sanctify it.



1.9 FURTHER READING

- 1) Dasa Harihara, & Dutt, T. (1921). *Life and letters of Toru Dutt*. London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press.
- 2) Dutt, T. (1880). *A sheaf gleaned in French fields*. London: C.K. Paul & Co.
- 3) Dutt, T. (2003). *Ancient ballads and legends of Hindustan*. Allahabad: Kitabistan.
- 4) Jain, S. (2017). *Indian writing in English*. Delhi: Hari Books.
- 5) Naik, M. K. (1984). *Perspectives on Indian poetry in English*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications.
- 6) Parthasarathy, R. (1994). *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian poets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 7) R., S. I. K. (2006). *Indian writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publ.
- 8) Srinivasa Iyengar, K. R. (1996). *Indian writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publ.

1.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The poem definitely has autobiographical tone...the first two stanzas are depiction of the tree and the rest is the exploration of her happy memory and her desire to consecrate it because she never wants to forget her siblings.

Ans to Q No 2: The Casuarina tree is the central theme of the poem as it has both literal and figurative significance...the tree has survived despite various difficulties like the poet who lost her siblings and suffered from the same disease that took her playmates from her life...the calling of the tree refers her love for motherland and her happy childhood days.

Ans to Q No 3: Death and childhood memory along with nature and culture constitute the central themes of the poem...the death of her brother and sister disturbed her like the tree is tantalised by the creeper tree... the poet mentions that no other country could withstand its identity at the foreign invasion.

Ans to Q No 4: The poet used various figures of speech in the poem and personification is one of them. For example, 'the giant wears the scarf' is a personification because she treats the Casuarina tree like a person...the tree is very near to her and endeavours to consecrate it like Wordsworth's Yew tree.



1.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** Describe Toru Dutt's love for the Casuarina tree.
- Q 2:** Why does the poet want to sanctify the Casuarina tree? Do you think the magnificence of the tree is less important to her than the happy childhood memories? Give a valid answer.
- Q 3:** Can you draw a comparison between Toru Dutt and Romantic poet John Keats? Do you think Toru Dutt's treatment to nature is similar to Keats? Give a reasoned answer.
- Q 4:** Describe the animals and birds that play with the Casuarina tree.
- Q 5:** Can you find any bi-cultural element in the poem? Do you see any reference to her visit to foreign lands in the poem? Explain with reference to the poem.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 2: SAROJINI NAIDU: “TO YOUTH”

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 2.1 Learning Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Sarojini Naidu: The Poet
 - 2.3.1 Her Life
 - 2.3.2 Her Works
- 2.4 Text of the Poem
 - 2.4.1 Explanation of the Poem
- 2.5 Major Themes
- 2.6 Style and Language
- 2.7 Critical Reception
- 2.8 Let us Sum up
- 2.9 Further Reading
- 2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 2.11 Model Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- explain the life and works of one of the significant poets in Indian English literature, namely, Sarojini Naidu
- describe her contribution towards pre-independent Indian poetry in English
- discuss Naidu’s poem “To Youth”
- list down the important themes reflected in the poem
- appreciate the style and technique of the poem

2.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the second unit of the course and here we shall deal with another woman poet who have made distinctive contribution to the development of pre-independent Indian English poetry, namely, Sarojini

Naidu. In the previous unit, you were exposed to Toru Dutt's poetry. You must have already noted the romantic vein in her poetry. Indeed, the early Indian English poets like Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, etc. were all influenced by Romanticism and this was true in case of Sarojini Naidu also. Educated in the west, Naidu was, It must interest you that for the numerous songs Naidu had written, she was popularly known as the "Nightingale of Indian Song" (Iyengar). Actively participating in the then politics of the country as well as fighting for women's causes, Sarojini Naidu was a gifted speaker. She had also dedicated a few of her poems to Gandhi and Jinnah. However, we shall here be concerned with one of her beautiful and short poems, titled "To Youth". Apart from a discussion on the context of the poem, we shall discuss the poem in details, focussing mainly on its main theme and Naidu's poetic style. We shall also reflect upon the reception of her poetic expression. Let us first move on to a detailed description and analysis of the life and works of Naidu before dealing with the poem prescribed in your course.

2.3 SAROJINI NAIDU: THE POET

We are already aware that Sarojini Naidu belonged to the early generation of Indo-Anglican poets by virtue of her association with romanticism as well as her outlook. In the West, the poems of Naidu were received very well and she attained desirable success and recognition. Her deep association with the **Rhymers' Club**, more specifically to Arthur Simons; and the influence and guidance of Edmund Gosse had a huge impact on her poetic output. In fact, it was Gosse who diligently analysed her works and influenced her to lay emphasis on themes and issues reflecting her motherland. To quote Rajyalakshmi, "In terms of the English literary milieu, she was conventional in the mass and style of her poetic utterance. But from the point of view of the vernacular tradition, she was a modern . . . inheritor and imitator in one tradition, she was, in her own time, a pioneer and a rebel in another" (Rajyalakshmi, 5). Her lyrical bent of mind which was a result of her love

and influence of British romantic poetry, is a distinctive feature of her poetic oeuvre. Perhaps a close look at her life and works will enable us to grasp a better idea regarding the poet. In the next two sub-sections, we shall, therefore, emphasise on her biographical details so as to understand her concerns expressed through poetry.



LET US KNOW

Rhymers' Club: It was founded by William Butler Yeats, T. W. Rolleston and Ernest Rhys in 1890. The Rhymers' Club comprised a group of poets having its base at London who met to read poetry and discuss criticism. Significantly, the group of poets assembled sometimes at 'Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese', a pub in London and in the 'Domino Room' of the Café Royal or at private homes at other times. Akin to the instability of their meeting place, the membership also kept on shifting. Some of the poets associated with the club are Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Francis Thompson, Richard Le Gallienne, John Gray, John Davidson, Arthur Symons, Ernest Radford, and Thomas William Rolleston, Oscar Wilde, etc. among others. The Club published two volumes of poetry titled *The Book of the Rhymers' Club* (1892) and *The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club* (1894). The poets of this Club were referred to as "The Tragic Generation" by W.B. Yeats.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name the earliest Indian English poet to have contributed to Indian English poetry. What are the titles of his two poetry collections?

Q 2: Fill in the blanks:

- a. "Savitri" by Sri Aurobindo consists of _____ lines.
- b. "Visions of the Past" is a poem by _____.

Q 3: What was Edmund Gosse's advice to Sarojini Naidu?

2.3.1 Her Life

Born on February 13, 1879 Sarojini Naidu was the eldest daughter of Dr. Aghore Nath Chattopadhyay- a scientist and principal of Nizam's College at Hyderabad, and Varada Sundari Devi- a Bengali poet. As a student, Sarojini Naidu was bright; she was the topper in matriculation examination from Madras University. Naidu also had a zeal for learning different languages which becomes evident from the fact that apart from Bengali, she was adept at as many as three other languages including Urdu, Telugu and Persian. She surprised her father with her skills as well as her command over language with her very first poem titled "The Lady of the Lake", a poem consisting of thirteen hundred lines. Her father was very delighted with Naidu's poetic brilliance and lucidity of expression and supported her wholeheartedly. In fact, he helped her write the play *Maher Muneer* (in Persian language) and sent it to the Nizam of Hyderabad, only to be approved by the later, a scholarship for Sarojini Naidu to embark upon a new journey to England. Thereafter, Naidu got herself admitted at the King's College and later at Girton College, Cambridge at the age of sixteen. Young Sarojini was elated to meet the distinguished English writers like Arthur Symons and Edmund Gosse abroad, who later influenced her greatly and shaped her as a poet. We have already noted how their association played a significant role in guiding Naidu towards writing poems with a touch of local flavour. Naidu was in love with a South Indian man namely, Muthyala Govindarajulu Naidu who belonged to a non-Brahmin caste. Their love, however, later culminated in their wedding in 1898. She was nineteen at the time of her wedding. Their marriage turned out to be happy; they had four children from their marriage.

So far, we have seen only one phase of her life. The second phase of her life is quite significant considering her role in Indian politics. She was not only a poet; she fought for the national cause as well. Her entrance into the political field was triggered by the partition of Bengal in 1905, which disheartened her to a great extent. Significantly, her acquaintance with Gandhi and Gopal Krishna Gokhale led her way towards participation in the freedom struggle. It

was Gokhale who encouraged her to utilise her intellect and education for the cause of the nation and introduced her to other leaders like Nehru and Jinnah. With an aim to speak for the nationalist cause, Naidu travelled extensively throughout India as well as Europe and America delivering lectures on youth welfare, women's participation in nation building, freedom of women, dignity of labour, etc. Naidu even assisted Annie Besant in the formation of women's association and fought for the rights of women. Throughout her political career, Naidu was an ardent supporter of Gandhi and hence always supported him in every movement against the British like Non-Cooperation movement, Civil Disobedience movement, Sabarmati Pact and so on. Her political activism led to her imprisonment many times. She was a representative of All-India Home Rule Deputation to England in 1919 also. Owing to her persistence and selfless contribution in the political arena, Naidu was elected as the President of the Indian National Congress Party in 1925, making her the first woman to hold such a position. Her role in India's freedom struggle was marked by sheer dedication, intelligence, courage as well as patriotism. After India attained Independence, she even went on to become the first lady-Governor of United Province (now Uttar Pradesh). She died of a heart attack on 2nd March, 1949.

It must be noted that despite dedicating her time and energy in the political matters, Naidu did not stop writing poetry. In fact, the beauty of her poetry lies in its lyric quality. In the following section, we shall discuss the writings of this great Indian English poet.



LET US KNOW

Sarojini Naidu's childhood home located at Nampally was bequeathed to the University of Hyderabad by her family. After the publication of her poetry collection *The Golden Threshold* in 1905, Nampally was renamed as The Golden Threshold. The University renamed its School of Fine Arts and Communication as "Sarojini Naidu School

of Arts and Communication" to pay a tribute to this distinguished poet. The School provides courses of study in the disciplines of, Dance, Theatre Arts, Painting and Sculpture and Communication.

2.3.2 Her Works

As we have already noted in the beginning of the unit that Naidu started writing poetry as a young girl. "The Lady of the Lake" was the first poem written by Naidu. Next, she wrote the play, *Maher Muneer* (in Persian language) which got her a scholarship to study abroad. In order to get a better idea of her poetry, we must be very well-acquainted with the life of the poet and this is so true in Naidu's case. In fact, all her early/childhood poems written before 1896 were published in the volume titled *Poems*. This collection is very rare; you can find one in the National Library of Calcutta. (Naravana 22) Naidu is credited for writing one fantasy called *Nilambuja* (*The Blue Lotus*). Though it was written in 1905, it was published only in 1919. It is an autobiographical piece of writing exemplifying her imaginative bent of mind and a balance of her romantic taste coated with idealistic and altruistic love.

Her first published work of poetry was *The Golden Threshold* which appeared in 1905. Apart from the poem discussed in this unit, some of the other poems in this collection are "Ecstasy", "To Death", "To My Children", "Past and Future", "Autumn", "Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad", "Damayanti to Nala in the Hour of Exile", etc. Her invocation to Lord Buddha that is the last poem of this collection is expressed through the poem, "To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus". This poem captures the idea of longing, nostalgia and regret. Naidu beautifully presents the human desire to reach the level of perfection as Lord Buddha:

The end, elusive and afar,
Still lures us with its beckoning flight,
And all our mortal moments are
A session of the Infinite.
How shall we reach the great, unknown
Nirvana of thy Lotus-throne?

The Bird of Time (1912) is her second collection of poetry. This volume also had a subtitle "Songs of Love and Death". Some of the poems from this collection are "The Bird of Time", "Guerdon", "A Love Song from North", etc. This volume also captured many Indian festivals as its theme and also included some of her best nature poems apart from the theme of love. Naidu matured as a poet with each poetry collection and her last collection titled *The Broken Wing* (1917) had seriousness of tone. Apart from poems, she also wrote essays, eg. "Words of Freedom". Let us now look at the poem prescribed in your course.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How did Sarojini Naidu receive a scholarship from the Nizam of Hyderabad?

.....

.....

Q 5: What were the topics on which Naidu delivered lectures during her political career?

.....

.....

Q 6: Mention some of the poems included in the volume *The Golden Threshold*?

.....

.....

Q 7: What is the last poetry collection by Naidu?

.....

.....



Comrade: friend.

Thou: archaic word which means you.

Fickle: inconsistent.

2.4 TEXT OF THE POEM

O YOUTH, sweet **comrade** Youth, wouldst **thou** be gone?
 Long have we dwelt together, thou and I;
 Together drunk of many an alien dawn,
 And plucked the fruit of many an alien sky.
 Ah, **fickle** friend, must I, who yesterday

Dreamed forwards to long, undimmed **ecstasy**,
Henceforward dream, because thou wilt not stay,
Backward to **transient** pleasure and to thee?

I give **thee** back thy false, **ephemeral** vow;
But, O beloved comrade, ere we part,
Upon my mournful eyelids and my brow
Kiss me who hold thine image in my heart.

Ecstasy: a state of being carried away by overwhelming emotion.

Transient: lasting a very short time.

Thee: archaic word which means you.

Ephemeral: short-lived.

Vow: promise.

Thine: archaic word, which means yours.

2.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

"To Youth" by Sarojini Naidu appeared in her poetry collection titled *The Golden Threshold* which was published in 1905. This volume consisted of numerous poems which dealt at large with the Indian way of life. The poems from the volume revolve around themes such as nature, personal and philosophical observations, myth and various occupations in which the people of India were engaged since ages like weaving, fishing, farming, etc. among others. One of her philosophical and personal poems is the topic of our study in this unit. So, let us look at the poem stanza-wise in order to interpret the poet's philosophical bearings expressed through it.

As the title says, "To Youth" is a poem where Sarojini Naidu addresses her youth. It is a personal poem without any doubt in which the poet regrets that her youth is not permanent. The poem has an element of longing as well as grief in it.

Stanza 1: In the first stanza, the poet exclaims with regret that her youth is short-lived:

O Youth, sweet comrade Youth, wouldst thou be gone?
Long have we dwelt together, thou and I;
Together drunk of many an alien dawn,
And plucked the fruit of many an alien sky.

In the above lines, the poet refers to her youth as a 'sweet' friend and lover. She is aggrieved at the thought of her lover who will vanish and leave her alone. She remembers the time when both of them drank and celebrated together in an 'alien dawn' under

an 'alien sky'. She reminds her youth all the happy moments shared together. Here, we can see that Naidu has personified youth as a human lover which possesses all human qualities and that is why they 'dwelt together', 'together drunk' and 'plucked the fruit'.

Stanza 2: The second stanza shifts to the inconsistency of her lover. While in the first stanza, we can find a sense of regret, in this stanza her grief appears to increase at the thought of being deserted by her lover.

Ah, fickle friend, must I, who yesterday
Dreamed forwards to long, undimmed ecstasy,
Henceforward dream, because thou wilt not stay,
Backward to transient pleasure and to thee?

Here, the poet calls youth a 'fickle friend' who once assured her a longer period of togetherness but is leaving her half way. She tells him painfully and with a broken heart that if he departs, her dreams that were as bright as 'undimmed ecstasy' once will now be shattered. As youth will soon leave her, she will henceforward be able of dreaming only short-lived pleasure without the company of her lover. In fact, here Naidu very poignantly reflects on the temporary nature of youth.

Stanza 3: The third stanza reflects the poet's realisation of the temporariness of her youth. She, however, asks her beloved youth to kiss her before he departs.

I give thee back thy false, ephemeral vow;
But, O beloved comrade, ere we part,
Upon my mournful eyelids and my brow
Kiss me who hold thine image in my heart.

The above lines are an expression of deep grief that the poet felt at the loss of her youth. Youth stayed with her only for a short period of time. As he is preparing to abandon her, she urges him to leave her with a good memory by kissing her. The poet acknowledges that she held him so dear that his image will forever be treasured in her heart: "hold thine image in my heart".

Thus, this poem is a reflection of the predicament of

human misery due to the transient nature of youth. The poem holds significance because of its universal theme- an awareness regarding the short-lived youth. The poem captures both the amusing and adventurous company of her youth as well as the glowing away of that youthful spirit as one's age progresses. This poem can be read as her personal experiences of her own loss of youth. There is a certain kind of melancholy and sadness attached to the poem which makes it even more beautiful. As a poet, Naidu's philosophical bent of mind is very obvious from the reading of this poem. Human life is a mixture of well and woe, and Sarojini Naidu is good at crafting both these opposite states in her poems.

2.5 MAJOR THEMES

Sarojini Naidu's poetry is a reflection of her philosophy of life. The skill with which Naidu encompasses human life in its different forms—including both joys and sorrows, in her lyrical poetry is worth mentioning. In the poem "To Youth" we can find a seriousness of tone as well as a deeper philosophy of life, that is, the temporary nature of youth that bothers all human beings. One significant trait of this poem is hence, the universal element in it. Through the poem, Naidu has touched upon a grave concern that affects all human beings. Youthfulness is desired and sought after by every individual because along with youth, there comes many advantages. The first stanza very aptly and concisely sums up the enjoyments and pleasure that youth brings to one's life. However, the transitory aspect of youth pains the poet; in a way she sadly acknowledges the onset of old age which is again a part of life.

We can also find a romantic element in the poem. It must, however, be noted that though Sarojini Naidu was much influenced by the Romantic poets like Keats, Shelley, etc., her poetry were not merely imitative; rather she added an individuality to her poems. In case of "To Youth", Naidu philosophises not only the short lived youth but also fancies youth as her lover. She then expresses her grief before him and urges him to show his affection for her: "Upon my mournful eyelids and my brow/ Kiss me who hold thine image in my heart". Thus, by personifying youth Naidu

grapples with the idea of youth in a poignant way.

Melancholy or sadness runs through her poetry in a wide manner. As an inquisitive observer, Naidu perceives both the brighter and darker aspects of life in a precise and reflective manner.

Apart from philosophical overtones, her poetry is replete with the themes such as love, nature, Indian myths, patriotism, womanhood, etc. as reflected in the collection *The Golden Threshold* from which the poem under discussion appeared.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What does the poem "To Youth" deal with?

.....
.....

Q 9: Why does the poet call youth a 'fickle friend'?

.....
.....

Q10: Explain the theme of the poem "To Youth".

.....
.....

