

GAUHATI UNIVERSITY
Centre for Distance and Online Education

ENG-3016

M.A. Third Semester

(Under CBCS)

ENGLISH

Paper: ENG 3016
WORLD POETRY



CONTENTS:

Block- 1

Unit 1: An Introduction to World Poetry

Unit 2: Introducing Li Po

Unit 3: Li Po: The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter

Unit 4: Introducing Kaneko Mitsuharu

Unit 5: Kaneko Mitsuharu: Opposition

Block- 2

Unit 1: Introducing Jibanananda Das

Unit 2: Jibanananda Das: Banalata Sen

Unit 3: Introducing Faiz Ahmed Faiz

Unit 4: Faiz Ahmed Faiz: The Love We Had Before

Block- 3

Unit 1: Introducing Zbigniew Herbert

Unit 2: Zbigniew Herbert: Elegy of Fortinbras

Unit 3: Introducing Nelly Sachs

Unit 4: Nelly Sachs: Landscape of Screams

Block- 4

Unit 1: Introducing Carlos Drummond de Andrade

Unit 2: Carlos Drummond de Andrade: Travelling in the family

Unit 3: Introducing Constantine Cavafy

Unit 4: Constantine Cavafy: Waiting for the Barbarians

Block- 5

Unit 1: Introducing Boris Pasternak

Unit 2: Boris Pasternak: English Lessons

Unit 3: Alec Derwent Hope: Australia

Unit 4: Nazim Hikmet: A Sad State of Freedom

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SYLLABUS
MA in English
Semester- III

Paper ENG 3016
WORLD POETRY

This paper on World Poetry aims to acquaint students with poems from different locations and cultures of the world through translations in English. Poetic traditions carry the locational imperatives through registers of verse in ways that aren't always accessible in the same way in other generic modules. The student is expected to take these poems as samplers of culturally nuanced positions in different society where poetry has been received and read. An engagement with poetry beyond the English-language traditions, it is hoped, would also facilitate a wide-spectrum perspective regarding the study of poems.

Learning Objectives:

- This paper on World Poetry aims to enable students to
- engage with the poems and poetic traditions closely,
- understand how these texts are produced by and in their contexts,
- look at poetry from different locations, cultures and languages,
- analyse the poetic processes involved in the making of poems
- situate poetry through an understanding of themes and issues pertaining to culture, society and represented realities

Course Outcome:

- A familiarity with poetic texts and contexts from different parts of the world
- Evaluation of approaches to world poetry through reading of texts and contexts

Texts:

- Li Po (701-762): The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter
- Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933): Waiting for the Barbarians
- Boris Pasternak (1890-1960): English Lessons

- Nelly Sachs (1891-1970): Landscape of Screams
- Kaneko Mitsuharu (1895-1975): Opposition
- Jibanananda Das (1899-1954): Banalata Sen
- Alec Derwent Hope (1907-2000): Australia
- Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902-1987): Travelling in the Family
- Nazim Hikmet (1902-1963): A Sad State of Freedom
- Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984): The Love We Had Before
- Zbigniew Herbert (1924-1998): Elegy of Fortinbras

Recommended Reading:

- J.D. McClatchy ed. The Vintage Book of Contemporary World Poetry, New York: Vintage: 1996
- Clifton Fadiman et al ed. World Poetry, New York: Norton, 1998
- Willard Spiegelman. How Poets See the World: The Art of Description in Contemporary Poetry, Oxford, OUP: 2005

Paper ENG 3026
WORLD DRAMA

This paper examines a large swathe of landmark representative (non-British) dramatic literature from across the world, from the classical to the modern performative traditions. It will situate the plays in their specific cultural and conceptual historicity and consider them in the context of performance practices as well as literary merit. The scope of this paper is necessarily large, as it attempts to bring together diverse texts and traditions.

Course Objectives:

- The paper aims at a disciplined examination of dramatic writing, and a wide range of theatrical experiences, and exposes the student to some of the best and most representative plays in all its diversity.
- To interpret and understand some of the preeminent dramatic forms, concepts, texts and practices;
- To explore the various elements of drama: staging and performance, form and scenic contrast, language and

dialogue, character and conflict, music and dance, use of symbol, myth, theme, message and referentiality,

- To read and analyse plays of various periods and representing various points of view, including those of gender, ethnicities, and other diversities;
- To engage with drama inter culturally, moving away from Eurocentrism.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will develop the ability to close-read, interpret, and write about plays, not only as literary texts but also as performance artefacts.
- Enable the students to articulate their understanding of the relationship between literature and the historical/cultural contexts from where the plays emerge.
- Understand the architecture of play-making, plot construction, dialogue, character development, symbols and motifs and staging.
- Understand how, on the one hand, the dramatic and theatrical traditions of the West were appropriated, subverted and refashioned in colonial/postcolonial societies, and on the other, how the Western theatrical tradition enriched itself through exposure to the ancient traditions of the East.

UNIT I

(20 Marks: 10+10) (2 Credits)

History/Genre/Context/Practices

This unit will require the students to engage with and understand the development of various genres and historical evolution of various theatres across the world, set within specific cultural contexts:

- Classical theatre
- Folk & Aboriginal Theatres
- Realism & Naturalism
- Epic theatre, Theatre of Cruelty
- Expressionism & Absurd Drama
- Feminist & Queer Theatres
- Post-colonial & Post-dramatic theatre

UNIT II
(60 Marks) (4 Credits)

- Plays/Texts
- Sophocles (c.497-c.406 BCE): Antigone
- Moliere (1622-73): Misanthrope
- Samuel Beckett (1906-1989): Waiting for Godot
- Habib Tanvir (1923-2009): Agra Bazar
- Dario Fo (1926-2016): Accidental Death of an Anarchist
- Derek Walcott (1930-2017): Pantomime

Recommended Reading:

- Brian Crow & Chris Banfield. An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theatre, Cambridge: CUP, 1996
- Claire Warden. Modernist and Avant-Garde Performance: An Introduction. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2015
- Daniel Gerould. Theatre/Theory/Theatre: The Major Critical Texts from Aristotle and Zeami to Soyinka and Havel, Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 2003
- E.J. Wastelake. World Theatre: The Basics, Oxon: Routledge, 2017
- Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb. Living Theatre: A History of Theatre, New York: Norton: 2017
- Helen Gilbert & Joanne Tompkins. Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics, Routledge, 1996
- J. Ellen Gainor ed. The Norton Anthology of Drama, 2 vols., New York: Norton, 2013
- Marvin Carlson. Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present. Cornell: Cornell UP, 1984
- Mira Felner & Claudia Orenstein. The World of Theatre: Tradition and Innovation. London: Pearson, 2005
- Shepherd-Barr. Modern Drama: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford: OUP, 2016

Paper ENG 3036
WORLD FICTION

This paper on World Fiction aims to acquaint students with poems from different locations and cultures of the world through translations in English. Poetic traditions carry the locational

imperatives through registers of verse in ways that aren't always accessible in the same way in other generic modules. The student is expected to take these poems as samplers of culturally nuanced positions in different society where poetry has been received and read. An engagement with poetry beyond the English-language traditions, it is hoped, would also facilitate a wide-spectrum perspective regarding the study of poems.

Learning Objectives:

This paper on World Fiction aims to enable students to

- engage with the fictions and their traditions closely,
- understand how these texts are produced by and in their contexts,
- look at fictions from different locations, cultures and languages,
- analyse the fiction making processes involved in the making of these texts
- situate fiction through an understanding of themes and issues pertaining to culture, society and represented realities

Course Outcome:

- A familiarity with fictional texts and contexts from different parts of the world
- Evaluation of approaches to world fiction through reading of texts and contexts

Texts (6 Credits)

- Natsume Soseki (1867-1916): Botchan
- Selma Lagerlof (1858-1940): The Wonderful Adventure of Nils Holgerssen
- Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986): The Circular Ruins | The Aleph
- Yesar Kemal (1923-2015): Memed, My Hawk
- Ismail Kadare (1936-): The File on H
- Salman Rushdie (1947-): Shame

Recommended Reading:

- Frederick Luis Aldama. Analyzing World Fiction, Texas: U of Texas P, 2012

- J. Hillis Miller. *Communities in Fiction*, New York: Fordham UP, 2014
- Mary Ann Caws. *Reading Frames in Modern Fiction*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014

Paper ENG 3046

MODERN LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY

This paper on Modern Literary Criticism and Theory aims to acquaint students with criticism reflecting different reading positions and approaches to literature. Critical traditions are embedded in theorizations on and about literary practices which facilitate the nuanced engagement with texts and contexts. The student is expected to take these critical texts as samplers of criticism and theory and pursue the interest in literary studies by focussing on modes of reading that open up further possibilities of analysis. An engagement with criticism beyond the English-language traditions, it is hoped, would also facilitate a wide-spectrum perspective regarding the study of literature.

Learning Objectives:

This paper offers a sampling of texts through which the students are expected to engage with modern literary criticism and theory from a variety of perspectives and reading modes. It is assumed that the students' familiarity with the Classical trends in criticism would serve as the grounding for their focussed dialogue with modern and contemporary critical practices through a study of the prescribed texts which relate to developments in fields such as Modernism, Feminism, Post-Colonialism, Deconstruction, Cultural Studies and Marxist Literary Theory.

The teaching of these texts are directed towards the facilitation of conceptual clarity and the nurturing of the ability to discern and engage with critical apparatuses and distinguish forms and modes of reading so as to take this experience to other texts, drawing on insights gained from this paper.

The student is expected, after the experience of this paper, to be better geared to address and situate nuances beyond the meaning-

seeking textualities and thus be enabled to develop the sense of critical discernment through the cultivation of an openness that is alert to the specificities of reading practices and the contours of literary theory and how they can be engaged with.

Course Outcome:

This paper aims to enable students to:

- engage with the criticism closely,
- understand how these criticism generates ideas and reading structures,
- look at critical concepts and how they are formulated,
- analyse the critical processes involved theorizations
- situate criticism and theory through an understanding of concepts and discourses
- facilitate familiarity with critical texts and reading modes
- enable evaluation of approaches to modern literary criticism and theory through reading of texts and contexts

Texts (6 Credits)

- Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913): Nature of the Linguistic Sign
- Michel Foucault (1926-1984): What is an Author?
- Chinua Achebe (1930-2013): Colonialist Criticism
- Stuart Hall (1932-2014): Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies
- Susan Sontag (1933-2004): Against Interpretation
- Pierre Macherey (1938-): Borges and the Fictive Narrative

Recommended Reading:

- Denis Walder ed. Literature in the Modern World, Oxford: OUP, 2005
- M.A.R. Habib. Modern Literary Criticism and Theory: A History, Malden: Blackwell, 2007
- Patricia Waugh. Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide, Oxford: OUP, 2014

CONTENTS:

BLOCK- 1	Page: 12-81
Unit 1: An Introduction to World Poetry	
Unit 2: Introducing Li Po	
Unit 3: Li Po: The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter	
Unit 4: Introducing Kaneko Mitsuharu	
Unit 5: Kaneko Mitsuharu: Opposition	
BLOCK- 2	Page: 82-135
Unit 1: Introducing Jibanananda Das	
Unit 2: Jibanananda Das: Banalata Sen	
Unit 3: Introducing Faiz Ahmed Faiz	
Unit 4: Faiz Ahmed Faiz: The Love We Had Before	
BLOCK- 3	Page: 136-183
Unit 1: Introducing Zbignew Herbert	
Unit 2: Zbignew Herbert: Elegy of Fortinbras	
Unit 3: Introducing Nelly Sachs	
Unit 4: Nelly Sachs: Landscape of Screams	
BLOCK- 4	Page: 184-255
Unit 1: Introducing Carlos Drummond de Andrade	
Unit 2: Carlos Drummond de Andrade: Travelling in the family	
Unit 3: Introducing Constantine Cavafy	
Unit 4: Constantine Cavafy: Waiting for the Barbarians	
BLOCK- 5	Page: 256-322
Unit 1: Introducing Boris Pasternak	
Unit 2: Boris Pasternak: English Lessons	
Unit 3: Alec Derwent Hope: Australia	
Unit 4: Nazim Hikmet: A Sad State of Freedom	

BLOCK- 1

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Unit 5: Kaneko Mitsuharu: Opposition

UNIT- 1
AN INTRODUCTION TO WORLD POETRY

Unit Structure:

1.1 Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Historical Evolution of World Poetry

1.4 Major Themes

1.5 Poetic Forms and Techniques

1.6 Representative Poets and their Contributions

1.7 Summing Up

1.8 Discussing a Question

1.9 References/Suggested Readings

1.1 Objectives

In this course, "An Introduction to World Poetry," you will be provided a thorough grasp of the various poetic traditions that exist around the world. We will look at how poetry from throughout the world has changed over time and analyse how different historical, cultural and sociopolitical situations are reflected in it. We will also look at notable poets and their important works. The themes and literary forms that characterize their contributions to world literature will be looked at in the parts that follow. We will also examine critical and theoretical frameworks, including literary theory, postcolonialism and comparative literature. These are essential for understanding the influence of these poets. After completing this course, you should be able to:

Remember eminent poets from a range of foreign literary traditions and their most important compositions and contributions.

Analyze the influences of historical occurrences, cultural customs with political shifts on the subjects and literary styles of these poets.

Examine the writings of important international poets using a variety of critical techniques, including postcolonial theory and comparative literature.

Evaluate the contributions of eminent poets from various areas to garner more knowledge about their writings and the environments in which they were produced.

Assess how important social, historical and cultural factors were in influencing the poetry of influential people in various eras and geographical locations.

The central goal of this lesson is to help you acquire the skills necessary to recognize and evaluate the rich traditions of world poetry as well as its relevance in many social, historical and cultural settings.

1.2 Introduction

World poetry encompasses the vast and diverse poetic traditions from cultures across the globe. It is the universal language of human expression which encapsulates a myriad of experiences, emotions and perspectives. From the ancient epics of Mesopotamia to contemporary free verse, poetry has always been a very powerful medium for storytelling, cultural transmission as well as personal reflection. The significance of world poetry lies in its ability to transcend geographical and temporal boundaries, offering readers and listeners a profound understanding of the human condition.

This lesson aims to explore the rich varieties of world poetry by looking at its historical evolution, including major themes, poetic forms and representative poets. We will delve into the ancient origins of poetry, tracing its development through various historical periods and cultural contexts, while also analyzing the recurrent themes that emerge in it from different parts of the world. Such themes include nature, love suffering and identity. Additionally, we will discuss various poetic forms and techniques that poets have been known to employ to express their visions and emotions. It shall highlighting the diversity and creativity inherent in global poetic traditions. In an increasingly interconnected world, where cultures continuously interact and influence one another, understanding world poetry fosters greater empathy and appreciation for cultural diversity and allows us to see the common threads that unite humanity while also celebrating the unique expressions of different societies. By engaging with world poetry, we can attempt to break

down cultural barriers and enrich our own literary and artistic sensibilities.

This lesson is structured to provide a comprehensive introduction to world poetry. We shall begin with an exploration of the historical evolution of poetry by examining key periods and movements from ancient to contemporary times. Next, we will delve into major themes in world poetry and analyze how poets across cultures have grappled with universal human experiences. Following this, we will further explore various poetic forms and techniques, illustrating the rich diversity of poetic expression, which will be followed by profiling some representative poets and their contributions to the world of poetry. This lesson will attempt to highlight their unique voices and the impact of their works. Finally, we will conduct a comparative analysis of selected poems in order to showcase how different cultural contexts influence poetic expression.

1.3 Historical Evolution of World Poetry

Historical Evolution of World Poetry:

Poetry is a form of literary art that expresses emotions and ideas through rhythmic and often symbolic language, which has evolved over millennia across various cultures. This evolution reflects the changing human experiences, societies and intellectual movements. In order to understand the historical evolution of world poetry, it is very important to explore its journey from ancient times to the modern era.

Ancient Poetry:

Ancient poetry forms the bedrock of literary traditions, which originated in civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and China. These early poetic forms were often popularly intertwined with religious, mythological and cultural narratives.

- **Mesopotamian Poetry:** One of the earliest known works is *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, a Sumerian epic dating back to around 2100 BCE which is a narrative poem that explores themes of heroism, friendship and includes a quest for immortality. It significantly influenced later literary works

and provides a thorough glimpse into ancient Mesopotamian society and beliefs.

- **Egyptian Poetry:** Egyptian poetry, such as *The Pyramid Texts* and *The Book of the Dead*, is rich in religious and funerary themes which date back to the Old Kingdom (c. 2686–2181 BCE). They used poetic forms to convey spiritual and moral teachings.
- **Greek Poetry:** Greek poetry, notably the epics of Homer-*The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*- has had a profound impact on Western literature. These works were composed around the 8th century BCE, and they blended myth, history, and legend. They focussed on themes of heroism, fate and the human condition. Additionally, Greek lyric poetry, exemplified by Sappho and Pindar, introduced the idea of personal and emotional expressions.
- **Chinese Poetry:** In China, *The Book of Songs* (Shijing), a collection of 305 poems, was compiled around the 11th to 7th centuries BCE. It is one of the oldest anthologies of Chinese poetry. These poems cover various aspects of life, including love, politics and ritual, and they have been integral to the Confucian education and cultural heritage.

Medieval Poetry:

During the medieval period, poetry flourished in diverse cultures, with each developing unique styles and themes.

- **Islamic Golden Age:** The Islamic Golden Age (8th to 14th centuries) saw the emergence of rich poetic traditions with Persian poets such as Rumi and Hafez writing mystical and philosophical poetry. They explored themes of divine love and existential reflection. Rumi's works, particularly the *Masnavi*, remain influential worldwide.
- **European Troubadours:** In medieval Europe, the troubadours of Southern France composed lyrical poetry focused on chivalry and courtly love. This was a tradition that spread across Europe, influencing poets like Dante Alighieri, whose *Divine Comedy* (1308-1320) came about as a monumental work, blending poetic imagination with religious and philosophical inquiry.

- **Indian Bhakti Poetry:** In India, the Bhakti movement (8th to 17th centuries) produced devotional poetry that expressed intense personal devotion to deities, as demonstrated by Poets like Kabir and Mirabai, who challenged orthodox religious practices and emphasized the importance of personal spirituality and direct communion with the divine.

Renaissance to Enlightenment:

The Renaissance (14th to 17th centuries) was a period of renewed interest in classical antiquity, leading to a flourishing of poetry in Europe.

- **Renaissance Poetry:** Poets like Petrarch and Shakespeare exemplified the Renaissance spirit. Petrarch's sonnets, written in Italian, were known to explore themes of love and humanism, while Shakespeare's sonnets and plays combined intricate wordplay with profound insights to shed light on human nature and emotions.
- **Enlightenment Influence:** The Enlightenment (17th to 19th centuries) brought an emphasis on reason, science and intellectual discourse with the poetry during this period often reflecting these values, as seen in the works of Alexander Pope and Voltaire. These poets used satire and wit to critique society and looked to advocate for rational thought.

Modern and Contemporary Poetry:

The 19th and 20th centuries witnessed dramatic changes in the form and content of poetry as they started to reflect a broader social and cultural transformation.

- **Romanticism:** The Romantic Movement (late 18th to mid-19th century) emphasized emotion, nature and individualism. There were many poets like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge who tried to capture the sublime and the beauty of the natural world. It was largely a reaction against the Industrial Revolution and Enlightenment Rationalism.
- **Modernism:** The early 20th century saw the rise of Modernism, characterized by experimentation with form and a break from traditional structures. Poets like T.S. Eliot and

Ezra Pound used fragmented structures and unique stream-of-consciousness techniques to reflect the complexities of modern life.

- **Postmodernism:** Postmodern poetry, emerging in the mid-20th century, continued to challenge conventions, often embracing paradox, irony and intertextuality with poets like Allen Ginsberg and Sylvia Plath exploring themes of identity, alienation and finally the subconscious.
- **Globalization and Contemporary Trends:** In recent decades, globalization has facilitated a cross-cultural exchange of poetic ideas which has made it possible for contemporary poets, such as Seamus Heaney and Mahmoud Darwish to engage with global themes while drawing on their cultural roots. The digital age has also transformed the dissemination and consumption of poetry which has made it more accessible and diverse.

Stop to Consider

Here are some interesting facts about World Poetry-

1. **Rumi's Influence:** The 13th-century Persian poet Rumi is one of the best-selling poets in the United States today. This shows the enduring and widespread appeal of his mystical and spiritual verses.
2. **African Oral Traditions:** Much of African poetry originates from rich oral traditions, where poetry was performed with music and dance long before being written down, and this is how it was preserved as historical and cultural narratives through generations.
3. **Haiku's Global Reach:** The Japanese haiku, a brief three-line form traditionally focused on nature, has inspired numerous international poets to adopt and adapt its concise and evocative style in various languages and explore more possibilities.
4. **Beat Poets in Japan:** The American Beat poets of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder, were significantly influenced by classical Japanese and Chinese poetry which blended Eastern literary techniques with their countercultural themes.

SAQ

1. Write a few lines on the origins of World Poetry. (30 words)

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.....
.....

2. Write the significance of the key eras in World Poetry. (60 words)

.....
.....
.....
.....

1.4 Major Themes

Among the myriad themes explored in world poetry, four stand out for their universal resonance: nature and the sublime, love and human relationships, suffering and struggle, and lastly, identity and self-expression. These themes not only showcase the rich variety of human emotion and thought, but also highlight the interconnectedness of various poetic traditions. This lesson delves into these major themes by offering a comparative analysis of how poets from various cultures have depicted these profound aspects of human life.

Nature and the Sublime:

Nature has been a perennial source of inspiration for poets across the world as it is seen to be serving as a canvas for expressing beauty, the sublime and the human condition. The depiction of nature varied significantly between cultures, often reflecting distinct philosophical and aesthetic values. In the Western tradition, William Wordsworth stands out as a quintessential nature poet. Particularly his "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," celebrates the serene and restorative power of nature. He views nature as a sublime force, capable of invoking profound emotional and spiritual experiences often emphasizing on the interconnection between human beings and the natural world while portraying nature as a source of solace and enlightenment.

In contrast, Japanese haiku poet Matsuo Basho presents nature in a more minimalist and immediate form in order to capture fleeting

moments of beauty and reflect a deep appreciation for the transient nature of life. For example, in his famous haiku:

"An old silent pond... A frog jumps into the pond, splash! Silence again."

Basho's concise imagery evokes the essence of a moment in nature, which blends simplicity with profound observation. Unlike Wordsworth's expansive and reflective verses, Basho's haikus often focus on the delicate and transient aspects of the natural world which hints at a Zen-inspired awareness of the present.

Love and Human Relationships:

Love and human relationships are central themes in poetry, encompassing romantic, familial and social bonds. These themes are explored with varying intensity and cultural specificity in different poetic traditions. In the Western canon, Shakespeare's sonnets offer a rich exploration of romantic love and beauty, intertwining it with the passage of time. Sonnet 18, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" immortalizes the beloved's beauty and the power of poetry to completely transcend temporal decay. Shakespeare's treatment of love is multifaceted, encompassing idealized romantic affection, the complexities of desire and finally the inevitability of change.

In Persian literature, the ghazals of Rumi provide a different perspective on love, trying to blend the earthly and the divine. Rumi's poetry often seems to portray love as a mystical and transformative force, capable of bridging the human and the divine. For example, in his ghazal "The Alchemy of Love," Rumi writes that:

"You come to us from another world From beyond the stars and void of space. Transcendent, Pure, of unimaginable beauty, Bringing with you the essence of love."

Rumi's ghazals try to depict love as an all-encompassing, spiritual journey which emphasizes its capacity to transcend the mundane and connect with the eternal.

Suffering and Struggle:

The portrayal of suffering and struggle in poetry provides poignant insights into personal and collective human experiences as poets

from various backgrounds respond to the traumas of war, colonization and social injustices. They offer powerful commentaries on human resilience and the quest for justice. One such poet was Wilfred Owen, a British war poet, who captured the horrific realities of World War I in his poetry. In "Dulce et Decorum Est," Owen exposes the brutalities of trench warfare and challenges the romanticized notion of dying for one's country with his vivid imagery and stark realism conveying the profound suffering and disillusionment experienced by soldiers. It was seen as a powerful anti-war statement.

Similarly, Pablo Neruda was a Chilean poet who addresses themes of political struggle and social injustice in his works, while also being known as a love poet. In "The Heights of Macchu Picchu," Neruda not only celebrates the ancient Incan civilization but also mourns the exploitation and suffering of indigenous peoples under colonial rule that had followed. His poetry combines lyrical beauty with a passionate call for social justice which reflects his deep commitment to political activism.

Identity and Self-Expression:

Themes of identity, race, and gender are seen as integral to contemporary poetry, offering nuanced explorations of personal and collective identities. Poets like Maya Angelou and Derek Walcott have been known to have made significant contributions to these themes, using their work to articulate experiences of marginalization and resilience. Maya Angelou's poems like "Still I Rise," powerfully address themes of racial and gender identity. Angelou celebrates Black resilience and defiance in the face of oppression. She uses her own experiences to highlight broader social injustices. Her assertive tone and evocative imagery are good at conveying a strong sense of empowerment and self-affirmation.

Derek Walcott was a Caribbean poet who explored themes of colonial identity and cultural hybridity in his work. In his epic poem *Omeros*, Walcott reimagines Homeric themes within a Caribbean context, addressing the complexities of postcolonial identity and the interplay of diverse cultural influences. Walcott's poetry reflects a deep engagement with his heritage, blending classical allusions with Caribbean vernacular to create a very unique voice.

1.5 Poetic Forms and Techniques

World poetry showcases an array of forms and techniques that enrich the literary landscape. Understanding these forms and techniques like sonnets, haikus, ghazals and free verse along with the use of crucial elements like imagery, symbolism, language, diction, sound and rhythm, provides us with a comprehensive insight into the global poetic tradition.

Forms and Structures:

Originating in Italy in the 13th century, the sonnet is a 14-line poem usually written in iambic pentameter. Petrarchan and Shakespearean are its most notable forms where the Petrarchan sonnet, with its octave and sestet, mainly explores themes of love and beauty. The Shakespearean sonnet on the other hand, comprises three quatrains and a couplet and offers a broader thematic range. Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18" epitomizes the form which blends personal emotion with universal themes.

Haiku, a traditional Japanese form, consists of three lines with a 5-7-5 syllable pattern that emerged in the 17th century. Haiku captures fleeting moments of nature and human experience with brevity and depth as Matsuo Basho's haikus exemplify. In this form, each word is meticulously chosen to evoke a specific emotion or image as seen in "An old silent pond... / A frog jumps into the pond— / Splash! Silence again."

The ghazal, with roots in 7th-century Arabic poetry is characterized by rhyming couplets and a refrain, traditionally expressing themes of love, loss and divine longing. In Persian and Urdu poetry, ghazals by poets like Rumi and Ghalib blend mysticism with personal reflection in a unique way. Ghalib's ghazals, for instance, use rich imagery and intricate metaphors which explore the human soul's quest for the ultimate union with the divine.

Free verse eschews traditional meter and rhyme schemes which offers poets greater flexibility. Emerging prominently in the 19th and 20th centuries, this allows for a more natural flow of language. Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* are seminal works in free verse that demonstrate how its fluidity can convey complex emotions and ideas without the constraints of structured forms.