2.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

Sarojini Naidu's poetry is replete with lyrical qualities which makes her poems so charismatic and new. In fact, Naidu captures the essence of Indianness through sweet expressions, that is, apart from the lyrical quality, her poems reflect her strength in terms of diction, versification and word-usage. For the lyrical skill with which Naidu dealt with the varied themes such as love, nature, etc. in her poems, she was popularly called the 'nightingale of India' or 'Bulbule Hind'. There is such a beautiful flow in her poetry that touches anyone who reads them. It must be noted how she roped in the Indian way of life and philosophy in her poetry. Her poems were able to stir passion and patriotism at a time when India's freedom struggle was at its peak. The most fascinating quality of Naidu

is her choice of words as we have already noted. Her poems are short yet powerful and notable for their simplicity.

Naidu's patriotic fervour that is full of intense emotion is exemplified very well in her poems like "Awake", "Lotus", "The Gift of India", etc. In fact, written in 1915, "The Gift of India" which is a poem on the contribution of the Indian soldiers in the War reverberates with emotional intensity. Read the following lines from the poem to get a better idea of her patriotic vein:

Is there aught you need that my hands withhold,
Rich gifts of raiment or grain or gold?
Lo! I have flung to the East and West
Priceless treasures torn from my breast,
And yielded the sons of my stricken womb
To the drum-beats of duty, the sabres of doom.

The compactness of her style is also visible in her love poems. Being a poet who is highly influenced by romanticism, Naidu's love poetry was an epitome of her own feelings and thoughts. Speaking about the presentation of the brighter as well as the darker shades of love, in her poetry, one could find both. In poems like "The Sorrow of Love", "My Dead Dream", etc. Naidu touches upon the darker side of love like the pain and sufferings in love as well as the lover who can be cruel. Dealing with varied emotions, her love poetry is feminine in tone and this has to be read with regard to her idea of womanhood. In her poetry, women were portrayed as fragile, delicate and dependent; this was perhaps the world view during the time in which she wrote. However, the joys and devotion associated with love were reflected in her poems like "The Flute Player of Brindavan", "Songs of Radha", etc. Naidu's love poems reflected her desire and passion for divine love as well.

To quote Satvinder Kaur: "Music and melody are the chief characteristics of her lyricism". (340) This is evident in her poem "The Indian Weavers" where the weavers sing thus:

Weavers, weaving at break of day,
Why do you weave a garment so gay? . . .

Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild,
We weave the robes of a new-born child.

Naidu's poems are notable for the element of 'pathos'. A prime example of this is her poem "To Youth", where a sense of grief and sadness lurks to a great degree. With apt expression and simple language, Naidu represents the universal condition of old age. We can see the power of her observation in her poems; this poem it is the observation of human condition. As discussed, through her craftsmanship, Naidu not only deals with the brighter side of life in her poetry but also the darker experiences and challenges of life. She uses personification in this poem. Personification is attributing a personal nature or human characteristics in non-human or inanimate object. Here she personified youth, which is an abstract idea, as her 'beloved', 'sweet comrade', 'fickle friend', etc. The poem is short consisting of only twelve lines with a rhyme scheme abab-cdcd-efef. The greatness of Naidu as a poet is reflected in the way she captures grave subjects in such short lyrics. The language of the poem is very simple and easy to understand. Her philosophical bent of mind is very well represented in this poem.

2.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION

The Golden Threshold which appeared in 1905 received positive reviews from its publishers. It was published by William Heinemann from London. Arthur Symons in his "Introduction" to this collection wrote: "Her poetry seems to sing itself, as if her sweet thought and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of themselves". M. K. Naik noted that: "Naidu's finest lyrics have a perfect structure and an exquisite finish. She handles various metres and stanza forms with consummate ease. Of all her peers, she has perhaps the finest ear, and her mastery of word music is indubitable. Her imagery is drawn from the Indian scene, when she is at her best, is original and evocative". (Naik 22) However, it must be noted that Naik found her patriotic poems were comparably weaker.

However, Naidu also faced criticism. Her poetry was charged to

be limited in its scope. Unlike the modernists Yeats and others, writing during the same time, her poetry did not reflect any experimentation. It has been found that her choice of themes and her way of handling the themes are the points that the recent criticism hinted at. In the article "Sarojini Naidu: Reclaiming a Kinship", Makarand Paranjape, wrote that: "In Europe, the first wave of modernism was beginning to gather momentum. There were to be cataclysmic changes in poetic fashion. Sarojini was swept aside by this tide. She never published another collection in her lifetime." (Paranjape Making India,175)

The gift of Sarojini Naidu to the gamut of Indian English poetry cannot be overlooked. She has, in fact, added greatly to the rich expressions of Indian way of life through her poetry as well as can be credited to show the world the richness of India's traditions. Dwivedi pointed out the "exquisite melody and fine delicacy of feeling and expression blended with freshness and exuberance of spirit" (116) which beautifully explains her contribution to the world of poetry.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: Mention a few patriotic poems by Naidu.

.....

Q 12: Write a short note on the reception of
The Golden Threshold.

.....



2.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have gained a brief idea regarding Indian English poetry before Independence and dealt at length with Sarojini Naidu's poem "To Youth". Apart from reflecting on the life and works of Naidu,

we have read the text of the poem and extracted its summary. Other important aspects like thematic concerns in her poetry and the critical reception of the poet have also been discussed. After reading this unit, you might develop interest in Naidu as a poet and also as a freedom fighter. You can enrich yourself by getting acquainted with some of her other poems.



2.9 FURTHER READING

- 1) Dwivedi, A. N. (1979). "Sarojini—The Poet (Born February 13, 1879)". *Indian Literature*, Vol. 22, No. 3, Aspects of Modern Poetry. Published by: Sahitya Akademi.
- 2) Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa. (2013 rpt.) *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
- 3) Kaur, Satvinder. (2003). *Sarojini Naidu's Poetry: Melody of Indianness*. New Delhi: Swarup & Sons.
- 4) Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna. (ed.) (2010). *A Concise History of Indian Literature in English*. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- 5) Naidu, Sarojini. (1905). *The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann.
- 6) Naik, M. K. (2006). *Indian English Poetry: from the beginnings upto 2000*. Delhi: Pencraft International.
- 7) Naravane, Vishwanath S. (1980) (1996 rpt.). *Sarojini Naidu: An Introduction to Her Life, Work and Poetry*. New Delhi: Orient Longman.
- 8) Paranjape, M.R. (2013) "Sarojini Naidu: Reclaiming a Kinship." Making India: Colonialism, National Culture, and the Afterlife of Indian English Authority. Sophia Studies in *Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures*, vol 2. Springer, Dordrecht.
- 9) Rajyalakshmi, P. V. (1977). *The Lyric Spring: A Study of the Poetry of Sarojini Naidu*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications.

2.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was the earliest Indian English poet to have contributed to Indian English poetry. His two poetry collections are- Poems, published in 1827 and The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems, published in 1828.

Ans to Q No 2: a. 24000 lines. b. Michael Madhusudan Dutt.

Ans to Q No 3: Edmund Gosse analysed Naidu's works and advised her to lay emphasis on themes and issues reflecting her motherland rather than "imitating the English classics".

Ans to Q No 4: Her play Maher Muneer was sent to the Nizam of Hyderabad, only to be approved by the later, a scholarship to embark upon a new journey to King's College in England.



Ans to Q No 5: With an aim to speak for the nationalist cause, Naidu travelled extensively throughout India as well as Europe and America delivering lectures on youth welfare, women's participation in nation building, freedom of women, dignity of labour, etc.

Ans to Q No 6: "Ecstasy", "To Death", "To My Children", "Past and Future", "Autumn", "Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad", "Damayanti to Nala in the Hour of Exile", etc.

Ans to Q No 7: *The Broken Wing* (1917).

Ans to Q No 8: "To Youth" is a poem where Sarojini Naidu addresses her youth. It is a personal poem without any doubt in which the poet regrets that her youth is not permanent. The poem has an element of longing as well as grief in it.

Ans to Q No 9: The poet calls youth a 'fickle friend' because it once assured her a longer period of togetherness but is leaving her half way. She tells him painfully and with a broken heart that if he departs, her dreams that were as bright as 'undimmed ecstasy' once will now be shattered.

Ans to Q No 10: Refer to 2.5

Ans to Q No 11: "Awake", "Lotus", "The Gift of India", etc.

Ans to Q No 12: Refer to 2.7



2.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** Write briefly on the poetic output of Sarojini Naidu.
- Q 2:** Explain the theme of the poem "To Youth" by Sarojini Naidu.
- Q 3:** Do you think Naidu's political and patriotic inclinations affected her poetry writing?
- Q 4:** Highlight the significance of Sarojini Naidu in the context of Indian English poetry.
- Q 5:** Provide a gist of the poem "To Youth" in your own words.
- Q 6:** Discuss the reception of Sarojini Naidu as a poet.
- Q 7:** Discuss Sarojini Naidu as a romantic poet with an emphasis on her life and works.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 3: A.K. RAMANUJAN: “SELF PORTRAIT”

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 3.1 Learning Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 A.K Ramanujan: The Poet
 - 3.3.1 His Life
 - 3.3.2 His Works
- 3.4 Text of the Poem
 - 3.4.1 Explanation of the Poem
- 3.5 Major Themes
- 3.6 Style and Language
- 3.7 Critical Reception
- 3.8 Let us Sum up
- 3.9 Further Reading
- 3.10 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 3.11 Model Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the development of poetry in Indian English literature
- gain an insight into the life and works of the Indian poet A.K. Ramanujan
- grasp the content and context of the prescribed poem “Self-Portrait”
- highlight the significant themes pertaining to the poem
- analyse the poet’s sense of style and use of language
- gain a detailed idea on the poet’s critical reception
- appreciate the nuances in Ramanujan’s poetry
- further explore and enjoy the poetry of Ramanujan

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Modern Indian English Poetry at a Glance

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



Diaspora: those who belong to two or more nations at the same time.

The present unit introduces the learner to the modern Indian poet A.K. Ramanujan and takes up a representative poem by him that is titled "Self-Portrait." The poem examines the experiences of association and dissociation, as well as, the feelings of recognition and alienation in the modern individual. The present introduction to modern Indian English poetry shall be beneficial to the learner as a necessary ground work for a detailed study of the unit.

Some of the prominent twentieth century poets are A. K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekial, Keki N. Daruwalla, Kamala Das, Eunice De Souza, Dom Moraes, R. Parthasarathy, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Adil Jussawala, Vikram Seth and Gieve Patel. Several of these poets wrote and translated poetry in two or more languages. Some of the Indian English poets to have received the Sahitya Akademi Award are: Jayanta Mahapatra for his anthology titled *Relationship* (1981), Nissim Ezekial for *Latter Day Psalms* (1983), Keki N. Daruwalla for *The Keeper of the Dead* (1984), Kamala Das for *Collected Poems* (1985), Dom Moraes for *Serendip* (1994) and A.K. Ramanujan for *Collected Poems* (1999). Also, Rabindranath Tagore was

one of the first Indian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, for his collection of poetry titled *Gitanjali* (1910) translated from Bengali into English as *Song Offerings*. You may consider reading some of their best literary anthologies or select poems based on your interest and subjective choice.

Voices from the North Eastern Poets of India

Interestingly, several leading voices have emerged from the region of North East India such as the bilingual poets Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih from Shillong, Robin Ngangom from Manipur, Mamang Dai from Arunachal Pradesh, Mona Zote from Aizawl, Easterine Irulu and Tiameraenla Monalisa Chankija from Nagaland. The North-Eastern poets through their poetry **articulate** the pressing social and political concerns, discourses on identity and ethnicity, problems of terrorism and insurgency, traditions of customs and tribal heritage. Poetry from the North-East not only reflects a sense of 'rootedness' to the various ethnic and regional cultures but also mirrors the socio-political 'disturbances' that overshadows everyday life in the region.

Articulate: to communicate or express in words



With this, you may try reading Nongkynrih's *The Sieve* or *The Yearning*; Ngangom's *Words and The Silence* or *The Desire of Roots*; Dai's *River Poems* or *Legends of Pensam* or even the recent anthology titled *Dancing Earth* edited by Ngangom and Nongkynrih among others.

Owing to the commonality of experience, you will certainly find it easy and interesting to relate to the Indian themes and contexts reflected through the genre of poetry in Indian English literature. With this, let us unravel the brief biography of the prominent Indian English poet, A.K. Ramanujan and enrich our ideas on the significant literary contributions of the poet.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name the work for which A.K. Ramanujan received the Sahitya Akademi Award?

.....

Q 2: What did the North Eastern poets articulate through their poetry?

.....



Posthumously: taking place or happening after the concerned person's death.

3.3 A.K. RAMANUJAN: THE POET

A.K. Ramanujan is a renowned Indian English poet whose wide literary contribution is treasured in the scenario of Indian English literature. He was an exceptional scholar and to his own credit wore several feathers in his cap as a multi-lingual poet, playwright, author, translator, researcher, folklorist and philologist. Also, he was well versed in Indian folklore and languages owing to his early interest and exposure which gave an edge to his literary works. He was awarded the Padma Shri by the Government of India in the year 1976 and **posthumously** the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1999 for his poetry volume entitled *The Collected Poems*. Although, Ramanujan was based in America, he strongly identified with his Indian roots for which he is considered one of the significant Indo-American poets. The discussion in the following subsections will enable the learner to gain a better insight into the life and works of Ramanujan.

3.3.1 His Life

If you trace a finger down an Indian map and locate the city of Mysore, this was the place where the Indian-English poet Ramanujan was born and brought up. A. K. Ramanujan (16 March 1929–13 July 1993) was born to a traditional Srivaishnava Brahmin family that was charged with an intellectually *conducive* atmosphere, the kind where interactive discussions of ideas were very much encouraged. His mother was a homemaker and his father, Attipat Asuri Krishnaswami, was an avid astronomer and a professor of Mathematics who taught at Mysore University. He also had a sibling by the name of A.K. Srinivasan who is an established author and a mathematician. Although, we know the

Conducive: contributing or helping towards.

poet by his abbreviated name, his complete name was 'Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan.'

As a young boy, Ramanujan had an easy access to his father's study which was well-stocked with a range of books that opened up like a wide world of knowledge to him. His father stirred an interest in him to wonder at the night sky and learn the positions of the constellations at an early age. But, young Ramanujan also wondered what had made his father interested in the two contradictory subjects of **Astronomy** and **Astrology**. As a professor of Mathematics, it was more likely for his father to be rationally inclined towards the scientific subject of Astronomy but his equal interest and inclination towards the subject of Astrology puzzled young Ramanujan. You will be surprised to learn that as a young boy, Ramanujan was much attracted towards the practice of magic. He even donned the magician's hat and tailored coat, appearing to pop bunnies and flowers out of the blue and to work his magical wand of make-belief on others. He desired to become a magician and often performed tricks of magic in his locality to entertain others.

Although, his mother was a conventional woman of her time, she encouraged the pursuit of knowledge in her son. His father would often share Western classical works with his family by translating and narrating those into Tamil. Ramanujan began his early education in the Kannada medium as a student of Marimallappas High School, Mysore, and went on to study at the Maharaja College of Mysore. Although, he had opted to study in the Science stream at the college level, his father had encouraged him to pursue English Majors and switch from Science. He pursued his post-graduation in English at the University of Mysore and received a Fellowship in Linguistics at the Deccan College, Pune for a year i.e., from 1958 to 1959. Thereafter, he received the prestigious Fulbright Fellowship at Indiana University, Bloomington in the United States of America from 1959 to 1962 where he was awarded Ph.D. in Linguistics.

Ramanujan's father had **instilled** in him a streak of

Astronomy: the science of stars, planet and the universe.

Astrology : the study of the supposed influence of stars and planets on human affairs.

Instilled : to gradually establish in someone's mind.



Philologist : one who studies philology which is the study of the structure, historical development and relationships of a language or languages

Vernacular : the languages or dialects spoken in one's country

Dialects : a form of a language limited to a particular group or community

intelligence and independence at an early age which in time developed and enriched his intellect. He gained proficiency in several languages such as Sanskrit, Kannada, Tamil, Telegu and English which contributed greatly towards his academic research. The kind of knowledge he had acquired with his interests as a **philologist** and a researcher, equipped him with the ability to write and experiment across these languages and various literary forms. Also, he emphasised on the importance of acknowledging and cultivating an interest in other **vernacular dialects** and languages apart from one's own mother tongue.

He began his professional career as a Lecturer of English Literature and Language in various colleges based in Belgaum, Madurai, Quilon and Baroda. He taught at The Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda for eight years before he joined as an Assistant Professor at the University of Chicago in 1962. He was also invited to lecture in other reputed universities of America such as Harvard University, University of California, University of Chicago, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin and Carleton College. The development of the South Asian Studies programme at the University of Chicago was due to the efforts of Ramanujan who was associated with the departments of Linguistics and South Asian Languages and Civilizations, as well as, the Committee on Social Thought being appointed as an honorary Professor. He received the MacArthur Fellowship in the year 1983 and became an Assistant Professor of Linguistics, Tamil and Dravidian Languages at the University of Chicago (1962-1966). In the year 1968, he received promotion as a Professor of Dravidian Studies and Linguistics (1968).

Ramanujan married a Syrian Christian woman from Kerala but they had consequently separated from each other. Having suffered an anesthetic reaction during a preparation of his medical surgery, he passed away on 13 July 1993 in Chicago.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What was the complete name of A.K. Ramanujan?

.....

.....

Q 4: In which subject was Ramanujan awarded a Ph. D. degree?

.....

.....

Q 5: Name the languages in which Ramanujan had gained proficiency.

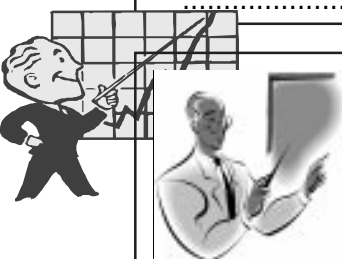
.....

.....

Q 6: How did Ramanujan begin his professional career?

.....

.....

**LET US KNOW**

To enlist some of Ramanujan's particular interests, he was greatly drawn towards the tenets of Buddhism and also had an inclination towards the classical Tamil poets and the forms of, Kannada *vacanas* (sayings or free verse lyrics), *Bhakti* love poetry and ancient, ancestral Cankam or *Sangam* poetry of the Cankam period which greatly influenced his poems. You will be surprised to know that there were around five hundred Cankam poets who wrote about 2381 poems as a whole. The *Bhakti* poets were influenced by Cankam poetry and created a mystical appeal through their love poems. And the *vacanas* in Kannada were translated by Ramanujan which captured his interests in the classics.

3.3.2 His Works

A love for poetry captured Ramanujan during his college

years when he read poetry in Kannada and began to experiment with the form in Kannada, Tamil and English. Thus, Ramanujan is also considered as a tri-lingual poet owing to the ease with which he wrote and translated in these languages. He was an avid reader from an early age as he had an easy access to his father's study and was much inspired by the Kannada poet Adiga. Also, he was well-read in the modern poetry of T.S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas. He began writing poetry at the age of seventeen and was at his literary prime during his early teaching years.