Imagery and Symbolism:

Across Traditions Imagery and symbolism are vital in conveying deeper meanings and evoking emotions which is why different cultures use these tools uniquely to reflect their distinct philosophies and aesthetics. Mystical Symbols in Sufi Poetry vs. Natural Imagery in Romantic Poetry Sufi poetry, rich in mystical symbolism, are often seen to employ metaphors of the beloved and wine to represent the divine. Rumi's poetry, for instance, is known to use the metaphor of the moth and the flame to depict the soul's yearning for God. In contrast, Romantic poetry, exemplified by Wordsworth, uses natural imagery to explore human emotions and the sublime as seen in his "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", which uses the image of a field of daffodils to evoke a sense of beauty and transcendence.

Language and Diction:

Language and diction are crucial in shaping a poem's tone and accessibility which is why various poets often use dialects and vernacular to imbue their work with authenticity and cultural resonance. For example, Robert Burns' use of Scots dialect in poems like "A Red, Red Rose" lends a distinct cultural flavor that Standard English would be found lacking in. Linguistic diversity allows poets to express nuances that may be normally untranslatable. Pablo Neruda's use of Spanish in *Canto General* captures the rhythm and melody inherent in the language, which enriches the poem's emotional and sensory appeal. Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore's Bengali verses in *Gitanjali* convey spiritual depth through their native linguistic patterns which might be diluted in a direct translation.

Sound and Rhythm:

Meter provides a structured rhythm, as seen in the iambic pentameter of Shakespeare's sonnets, which create various rhythmic and harmonic effects. Rhyme schemes, whether simple or complex, also play a significant role as seen in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven". The ABCBBB rhyme scheme creates a haunting, memorable musicality that seems to complement the poem's eerie atmosphere. Similarly, alliteration, the repetition of consonant sounds, and assonance, the repetition of vowel sounds, contribute to the poem's sonic texture greatly. In *Beowulf* the use of alliteration ("Heorot trembled, wonderfully / built to withstand the blows, the

struggling / great bodies beating at its beautiful walls") emphasizes the poem's oral tradition thereby enhancing its dramatic effect. Sound and rhythm not only create an aesthetic pleasure but also reinforce a poem's themes and emotions to a certain degree. In Sylvia Plath's "Daddy", we can see that the use of harsh, repetitive sounds mirrors the intensity of the poet's emotions, enhancing the reader's experience of the poem's dark and dissonant themes.

1.6 Representative Poets and their Contributions

Classical Poets:

Classical poets have significantly shaped the foundations of world poetry, setting standards and themes that have endured through centuries and three towering figures in this realm are Homer, Li Bai, and Virgil. Homer is often considered the cornerstone of Western literature, mainly due to his epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, which were composed around the 8th century BCE. They are not only masterpieces of narrative poetry but also rich sources of Greek mythology and culture. Homer's influence is evident in the epic traditions of later poets such as Virgil and Dante and his works have been central to the Western canon which shaped storytelling techniques and thematic exploration of heroism, fate and the human condition.

Li Bai was a Chinese poet from the Tang dynasty (701-762 CE) who is renowned for his lyrical and imaginative poetry. His works often explored themes of nature, friendship and the pleasures mingled with the transience of life. Li Bai's use of vivid imagery and his ability to convey deep emotion in a deceptively simple manner have made his poetry timeless. He greatly influenced not only Chinese poetry but also had a lasting impact on other East Asian literary traditions. His works continue to be celebrated and studied for their immense artistic beauty and nuanced philosophical depth.

Virgil was a Roman poet of the Augustan period (70-19 BCE), and is best known for his epic *The Aeneid*. This work, modeled after Homeric epics, tells the story of Aeneas, a Trojan hero and a progenitor of Rome. Virgil's poetry is characterized by its formal perfection, deep patriotism and exploration of destiny and duty. This

text became a national epic of Rome and has been influential in the development of Western literature, providing a template for epic storytelling and being a source of inspiration for later greats like Dante and Milton.

Medieval to Renaissance Poets:

The transition from the medieval to the Renaissance period saw quite significant developments in poetry, with poets such as Dante, Chaucer and Mirabai playing pivotal roles. Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is best known for his epic poem *The Divine Comedy*, a monumental work which explored the realms of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. It is written in the vernacular Italian and is noted for its rich allegory, theological depth and beautifully vivid imagery. *The Divine Comedy* not only provided a detailed vision of the afterlife but also served as a commentary on contemporary politics, society and morality. Dante's influence is profound, as it extended across Western literature and inspiring poets like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343-1400) is an important person in this regard, often called the "Father of English literature". He is most famous for *The Canterbury Tales*. This collection of stories in the greater plot of the text, are told by a group of pilgrims on their way to Canterbury. They show Chaucer's mastery of narrative and his keen insight into human nature. Writing in Middle English, Chaucer's work helped establish English as a legitimate literary language with his use of a wide range of voices and genres within a single work, that also had a lasting impact on English literature and narrative poetry.

Mirabai (c. 1498-1547) was a Hindu mystic poet and devotee of Krishna who wrote in Rajasthani and Hindi. Her bhajans (devotional songs) express deep personal devotion and a longing for union with the divine, characterized by its simplicity. It was imbued with emotional intensity and an acute use of folk imagery. Her works have had a lasting influence on the Bhakti movement in India which promoted a personal, direct relationship with the divine and inspired countless later poets in Indian devotional traditions.

Modern Poets:

The modern era of poetry spanned the late 19th and early 20th centuries and saw significant innovation in form and content, where poets such as T.S. Eliot, Rabindranath Tagore and W.B. Yeats leading the way.

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) is a towering figure in modernist poetry with his works, including *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," are known for their complex structure, use of allusion and deep exploration of disillusionment and fragmentation in the modern world. Eliot's innovative use of free verse and myth has had a profound influence on 20th-century poetry which shaped the modernist movement and beyond.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a Bengali polymath was instrumental in reshaping Bengali literature and music. His collection *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings) earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, being characterized by its lyrical beauty and philosophical depth. It often explored themes of nature, spirituality and humanism. His works transcended cultural and linguistic barriers and influenced not only Indian literature but also garnered international acclaim.

W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), was a major Irish poet and one of the foremost figures of 20th-century literature. He is known for his symbolic and often mystical poetry. His works like "The Second Coming" and "Sailing to Byzantium" reflect his deep engagement with Irish politics and personal mysticism. Yeats' evolution from Romanticism to a more modernist style has influenced generations of poets to fuse up traditional forms with modern themes.

Contemporary Poets:

Contemporary poetry is marked by its intricate diversity and global perspective where poets like Seamus Heaney, Mahmoud Darwish, and Louise Glück made significant contributions. Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) was an Irish poet and Nobel laureate, who is celebrated for his evocative and accessible verse. His work is seen to often draw on rural life, Irish history and personal experience, as seen in elaborate collections like *Death of a Naturalist* and *North*. Heaney's masterful use of language and his ability to effectively pair up the personal with the universal have made his poetry deeply resonant.

Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), a Palestinian poet, was well known for his powerful and poignant poetry that often addressed themes of exile, identity and resistance. His works, such as "Mural" and "Unfortunately, It Was Paradise," reflect the deep collective pain and hopes of the Palestinian people. Darwish's lyrical and emotionally charged poetry has made him a leading voice in contemporary Arabic literature.

Louise Glück (b. 1943), an American poet and Nobel laureate, is known for her introspective and formally precise poetry as demonstrated in her works like "The Wild Iris" and "Faithful and Virtuous Night.". Her poetry is known to often explore themes of personal trauma, family dynamics and existential reflection. Glück's spare, exacting language and her ability to illuminate the human experience have garnered critical attention and a very wide readership.

SAQ

1. What is the importance of Mahmoud Darwish in the World Poetry? (60 words)

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.....

2. Mention the major works and writers of World Poetry. (30 words)

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Check Your Progress

1. Discuss the evolution and significance of various forms and structures in world poetry, such as sonnets, haikus, ghazals, and free verse, providing examples of each.

2. Analyze the role of imagery and symbolism in world poetry, comparing the mystical symbols used in Sufi poetry with the natural imagery found in Romantic poetry. Provide specific examples from poets like Rumi and Wordsworth.
3. Evaluate the impact of language, dialects, and vernacular on the tone and cultural resonance of poetry, using examples from poets like Robert Burns, Pablo Neruda, and Rabindranath Tagore.
4. Examine the techniques of sound and rhythm in world poetry, including meter, rhyme, alliteration, and assonance, and discuss how these elements enhance the meaning and experience of poems. Provide examples from works like Shakespeare's sonnets and Sylvia Plath's "Daddy."

Stop to Consider:

- Dante's *Divine Comedy* is divided into three parts-*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*-and each part contains exactly 33 cantos, symbolizing perfection in medieval numerology.
- The Persian poet Rumi is one of the best-selling poets in the United States, despite having written in the 13th century.
- The sonnet form, particularly popularized by Petrarch and Shakespeare, was originally invented by the 13th-century Italian poet Giacomo da Lentini.
- Sappho, an ancient Greek poet from the island of Lesbos, is often called the "Tenth Muse" and is renowned for her lyric poetry that explores themes of love and passion.
- The longest poem ever written is the *Mahabharata*, an ancient Indian epic, which contains over 100,000 couplets.
- Pablo Neruda, the famous Chilean poet, wrote *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* when he was just 19 years old, and it remains one of his most popular works.
- Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali poet, became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for his collection "Gitanjali."
- The concept of spoken word poetry has ancient roots and can be traced back to the oral traditions of storytelling and performance poetry in African and Indigenous cultures.

1.7 Summing Up

We have seen that world poetry is a rich and diverse form of artistic expression which reflects the myriad of human experiences and cultural landscapes, transcending geographical, linguistic, and temporal boundaries, while offering a unique lens through which we can understand the different societies. The history of world poetry begins with ancient oral traditions, where poetry was used to convey stories, rituals and cultural values. The earliest known poems, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* from Mesopotamia reveal humanity's early engagement with verse, with classical civilizations such as including Greek and Roman cultures further formalizing poetic structures. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are foundational texts that influenced Western literature greatly. On the other hand, Chinese poetry, exemplified by the works of Li Bai and Du Fu during the Tang dynasty, seemed to emphasize nature and philosophical reflections. We have seen also that Persian poetry, with luminaries like Rumi and Hafez, explored themes of mysticism and love, often in the form of ghazals. Furthermore, the medieval period saw the rise of poetic traditions in Europe with Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, which blend vernacular language with rich allegory and social commentary.

We have discussed how the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods brought innovation and diversification in poetic forms and themes. Poets like Shakespeare and Milton seems to expand the boundaries of poetic expression while the Romantic era was led by poets such as Wordsworth and Keats. They focused on individualism, nature and emotional intensity. Furthermore, we learned that the modern and postmodern periods introduced free verse and broke away from traditional forms, with poets like T.S. Eliot and Sylvia Plath exploring complex psychological and existential themes. We have studied that world poetry encompasses a wide array of themes that reflect the universal and particular aspects of human experience. Death and mortality are explored in elegies and contemplative works across cultures, right from the ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead* to contemporary poems. Spirituality and the divine are prominently, particularly in the works of mystic poets like John Donne and Mirabai. Social justice and political critique are also significant themes, with poets like Pablo Neruda and Langston Hughes addressing issues of oppression and inequality.

We have studied that the ghazal, with roots in Arabic and Persian poetry, features rhyming couplets and a refrain and explores themes of love and loss. Free verse, popularized in the 19th and 20th centuries, abandons traditional meter and rhyme which allows poets like Whitman and Eliot to experiment with form. The contributions of representative poets have significantly shaped world poetry. We now know that Homer's epics laid the groundwork for Western narrative poetry while Li Bai's lyrical verses enriched Chinese literature with their emotive depth and vivid imagery. Rumi's mystical poetry bridged cultural and spiritual divides which resonated across centuries. Finally, we learnt that contemporary poets continue to innovate and challenge conventions, reflecting the evolving nature of world poetry. Figures like Seamus Heaney and Mahmoud Darwish seem to address themes of identity, exile and political struggle, ensuring that poetry remains a vital and dynamic form of cultural expression.

1.8 Discussing a Question:

Here is a solved question for your perusal:

Q. Critically analyze the evolution of world poetry from its ancient origins to contemporary forms, focusing on the major themes, forms, and representative poets that have significantly shaped its trajectory. Discuss how historical, cultural, and social contexts have influenced poetic expression and how these influences are reflected in the works of key poets.

Answer:

The evolution of world poetry is a fascinating journey that spans millennia, which reflects the diverse arena of human experience and thought. From its ancient origins to contemporary forms, it is seen how poetry has evolved through various stages, each marked by distinct themes, forms and cultural influences.

Poetry's origins lie in the oral traditions of ancient civilizations, where it had served as a vehicle for storytelling, religious rituals and cultural preservation. One of the earliest known examples is the *Epic of Gilgamesh* which is a Mesopotamian epic poem that dates back to the third millennium BCE. This work provides insights into the values and beliefs of early Mesopotamian society but also

introduces various themes like heroism and the quest for immortality. Classical Greek and Roman poets further formalized poetic structures and themes as seen in Homer's epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, which are foundational texts of Western literature. They emphasize upon themes of heroism, fate and the human condition. These works have profoundly influenced narrative poetry while setting standards for epic storytelling. Similarly, the Roman poet Virgil's *The Aeneid* was built on Homeric traditions, merging Roman ideals of duty and destiny with poetic artistry.

In the East, Chinese poetry during the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) showed the rise of poets like Li Bai and Du Fu, whose works explored themes of nature, friendship and the transience of life. Their use of vivid imagery and emotional depth has had a lasting impact on East Asian literary traditions just like Persian poets such as Rumi and Hafez, who through their mystical ghazals delved into themes of divine love and spiritual longing. Furthermore, the medieval period in Europe witnessed significant developments in poetry, especially with the works of Dante Alighieri and Geoffrey Chaucer. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a monumental allegorical epic that is seen to explore the afterlife through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. It is written in vernacular Italian and artfully combines theological depth with rich imagery along with a reflection of the medieval synthesis of classical and Christian traditions.

Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is written in Middle English, as a collection of stories told by pilgrims travelling to Canterbury. This work showcases Chaucer's narrative skill and his keen insight into human nature, which offers a vivid portrayal of medieval society. We can see that both Dante and Chaucer's use of vernacular language helped to establish their respective languages as legitimate mediums for literary expression. The Renaissance period marked a revival of classical ideals and an exploration of humanism with poets like William Shakespeare and John Milton in England pushing the boundaries of poetic form and content. Shakespeare's sonnets, with their intricate structures and exploration of themes such as love, beauty and mortality, are widely regarded as masterpieces of lyric poetry. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, an epic poem, is known to address themes such as free will, redemption and the human condition, blending classical form with Christian theology.

The Romantic era, spanning the late 18th and early 19th centuries, included poets like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and rejected the formal constraints of neoclassical poetry. They instead celebrated the sublime beauty of nature and the depth of human emotion. Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, co-authored with Coleridge, marked a significant shift towards personal expression and simplicity of language which made poetry more accessible to the general populace. The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the rise of modernist poetry which was characterized by a break with traditional forms and an exploration of fragmented realities. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* with its complex structure, dense allusions and themes of disillusionment and fragmentation, epitomized modernist experimentation. Eliot's work reflected the cultural and social upheavals of the early 20th century, focussing on the aftermath of World War I and the loss of traditional values.

Contemporary poetry is marked by its diversity and global perspective, reflecting the complexities of the modern world. Poets like Seamus Heaney, Mahmoud Darwish, and Louise Glück have been known to have made significant contributions to contemporary literature. Heaney's work often draws on rural life and Irish history, which uses rich imagery and language to explore themes of identity and memory. His collection *Death of a Naturalist* is a poignant exploration of childhood and nature that highlights his signature style of writing. Mahmoud Darwish, a Palestinian poet, addresses themes of exile, identity and resistance in his works which capture the collective pain and aspirations of the Palestinian people. It uses lyrical language and powerful imagery to evoke deep emotional responses. Darwish's "Mural" is a good example of profound reflection on life, death and the quest for freedom. Louise Glück, an American poet and Nobel laureate, is well known for her introspective and formally precise poetry. It is noted in her works, including *The Wild Iris*, which explores themes of personal trauma and family dynamics while combining it with existential reflection. Glück's exacting language and her ability to illuminate the human experience have garnered great critical acclaim and a wide readership.

The evolution of world poetry is a testament to its enduring power and versatility as a form of unique artistic expression. From ancient epics to contemporary free verse it can be noted how poetry has continually adapted to reflect the changing cultural, social and

historical contexts of its time. Major themes such as love, nature, mortality and social justice remain central to poetic expression, and we can see diverse forms and techniques enrich its corpus. The contributions of representative poets across different eras and cultures truly highlight the universal appeal and transformative potential of poetry.

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UNIT- 2
INTRODUCING LI PO

Unit Structure:

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introduction to Chinese Poetry

2.3 Introducing Li Po

2.3.1 Li Po and Yeuh fu poetry

2.4 Ezra Pound – Life and Works

2.5 Summing Up

2.6 References/ Suggested Readings

2.1 Objectives

The aim of this unit is to --

- *acquaint* the reader with Classical Chinese poetry
- *introduce* the importance of the Chinese poet Li Po
- *explain* how Li Po came into the American literary scene
- *understand* Ezra Pound against the context of Chinese poetry

2.2 Introduction to Chinese Poetry

The country of China is an ancient civilization which has made notable contribution towards the world. The country is known as the earliest chronicler and they have written records from around the Shang dynasty [1600-1040 BCE]. Poetry is a highly regarded literary genre in China which is traditionally divided into (Shi), (Ci), and (Qu). ‘Shi’ was the term used to refer to poetry of all genres such as hymns or odes and mostly involved poetry written in four-character lines ‘Ci’ was a form of lyric poetry that had lines of irregular lengths; and the ‘Qu’ form of poetry was based upon songs of various tones. All the traditional forms of Chinese poetry are rhymed and there is also poetry written in a free verse style form. Poetics during the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420) was influenced by the ideology of *xuanyan* which means “discourse on the mysterious. There was conversational poetry that covered a wide range of

subjects from metaphysics to epistemology to behavior – everything deemed mysterious.

Poetry was considered as a subject in the Chinese civil service examinations (*keju*). Educated men were expected to be able to write poems to apply for government jobs and those who qualified were regarded as *jinshi* or ‘presented scholar’. This was because the works of the poets were heard in the courts of Imperial Chinese Emperors. As such, Classical Chinese poetry is regarded as an important part of Chinese culture.

The Tang Dynasty (618-907 BC) was a period of prosperity and opulence in Chinese history.

The arts such as painting, pottery, calligraphy, sculpture, dance, and literature flourished during this period. Tombs and graves of the rich were decorated with ornaments which have helped archeologists and historians understand the economic standing of the Tang Dynasty. In the political and national scene, the Tang Dynasty was characterized by generations of wars and battles against the Turks. Great effort was made to acquire land mass and the expansion of geographic proportions. All of this made China a powerful kingdom at that time with great military strength. Over all, it was a period of prosperity and peace.

From 712 began reign of Emperor Xuanzong and it was an efficient period of Tang governance that lasted until 755. During his reign, Xuanzong expanded the school and health-care systems, increased agricultural productivity, and maintained law and order. And it was during his reign that the literary sphere during the Tang period witnessed the emergence of skilled writers who produced works that are still relevant. The poets of the period are renowned and they created an unchallengeable corpus of work. Tang poetic forms include: *lushi*, a type of regulated verse with an eight-line form having five, six, or seven characters per line; *ci* (verse following set rhythmic patterns); and *jueju* (truncated verse), a four-line poem with five, six, or seven characters per line. The era saw writings from major cultural figures such as Li Bai, Du Fu, Wang Wei, Bai Juyi, Yuan Zhen, Li Yuxi and Han Yu. As such, the Tang Dynasty is regarded as the ‘Golden age of Chinese poetry’.

The poetic output was considered as cultural capital because it was a medium that could be used for political gain or social prestige. Poetry or poetic exchanges allowed one to display one’s literary and cognitive abilities and it was a competence that was cultivated and transmitted within families. Owing to the grand focus on quality literary production, the corpus of Classical Chinese poetry is a wealth in the realm of literature. It consists of a rich history of literary form, historical references, and imagery that stretches back over thousands of years.

SAQ:

Q1. What were the traditional divisions of Classical Chinese poetry? (20 words)

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Q2. Why do you think poetry was considered as an important subject in Imperial China? (20 words)

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Q3. Write about your understanding of the Tang dynasty. (40 words)

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2.3 Li Po – Life and Works

Amongst all the High poets, it is Li Bai (701-762), or Li Po or Tai Bai, who is the most outstanding poet in ancient China’s Tang dynasty. Li Po is also regarded as “Poet Immortal”. He ardently followed the concept of *wuwei*, ‘do nothing’ which is reflected in his life and his poetry. He was an avid reader and employed by Emperor Xuangzong as a palace poet. He remained in the court of the Emperor until he fell into disfavour in 744. Soon after, the An Lushan rebellion broke out in 755 but Li Po was not in the capital at that time. However, Li Po spent the last eight years of his life being imprisoned, banished, pardoned, and ill.

A lot of historians both in the West and the East have worked towards discovering the literary legacy of Li Po. They have engaged themselves in collecting and copying manuscripts, deciphering inscriptions about him. They have also visited and renovated his gravesite, selected poems for anthologies, made several editions of his work, and viewed paintings of him.

Very little autobiographical information can be found in his poems, which has made them difficult to be dated. Around 1000 poems attributed to Li Po exist today. Despite his decline in his last years, he was and still is recognized as a genius as he stepped outside genre conventions to experiment with poetry. He wrote of horrific wartime events, his childhood, mundane events, love, grief, loyalty, his travels and, even the everyday things he encountered. His poetry is important not only because of its outstanding literary quality, but because of the historical information it gives us about life during the Tang Dynasty.

There is evidence of only one collection that the poet himself compiled during his lifetime. He mentioned about this collection in a farewell preface that he had composed in 759 for the Buddhist monk Zhenqian. In this preface, Li Po had stated that he had made a copy of “all that he’d written in his life” for the monk. However, no evidence is found of the collection. During the time of Li Po’s death around 762, only two people were entrusted with partial copies of his poetry. One was his younger friend and drinking companion, Wei Hao and the other was his younger cousin, the official and famous calligrapher Li Yangbing. Wei Hao compiled a collection titled *Li Hanlin ji* while Li Yangbing’s compilation was titled *Caotang ji*.

However, neither of the collections survived beyond the Song dynasty because the poetry of Li Po faced intense scrutiny, editing and even erasure during the Song dynasty in the attempt to reconfigure the past. The prefaces of the two collections are still intact and they offer contrasting views about the life and work of Li Po. The preface of Wei Hao is brief and casual while Li Yangbing’s preface was serious, ambitious and, defensive about Li Bai’s work and his reputation.

Stop to Consider

Various anthologists were also counted among the admirers of Li Po, and they created rather different versions of the poet through their selections of his poetry. Because Li Po was such a renowned figure, all of the anthologists and scholars of Li Po wanted to present themselves as established scholars of his poetry. As such, they tried to get their hand on every written material of Li Po and produce compilations that would gain popularity.

For example, several of the twenty-eight Li Bai poems in the tenth-century Shu anthology *Cao diao ji* 才調集 (Collection of the tunes of the talents) do not appear in any other Tang anthology. Almost all of these poems center on romantic longing and there are also five poems written in a first-person female voice.

Also, a wide range of ninth- and tenth-century anecdote and tale collections were also produced in order to preserve the memorable Li Bai stories such as the historical story *Guo shibu* 國史補 (Supplement to the History of the State). There were also gossip and humorous stories included in collections such as *Yunxi youyi* 雲谿友議 (Friendly discussions at Cloudy Creek) and the *Ben shishi* 本事詩 (Stories behind poems).

Furthermore, during the Tang dynasty, the versions of Li Po's poetry appeared in a variety of literary forms such as commemorations, admirations, and anecdotes. A considerable amount of admiration and praise of Li Po was found in several Tang poetry and letters. Even dozens of Tang poems praising Li Bai's unique poetic genius composed by readers survive till date. Also, other Tang poets such as Bai Juyi, Yuan Zhen, Han Yu and Meng Jiao championed Li Bai's brilliance. And by the late ninth and early tenth century, there was the emergence of stylistic imitations of Li Po found in the works by the poets such as Guanxiu and Qiji.

2.3.1 Li Po and yeuh-fu poetry

The yeuh-fu poetry came into existence as a genre during the Han dynasty. Yeuh-fu poetry includes anonymous and folk poems as

well as literary imitations. Yeuh-fu poetry allows the “outsider on the inside stance”. Some of these poems were also musical. Li Po largely used the style of yeuh-fu poetry for his writings and the genre determined his poetic style. There were other poets such as Tu Fu and Wang Wei who had also written several yeuh-fu poems. Both Tu Fu and Wang Wei were popular High Tang poets like Li Po. But it is yeuh-fu poems written by Li Po that popularized the genre during the Tang dynasty.

Li Po’s reputation as a poet in various Tang anthologies was centered around yeuh-fu. “The Road to Shu Is Hard” is one of his most famous yeuh-fu poems. Other of his yeuh-fu poems include titles such as “Bring in the Wine”, “Tune of Crow-black Night”, “Hardships of the Road”, etc. Kuo Mao-chien of the Sung dynasty in his book *Poems of Yeuh fu* identified twelve yeuh-fu categories such as ‘hsiang-ho’ and ‘tsa-ch`u’. The yeuh-fu poems of Li Po are so varied in forms, themes and style that they fall under all these categories except one. In his collection, Kuo Mao-chien has included nearly 600 authors but Li Po stands out because of his unique style of writing and the range and power of his poetry. This poetic genre allows the poet to use adopted voices and although Li Po experimented quite a lot, yet he did not deviate from the structure of the genre. Apart from his fifty-nine ‘ku-feng poems’, all the other famous poems such as “The Road to Shu is Hard” fall under the yeuh-fu genre.

There has been no other poet who has identified himself so closely with the yeuh-fu genre like Li Po and all the poets who tried writing in this style after him necessarily worked in his shadow.

SAQ

Q1. Why was the Tang dynasty considered as the ‘Golden Age of poetry’? (20 words)

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Q2. In which form of poetry was Li Po most proficient? (20 words)

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2.4 Ezra Pound

Life and Works:

Ezra Pound (1885-1972) is an influential poet of the twentieth century who has made significant contribution to modernist poetry. He is an important part of literary movements such as Imagism and Vorticism. Ezra Pound was one of the most innovative poets of his time, both in terms of matter and form, and greatly supported new talent and new experiments in poetry. Apart from being a poet, he was also a renowned critic and his desire for the avant-garde led him to promote a unique modernist aesthetic in poetry. He also aided in facilitating the exchange of works and ideas between British and American writers. In this regard, he greatly helped in advancing the work of major contemporaries such as W. B. Yeats, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams., James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and T.S. Eliot.

Ezra Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho. His parents moved to Philadelphia when Pound was a young boy. Pound pursued his education in English literature, American history and the Greek and Roman classics from the University of Pennsylvania. He then moved to Hamilton College, where he took up the study of Old English and Romance literatures and graduated in 1905. He also engaged himself in teaching medieval and Renaissance literature at the London Regent Street polytechnic while simultaneously trying to make his mark as a poet. His first verse collection was *A Lume Spento* (1908) which published in Venice followed by the publication of *A Quinzane for This Yule* (1908) and *Personae* (1909) which appeared in London. His translations and scholarly works appeared in *The Spirit of Romance* (1910).