To enlist some of his major poetry volumes in English they are *The Striders* (1966), *Relations* (1971) and *Second Sight* (1986). Some of the significant poems and widely anthologised poems in the volume of *The Striders* are: "The Striders", "Snakes", "Breaded Fish", "Still Another for Mother", "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing", "Self Portrait" and "A Poem on Particulars". The volume *Relations* comprised poems such as: "Small Scale Reflections on a Great House", "Smalltown, South India", "Some Relations", "Old Indian Belief", "Obituary", "Prayers to Lord Murugan", and "The Hindoo". His subsequent volume *Second Sight* contained poems such as "No Amnesiac King", "Astronomer", "Snakes and Ladders", "Zoo Gardens Revisited", "Extended Family", "Love Poem for a Wife and her Trees", "Chicago Zen" and "Second Sight." The dominant themes that emerge from these volumes are reflections on the self (e.g. "Self Portrait"), one's roots and traditions, family and relations (e.g. "Small Scale Reflections on a Great House" or "Some Relations"), the east and the west (e.g. "Conventions and Despair" or "Snakes and Ladders") to mention a few.

Some of his other notable works in translation are: *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (1967), *Speaking of Siva, Kannada Bhakti poems by Virasaiva saints* (1973), *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981), *Poems of Love and War* (1985), *Folktales from India, Oral Tales from Twenty Indian Languages* (1991) and *Samskara* (translation of U.R Ananthamurthy's Kannada novel)

(1976). Some of his co-authored and co-edited works are *The Literatures of India: An Introduction* (1974), *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India* (1986), *When God Is a Customer: Telugu Courtesan Songs by Ksetrayya and Others* (1994) and *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry* (posthumous 1994). After his demise, the following works namely, *The Black Hen* (1995), *The Flowering Tree and Other Oral Tales from India* (1997), *Collected Essays* (1999) and *Uncollected Poems and Prose* (2000) were posthumously published. His significant essays are: "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" (1990), "Where Mirrors Are Windows: Toward an Anthology of Reflections" (1989), and his commentaries in *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (1967) and *Folktales from India, Oral Tales from Twenty Indian Languages* (1991).

He was greatly influenced by the ancient South Indian poetical convention of Cankam poetry which was a literary form that gave rise to love poetry as practiced by the Cankam poets. The characteristic of Cankam poetry was the *akam* form (the poems of the inner world) and *puram* (the poems of the outer world) which we shall further discuss in the subsection 3.6 of the unit. Thus, the range of Ramanujan's literary and academic works indeed provides a glimpse of the poet's creative versatility and wide academic scholarship that remains unmatched in the scenario of Indian English poetry even today.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Why is Ramanujan considered a trilingual poet?

.....

Q 8: Name some of the major poetical works of Ramanujan.

.....

.....

3.4 TEXT OF THE POEM

The poem "Self-Portrait" is taken from A.K Ramanujan's first poetry collection titled *The Striders* that was published in the year 1966 by the Oxford University Press and was well-received by readers. This volume was recommended to the members of the Poetry Society, based in London. Some of the poems in this volume are "The Striders", "Snakes", "Breaded Fish", "A River", "A Poem of Particulars" and "An Image for Politics."

Let us read through the text of the poem before we study the detailed explanation provided in the subsequent sub-section



Resemble: look similar to someone or something.

Laws of Optics: the laws concerning the branch of science concerned with vision and the behaviour of light.

Portrait: painting, drawing or photograph of a person

SELF PORTRAIT

I **resemble** everyone
But myself, and sometimes see
in shop windows,
despite the well-known **laws**
of optics,
the **portrait** of a stranger,
date unknown,
often signed in a corner
by my father.

3.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

After going through the poem, you will be able to extract some form of meaning from the text. The given explanation of the poem is only one form of interpretation of the text to which you may add your own. Poetry is always open to meaning and you are free to come up with your own interpretation as long as you can reason out and justify your ideas. The poem has been divided into three parts for the convenience of explanation as given below:

Line 1-3

"I **resemble** everyone
But myself, and sometimes see
in shop windows,"

Sometimes, the poet stops to glance at his reflection in the glass of the shop windows. The poem begins with the singular "I" by stressing on the perspective of the poet in the first person narrative. The poet here does not exclusively highlight the aspect of his individuality but rather 'likens' his appearance to that of others. The very word 'resemble' denotes a 'sense of similarity' which is distinct from being 'same' or 'sameness.' Perhaps, the poet means to say that he finds himself to be just another everyday face lost in the sea of the crowds. This echoes the feeling of alienation and loneliness; the very feeling of being lost among people. It takes away from the special feeling of being counted as an 'individual' and celebrating the 'sense of self' that defines a person. Have you ever found yourself walking along with a crowd of people in a city? Sometimes, during certain hours of the day, you may find such crowds in a terrific rush and at other times you may just find them moving along at their own pace. If you find yourself walking along such a crowd, you may have that strange feeling of resembling those unknown faces, 'strangers' who are all headed somewhere, with some kind of purpose and some kind of work just like you do everyday. Perhaps, the poet here tries to bring that image of a crowd through these opening lines.

Line 4-6

**"despite the well-known laws
of optics,
the portrait of a stranger,"**

The poet here refers to the laws of optics which is a branch of science that concerns with the nature of light and vision. You may have studied the function of human vision in your Biology lessons. Basically, the reflection of light from a perceived object on the human retina sends signals to the brain via the optic nerves which reflects the image of things as we see them. The secret behind our vision is a scientific process that takes place in

a flash. But the poet's vision deviates or departs from these established scientific laws. What he sees in his reflection is literally the portrait of a stranger, probably his father as indicated in the last lines. He finds the image of this stranger juxtaposed with his own. The poet may find himself overshadowed by the figure of his father or may experience a sense of nostalgia on remembering his father.

Line 7-9

**"date unknown,
often signed in a corner
by my father"**

The portrait of his father seems to chase his own reflection and his sense of imagination. These last lines indicate that the person is reminded of his father's old portrait each time he catches his reflection. It could also be a photograph bearing his father's 'signature' in the corner. It is not mentioned whether his father is well alive or has passed away but we certainly find a note of nostalgic remembrance in the poem. We often miss the presence of someone we love, long after they are gone. Sometimes, their absence can leave a sense of emptiness in our hearts and haunt our memories. The poet experiences a sense of alienation and dissolution of his individuality. In all probability, the portrait is a mental picture in the mind of the poet. He seems to distinctly remember his father's portrait and his signature, but cannot remember the date, perhaps the ink had smudged with time or perhaps, when he had seen it for the last time. It could also symbolically mean that his father's portrait was timeless and made his presence felt through or was embodied in the reflection of his son-the poet himself. This could be one possible interpretation of the poem but there can be several other meanings that can be extracted from it.

It could also be possible that the poet could be reminded of his father's 'obituary' in the newspapers. Have you ever noticed

an obituary published in the pages of a newspaper? An obituary is dedicated in memory of a deceased person in the form of a short piece of biography or a few words of tribute along with a portrait or photograph of the deceased, quoting the dates of birth and death below it. The possibility of the portrait in the poem being an obituary is only a matter of **conjecture** drawing from another poem by Ramanujan titled "Obituary" which is centered on the poet's father. In this poem, the poet finds himself flipping old newspapers to find a few lines on his father who had left a complete absence and a change in circumstances after his demise. His father had left his wife widowed and a sickly grandson, a decaying house and **liabilities**, the last of his mortal remains and the customary annual rituals as the opening line of the poem "Obituary" reads: "Father, when he passed on/left dust/on a table full of papers."

Conjecture: an opinion based on incomplete information; a guess

Liabilities: a sum of money that is owed



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Complete the following lines:
 "despite the well-known laws
 Of,
 The of a stranger,"

3.5 MAJOR THEMES

Some of the themes that emerge from the poem are: memories and imagination which are closely related to the past and the present; and the quest of identity which is again associated with and inseparable to the ideas of family and homeland. Thus, it all boils down to one's roots and the sense of longing and belonging. Read the given poem to try and formulate some of your own ideas on these significant aspects:

Memory and Imagination

Fragments of early memories and **reminiscences** of the past find a



Irony: a situation that appears opposite to what one expects

Reminiscences: the enjoyable remembering of past events

Vividly: clear images in the mind; to see clearly

Vague: not certain or definite

Reverts: return to a previous state

Recoiling: suddenly moving back in fear

frequent expression in the poetry of Ramanujan. His poetry bears a streak of confession in the way he reveals certain truths about his family or at times in the way he hints at the irony of certain situations in the family. At times, he '**vividly**' or distinctly recollects certain moments of the past and at other times certain memories appear **vague** and fragmented. The poet often **reverts** to memories of his childhood days with a sense of nostalgia and longing for a never-to-return past. He weaves memories of himself as a child in poems like "The Snakes" where he recollects the **recoiling** fear of looking at snakes or in "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing" where he remembers climbing trees and playing on a swing with his cousin sister.

And at other times, he simply recounts moments spent with his family and dear ones as noted in his collection of poems titled *Relations* which contains poems like "Small-scale Reflections on a Great House" centered on his family home, "Love Poem to a Wife" dedicated to his wife, "Of Mothers, among Other Things" for his mother and "Obituary" on losing his father. In certain poems of Ramanujan, we find a sense of emotional attachment to the past but there are poems in which the poet does not sentimentalise the past but simply draws on his memories. We are all often drawn to the memories of the past in our living present aren't we? The poet here is immediately reminded of the portrait of his father, the moment he sees his own reflection on a shop window. Perhaps, the memory of his father haunts him and tricks his own imagination. Whether it is one's own personal history or a historical past, one cannot completely lose track or leave the past behind all too easily. The past has a presence even in the present, which is something that Ramanujan tries to examine through his poetry. He tries to figure out how best to maintain a dynamic relation with both the past and the present.

Identity

A crisis of identity is a common experience of the diasporic writers who find themselves rooted in their 'country of origin' and established in their 'country of adoption' at the same time. Their desire to belong to their native land which they can no longer call their own leads them to a collective sense of identity-crisis. For the modern diasporic individual

then, the native country transforms into an imaginary homeland that belongs to the realm of imagination in time and space. Salman Rushdie's significant essay titled *Imaginary Homelands* brings these confusing experiences of a diasporic writer to the fore. It tries to examine how the idea of the 'home' changes over the years. And this is significantly reflected in Ramanujan's poetry that has a quest motive through which the poet tries to arrive at some form of self-definition.

For an instance, in "Self Portrait", the poet tries to fight the feelings of alienation, fragmentation of identity, dissociation of individuality and **disorientation** in a crowd outdoors. In the poem, the poet reflects on how his father's identity is strung with his own. Similarly, in another poem "Snakes and Ladders", the poet desires to look into his past to search for his roots and identity. Thus, the surfacing of certain sensitivities of the poet in relation to the definitions of one's 'identity' can be clearly understood. Also, there is a tug and pull of the 'self' and the 'other', 'tradition' and 'modernity', the 'center' and the 'periphery', the East and the West and the search for definitions of 'identity' and 'home' as some of the **binaries** that can be found in the poetry of Ramanujan. Thus, the theme of 'identity' which is central to the poetry of diasporic-writers emerges strongly in the poetry of Ramanujan.

Disorientation: a sense of confusion or to which one cannot relate to.

Binaries: that which involves two (opposite) factors, aspects or qualities.

Roots

True to one's roots, an individual always carries some part of his cultural baggage regardless of where in the globe he is headed towards. In Ramanujan's poetry, we find how the poet's constant preoccupation with his distant home and family through the help of his memory and imagination keeps him rooted. It is true that it becomes difficult to define one's own identity without the reference to his immediate family. Thus, the poet's reference to the themes of the 'home' and the 'family' can be extended to the symbolical metaphors of the 'nation' and its 'diverse people'. While the home shelters a family, the nation is a home that brings its people, their customs and traditions together and binds them with a sense of oneness. Just as a home encompasses a family at a **microcosmic** level, the nation encompasses its diverse people at the **macrocosmic** level. And this is one

Microcosmic: something that represents a smaller picture or representation at a smaller level.

Macrocosmic: something that represents a larger picture or representation at a larger level.

Lineage: descent, ancestry or pedigree

of the significant aspects found in Ramanujan's poetry.

To elaborate on the poet's constant reflections on his family and his native home, we may take an instance of his poem titled "Small Scale Reflections on a Great House." The poet here draws a picture of a time when he grew up in a traditional Indian family and neighbourhood as a young boy. The memories of his parents and his extended family, cultural traditions and customs, languages and practices, childhood days and interesting anecdotes anchor him to his roots and his past. The poet traces his roots and identity through the inseparable sense of belonging to the place of his birth and country of origin. Also, in the poem "Self Portrait" the imaginary reflection of the father's image on the poet's own is a form of representation, on how one's 'roots' or in fact one's '**lineage**' is inseparable and at times inescapable from one's own identity. Bruce King in his Introduction to *Three Indian Poets: Ezekial, Moraes, A.K. Ramanujan* makes a comparison between of the poet with Ezekial and Moraes and writes: "Of the three poets, Ramanujan is naturally the most rooted in a traditional India; he is also an example of how varied traditions can be and how much they change."

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Who wrote the significant essay *Imaginary Homelands*? What does the essay highlight?

.....

.....

Q 11: What are some of the binaries that can be found in the poetry of Ramanujan?

.....

.....



LET US KNOW

In the introductory pages of the significant volume titled *The Oxford Indian: Ramanujan*, there is a detailed discussion on the poet's ease with writing

and translating across the three languages, English, Tamil and Kannada. Although, Tamil was his mother language, he was well versed and fluent in the other two languages. He also had an interest in Sanskrit and to quote a passage from the volume, it is given thus:

"He (referring to Ramanujan) said, 'I am ideologically radical' about Sanskrit". Further it states thus, "He believed in the muscular strength of regional languages and literatures. Folk literatures and other 'counter systems' inspired him. As a linguist he looked at the languages within languages; in the Kannada region, he knew some dozen dialects. He knew the intricacies of the Indian language problem."

3.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

According to Bruce King, "[a]lthough Ramanujan's verse was early recognised by fellow poets as excellent, it has taken time before critical and academic studies could come to terms with his complexities." King in *Three Indian Poets* discusses how Ramanujan's concerns as a poet stood divided between his roots in Indian culture and his modern self. This is why, in several of his poems we come across his concerns of realisation and disorientation with shifting changes, association and alienation in changing milieus, attraction and repulsion towards conventions, formation and fragmentation of his own self-identity. It is much through the strains of his poetry that he is found to have grappled with the question of identity, ambiguity and multiplicity within the self and the search towards self-definition.

Ramanujan was of the opinion that, "the authentic voice of the poet, his true 'language', [did] not solely depend upon the tongue in which he [chose] to express himself, the landscapes, the personae, the appropriate moods, all [became] a language within a language." His poetry is resonant with evocative images, symbolism, myths, mysteries, metaphors, **metaphysical** elements and flashes of truths. Much of his

poetry collections encompass thematic aspects on the human existence and nature, individual and the society, family and roots, tradition and modernity, conventions and progressions, reflections and memories, time and space, east and the west, past and the present. He captures the modern Indian experience as an expatriate with jarring realism.

Ramanujan followed two particular conventions in his poetry that of the 'Interior' (or *Akam* in Kannada) and the Exterior (*Puram*). The Interior or the *Akam* frame highlighted any specific context such as personal history for an instance and the Exterior or the *Puram* frame highlighted wider contexts such as Indian history drawn from facts. If noticed carefully, these conventions are clearly reflected in the poetry of Ramanujan where he dealt with the inner and outer aspects. His expertise as a philologist and folklorist lent an interdisciplinary edge to his research, scholarship and a sharp intellect. In his own words, he wrote:

"English and my disciplines (linguistics; anthropology) give me my 'outer' forms-linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience; and my first thirty years in India, my frequent visits and field trips, my personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore give me my substance, my 'inner' forms, images and symbols. They are continuous with each other, and I no longer can tell what comes from where."

In the present poem, we will find the compact structure in which the lines are clipped and yet, in just a few words easily evoke the images of shop-windows and the poet's mirrored reflection, the optical laws of Physics floating out of our school text books and an unfamiliar portrait with a distinct signature. "Self-Portrait" stands as a complete poem with all the elements of fragmentariness that it encompasses. Even without the use of poetical devices or much word-play, Ramanujan creates a fine balance of poetical expression with a striking sensibility in just about a few words in the poem.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: What are some of the thematic aspects in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan?

.....

Q 13: Discuss the two conventions of *Akam* and *Puram* in Ramanujan's poetry.

.....

Q 14: What are the significant aspects of the poem "Self-Portrait" in relation to the use of style and technique?

.....

.....

3.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Bruce King in his Preface to *Three Indian Poets* writes that, "[o]ne of Ramanujan's great scholarly achievement was to reveal how Indian culture is varied and yet the many streams are related." As one of the most prominent Indian poets, the poetry of Ramanujan is enriched with the Indian cultural context and his poetry is woven with ancient literary forms and conventions, myths and legends, symbols and allusions, folklores and metaphors. Some of Ramanujan's favourite readings were the classical Tamil poets, the Cankam or *Sangam* poets, the Bhakti or *Alvar* poets and equally the poetry of P. B. Shelley, W.B. Yeats, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams.

As a poet, he spent years working on his poems and even confessed of having worked on just one poem for about a decade. He mostly practiced re-working his drafts over and over again. To him, this experience was significant in the sense that in redoing his poems, he not only found new changes in his creation but also within himself. This was a "creative act" in itself, through which the craft of poetry transformed the

poet and the poet's sense of creativity. Poetry to Ramanujan came from unknown inspiration and through many different ways. Kriittika Ramanujan in the preface to *A.K. Ramanujan: Collected Poems* makes a mention of how the poet in a lighter vein spoke of his poems being his babies that required constant cleaning.

In an interview with Chirantan Kulshrestha, the poet was questioned on whether memory bore a special meaning in his poetry; his response was that he did not have any such methodological approach to his creation. To quote him, Ramanujan said: "I don't really know. I simply write poems as they occur to me; I have to have no theory." He also maintained that he did not sentimentalise the past but rather highlighted how the past tended to mould one's sensibility with the passing of time. He is quoted to have said that although, he came up with several poems "obsessed" with memory in the form of the personal, historical and mythical, it was all but a form of fluid expression. He believed that the poetry was not just a simple act of writing from the sources in the immediate present and again that if a poet was "worth the ink, he [would write] with everything he [was]" which is not just a form of self-expression but also a diversion from it.