Apart from producing several publications, he also engaged himself in teaching and writing influential critical essays. There are two volumes of his essays titled *Make It New* (1934) and *Literary Essays* (1954), which mostly contain critical essays written before 1920. The two other volumes, *The ABC of Reading* (1934) and *Polite Essays* (1937) contain essays where he expresses his appraisals of modern writing.

Although much of his life was spent outside America, yet he never let go of his American identity and was very conscious about it. All of this led to the cultivation of a sense of cosmopolitanism in Pound.

He started advocating for writers to establish literary standards that are independent of national boundaries. Such ideas of Pound can be found in his essays like “Renaissance” where he wrote about how texts from earlier ages should be considered as literary models and should not be plagiarized but transformed and surpassed. Such opinions made Pound a radical poet among his contemporaries.

Ezra Pound promoted the music of the American composer George Antheil. He was also responsible for having James Joyce’s novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* serialized in the journal *The Egoist* and he also made important editing changes in T.S. Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land*.

Most importantly, he formulated the theory of Imagism along with people such as Richard Aldington and Hilda Doolittle. The title “Imagiste” was provided for the group and the efforts of the group led to the publication of *Des Imagistes: An Anthology (1914)*. The three main principles of this movement were:

- 1) the “direct treatment” of poetic subjects
- 2) economy of language by a radical condensing by the elimination of any unnecessary or merely ornamental words
- 3) an inorganic selection of rhythmical patterns—

The Imagists emphasized on the short poem dominated by a single image or metaphor around which the central meaning of the poem is structured. This movement emerged as a reaction to the abstracted meaning found in most nineteenth century poetry.

Stop to Consider

Ezra Pound’s *Guide to Kulchur (1938)* contains his many perceptive observations on aspects of history and culture. But it is now subjected to an increasing attack for its anti-Semitism as Pound was increasingly emphatic in his denunciation of the Jews and he supported fascism. He also openly criticized the American President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Pound’s outspoken political views landed him in trouble. He was safely functioning because he was in Europe at that time and

protected by the Italian government. Despite being conscious of his American identity, he delivered talks to American troops that mocked the American government. All of this had the American government try him for treason in 1943. He was also denounced from literary circles and he was edited out of an anthology.

Yet undeterred, Pound continued to advocate his opinions freely. However, after the fall of Italy in the Second World War, Pound was imprisoned for months in an open-air cage because of his mocking of the American troops. The experience of it affected him physically and emotionally and he wrote about it in his *Pisan Cantos*. The collection won him the Bollingen Prize for poetry in 1948 but the *Pisan Cantos* was received critically because of Pound's political views and the charge of treason. Eventually, because of the efforts of influential friends, lawyers, congressmen and, literary figures, Pound's charge of treason was dropped in 1958 and he was free to return to Italy.

Further, Pound greatly emphasized on reviving lost traditions and the necessity of holding on to one's culture and history. His sense of cosmopolitanism cultivated in him the desire to try his hands in various styles of poetry from across the world. He was greatly interested in the poetic traditions of the East and involved himself in reading and translating Chinese and Japanese poetry. From such experimentation emerged Pound's famous haikus such as "In a Station of the Metro:". Haiku is a traditional Japanese poetic style which involves short poems with a single, central meaning. The intermingling of the form of haiku along with his ideologies of Imagism makes the poem "In a Station of the Metro" a famous example of an imagist poem. In the same line of study, experiment and research, Pound published his *Cathay* (1915) and *Lustra* (1916) which are anthologies of translated Classical Chinese poetry. He was introduced to Chinese poetry through the notes of the scholar Ernest Fenollosa. In his translations of the poems of the Classical Chinese Poet Li Po or Li Bai in his collection *Cathay*, earned him a great reputation and also launched Li Po into the American literary sphere. He also had interest in Confucian ethics which can be felt in the *Cantos* and in his *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius* (1954).

SAQ:

Q1. How do you think a sense of cosmopolitanism was imbued in Ezra Pound? (20 words)

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.....
.....
.....

Q2. Write a note about Imagism and its ideals. (30 words)

.....
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.....

Pound spent the rest of his life in Italy with his wife and daughter and made occasional visits to the United States. In 1969, he received an honorary degree from Hamilton College. He received the Harriet Monroe Award for poetry in 1962 and a prize from the Academy of American Poets in the following year. However, in 1972, just before his death, Pound was nominated for the Emerson-Thoreau Award but the governing body overruled the nomination and did not give Pound the prize because of his controversial political stance. Despite swaying between innovation and controversy, Ezra Pound lived a reputed life and carved a name for himself in the literary landscape of American poetry

2.5 Summing Up

Li Po occupies a significant position in the canon of Classical Chinese poetry for his remarkable poetry. He greatly innovated with the poetic traditions and the yeuh-fu genre of poetry was his forte. The poet was introduced to the West because of the efforts of the American poet Ezra Pound who had profound interest in the Chinese poetry. In this unit, you are introduced to achievements and appeal of two poets from two different spatio-temporal locations who have exerted great influence in the literary production of their times. The works of Li Po and the genius of Ezra Pound have coupled together in the twentieth century which has introduced new potential of study and research to broaden the scope of World poetry.

Check Your Progress

Q1. Elucidate your understanding on why Chinese Poetry is considered as an important part of Chinese culture.

Q2. What made Li Po a standalone poet in the canon of Chinese poetry? Do you think the discrepancies faced by scholars and anthologists in the documentation of his poetry affected his appeal?

Q3. Why is Ezra Pound considered as an innovative and influential poet? Elaborate in reference to his works.

Q4. Ezra Pound experimented with several poetic forms. How would you draw connections between Imagism and his production of Chinese and Japanese poetry?

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UNIT- 3

LI PO: THE RIVER MERCHANT'S WIFE: A LETTER

Unit Structure:

3.1 Objectives

3.2 Ezra Pound's *Cathay*

3.3 Reading 'The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter'

3.3.1 The Text

3.3.2 Summary

3.4 Critical Appreciation

3.5 Theme and Imagery in 'The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter'

3.6 Li Po – In Translation

3.7 Summing Up

3.8 References/ Suggested Readings

3.1 Objectives

The aim of the unit is to:

- *introduce* Ezra Pound's *Cathay* and the significance his translations
- *comprehend* the meaning of Li Po's poem "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter"
- *evaluate* the poem's theme and use of imagery
- *understand* the reception of Ezra Pound's translations.

3.2 Ezra Pound's *Cathay*

From around the early twentieth century, there has been a growing interest in international sinology in America. Amongst the people interested so, the American imagist poet Ezra Pound was in the fore and he engaged himself in translating a large number of Chinese ancient poems. There was an upsurge in amateur and scholarly translation in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, led by figures such as James Legge, Herbert Giles, and Arthur Waley.

And Ezra Pound's poetic engagement with China and also Japan was influenced by this new wave of scholarly study.

Ezra Pound was the anointed custodian of the posthumous manuscripts and notebooks of Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), a Spanish-American academic and orientalist. Following the premature death of Fenollosa, Pound found himself in possession of a rich inheritance: translations and schematic analysis of the Japanese Noh corpus; and notes and essay drafts on the Chinese language and Chinese Tang poetry. These poems ranged from the late Zhou Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty – from roughly the fourth century BCE to the eighth century CE. All of these scholarly materials inspired Pound to begin his own study of the Chinese language through the notes of Fenollosa. Eventually, he published the prominent essay “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry” and some more significant work on translating Chinese poetry into English with an emphasis on the Confucian Book of Odes (Shijing) and the Tang masters.

From the materials he had in hand, a small number of Pound's translations of the Chinese poetic materials became the volume *Cathay* in 1915. There were a total of 150 poems in the sixteen notebooks of Fenollosa, written by different Chinese poets from various dynasties. Of them, Pound selected 19 poems for *Cathay*, among which 12 poems were written by Li Po. This demonstrates the appeal of Li Po's poetry which even exerted a profound influence on Ezra Pound. Pound referred to Li Po also through the Japanese name ‘Rihaku’. This was because Fenollosa's work was assisted by two Japanese scholars of Chinese poetry, Ariga Nagao and Mori Kainen who referred to Li Po as ‘Rihaku’. As such, the subtitle of *Cathay* reads as follows: “For the Most Part from the Chinese of Rihaku, from the notes of the late Ernest Fenollosa, and the Decipherings of the Professors Mori and Ariga.”

There were twelve poems of Li Po translated by Pound in *Cathay*. There were two war poems titled “Lament of the Frontier Guard” and “South-Folk in Cold Country”. There are two poems concentrating on the theme of abandoned women which are “The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter” and “The Jewel Stairs' Grievance”. Then there are three poems on the theme of departure, which are “Leaving-Taking Near Shoku” , “Taking Leave of a Friend”, “Separation on the River Kiang”, “The City of Choan”,

“The River Song”, “Exile’s Letter”, “Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin”, “The Blowing of Spring Wind Has Brought greenness to the Grass in Ying Zhou”

In this collection *Cathay*, the most appealing is the poem “The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter” which is a translation of a Li Po’s poem *Changgan Xing* or *Chokan Shin*. Li Po has written *Changgan Xing* in the style of the *ancient poems* (i.e., *gu shi*) of folk song origin. Many Western scholars engaged in the study of translated American poetry have recognized the poetic quality and imagistic strength of Ezra Pound’s “The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter”.

SAQ:

Q1. How did the notes of Ernest Fenollosa inspire Ezra Pound? (30 words)

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.....

Q2. What are the poems of Li Po included in Ezra Pound’s *Cathay*? (30 words)

.....
.....

Q3. In which poetic form was Li Po’s “Changgan Xing” written? (20 words)

.....
.....

3.3 Reading ‘The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter’

3.3.1 The Text

While my hair was still cut straight
across my forehead

I played about the front gate, pulling
flowers.

You came by on bamboo stilts, playing
horse,

You walked about my seat, playing with
blue plums.

And we went on living in the village of
Chōkan:

Two small people, without dislike or
suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.

I never laughed, being bashful.

Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.

Called to, a thousand times, I never
looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,

I desired my dust to be mingled with
yours

Forever and forever, and forever.

Why should I climb the look out?

At sixteen you departed

You went into far Ku-tō-en, by the river
of swirling eddies,

And you have been gone five months.

The monkeys make sorrowful noise
overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went
out.

By the gate now, the moss is grown, the
different mosses,

Too deep to clear them away!

The leaves fall early this autumn, in
wind.

The paired butterflies are already yellow
with August

Over the grass in the West Garden;

They hurt me.

I grow older.

If you are coming down through the
narrows of the river Kiang,
Please let me know beforehand,
And I will come out to meet you
As far as Chō-fū-Sa.

3.3.2 Summary

Lines 1-6:

The poem is written in the form of a letter expressing a lonely young wife's pain of separation. The narrator recalls the early days of her life when she met her husband when they were both very young. She has not seen her husband for five months and to cope with the separation, she spends her days reminiscing about the sweet days of their childhood. She recalls how as a young girl she would be plucking flowers and plums and playing within the campus of her house while her husband as a young boy would be indulged in "playing horse". They both lived in the village of Chokan and the first lines of the poem circle around the innocence of children and the contented playfulness of the children. The young wife did not think that she would be betrothed to him as for which she says that were growing as "Two small people, without dislike or suspicion".

Lines 7-10:

In these lines, the young wife thinks of her life after she was married to her husband at the age of fourteen. There is a change in the way she addresses her husband. In the earlier lines, she referred to her husband as "you" because there was no established relationship between them. But after she is married to him, she addresses her husband as "My Lord". The wife also identifies the growing change in her emotions towards her husband and the coyness that came into her. She also conformed to the demure behaviour expected of a wife. The dynamics of changing relationship between growing adults is hinted at in these lines.

Lines 11-14:

These lines solidify the feelings of love that have grown over time in the wife. She has accepted her husband as the sole reason of her validation. She keeps her emotions to herself, thus feeling them

more sharply. She has overcome her timidity and now longed for complete identification with her husband. This is indicative of her maturity. She desired for a permanent union with her husband and wished for her dust to be mingled with that of her husband. In essence, she wanted to be with her husband until death – “Forever and forever, and forever.” She thinks that now that she has grown conscious of her feelings, she will work towards building her relationship with her husband and she thought about not to worry about separation.

Lines 15-18:

In these lines there is a change in tone. When the wife was sixteen years old, her husband departed for business and remained absent for long periods of time. As a river-merchant, the husband starts his voyage and this leads to separation between the couple just when the wife grew conscious of her emotions and wifely duties. The waters of the river take the husband away to faraway lands.

Hence, the wife is left to drown in the pain of separation. Life became sorrowful for her and even in the natural events around her, she only saw, heard and felt sorrow. Even the chatter of the monkeys feels sorrowful to her. Her life lost its color and purpose.

Lines 19-30:

To the wife, it seemed that she broke out of the dream of soft love that she was dwelling in. The new-felt, bubbling emotions that she felt towards her husband did not get its fulfillment. He has been gone for five months and she longed for communion. The separation has become unbearable for her. She remembers how her husband reluctantly left her for his duty. She hopes that her husband too is missing her and thinking about her.

She observes all the omens and seasonal changes around her. The pair of butterflies reminds her of lovers and love. The autumnal decay and falling leaves indicate the passage of time and the growing age of the wife. She pines at her husband's absence.

The closing lines express the innermost longing on the part of the wife. She is wistfully and patiently waiting for her husband to return. She is also in love with her husband that she requests him to let her know beforehand when he about to return, so that she will go even to the dock to meet her husband.

Stop to Consider

Changgan was an area located in Nanjing which was a city in eastern China and is nearly 2500 years old. From around 229, Nanjing served as the capital for six dynasties for about three hundred years. It was the cultural, economic, and political center of the southern part of China that lay near the Yangtze River. But in 589, the towns and former palaces of Nanjing were destroyed by the first emperor of the Sui Dynasty, Yang Jian who converted the area into agricultural lands.

When Li Bai composed the poem *Changgan Xing* more than one hundred years later, the area was famous only for its historical sites and cultural relics. The remannt made viewer understand about the former glory of the city of Nanjing. As Li Po was a traveller, he visited Nanjing several times and even lived there during his late years. He composed around one hundred poems about Nanjing in his lifetime. The area of Changgan finds references in the poem *Changgan Xing* and the poem is also believed to be influenced by Nanjing folk songs known as wuge and xiqu.

SAQ

Q1. Do you think the wife was conscious of the dynamics of their relationship? (30 words)

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.....

Q2. Why do you think the pain of separation become unbearable for the wife? (30 words)

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Q3. What are the dominant emotions in the poem? (20 words)

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.....
.....

3.4 Critical Appreciation

“Changgan Xing” is a classical Chinese poem presenting the monologue of a chaste wife who is missing her husband and awaiting his return. The poem was created in imitation of earlier Chinese folk songs. The poem tells the story of a woman longing to see her husband who has left for business by linking all of the wife’s life scenes together. The progression of age and season is also depicted to make the poem a complete artistic whole. The poem traces the wife’s reminiscences of their childhood, marital life and the husband’s absence after marriage and the wife’s isolation, loneliness and longing.

At a deeper level, the poem is a proclamation of love, which has several emotional culminations. There is the wife’s voiced willingness to be with her husband until they mingle together as dust or ashes. She is consistently worried about her which is reflected through her speaking about the “swirling eddies” in the rivers. And she promises to go all the way to meet her husband at Cho-fu-Sa , a dock that is more than 200 miles from her hometown.

The interrogative and jussive clauses help to deliver the commitment and endurance of waiting, thus calling for a response. Beyond the surface of the poem, there is the romantic scheme of values. The beginning of the poem reflects charm and tenderness. As the poem proceeds, there is the intermingling of the emotions of love and grief indicating at the complexity of adult emotions and relationships. The separation from her husband tests her patience and endurance.

When the narrator moves from the reminiscences of her childhood to her present condition of solitude and sorrow, the reader understands that there is an undercurrent of dissatisfaction and longing that makes the poem more than a declaration of love. Her delicate modesty is also reflected in the poem. There change in the dynamics of relationship in marriage is also hinted at when she expresses her reverence by addressing her husband as “My Lord”. In the original poem, in reference to the wife, Li Po used first-person singular feminine pronoun, qie, and to the absent husband, Li Bai resorted to the usage of two pronouns – jun and lang. The pronoun ‘jun’ is a second-person singular masculine pronoun used to respectfully address friends or familiar people. The pronoun

‘lang’ is a context-bound pronoun that is used to refer to a woman’s husband, lover or boyfriend in second-person or third-person singular masculine.

By quoting the last lines of Ezra Pound’s poem as an epigram, the Assamese poet Hem Barua also evokes a similar situation of emotional longing in his poem “Mamatar Sithi”. This poem circles around the longing of an Assamese wife for her husband. Like in Ezra Pound’s poem, the urgency of the wife’s desire is echoed in the closing lines of Barua’s poem which read as:

“When you return, do let me know. I will go beyond
the river Bhogdoi and call you”

These lines of Hem Barua’s poem can be regarded as a literary transcription of Pound’s original lines.

Pound’s translation has a flow and beauty that has retained the cultural flavour and the emotions of the original poem written by Li Po. His skill can be seen in his reconstruction of the nuance and obliquity of the complex state of internal feeling of the lonely wife.

3.5 Theme and Imagery in ‘The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter’

There is an austere quality of Chinese classical poems. They are simple and precise, but powerfully evocative as can be seen in the poetry of Li Po. Ezra Pound has attempted to capture the essence of the poem by keeping intact the lucid simplicity and naturalness of the poem “The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter” by adopting Imagist techniques.

The central theme of the poem revolves around the wife’s longing for her husband. To convey this, imagery abound in the poem. The first ten lines of the poem capture charm and tenderness. The images of “two small people” who are playing about a seat while plucking plums indicate innocence and the blossom of pure love. In the ninth and tenth lines, the slight change of mood from childhood innocence to shyness brings forth the impression of a young wife.

The “Blue plums” and “bamboo stilts as playing horse” have connotations specific to Chinese culture. The playing horse with bamboo stilts is a boy's pastime and to play with blue plums is mainly a game for girls as earlier, it was the job of a woman to pick fruits such as plums. According to the classical literature, a mature woman uses plums as a medium to reach out to a male partner. Therefore, plums also symbolize the ability to reproduce and growing sensuality

A pair of butterflies is regarded as a traditional symbol of lovers in Chinese literature. Its imagery alludes itself to the legend of “Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai,” which is Chinese love story. In this legend, the two young lovers are separated by their families. The girl is forced to marry someone else by her parents against her parents and she becomes ill and dies of a broken heart. At the news of her death, her young lover also kills himself in front of her grave. As the legend goes, they are transformed into a pair of beautiful butterflies to stay together with each other.

The passage of time and the change of season is illustrated through phrases such as “leaves fall early this autumn” and “yellow with August”.The use of rivers in the poem is also noteworthy. Just as rivers constantly flow and change courses, the relationship between the wife and her husband in the poem has also changed and evolved. The river also functions as a physical barrier between them as her husband has gone away beyond the river where she cannot reach him.

SAQ:

Q1. What are multilayered themes in the poem “The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter”? (20 words)

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Q2. Write a note on the use of imagery in the poem. (30 words)

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Q3. Through subtle hints, the progression of age and emotions are reflected in the poem. Write about your understanding of the same. (40 words)

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.....

Stop to Consider

The businessmen of feudal China were of two types: xingshang (i.e., traveling traders) and zuogu (i.e., homekeeping vendors or storekeepers). The xingshang transported goods from one place to another for profit. On the other hand, the zuogu ran local businesses only. Early Chinese poets often chose to write about the complaints or longings of traveling merchants' wives. In this context, *Changgan Xing* is a monologue of the wife of a traveling trader.

What makes Li Po's poem special is his dealing with the themes of longing. He presents the poem not as the complaints of a lonely wife but as a proclamation of love. This is specifically illustrated through the lines in which the wife voices her willingness to be with her husband until they mingle together as dust and her promise of going all the way to meet her husband at the dock in Changfengsha.

The poem is about the intimacy of love and relationship between two people who have grown up together. Looking into the historical context of the Tang dynasty, the people were allowed great freedom in the proceedings of marriage and the choice of their spouses. As such the poem deviates from traditional representations of complaining merchant wives and stands as a testimony of a wife's love who is ready to stand through every trial while holding on to the hope of being reunited with her love.

3.6 Li Po- In Translation

According to Wu Juntao, "poetry can never be adequately rendered in another language. Be that as it may, various versions are allowable, and even necessary. The poetry of a great poet invites different translators just as beautiful scenery invites different painters to paint". The transmission of a poem through translation poses quite a many challenges as it is difficult to convey the intact meaning from language to another. Every language has its limitations and the syntactic structures vary. As such, the act of finding the accurate words as well as to hold together the form of the poem.

Ezra Pound's translations of Classical Chinese poetry have attracted a wide range of responses. Ezra Pound's *The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter* is regarded by many Western scholars as a product in itself rather than being a translation and cross-cultural representation of Li Po's poem *Changgan Xing*. However, contrary to these Western scholars, many scholars from China or of Chinese origin have regarded the collection *Cathay* as a successful translation. These scholars have stressed that there are cultural connections between the original classical Chinese poems and Pound's translations. They opine that Pound's inadequate mastery of the Chinese language had not posed any limitations and prevented him from conveying the essence of the original poem. As such, the opinions are divided between scholars who consider *The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter* as a proper representation of Chinese culture and society and others who opine that it is a partial, inadequate rendition which might contribute towards misinterpretation of the original poem and reinforce stereotypical beliefs.

In his endeavor, Pound had attempted to employ most of the original images that appear in the original *Changgan Xing*. He also follows the organization pattern of the lines of the original poem. The poems of *Cathay* are notable for being able to keep intact the genre and prosody of a poetic tradition to which Pound had very limited direct access. The translated poems have been noted by scholars for their lack of embellishment. Pound follows what Arthur Waley had considered that yung-shih or literary allusion a 'cardinal vice' of classical Chinese poetry and that it is best if avoided in translation. But the missing of the subtle implication of the allusions by Pound has however gone towards hampering the artistic integrity of the poem.

The poetic genius of Pound had allowed him to translate the poems by developing an intuitive sense of the original author's tone and poetic organization. This he has been able to achieve owing to the insight he gained about Chinese language and culture from Fenollosa's notes and the interpretations of the Japanese professors. Edward H. Baker believes that Pound intentionally took out the allusions in order to keep the simplicity of the poem: Yet he has done an acculturation of Li Po's poem and *The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter* can be regarded as an attempt at creating something new.

Stop to Consider

A further example of the translation of Li Po's poetry can be analyzed. Stephen Owen and Xu Yuanchong produced different translations of a famous Li Po poem titled *Yue Xia Du Zhuo* (月下独酌) which is famously known as "Drinking Alone by Moonlight". It is interesting to note that each translation present different aesthetics of the same poem.

1) "Drinking Alone by Moonlight" - (Translated by Stephen Owen)

Here among flowers one flask of wine,
with no close friends, I pour it alone.
I lift cup to bright moon, beg its company,
then facing my shadow, we become three.
The moon has never known how to drink;
my shadow does nothing but follow me.
But with moon and shadow as companions the while,
this joy I find must catch spring while it's here.
I sing, and the moon just lingers on;
I dance, and my shadow flails wildly.
When still sober we share friendship and pleasure,
then, utterly drunk, each goes his own way
Let us join to roam beyond human cares
and plan to meet far in the river of stars.

2) "Drinking Alone under the Moon" -
(Translated by Xu Yuanchong)

Among the flowers, from a pot of wine
I drink without a companion of mine.
I raise my cup to invite the moon who blends
Her light with my Shadow and we're three friends.
The Moon does not know how to drink her share;
In vain my Shadow follows me here and there.
Together with them for the time I stay,
And make merry before spring's spent away.
I sing and the moon lingers to hear my song;
My shadow's a mess while I dance along.

In regard to Cathay, T. S. Eliot had famously said that says, “As for Cathay, it must be pointed out that Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our times. . . . His translations seem to be—and that is the test of excellence—translucencies; we think we are closer to the Chinese.” Yet while reading such statement, one has to understand that that if T. S. Eliot thinks that Cathay makes him feel “closer to the Chinese”, it is more because Pound’s translations conform to the western perception of the Chinese. The problem in translations of ‘Oriental’ literature is a challenging task because of the differences in culture and perceptions. Often such translations are shadowed by stereotypes. The detailed research that proceeded after the release of Ezra Pound’s translations bring to light that the uniqueness of the original poems was however reduced to a limited and biased representation. Scholars have been led to doubt the cultural appropriation in Pound’s translations and that the social context of the production of *Changgan Xing* has been ignored.

Pound took liberty to translate the poetic title of *Changgan Xing* which literally meant “A Song of Changgan.” He renamed the poem as *The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter* in spite of the fact that Fenollosa had made it clear that the last Chinese character of the original title meant a “narrative or lyrical song.” Similarly, he translated the Yangtze River as *the river Kiang* regardless of Fenollosa’s note. Additionally, Pound also substituted Fenollosa’s transliterations for two major Chinese place names. He named Changgan as **Chokan** and Changfengsha as **Cho-fu-sa**.

Moreover, the cultural allusion in the poem was overlooked and the imagery was subjected to Western interpretations. The meanings in the use of symbols and imagery such as a pair of butterflies differ according to cultures but Pound chose to employ his understanding on the poem. As such, the onus lies on the reader to maintain their position while reading translations that differ from the context in which they were produced.

Pound greatly relied on the trust he had on his understanding of Li Po’s poetry and he recreated the translation from his own imagination; going beyond the boundaries of language and culture. And in such a context, the reader has to know that an inventor cannot necessarily be an accurate translator.

Check Your Progress

Q1. What are the conditions that inspired Ezra Pound's *Cathay*? Do you think the essence of Chinese poetry has been successfully captured in the collection?

Q2. Elucidate your understanding about how the position of the wife in the poem "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter" reflects the dynamics of human relationship. Is the poem able to contain a universal appeal?

Q3. Write about the universality of Li Po's poem *Changgan Xing* by referring to its impact in the literary sphere of various spatio-temporal locations.

Q4. Do you think Ezra Pound's translation has been adequate? What do you understand of the complexities that accompany the act of translation? Elaborate in reference to the "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter".

3.7 Summing Up

Ezra Pound's poem "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter" which is a translation of the Chinese poet Li Po's poem *Changgan Xing* introduces the reader into the realm of Chinese poetry. The unit looks into the conditions that inspired Ezra Pound to translate Li Po's poetry and the complexities involved in the art of translation. The reader must understand that translations have the potential of spaces between original and intended meaning but in the end, it is always about how poetry affects and transports the heart and mind of the reader.

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UNIT- 4

INTRODUCING KANEKO MITSU HARU

Unit Structure:

4.1. Objectives

4.2. Introduction

4.3. About the Poet

4.4. His literary and art works

4.5. The Nature of his Literary Compositions

4.6. Summing Up

4.7. References/Suggested Readings

4.1 Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- *Learn* about Kaneko Mitsuharu
- *Know* about his literary compositions
- *Learn* about his paintings and art works
- *Analyse* the style and nature of his literary compositions and techniques of his artworks

4.2 Introduction

Kaneko Mitsuharu was an esteemed, pre-eminent Japanese poet, essayist, and translator. He was born and brought up in Japan, and was acquainted with Western literature from an early age, influence of which can be evidently witnessed in his literary compositions. Mitsuharu initially adhered to the traditional Japanese forms of literature but gradually shifted to more innovative and experimental styles of poetic work. His poetry is distinctively characterised by its bold exploration of individualism, social criticism, and absurd themes. His iconic poem, “Opposition” (discussed in the next Unit) exemplifies his rejection of traditional Japanese values and other societal norms and conventions. As a key figure in Japanese avant-garde movement, Kaneko introduced Western poetic concepts and

immensely contributed to the development of Modern Japanese literature. Along with his poetic compositions, Kaneko also did rigorous translation works. His translation of French poetry, particularly Andre Breton's works, expedited cross-cultural exchange. Throughout his illustrious career, Mitsuharu published numerous poetry collections, essays, and translations, certifying his status as a pioneering force in the Japanese literary world.