As a multi-lingual poet, he opined that the medium of language in which a poet wrote was not just based on choice but also one's ability. According to him, if a poet has the 'ability' to switch writing in multiple languages, he would certainly do so. His cited reasons of writing in English were the medium of his education and adopting it as the language of conversation with his family and friends –having lived abroad for two decades. Yet, he confesses his love for reading, writing and translating poetry in Tamil and Kannada alternatively; also stating the fact that he "studied and taught English in India and taught Indian languages abroad." Thus, Bruce King had stated that "He [Ramanujan] is often said to be the best of the Indian language poets, a great translator from southern Indian English language poets and an excellent scholar in such fields as linguistics and folklore." Also, significantly the leading Indian dramatist Girish Karnad in the *Indian Express* declared through his write-up that "...it is clear that

[Ramanujan] is among the most important Indian poets of this century" which is true with regard to the position that the poet continues to occupy in the rolls of Indian English poetry.



3.8 LET US SUM UP

After a thorough study of the unit, you will be able to discuss the development of poetry in the Indian English literary scenario with regard to contemporary Indian English poets. The introductory section of the unit will also enable you to gain an insight into the life and works of the Indian poet A.K. Ramanujan. The provided explanation of the text and the highlighted themes will help you to grasp the content and context of the poem. You will also be able to critically analyse the sense of style and use of language by the poet. Moreover, you will receive an idea of the poet's critical reception and appreciate the nuances in his poetry. The unit is designed to stir your curiosity and interest in your further exploration of the Indian English poets and also Ramanujan with the range and depth of his timeless and captivating poetry.



3.9 FURTHER READING

- 1) King, Bruce. (2005). *Three Indian Poets: Ezekial, Moraes, Ramanujan*. Second Edition New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 2) Naik, M.K. (2009). *Indian English Poetry: From the Beginnings Upto 2000*. New Delhi: Pencraft International.
- 3) Ramanujan, Molly Daniels. (ed.) (2011). *The Oxford India: Ramanujan* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: A.K Ramanujan received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his *Collected Poems* (1999).

Ans to Q No 2: The North-Eastern poets through their poetry articulate the pressing social and political concerns, discourses on identity and ethnicity, problems of terrorism and insurgency, traditions of customs and tribal heritage.

Ans to Q No 3: Although, we know the poet by his abbreviated name, his complete name was 'Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan.'

Ans to Q No 4: Ramanujan was awarded a Ph.D. degree in Linguistics

Ans to Q No 5: He gained proficiency in several languages such as Sanskrit, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and English which contributed greatly towards his academic research.

Ans to Q No 6: He began his professional career as a Lecturer of English Literature and Language in various colleges based in Belgaum, Madurai, Quilon and Baroda.

Ans to Q No 7: Ramanujan is known as a tri-lingual poet as he began to experiment writing poetry in the languages of Kannada, Tamil and English. Thus, Ramanujan is also considered as a tri-lingual poet owing to the ease with which he wrote and translated in these languages.

Ans to Q No 8: To enlist some of his major poetical works in English they are as follows: *The Striders* (1966), *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (1967), *Speaking of Siva* (1973), *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981), *Poems of Love and War* (1985), *Relations* (1971), *Selected Poems* (1976) and *Second Sight* (1986).

Ans to Q No 9: "despite the well-known laws
Of optics,
The portrait of a stranger,"

Ans to Q No 10: Salman Rushdie wrote the essay titled *Imaginary Homelands*. The essay brings the confusing experiences of a diasporic writer to the fore.

Ans to Q No 11: The sense of the 'self' and the 'other', 'tradition' and 'modernity', the 'center' and the 'periphery', the East and the West and the search for definitions of 'identity' and 'home' are some of the binaries that can be found in the poetry of Ramanujan.

Ans to Q No 12: Much of his poetry collections encompass thematic aspects on the human existence and nature, individual and the society, family and roots, tradition and modernity, conventions and progressions, reflections and memories, time and space, east and the west, past and the present.

Answer to Q13: Ramanujan followed two particular conventions in his poetry that of the 'Interior' (or Akam in Kannada) and the Exterior (Puram). The Interior or the Akam frame highlighted any specific context such as personal history for an instance and the Exterior or the Puram frame highlighted wider contexts such as Indian history drawn from facts.

Answer to Q 14: The significant aspect of the poem is its compact structure in which the lines are clipped and yet, in just a few words easily evoke the images of shop-windows and the poet's mirrored reflection, the optical laws and an unfamiliar portrait with a distinct signature. "Self-Portrait" stands as a complete poem with all the elements of fragmentariness that it encompasses. Even without the use of poetical devices or much word-play, Ramanujan creates a fine balance of poetical expression with a striking sensibility in just about a few words in the poem.



3.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the development of Indian English poetry.

Q 2: Discuss A. K. Ramanujan as an Indian English poet.

- Q 3:** Explain the life and works of the poet A.K. Ramanujan.
- Q 4:** Give a detailed explanation of A.K. Ramanujan's poem "Self-Portrait"
- Q 5:** Explain and highlight the major themes of Ramanujan's "Self-Portrait".
- Q 6:** Discuss the style and use of language in Ramanujan's poetry.
- Q 7:** Explain the following extracts with reference to context:
- a) "I resemble everyone
But myself, and sometimes see
in shop windows,
despite the well-known laws
of optics"
 - b) "the portrait of a stranger,
date unknown,
often signed in a corner
by my father"
- Q 8:** Briefly discuss the critical reception of the poet A.K. Ramanujan in your own words.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 4: EUNICE DE SOUZA: “WOMEN IN DUTCH PAINTING”

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 4.1 Learning Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Eunice de Souza : The Poet
 - 4.3.1 Her Life
 - 4.3.2 Her Works
- 4.4 Text of the Poem
 - 4.4.1 Explanation of the Poem
- 4.5 Major Themes
- 4.6 Style and Language
- 4.7 Critical Reception
- 4.8 Let us Sum up
- 4.9 Further Reading
- 4.10 Answers to Check Progress
- 4.11 Model Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- grasp the significance of Eunice de Souza's poetry
- discuss the life and works of Eunice de Souza
- summarise the poem “Women in Dutch Painting”
- analyse the style and language of the poet
- gain an idea on the poet's critical reception
- gain an insight into de Souza's feminine sensibility as reflected in her poem

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with Eunice de Souza, an Indian English poet, literary critic and novelist. Here we shall deal with one deal with of her

poems titled, "Women in Dutch Painting". We shall be dealing chiefly with the various aspects of the poem in general and de Souza as a poet in particular by reflecting on her style and technique. First of all, let us have a look at her life and works; this will enable us to read the poem in a better way and enhance our understanding towards de Souza as a poet.



Camaraderie: a feeling of friendship and trust among people who work and spend a lot of time together.

4.3 EUNICE DE SOUZA: THE POET

In an interview with Sindhu Menon, de Souza said, "For me, writing poetry was sudden. I was not even thinking of being a poet. I have this image of Arvind Mehrotra, Arun Kalatkar, Adil Jussawala, this tremendous **camaraderie** and I rather envy this camaraderie of poets. But I did not think I would ever be one. It sounds so very corny but romantic, but the poems just turned up one day. That was the beginning." Aside from poetry and fiction, de Souza has edited numerous anthologies and collections. She also wrote a weekly column for the *Mumbai Mirror*. Let us look at depth the life and works of the poet.

4.3.1 Her Life

Eunice de Souza was born in Pune in 1940 to Roman Catholic parents of Goan Catholic family and grew up in Pune. She completed her MA in English literature from the Marquette University in Winconsin and subsequently completed her PhD from the University of Mumbai. She taught English at St Xavier's College, Mumbai and was the Head of the Department until her retirement. She was involved in the well known literary festival "Ithaka" organised at the college. She has been involved in theatre, both as actress and director. She passed away in Vakola, Mumbai on July 29, 2017, leaving a void in the history of Indian English literature.

When Eunice de Souza died in July 2017 she left little that required tidying up or sorting out. She had organised her prayers-letters, reviews, certificate, ephemera – neatly into folders, photos into albums, had given away to friends precious things of hers,

pictures, paintings and furniture. Her last volume of poetry had been published the year before with urgency. Fiercely independent to the last, despite her failing health, she had got herself into a state of preparedness. This collection, *A Necklace of Skulls*, predating it by several years, is a collection of her complete earlier poems, including her pioneering first book of poems – *Fix*.

LET US KNOW

Eunice de Souza must have imagined death when she was writing her later poem "Death":

"Under the dusty mango tree
Ceremonial shaving of heads
The newly bald make fun of each other.
The newly dead is an unknown quantity
Urged on by the tuneless singing of the women
And men in white standing their ground."

4.3.2 Her Works

Eunice de Souza has published four volumes of poetry, two novellas and edited several anthologies of poems and essays. Her first book of poems *Fix* was published in 1979, followed by *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988), *Ways of Belonging* (1990) and *Learn from the Almond Leaf* (2016). She also wrote two novels – *Dangerlok* (2001) and *Dev and Simran* (2003) – several books for children and edited several poetry anthologies, the last of which, *These My Words: the Penguin book of Indian Poetry* (2012), she co-edited with Melanie Silgado. In the last several years of her life she brought all the weight of her knowledge to her much loved weekly *Mumbai Mirror* column on reading and literature which she wrote right to the end. Her first collection of poems *Fix* (1979) gives the impression that she is a Goan rather than an Indian poet in English. All twenty four of the poems in the volume revolve around life in the Goan Christian community of which de Souza



is a part, although the setting of the poems is not Goa, but the city of Poona, where she was born and raised.

Her second volume *Women in Dutch Painting* is not a radically different book from *Fix*. In fact, it can be called an extension of it, both in terms of form and theme and her women-centric poems appear again in this volume. In *Women in Dutch Painting* de Souza compares the women in Vermeer's paintings to those whom she knows in real life experience with understanding and acceptance. There is understanding and even a note of appreciation in de Souza's analysis of these women. The serenity seen in the paintings and also in the women the poet knows (the aunt, Anna who writes poems) stems from consciousness of a life – embracing perspective, not from resignation or a lack of understanding: an indication of inner strength, not weakness. Although one can recognise a current of anger in de Souza's poetry at the social and moral attitudes towards women in general and those of the Goan Catholic community in particular, there is also compassion and sympathy for their victimisation caused by their passivity, conformity, illusions and acceptance of feminine norms set by a society hostile to them. There is understanding for the compulsions that make a woman silent and compliant. The **parenthetical** dedication provides a certain ironic tone to the poem.

The strength of de Souza's poetry has always been its economy and its sharpness of expression. This irony of this combination certainly does not mean an absence of feeling; its intensity suggests, by implication, a quest for a truer compassion than the variety invoked by more **florid effusions** of sentiment.

Eunice de Souza as a Confessional Poet

Eunice de Souza is one of the most famous confessional poets of second half of twentieth century. Her poetry allows us to peep into her sufferings and tortured psyche on the one hand and the paradox and complexity of the female psyche on the other hand. She reveals the tensions and frustrations which a woman



Parenthetical: given as extra information in a speech or a piece of writing.

Florid: over-elaborate.

Effusions: an instance of unrestrained speech or writing.

faces because of the discrepancy between the social roles of women. The themes of love and sexuality in her poems show how she is dissatisfied with the society which demands silent acceptance from a woman. She adopts an aggressive attitude, yet she is quite aware of the growing unrest of her life that gives her pain and suffering. Coupled with the desire for autonomy and self definition is the fear of becoming a victim and of being treated as a deviant if a woman dares to defy patriarchal structure. Living within this socially imposed identity, she feels alienated, both emotionally and socially. This alienation and resultant unresolved tensions breed confusion and depression. The mind of a woman is always filled with a sense of fear. A woman's life is constantly bogged down by fear and it is one of the main hindrances or hurdles towards the attempt of self realisation.

The same fear resulting in delusions of persecution can also be seen in de Souza's poem as when she claims:

"I thought the whole world
Was trying to rip me up
Cut me down go through me."

Eunice de Souza exposes several instances, delivered in the tone of alienation which beautifies her work.

".....Prabhu was no fool
And got the best of both worlds.
(Catholic Brahmin!
I can hear his fat chuckle still)

Here the sense is one of a desperate compromise; Prabhu aspires to the status of Brahmin whilst at the same time claiming a catholic identity. This shows an impression of alienation despite one's trial and efforts. Eunice de Souza is also displaced by her own ambivalent relationship with male hegemony and by a personal alienation both within her own culture and the wider Indian context.

These futile efforts of holding back her feminine feelings and trying to prove herself a boy make her tone harsh and sardonic

so much so that her own community denounced from the pulpit at St. Peter's in Bandra, and Adil Jussawala said that if she continued in the same vein, she would soon be condemned at St. Peter's in Rome. She even rebels against her family upbringing. Some of her poems show her conflict with her parents. While addressing her mother, the poet says:

"Forgive me, mother,
That I left you
A life-long widow
Old, alone
....
In dreams
I hack you." (Forgive Me, Mother)

Poetry emerges as creativity safeguarded by turning the terror away from waging war against others to waging war against oneself; by shifting the battle ground from the landscape to one's mindscape.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Write about the confessional poetry of Eunice de Souza.

.....
.....

4.4 TEXT OF THE POEM

Women in Dutch Painting

(For Melanie Silgado)

The afternoon sun is on their faces.

They are calm, not stupid,
pregnant, not bovine.

I know women like that

And not just in paintings—
 an aunt who did not answer her husband back
 not because she was plain
 and Anna who writes poems
 and hopes her avocado stones
 will sprout in the kitchen.
 Her voice is oatmeal and honey.

4.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

This poem is included in the volume *Women in Dutch Painting*, where de Souza moves into a more introspective space, but no less challenging. "Women in Dutch painting" is a poem about the women who appear in art by Dutch painters, especially Vermeer. She compares these women to women she knows.

In this poem, her social concerns become explicit, but her tone softens and acceptance, is noticeable unlike the poems of *Fix*. It is important to focus on paintings of women by Dutch painters such as Johannes Vermeer and Rembrandt. The scene of the poem is set in domestic places and yet seems to have an independent life of the interior.

She looks at women such as the ones seen in Dutch painting and then moves her look to similar women in real life. There is understanding and acceptance, even appreciation in her poems. The adjectives provide the clue to 'reading' them: come, not stupid/pregnant, not bovine'. The serenity seen in the paintings and also the women the poet knows (the Aunt Anna who writes poems) springs from awareness and a life embracing thought, not from a lack of understanding: an epitome of inner strength. Thus the dedication gives a certain ironic inflection to the poem. Her student Melanie Silgado is herself a poet, who writes often in **acerbic** tone about women issues and social norms for women in patriarchal Christian world to which she belonged.

According to Adil Jussawalla, "Eunice de Souza's poems have an accuracy of detail and something of the quality of photographs taken at a decisive moment – with individuals or groups



Acerbic: Critical in a direct and rather equal way.

fixed at their most acute moments of pretension, cruelty or loneliness – that make them memorable." Her work has been critically acclaimed and reflects her enduring concerns with the self and women in society as they navigate through relationship, love, loss, anger and fulfilment. She also examines her Roman Catholic community and exposes its hypocrisy and conservatism.

Arundhati Subramaniam said, "De Souza will be remembered as one of Anglophone Indian poetry's significant voices. If Kamala Das brought female sexuality into Indian verse, de Souza ushered in female rage –a white-hot, page-searing, bone-chilling fury."

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: Which Dutch painter does de Souza specially refer to?

.....



Aggrandizement :
 increasing the power status or wealth; artificially improve the reputation of someone.

4.5 MAJOR THEMES

Self Expression of the Indian Women Poets

The study of Indian writing in English exposes the self expression of Indian women poets, their individual approaches and styles. They made a consequential subscription to the **aggrandizement** of Indian English literature similar to their male counterparts. They excel in the art of characterisation and portray the psyche of women and the crises in their lives in a male dominated society. Their search is not only for knowledge but also for identity as women. Thus, their writing is not merely self-expression but also a means of self-exploration and self-assertion. Among them Eunice de Souza is quite notable for her strong confessional voice and self-assertion. She transformed her poems to a mirror towards feminine sensibility.

Post-independence literature written by Indian women expresses their desire for freedom and self-assertion. Patriarchal society, cultural

practices, social taboos, superstitious beliefs and harmful practices— these are some of the factors that deprive women from essential progress and development. An exploration of self and the search for identity became an utmost need of the hour and this wave of contemplation primarily sprang up from Indian women writers, who used their written and imaginative expressions to describe the multi-dimensional approaches to femininity.

The Indian women's poetry thus operates within two divergent pulls—an impulse towards a genuinely independent definition of the self, on the one hand and the strong hold of patriarchal social reality towards their self-**effacement** on the other. As a vibrant poet, Eunice de Souza penned down her depressed desires with utmost naturalness and volunteered to speak on behalf of the thousands and millions of Indian women voice. She voices bold and honest expression of her hidden emotions with rich feminine sensibility. She takes the weapon of poetry as a means to react to the world around them. Eunice de Souza also feels terrified with the existing society and takes poetry as a means of self-expression. Her voice of rebelliousness and bitterness is mainly due to the common parental attitude of being unwelcoming towards a girl child and indifference towards women in patriarchal society. The mentality of the society towards a girl child and the effort to condition her into fitting or suiting **stereotypical** roles irritates the poet as revealed through her poems. She inquires the male-centric Indian society and thus became a representative of female literary modernism.

Confessions of Inner Turmoil

The poet's confessional mode here reveals the insecurity of her mind. She seems to be longing for peace and comfort at the price of her inner and suppressed desires, however there is a constant undercurrent of frustration and tension. An increasing awareness causes the poet to raise her voice against inequality and oppression. This new generation of women poets have emerged as — unafraid, motivated of feminist ideologies. The conflict in their minds between feminist learning and tradition-bound roles has left them **bewildered** and **perplexed**. The poetry

Effacement :

making oneself appear unimportant.

Stereotypical :

relating to a stereotype or over simplified idea of the typical characteristics of a person or thing.

Bewildered :

bemused or puzzled.

Stereotypical :

deeply or disturbingly confused.

appears as an expression of a woman's inner turmoil who is denied what she hungers after.

Eunice de Souza's voice of rebelliousness and bitterness is chiefly owing to gender discrimination which is still a common practice in the patriarchal Indian society even today. Eunice de Souza is representative of female literary modernism. Thus, Kamala Das' bold confession and Imtiaz Dharker's open challenge to the purdah-system are inspiring voices to the poet. She is conscious of the existing stereotypes in the Indian society and through her rebellious poetry seeks to root out these social constructs and bring a change in the mindsets particularly of the Indian women folk.