4.3 About the Poet

Kaneko Misuharu was a Japanese poet and painter, born on 25th December, 1895, in Tsushima, Aichi, in Japan. His biological parents were OhgaKazukichi and Ryo, but he was adopted by Sumi and Kaneko Sohtaroh at the age of two, thus earning him the family name Kaneko. He was initially named Yasukazu but later he changed it to Mitsuharu since he evolved as a writer with the publication of his poems and artworks. Kaneko's biological father suffered loss in business and thus, willingly gave up his son for adoption. On the other hand, his adopted father, Sohtaroh, was a rich and successful company executive and art collector who gave a pampered and luxurious life to Misuharu. He grew up to be a spoiled teenager who would often bring women from pleasure quarters while his parents never rebuked or restricted him from anything. Mitsuharu did not excel much in his academics as well. He frequently dropped out of different institutes within a short fraction of time. He did his schooling from the prestigious Gyohsei Gakuen, a French Catholic private school. He attended the Waseda University but left his studies mid-term. He joined the Tokyo School of Art to study Japanese painting but did not complete the course either. He later joined the Keio University to study English but dropped out of there too.

Kaneko Misuharo was exposed to Western art and literature from an early age. He also studied poetry and painting under the supervision of different masters. He was greatly influenced by traditional Japanese poetry like tanka and haiku. His poems usually explored themes like love, nature, and the human condition. He was particularly recognized to be the only Japanese poet to write anti-war poems during the Second World War. His works immensely

influenced post World War II Japanese art and literature. He died on 30th June, 1975, in Kichijoji, Honcho, Musashino in Tokyo, Japan.

Check Your Progress:

- Q1. When was Kaneko Mitsuharu adopted and by whom?
- Q2. Where did Mitsuharu study Japanese painting?
- Q3. Why did Mitsuharu attend the Keio University?
- Q4. Name two traditional Japanese forms of poetry that significantly influenced Mitsuharu's poetic creations.
- Q5. When did Kaneko Mitsuharu die?

4.4 His literary and Art Works

Kaneko Mitsuharu was one of the most prominent and renowned poets of the 20th century Japan. His first poetry collection was *Akatsuchi no ie* (Red Clay House) published in 1919. His unique blend of traditional Japanese and Western modern techniques led to creation of new and innovative artistic styles for his poetic compositions. He published several collections of poetry and artwork. His poetry collections include *Shinsei* (New Star, 1919) and *Kaneko Mitsuharu Shishu* (Kaneko Mitsuharu Poetry Collection, 1972). His best-known poems include *Kohro* (The Censor) published in 1916, *Sekido no ie* (The House of Red Clay, 1919), *Koganemushi* (Japanese Beetle, 1923), *Mizu no Ruroh* (Wanderings of Water, 1926), *Same* (Sharks, 1937), *Ga* (Moth, 1948), *Hana to Akibin* (Flowers and Empty Bottles, 1973), *Hijoh* (Merciless, 1955), and others. He also wrote several essays like "Marei Ran'in Kikoh" (Malay and Dutch East Indies Travelogue, 1940), "Dokuro-Hai" (Skull-cap, 1971), "Nemura Pari" (Go to sleep, Paris, 1974), and "Nishi Higashi" (West and east) in 1974. *Shijin* (Poet, 1957) is an autobiography. He was awarded the Yomiuri Prize for Literature in 1954.

Most of his literary works were composed in the Japanese language. He preferred simple and lucid language and emphasized on clarity of meanings over ambiguity, and emotional depth. He experimented

with various innovative forms and free verse for his poetic compositions. Hiraoki Sato, a translator and an essayist, translated many of Mitsuharu's poems that invited a larger readership from across the globe to enjoy the kaleidoscopic world of his poetry. Some of his best-known poems include "Bald", "Seals", "At the Lighthouse", and "The Old Capital Nanking". "Bald" is an apocalyptic poem by Kaneko that he composed during the war on the day of his only son's draft physical. He made his son fall sick but intentionally letting him inhale smoke to escape from being drafted for the war. In the poem, "Seals", he compares himself and the others around him to seals in the wake of the Japanese military aggression. A significant theme in many of his poetic compositions and paintings is eroticism or erotic love, resonating with his unwavering admiration and devotion for the female counterpart, his love for women. In "Another Poem", the reader experiences a shocking display of Kaneko's eroticism.

Kaneko Mitsuharu was trained in traditional Japanese painting called Nihonga. He fundamentally focused on landscapes, still-life, and figurative art, for his paintings. His artworks incorporated traditional and Western techniques and styles inspired by movements like Fauvism and Expressionism. His paintings are mostly characterized by dynamic compositions, bearing bold colours and emotive brushstrokes. He was the co-founder of the Japanese avant-garde art group, Shinseisakuha. His art works were exhibited across Japan as well as internationally, in places like Paris and New York, that have been influential centres for the promotion and exhibition of paintings and art works since the ancient times. Apart from several poetry collections, he also published artbooks. His artbooks include *Mitsuharu-ga* (Mitsuharu's paintings) published in 1995 and *Kaneko Mitsuharu Sakushinshu* (Kaneko Mitsuharu Art Collection) (1972).

Check Your Progress:

- Q1. Name the first collection of poetry by Kaneko Mitsuharu.
- Q2. When was the poetry collection, *Shinsei*, published?
- Q3. Name two essays by Kaneko Mitsuharu.

Q4. In which year, Kaneko Mitsuharu was awarded the Yomiuri Prize for Literature?

Q5. What is Mitsuharu's poem, "Bald", about?

Q6. Name any poem that bears evidence of Mitsuharu's eroticism.

Q7. Name the Japanese avant-garde art group co-founded by Kaneko Mitsuharu.

Q8. Name the two artbooks by Kaneko Mitsuharu.

4.5 The Nature of his Literary Compositions

Kaneko Mitsuharu's works are recognised globally for his innovative styles and distinctive experimentations. His poetic style is remarkable for its unique blend of traditional Japanese forms with Western modernist techniques. He often explored the surreal subconscious, the irrational and fantastical themes in his poetry. His poems employ vivid imageries and symbols to convey complex human emotions and ideas. He often depicts the natural world, the urban landscape, or recounts human condition and experiences in his poetic endeavours. He usually constructs fragmented narratives and disjoint structures to reflect modern crisis and angst and societal chaos. Mitsuharu reinforces individualism and emphasizes on autonomy and freedom from the shackles of conventional rules and norms. He persistently challenges the traditional Japanese values and authority in his poems. His poems are basically a social critique of the mindless conformity and inclination towards the predominant power structure that lays the instructions and dictates on how an individual is supposed to live, survive, and function. His poems focus on existentialism as it explores human existence, morality, and the purpose and true meaning of life. The interaction and relationship between human and the natural world form a pivotal thematic concern in many of Mitsuharu's poems. He employed various literary techniques such as metaphors, irony, and allusions in his poetic compositions. The fragmented, non-linear pattern and unstructured narrative of many of his poems recalls the stream-of-consciousness technique as it reflects on the inner turmoil and thoughts of the speaking persona as well as the reader who resonates with it. Kaneko's poems can be clubbed under the genre of experimental

poetry as it breaks from the traditional poetic form and demonstrate innovative use of language and poetic style. It creates a collage of disparate elements, words, and images to create new meanings. Kaneko Mitsuharu's literary works bears the influence of French surrealism, especially the works of Andre Breton and Paul Eluard. The readers can also identify and witness glimpses of European modernism in his works, with specific influence of writers like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. His poems also bear elements of Japanese traditional poetic forms like Haiku and Tanka. Some of his most notable works include "Opposition" (1926), *The City* (1930), *The River* (1940), and *The Poems of Kaneko Mitsuharu* (1947). Mitsuharu's works have tremendously influenced post-WWII Japanese literature and contributed to the development of Japanese modernism. his works have promoted cross-cultural exchange between the East and the West literary traditions and inspired generations of Japanese writers and poets.

SAQ:

Q1. Write a short note on Kaneko Mitsuharu's art and painting endeavours.

Q2. How does Kaneko Mitsuharu's poetic compositions resonates with Experimental poetry.

4.6 Summing Up

Kaneko Mitsuharu was a visionary, ingenious Japanese poet, essayist, and translator who dramatically altered modern Japanese literature and poetry. Through his innovative and bold styles of composition, Mitsuharu challenged traditional Japanese values, embracing Western modernist and surrealist ideology. His poetry is blatantly marked by experimentation, symbolism, and social critique, as he explored themes of non-conformity, individualism, and the human condition. His translation of French poetry and literary criticism aided in moulding Japan's literary panorama. Mitsuharu's contribution have a lasting impact on art and literature across the globe with major influence on post-WWII Japanese literature, modern Japanese poetry, and the country's cultural

identity. His innovative style combined with a unique blend of tradition and modernity contributed to Japanese literary modernism. Mitsuharu's poetry bridged the gap between Eastern and Western literary traditions, contributing towards the creation of international literary discourses. His inventory, trailblazing work continues to resonate with the wider reading public, confirming his position as a seminal figure in Japanese literary history. His legacy persists and continues to inspire poets, scholars, and readers worldwide to this day.

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UNIT- 5

KANEKO MITSUHARU: “OPPOSITION”

Unit Structure:

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 “Opposition”: The Poem

5.4 “Opposition”: An Overview

5.5 Poetic Devices and Techniques

5.6 Imageries and Symbols

5.7 Summing Up

5.8 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- *Learn* the poem
- *Analyze* the poem critically
- *Understand* the structure of composition
- *Know* the relevant imageries and symbols

5.2 Introduction

Kaneko Mitsuharu was one of the most celebrated Japanese poets, known for his expressive and innovative style of composition. He uniquely blended traditional Japanese forms with modernist sensibilities as he experimented with various structures and narrative styles. He celebrated nature and its mythical beauty shrouded in mystique and unfathomable charm through his writings. He also devoted his creativity to erotic love and narrated shocking depiction of intimate relationships, desires, longing, and melancholy in his poems. He employed vivid imageries and sensual descriptions of nature as well as human experiences in his poetry. His works are also replete with symbolisms from traditional Japanese myths and

folklore. His literary oeuvre serves as social commentary as it critiques the problematic conventions of modernity and social changes. Mitsuharu's poetry offers at once a familiar and an unconventional glimpse into traditional Japanese poetry and helps readers acquaint with the history and cultural heritage of Japan. Some of his works have been translated into English, like the *Selected Poems of Kaneko Mitsuharu* (1987) by Hiraoki Sato and *The Poetry of Kaneko Mitsuharu* (1996) by Takashi Ikemoto. His notable works include *Shinsei* (New Star, 1919), *Yujo* (Friendship, 1947), and *Kaze no Shukuzu* (Wind's Footprints, 1954).

5.3 *Opposition: The Poem*

Opposition

In my youth
I was opposed to school.
And now, again,
I'm opposed to work.
Above all it is health
And righteousness that I hate the most.
There's nothing so cruel to man
As health and honesty.
Of course I'm opposed to the Japanese spirit
And duty and human feeling make me vomit.
I'm against any government anywhere
And show my bum to authors and artists
circles.
When I'm asked for what I was born,
Without scruple, I'll reply, To oppose.
When I'm in the east
I want to go to the west.
I fasten my coat at the left, my shoes right and
left.
My hakama I wear back to front and I ride a
horse facing its buttocks.
What everyone else hates I like
And my greatest hate of all is people feeling
the same.
This I believe: to oppose
Is the only fine thing in life.

To oppose is to live.

To oppose is to get a grip on the very self.

—Kaneko Mitsuharu

5.4 “Opposition”: An Overview

The poem, “Opposition”, by Kaneko Mitsuharu is basically a declarative speech of rebellion and non-conformity to oppose the prescribed societal norms and conventions. The poetic persona boldly rejects all forms of authoritative institutions and societal expectation as well as refuses to abide by them. The poem opens with the speaker’s assertion that he opposed the institution of the school as a child. In the present times, as the poet embraces adulthood he is “opposed to work”. The poem is a critique of social hypocrisy that challenges the façade of morality, sincerity, and commitments. In the poem, the poet rejects all kind of authority like school, work, and the government. He further rejects conventional morality like health and honesty, considering them as “cruel to man”. He also opposes traditional values and the Japanese spirit like “duty and human feelings” which make him nauseous. He vehemently announces that his purpose to be born is, “without scruple”, to oppose. He lists a couple of daily chores and designs that he performs the opposite way to establish his non-conformity and rejection. He fastens his coat in the left-side and wears his hakama from back to front. He even asserts that he rides a horse facing backward. He likes and adores things not usually liked by others while detesting those that are commonly admired by all. His greatest form of hatred erupts against mutual feelings experienced by people together. He firmly believes that the only fine thing in life is to oppose, which is the ultimate truth and reality, the only way to realize one’s worth and purpose in life. Kaneko’s poem reflects his disillusionment with societal norms and institutions. The provocative tone of the poem challenges the readers to question their values and belief-systems. While some critics viewed the poem as nihilistic, others saw it as a performative piece of literary art, a means to assert individuality and autonomy. The poem basically falls under the genre of experimental poetry that challenged the traditional poetic forms and conventions, paving the way for future Japanese avant-garde movements. The poem was composed at a time when Japan was witnessing substantial social changes,

modernization, and cultural upheaval in the first half of the 20th century. It was a time when Japanese literature and art was enormously influenced by Western intellectual movements like existentialism and surrealism.

Stop to Consider:

Experimental poetry:

Experimental poetry refers to a poetic form that emerged during the 20th century that challenged the traditional forms and styles of poetic composition. The narratives are basically fragmented or non-linear in pattern. Experimental poetry makes innovative use of language in terms of syntax, semantics, and phonetic experimentations to create a hybrid literary form. It blends poetry with prose, drama, or visual art and employs vivid imageries and symbolisms. Experimental poetry seeks to subvert the traditional poetic themes and explore new subjects and perspectives. It uses ambiguity, irony, and unpredictability to conjure a playful yet mysterious atmosphere in the poems. Experimental poetry is fundamentally self-reflexive which reflects on its own poetic nature, fostering a new form of artistic creativity. The fragmented sentences and the fluid, unstructured narrative recalls the stream-of-consciousness technique as it challenges the readers to engage with the poems and reflect on the intricacies of life. Experimental poetry creates a collage of disparate words and images and encourages diverse voices and perspectives. Experimental poetry alludes to history and culture across the world in an unconventional manner. Experimental poetry was influenced by various art movements such as surrealism, futurism, dadaism, and cubism, as well as bears impact of beat poetry, concrete poetry, language poetry, minimalism, and others. Notable experimental poets include T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Allen Ginsberg, John Ashbery, and Adrienne Rich.

Check Your Progress:

Q1. Why, in your opinion, does the poet oppose all forms for authority like school and office?

Q2. From your reading of the poem “Opposition”, what are some of the common everyday chores that the speaker performs in opposition to the conventional ways of doing them?

Q3. What do you think is the speaker’s “greatest hate of all” as described in the poem, ‘Opposition’?

Q4. How do you know that the poet opposes the traditional Japanese values and cultural conventions? Discuss.

Q5. When was the poem composed?

5.5 Poetic Devices and Techniques

Kaneko Mitsuharu employs a blend of various poetic devices and techniques for his poetic compositions, including the poem, “Opposition”. Mitsuharu’s innovative style blends traditional Japanese imagery with Western modernist influence, creating a unique poetic expression. He uses vivid imageries and contrasting images to challenge the societal norms and values prevalent during his contemporary times. He also uses images like that of a horse and a hakama to represent Japanese tradition and conformity. The title of the poem, “Opposition”, is paradoxical as he asserts it as his sole purpose in life which juxtaposes societal expectations and conventions. Kaneko uses ironical phrases such as “health and honesty” which he considers oppressive, “Japanese spirit” and “duty” as nauseous, while “authors and artists” become targets of his disdain. He structures the poetic statements as enjambment, mirroring the stream-of-conscious technique in literature. The readers constantly encounter repetitive words and phrases in the poem. For example, the word “oppose” recurs multiple times which emphasizes his blatant disregard or defiance of social etiquettes or behavioral norms. Kaneko also uses various symbolisms to express his angst and the societal chaos he aspires to oppose. The East-West dichotomy represents opposing or contradictory perspectives. The left and right reversal of the shoes and the back and front pattern of wearing the hakama denotes opposition to traditional orientation and symbolizes rejection and non-conformity. The free verse style of composition and the unrhymed, irregular stanzas mirrors the speaker’s fluidity of thoughts and emphasizes natural speech rhythm and expressive form. The poem is an unapologetic rejection of

societal norms and traditional values. 'Opposition' carries a defiant but liberating overtone as the poet embraces opposition as a form of artistic expression in the poem.

Stop to Consider:

Different types of Japanese poetry:

Japanese poetry encompasses various forms, styles, and poetic structures, each with its own characteristics and the history of origin. There are various forms of poetry in Japanese literature such as traditional forms, classical forms, regional forms, as well as modern and contemporary forms which reflect the rich cultural heritage and literary evolution of Japan. The traditional form of poetry includes Haiku, Tanka, Waka, Renga, and Haibun. The ancient classical form of Japanese poetry dates back to the 8th century and continued until the 11th century as the most prominent poetic form. The significant classical form includes Manyoshu (8th century), Kokinshu (10th century), and Shikishi (11th century). The Hokku, Kyoka, and Nagauta are popular regional forms of Japanese poetry. The modern and contemporary forms incorporate Free Verse (*Shi*), Prose Poetry (*Shi-Shosetsu*), Surrealist Poetry (*Chogen-ji-shi*), Concrete Poetry (*Konkurito-shi*), and Digital Poetry (*Denshi-shi*). Some of the most prominent Japanese poets who excelled in their particular forms includes Matsuo Basho (Haiku master), Yosa Buson (Haiku and Tanka poet), Akiko Yosano (Tanka and feminist poet), Junichiro Tanizaki (Modernist writer and poet), and Kenzaburo Oe (Nobel laureate, poet, and novelist).

Let us discuss some of the popular Japanese poetic forms in detail:

Haiku:

Haiku is a traditional Japanese poetic form which evolved during the 7th century, inspired by existing poetry forms like Tanka and Renga. Haiku gained popularity as a distinct poetic genre during the Edo Period with the contribution of influential poets like Buson and Issa during the early 17th century and continued as a dominant poetic form until late 19th century. Haiku was introduced to the West during the Meiji Period, from 1868 to 1912, and it had a major influence on modern poetry. The most significant characteristic of

Haiku is the seventeen-syllable structure, composed in three lines, following the 5-7-5 syllabic pattern. It typically consists of two parts- the first two lines denoting the upper stanza and the final line marks the lower stanza of the poem. Haiku employs vivid natural imageries, especially seasonal references to evoke sensitivity and emotions. It uses simple and concise language to convey complex ideas and feelings. Famous Haiku poet include Matsuo Basho, Yosa Buson, and Kobayashi Issa. Rooted in Japanese tradition, Haiku as a poetic form has evolved and inspired poets through the ages. Its peculiar structure and unique blend of simplicity and emotional depth has made it a timeless and universal art form across the world.

Nagauta:

Nagauta is one of the most prominent traditional Japanese poetry forms which evolved from existing poetic forms such as Tanka and Haiku. Nagauta originated in Western Japan during the Edo Period (1603- 1867), its lyrical style and narrative structure influenced by Heian period poetry. Nagauta are long narrative poems, typically consisting of 20-50 lines, divided into multiple stanzas. It tells stories and recounts everyday life and human condition in a distinct narrative structure with a precise beginning, middle, and end. The min'yo folk songs immensely inspired and influenced this genre of Japanese poetry. Nagauta often incorporates themes from Buddhist and Shinto mythology as well as seasonal references and human relationship with nature. Notable Nagauta poets include Ryokan, Shusei Tokuda, and Hakucho Masamune. Nagautas have had a major influence on the development of modern Japanese poetry and its story-telling style inspired modern novelists across the world. Nagauta has played a major role in the preservation of folk culture and Japanese folk traditions.

SAQ:

Q1. Discuss briefly about the different poetic devices used in the poem, "Opposition".

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5.6 Images and Symbols

Kaneko Mitsuharu's poem, "Opposition", employs potent imagery and symbolism to indicate individuality, non-conformity, and rebellion. The poem is replete with images that create a powerful critique of societal norms and expectations. Mitsuharu reflects on the traditional aesthetics and emphasizes a stark opposition to them. The opening line of the poem, "In my youth/ I was opposed to school" outlines the rebellious spirit of the poetic persona as he declares his non-conformity to societal dictates and expectations. He considers "health and honesty" as oppressive forces which denotes the subversion of traditional virtues as well as embodies societal expectations and moral constraints. His customary design of wearing the Hakama "front to back" symbolizes the speaker's rejection of traditional attire and cultural norms. The "East-West" and "Left-Right" configuration illustrates the polar perspectives defying traditional disposition. The "East-West" dichotomy may possibly denote opposing world-views and cultural differences while the "Left-Right" reversal challenges traditional binary thinking. Let us discuss some of the significant images and symbols in detail:

- **Hakama**

The hakama is a traditional Japanese garment worn over a kimono, traditionally during martial art events like kendo and iaido as well as during cultural ceremonies, rituals, and weddings. The hakama symbolizes Japanese cultural heritage and usually represents virtues like discipline and respect. Historically, this traditional attire indicates social status of an individual, their age, rank, as well as their profession. It is also a ceremonial wear basically donned to commemorate anniversaries, celebrate weddings, or observe common tea ceremonies. In the poem, *Opposition*, the hakama represents non-conformity as it challenges the Japanese cultural and traditional values. In the poem, the speaker states that he wears the hakama "back to front" symbolizing his rejection of tradition and cultural constraints. The act of wearing the traditional attire in the opposite design denotes non-conformity, emphasizing the poet's individuality. The hakama stands as a symbol of cultural pride in Japanese art and literature. However, in the

poem “Opposition”, it is used as a means of artistic expression to denote rebellion and rejection of the Japanese cultural and societal conventions. It stands as a challenge to authority as Kaneko questions the societal expectations and norms through his innovative, experimental poetic approach. The poet’s denial to wear the hakama in the conventional way asserts the significance of his self-expression over conformity. In keeping with the cultural context of the poem and its exposure to Western ideas, values, and artistic movements, the hakama reflects on the Japanese cultural identity as it explores the tension between traditional heritage and modernity. In the poem, “Opposition”, the hakama serves as a powerful symbol which challenges the traditional Japanese values, embracing individuality. Kaneko’s innovative style draws on the traditional symbol which is used as an imagery for rebellion in the poem.

- **Horse**

The horse is traditionally associated with strength, power, and virility. In art and literature across the world, the horse denotes a potent symbol for moral values like nobility, dignity, and honour. The horse often represents progress and advancement, liberation and momentum. In the poem, *Opposition*, the horse symbolizes themes of rebellion and non-conformity against societal expectations. The act of riding a horse facing its buttock can be seen as a reversal of societal expectations, emphasizing individuality and distinctiveness. In contrast to the horse’s natural majesty and magnificence, the poet broaches it with some absurd, ludicrous action. The poet uses the imagery of the horse to represent his non-conformity and rejection of societal norms as he subverts the animal’s symbolic association with strength, power, nobility, and the like. Riding a horse facing its buttock challenges the traditional notions of progress and forward movement. In the Japanese culture, the horse symbolizes good fortune and prosperity. However, in “Opposition”, Kaneko’s horse is a symbolic representation of the established power structure that he

challenges and rebels against in the poem. Kaneko Mitsuharu celebrates unconventional thinking and perceptions as he prioritizes self-expression and individuality over conventionality and traditionalism.

SAQ:

Q1. Try to find other relevant images and symbols in the poem, “Opposition”, with reference to the Japanese culture and traditional norms.

Q2. What does the act of wearing the hakama “back to front” symbolizes in the poem, “Opposition”? Discuss.

Q3. What do you think the horse is a significant imagery in art and literature? Discuss with reference to the poem, “Opposition”.

5.7 Summing Up

Kaneko Mitsuharu’s poem, “Opposition”, is a pronounced assertion of defiance and non-conformity against societal norms and expectations. Mitsuharu draws on provocative language and various rhetorical devices as well as metaphors and images to affirm his rejection of traditional values, authority, and cultural constraints. The poet embraces opposition as a means to assert his individuality and autonomy as he challenges the contemporary social status quo. He questions the notion of “health and honesty” as oppressive forces. Similarly, he follows certain daily customs like buttoning up a coat or wearing his shoes or the Hakama in the opposite way rather than following the conventional pattern. The poem is a unique blend of Japanese imagery and Western modernism, thus designing a distinctive poetic expression. The poem, “Opposition”, celebrates non-conformity, self-expression and the form of liberation attained through challenging the established social order and norms. The poem calls forth the readers’ attention to reevaluate their individual correlation with the prescribed societal norms and conventions.

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BLOCK- 2

Unit 1: Introducing Jibanananda Das

Unit 2: Jibanananda Das: Banalata Sen

Unit 3: Introducing Faiz Ahmed Faiz

Unit 4: Faiz Ahmed Faiz: The Love We Had Before

UNIT- 1

INTRODUCING JIBANANANDA DAS

Unit Structure:

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Objectives

1.3 Jibanananda Das in his time

1.4 Jibanananda Das and the literary scene in Bengal

1.5 The poet and his poetry

1.6 Political Consciousness

1.7 His prose works

1.8 Summing Up

1.9 References/Suggested Readings

1.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.11 Model Questions

1.1 Introduction

Jibanananda Das, often called “Rupashi Banglar Kabi” was born in Barishal, Bangladesh in 1899. He studied English literature in Presidency College, Kolkata and earned his Master’s degree from Calcutta University. Although Das was highly underrated during his time, later evaluation of his work showed potential and received much popularity. Known chiefly for his poems, Jibanananda Das also wrote 21 novels, and 108 short stories. Some of his most popular works include *Ruposhi Bangla*, *Banalata Sen*, *Mahaprithibi*, *Shreshtha Kavita*. His poem *Banalata Sen* is particularly famous and is considered a classic in Bengali literature. Das’s father Satyananda Das was a headmaster, essayist and the founder editor of *Brahmo Badi*, a journal regarding the Brahmo literature and social issues. His mother, Kusum Kumari Das was a remarkable poet and was highly influential during her time. She is mostly known for her “An Exemplary Boy” (*Adashar Chele*). Jibanananda began publishing in *Brahmo Badi* when he was in college, and later went on to contribute various Bengali magazines. His poetry takes its resource from the rich landscape and nature of

Bengal. Das's poetry envelopes the themes of love, nature, and the reality of the human condition etc.

1.2 Objective

After going through this unit you will be able to

- *understand* the biographical history of the poet,
- *understand* the literary context in which the poet wrote,
- *get* an introduction to his major works,
- *analyse* the major themes in his poetry,
- *critically* read and discuss his works.

1.3 Jibanananda Das in his time

Born in pre-independence Bengal, Das like other contemporaries was dealing with the upheavals of a colonized society, struggling to get freedom from the British. So, as a consequence, his poetry reflected the same hunger for identity and the disillusionment that followed. Das felt the impact of the Bengal division heavily and much of his poetry deals with that sense of loss of identity, and a search for the lost homeland. The historical context is of particular importance while reading his poetry as it has shaped his work, giving it a personal identity while reflecting on broader social issues of the time. Although not overtly political, his poetry often deals with a longing for freedom from the oppressive forces and an exploration of national identity. Das poetry with its reflections on the landscape and people of Bengal can be seen as a metaphor for the larger struggle for independence.

1.4 Jibanananda Das and the literary scene in Bengal

Das wrote at a time when the literary scene was gaining new momentum. The Bengal Renaissance fostered a flourishing literary, cultural and intellectual atmosphere. Like many of his contemporaries of the time, Das was highly influenced by Tagore and his work. Tagore's contribution inspired them to carve a unique identity of their own. The period also witnessed the rise of modernism in literature. Jibanananda Das known as one of the modernist writers of the time, explored new writing techniques and styles, keeping in focus the demands of the age. His work often

depicted the melancholy, and introspective nature of modernist writings.

Stop to Consider:

The Bengal Renaissance:

The Bengal Renaissance was a socio-cultural and intellectual movement that emerged in the Bengal region of India during the 19th and the early 20th centuries. It was marked by a significant shift in the fields of science, art, music, literature and social reform. This period saw a reawakening of creativity and progressive ideas, leading to a revival of Bengali culture and a re-birth of intellectual life. It was a time of re-birth and regeneration. In the social scene, reforms such as the abolition of Sati, child marriage and such were gaining momentum. Reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy pushed towards a shift in the functioning of society. In literature and the arts, Rabindranath Tagore's contributions and the resulting Nobel Prize in 1913 inspired the next generation of writers, including Jibanananda Das. The Bengal Renaissance had an indisputable contribution towards the creation of the modern Indian identity, and showed the way towards a renewed focus on the country's cultural and intellectual legacy.

1.5 The poet and his poetry

One of the most prominent poets of modern Bengali literature, Das's unique style incorporates many elements of modernism like alienation, symbolism, allusions, memory, experimental form, a sense of disillusionment and melancholy. Modernist literature frequently involves themes of alienation and isolation, and Das's works are no exception. His poetry often reflects a profound sense of loneliness and loss of identity. The characters in his poems frequently struggle with feelings of being disconnected from the world around them, which further establishes its modernist preoccupation with the individual's inner experience.

A rich layer of symbolism distinguishes Das's poetry with its elements drawn from nature and the striking character of rural Bengal. He uses imagery to highlight the beauty of the countryside with its lush fields, rivers, and foliage. Das's portrayal of love is

often intertwined with nature to bring out the transient nature of love and the longing for it. While nature dominates much of Das's poetry, he also writes about the urban landscape that helps him capture the sense of alienation that much of modernist writings deal with.

Jibanananda is often recognized as the first surrealist in Bengali poetry. He was aware of the literary movements in Europe and this encouraged Das to incorporate those modern literary techniques. His poems, especially the ones that he wrote after 1930, transcend the boundary of consciousness. He incorporated various symbols and metaphors in his poetry, and his active experimentation with the form gave his poetry a multidimensional character. Themes such as the love for nature and the glory of the motherland, the ideal woman, human condition, poverty and hunger are all justly explored in his poems. Das is also considered the first Bengali poet who used myth and archetype to narrate primeval reality. For this reason, the tales and characters of Indian, Egyptian, and Greek mythology are common in his poetry. In *Banalata Sen*, he talks about the historical epochs of ancient times. Das's poetry also makes use of local Bengali words that helps in giving it a regional appeal. Das is also found to have used many Arabic or Persian words, but his later use of English words along with Bengali helped in establishing his universal popularity.

Check Your Progress

- Q1. What are some of the characteristics of modernist writings?
- Q2. Do you know about the European Renaissance?
- Q3. What kind of influence did Surrealism have on Jibanananda Das?

1.5.1 Symbolism in Jibanananda Das's poetry

Das in his poems uses nature to symbolize human emotions and the transience of existence. In *Rupashi Bangla*, the natural landscape symbolizes different phases of the human life. The river Dhansiri, with its perennial flow depicts the flow of life and its continuous movement. The birds conjure the idea of freedom and the breaking of shackles to soar high up in the sky. The dark clouds are like the

struggles of life that are inevitable. In *Banalata Sen*, the journey of the poet that took him a thousand years represents the search for meaning and purpose in life. The character of Banalata Sen symbolizes a place of respite, beauty and belonging. For the poet, Banalata Sen is his place of retreat that allows him to forget the weariness of life and the. She is his sanctuary, his source of eternal solace. The places and people of historical importance like Ashoka, Vibhisara symbolize the quest for solace that has survived the fall of empires and endured the test of time. This never-ending search binds humanity to its ancestral roots.

Stop to Consider:

Symbolism is simply the idea that a thing in question might actually represent something else entirely. It was a late 19th-century art movement in the arts that came about as a reaction against naturalism and realism. It started with poetry and then later spread to painting and theatre as well. Some of the important symbolist poets include Stephane Mallarme, Arthur Rimbaud, Jules Laforgue etc.

1.5.2 Disillusionment and Alienation

A recurring theme in Jibanananda Das's poetry is the theme of alienation and disillusionment that isolates the poet and gives his poems a note of perpetual melancholy. In one of his poems *Aat Boshor Ager Ekdin* ("A Day Eight Years Ago"), one can trace this theme and understand how the lost glory of the past, and the decay of the present civilisation has affected the poet. The poem explores the theme of the futility of human endeavours, death and eventual decay. The poem starts abruptly with a pervasive note of horror, disclosing death by suicide. The poem talks of a distant past and how once it is lost it can never be found again. Use of images that evoke death and decay adds to the transient nature of human life. The poet's sense of disillusionment with the present is highlighted by his longing for the past. The theme of disillusionment along with his portrayal of alienation and solitude gives his poetry a modernist character. His poetic persona often feels isolated from society and disconnected from the world around him. This sense of not belonging and feeling lost is the theme of poems like *Akashlina*

("Sky-bound"). In some of his other poems, Das's disillusionment is further established by his critique of the modern world and the urban landscape. Even in *Banalata Sen*, the poet longs for some kind of solace in the modern world, feeling alienated from it. His longing also for the glory of the past is another way of expressing his discontentment with the modern civilization.

Check Your Progress:

Q4. What other modernist elements do you find in the poems of Jibanananda Das?

Q5. How is symbolism different from naturalism and realism?

Q6. Can you locate the theme of alienation in other poets?

1.5.3 Themes of death and decay

Jibanananda Das's poetry is deeply involved in the age-old questions of the transience of human life. This preoccupation with the theme of death and decay is a reflection of his disillusionment with the world. His poems talk about the temporary nature of life and the futility of human endeavours. His frequent use of imagery of death and decay in his poems serve to establish his disillusionment. In *Aat Boshor Ager Ekdin*, he uses the image of "plague rat" to depict the human condition. The entire poem is filled with images of decay, such as the haunting atmosphere settings, the fallen leaves, and the desolate landscape. These images help in depicting the temporary nature of life and the inevitability of death. The poem carries the descriptions of deserted and decaying places, reflecting the sense of loss and the decaying state of the present time. The passage of eight years signifies the slow but inevitable decay of time as if looking back at a memory that is now lost to the throes of time.

1.5.4 Nature and the natural landscape

It is evident that Jibanananda Das's poetry pays serious attention to nature and the natural landscape. It helps the poet in creating a space that is a reflection of his inner emotions as well as the thematic concerns. It also allows creating a unique and evocative landscape

that is unlike any other. Das is known for his unique portrayal of nature which is not limited to being descriptive but has deep symbolic significance. Nature often helps the poet in giving voice to his existential musings and proves important in representing his emotional state. It is well known that Das's poetry draws upon the natural beauty of Bengal, and the Bengal countryside with its luscious trees and ever-flowing rivers. His homeland acts not only as the backdrop to his poems but proves significant to his poetic aspiration. The nostalgic treatment of these natural elements gives his poems an appeal that is both personal and widely universal. In looking back at the untouched beauty of nature the poet longs for a lost paradise. Even the themes of alienation and disillusionment that Jibanananda Das is often associated with are deeply rooted in his treatment of nature. The world of nature provides him a place to contemplate the questions of existence, time, death etc. The natural setting in which most of his poetry is based adds another layer to his reflections on the transience of life and the reality of life.

Stop to Consider

The theme of nature and introspection that Jibanananda Das's poems abound in are common to those of the Romantic poets like William Wordsworth, Coleridge, John Keats, Shelley etc. So, the influence of these poets on Das is evident in his use of nature imagery to talk about the human condition. His longing for the untouched glory of the past, his worship of nature and natural landscapes, his introspective musings, his melancholic representation of the temporary nature of human life etc. are all elements that the British Romantic poets dealt with in their works.

1.6 Political Consciousness

Of course, Jibanananda Das is celebrated for his nature poetry and his profound exploration of the decaying human condition, but one aspect of his works that is often neglected is his political consciousness surrounding the socio-political scenario of the country, and particularly of Bengal during the time. This consciousness shaped much of his writings. Jibanananda Das lived during the colonial period of British India, which had obvious impact on his writings. Many of his poems carry in them a note of

resistance against the oppressive powers, and reflects the struggles of his countrymen under the colonizer. Although these themes are not as evident as his other preoccupations, there is a longing for the lost identity of the country, as well as of Bengal. In *Banalata Sen*, the journey of the poet through the ages, witnessing empires and historical events is a way of emphasizing the rich cultural heritage of the land, and a kind of resistance against the forces at work. The poet's search for freedom and comfort is also the nation's search for the same kind of freedom and solace under the British. Das's poetry is also fraught with the knowledge of the plight of his fellow human beings, struggling with poverty, famine, riots, division etc. This representation of the struggles of the marginalized allows Das to bring out the reality of the society.

Check Your Progress

Q7. How is nature represented differently in different poems?

Q8. What does the sense of longing in Jibanananda Das's poetry signify?

Q9. Are there any similarities between Jibanananda Das and the Romantic poets in terms of their treatment of nature?

1.7 His prose works

Although Das is known primarily as a poet, he also wrote prose works. A look at those would allow the reader to understand his literary genius better, and appreciate the extent of his output. Some of his notable works include *Malyaban*, *Jalpaihati*, *Kabi-kahini*, *Musalmanir Golpo* etc. Some of these are novels, others essays and short stories. His prose works give an insight into his philosophical knowledge and his engagement with existential themes. Often considered an autobiographical work, *Malyaban*, explores the mind of the protagonist, and reveals the inner emotions that motivate his actions, thoughts, and feelings. *Jalpaihati* again depicts the rich cultural and natural landscape of rural Bengal, something that Das so adroitly does in his poetry. Some of the recurring themes in poetry that one can recognize in his prose work as well is the theme of life and death, and the futility of human endeavours. In some of his other works Das also advocates for communal harmony and

mutual empathy, especially between the Hindus and the Muslims following the division of Bengal.

1.8 Summing Up

Jibanananda Das, rightly called one of the greatest Bengali poets of the 20th century, left his distinctive mark on Bengali literature with his unforgettable poetry and his exploration of profound philosophical themes in a language that is unique and impactful. His works, dealing mostly with nature and the human condition, with an accurate reflection on the horrors of the day, as well as the political reality of the modern world continues to appeal readers without being tied down to any particular time or place. The theme of nature is one of his most recognized preoccupations. Das with his ability to bring out with the help of his description, the beauty of Bengal is unparalleled. From the trees, to the river, Jibanananda talks about everything and describes everything with the kind of attention that proves his deep connection with his homeland. Nature in his poems is often used as symbols to represent deeper truths about life and society. Another recurring theme in Das's work is the theme of time, death and the ephemerality of the human experience. The way he reflects on these ideas reveals his deep understanding of the human condition, and also proves the extent of his philosophical knowledge. Das's ability to depict the various moods of Bengal and its culture, its nature and its society is admirable. His themes that are universal in their treatment and appeal has led to his global recognition and continues to attract readers across borders.

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1.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

1. Modernist literature is a part of a wider movement that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It focused on a deviation from traditional techniques of writing, and popularized the exploration of newer forms and styles. Some of the key features of modernist writings are fragmentation of thought and writing, using stream-of-consciousness method of writing, use of symbolism, multiple perspectives, disillusionment, insight into human emotions etc. These stylistic choices actually reflected the nature of the society at the time- post-war horrors, struggles of the society to get back to its past glory, loss of faith in society, difficulty of understanding human emotions, and the sense of alienation from everything. While the literature of the earlier age leaned towards realism, and aimed to reflect that reality in literature as well, modernists drew away from that, and instead focused more on the inner workings of the human mind, and the individual experiences.
2. The Renaissance was a period of “rebirth” in the arts, science, culture, believed to have originated in Italy. It was a period of transition in Europe, beginning in the 14th century and lasting into the 17th century. It was marked by a renewed interest in classical art and culture, and an attempt to revive it. In art and architecture, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo used innovative techniques and transformed the state of art and took it to newer heights. Writers like Boccaccio, Petrarch, Dante produced works that explored human nature and focused on the Renaissance idea of individualism. There was also the invention of the printing press that transformed the dissemination of knowledge and introduced a new era of writing and literacy. In science, the contribution of Copernicus, Galileo, Johannes Kepler revolutionized the way the universe was perceived, thereby opening the possibility of later inventions and discoveries. Also, it is important to mention Christopher Columbus, Vasco da

Gama who with their discovery of far-off nations led to an age of exploration, and made possible the eventual colonization of these places by European empires. As such, the Renaissance was a movement that laid the foundation for later intellectual and cultural developments in the world.

3. Surrealism was a 20th century, avant-garde movement that aimed to allow the unconscious mind of the artists to express itself, that often gets depicted as illogical, dream-like scenes. Jibanananda Das's poetry had surrealist elements in them that prove his association with the movement. These include- dream-like imagery, exploration of the unconscious mind, symbolism, sense of alienation. Jibanananda Das in his poetry uses imagery that transports the reader to another realm and blurs the distance between the real and the imaginary. The surrealist imagery of the poems allows the reader to enter a realm that is beyond the ordinary. Surrealists were deeply invested in knowing the inner workings of the unconscious mind. And, Jibanananda's poetry often explores the deeper layers of human consciousness, and use the themes of desire, emotions, memory etc. to understand the self and the universe.
4. Some other elements of modernist poetry that Jibanananda Das uses in his poetry are stream-of-consciousness and innovative use of language. He writes about his thoughts and the thoughts of his characters as it flows, often giving it a sense of immediacy. Stream-of-consciousness as a modernist technique helps in revealing the inner workings of the complex mind of the character. One poem in which Das uses the technique is *Bodh*. Das's innovative use of language is another modernist element that is overlooked. His fluent experimentation with the syntax and diction of poetry and his use of different, and original words, some of which are Bengali, gives his poetry a unique freshness and adds to its originality.
5. Symbolism, realism, and naturalism are movements that have their distinctive characteristics and are very different in approach and utility. While symbolism focuses on the use of symbols to represent ideas, realism depicts life as it is in its true character, and naturalism, which might seem like it is similar to realism, is actually influenced by scientific theories. It focuses on the idea that human beings, although different from one

another, are the product of their environment. Symbolism aims to bring out deeper truths and explore the reality of the human condition. Realism, in its true depiction of reality, often reveals many social issues and the realities of human existence. And, naturalism focuses on the impact of one's heredity and environment on one's character. In doing so, it also challenges the idea of free will and questions its existence.

6. A poet whose exploration of the theme of alienation is significant is Nissim Ezekiel. Born as a Jewish in Bombay, Ezekiel often felt out of place among his Hindu and Muslim friends. He takes up this sense of not belonging in his poem *Background Casually*. In the poem, He describes himself as the "frightened child" who was constantly mocked by his peers at the Catholic school that he went to. He felt disconnected from the outside world, creating a gulf between his inner emotions and the world outside. There was also the constant struggle of writing in a language that was not his mother tongue, resulting in the alienation of the poet. In some of his other poems, he also paints a poignant picture of human life and its temporary nature. Ezekiel's association with many philosophical and deeply intellectual ideas further contributes to the sense of alienation. And, this results in a disassociation from reality, and the conventional social beliefs.
7. Jibanananda Das is known for his use of rich and vivid imagery to represent the natural world. Often, the imagery he uses captures not only the visual aspect of nature but also the emotional connections that human beings associate with nature. Something as ordinary as the river, the moon, the trees are imbued with rich layers of meanings that reflect the inner emotions of the characters. Das takes nature not only as the guiding force but also integrates it into the layered human life, with all its struggles and individuality. Nature in Das's poetry is also associated with loss and a longing for the glory of the past. The beauty of the natural world that is temporary like human life allows the poet to capture the idea of the temporary nature of existence. He also looks at nature and realizes that like the trees, the rivers, human life is also subject to decay, and this recognition leaves in his poetry a sense of melancholy.

8. The readers of Jibanananda Das's poetry is aware of the sense of longing that manifests itself in the way he writes, the themes, the choice of language and words, the imagery etc. There is a deep sense of longing for the past along with the search for solace, and meaning in life. In *Banalata Sen*, the poet evokes memories of ancient civilizations, and historical events. The loss of that past makes the poet long for a time and place that is nowhere to be found. This leads to the desperation of the poet. There is also the sense of longing for meaning in life, an existential search for it. His works reflect this search for meaning that is not to be found in the ordinary things in life. In his depiction of the beauty of Bengal, the poet looks for simpler times in the past. Apart from the aspiration for higher philosophical knowledge, the poet also looks for those lost days of past. This gives his poetry a melancholic character. His connection to nature is imbued with a sense longing and search. In many of his poems, Das expresses his deep attachment to Bengal and its landscape, yet this attachment is tinged with a sense of loss and a desire to return to the natural world that is untouched and pristine.
9. Jibanananda Das's treatment of nature can be compared with the preoccupation with nature of the Romantic poets. Both Jibanananda Das and the Romantic poets use nature to reflect personal emotions and embody certain universal themes. Das looks at nature in order to understand personal emotions and is therefore more introspective. However, while the Romantics were more concerned with universal themes in terms of imagery and symbolism, Das's poetry focuses on the beauty of a particular region and therefore lacks the universal appeal of the Romantics. They are not rooted a particular region or cultural landscape. Like Wordsworth, Jibanananda Das longs for the past that is untouched and looks at it with a sense of nostalgia. He looks at the urban landscape and finds it deterioration from the simple joys of rural life. He writes in a style that is simple and lyrical, just like Wordsworth. Like Shelley, he writes in a way that evokes a melancholy atmosphere. Shelley also writes of the temporary nature of human existence, and the decay that time brings. There are also differences in the way Jibanananda Das looks at nature without idealizing it, in a natural, realistic way. Romantic poets also take nature to be free from the decay of

time and therefore eternal, but Das looks at the ephemeral nature of it and recognizes its transient character.

1.11 Model Questions

1. Do you think Jibanananda Das's poetry helped in shaping the course of Bengali literature in the post-Tagore generation? Elucidate.
2. Write on the use of natural imagery in the poems of Jibanananda Das.
3. How is Das's poetry different from that of his contemporaries?
4. Write about the influence of European movements on Jibanananda Das's works.
5. Can you find the same theme of alienation in other poets of his time? Discuss at least two of them.
6. Is Jibanananda Das a modernist writer? Explain briefly.
7. What role did Jibanananda Das play in popularizing Bengali literature? Elucidate.
8. Write on the stylistic elements used by Jibanananda Das in his poetry.
9. Discuss the lyrical quality of Jibanananda Das's poems.

xxx

UNIT- 2
JIBANANANDA DAS: BANALATA SEN

Unit Structure:

- 2.1 Introduction**
- 2.2 Objectives**
- 2.3 Jibanananda Das and his poems**
- 2.4 ‘Banalata Sen’: overview**
- 2.5 ‘Banalata Sen’ themes**
- 2.6 Modernist elements**
- 2.7 ‘Banalata Sen’ and other poems**
- 2.8 Summing Up**
- 2.9 References/Suggested Readings**
- 2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress**
- 2.11 Model Questions**

2.1 Introduction

Jibanananda Das is for obvious reasons often regarded as one of the most significant poets in Bengali literature after Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam. He is known for his introspective and philosophical poetry and his long-lasting influence on modern Bengali poetry. Born in Barisal, which is now in Bangladesh, Das’s father Satyananda Das was a headmaster, essayist and the founder editor of *Brahmo Badi*, a journal regarding the Brahmo literature and social issues. His mother, Kusum Kumari Das was a remarkable poet and was highly influential during her time. She is mostly known for her “An Exemplary Boy” (*Adashar Chele*). He pursued his higher education in English literature at the University of Calcutta, where he was introduced to the works of Western poets such as John Keats, T.S. Eliot, and W.B. Yeats, which significantly shaped his literary sensibility. Jibanananda Das, often called “Rupashi Banglar Kabi”, was highly underrated during his time, later evaluation of his work showed potential and received much popularity. Known chiefly for his poems, Jibanananda Das also wrote 21 novels, and 108 short stories. Some of his most popular works include *Ruposhi Bangla*, *Banalata Sen*, *Mahaprithibi*, *Shreshtha Kavita*. His poem ‘Banalata Sen’ is particularly famous and is considered a classic in Bengali literature. His poetry takes its

resource from the rich landscape and nature of Bengal. Das's poetry envelopes the themes of love, nature, and the reality of the human condition etc.

The poetry of Jibanananda Das is known for its introspective and philosophical nature, coupled with imagery that is vivid and impactful, which is again layered with a touch of melancholy. Themes in his poetry include the beauty of nature, ravages of time, temporary nature of human existence etc. Although the political and social scene of Bengal had an influence on him, his poetry is never strictly political, unlike most of the other writers of the time. His focus was less on the issues of universal significance and more on the individual. Das's poetic genius was seldom appreciated during his time. But his unconventional treatment of conventional themes, and his unique way of using language to depict the reality of life set him apart and established his position as one of the most popular modern Bengali poets. Among his most important works, *Banalata Sen* holds particular importance. Any poetry anthology of Jibanananda Das is incomplete without it. First published in 1935, 'Banalata Sen' is a poem of longing, not only for what is in the past but also for comfort and solace in the present. It is a poem about the ideal woman, the refined beauty that is also a metaphor for the beauty of rural Bengal. Written in the form of a monologue, the poem urges the readers to look at the journey as their own. The journey is a philosophical journey about the human condition and the search for meaning in life. This journey is not just a physical one but also a metaphorical exploration of the human condition. Das's genius use of language and themes has turned the character of Banalata Sen into one of the most iconic characters in modern Bengali poetry, representing the ideal of love, solace, beauty, and history. Any discussion of Jibanananda Das is incomplete without the mention of 'Banalata Sen', a poem that continues to appeal readers.

2.2 Objectives

This unit is an attempt to analyse the poem, read its context, and understand its stylistic elements. After going through this unit you will be able to

- *understand* the biographical history of the poet,

- *understand* the literary context in which the poem was written,
- *analyse* the themes of the poem,
- *read* the poem focusing on its language and stylistic elements,
- *critically* read and discuss his other works.

2.3 Jibanananda Das and his poems

Jibanananda Das was highly influenced by his upbringing in Bengal at a time when the culture and literature of Bengal was taking a revolutionary turn, with writers like Tagore making the way for future generations. Das was not an exception. He was heavily influenced by the genius of Tagore. During his time in University of Calcutta, Das was exposed to many western literary traditions, and the impact of that can be seen in his blending of western and traditional Bengali elements as well as themes. From his first collection of poems *Jhara Palak* his preoccupation with nature and the human condition became evident, and also laid the foundation for his later works. Das poems carry a sense of nostalgia and longing, and when this despondency is represented in a natural, rural landscape of the Bengal countryside, the effect is poignant and unique. Love, loss, death, decay, introspection, philosophy of life, nature, alienation, melancholy etc. are some of the themes found in his poems. There is a convergence of modernist elements with Romantic preoccupation with nature, and all this is heightened by the dexterous use of symbolism and imagery. For Jibanananda, nature is the perfect representation of the temporary human life which is prone to decay and loss. This philosophical introspection gives his poems a unique character. Although the note is of melancholy, Das juxtaposes it well with the comfort that is found in the beauty of nature which is untouched.

2.4 ‘Banalata Sen’ overview

‘Banalata Sen’ is one of the most widely-read and loved poems by the modern Bengali poet Jibanananda Das. Published in 1942 in the collection *Banalata Sen*, the poem is popular for its lyrical quality,

excellent imagery, and for its titular character Banalata Sen who represents the ideal feminine. The poem has three stanzas, each depicting a different phase of the journey. The poet begins by describing his tedious journey across time, from Sri Lanka, through the city of Ashoka and Vidarbha. This journey through the past represents the quest for meaning and solace that has driven the poet to travel relentlessly in order to realize that pursuit. When the poet says that he has travelled for a thousand years, he represents humanity from the beginning of time. This search and longing for comfort and solace has been there even during the ancient ages. People have wandered the most prosperous lands like the city of Ashoka but have failed to find any fulfilment.

The second stanza describes the beauty of Banalata Sen, comparing her to the dark night, and her face like that of a goddess, and nature. Here the poet is welcomed by Banalata Sen, who enquires about his journey and offers his comfort. The description of the beauty of the woman can be compared with the beauty of Bengal, with its rich landscape, rivers, and birds. Nothing in the world compares to the sense of belonging that one finds in one's homeland. To Jibanananda Das, Banalata Sen represents that homeland, with its untouched beauty, away from the hustle of the urban life. The final stanza reflects on the return of the poet to a place of comfort and solitude. Das uses the imagery of birds returning home, and the last glimmer of sunlight that disappears into the darkness of the night to signify a fulfilment of the arduous journey and finding peace and solitude at last.

Stop to Consider

Jibanananda Das's preoccupation with the theme of decay and melancholy can be seen as a response to the social and political scenario of Bengal. He lived through the Bengal famine, the division of Bengal, and that atmosphere of uncertainty and disillusionment manifested in his poetry in the form of melancholy themes and setting. Das's personal life was also unstable and left him dissatisfied with his life. Das was also deeply influenced by the Romantics, and his interest in the philosophical ideas about life and existence shaped most of his poetry. Like the romantics,

Jibanananda Das took to nature to express the depth of his emotions and his ideas of life. But unlike the romantics he did not worship nature, but takes it as a backdrop for existential questions and deeper inner emotions. Many of his poems carry a sense of nostalgia and longing for the past, while being aware of the temporary nature of it. His recognition of the decay of time and the reality of the human condition made him write poetry

2.5 “Banalata Sen” themes

Some of the major themes in the poem are- search for freedom and comfort, theme of journey, myth and history, feminine beauty, nature, love, longing, the transience of human life. The journey that the poet takes on is a search to find peace and fulfilment from the arduous journey of life and duties. The poet like the people of the past has travelled all over the globe, visiting the most extraordinary places, and meeting illustrious people, but nothing has fulfilled his search. With the journey the poet also reflects on the passage of time and how it decays everything, ruins empires. This is juxtaposed with the eternal beauty and timeless comfort that Banalata Sen provides. There is a description of historical events and places that is another important theme. It signifies the duration of the journey and incompleteness. Although the poet has travelled across history, he is yet to find what he is looking for. This emphasizes the difficulty of finding peace and solitude in the modern world. Das’s search for comfort and solace can also be seen as the search and longing for love and companionship that he only finds in the presence of Banalata Sen. The theme of nature is important to Jibanananda Das’s poetry as it allows the poet to depict the beauty of Banalata Sen. In the later stanzas it also helps in representing the fulfilment of the search for peace and freedom. The poet uses natural imagery to describe the beauty of Banalata Sen, and the connection with nature makes her beauty pure and timeless. Overall, the poem is an

exploration of the search for peace, eternal beauty, and the temporary nature of time and human existence.