Eunice de Souza, like Sylvia Plath uses poetry as an instrument of catharsis or mental purgation, for getting rid of her inhibitions and obsessions, which hinder the progress of life. To her, poetry also becomes a vehicle of religious experience, which finds its outlet in the poems dealing with the mythical love. Like Plath, de Souza finds confessional mode, a perfect medium for giving vent to her struggle with her suicidal instinct. But Plath's wish of death is strong than de Souza. It is also found that the poet's life experiences produce in her an acute sense of depression, making her fed up with life.

Emancipation : freedom.

While expressing their innermost experiences Plath and Eunice de Souza makes confessional a mode of female **emancipation** and an embodiment of truths, valid to all humanity. Social and universal strains mark the poetry of Plath as well as of de Souza. In their poetic journey, they proceed from a purely personal to a social stance. According to critics like Dr. Tanu Gupta and Anju Bala Sharma, "Confessional poetry is the poetry of personal or 'I'. It is the poetry which springs from the personal life of the poet. Private experiences, alcoholism, masturbation, and feelings about trauma, depression, relationship and suicidal attempts are expressed in this poetry, often in an autobiographical manner. The poet reveals directly or indirectly his or her own experiences, problems and psychological complex in his or her poetry."

4.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The significant aspect in the poetical structure of the evocative poetry of de Souza is the question of style. In an interview with Sindhu Menon, de Souza says, "I think, one has to be very self-critical. Everyone has this experience. You write something, keep it for a week, a month, six months. Then you are quite horrified. I think one has to do that. It is a mistake to try to publish too fast. Our environment is not critical. Somebody publishes two poems and calls himself a poet. This does a disservice. There is a very strange idea that technique is the same –like in teaching, that formalist reading somehow destroys the passion. I think this is complete nonsense. Language is what poetry is all about. It is not about wearing your heart on your sleeve, courage and all that. It is finally language. And if you forget that you are not really a poet."

The strength of Eunice de Souza as a poet lies basically in the way she uses language. Her poems are spoken discourses, predominantly dramatic, most of them narrating some seemingly ordinary events, but full of biting social satire. In the poem "Miss Louise", the poet says,

"She dreamt of descending
Curving staircases
Ivory fan aflutter
Of children in sailor suits
And organza dresses
Till the dream rotted her innards
But no one knew;
Innards weren't permitted
In her time."

Her first volume *Fix* is full of irony; it is as though she was trying to create a poetic space for herself with this work. The purpose of irony is to draw the reader's attention to the anomalies of life around her. As a poet, she also some what works like a plastic surgeon deftly trying to correct the deformities of the society:

"Irony as an attitude to life

Is passé, you said....

So be it, friend.

Let me be passé and survive..."

Although, her poems are full of violent emotions, the introduction of the 'intelligent voice' makes it possible for her to achieve a balance between the emotional and the cerebral which saves the poems from becoming merely confessional in the end. One can see the development of a mature voice in her poetry from irony to contemplation in her second volume *Women in Dutch Painting* onwards. This seems to come from an understanding of the fact that pain is inevitable in life and there is no point in crying or feeling hurt about it so why not revel in it: In the poem, "The Hills Heal", the poet says,

"The hills heal as no hand does.

The heart is stilled by the blue flash

Of a lonely jay's wing."

Her persona answers those who might wonder if she gets joy out of life. In the poem, "For S. Who Wonders if I Get Much Joy Out of Life", the poet creates a stark image stating thus,

"As a matter of fact I do,

I contemplate....

.....

I look striking in red and black

And a necklace of skulls"

It is also a fact that men and women have responded differently to her poems; this difference can be demonstrated strikingly with one particular poem "He speaks" from her first collection *Fix*, which speaks volumes about de Souza's art. The poem is in reported speech, and a good example of her dramatic monologues. The male character is full of self importance, and tries to show his superiority over his lover who seems to be madly in love with him. She demolishes this character in his attempt to treat the lover callously at the same time pretending to be self righteous. The punch lines of the poem appear when the male character tries to "Fix" the woman and exposes himself. It is then that we see the savage irony of the poem

come through. In the poem "He Speaks", she says,

"I decided there was only one
 Thing to do: fix her
 The next time we were making love
 I said quite casually:
 I hope you realize I do this
 With other women."

Eunice de Souza writes with complete freedom of form and structure. The poem "Autobiographical" is a monologue having a direct opening, followed by a series of conflicts that override the poet's sensibility. The poem ends with a resolution, expressed in an ironic manner. A close examination of her language is suggestive of de Souza's rebellious resentment of the suppression of the female and gender prejudice. Like other women writers Eunice de Souza rejects the refined lady-like idiom of earlier women writers to register their rejection of the norms of patriarchy. To raise their voice against their **marginalised** position, and the social and sexual inequalities suffered by women in patriarchal society, they resort to –the rejection of the language those in power created for the politics of patriarchy.

Eunice de Souza's preference to the use of self-asserted language, irony and self-construction in flat and un-poetic tone is evident. Many critics compliment the experimental style of writing adopted by her as – Eunice de Souza's anthology with concerns of gender and nationality emerges as a great poetic genre. Ferdinand expresses her significant views on the poetry of de Souza, "There are poems which speak of failure, isolation, disintegration and loss. She has attempted to come out her traumas through her poetry. Her self-expression gets completely exposed, stripped of all gloss and her sense of betrayal".

Eunice de Souza being a Mumbai-based, Goan poet offers a wide range of themes and subject matter in poetry. The poet in her offers a range of highly **volatile emotions** through her poems, changing direction and gaining effect from her inner contrasts, conflicts, ironies and satires. Eunice de Souza belongs to that generation of post-independence women

Marginalised :

making a group or a person feel less important or powerful.

Volatile emotions:

highly charged emotions or sentiments.

Introspections :

self examination.

Tantalising :

teasing (someone) with the right or promise of something.

Ambivalence :

having mixed feelings about something or someone.

poets who have given a convincing assurance that Indian English poetry matches the best everywhere. In her poetry, the directness of speech, rhythm and colloquial language is an expression of emotional involvement.

Eunice de Souza's poems are major attempts to invoke subjective reflections and **introspections** in the readers. She adopts an observant tone with a detached voice and underlying rage in her poems. She expresses her resentment against the Goan-Catholic society in this way that it makes her tone strident. Many of her poems are the exposure of this harsh attitude:

"No matter that
my name is Greek
my surname Portuguese
my languages alien.
There are ways
of belonging.

I belong with the lame ducks." (– "de Souza Prabhu")

In these above lines, the trans-cultural associations of her name, and the self-destructive conclusions she reaches are delivered in an ironic tone. The word 'alien' is used to describe her chosen language, English. This shows a **tantalising ambivalence** because we are not sure if the writer feels the language is alien to her, or alien to her culture. Like many other Indian poets, she probably feels she has no choice but to use English; whether she feels comfortable with the choice or not.

Eunice de Souza's verse encompasses her memories of Goan Catholic life in Pune and represents the community's repressions, prejudices and ignorance. Discontented childhood experiences as part of this community form the stuff of much of her poetry. Her verse expresses her private fears, anxieties, anger, guilt, depression, desires and hopes. Though satirical and ironic in tone, as a poet, de Souza never lapses into sarcasm. Instead the message is conveyed with ironic juxtaposition of details and economy of expression, abrupt endings and easy diction, which lends to de Souza's poetry a sense of naturalness.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Write about the autobiographical elements reflected in de Souza's poetry.

.....

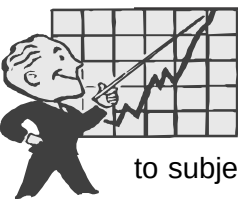
Q 4: Write about the de Souza's rebellious resentment of the suppression of the female and gender prejudice.

.....

Q 5: Write on the feminine sensibility as expressed in de Souza's poetry.

.....

.....

4.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Modern poetry can be viewed as defining the relationship of the the outside world, the material aspects having been subjugated to subjective memory. It is the inner world of the poet, the psychological, spiritual entity that matters; not the actual world outside. The poet can take off from even an insignificant sight, sound or smell, and create an imaginative space within his head. The latter phase of Modernism, on the other hand, began to dwell on the actual state of affairs outside; however, the approaches were almost similar.

It is quite paradoxical that Indian English poetry took on a definite character of its own and flourished as part of what we now call Indian English literature only after the colonisers left the land. For that very reason, this poetry that gradually grew into a considerable body of work in the corpus of Indian literature had to interrogate its own existence and relevance in a foreign language to begin with. The strong stand taken in favour of English as an Indian language by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and the founder-president of the Sahitya-

Akademi, helped Indian poetry in English redefine itself and assume its role in developing the literary traditions of Indian which would significantly contribute in nation-building.

In *A History of Indian English Literature*, M K Naik says "It is in poetry that the post-Independence period witnessed the most crucial developments. In the fifties arose a school of poets who tried to turn their backs on the romantic tradition and write averse more in tune with the age, its general temper and its literary ethos. They tried, with varying degrees of success, to naturalise in the Indian soil the modernistic elements derived from the poetic revolution affected by T. S Eliot and others in the twentieth century British and American poetry."

The poems evidence a high level of consciousness of the situation and problems faced by women, though expressed in ironic understatement rather than in overt comment.

In an essay "Interpretative Testimony: Kamala Das and Eunice de Souza", R. Raj Rao said, "As a poet, Eunice de Souza's aesthetic and politics are in conflict with each other. Her politics are feminist and womanist as well as radical, while her aesthetics are masculine and canonical, as well as conservative, even when she writes poems about marginalised women, the shape and texture of the poem takes precedence over the women's victimization."

Afeefa Banu, in *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English*, so says "Along with irony, there is a hidden humour in this poem which seems quite intolerable to some of the male critics, who have called this poem "technically brilliant". It is more like a 'private reprisal'. Of all the poet's writing in India now, Eunice de Souza is perhaps the only one who has mastered the spoken idiom of English and for that reason alone I would like to place her as the best of poets writing in English in India today."



4.8 LET US SUM UP

After a detailed study of the unit, the learner will be able to grasp the

significance of the poet, Eunice de Souza. The learner will be able to discuss the life and works of the poet and also summarise the poem, "Women in Dutch Painting". The learner will also be able to discuss the relevant themes in de Souza's poetry and analyse the poet's use of style and language. Together with receiving an idea on the critical reception, the learner will be able to appreciate the significance of such confessional poetry. Moreover, the learner will gain an insight into the feminine sensibility reflected in de Souza's poems and the status of women poets in Indian writing in English, with special reference to the poem "Women in Dutch Painting".



4.9 FURTHER READING

- 1) Beniwal, Anup. (1999). "Identity, Experience, Aesthetic: Indian Women's Poetry in English". Occasional Papers. pp.71-95.
- 2) Atma Ram (ed.) (1989). Contemporary Indian English Poetry. Calcutta: Writers Workshop.
- 3) De Souza, Eunice. (2009). A Necklace of Skulls: Collected Poems. New Delhi: Penguin Books .
- 4) De Souza, Eunice. (1979). *Fix*. Bombay: New Ground.
- 5) Dey, Esha. (1985). "Woman as Object: The Feminine Condition in a Decadent Patriarchy". *The Literary Criterion*. 10.4, pp. 9-20.
- 6) Dwivedi, Suresh Chandra. (1985). *Twentieth Century American Poetry: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Allahabad: Kitab Mahal.
- 7) Fernandes, Keith. (1994). Introduction. *Selected and New Poems by Eunice de Souza*. Bombay: St. Xaviers.
- 8) King, Bruce. (2007). Modern Indian Poetry in English. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 9) Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna. (ed.) (1990). *Twenty Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 10) Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna. (ed.) (1992). *Twelve Modern Indian English Poets*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- 11) Naik, M.K. (2006). *Indian English Poetry from Beginning upto 2000*. New Delhi: Pencraft International.
- 12) Nair, Rama. (2001). *Trends and Techniques in Contemporary Indian English Poetry*. New Delhi: Prestige Books.

4.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The poet's confessional mode here reveals the insecurity of her mind. She seems to be yearning for peace and comfort at the price of her inner and suppressed desires, however there is a constant undercurrent of frustration and tension. An increasing awareness made them raise their voice against inequality and oppression. This new generation of women poets have emerged as — unafraid, motivated of feminist ideologies. The conflict in their minds between feminist learning and tradition-bound roles has left them bewildered and perplexed. The poetry appears as an expression of a woman's inner turmoil who is denied what she hungers after.

Ans to Q No 2: Vermeer.

Ans to Q No 3: Eunice de Souza's verse is made upon her memories of Goan Catholic life in Pune and represents the community's repressions, prejudices and ignorance. Discontented childhood experiences as part of this community form the stuff of much of her poetry. Her verse expresses her private fears, anxieties, anger, guilt, depression, desires and hopes. Though satirical and ironic in tone, de Souza never lapses into sarcasm. Instead the message is conveyed by ironic juxtaposition of details with economy of expression, abrupt endings and easy diction, which lends to De Souza's poetry a sense of naturalness.

Ans to Q No 4: A close examination of her language is suggestive of De Souza's rebellious resentment of the suppression of the female

and gender prejudice. Like other women writers Eunice de Souza rejects the refined lady-like idiom of earlier women writers to register their rejection of the norms of patriarchy. To raise their voice against their marginalised position, and the social and sexual inequalities suffered by women in patriarchal society, they resort to –the rejection of the language those in power created for the politics of patriarchy.

Ans to Q No 5: She voices her bold, and honest expression to her hidden emotions with rich feminine sensibility. She takes the poetry as a mean to react to the world around them. Eunice de Souza also feels terrified with the existing society and takes poetry as a means of self-expression. Her voice of rebelliousness and bitterness is mainly because of the common parental attitude of being unwelcoming towards a girl child and indifference towards women in patriarchal society. The mentality of the society towards a girl child and the effort to condition her to fit in stereotypical roles irritates the poet as revealed in her poems. She inquires the andocentric Indian society and thus became a representative of female literary modernism.



4.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

- Q1:** Discuss the life of the Indian English poet Eunice de Souza.
- Q2:** Discuss Eunice de Souza as a confessional poet with reference to the poems you are familiar with.
- Q3:** Give a brief summary of the poem "Women in Dutch Painting".
- Q4:** Explain some of the major themes in Eunice de Souza's poetry.
- Q5:** Discuss the critical reception of Eunice de Souza together with the poet's use of style and language.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 5: KEKI N. DARUWALLA: “CHINAR”

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 5.1 Learning Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Keki N. Daruwalla: The Poet
 - 5.3.1 His Life
 - 5.3.2 His Works
- 5.4 Text of the Poem
 - 5.4.1 Context of the Poem
 - 5.4.2 Explanation of the Poem
- 5.5 Major Themes
- 5.6 Style and Language
- 5.7 Critical Reception
- 5.8 Let us Sum up
- 5.9 Further Reading
- 5.10 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 5.11 Model Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the life and works of the poet Keki N. Daruwalla
- describe the context of the poem “Chinar”
- explain the poem and highlight some of its major themes
- analyse the style and language employed in the poem
- provide a critical reception of Daruwalla’s poetry

5.2 INTRODUCTION

The present unit takes up the poem “Chinar” written by the poet Keki N. Daruwalla. The poetic universe of Daruwalla is fascinating as it reflects the poet’s sensitivity towards the world around him and the poet’s vision of an ideal environment where man is at harmony with Nature and

himself. Before we explore more about the poem, let us briefly take a look at modern Indian English poetry. The learner may note that the poets who wrote in the post-independence period, namely Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan and Dom Moraes are considered the founding fathers of modern Indian poetry.

These poets who had begun writing in the 1950s had adopted a new set of perspective and poetical practices in an attempt to move away from the earlier practices of the genre. They infused into their poetry a spirit of enquiry, expressing their intellectual urges and their concerns of the contemporary socio-political and cultural practices. As Bruce King notes, "In the poems of Ezekiel, Ramanujan, and Moraes there is comparatively little use of the surreal, little trust in self-expression without shape, economy and revision, and little interest in experiment of form for its own sake. They are seldom very obscure or impossibly difficult to understand" (2).

Further, King notes that initially these poets began to pour their fresh perspectives and poetical ideas into the traditional mould of poetry mostly emphasising the lyrical quality, logical frame and the gradual development of feeling, argument or expression. However, through the decades their poetry particularly in the more matured phases of their literary career became more open to changes and more experimental. In fact, they were a source of inspiration for another crop of poets often referred to as the New or Modernist poets of the 1960s such as Keki N. Daruwalla, Jayanta Mahapatra, P. Lal., R. Parthasarathy, Adil Jussawalla, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, etc. among others, all of who have produced some of the best works in Indian English poetry.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who were considered the founding fathers of modern Indian English poetry?

.....
.....

Q 2: Name some of the prominent poets who wrote in the 1960s.

.....
.....

5.3 KEKI N. DARUWALLA: THE POET

The learner may be well aware that Keki N. Daruwalla is one of the most prominent poets to have contributed to Indian English poetry and literature. Daruwalla had infused contemporary concerns and perspectives into his poetry and is very much a thinking poet or a poet of deep contemplation. He is the sort of poet who is so sensitive and thoughtful that his verses can also compel his readers to delve deeper into themselves as well as the world around them. This is particularly more evident when one explores the range and depth of Daruwalla's poetry. Let us then gain a brief insight into the life and the works of this remarkable poet before we explore the text of the prescribed poem.

5.3.1 His Life

Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla who had also served as a former police officer in the Indian Police Service (IPS) had continued his love for poetry and writing despite the serious responsibilities that he had to shoulder. His keen observation, sharp sensitivity and realistic portrayal of the world around him combined with his poetic sensibilities, striking images and literary finesse makes his poetry remarkable and memorable at the same time. It is little wonder that he occupies a well-established position as one of the leading poets of India.

Daruwalla was born in 1937 in Lahore before his parents had decided to relocate to Burhanpur and then to Rampur prior to the partition of India and Pakistan. He had completed his higher studies from Punjab University, Chandigarh and joined the police services followed by his stint as Assistant to Prime Minister on International Affairs. Following his official retirement, Daruwalla

continued to lead an active life as a poet and speaker with his residence in Delhi. As a widely-read poet, he continues to occupy his time with poetry weaving his memories, experiences, observations and concerns into his works. Daruwalla was honoured with the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1984 for his poetry volume *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982) and was also the recipient of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for Asia in the year 1987. The Indian Government had honoured Daruwalla with the Padmashree in the year 2014.