Check Your Progress

Q1. What is the significance of the first stanza of the poem Banalata Sen?

Q2. Write about the titular character in the poem. What does she signify?

Q3. What do you understand about Jibanananda Das's poetic vision by reading the poem?

2.6 Modernist elements in 'Banalata Sen'

Jibanananda Das's poetry is known for its vivid imagery and symbolism. The poem is full of vivid, precise images and symbols. The imagery of ancient cities and places evokes a sense of history and the extent of human experience. It shows the poet's desperation and intense longing that is not limited to any particular time or place. Natural imagery of birds, the sea, nature is used to suggest ideas such as the vastness of human longing, the search for peace and clarity. The imagery of the sunlight disappearing and of evening descending, and return of the birds to the "bird's nest" symbolize the poet's return to his native land, where he attains peace and solitude.

The ideal woman symbol manifested in Banalata Sen symbolizes the standard of beauty, maternal comfort, and peace. Her beauty soothes the poet after his arduous journey across the globe. This represents the sense of refuge that the poet finds in her presence. The long, difficult journey of the traveller is contrasted with the soothing, ethereal beauty of the ideal woman. She also represents the pure and serene beauty of Bengal which is enough for the poet to find peace and fulfilment. Another modernist element is the stream-of-consciousness technique that the poet employs to capture the flow of thought of the speaker and reflect his inner feelings. As a technique stream-of-consciousness allows the writer to dig into the psychological state of the speaker and understand the depth of emotions. The abrupt beginning in the voice of the speaker heightens the sense of desperation to find comfort and peace in a

world that lacks both. There is also the element of alienation in the poem- a certain disillusionment with the outside world and society. While the speaker journeys through the ancient times there is a sense of fragmentation and disillusionment, and therefore the journey aims to find meaning and order in life. In contrast with the world of ruin of ancient empires like Sri Lanka and the city of Ashoka, the speaker finds calm and a sense of belonging in Banalata Sen. This fulfilment when contrasted with the world outside brings in the effect of an alienated society and people. Another modernist element in the poem is the lack of a time structure. The non-linear movement of time and space represents the importance of individual experience over the necessity of maintaining objective coherence.

Check Your Progress

Q4. Discuss the imagery and symbols used to describe the character of Banalata Sen.

Q5. Is Banalata Sen a modernist poem?

Q6. What does the final stanza of the poem signify? Write briefly.

2.7 'Banalata Sen' and other poems

It will do well to take a look at some other poems by Jibanananda Das that deal with similar themes. Poems like *Abar Asibo Phire*, *Tomar Shongey*, by Jibanananda Das have similar concerns. In *Abar Asibo Phire* the poet suggests a yearning to return to the simpler joys of past. Using nature imagery of birds, rivers and trees, Das draws up a vivid picture of rural Bengal and longs for the beautiful past. The tone of nostalgia is evident in the way the speaker wants to return to his homeland in every form, as it is the only place where he finds comfort and emotional fulfilment. *Tomar Shongey* also carries a hint of longing for the beloved, and the eternal beauty of the ideal woman that stands through time and decay.

There are also other modernist poets that write about the sense of alienation and fragmentation in the modern world. One such poet is T.S. Eliot who in his poem *The Wasteland*, refers to various cultural and historical events and time in search of meaning in a post-war world that lacked order and calm. This journey finds a release and a potential answer towards the end of the poem, which ends in hope

for peace and order. Both of these poets explore the themes of existential anxiety, longing for peace and comfort in a world that lacks it, and the futility of human endeavours in such a landscape.

2.8 Summing Up

Often considered one of the most, if not the most important poem by Jibanananda Das, 'Banalata Sen' is known for Das's lyrical use of language, modern techniques, unconventional themes, and his preoccupation with philosophical truths. Das takes the personal quest of the speaker and makes it universal, thereby establishing the poem's appeal to a wider audience across borders. The poem is a journey of a lifetime, a never-ending quest for meaning in life. With the help of imagery, symbolism and language, the poet captures the essence of such an arduous journey. The eventual peace that comes when the speaker finds himself in the presence of Banalata Sen, the ideal of love, beauty and peace, gives the poet a sense of fulfilment. The poem is divided in three distinctive stanzas, and each of them related a different phase of the poet's journey. In the first stanza the poet describes his journey that is arduous and uneventful across time and space. By describing his route across different nations, both mythical and real he makes the reader imagine the vastness of such an undertaking. He mentions Sri Lanka, Malaya, and other illustrious cities of the past symbolizing the seriousness of his quest for peace and solace. The second stanza deals with the description of the captivating nature of Banalata Sen's beauty. Das compares her hair to the dark nights of Vidisha, her face to the sculpted face of a goddess, and her eyes to the nest of some bird. Similarly to the poet Banalata Sen brings that same feeling of being at peace and he finds comfort in her presence. It is Banalata Sen, the character who asks the poet about his journey as if to convey the equal intensity of her longing for the poet to come and visit her. Her longing represents the longings of the homeland, and the nature. The final stanza describes the culmination of the poet's journey that ends in peace and fulfilment. After travelling to lands far-off and mythical, and failing to find meaning, the return of the poet is represented by the return of the bird to its nest, its ultimate destination. The poem is introspective in its quest for some peace and meaning in life. It allows the reader to look into the depths of human quest and the endless journey of finding comfort and peace in a world that fails to

offer that. The poem has attained wide acclaim for its exploration of deep philosophical ideas, its lyrical beauty, its use of historical imagery and symbolism. The blend of romantic elements and philosophical truths is exceptional and it continues to enjoy critical appreciation.

2.9 References/Suggested Readings

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Dasgupta, Subhas. *The Poetry of Jibanananda Das: A Revaluation*. Nabajatak, 2002.

Perkins, David. *A History of Modern Poetry*. Harvard University Press, 1976.

Seely, Clinton. *A Poet Apart: A Literary Biography of the Bengali Poet Jibanananda Das*. University of Delaware Press, 1990.

2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

1. The first stanza of the poem begins abruptly with the speaker breaking into a monologue about his journey across continents and nations, mythical cities and historical empires, only to comfort. “For thousands of years” allows the poet to describe the arduous journey that felt like a thousand years across borders and time. It is important to understand that the journey of the speaker is a universal journey that people right from the ancient times have undertaken in order to locate the ultimate destination. The futility of the journey is described by the weary heart of the poet. This stanza is significant as it introduces the reader to the journey of the speaker and gives an initial impression of the significance of such a quest, and the futility of human endeavours. It is also a manifestation of Jibanananda Das’s insistence of finding true freedom in the midst of nature and in the urban landscape. The imagery of the ancient cities and places represents the desperation of the poet to find peace, and explains

how no matter what one does, even the riches of the world fail to bring the sense of fulfilment and meaning that humans so desperately look for.

2. The character of Banalata Sen is the ideal feminine, the symbol of peace, love, comfort and timeless beauty. Banalata Sen represents eternal grace and peace in a world that is unstable and lacks order. She is described by the poet as one with hair like the nights in Vidisha, face like a goddess and eyes like a bird's nest. In describing her the poet reveals his own longing for peace and tranquility, and spiritual freedom. He compares her to historical places, mythical faces, and natural elements. Therefore, her character signifies a connection with the distant past that is free from the decay of time. Banalata Sen symbolizes a connection to the past, as her beauty and presence transcend time. She represents the continuity of historical and cultural glory. Her presence soothes the weary speaker after his journey and provides him a space of tranquil existence. The speaker is like a bird that returns to its nest at the day's end. He too returns to the familiar embrace of Banalata Sen after a long journey, being sure that only her presence can bring him solace. She is nature, culture, history and religion to him. Her presence is soothing, encouraging, eventful, and feels like a spiritual experience.
3. Jibanannada Das is a modernist poet, plagued by the issues that other modernist writers write about as well. But his poetry is not limited to just that. A key aspect of his poetic vision is the richness of the natural world that he often describes in his poems. For him, the Bengal countryside with its luscious forests, and rivers, and birds has a beauty that is both captivating and intriguing. His depiction of nature brings out his longing for the past, untouched rural landscape, as opposed to the urban life. It also brings out his preoccupation with the transience of human life. His poetry serves as a representation of the eternal beauty of nature and the changing seasons depict the cycle of life and death. His poetic vision is affected by the sense of nostalgia that runs through his works. His natural descriptions also speak of that longing for an idyllic past. It is important to recognize that his longing also represents a universal longing, a quest for the ordinary joys of life. His particular emphasis on the beauty of the Bengal countryside gives roots his poem to a particular

culture, but his exploration of themes that are universal and resonate with readers across borders allows for a wider appeal.

4. The sense of disillusionment that is found in his poetry also adds to his poetic vision. Jibanananda Das's poems depict the disillusionment of the poet, and his alienation from the society and its issues. The tumultuous state of the nation and Bengal during the time shaped much of his poetry. This also connects well with his preoccupation with the themes of life and death. Das writes about the human condition, and the passage of time. His contemplation of the human existence has deep philosophical insights and shows the depth of his understanding of the temporary nature of everything. Therefore, his poetic vision is complex yet influential in inspiring generations of writers after him.
5. As a modernist poet, Jibanananda Das is known for his use of imagery and symbolism to represent deeper truths and meanings in his poems. In 'Banalata Sen', the poet describes the beauty of Banalata Sen by using both nature and romantic imagery. She is described as a goddess with hair as magical as the nights in Vidisha, the shape of her face as symmetrical and extraordinary as that of a goddess carved by a master sculptor. The imagery of the bird's nest is used to describe her eyes that bring the same sense of calm and belonging that a bird's nest brings to the bird. Her description makes her appear like a mythical figure from ancient stories, giving her a mystical aura. Das uses many symbols and images to bring to life the character of Banalata Sen. The images reveal the poet's own longings as much as it adds to the beauty of the ideal woman. From the first stanza, Jibanananda Das uses mythical imagery that sets the platform for the final reveal. By highlighting the arduous journey and the struggles he had to endure before finding himself in the presence of Banalata Sen, the poet heightens the beauty of the woman. What he could not find in the cities of Ashoka, the empires of the past, he finds it in Banalata Sen. This signifies that her beauty is greater than all of that. It also signifies the mystical and elusive nature of the character as it took him so long to finally reach her. Banalata Sen is the light that brings peace and comfort to the speaker who had to travel through the darkness of life to come to her and sit by her. This journey indicates his relentless pursuit of light, manifested in the character of

Banalata Sen. Light here means knowledge, and meaning and comfort, while the darkness of life suggests the struggles of life, and the reality of human existence. Therefore, it can be said that Jibanananda Das adroitly uses imagery and symbolism to describe the eternal beauty of Banalata Sen.

6. A modernist poem has certain elements that distinguish it, and as a modernist poet himself Jibanananda Das makes use of these elements and techniques in the poem Banalata Sen. The poem is filled with imagery and symbolism. From the description of the journey across nations, to the beauty of Banalata Sen everything is described with images that are vivid and precisely placed. 'Banalata Sen' blends the images of historical empires, mythical cities, natural elements and spiritual ideas to create a narrative that poignantly describes the human condition, and the search for meaning in life. The images in the poem give it a lyrical appeal while describing questions of philosophical importance. The use of the stream-of-consciousness technique is another modernist element in the poem. As the speaker in the poem journeys across time, this technique allows the poet to capture the movement and also give an insight into the mind of the traveller. Das's poetry is a poetry of introspection and an exploration of the deeper truths of life and the individual. The stream-of-consciousness technique helps him achieve that. The way the narrative flows also allows the poet to talk about things from the past while discussing the issues of the present. The concern about the meaning of life and the quest for it is a modernist theme. The speaker in the poem sets out to find meaning and peace but all his endeavours prove futile. It is only in the presence of Banalata Sen that he achieves solace and meaning. There is also the theme of alienation and disillusionment.
7. The final stanza of the poem is about the fulfilment of the poet and his meeting with Banalata Sen. The tone of the poem gets relaxed with the "day's end", with the birds returning to their nests, the veil of dew spread across the landscape. Even the last glimmer of sunlight is wiped out and the rich colours of the earth fade out. The return of the birds after a long journey in search of food and shelter is compared with the speaker's return home. To him, home means the presence of Banalata Sen. His

long and tedious journey across the globe comes to an end when he finds the light of Banalata Sen, who represents knowledge and meaning, and peace. The return of the poet is like a return to his homeland, in the midst of nature in rural Bengal. All the rich nations of the world could not give him the peace and solace that he finds in the presence of Banalata Sen. If read as a love poem. Banalata Sen can be seen as the beloved who waits for the return of her lover, and he after traversing through the rough terrains of the world comes back to her eventually. The last stanza gives a deep philosophical insight into the human existence. The last stanza is significant as it provides a resolution and a return to peace for the speaker. It also focuses on the idea of having a place to find solace and peace, almost as if life's struggles although inevitable can actually have a tranquil conclusion.

2.11 Model Questions

1. What are some other elements of modernist poetry in the poem?
2. What is the significance of historical and cultural imagery in 'Banalata Sen'?
3. Do you think the speaker actually attained eternal peace, or is it a temporary relief? Elucidate.
4. Analyse the structure and form of the poem.
5. How is the poem different from Jibanananda Das's other works?
6. What philosophical questions does the poem raise? Does the speaker find the answers?
7. How is the poem a reflection of Bengal and its culture?
8. Is it a romantic poem? Give reasons to support your answer.

xxx

UNIT- 3
INTRODUCING FAIZ AHMED FAIZ

Unit Structure:

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Objectives

3.3 Life and background

3.4 His Works

3.5 Critical Reception

3.6 Contexts of the Poems

3.7 Reading the Poems

3.8 Summing Up

3.9 References/Suggested Readings

3.1 Introduction

Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911–1984) is considered one of the most influential Pakistani poets of Urdu language. He occupies a significant place in World Literature as one of the greatest poets. He lived a life deeply intertwined with the political and cultural landscape of South Asia. His poetry has been translated into numerous languages. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to discuss the life and background of the poet along with his literary journey.

3.2 Objectives

This is the third unit of block II. The aim of this unit is to provide you with a general introduction to the poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz and his works to acquaint you with his life and the critical reception he received as a poet.

After finishing the unit, you will be able to--

- *know* the poet's life and background,

- *obtain* a general idea of the works of the poet,
- *gain* a comprehensive knowledge of poetic themes,
- *place* the poet in the tradition of world literature.

3.3 Life and Background

Faiz Ahmed Faiz was born on February 13, 1911 in Sialkot, Punjab (now in Pakistan). He belongs to a Kashmiri descendant land-owning family. He received his early education in a mosque school in Sialkot. Then he was enrolled in the Scotch Mission School in 1921 and completed his matriculation in 1927. He attended the Government Murray College Sialkot. Faiz's father, Sultan Mohammed Khan who was a barrister played a significant role in forming his intellectual and social outlook. Faiz's interest in literature and poetry began at a young age as he got influenced by the rich literary environment of Sialkot. He was particularly drawn towards progressive and revolutionary ideas, which subsequently became the defining characters of his poetry and political life.

In 1929, Faiz moved to Lahore to pursue his higher education at the Government College University. Lahore was then a hub of intellectual and cultural activity.

During his time in Lahore, Faiz lost his father unexpectedly in 1931, which led to financial difficulties and family disputes over property. Despite these challenges, Faiz completed his B.A. in 1931 and obtained a Master's degree in English and Arabic literature in 1933 and 1934, respectively. After completing his education, Faiz started his career as an educator. He was appointed as a lecturer at the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College of Amritsar in 1935. Faiz was introduced to Marxist ideology by Mamud al-Afar and his wife, Rashid Jahan, who were prominent figures in the All-India Progressive Writers' Movement, a literary movement that aims to use literature as a tool for socio-political reform. This movement held its inaugural meeting in 1936 in Lucknow. He became a member and secretary of the Punjab branch of the Progressive Writers' Movement. In 1940, he took up a position as a lecturer in English at Hailey College in Lahore, while continuing to write poetry.

He embarrassed the Marxist perspective through discussions and reading of Marxist literature. Marxism offered Faiz a lens through which he critiqued the social inequalities and injustice prevalent during the colonial period. His exposure to Marxist ideology inspired him to explore themes such as class struggle, oppression, and the promotion of social justice in his literary works.

Simultaneously, Faiz also remained actively involved in literary circles and contributed to various progressive Urdu journals. Through his writings and engagements in these circles, Faiz sought to promote progressive ideas, advocating societal transformation and equality. In October 1941, Faiz Ahmed Faiz married Alys George, who passed away in 2003. Alys also shared Faiz's left-wing political views and proved to be a suitable partner for him in his turbulent life.

Faiz's commitment to social justice drove him to join the Communist Party of India in 1947. He actively participated in the struggle against British colonial rule. During World War II, Faiz joined the British Indian army as a captain in the Public Relations Department and was raised to the rank of lieutenant colonel by 1944. In 1947, he left the army and was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE). Later, he also advocated for the rights of workers and peasants in post-Independence India. However, his outspoken activism eventually resulted in his arrest in 1951 under the Safety Act, a move aimed at suppressing dissent. His imprisonment deeply influenced his poetry, strengthening his determination to use his literary skills in the face of political and social causes.

The partition of India in 1947 had a significant impact on Faiz's personal and literary life. Along with millions of others, Faiz migrated to Pakistan after the partition of Punjab. The trauma and disruption caused by the partition left a deep mark on Faiz, and this was reflected in his poetry. In his poetry, he often explores themes of displacement, loss, and the search for identity.

After moving to Pakistan, Faiz continued his literary and journalistic pursuits. His works played a crucial role in the development of Urdu literature and were vital in shaping the cultural identity of the newly formed nation. His poetry resonated with people across diverse

linguistic and cultural boundaries, earning him wide readership, recognition and admiration.

Faiz served as the editor of some prominent literary magazines and newspapers. He worked as an editor-in-chief of the English newspaper "Pakistan Times" and the Urdu newspaper "Imroze.". In 1938, he also served as the editor-in-chief of the monthly Urdu magazine "Adab-e-Latif" until 1946. Through his editorials, Faiz advocated for the rights of the workers, social equality, and political freedom. He used these platforms to raise awareness about social issues, criticize authoritarianism, and promote democratic values.

Faiz was deeply involved in the Pakistan Trade Union movement. He was arrested in 1951 for his role in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy. During his four years of imprisonment, he wrote some of his most celebrated poetry. After being deported, he moved to London. In 1958, he returned to Pakistan but was detained again. Later, he went to Moscow on Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's requests. Eventually, he settled in the United Kingdom.

Faiz returned to Pakistan in 1964 and lived in Karachi. He became the Rector of Abdullah Haroon College. With Bhutto's support, Faiz received a position in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to make people oppose the separation of Bangladesh.

In 1972, Bhutto appointed Faiz as the Culture Advisor at the Ministry of Culture. Faiz retired from government roles in 1974. After Bhutto was removed from power and executed, Faiz was deeply affected and left Pakistan and went to Beirut, Lebanon.

In Beirut, he became the editor of 'Lotus' magazine which was sponsored by the Soviet Union and developed friendships with Edward Said and Yasser Arafat. As his health declined in 1982, he returned to Pakistan. Faiz died in Lahore in 1984. At the time of his

death, he was a nominee for the Nobel Prize in Literature. His death marked the end of a notable era in Urdu literature. However, his influence and contributions continue to have a lasting impression all over the world.

3.4 His Works:

Faiz Ahmed Faiz is known for his revolutionary but romantic poetry. He intertwines classical forms with contemporary themes. In his early literary career, romantic themes were dominant in his poetry, but later he shifted towards more socio-political themes. The well-being of society and the welfare of the people was his primary concern in his later poems. Faiz's early poetry was deeply influenced by classical Urdu poets like Ghalib and Iqbal, but he quickly developed a unique voice. In 1938, Faiz started his career as editor-in-chief of the Urdu magazine 'Adab-e-Latif.' and in 1947, he was appointed as the editor-in-chief of the newspaper "Pakistan Times.". Later, he also served as the editor-in-chief for the literary journal "LOTUS," which was funded by the Soviet Union. He also published the biography of Amir Abdur Rahman, an Emir of Imperial Afghanistan. In 1941, Faiz published his first poetry collection, "Naqsh-e-Faryadi" (Remonstrance), and went on to publish more books of poetry throughout his life. Some of his works include "Dast-e-Saba" (Fingers of the Wind) (1952), Zindan Nama (Prison Thoughts) (1956), "Dast-e-Tah-e-Sang (Duress) (1965), "Sar-e-Wadi-e-Seena (At the Head of the Valley of the Chest) (1971), Sham-e-Shehr-e-Yaran (Evening in the City of Friends) (1978), "Mere Dil Mere Musafir" (My Heart, My Traveler) (1981), "Saare Sukhan Hamare" (All our Words) (1983), "Nuskha-ha-e-Wafa" (Draft of Fidelity) (1984), and "Ghubar-e-Ayyam (The Ashes of Time) (1984).

3.5 Critical Reception

Faiz Ahmed Faiz is seen as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century, especially in Urdu literature. Faiz poetry is adored for its beautiful language, deep emotions, and strong social and political messages. His poems are praised for their beautiful language, blending old Urdu with new ideas. He is very skilled in using meter, rhyme, and rhythm. Faiz deals with important social and political issues like resistance, justice, and human rights in his poems. His famous poem "Hum Dekhenge" (We shall see) has been used in many social movements as slogans. His poetry connects deeply with people, expressing a wide range of feelings such as love, loss, hope, and sadness which makes his work relatable.

Along with literature, Faiz also contributed to the music, theatre, and activism. Many of his poems have been turned into songs. His works are celebrated in both India and Pakistan, as well as among South Asia. Some critics say Faiz's poetry can be sometimes difficult to understand because of its complex imagery and language making it less accessible to everyone.

Stop to Consider

Faiz Ahmed Faiz received several prestigious awards throughout his life, recognizing his literary talent and commitment to social justice. Here are some of the most notable ones:

Lenin Peace Prize (1962): This prestigious award, given by the Soviet Union, was a major recognition of Faiz's voice for peace and social justice. He was the first Asian poet to receive this honour.

Nishan-e-Imtiaz (1990- Posthumous): This is Pakistan's highest civilian award and it was bestowed upon Faiz posthumously in recognition of his outstanding contribution to literature.

Lotus Prize for Literature (1976): This international literary award was established by the Afro-Asian Writers' Association in recognition of Faiz's contribution to Urdu literature.

Nomination for Nobel Prize in Literature (Shortly before 1984): Though he didn't win the Nobel Prize, the nomination itself is a testament to the global recognition of his literary merit.

MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) (1946): This award, given by the British government, pre-dates Pakistan's independence. It highlights the early recognition which Faiz received for his literary talent.

Additional Recognition:

Faiz's poems have been translated into numerous languages, showcasing his work to a wider audience.

He is celebrated as a symbol of resistance and social justice in Pakistan and beyond.

Literary awards named after him, like the Faiz Award, keep his legacy alive and recognize the work of other poets.

Overall, Faiz Ahmed Faiz's awards and recognition solidify his position as a towering figure in Urdu literature and a voice for the oppressed.

3.6 Contexts of the Poems

Faiz Ahmed Faiz stands as a towering figure in Urdu literature, not only for his poetry but also for his unwavering commitment to social justice. His poetry is a potent blend of artistic beauty and revolutionary spirit, which can be best understood within the historical and political context of his life. Faiz's early collections, like "Naqsh-e-Faryadi" (Remonstrance) (1941) and "Dast-e-Saba" (Fingers of the Wind) (1952), reflect his mastery of traditional Urdu poetry. Themes such as love, longing, and nature dominated these works. He employed vivid imagery and a lyrical style to explore the depth of human emotions. Poems like "Raat yun dil main teri (Last Night) and "Phir koi aaya dil ye zar" (Solitude, composed during this phase, show his romantic sensibilities). This intertwining of

love and socio-political themes became a hallmark of Faiz's style of writing. After the partition of India in 1947, he witnessed the violence and displacement of millions; as a result, his poetry grew more political. Collections like "Dast-e-Saba" (Fingers of the Wind) (1956) addressed themes of displacement, violence, and the search for identity. Poems like "Subh-e-Azadi" (The Dawn of Freedom) deal with the disillusionment after independence, while "Dharti Maan Le" ("Accept, O Earth") laments the human cost of political upheaval. These works marked Faiz's transition from a romantic poet to being a voice for the voiceless. Faiz was associated with the Communist Party of Pakistan, which led to his imprisonment in 1951. The experience within the prison fueled his revolutionary spirit and this got reflected in collections like "Zindan Nama" (Prison Thoughts) and "Sar-e-Waadi-e-Seena" (At the Head of the Valley of the Chest). Poems like "Mujhe Dhundne Aaye Zindani Mein" (You Came to Find Me in Prison) and "Hum Mukhalif Hain" (We are Opposers) became powerful anthems for those fighting for freedom and social justice. These works highlight Faiz's protest against oppression. Faiz's outspoken nature continued to land him in trouble. During General Zia-ul-Haq's regime, he was forced into exile. However, Faiz continued to write with a sense of purpose. Collections like "Shaam-e-Sheher-e-Yaaraan" (The Evening of the City of Friends) and "Raat Di Raat" (Night After Night) explored themes of resistance, exile, and the yearning for a better future. "Hum Dekhenge" ("We Shall See") written during this period is still a potent call for social change and democracy across South Asia. These works demonstrate Faiz's unwavering commitment to his ideals. Faiz was an extraordinary writer in Urdu. He was able to paint vivid images with his words by drawing inspiration from nature, ancient stories, and even ordinary things. He used metaphors, similes, and symbols to make his poems understandable and deeply emotional. Faiz has the ability to weave love and revolution together seamlessly. In almost all of his works, he expressed his desire for a fair society through the language of romantic love. This unique blend resonated with readers and which makes his message of revolution even more powerful. Faiz's poetry goes beyond borders and languages. He became a symbol of resistance for oppressed communities worldwide. His contributions still continue to inspire generations of activists, artists, and writers across the globe. Even today, Faiz's poems are recited during

protests, performed by musicians, and studied in universities, demonstrating their enduring relevance.

3.7 His Poetry

“Naqsh-e-Faryadi” (Remonstrance) is the first collection of poetry published by Faiz Ahmed Faiz in 1941. With this collection, Faiz was able to establish himself as a significant voice in Urdu literature. The poems in this collection are a blend of traditional ghazal with modern themes. The poems depict a deep sense of longing and sorrow, which are the characteristics of classical ghazals. Faiz's depiction of love is not solely romantic, but also has themes of separation, sacrifice, and hope. Faiz's concern for social justice and his political awareness are evident in this collection of poetry. He addresses socio-political issues such as oppression, inequality, and the struggles of the common people. The poems show Faiz's concern towards the socio-political condition of the British colonial period in India and the emerging struggle for independence. His style of writing is rich and vivid, and the influence of traditional Persian and Urdu literature is evident. The poems in this collection show his use of poetic techniques like metaphor, symbolism, and imagery. "Mujhse Pehli Si Mohabbat Mere Mehboob Na Maang" (The Love We Had Before) and “Bol” (Speak) are the notable poems included in this collection. In the poem "Mujhse Pehli Si Mohabbat Mere Mehboob Na Maang" (The Love We Had Before), Faiz brought together personal love and socio-political realities. The speaker asks his beloved not to expect the same love as they used to share before. The world's suffering and injustices made them realize that there are greater issues in life that they need to look into. In the poem “Bol” (Speak), Faiz urges people to speak out against oppression and injustice. The poem is a reflection of Faiz's revolutionary spirit and his belief that words are strong tools of resistance. The repetitive structure and imperative tone of the poem emphasize the need and importance of raising one's voice against injustice.

The poetry collection “Dast-e-Saba” (Fingers of the Wind) (1952) was written during his years of imprisonment from 1951 to 1955. The poems in this collection explore the themes of resistance, revolution, human suffering, and longing for freedom. The poems

encourage the downtrodden to rise against their oppressors and give hope for a better future through collective struggle. Two well-known poems from this collection are "Nisar mein teri galiyoun ke" and "Aaj bazaar mein pa-ba-jaulan chalo." These poems are admired for their emotional depth and their messages about life and society. The poems clearly show the pain and suffering of people living under oppressive governments. Faiz reflects his own experience in prison and exile in his writing. He doesn't only describe the suffering; he also appeals to the readers to come forward and work together to make a just society. Faiz's poetry is rich in symbolism. The title "Dast-e-Saba" itself stands as a metaphor for the gentle yet persistent force of change. Symbols used in the poems, such as 'chains,' 'prison,' and 'night' represent oppression, while 'morning' and 'spring' represent freedom and hope.

"Dast-e-Tah-e-Sang, translated as "The Hand Beneath the Stone, or Duress," is one of Faiz's notable poems that reflects Faiz's experiences, thoughts, and socio-political observations during a period of political turmoil in Pakistan's history. It is a masterpiece that highlights Faiz's ability to express social criticism in a lyrical way, making it a cornerstone of Urdu literature. "Bol ke lab azaad hain tere" and "Bahaar aayi." are notable poems which are included in this collection.

"Sar-e-Wadi-e-Sina" (1971) is a poetry collection written after Faiz's travels in the Middle East. The poems in this collection reflect the global struggles for freedom. The poems combine personal emotions with broader socio-political themes. "Hum ke thehre ajnabi" and "Chand roz aur meri jaan." are notable poems of this collection. The collection shows Faiz's deep empathy towards the oppressed worldwide. It highlights his everlasting commitment towards justice and human dignity.

The poetry collection "Sham-e-Shehr-e-Yaran" (Evening in the City of Friends) by Faiz evokes a sense of nostalgia and longing for a past era of friendship and joy. Faiz makes use of vivid imagery and portraits of a vibrant city that was once lively around friends but is now lifeless. It reflects on the passage of time and the pain of separation from friends. Through his powerful words, Faiz conveys a deep sense of longing for the friends who are no longer present. It masterfully weaves together personal emotions, loss and social issues using rich imagery and beautiful language.

"Mere Dil Mere Musafir (My Heart, My Traveler), published in 1981, explores the themes of love, exile, resistance, and hope. This collection was written during Faiz's exile from Pakistan. The traveler symbolizes the journey of life. The poems reflect Faiz's feelings of displacement and yearning for his homeland. "Kuch Ishq Kiya Kuch Kaam Kiya" and "Mere Dim Mere Musafir" are notable poems from this collection. The collection "Saare Sukhan Hamare (All Our Words) was published towards the later years of Faiz's life. "Saare Sukhan Hamare" is no exception, addressing themes of love, revolution, social justice, and humanism like the other collections.

"Nuskha-e-Wafa (The Draft of Fidelity), another significant work by Faiz, deals with the themes of loyalty, betrayal, and perseverance. "Nuskha-e-Wafa" is known for its deep emotions and profound sense of empathy.

In Ghubar-e-Ayyam, "The Dust of Days" or "The Ashes of Time" is a significant poetic collection by Faiz. This collection is renowned for its depth of emotion, lyrical beauty, and reflections on various aspects of life, society, and human existence. Like the other collections of Faiz's poetry, themes of social justice, equality, and the plight of the oppressed are also prevalent in "Ghubar-e-Ayyam." The title implies a reflection on the passage of time. Faiz contemplates the transience of life, memories, and the inevitability of change. Each poem in "Ghubar-e-Ayyam" reflects Faiz's emotional depth and his ability to express his emotions with clarity and poignancy. Throughout "Ghubar-e-Ayyam," Faiz criticized the societal failures and the unfulfilled dreams of progressive movements in Pakistan.

Check Your Progress

- Q1. How has Faiz influenced modern Urdu poetry and literature?
- Q2. Discuss some of Faiz's key anthologies highlighting the post independence era.

3.8 Summing Up

Faiz Ahmed Faiz is a major figure in World Literature. He is known for combining artistic beauty with revolutionary ideas. He was deeply influenced by his upbringing and education, which fostered his love for literature and poetry. Moving to Lahore for college and subsequent involvement in the All-India Progressive Writers' Movement marked the beginning of his lifelong commitment to social justice and Marxism.

There was a gradual shift in Faiz poetry after the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. Sociopolitical themes took over his romantic themes. His several poems are sung as anthems in various social movements, as they stand for justice and human rights. Although Faiz was imprisoned and exiled for his political beliefs, he continued to write powerful poetry.

Throughout his life, Faiz faced several criticisms. While some criticize him for his linguistic complexities, some comment that his political views create limitations for the universal approach of his works. Faiz not only contributed to literature but also to music and theater. Faiz shows a unique ability to bring together love and revolution together using vivid imagery. His poetry has been inspiring to activists, artists, and writers globally. He is celebrated for the beauty, depth, and commitment to social justice in his poetry. Critics argue that Faiz idealizes the experiences of suffering and struggle and makes them seem more romantic. Despite the harsh criticism that he came across, Faiz Ahmed Faiz's work remains highly influential.

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UNIT- 4
FAIZ AHMED FAIZ: THE LOVE WE HAD BEFORE

Unit Structure:

- 4.1 Introduction**
- 4.2 Objectives**
- 4.3 Reading the poem**
- 4.4 Major Themes**
- 4.5 Poetic Style**
- 4.6 Critical Reception**
- 4.7 Summing Up**
- 4.8 References/Suggested Readings**

4.1 Introduction

Faiz Ahmed Faiz is considered one of the greatest Urdu poets of the 20th century. His works have been translated into several languages worldwide. In the previous chapter, we have already discussed his personal and literary journey. In this chapter, we will critically discuss the poem "The Love We Had Before" (Pehli si Mohabbat) prescribed in your syllabus. It is one of the frequently sung and translated poems that reflect the poet's personal feelings for his former lover and his willingness to sacrifice those feelings for the welfare of society.

4.2 Objectives

This is the fourth unit of block II. The aim of this unit is to provide you a critical understanding of the poem "The Love We Had Before" by Faiz Ahmed Faiz which is prescribed in your syllabus. It will mention the main themes and explain the poetic style of the poet.

After finishing the unit you will be able to--

- *read* the poem in the proper context,

- *interpret* the poem critically,
- *acquaint* yourself with the major themes of the poem,
- discuss the poetic style of the poet.

4.3 Reading the poem

Mahmood Jamal: “Do not ask of me, my love”

(From - Modern Urdu Poetry, 1986)

“Do not ask of me, my love,
that love I once had for you.

There was a time when
life was bright and young and blooming,
and your sorrow was much more than
any other pain.

Your beauty gave the spring everlasting youth:
your eyes, yes your eyes were everything,
all else was vain.

While you were mine, I thought, the world was mine.”

In the first stanza of the poem “The Love We Had Before” the poet asks his beloved not to expect the same love he had for her before. He remembers a time when his life was bright and joyful. The poet cherishes the time they spent together and feels that the beloved's sorrow is more important than any other pain in the world. This is because of the love that existed between him and his lover. The poet is unable to see any pain and suffering beyond his love. Her beauty enchants him so much that he was blind to everything else around him. He is a captive of her beautiful eyes and fails to recognise the reality of life. He feels that his love for her would give him an

everlasting youth. He believes that there is nothing beyond love and doesn't know what else to do besides loving and being loved.

“Though now I know that it was not reality,
that's the way I imagined it to be;
for there are other sorrows in the world than love,
and other pleasures, too.”

In the next part of the poem, the poet talks about his realisation. He understands that love is not all he wants in life. He also realises that there is much more to seek in life. He reveals that when he was in love, he thought that the whole world belonged to him. He believed that love fulfills the gaps of life, dreams and desires of human being. He also admits that he failed to understand that there were other things beyond love.

In this stanza, he confesses that he has come to see that his view of love was just an illusion. He used to see love as a dream but now wants to detach himself from this illusion. He desires to go back to reality, in order to find out what is happening around the world. He is trying to break free from his illusion. He now realizes there are other sorrows in the world beyond his beloved's sorrows. He contradicts his earlier belief about sorrow. He also realizes that there are other pleasures in the world besides love. He needs to look into the sorrows and sufferings which are more intense than an individual's sorrow. He justifies his detachment in these lines and tries to move away from the comfort zone of love he had been living in. He highlights that pleasure and pain is part of love. While unfulfilled love can bring great sorrow, it can also be a medium of boundless pleasure. He again asks his beloved not to expect the same love he once had for her, as he has to detach himself from her. He has ultimately realized that life holds more value than just love. Hence, he would fail to shower the same amount of love he had for his beloved before.

“Woven in silk and satin and brocade,
those dark and brutal curses of countless centuries:
bodies bathed in blood, smeared with dust,

sold from market-place to market-place,
bodies risen from the cauldron of disease,
pus dripping from their festering sores-
my eyes must also turn to these.”

You're beautiful still, my love, but I am helpless too;
for there are other sorrows in the world than love,
and other pleasures too.

Do not ask of me, my love,
that love I once had for you!

The next stanza refers to rich fabrics like brocade and silk that symbolise authority. “.dark and brutal curses...” stands for the miseries and sufferings that the innocent people went through due to war, slavery and diseases. He talks about the brutal oppression meted out by those in power to the poor masses. Those brutal wars against the voiceless people continued for countless centuries. “...Bodies bathed in blood...” refer to those wars which caused great havoc in society as countless people lost their lives. “...Smearred with dust...” refers to the dead bodies treated like animals. Poverty leads to the people selling themselves and their children as slaves in order to provide food to the family to survive the war. The people of the world have lost everything due to war. During war, people suffered from serious diseases, and many lost their lives in pain and suffering. “...Pus dripping from the body...” symbolizes the pain that the poor people goes through due to unattended wounds. The poet failed to see these harsh realities when he was devoted to his beloved and captivated by her eyes. The poet finally realises that there are much more to bother about in life than love alone. He repents that he has wasted his favourable time drowned in love while he should have given attention to the suffering of the world in the hour of need. He also consoles his beloved that she’s beautiful and he still loves her. But he has other reasons to worry too and he cannot be around her all the time. He is helpless as he needs to serve humanity. Hence, he again asks his

beloved not to expect the same kind of love from him again which he had once for her.

4.4 Major Themes

Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem "The Love We Had Before" (Mujh Se Pehli Si Mohabbat) explores several themes. Some notable themes in the poem are nostalgia, detachment, social injustice, sacrifice, human sufferings, responsibility and revolutionary spirit. Each of these themes deeply connect to the poet's emotional journey and reflects broader social and political concerns. Some of the themes are discussed here:

Nostalgia

In the poem, the theme of nostalgia is explored by the poet by bringing in the memories of his beloved. The poem begins by addressing his beloved with a plea not to expect the love that once existed between them. The memories of the connection that existed between the poet and his beloved bring a sense of nostalgia to the poem.

Detachment

The theme of detachment is quite evident in the poem, as the poet fails to continue loving his beloved like the way he did before. The poet reveals that he has been living in illusion while he was with his beloved. He was so captivated by the eyes of his beloved that he failed to see the harsh reality of life. But now that he has realized the sufferings of the oppressed in society, he feels detached from his beloved. He feels that he has greater responsibility in life than loving and being loved.

Human sufferings

The theme of human sufferings is explored in the poem through the poet's realization of the greater sorrows in the world. He realized that the world was going through immense sufferings caused by war, slavery, and diseases.

Social Injustice

The theme of social injustice is presented through images such as silk, brocade, market etc. The innocent people are forced to face violence at the hands of the authorities in power. The power politics in society create social instability and injustice. The poet feels the need to be the voice of those voiceless poor people who have lost the spirit to fight against injustice. Hence, he wants to get detached from his love to provide strength to the needy.

Sacrifice

The theme of empathy is brought by the poet's decision to detach himself from his beloved. He is ready to sacrifice his own happiness in order to stand in favor of the innocent people who are tortured by the people in power. The poet feels that love is not the only pleasure in life. He is ready to sacrifice his happiness selflessly for the greater good of the society.

Responsibility

Faiz Ahmed Faiz advocates for social responsibility. He believes that everyone should take the responsibility of speaking up against injustice and stand as a barrier against social evils. The poet reassures his beloved that she is still beautiful and he loves her, but he is helpless as he realizes his responsibility towards society now. Through the poem, he appeals to the readers to stop being selfish and come forward to be the voice of the voiceless, and to be a responsible individual.

Revolutionary spirit

Faiz himself was a revolutionary. In almost all his works, the theme of revolution is evident. Here, the poet himself is ready to detach himself from his beloved, who brings joy to his life. He feels that there are greater sorrows in life than the individual sorrow of his love, which he needs to address. This reflects his transformation from a lover almost blind in love to a matured revolutionary. He is ready to sacrifice everything and start a revolution against the oppressors. His revolutionary spirit gives him strength to stand and fight against socio-political injustice in society. His revolutionary spirit makes him able to sense the sorrows and sufferings of the world, which he missed when he was intoxicated by the beauty of his beloved.

Check Your Progress

Q1. What does the poet's plea to his beloved reveal about his internal conflict and desire?

Q2. How does the poet's perspective of love change throughout the poem?

4.5 Poetic Style

In the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, there is a fusion of traditional and modern elements. Faiz's connection with classical Urdu poetry and contemporary political issues are quite evident in his poetry. Faiz's mastery is to combine traditional Urdu forms like ghazals with modern themes. He often used the ghazal, a traditional form with rhyming couplets and a repeated refrain in his early poems. Even with this classical structure, he managed to deal with modern issues like social justice and revolution. In the beginning of his career, Faiz's poetry focused on romantic themes, exploring love, desire and nature. He included vivid imagery and symbolism in his poems. Poets like Ghalib and Iqbal influenced him to compose his early books, such as "Naqsh-e-Faryadi" (1941) and "Dast-e-Taha-e-Sang" (1946). In his later years, his poetry began to focus eventually more on revolutionary and social-political themes. In his later works, he combines romantic ideas with a strong focus on social justice and raises his voice to support the voiceless. Faiz's poetry is famous for its vivid imagery. Faiz often makes use of metaphors, similes and symbols to express complex feelings and ideas. By using imageries, he creates a contrast between the beauty of life with the harsh realities one faces.. His poems usually start with a clear tone that reflects his opinion on a topic. As the tone shifts throughout the poem, it shows how hope and defiance can help address current problems. Faiz uses metaphors and similes to explore deeper meanings, revealing complex ideas and feelings. His poetry often discusses political and social issues, reflecting his involvement in social movements and his criticism of political oppression. Poems like "Subh-e-Azadi" (The Dawn of Freedom) and "Dharti Maan Le" (Accept, O Earth) express his disappointment with political events and the human suffering caused by political turmoil. Faiz's poems also call for social change. He uses a style called 'nazm' in Urdu

poetry, which is more flexible and revolutionary than the traditional 'ghazal' (love poems). Traditional themes like love and separation become tools to explore political oppression and support for the oppressed. He uses straightforward, everyday language in his poetry making difficult political and social issues more accessible to regular readers. By using common language and idioms, he connects traditional poetic expressions with contemporary concerns. Faiz combines his own personal emotions with his sociopolitical experiences in the poems. His own feelings of love and pain are set against broader socio-political contexts. The blend of personal and political visions makes his poetry resonate with both individual and collective struggles. A bold, revolutionary tone is always present in almost all the works of Faiz. With his poems, he challenges authority and advocates for social change. Works like "Zindan Nama" (Prison House Songs) and "Hum Dekhenge" (We Shall See) are a reflection of his strong commitment to justice. Faiz's work is rich with religious imagery, which reflects his Sufi beliefs rather than traditional interpretations. He often refers to the beloved, focusing on themes of love and loss. His philosophy is one of inclusivity and compassion, even towards those who have wronged him. This reflects the Sufi principles of forgiveness and love for all beings. One notable feature of Faiz's poetry is his use of varying tones. Within a single poem, the tone can shift significantly, adding depth to the meaning. He uses detailed meters, rhyme patterns, and other poetic techniques to enrich his poems. In the poem "The Love We Had Before," the poet starts with a romantic appeal, and gradually he shifts to a serious tone in order to highlight the harsh situation around him. Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetic style has a unique blend of classical and modern elements that he borrowed from the classic Urdu poets. It also includes rich imagery and powerful social and political messages.

4.6 Critical Reception

Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem "The Love We Had Before" (Pehli-Si Muhabbat), published in 1943 in his first poetry collection *Naqsh-e ariyaadi* has become one of his most famous and frequently sung and translated works. The poem, written as an address to his former lover, alternates between affection and detachment. It has inspired

and intrigued both critics and enthusiasts because it reflects the poet's personal feelings for his beloved and his willingness to sacrifice those feelings for the welfare of the society. The poem is divided into two parts: the first part uses nature imagery to emphasize the poet's past love experience when he seems to have eternal love for his beloved. It is written in the style of classical Sufi love poetry inspired by the poets like Shams Tabrizi, Rumi, Hafiz, and Ghalib. The second part shifts focus to the harsh realities of the present, where the poet is frustrated with the devaluation and suffering of human life. The poet feels the need to address the injustices that the people are facing. The poem begins with an appeal to his beloved not to expect the same love he once had for her. He also reflects on the past when the beloved meant everything to him, and her presence added meaning to his life. The poem shifts between past and present which creates a temporal dichotomy. The poet's intense feelings for his beloved are brought out with the lines, "Your beauty gave the spring everlasting youth; your eyes—yes, your eyes were everything; all else was vain". This line portrays the love that the poet has for his beloved. He credits his beloved for bringing in the glory of spring through her beauty, making everything else in the world seems insignificant compared to her eyes. His love for her is intertwined with his appreciation of nature.

The poet introduces a couplet that appears again at the end, capturing the essence of the poem.

"...for there are other sorrows in the world than love, and other pleasures too." These lines reflect the poet's abrupt break from his romantic style of writing, reminding him of the present realities that prevent him from reliving those carefree romantic days. Alternatively, these lines may signify an important moment in Faiz's life in the early 1940s when he was involved with the All-India Progressive Writers' Movement. This movement broadened his vision to include the experiences of humanity and the nation over individual concerns. The poem signifies a critical moment in Faiz's evolution as a poet who represents the mature voice, aspiring to rise above personal inclinations to address the needs of the masses.

The second part of the poem is filled with graphic imagery that depicts the brutal exploitation of human bodies throughout history,

masked by deceitful appearances of luxury. Faiz criticizes the commodification of human bodies covered in dust and soaked in blood in the market of greed and desire. He also brings in images describing diseased and decaying bodies. The poet draws these revolting images and contrasts them with the beauty of his beloved. Despite his love for his beloved, he is committed to addressing the injustices faced by people around him. To highlight this, he talks about other sufferings and pleasures beyond love. The poem ends with the poet reiterating his initial statement: “Do not ask of me, my love, that love I once had for you!”. The poem justifies the poet’s decision connecting past and present, personal love and social commitment. In the last line the poet again reaffirms his growing empathy for the pain of others.

In this poem, the traditional image of the passionate lover transforms into a fiery revolutionary over time. The second part emphasizes the poet’s internal conflict about love and responsibility. This is also a reflection of Faiz’s struggle to maintain connections with precolonial romantic idealism, represented by poets like Ghalib and Mir Taqi Mir, while addressing contemporary issues. Although he aligned with progressive poets and expressed dissent against feudal establishments, he preserved and revived classical poetic forms of the ghazals and nazms.

Thus, the poem “The Love We Had Before” is able to retain the spirit of romantic love and also questions its relevance within the poem. Though the poet acknowledges his continued love for his beloved, he also emphasizes the irreversibility of his decision in order to prioritize the suffering masses.

Faiz subtly captures the modern poet’s dilemma of alienation while offering a vision for the future. Faiz represented history, politics, along with personal dilemmas in the poem. The poem marks Faiz’s transition as a poet from being a romantic to a world poet, denouncing idealism while addressing public suffering. Faiz dreamed of a future free from tyranny and exploitation, a vision shared by many in the Third World.

Check Your Progress

Q1. How does the poet portray the evolution of love to detachment in the poem?

Q2. How does the poet's personal loss relate to the boarder socio-political issues?

4.7 Summing Up

Faiz Ahmed Faiz's "The Love We Had Before" is a significant poem which reflects how political and personal disappointment affects one's emotions. Here, Faiz skillfully portrays his transition from a intense lover to a mature and socially responsible individual. The poem's free verse structure, rich imagery, and melancholic tone shows an impactful transition caused by external and internal conflicts in the poet. Faiz's examination of love, sorrow, and political disappointment makes this poem an important part of Faiz's work. The poem has a universal appeal. The poet recalls his beautiful love which he is not able to continue in the same way due to social responsibilities. Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem "The Love We Had Before" (Pehli-Si Muhabbat), published in 1943 in his first poetry collection *Naqsh-e Fariyaadi*, has become one of his most famous and frequently sung and translated works. The poem, written as if the poet is addressing his former lover, alternates between affection and detachment. It has inspired and intrigued both critics and enthusiasts because it reflects the poet's personal feelings for his beloved and his willingness to sacrifice those feelings for the welfare of the society. The poem is divided into two parts: the first part uses natural imagery to emphasise the poet's past love experience when he seems to have eternal love for his beloved. It has been written in the style of classical Sufi love poetry inspired by the poets like Shams Tabrizi, Rumi, Hafiz, and Ghalib. The second part shifts focus to the harsh realities of the present, where the poet seems frustrated with the devaluation and suffering of human life. He desperately feels the need to speak against the injustices towards the innocent people. In the very beginning of the poem, the poet firmly asks his beloved not to expect the same kind of love he once had for her. He also remembers the past when his beloved meant

everything to him. The shift between past and present is established in the first two lines, creating a temporal dichotomy that lasts throughout the poem. The poem portrays the poet as a passionate lover. He credits his beloved for bringing in the glory of spring to his life. He also claims that his beloved makes everything else in the world seem insignificant. The poem signifies a critical moment in Faiz's evolution as a poet who represents the broader voice and conscience of society, aspiring to rise above personal inclinations to address the needs of the masses. The second part of the poem is filled with graphic imagery which depicts the brutal exploitation of human bodies

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BLOCK- 3

Unit 1: Introducing Zbignew Herbert

Unit 2: Zbignew Herbert: Elegy of Fortinbras

Unit 3: Introducing Nelly Sachs

Unit 4: Nelly Sachs: Landscape of Screams

UNIT- 1

INTRODUCING ZBIGNIEW HERBERT

Unit Structure:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 About the Poet
- 1.4 Herbert's Literary Works
- 1.5 Awards and Recognitions
- 1.6 Summing Up
- 1.7 References/ Suggested Readings

1.1. Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- *learn* about the author,
- *analyse* his literary works,
- *understand* the nature of his works,
- *know* about the socio-political situation of his time.

1.2. Introduction

Zbigniew Herbert is recognised as one of the most important and influential post-war Polish poets of the twentieth century. Known for the direct language and strong moral concern, Herbert's poetry was shaped mostly by his personal experiences embedded in the political history of the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships. Often considered as 'a witness to his time', Herbert wrote explicitly about the contemporary political condition; his writings preoccupied with the historical nightmares, with an effective mix of humour and satire. His poetic genius reflected in that his writings satirised the political oppressions while his humour avoided a total politicization of his literary manoeuvres. He was also a playwright, an essayist, and also taught at several universities. His literary works were translated into more than 38 languages, including English. He won

many awards and was nominated several times for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

1.3. About the Author

Zbigniew Herbert was born on 29 October, 1924, in Lwow, Poland (presently, known as Lviv, Ukraine). His father, Boleslaw, was a soldier recruited in the Polish Legion to fight in World War I. Herbert experienced political interference from an early life. The Soviet occupation had a major influence in Herbert's education. Prior to the war, Herbert attended the *Panstwowe VIII Gimnazjum Liceum im. Krola Kazimierza Wielkiego we Lwowie*, which was later renamed as *High School nr 14* during the Soviet occupation. Subsequently Lwow was occupied by the German and Soviet invasion, which prompted Herbert to continue his further studies at the secret meetings organised by the Polish underground. He graduated during this period in January, 1944. Concurrently, he also joined the Home Army, popularly known as AK (*Armia Krajowa* in Polish), which was the dominant resistance movement in Poland during World War II. He worked several odd jobs during the time such as a louse-feeder to produce anti-typhus vaccines, a salesman in a metal article shop, etc. He began Polish philology studies at the secret University of Jan Kazimierz in Lwow but could not continue with it as Lwow was besieged by the Soviet army and the Polish natives were forced to evacuate their hometown. Herbert family moved to Krakow and soon Lwow became a Ukrainian Soviet city, no longer marked within the borders of Poland. The feeling of displacement and the loss of his beloved hometown can be seen to serve as recurrent significant motifs in his later literary works. Herbert studied economics in Krakow. He attended the Jagiellonian University, along with the Academy of Fine Arts for further studies. He studied law and received a Master of Law at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun. In the year, 1951, Herbert attended the University of Warsaw to study philosophy.

Zbigniew Herbert's initial years as a writer were not very fruitful. He did not adhere to the popular contemporary literary style, which was socialist realism. He was also reluctant to write on the political turmoil and the propagandas. His early writings were reports and reviews from theatrical and musical exhibits. Some of his reviews were published in a journal, *Slowo Powszechne*. Oftentimes, he

wrote under different pseudonyms like Patryk, Boleslaw, Stefan, etc, for different journals and magazines. He travelled to several places like Vienna, France, Austria, England, Scotland, Italy, Greece, etc, that he could afford with his academic and literary incomings. The reflections of his travel experiences can be witnessed in many of his literary productions like in the essay “The Barbarian in the Garden”, and the poem *Prayers of Mr. Cogito — The Traveller*. In 1986, Herbert moved to Paris and three years later, in 1989, joined the *Polish Writers’ Association*. In 1990, he became a member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. He became a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1993.

Zbigniew Herbert died on 28th July, 1998, in Warsaw.

Check Your Progress:

1. When and where was Zbigniew Herbert born?
2. Why was the poet forced to evacuate and leave his hometown in Poland?
3. How did the poet continue with his higher studies after the Soviet invasion in Lwow?
4. Where did Zbigniew Herbert study law?
5. Name a literary work by Herbert that reflects his travel experiences.
6. When did Herbert join the *Polish Writers’ Association*?
7. When did Herbert become member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences?