5.3.2 His Works

The first volume of poetry by Daruwalla that was published by the Writers' Workshop was titled *Under Orion* (1970). This volume had, in fact, caught the attention of the poet Nissim Ezekiel who was much impressed by the quality and depth of his poetry. Ezekiel had remarked that "the volume was impressive evidence not only of mature talent but of literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness". This work was shortly followed by his second anthology of poems titled *Apparition in April* in the year 1971 which also won him the Uttar Pradesh State Award in 1972. Thereafter, there was no looking back for the poet as he had arrived in the literary scene and had carved his own position as a prominent Indian English poet. Thus, he continued to publish several other remarkable volumes of poetry parallel to his government service.

The volumes that followed his second publication were in the following order: *Crossing of Rivers* (1976), *Winter Poems* (1980), *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982), *Landscapes* (1987), *A Summer of Tigers: Poems* (1995), *Night River Poems* (2000), *The Scarecrow and the Ghost* (2004), *A House in Ranikhet* (2003) and *For Pepper and Christ* (2009). The anthologies of his short stories are titled *Swords and Abyss* (1979) and *The Minister for Permanent Unrest and Other Stories* (1996). The recurrent motifs in his writings include portrayals of Indian life and culture, rivers and landscapes, birds

and animals to mention a few which are evoked through his striking use of metaphors and powerful imagery. Daruwalla has also been the President of Poetry Society of India and has edited an anthology of modern Indian poetry titled *Two Decades of Indian Poetry* (1980). He keeps himself busy with his frequent travels, invitations to speak at forums, literary festivals, interviews and discussions. Daruwalla continues to experiment and enjoy his undying passion for poetry and writing.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Name the poetry volume for which Daruwalla won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award.

.....

Q 4: What are the titles of the anthologies of short stories by Daruwalla?

.....
.....



Confronts: to face, meet or deal.

Dusk: evening time or time of sunset just a little before it gets dark.

Drip: falling drop by drop

Crinkled: when something folds up.

Moth: insects that have powdery wings like butterflies.

Descent: a movement to a lower place.

Sapless: lacking strength, vitality or essence, frail and weak.

Bonfire: a large fire lit at night.

5.4 TEXT OF THE POEM

Let us first begin with a reading of the prescribed poem before discussing the context of the poem together with its summary and emergent themes.

"Chinar"

The chinar **confronts** the sunset
with its own **dusk**.

You can hear the **drip** of **crinkled** leaf.

Isn't this what they call dry rain,
this slow, twisting dead-moth **descent**
from the **sapless** branch?

In the eye of the lake
and the running eye of Jhelum
it holds you, this **bonfire** death

that slowly drips fire,
 these **smouldering** rusts
 without the **clank** of metal.
 A wind **alights** on the tree
 and the eye cannot follow
 each bronze-scale **severed**
 from the **mail** of the dying giant,
 each clenched child-fist of a leaf,
 the **largesse** of it
 the **aching drift** of it
 the **flame** and the fall of it.

5.4.1 Context of the Poem

The poem captures the central image of the Chinar tree which is native to Kashmir. The learner may have heard of the picturesque Char Chinar (Four Chinars) which refers to a small island on the famous Dal Lake in Kashmir. The small island is surrounded by tall pillar-like Chinar trees on all the four corners. This indeed strikes a beautiful picture as the chinars distinctly stands out in the backdrop or the scenery of the lake. In the local Kashmiri dialect, the term Boonyi is another term for the Chinar tree.

This tree is commonly found in every Kashmiri village and is not only impressive for its beauty and the cool shade it provides but Chinar is also very useful in medicinal requirements, dye-preparation and wood work. The Chinar turns from green to red with the change of seasons from spring to autumn and is a stunning presence in the Kashmir valley. It has broad leaves which are almost like a human palm and artisans even use it for leaf-carving.

The tree on its own has a long life and in fact there are Chinars that are more than six centuries old and has stood undisturbed through the ages. However, the drastic climate changes, flooding and felling of these trees pose as growing threats at present. Significant steps towards creating widespread awareness along with



Smouldering: to burn slowly without flame.

Clank: a sound particularly made by metal striking another metal body.

Alights: settling down gently (like a bird).

Severed: cut down or broken down.

Mail: a protective iron coat.

Largesse: sense of generosity and of showering gifts to others.

Aching: to feel a continuous pain.

Drift: to move or float gently.

Flame: a bright stream of burning gas.

legal measures have been taken by the government in this regard before it is too late to press for action. It is hoped that the profound presence and the magical charm of these trees which are a living heritage and a treasure in themselves are never lost and conserved for generations to come.

5.4.2 Explanation of the Poem

The breath taking view of both sunrises and sunset skies are sometimes the most amazing and captivating experiences that make us realise the beauty of Nature and God's creation. Sunrises take place at 'dawn' which refers to the morning time and the sunsets at dusk which refers to the evening time just before night time. Here, in the poem the chinar in its fragile condition finds a description in the background of a sunset. The first image that we receive in the introductory lines is that of the Chinar tree which seems to find its own reflection in the sunset sky.

The use of personification can be noted in terms of the 'chinar' confronting the 'sunset' as if the two were two living persons looking at each other. In the introductory lines, the leaves of the chinar are presented in its final fragile condition where one can almost imagine the folding leaves falling from the branches in the air like a dying moth without life and vitality. This is compared to the phenomena of dry rain which is a weather condition in which the rain silently evaporates in the air even before it reaches the ground. The sap or the essence of the branches are dried up and the leaves remain lifeless in form. At the sunset hour and at the end of the autumn season, the tree finally sheds its red dry leaves perhaps, with the promise of returning to life with the onset of the spring season and a new dawn.

The poet then directs the reader's imagination to the waters of a lake (as Kashmir is also the land of beautiful lakes) and to the Jhelum river which is a tributary of the Indus river. The images of lake and the river are personified, for example, the "eye of the lake"

or "running eye of Jhelum" brings to one's imagination the striking image of a person with either tears of joy or sorrow in his or her eyes and bearing the reflection of the bright red chinar at sunset. The appearance of the chinar is a reddish or a russet colour as it is on the verge of shedding its leaves in the autumn season. In fact, the image of the fiery red tree is described as a captivating sight in itself, a sight to behold and always remember. It is compared to the dying fires of a lit up "bonfire" as mentioned in the phrase, that the tree "slowly drips fire" in its "bonfire death". Also, the falling of the red leaves is compared to surface of rusting metal that 'silently' wears out without any form of friction with another metal body.

In the final lines of the poem, the poet brings to mind the image of the wind that seems to gently perch or 'alight' on the tree like a bird. The gentle wind seems to sway the branches of the chinar and to finally cause the tree to shed its dearly held leaves all at once. The poet notes that this sudden shower of shedding leaves



makes it difficult for the onlooker to take note of each and every break and fall of the dying leaves on the tree. The shedding leaves from the giant tree is again compared to a 'chain mail' or a protective armour or coat that loses its sheen after being worn by a giant or a warrior for a long time. The final image in the poem is that of a 'crinkled leaf' that is tightly clenched like the palm of a little child and in the shape of a fist. Each generous leaf that spreads out like the generous palms of a little child express a sense of liveliness and it is indeed a gift to the land and its people. However, with time these leaves finally bid farewell to its parent tree with the promise of returning again. Thus, the poet compares the chinar leaves to bright flames that painfully ("aching") drift in the air falling to the ground.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What is the central image of the poem
"Chinar" by Keki N. Daruwalla?

.....

.....

Q 6: What are the useful properties of the chinar?

.....
.....

Q 7: Mention the first image that one receives in the introductory lines of the poem "Chinar".

.....
.....

Q 8: Why does the chinar appear red?

.....
.....

5.5 MAJOR THEMES

Some of the major themes that emerge from the text of the poem are as discussed below:

Death and Life: The chinar is seen to be in the middle or rather at the cusp of life and death. In fact, there is a sense of foreboding death in the poem though the poet does not ascertain whether it is a final death of the chinar tree or only a seasonal death. The tree is seen to stand tall like a giant with its drying stems devoid of its sap and its dried leaves almost at the edge of its fall. It is probably the end of autumn and near winter season which is when all majestic trees shed their leaves and leave the branches bare.

You may note that we generally relate sunsets, autumns or winters with the end of life. However, we also know that Nature has its own cycle whereby every sunset awaits a new sunrise and every autumn or winter a new spring. As the author Beau Taplin is quoted to have said "Sunsets are proof that endings can be beautiful too" or as the poet P.B. Shelley had famously written, "O wind, if winter comes, can spring be far behind?" These profound words show that there is promise in everything if we know how to look for it. In fact, it is only a matter of time that happy changes make way into our lives- the kind that we all look forward to. Although, the Chinar seems to be at the end of its time yet the poet

hopes that it springs back to life once again. The Chinar holds the promise of returning to life with new sprouting leaves like an open palm of a child that stretches out to the heavens and cherishes every drop of rain.

After all, hope is what turns the world around and keeps it moving. In fact, even if the chinar never returns to life, another chinar must grow in its memory and take its place. We know that death is an inevitable part of life and nothing in the world can escape its clutches but there is satisfaction in the thought that life continues to surge ahead. This is owing to the truth that such is the law of Nature that there is an end to every beginning and a beginning to every ending. We can say that the poet directs our hopes to the fact that everything will eventually change. Once the new season arrives and there is enough rainfall for new growth many chinars will spring into life and not just one. With the right environment for sustenance and growth, the chinar would come into life and continue to be a joy to its people and its land.

Environment and Elements of Nature: The chinar is seen to be struggling for life amidst nature and its elements. If there is insufficient water, rain or proper climatic conditions not to mention the flooding and felling of these trees, it will not be long before they disappear from the region. Chinars grow well in the eastern Himalayan region and do not require too much tending or nurturing. However, if the environmental and climatic conditions are unfriendly or if the human need for these natural resources are not reduced then the chinar will be in great danger. Although the poet depicts the chinar in its natural process of bloom and fall yet in reality the chinar is affected by anthropocentric or man-made activities that affects the natural environment and climate as well. Trees are our renewable resources and if we do not value and exercise our judgement in carefully conserving them we will lose them forever.

The poem presents all the elements of nature i.e., water, wind, fire and earth. The water of the lake and the Jhelum river are shown to express tears of sorrow and joy or perhaps even both- at the sight of the magnificent tree losing its leaves with a promise of returning again in

spring time. The wind gracefully carries the leaves to its resting place on the ground of the land to which it belongs. The fire is in its colourful leaves that gives the appearance of a dying fire consuming itself and leaving behind the story of its passion with which it lived for countless seasons. These elements are wonderfully woven in the text of the poem and reflect how the natural world is sustained by them and even embody or reflect their characteristics.



LET US KNOW

The poem "Chinar" reminds one of another amazing poem by Keki N. Daruwalla titled "The Tree". The learner will find it interesting to note the striking images

in this poem that reads as follows:

The hive slept like Argus
It's thousand ice covered with bees
The light as it fell through the neem tree
Was a marine light, in which
Yellow moths set sail
From one perforated shadow to
Another the hive was mystic
A drugged mantra with its dark syllabus asleep
As the afternoon wore on the honey-thieves came
And smoked the bees out
And carved out a honey laden
Crescent for themselves
And left a lump of pocked wax behind.
The bees roamed the house
Too bewildered to sting the children
At night they slept, clinging to
The tree fork, now scarred with burns.
Sparrows and squirrels, a bird with
Black crest and a red half moon for an
Eyelid bickered over

The waxed remains the next day
 Then with a drone of staining engines
 The bees rose like a swarm of
 Passion from a dying heart, and
 left.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What is the ultimate law of Nature as discussed with regard to the poem "Chinar"?

.....

Q 10: Why are trees important to us and the future generations?

.....

.....

5.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The verses of Daruwalla contain a rhythmic flow of thought, an eye for details, striking imagery, mastery of expression, presentation of varied moods and a range of thematic concerns with a touch of the dramatic. Often a portion of his poems which can be taken as his nature or animal poetry reminds one of the English poet Ted Hughes who is considered an animal poet. However, Daruwalla's poetic sensibility is quite different from Ted Hughes as the context and concerns are different as well. The treasures of his poetical volumes are interesting and tend to remain fresh and vivid in one's imagination long after one has completed reading them. This can be attributed to the depiction of Nature in its varied moods and forms, the changing locales, landscapes, riverscapes and cityscapes that he presents in his works thereby opening up a broad canvas in which the reader can freely paint his or her impressions at a stretch. As a poet he brings us closer to ourselves and makes us more conscious of the world around us.

His personal observations from his wide travelling as a police officer also adds an urgency or immediacy to his thoughts or concerns

that are reflected in his poetry. While at times Daruwalla as a poet engages with these gnawing thoughts yet there are moments when he tends to detach himself from the harshness of certain disturbing realities. There are certain moments when he comes across as cynical or doubtful regarding the possibilities of hope and change as an observant or thinking poet. In this regard M.K. Naik notes thus, "The poet's changing response to his experience range from non-committal, clinical detachment on the one hand to cynical difference on the other while in between these two extremes there is an entire spectrum of varying attitudes" (96). However, if one is careful to discover the significant messages that the poet tries to convey through his poetry, one will also find that therein lies the roots of understanding the necessity of healing the world we live in.

A similar message can be found in the poem "Chinar" which in a short and effective way conveys the need to draw our attention to the living world around us and to make a concerted effort in celebrating and even healing it into life. This note of concern can be found in the constant emphasis in the poem for an instance, sunset and dusk, eye and running eye, fire and bonfire, crinkled leaf and clenched child fist, etc. You could also note the ending lines which end with a similar emphasis by the poet: "the largesse of it/ the aching drift of it/ the flame and the fall of it". The use of metaphors in the poem are striking as they bring alive these images in our imagination at once for e.g., "eye of the lake", "running eye of Jhelum", "bonfire death" or "wind alights". Although the reader can sense a movement that is present in the body of the poem, there is also a repressed silence in which the song of the rain, the crinkle of the leaf, the descent of the moth, the whisper of the wind, the crackle of fire or the fall of the leaves cannot be heard. It is almost as if death or rather seasonal death silently claims them all. The poem is captured in simple language and even as it is compact in its form, it effectively conveys the majesty of the chinar in life and death.

5.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Keki N. Daruwalla had always known in his heart that no matter

what he did poetry would always be his one true calling. Poetry to him has been a spontaneous and inseparable part of his being. He has always taken his gift for writing seriously and has worked very hard to establish himself as a poet. A lot of study and research goes into his work and you could say that he literally does all the homework before he writes down a poem in vivid details. Also, his wide travels on various accounts has always been an added advantage.

Daruwalla opines that travelling has given him an insight into the character of different places deep and the changing scenarios across the country through the decades. Daruwalla's travelling experience adds much to his poetry as he himself had stated "we travel because we often fiddle for a line or metaphor which help the poem to go across to readers, otherwise your poem is just a vast landscape" further adding thus, "If you're not travelling, you're sitting in a chair and writing like anyone else. Imagination travels, I write about what I experience, and whilst sitting in a cubicle, you can't experience much".

The mastery of Daruwalla as a poet is simply attested by the range of his experiences, depth of his reading and sharp intellectual acumen that determines his choicest of words, precision of thought, a control of emotions and clarity of expression. While discussing the poetical characteristics of the contemporary Indian English poets, Naik describes the credibility of Daruwalla's powerful poetry thus, "In Daruwalla's poetry, on the other hand, forces of Nature often emerge as living entities with a personality of their own and those these poems do describe, the effect of these forces have in the human situation, their main thrust is to project these forces as protagonists with a will of their own" (94). His poetry also reflects a narrative style which the poet traces to his early readings of that 19th century poets and the influence that they had on him. Besides having spent his early years in Lahore, he was also well versed in the Urdu language and the works of Faiz Ahmad Faiz.



5.8 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit in details, the learner will gain a brief idea on some of the leading poets of modern Indian English poetry and be familiarised with the life and literary career of the poet Keki N. Daruwalla. A thorough reading of the unit will enable the learner to further explain the relevant context in which the poem is set together with the content and message conveyed in the poem. Some of the emergent themes pertaining to the text of the poem have been highlighted to which the learners may further add their own interpretations. Also, a discussion on the poetic style and language as well as the critical reception of the poet will guide the learner in forming his or her own analysis of these aspects. The unit thus makes an attempt at encouraging you to explore and enrich your knowledge on the depth and range of poetical works by the Keki N. Daruwalla.



5.9 FURTHER READING

- 1) King, Bruce. (2002) *Three Indian Poets: Ezekial, Moraes, and Ramanujan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 2) Naik, M.K. (2006) *Indian English Poetry from the Beginnings upto 2000*. New Delhi: Pencraft International.
- 3) Singh, R.A. (2002) *The Poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla*. Jaipur: Book Enclave.



5.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q No 1: Nissim Ezekial, A.K. Ramanujan and Dom Moraes are considered the founding fathers of modern Indian poetry.

Ans to Q No 2: Keki N. Daruwalla, Jayanta Mahapatra, P. Lal., R. Parthasarathy, Adil Jusawalla, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, etc. among others.

Ans. to Q No 3: Daruwalla was honoured with the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1984 for his poetry volume *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982).

Ans. to Q No 4: The anthologies of short stories are namely: *Swords and Abyss* (1979) and *The Minister for Permanent Unrest and Other Stories* (1996).

Ans. to Q No 5: The poem captures the central image of the Chinar tree which is native to Kashmir.

Ans. to Q No 6: Not only for beauty and the shade it provides, but the Chinar is also very useful in medicinal requirements, dye-preparation and wood work.

Ans. to Q No 7: The first image that we receive in the introductory lines is that of the Chinar tree which seems to find its own reflection in the sunset sky.

Ans. to Q No 8: The appearance of the chinar is a reddish or a russet colour as it is on the verge of shedding its leaves in the autumn season.

Ans. to Q No 9: The law of Nature is that there is an end to every beginning and a beginning to every ending

Ans. to Q No. 10: Trees are our renewable resources and if we do not value and exercise our judgement in carefully conserving them we will lose them forever.



5.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the life and works of the poet Keki N. Daruwalla.

Q 2: Write a note on the context of the poem "Chinar".

Q 3: Explain both the context and the content of the poem "Chinar" by Keki N. Daruwalla.

- Q 4:** Discuss the major themes in the text of the poem "Chinar"
- Q 5:** Analyse the style and language of the poem "Chinar".
- Q 6:** Give a critical reception of the poem "Chinar".

*** ***** ***

UNIT 6 : RABINDRANATH TAGORE : “THE HUNGRY STONES” I

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 6.1 Learning Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Rabindranath Tagore : The Author
 - 6.3.1 His Life
 - 6.3.2 His Works
- 6.4 Background of the Short Story
- 6.5 Explanation of the Short Story
- 6.6 Let us Sum up
- 6.7 Further Reading
- 6.8 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 6.9 Model Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore in detail
- appreciate Tagore as a key figure of Bengal Renaissance
- explain the context of Tagore’s short story “The Hungry Stones”
- make a detailed summary of short story
- appreciate the story in its totality.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the sixth unit of the course. It will introduce you to the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore. You will also get an opportunity to deal with his short story “The Hungry Stones” and make an overall estimate of the story. Popularly known as Gurudev, Rabindranath Tagore was a multi-faceted personality. He is one of the most widely read of the poets and short story writers of Bengal. He wrote over one thousand poems, nearly two dozen plays, eight novels, more than eight volumes of short

stories, more than two thousand songs, books for children, autobiographical memoirs and many essays and articles on literary, social, religious, political and other topics. He was the first major writer to compose modern short stories in India.

The present story is about a cotton tax collector, who is sent to a small town and stays at a ruined palace of Mughal era. The palace is believed to be haunted. Every night, he experiences supernatural forces and experiences, conjured up by the spirits of the inhabitants of the palace and he is enamoured by the spirit of a beautiful woman. The story is simply a strange encounter in an old mansion with a touch of supernatural. It is the finest example of Tagore's supreme imagination, that builds up a tension between the fantastic past of the Mughal days and the drab reality of the modern times, just to bring to the forefront certain existential and metaphysical matters of life.

6.3 RABINDRANATH TAGORE: THE AUTHOR

In the following sections, you will get an idea about the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore.

6.3.1 His Life

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was born on May 7, 1861 at Jorasanko mansion in Calcutta. He was the youngest of the fourteen children of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi. Devendranath Tagore was a leader of the Brahmo Samaj, the societal component of Brahmoism. Tagore's grandfather Dwarakanath Tagore had established a huge financial empire through investment in coal mines, indigo and sugar. The Tagores were cultured and affluent. Belonging to a family of poets, philosophers, musicians and freedom fighters, Rabindranath Tagore naturally inherited an artistic bent of mind.

Initially, Tagore received education at home. In 1868, at the age of seven, he was admitted to the Oriental Seminary, the

earliest privately run school in Calcutta. Bengali was the medium of instruction there. Tagore passed his first examination with distinction and secured first position in Bengali. Soon he was sent to a regular school and got enrolled in St. Xavier's. At the age of twelve, he once accompanied his father to the Himalayas and on their way, they spent a few days at Santiniketan Ashram (a retreat in rural Bengal founded by his grandfather). This journey influenced the mind of young Rabi and played an important role in shaping his future life.

The Tagore family suffered a major setback in 1875, when Rabi's mother passed away. He was barely fourteen and this was the first time he experienced death from close quarters. Deeply affected by this personal loss, Rabi grew more mature as he realised the ultimate truth of life. In 1878, Rabindranath, along with his elder brother Satyendranath went to the United Kingdom for higher studies. During his stay of three years, Rabi studied English literature at London University. There he wrote *Sandhya Sangeet*, a book of verse. In another verse drama, titled *Bhagna Hriday*, he poured out the sufferings and frustrations of a broken heart away from home. Tagore returned back to India in 1880, before completing his studies. In 1883, he married Benimadhav Chowdhury's daughter Bhabatarini. After the marriage, Rabi renamed her Mrinalini. They subsequently became parents of five children.

In 1898, Rabindranath Tagore, along with his family shifted to his estate home at Shealdah. Due to his worst experience at school, he decided to educate his children at home. He also had plan to start a school different from other conventional schools. In 1901, his dream came true when he started a school named 'Patha Bhavana' at Santiniketan. It was a unique abode of learning, totally unfettered by religious and regional barriers. He modelled this institution on the principles of humanism, internationalism and sustainable environment. This institution grew into full-fledged

Viswa-Bharati University in 1921.

In 1902, Rabindranath's wife Mrinalini Devi passed away, leaving him heart-broken. He shared a very close bond with his wife. After her death, he composed a number of poems in her memory. Months after his wife's demise, Tagore lost his second daughter Renuka, who died of tuberculosis and he treasured the tender memories of his loving daughter in a poem titled, "Phanki" (*Deception*). Later the poem found its place in an anthology of verse named, *Palataka*. Again in 1907, Rabi's youngest son Shamindranath died of cholera and after a few years in 1918, his eldest daughter Madhurilata too left for her heavenly abode, creating a big void in his life. Soon he realised that they were all fugitives who escaped to the other world. Instead of spending time in grief, he poured out his sorrow into his writings. The poems and verses composed in memory of his beloved wife and children later came out in a collection titled *The Fugitives* in 1921. *Gitanjali* (*Songs of Offerings*), his masterpiece was born out of his loss and personal tragedy. It is a collection of hundred and three poems and Rabindranath won the Nobel Prize in 1913 for the English version of the work. He himself translated the poems into English.

Tagore's father gave him his political ideals. He was a nationalist and a patriot. He wrote many poems, songs and novels in order to propagate political and social reforms. His patriotic songs stirred every Indian heart with nationalistic fervour. He wrote the lyrics of 'Jana Gana Mana', which was later adopted as the National Anthem of India. He also composed the national anthem of Bangladesh, 'Amar Shonar Bangla'. In 1915, the British government conferred knighthood on him. But later Tagore repudiated it in protest of the Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre. From time to time, he participated in India's freedom struggle, though in his non-sentimental and visionary way. For him, the idea of nationalism must have the ultimate affinity with the ideals of

humanity.

Rabindranath Tagore was a liberal minded genius, who advocated the cause of women empowerment. He supported the cause of widow remarriage and allowed his son Rathindranath to marry a widow. This was the first instance of widow remarriage in entire Tagore family. In the late 19th and early 20th century, Tagore travelled to over thirty countries. These tours were mainly lecture tours that introduced him and his work to the global audience and provided him with the opportunity to meet several well-known personalities and litterateurs like George Bernard Shaw, Paul Thomas Mann, W B Yeats, Benito Mussolini, Ezra Pound, Einstein, H G Wells, Hellen Keller, etc. All these memorable meetings left indelible imprints in his mind and helped him evolve as a world writer.

Tagore died in 1941 at Jorasanko. He was cremated on the bank of Hoogly river.



LET US KNOW

One of the most memorable incidents of Rabindranath Tagore's life took place in 1926, when, for the first time, he met renowned scientist Albert Einstein. In 1930, Tagore again met him on four different occasions and they discussed on the scientific approach to life and the nature of truth and beauty. Tagore edited and published those discussions along with his Hibbert Lectures. Einstein also wrote letters to Tagore. Tagore once declined an honorary degree from Berlin University as a mark of protest against the persecution of Einstein in Nazi Germany.

6.3.2 His Works

Tagore produced works of untold topics. Mostly known for his poems, he authored several novels and novellas, short stories, essays, plays, numerous letters, many books for children, autobiographical memoirs and thousands of songs (Rabindra

Sangit). He was a good public speaker and his lectures were compiled into several volumes like *Europe Jatrir Diary*, *Manusher Dhorma*. Tagore also left behind many paintings and sketches.

Beginning with a few verses, under the pseudonym Bhanu Singha, Tagore embarked on an unforgettable literary journey and produced staggering range of literary output over a period of sixty years. His first major work was *Europe-Prbasir Patra*, a series of essays and letters, published in the journal *Bharati*. After that Tagore published several books of verse like *Kabi-Kahini*, *Bana-Phul*, and musical drama *Valmiki-Pratibha*, etc. In 1885, Tagore took charge of the family journal *Balak* and contributed many poems and essays to it. His first book of songs titled, *Rabi-Chhaya* was published during this period. Tagore penned his first novel *Bou Thakuranir Hat* in 1883. It was a historical romance. The year 1890 saw the publication of a collection of poems *Manasi*, which is regarded as his first mature work. It marks the maturing of his genius. In 1892, he published another collection of verse *Sonar Tari* and a comedy called *Godaygalad*. In 1900, he published a number of notable works like, *Katha o Kahini*, *Kalpana*, *Kshanika*, *Galpa-Guchha*. He wrote an essay "History of Bharatvarsha", emphasising India's unity within diversity. After the death of his wife and daughter Renuka within the span of a year, he wrote two collections of poems, *Shishu* (written for ailing Renuka) and *Smaran* (written in memory of his wife). His popular novel *Nauka-dubi* got published in 1906 and in the next year he was busy writing another masterpiece *Gora*, a novel that brilliantly captures the conflict between tradition and modernity. His collection of essays, titled *Path O Patheya* (1908) is noteworthy in the sense that it condemned political assassination as a strategy of freedom struggle and opened up new vistas in the realm of political thinking. His most famous anthology of poems, *Gitanjali* was published in 1910. After two years, while on a leisure trip to England, he started translating those poems for the English version of *Gitanjali*. When it was out in 1912, it received rave reviews from writers like

W. B. Yeats, A. C. Bradley, Bertrand Russell, etc.

Tagore is also credited with a beautiful collection of short stories. His stories are evocative, well-crafted and he has the gift for creating memorably luminous and original characters. His stories vividly recreate the images of Bengali life and landscapes in their depiction of casteism, poverty and corruption. His stories are modern in theme and technique and they represent reality in his profoundly original vision. His stories like "Kabuliwallah", "Vision", "Shasti", "Postmaster", "Joy Parajay", "Once there was a king", "Kankal", etc. are rare gems and they never get old.

In 1914, Tagore joined the literary group of *Sabuj Patra* (*Green Leaf*), an avant-garde literary journal. This journal advocated the spirit of rationalism and individual freedom in a novel way. Tagore was a regular contributor to *Sabuj Patra*. He published his epoch making novel *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*) in that journal, along with some of his other brilliant works, like *Balaka* (anthology of poems), *Phalguni*, a play and "The Hungry Stones", the short stories.

In the last phase of his life, the theme of death predominantly found echo in his works. He poignantly titled some of his books of verse like *Rogsajyay Arogya* (*Recovery* 1941), *Janmadine* (*On the Birthday*, 1941), and *Sesh Lekha* (*Last Writings*, 1941).



LET US KNOW

Sabuj Patra was a liberal and avant-garde Bengali magazine. It was first published in 1914 and was edited by Pramatha Chowdhury, one of the most influential and free-spoken Bengali writers of that period. Rabindranath Tagore inspired him to publish that journal. It expressed revolutionary modern views on society and political situations of the contemporary times. Though short-lived, *Sabuj Patra* was a major force in shaping modern Bangla language and literary styles. The only colour used in it was sabuj (green) and its cover

page was illustrated by a green palm leaf drawn by Nandalal Bose. Tagore published most of his early 20th century literary works, including his famous novel *Ghare Baire* in *Sabuj Patra*.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Mention some of the important works of Rabindranath Tagore.

.....

.....

Q 2: In protest of which incident did Tagore renounce his knighthood?

.....

.....

6.4 BACKGROUND OF THE SHORT STORY

Rabindranath Tagore was a master storyteller. He was the first major Indian writer to compose short story in the modern sense of the term and his short stories occupy the most exalted position in Bengali literature. Beginning with the first story "Bhikharini" (published in 1877 in *Bharati*), Tagore composed more than one hundred short stories throughout his extensive creative career. His stories deal with life and reality in a natural way.

Tagore wrote his popular short story "Kshudhita Pashan" in 1895. C. F. Andrews, who spent a considerable amount of time at Santiniketan with Tagore, translated the story into English as "The Hungry Stones". Tagore himself assisted Andrews in the translation process. So, "The Hungry Stones" is the English rendering of the original Bengali story "Kshudhita Pashan" and it was first published, along with a few others by Macmillan, London in 1916.

Tagore himself wrote about the source of this story in a letter addressed to Hemantabala Devi and also in *Chelebela (My Childhood)*. He clearly identified the story as a "work of the purest imagination." The inspiration behind writing this story was a real incident experienced by Tagore himself. Once, when Tagore was only 17, he visited his elder brother

Satyendranath, who was serving as a judge in Ahmedabad and he stayed at Shah Jahan's Moti Shahi Mahal, a palace at Shahibaug, situated near Sabarmati river. Tagore used to spend the whole day in that deserted palace. He later said that this building left an everlasting impression on his mind and this is reflected in the story. Tagore modelled the character of the story teller on Satyendranath's friend Dr Nishikanta Chatterjee, who was a member in the court of Nizam. The second listener, who is referred to as "theosophist kinsman" was Mohini Mohan Chatterjee, son-in-law of Dwijendranath Tagore. So, the plot of this story is based on actual observations of his personal life. Tagore himself commented that his stories were the fruit of his own experience and imaginative recreation of what he had seen and felt.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Comment on the background of the short story "The Hungry Stones".

.....

6.5 EXPLANATION OF THE SHORT STORY

"The Hungry Stones" is a short story centering on a seemingly bizarre and supernatural experience. The story has two narrators; the first narrator is an unidentified man who begins the story and the second narrator is a strange man who tells the first narrator a ghost story. "The Hungry Stones" begins when the first narrator informs that he along with another companion (the second listener) is returning to Calcutta by a train from a puja trip. One of the fellow passengers is a strange man who intrigues the first narrator and his companion with the depth of his knowledge and soon they are deeply engrossed in conversation. In order to reach Calcutta, they must board another train at another junction. They get off at a station to catch the connection. As they wait for the arrival of the new train, which is late, the second narrator begins to tell them a story. The story follows and it becomes the main narrative of the



Bizarre : grossly unconventional or unusual.

Bevy : a large gathering

Amuck : wildly without self-control.

tale. He remembers his past. Once, he was appointed as a cotton revenue collector at Barich. Barich stands on River Susta. A lovely marble palace, built 250 years ago by emperor Mahmud Shah II adds glory to that sleepy town. He decides to stay in that ruined palace. Karim Khan, an old clerk at his office repeatedly warns him not to stay there, but he ignores Khan's advice and lodges there. Initially, boredom engulfs him as his experience of the solitude of the deserted mansion is tedious. He works hard whole day, returns home tired and falls asleep quickly. However, barely a week passes, when he starts experiencing **bizarre** and weird happenings inside the palace. He begins to hear the footsteps and the sounds of maidens returning to bathe in the nearby Susta river. He vividly describes the first day on which he became aware that something definitely was queer about the palace. It was just the beginning of summer. One day, he was sitting leisurely on an arm-chair, enjoying the quiescent melancholy of the afternoon. When the sun was down, he thought of going out for a ride. As he was about to get up, he heard a footfall on the steps behind. He looked back, but could not see anyone. As he sat down again, he heard many footfalls rushing down the steps. He could feel the presence of a **bevy** of young women, laughing mirthfully and frolicking in the river. A wave of emotions swept over him. He was thrilled at the prospect of seeing them more clearly. But nothing came to light, leaving the man bewildered and confused between dream and reality.

The next morning, everything appears normal, and the haunting experience of the previous day seems like a fantasy. He is supposed to return late that day, but before it is dark, he feels strangely drawn to the palace. On the first floor of the palace, there is a big hall. As he pushes open the door of that hall, a great commotion seems to follow as if a throng of people has run **amuck** out of sheer confusion. Though he does not see anyone, yet feels enchanted by the faint sounds of gurgling fountain, music on the guitar, tinkling anklets, the song of caged bulbuls in the corridors, the distant note of *nahabat* and the crackle of storks-all creating ethereal melodies inside the palace. He introduces himself as

Srijut and comes under such a spell that this dream like vision appears to him the only reality in this world whereas the rest is unreal. However, he wakes up from this trance-like state, when his servant enters with a lighted kerosene lamp in his hand. Srijut immediately comes back to reality with a hearty laugh. After having dinner, he retires to bed and falls asleep. At night, suddenly he awakes to the gentle stroke of someone and a figure of a woman **beckons** him. He follows her through darkened corridors inside the palace. The girl seems like an Arab maiden out of a tale of *The Arabian Nights* and he thinks as if he is wending his way through the dark alleys of Baghdad. At last, she stops before a deep blue screen and he has vision of the figure of a terrible looking black eunuch, who is dozing with outstretched legs. As the girl holds up a fringe of the screen, Srijut catches the glimpse of a part of the room and a beautiful Persian maiden, sitting on a bed. As he attempts to step over the legs of the eunuch, he suddenly wakes up and his sword falls from his lap with a sharp clang on the marble floor. A terrible scream brings Srijut back to reality and he hears Meher Ali crying out in his customary way, "Stand back! Stand back! All is false!"

Beckons : signal with the hands or nod.

Frantic : excessively agitated.

Srijut is drawn back to reality from many such subsequent adventurous nights, referring to those as his 'One Thousand and One Arabian Nights'. Then follows a great discord between his days and nights. During the day, he is busy with his tedious job as a tax collector, but once nightfall hits, he hurries back to the palace to live a life of fantasy and becomes a person from an earlier age who actively indulges in delusive midnight fantasies. Many a times, the sudden reflection of the Persian beauty maddens him, allures him and confuses him. One night, the spirit of a beautiful woman entreats him to rescue her from that castle of illusion. He envisions a Bedouin kidnapping her from her mother and taking her to a slave market, where she is bought by a man for his master's harem. At this moment, suddenly, Meher Ali's **frantic** cry brings him back to the reality of his predicament. It has started to dawn and exhausted with midnight adventures, Srijut runs to Meher and asks, "What is false?" But Meher Ali is silent. This time, Srijut loses self-control and

runs like a mad man to his office. At office, he demands an explanation from Karim Khan. Khan, in an overarching metaphysical tone, tries to explain that at one time, the palace had witnessed enough heartbreak, unrequited love and secret longings. The curse of all the heartaches and blasted hopes even made every stone of the palace hungry to swallow up any man who tries to trespass its walls. Meher Ali, who tried to do that was spared but at the cost of his reason. Srijut desperately asks about the ways to break that spell of charm. Khan says that there is only one difficult means, and in order to know that he must first give ear to the sad life story of a young Persian girl who once lived in that palace.

Just at this moment, the announcement is made that the connecting train to Calcutta will arrive shortly. As the train steams in, an English gentleman, who catches a glimpse of the second narrator, cries "Hello" and invites him into his first class compartment. On the spur of the moment, the second narrator disappears with the Englishman. The first narrator and his theosophist friend must take a second class carriage, so they have no chance of meeting him again or knowing the climax of his story. The true identity of the man also remains a mystery. The first narrator tells his friend that probably the man was an **imposter** who took them for fool and fabricated a story just for pure fun. The first narrator then reveals that the discussion that followed this strange meeting ended in a lifelong **rupture** between him and his friend. So, at the end, the dispute between real and unreal is left unsettled by Tagore.

Imposter : a person who makes deceitful pretences.

Rupture : separation.

Tagore never intended "The Hungry Stones" to be a simple ghost story. The story is open to multiple interpretations and subject to further thoughts. The line of demarcation between living and dead, dream and reality, real and unreal or fact and fiction is rendered hazy. So, we cannot pin down the story to only one genre. Tagore's story revolves around one central theme- the human mind is often riddled with conflict or indecision and it tends to accept that version of reality that appeals to it most. It seems that the second narrator presents a fantastic ghost story and gives a false version of reality, which the first narrator denies to believe as a pure fabrication. But his friend, who practises theosophy and believes in the

importance of spiritual ecstasy or direct intuition, readily accepts the veracity of the story and ends his friendship with the first narrator. So, the disagreement between the first narrator and his friend represents a clash between the doubting materialist and the believer in outworldly affairs.

If we take the situation of the unknown narrator philosophically, then he is the **quintessential** representation of many of us who often experience this kind of existential dilemma in life. We often get caught in no man's land, flitting between conscious and the subconscious or concrete and illusion. But, the moment we live in the present and stop **ruminating** about the past or worrying about the future, we free ourselves. Our mind can be its own prison as well as its own salvation. The moment we realise that we are in the prison of our mind, we strive to free ourselves.


Quintessential :

perfect example of a class or quality.

Ruminating : think deeply, reflecting

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What is the central idea of the story "The Hungry Stones"?

.....

Q 5: Examine the climax of the story "The Hungry Stones".

.....
.....

Q 6: Why does the theosophist friend end his friendship with the first narrator at the end of the story?

.....
.....



6.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit provides a detailed portrait of Rabindranath Tagore, one of the greatest masters of art and literature in India. It also discusses his life and works in greater detail, while occasionally reflecting on multiple influences and events that shaped his genius. Chiefly, after you have finished

reading the unit, you have become familiar with Tagore's popular short story "The Hungry Stones". Apart from the summary, the unit consists of a short background note on the story. We shall be dealing with certain other aspects of this story in the next unit.

6.7 FURTHER READING

- 1) A. D. Choudhuri. (1976). "Tagore's Short Stories". *Indian Literature*, Vol. 19, No. 5. pp. 72-79.
- 2) Bhattacharyya, Sabyasachi. (2017). *Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation*. Penguin Random house India.
- 3) Mukherji, Bharati Prasad. (1942). *Tagore-A Study*. Bombay: Padma Publications.
- 4) Tagore, Rabindranath. (2018). *The Hungry Stones and other Stories*. New Delhi: Niyogi Books.
- 5) Thomson, Edward. (1984). *Rabindranath Tagore*. London: Oxford University Press.

Web Sources:

[http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The Hungry Stones](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hungry_Stones)

6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Poetry collections like *Gitanjali*, *Rakta Karabi*, *Arogya*, *Balaka*, *Giti-malya* etc.... novels like *The Home and the World*, *Gora*, *Nauka Dubi* etc.... numerous anthologies of short stories and essays like *Galpa- Gucchha*, *Europe Jatrir Diary*, *Letters from Russia*, and many more...plays like *Chandalika*, *Natir Puja*, *Chitrangada*, etc....and a great treasure trove of songs (*Rabindra Sangit*).

Ans to Q No 2: Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre.

Ans to Q No 3: The story is a pure work of imagination, Tagore Says...Tagore gives a background note on the story in his work *Chelebela* ((My Childhood) and also in a letter addressed to Hemantabala Devi... The inspiration behind writing this story was a real incident experienced by Tagore himself.

Ans to Q No 4: The conflict between real and unreal...the human mind tends to accept that version of reality that appeal to it most. ...often we colour our version of reality with our preconceptions or biases.

Ans to Q No 5: There is a twist in the climax of the story... the story is open –ended... no further information is provided regarding the true identity of the tax collector or his ultimate fate...the clash between fact and fiction or dream or reality is not resolved...even the relationship between the first narrator and his theosophist friend becomes tense as the friend is not willing to believe the opinion of the first narrator that this story is pure fabrication.

Ans to Q No 6: The second narrator presents a fantastic ghost story, which the first narrator denies to believe as a pure fabrication.... But his friend, who practises theosophy readily accepts the veracity of the story and ends his friendship with the first narrator....they have opposed world views....so, the clash between dream and reality (fact vs fiction) continues.



6.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the contributions of Rabindanath Tagore to Indian English Literature.

Q 2: Write a critical summary of the short story "The Hungry Stones".

- Q 3:** Tagore is the myriad-minded poet and writer. Comment.
- Q 4:** Which are the important literary works of Tagore? How do these works reflect Tagore's philosophy of life?
- Q 5:** What aspects of Rabindranath Tagore's life and relationship are seen to manifest in his works?

*** ***** ***

UNIT 7: RABINDRANATH TAGORE: “THE HUNGRY STONES” II

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 7.1 Learning Objectives
- 7.2 Introduction
- 7.3 Major Themes
- 7.4 Major Characters
- 7.5 Critical Reception
- 7.6 Let us Sum up
- 7.7 Further Reading
- 7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 7.9 Model Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- identify the major themes of the short story
- draw the character sketch of the major characters of the short story
- carry out a critical reading of the short story

7.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit is to be read in continuation of the previous unit, which deals with the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore. We have already discussed the background and gist of the short story “The Hungry Stones” in Unit 6. In this unit, we shall discuss certain important aspects of the story such as, its theme, and portrayal of major characters. We shall also reflect on the reception of this short story by the critics. Tagore is the first major Indian short story writer who deviated from the traditional mode of story telling and devised for himself a new modern structure. Most of his stories begin in medias res, develop around trivial or ordinary incidents or situations and end with a sudden twist. “The Hungry Stones” is one

such story. He published this story as "Kshudhita Pashan" in the remarkable Bengali periodical *Sadhana*.



LET US KNOW

Speaking about the origin of the story "Kshudhita Pashan" (The Hungry Stones), Tagore wrote in his autobiography *My Boyhood Days*, "In Ahmedabad I floated amidst old history. The Shahibag was my elder brother's allotted residence. During daytime he left for his work as a judge and those lonely enormous rooms haunted me. From the courtyard at front one could see the Sabarmati with knee deep water meandering in the sands. This courtyard with its pocket constructions of small water reservoirs whispered the secrets of the Begums' luxury bath...History never bothered to peep into my city-bred self amidst the hustle and bustle of Calcutta life. Our perspectives were engrossed with the immediate present, in contrast it was in Ahmedabad that for the first time I found history pulsating in its animated self. Its past days were like the hidden treasures concealed carefully underground. That was the first time my mind worked upon the story of The Hungry Stones."



Eerie :

mysterious suggestive of the supernatural

7.3 MAJOR THEMES

The following are some of the important themes of the story "The Hungry Stones."

Supernaturalism

"The Hungry Stones" is a subtle manifestation of the supernatural. It is one of only a handful of Tagore's short stories that deals with supernaturalism in a novel way. The story narrates a fantastic story that depicts the strange encounter of a man with some ghost-like and **eerie** characters from the distant past inside a deserted Mughal palace. The protagonist is drawn towards supernatural events and he refuses to return to the terms of reality. A cursory reading of the story will give the impression of a single linear tale of gothic romance. But, "The Hungry Stones" is

more than that. Tagore has not infused any crude horror or **grotesque** elements like sudden arrival of apparitions into the plot, but has given a psychological portrayal of the main character. Tagore is regarded as the architect of psychoanalytical supernatural short story. Everything Srijut experiences inside the **dilapidated** palace seems to be the fabrication of his subconscious mind. Actually, the solitude of the palace casts a spell on him and he is distorted into his self about reality and fantasy. In the story, the main focus is on the multiple personality of the central character.

Reality versus Fantasy

Conflicts often trap human mind. It is a common human tendency to accept or believe that version of reality, which appeals it most. The main underlying theme of "The Hungry Stones" is the contrast between fantasy and reality. Whether the strange **nocturnal** adventures of the tax collector inside the abandoned palace real or figment of dream is an unsolved riddle that baffles everyone and Tagore leaves this perplexed issue for his readers to decide. That's why, when the narrator responds to the shouts of Meher Ali by asking "What is False?" he never gets an answer. The unfinished finishing of the story fails to throw light on this crisis. Even the concluding remarks of the first narrator also hint that the confusion between the dream world and the real world continues to perplex human mind. Already it has created a rift in the relationship between the first narrator and his theosophist companion.

Grotesque : distorted and unnatural in shape or size.

Dilapidated : fall into decay or ruin.

Nocturnal : of or relating to or occurring in the night.

Human Fallibility

The story gives deep insight into the heart of man. The story is a deep probe into the inner workings of human mind. From the very beginning, the second narrator appears weird. He throws up a job without second thought, he keeps himself aloof in a ruined palace without any reason, experiences the resonance of life inside that palace and is filled with lively fear. His loneliness and the ancient palace cast a spell on him and he starts moving between two worlds; one the metaphysical, the other physical or real. It seems that driven by the vision of the Persian beauty inside that pleasure dome of Mughal past, he fabricates a story of unrequited love and subsequently falls into a limbo between the

dream world and the human world. Tagore brilliantly portrays the surreal experiences of the man with a plethora of poetic images and gives an introspective feel of the surreal mysteries that prevail in the story. We are not sure, whether "The Hungry Stones" is a ghost story or a real experience happened to the tax collector. No version of the story is favoured as the correct version by Tagore. Possibly, Tagore wants to highlight that there is nothing called absolute reality. Reality always evades determinateness. Human mind tends to accept that version of reality which appeals to it most.

7.4 MAJOR CHARACTERS

Let us have a look at the major characters in the story.

Second Narrator (Cotton tax collector)

He is the main protagonist of the story, who tells the first narrator and his theosophist friend a ghost story tinged with weird fantasy. He is presented as a knowledgeable person who can comment on any topic like science or religion with much ease. He is so well versed in any subject that the theosophist friend believes him to be supernaturally inspired. He introduces himself as Srijut just in passing. He appears strange and he tells them a strange story. It is difficult to decide, whether his story is based on truth or is mere fantastic fabrication. Actually, he represents Tagore's purpose in the story and by telling a supernatural tale just tries to voice some modern existential concerns in an indirect way.

First Narrator

He is an unidentified person who begins the story. He is the first narrator of the story. It is informed that he is returning to Calcutta by train from his puja trip. He is a well-reasoned man, guided by practical observation and experience. That is why he denies the veracity of the supernatural tale, told by the second narrator. His rejection of the story as a lie establishes him as a skeptic and a believer in day-to-day reality. Srijut's flitting between the dream world and the real world initially confuses

the readers. But on a philosophical plane, Tagore tries to comment on the contradictions between believers or difficulty of distinguishing between reality and fantasy.

Theosophist Friend

He is the person who accompanies the first narrator to Calcutta. As he practises theosophy, he believes in the power of intuition, meditation and prayer in order to achieve the ultimate knowledge of God. At the end, he even accepts the strange ghost story, narrated by the cotton tax collector as true and **severs** his relationship with the first narrator.

Karim Khan

He is a fellow office worker of Srijut at Barich. Srijut is close to Karim Khan and holds him in high esteem. Karim Khan advises him not to stay at the ancient palace. When Srijut asks for the means to break the spell of supernatural happenings inside the palace, Khan philosophises that the unsatisfied and unrequited passions and desires cursed the palace and rendered it hungry. That's why no one can escape its **esurient**



Severs : cut off.

Esurient : extremely hungry.



He is an insane man who roams around the palace complex, ominously shouting, "Stand back! Stand back! All is false! All is false!" In the story, he appears exactly at those critical junctures, when the ghostly encounters inside the palace compel Srijut to wander around in limbo between the real world and the dream world and constantly reminds him of the dangers of choosing a middle way between the two worlds.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Mention some of the important themes of the story.

.....

Q 2: Who is Karim Khan?

.....

.....

Q 3: How does Tagore blur the lines between reality and imagination in the story?

.....

.....

LET US KNOW

'The Hungry Stones' is a popular story by Rabindranath Tagore and many times it has been adapted into movies. In 1960, noted director Tapan Sinha made a film of the same name. In 1991, famous lyricist and poet Gulzar directed another critically acclaimed Hindi film "Lekin", based on that story. As Tagore left the story open to interpretations, these talented film makers transferred the story to celluloid with innovative twists and new dimensions of cinematic narration.

7.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

"The Hungry Stones" is a story within a story. Set in a bygone Mughal palace, this story once again proves that Tagore is a versatile genius in producing literary marvels with novel themes as well as techniques of narration. Sukumar Sen says, "Tagore is the first writer of the true short story in Bengali and he has remained the best."

The modernists believe that the truth is always relative. The realistic representation is always questioned. The modern condition is represented as one of uncertainty and loss of identity. The modern writers doubt the knowability of self and give more importance to intellectual, rational side of a man. The psychological exploration of the inner self of a character gets more focus. Modernism is also a movement away from apparent objectivity provided by fixed narrative points of view and clear cut moral positions. The boundary between fact and fiction gets dissolved. "The Hungry Stones" is a modern short story. Here, Tagore makes a shift from the conventional realistic mode of writing; instead, multiple narrators

express subjective reality. Thus, realism in this story becomes a modern mode of experiment and innovation.

The short story is tinged with supernatural elements. It tells about a haunted and deserted Mughal palace where the protagonist experiences a series of mysterious uncanny adventures. He is fascinated by the magical and weird vision of a Persian damsel and thereby loses self control and finds the real world around him trivial and meaningless. But what makes the story stand apart from the other ghost stories is that here Tagore delves deep into the inner recesses of the tax collector's confused mind and creates a brilliant psychological landscape where his distorted self oscillates between delusion and reality. He never learns what is true and false. Thus, this seemingly simple story is endowed with complex intricacies of human mind. Tagore pays more attention to the richness of the inner world of man, to psychological analysis and philosophical thoughts and less to outward events. This story is a perfect blend of poetic lyricism and psychological realism in an atmosphere of supernatural and weird speculation. Asit Bondyopadhyay commented about Tagore, "He delved deep into the psychology of man and riddle of existence in his short stories which are universal in their appeal."

The story keeps the line of demarcation between living and dead, dream and reality, or real and unreal blurred. Due to Tagore's deft handling of supernatural and the weird that ultimately reveals the queer human psyche, he is often compared to other great masters of short story like Edgar Allan Poe, Anton Chekhov, Guy De Maupassant, etc.

"The Hungry Stones" also fits in the genre of Romantic story. The story is in the style of romance from Arabian Nights. It is replete with medieval imagination and nature imagery. The picture of nature through the mountain Avalli and river Susta adds to the spirit of Romanticism. The imageries like song of caged Bulbul or cackle of storks in the garden are vivid enough to create unearthly music for Srijut inside the ancient palace which also takes the shape of an old enchanted castle somewhere in the sleeping city of Baghdad. The story becomes the tale of a Persian maiden who is abducted by Bedouin raiders and confined in this harem

of limitless wealth and insatiable passion. Thus, Tagore develops the story as a wonderful dream of fantasy and it truly defines romanticism as "strangeness added to beauty." However, the work constantly contrasts the active uproarious palace with passive contemplative Srijut. He vividly conveys his dilemma of living in a dream world that often merges into the real and thereby, it symbolically poses the ultimate metaphysical riddle of existence- who is hungry for love, sympathy, understanding, truth and goodness? Is it man or the stones?

A few critics also added a postcolonial dimension to the story. The story is a fictional account of the dual existence experienced by the second narrator. Donning a "sola hat like the Sahibs", he serves the British authority as a cotton tax collector. But his ghostly nocturnal adventures inside the Mughal palace teases him out of his colonial profession as well as situation and opens up for him a world of freedom and happiness in pre-colonial Mughal era. But it is impossible for him to enter into this domain permanently as he is still serving the colonial authority in his present capacity at Barich. Meher Ali, who dared to disrupt this dominant colonial reality by trying to enter into the precolonial world of luxury and love became afflicted with mental derangement. That is why, at the end, the conflict-ridden mind of the second narrator tries to disown the precolonial past by saying, "No, I can stay here no longer." Even the first narrator, who shares this strange story with the readers also dismisses it as utterly irrational. At the end, an Englishman invites the second narrator into his first class compartment and this gesture hints at historical amnesia that ultimately helps in the social mobility of the educated colonised in the direction of progress and advancement.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Do you think "The Hungry Stones" is a ghost story?

.....

.....

Q 5: What role does Meher Ali play in the story?

.....



7.6 LET US SUM UP

After we have finished reading this unit, we came to know that "The Hungry Stones" is a story of wonder and mystery. Tagore himself claimed that this story was a work of pure imagination. He recreates a bygone era of romance and unrequited love inside an ancient Mughal palace. However, under the garb of fantasy and mystery, Tagore meditates on some existential matters of life. He has a philosophical vision and he writes this story to fulfil that aim. This unit also discusses some other important aspects of the story like, themes and characterisation. The critical commentary on the story will enable us to appreciate it from various other angles and viewpoints.



7.7 FURTHER READING

- 1) A. D. Choudhuri. (1976). "Tagore's Short Stories". *Indian Literature*, Vol. 19, No. 5. pp. 72-79.
- 2) Bhattacharyya, Sabyasachi. (2017). *Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation*. Penguin Random house India.
- 3) Mukherji, Bharati Prasad. (1942). *Tagore-A Study*. Bombay: Padma Publications.
- 4) Tagore, Rabindranath. (2018). *The Hungry Stones and other Stories*. New Delhi: Niyogi Books.
- 5) Thomson, Edward. (1984). *Rabindranath Tagore*. London: Oxford University Press.

Web Sources:

[http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The Hungry Stones](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hungry_Stones)



7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Supernaturalism.....dream versus reality (opposed worldviews) human fallibility.

Ans to Q No 2: An old clerk of the office of the cotton collector who warns him to stay away from the palace at night.

Ans to Q No 3: By incorporating a ghost story in a realistic setting....inserting bizarre and supernatural elements... portraying the character of the protagonist in an enigmatic way.... keeping the conclusion of the story unresolved and open.

Ans to Q No 4: Not a simple ghost story....under the garb of a ghost story, it makes comment on the idea of fact and fiction.....representation of reality in literature.

Ans to Q No 5: He is a madman....roaming about the ancient palace.....and constantly reminding us of the dangers if we choose a middle way between the illusive world and the real world.

7.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the major themes of the short story "The Hungry Stones".

Q 2: Discuss "The Hungry Stones" as a supernatural story.

Q 3: Give a character sketch of Srijut.

Q 4: How do you interpret the bizarre and supernatural events surrounding the second narrator inside the palace?

Q 5: How does the tax collector suffer from existential crisis in the story?

Q 6: Write a note on the significance of the Arab damsel and the ancient palace in the story?

*** ***** ***

Name of the Paper:
Course Code:

**Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA)
Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University
City Office, Housefed Complex, Guwahati- 06**

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.

**The Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, KKHandiqui State Open University
Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati- 781006
(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?

.....
.....

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.

(To be inserted as last page after the end of the last unit of the course)

1