1.4. Herbert’s Literary Works

Zbigniew Herbert started his poetic endeavour in 1950 with the publication of an untitled poem in *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Few years later, he published a complete volume of 22 poems in an anthology of modern Catholic poetry. Herbert gained popularity as a poet with his *The Debut of Five Poets*, published in the magazine, *Zycie*

Literackie, in 1955. A year later, he published his poem, *Chord of Light (Struna Swiatla)*, in 1956. The poem deals with the themes of art, beauty, and human experiences. The poem meditates on the enduring power of art to transcend time and morality as well as evoke human emotions. The poem reflects on the fleeting nature of beauty through a painting that have captured a beautiful moment of some distant bygone past which now only exist in an art form. He published another volume of poetry, *Hermes, pies i Gwiazda (Hermes, Dog and Star)* in 1957. In 1960s, two more volumes of poems were published by Herbert, namely, *Study of the Object (Stadium przedmiotu)* in 1961 and *Inscription (Napis)* in 1969. Zbigniew Herbert introduced the character of Mr. Cogito in another poetry collection, *Pan Cogito*, in 1974, who also appeared in his later works. Another collection of his poems, *Report from a Besieged City and Other Poems (Raport z oblezonego Miastainnewiersze)* appeared in 1983, published by the Literary Institute in Paris. The collection was also published in Poland by other publishing houses. In 1990, another volume of poetry, *Elegy for the Departure (Elegianaodejskie)*, was published in Paris. He published *Rovigo* in 1992 in Poland. Herbert's last poetic work, *Epilogue to a Storm (Epilogburzy)* was published shortly before his death in 1998.

Zbigniew Herbert's poetic works are replete with elements of mythology and medieval legends and heroes. His study of the ancient past not only attempts to understand history but rather to comprehend the present scenarios better. He revived events and characters of the past to assess the values of the present. Though his literary works are well-stuffed with historical concepts and philosophy but they do not dwell in all the so-called logical explanation of the various systems in history. He tries to declutter the cultural layers through the mechanism of demythologization. The conflicts of his contemporary socio-political situation tremendously altered his perceptions of the heroic past. The Nazi occupation and the Soviet invasions did not correspond to a very heroic period. It was not an era of legendary heroes and their sacrifices, bravery, or martyrdom but rather a parody of derision and scorn. The brutal war experiences have dissolved the ingenuous perception of the past and gave way to speculation and wariness. It led to the assessment that visions of history are usually fabricated and moulded by the victor's chroniclers. This again led to the perception that the majestic portrayal of the legendary heroes may

be fallacious and imprecise or was based on a biased judgement or prejudices and thus those vanquished might had been the ones worthy of our solidarity.

Herbert's earlier works were highly influenced by classical Greek and Roman literature. He usually explored complex ethical issues by employing historical and mythological references and allusions to illustrate moral dilemmas. He quickly rose to fame for his unique poetic style which has a unique blend of traditionalism and modernism. He wrote scathing critiques as he tried to express his angst for totalitarianism and fascism through his writings, highlighting the political oppression of the masses. Herbert condemned the deteriorating high culture and escalating barbarism while simultaneously acknowledging the significance of popular culture in moulding our shared human experiences.

Zbigniew Herbert's poetry is known for its strong poetic appeal, exploring complex themes and emotions through rich imagery and symbolism. He employed a rich, layered language, using various symbols and metaphor for his poetic expressions, especially to convey complex ideas. His philosophical and moral predilections often led to introspective musings on morality, ethics, and human condition as it is profoundly expressed in Herbert's poetry.

Check Your Progress:

1. How many of Herbert's poems were published in the anthology of modern Catholic poetry?
2. Name his first poetic anthology. When was it published?
3. Name the two poetry volumes by Zbigniew Herbert.
4. Name the poetry collection in which Herbert introduced the character of Mr. Cogito.
5. Name Zbigniew Herbert's last poetic work.

Zbigniew Herbert's poetic compositions were popular for his unique blend of classical and modern elements that explores miscellaneous themes such as identity, morality, history, and different human

conditions and experiences. Some of his significant poetry collections are discussed below:

- ***Study of the Object (1957)***

The *Study of the Object* is the debut collection of Zbigniew Herbert that established him as a poet. The poems in this collection showcase his early style of composition which experimented a blend classical form with modernist elements. Significant poems in the collection include “The Study of the Object” and “The Pebble” which fundamentally reflects on an individual’s relationship with the world as he goes through different living experiences. The English translation of the collection came out in 1961.

- ***Report from a Besieged City (1983)***

This collection of poems was composed during martial law in Poland and thus highlights Herbert’s socio-political stance and his experiences during that time. Though Herbert did not directly rebuke the system, his poems contained subtle critiques of the prevalent political situation. Poems like “Report from a Besieged City” and “The Power of Taste” demonstrates his vehement resistance to totalitarianism, though he draws on poetic devices like metaphors and employs different imageries and symbolisms to convey his political messages. An extended version, entitled *Report from a Besieged City and Other Poems* was published in 1985, catapulting Herbert to international fame and recognition.

- ***The Prophet (1958)***

This collection of poems explores the intersection of identity, history, and culture. Poems like “The Prophet” and “The Return of the Proconsul” showcases Herbert’s unique blend of classical allusions and historical references. This collection of poems significantly influenced Herbert’s career as a poet, introducing him to the global readers.

• ***Pan Cogito (1974)***

This poetry collection is one of Zbigniew Herbert's most popular literary works. In this collection, the readers are introduced to the character of Mr. Cogito, mostly presumed as Herbert's poetic alter-ego, who also appears in many of his later works. The poems explore the complexities of human experiences through the embodiment of the poet's own thoughts and feelings. Mr. Cogito appears to be an intelligent and curious person, often lost in his own thoughts and deep contemplation about the world, the nature of reality, and also himself. He constantly questions his own existence and often grapples with the meaninglessness and uncertainty of the human life. He struggles with his own conscience and moral dilemmas as he is torn between his will to do good and survive in a complex world as well as cope with the absurdities of life. The poems address universal human concerns transcending cultural boundaries and norms through the life and experiences of Mr. Cogito. Significant poems in the collection include "Mr. Cogito's Lament" (1966), "Mr. Cogito on the Need for Precision" (1966), "Mr. Cogito's Refusal" (1968), "Mr. Cogito's Advice" (1974), and "Mr. Cogito's Ascension" (1983).

SAQ:

1. From your reading of the Unit, discuss the nature of Herbert's poetry?

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2. How do you think the political situation of Poland influenced Herbert's poetic compositions?

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1.5 Awards and Recognitions

In January 1964, Zbigniew Herbert received the Koscielski Prize, a Polish literary Award, in Paris. He won the Jurzykowski Prize, awarded for the translation of Polish work into English, in 1965.

He was awarded The Lenau Prize in October, 1965, in Vienna. He also received the Austrian State Prize for European Literature in the same year. This period marks the most fruitful and growing years of Herbert as a man of art and culture.

He won the Herder Prize in 1973. In the year, 1979, he was awarded the Petrarca-Preis for European literature and translations. He received the 'Solidarity' Prize in 1984. He also received the International Literary Prize of the Arts Council of Wales and the Mikolaj Sep Szarzynski Poetry Award the same year.

In 1987, he was given The Hungarian Foundation of Prince Gabor Bethlem Prize. He received The Bruno Schulz Prize in 1988. In 1990, he received the Jan Parandowski Polish PEN Club Prize.

He was awarded the Jerusalem Prize for the Freedom of the Individual in Society in 1991, which prompted his journey to Israel. He also received the Vilenica International Literary Prize in the same year.

Herbert was honoured with the Kazimierz Wyka Award in 1993.

He won the German Critics' Award for the Best Book of the Year in 1994 for his book *Still Life with Bridle*. He was honoured with The Ingersoll Foundation's T. S. Eliot Award for Creative Writing in 1995. He won the City of Munster Award in 1996.

He was posthumously awarded with the Order of the White Eagle by the President of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, on 3rd May, 2007.

Check Your Progress:

- Q1. Why and when was Herbert awarded the Jurzykowski Prize?
- Q2. What is the name of the award he won in Vienna?
- Q3. Write two literary honours he received for his contribution in the area of translation?

Q4. In which year did he win the Bruno Schulz Prize?

Q5. In which year was Herbert honoured with the Kazimierz Wyka Award?

Q6. Name the book for which he won the German Critics' Award for the Best Book of the Year in 1994.

Q7. Name the honour Herbert received posthumously from the President of Poland.

1.6. Summing Up

Zbigniew Herbert's literary compositions serve as a powerful exploration of the human experience, delving into themes of morality, culture, oppression and socio-political angst, and the search for meaning in a chaotic world. His work has had a profound impact on Polish literature and culture. His works are known for the moral obligations and as a voice of high conscience as his poems continues to be widely read and studies around the world. His poetic craftsmanship comes from his unique blend of classical influences and philosophical depth while maintaining the simple human touch which made his works widely acclaimed and admired.

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UNIT- 2

ZBIGNIEW HERBERT: ELEGY OF FORTINBRAS

Unit Structure:

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 The Poem

2.4 Summary and Analysis

2.5 Critical Reading of the Poem

2.6 Summing Up

2.7 References and Suggested Reading

2.1. Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- *understand* the poem,
- *analyse* the poem critically,
- *know* the poet's nature of composition,
- *learn* about the poetic genre of the period.

2.2. Introduction

One of the best and most widely known classic Elizabethan heroic tragedies, *Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare has witnessed innumerable adaptations and has been staged multitudinously across the globe through the centuries. The character of the protagonist, Prince Hamlet, have become a literary archetype over the decades as artists across the world borrowed, reshaped, and molded independent myths and tales both as literal character or a metaphoric representation for various literary and research works. A horde of academic writings centers on the character of Hamlet as well other characters of the play across different literary genres from plays to poetry to fiction, as well as art works like caricatures, paintings and portraits. The poem "Elegy of Fortinbras" by Zbigniew Herbert can

be read as a continuation of the classic drama, *Hamlet*. The speaking persona of the poem, Fortinbras, the Norwegian Crown Prince will be the future ruler of Denmark after the brutal massacre of the royal family following a bloody duel and poisoning. Fortinbras mourns Prince Hamlet's death and orders a grand funeral for him like a soldier with due respect and honour. The poet reflects on the socio-political condition of Poland under Soviet regime through a figurative evocation of the legendary character of Hamlet as eulogized by Fortinbras in the poem.

2.3. The Poem

Elegy of Fortinbras

To C.M.

Now that we're alone we can talk prince man to man
though you lie on the stairs and see more than a dead ant
nothing but black sun with broken rays
I could never think of your hands without smiling
and now that they lie on the stone like fallen nests
they are as defenceless as before The end is exactly this
The hands lie apart The sword lies apart The head apart
and the knight's feet in soft slippers.

You will have a soldier's funeral without having been a soldier
they only ritual I am acquainted with a little.

There will be no candles no singing only cannon-fuses and bursts
crepe dragged on the pavement helmets boots artillery horses drums
drums I know nothing exquisite
those will be my manoeuvres before I start to rule
one has to take the city by the neck and shake it a bit

Anyhow you had to perish Hamlet you were not for life
you believed in crystal notions not in human clay
always twitching as if asleep you hunted chimeras
wolfishly you crunched the air only to vomit
you knew no human thing you did not know even how to breathe.

Now you have peace Hamlet you accomplished what you had to and you have peace The rest is not silence but belongs to me you chose the easier part an elegant thrust but what is heroic death compared with eternal watching with a cold apple in one's hand on a narrow chair with a view on the ant-ill and clock' dial.

Adieu prince I have tasks a sewer project and a decree on prostitutes and beggars I must also elaborate a better system of prisons since as you justly said Denmark is a prison I go to my affairs. This night is born a star named Hamlet We shall never meet what I shall leave will not be worth a tragedy.

It is not for us to greet each other or bid farewell we live on archipelagos and that water these words what can they do what can they do prince

Stop to Consider:

The dedication at the beginning of the poem, "To C.M", is addressed to Zbigniew Herbert's contemporary Polish poet, Czeslaw Milosz.

2.4. Summary and Analysis

The poem "Elegy of Fortinbras" opens with the Norwegian crown Prince's arrival at the Danish court soon after the death of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, following a supposedly friendly duel which turned out to be a conspiracy to kill the Prince. The drama unfolds that leads to the death of not only the Prince but also the King, Queen, and other royal officials, leaving the throne of Denmark heirless. As Fortinbras stands alone before Hamlet's corpse, he assures himself that now they can talk "man to man" though the Prince lay lifeless on the palace's stairs. He compares Hamlet to a "black sun with broken rays" which does not emit light but is now forever drowned in darkness. He recalls with a smile Hamlet's hands that once hold swords but now lie "defenceless" as his sword lies aside on the ground.

Fortinbras held Hamlet on high esteem, and after knowing the Prince's story to avenge his father which led to his untimely death, he promises to bid his final goodbye by giving Hamlet a "soldier's funeral" with all due respect and reverence. He considered Hamlet no less than a soldier who gave up his life for his father and rid his country of the unworthy usurper. Also, Fortinbras was not very well-acquainted with any other ritual that involved candles and songs but "only cannon-fuses and bursts", helmets, boots, artillery horses, and drums. He announces this to be his first manoeuvre before ascending the Danish throne.

The Norwegian Prince accepts that Hamlet had to perish for he was not made for this world. He dwelled in his fantasies, believed in "crystal notions", and could not understand human ways and the practical world. He was haunted by the unfair world with its distorted realities which made him twitch restlessly in his sleep as if he was hunting "chimeras" or illusions that do not even exist. He was so tormented by the human realities that he forgot to breathe until he finally lost it all.

According to Fortinbras, Hamlet can now rest in peace as he have accomplished his duty, presumably to avenge his father's murder and punish the murderer and the usurper of the Danish throne. The rest of the work belongs to Fortinbras, the new king of Denmark. Fortinbras assures that Hamlet chose the easier path, a heroic death. It is Fortinbras who is left with the greater work, the 'eternal watch', that is, to bring order and stability to the kingdom of Denmark. He must keep a strict eye on the 'ant's hill', a metaphoric imagery for hard work and toil to run the kingdom, and 'clock dial', that is, the progress with the passage of time.

As Hamlet lay to rest eternally, as a star in the night sky, Fortinbras is left to do the mundane tasks like maintaining sewer projects, upgrade the prison system, and release decree on prostitutes and beggars. Hamlet's death was a tragedy, a heroic death worthy of praise and celebration, but Fortinbras would never have anything like that. Fortinbras concludes his elegy with an ache, a yearning that he would never meet Hamlet. They would never greet each other or bid farewell as they are now parts of two different worlds. These words can do very little to change what destiny had in store for them.

Check Your Progress:

Q1. What kind of funeral did Fortinbras ordered for Hamlet?

Q2. Why did Fortinbras wanted to give Hamlet a “soldier’s funeral”?

Q3. From your reading of the poem, why do you think Fortinbras believed Hamlet was destined to perish?

Q4. Why did Fortinbras think he was left with the tougher work while Hamlet chose the easier path?

2.5. Critical Reading of the Poem

Originally written in Polish, the poem “Elegy of Fortinbras” reflects on the Elizabethan classic, *Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare. Zbigniew Herbert in the poem meditates on the political upheaval of Poland under the Soviet regime and its impact on the common people. The poem continues from where the Shakespearean play ends after the death of Prince Hamlet and the other royal family members following a bloody duel. As the royal family lay lifeless on the royal court after all the palace intrigues and complots, the Norwegian Prince Fortinbras enters the Danish court as he announces himself as the new King of Denmark. The poem spans a brief time period from Fortinbras’s arrival to witness the gory bloodshed of the royal family as he mourns Hamlet’s untimely death and orders a princely funeral to honour him, to let the Prince rest with proper dignity and respect that he deserved.

The poem “Elegy of Fortinbras” by Zbigniew Herbert can be read as a continuation of William Shakespeare’s play, *Hamlet*, after Prince Hamlet’s death. The poem was published in 1961 through which Herbert tries to reflect on the contemporary socio-political scenario of Poland by a thematic retrieval of the classic play and the character of Hamlet. The poem explores the universal themes that lay at the core of human civilization and existence, such as death, legacy, moral values and ideals, etc. The speaking persona of the poem is Fortinbras, Norwegian Crown Prince and the potential ruler of Denmark after Prince Hamlet’s death. Fortinbras addresses Hamlet in the poem who died in a deadly combat to avenge his father, King Hamlet, who was murdered by the King’s brother to

usurp the throne of Denmark. Fortinbras's father, also known as Fortinbras, the King of Norway, was previously defeated by King Hamlet in battle. With no ruler to sit on the throne after the macabre duel that killed all the royal family members of Denmark, Fortinbras was to be crowned the ruler of Denmark. A long striving rivalry stood between the two territories because of the previous battle where King Hamlet has slain King Fortinbras. However, Prince Fortinbras held Prince Hamlet in high regards, especially after Horatio narrated the whole story of Hamlet and how he died a tragically heroic death while avenging his father's murderer and the usurper of the Danish throne.

In the poem, Fortinbras reflects on Hamlet's life as a Prince and his utterly tragic death. Though both were crowned Princes of their respective territories, Fortinbras serves as a foil to Prince Hamlet. Fortinbras is a practical ruler who prioritizes maintaining order and stability in his kingdom whereas Hamlet was mostly detached from reality and lived entangled in his own thoughts, ideals, and prejudices. The poem also beautifully describes the Renaissance age, the period when the play was written. Renaissance was the age of great cultural fulfillment and artistic achievements, of intellectual accomplishment, of travel, explorations and discoveries. However, it was also a time of inordinate violence and tumultuous political upheaval which makes the poem explicitly relevant to the socio-political condition of Poland, the Polish time period when the poem was written.

Zbigniew Herbert composed the poem "Elegy of Fortinbras" in the late 1950's and published it in the year, 1961. He was inspired to compose the poem after a Polish theatre house, the Stary Theatre, held a performance of the classic play, *Hamlet*, in 1956, in Krakow. It was a time of socio-political turbulence in Poland as it was under the communist regime. During that time, literary and artistic productions were strictly monitored and often censored. The play, *Hamlet*, inspired Herbert to see it from a communist lens and express his dissatisfaction and resentment of the oppression and tyranny as he experienced it.

The word 'prison' is figuratively significant in the poem. Fortinbras considers Denmark as a prison for Hamlet, a prison Fortinbras himself could not escape from. Both the two Princes were constrained by royal statutes and ordinances as well as their

ownmoral presuppositions, held restrained by brute forces beyond their control. This feeling of captivity and restriction is relevant to what the poet necessarily experienced in communist Poland after it became a Soviet territory. The poem can be read as a yearning for liberty and freedom in a politically restraint tyrannical Polish state.

One of the most significant aspects of the poem is intertextuality. Intertextuality, in simple terms, denotes interrelationship between two or multiple texts, especially in works of literature. The concept of intertextuality rapidly gained popularity in postmodern literature and analysis. Intertextuality posed the idea that any form of literary narrative exists in relation to prior literary texts, which connotes that no text is uniquely original and is influenced by some literary work of the past. The poem “Elegy of Fortinbras” is influenced by the classic Shakespearean play, *Hamlet*, and carries on from the point where the play ends. Fortinbras orders a grand funeral for Hamlet as the dead Prince is being taken away. The Norwegian Crown Prince speculates about the future of his new kingdom, Denmark, as he bids final farewell to the deceased Danish Prince. The poem is build upon the play and cannot be read in isolation without some prior knowledge about the plot and characterization of *Hamlet*. The poem brings about a more pragmatic end to the play as compared to Shakespeare’s dramatic ending of the heroic drama as the new ruler of Denmark, Fortinbras, is set forward to sit on the throne and the kingdom awaits a new beginning under his regime.

Stop to Consider:

Intertextuality refers to the interconnectedness between multiple texts. The word ‘intertextuality’ was coined by philosopher, Julia Kristeva, in the late 1960s to describe the mutual connection between different texts and how different works of literature influences, moulds, reflects, each other to create meaning and structure. Kristeva, in her critical analysis of Bakhtin’s concepts of Dialogism and Carnival, used the term ‘intertextuality’ to interpret her idea of multiple meanings in a text which again arises from its interrelation or connection to other texts. She believed that no text can be read or understood in totality solely by itself but through the understanding of its interconnectedness to other texts. Intertextuality can be included within the paradigm of post-structuralism- a school

of thought that emerged in the 1960s and 70s that challenged the principles of structuralism. Post-structuralism believed in the fluidity and ambiguity of meanings, especially in literary contexts, in contrast to structuralism's idea of using binary oppositions, symbols, or conventional codes as ways to elucidate the underlying structure of a literary text. Structuralism focused on a scientific interpretation of a text, disregarding the author's intention or the reader's interpretation and understanding of the text, whereas post-structuralism believed in the radical uncertainty of a single meaning but an endless proliferation of meaning for any potential text that constantly changes based on one's cultural as well as socio-political position in the world. As such, intertextuality served as a literary device for interpreting a text with reference to multiple other texts embodying myriad layers of meanings, thus creating a rich tapestry of ideas and contexts woven together.

As the title suggests, the poem is written as an elegy, and is structurally divided into six unequal stanzas. The poem can be read as a post-structuralist discourse as it does not follow a rigid structural pattern or even proper grammatical configuration. The narrative mostly follows a free-flowing, fluid word structure and line alignment with constant variations in the tone of the speaking persona as he reflects on various themes and ideas. Though written as an elegy, the poem is replete with political overtones and can be seen as a satire against the communist system of Poland. Hamlet is one literary character who surpasses the literary as well as the theatrical arena and seeks to represent the socio-political situations around the world. The Polish Hamlet featured in many Polish literary works that expressed the political turmoil and social angst of the masses against the communist totalitarianism.

Check Your Progress:

- Q.1. When was the poem "Elegy of Fortinbras" published?
- Q.2. What inspired Herbert to compose the poem, "Elegy of Fortinbras"?
- Q.3. Why did Fortinbras order a soldier's funeral for Hamlet?

SAQ:

Q.1. Do you think the poem, “Elegy of Fortinbras”, is a critique of the socio-political turbulence and the communist regime in Poland during the time of its composition. Discuss.

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Q.2. From your reading of the poem, “Elegy of Fortinbras”, present a critical analysis of the duality of the character dynamics of Hamlet and Fortinbras.

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Q.3. What do you understand by intertextuality in literature? Why do you think intertextuality is significant in the poem, “Elegy of Fortinbras”?

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2.6. Summing Up:

The poem, “Elegy of Fortinbras” by Zbigniew Herbert can be seen as a continuation of the Elizabethan classic drama, *Hamlet*. However, Herbert focuses on a relatively minor character from the play, Fortinbras, the conqueror of Denmark after Prince Hamlet’s death. The poem is written in the form of an elegy where Fortinbras laments the unfortunate death of the young Danish Prince and wishes that his soul rest in eternal peace as a star in the night sky as he himself takes over the charge as the new king of Denmark. The poem carries a political overtone as Herbert tries to express the socio-political turmoil of the Soviet occupied Poland and the angst and oppression of the masses.

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UNIT- 3

INTRODUCING NELLY SACHS

Unit Structure:

- 3.1 Objectives**
- 3.2 The Holocaust**
- 3.3 Holocaust Literature**
 - 3.3.1 Holocaust Poetry**
- 3.4 Nelly Sachs – Life and Works**
- 3.5 Literature as Testimony**
- 3.6 Summing Up**
- 3.7 References/ Suggested Readings**

3.1 Objectives

The Holocaust was one of the most heinous phases of violence during the Second World War where Jews were massacred and subjected to inhumane torture. After the end of the Second World War, a body of Holocaust Literature emerged from the survivors and this has constructed a corpus of powerful work. By the end of this unit, you will be

- *understand* the context that influenced the emergence of Holocaust Literature,
- *know* about Holocaust poetry and the poet Nelly Sachs,
- *learn* the importance of literature as testimony.

3.2 The Holocaust

The term “Holocaust” refers to the State- sponsored genocide of European Jewry perpetrated by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during the Second World War. The Second World War began on September 1, 1939 when Adolf Hitler led Germany into invading Poland. The Holocaust was sanctioned and led by Adolf Hitler under the ideals of National Socialism. The genocide of the Jews

had begun in the early 1930s but it increased in severity and continued until the end of the war in 1945.

Etymologically, the word *Holocaust* has come from the Greek word *holókaustos* or *holokauston* – *hólos* ("whole") and *kaustós* ("burnt"). The word is also a translation of the Hebrew word *olah*. According to the Bible, an *olah* was a sacrifice made to God that was burnt by fire. Over time and with relevant evolution, the term Holocaust came to be used to refer to the large-scale slaughter of the Jews. The word *sho'ah* or *shoah* which is the Hebrew word for "catastrophe" is also used to refer to the Holocaust amongst the Jews. As such, there is a complex etymology of the term "Holocaust" derived from theological sources. This brings forth the understanding that the Holocaust was considered a necessary action by Nazi Germany with the beliefs based on religious grounds. And since the late 1950s, the term 'Holocaust' occupied a well-known designation in the English language.

The Nazi bureaucrats who were involved in planning, coordinating and executing the proceedings of the Holocaust used various euphemisms such as *Evakuierung* (evacuation), *Umsiedlung* (resettlement), *Endlösung der Judenfrage* (the final solution of the Jewish question) and many other terms that meant offerings, sacrifice, martyrdom, etc. The use of phrases as such highlights the theological prejudices which were indoctrinated in the minds of the Nazis which made them believe that the existence of the Jews was a problem that needed to be solved. And because of such a perception, the Nazis saw their actions not as catastrophic, but as necessary for the well-being of mankind and to produce a pure German bloodline. As such, they believed that the Holocaust had intrinsic value and they made it appear that the deaths of six million Jews were a necessary sacrifice.

During the Holocaust, Jews of all ages were subjected to heinous torture. The Nazis made concentration camps such as Auschwitz, Mauthausen, Melk, and Ebensee –where they would torture the Jews through forced labour, violence and, inhumane punishments before finally killing them. There are various movies such as *Schindler's List* and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* that portray the egregious crimes that Nazi Germany indulged in during the Holocaust. Moreover, Jewish children were seen as a threat as they represented a future for Judaism and the prevalence of Jewish culture. To Nazi

Germany, it made no sense to exterminate Jewish parents while allowing their children to live. As such, even the children were subjected to the torture and those who were too young faced immediate selection for gas chambers.

In May 1945, Hitler's military was crushed by the Allied forces leading to the collapse of the Third Reich. This brought the twelve years of brutalizing Nazi terror to an end. By then, however, around six million Jews and millions of non-Jews were already murdered. The destruction left behind was incomprehensible. The physical, emotional and psychological state of the liberated prisoners was a sad sight. The Nazi Holocaust resulted in the destruction of homes, families, and the lives of the Jews living in German-occupied Europe. Although Hitler did not succeed in murdering all the Jews but he did successfully destroy Jewish life and culture. As such, most of the survivors were displaced as they had no hope or resources. There were thousands of unburied corpses in the concentration camps. The horrifying reality that appeared presented the extremes of man's inhumanity and it could not be ignored or denied.

The immediate post-war years saw varied reactions towards the Holocaust. The first was the unwillingness amongst the German populace to accept responsibility for the Nazi crimes. Amongst the post-war German populace, there was the prevalence of conscious ignorance towards what was happening in the death camps. In order to evade questions and responsibility for the Holocaust, the Germans began to self-identify themselves as victims. They attempted to project themselves as victims of Nazism, the Allied Forces and of the war, by at large. They began to claim that they were subjected to double victimization. This was consciously done so to re-model the post-war memory. Such attempts successfully masked the truth and prevented it from spreading across the national boundaries. It resulted in a long delay in the honest recognition of the crimes perpetrated under National Socialism received honest recognition.

There was the growth of a fervent desire amongst the German people to rework towards a new national consciousness and to reconnect with German's cultural past. They did so to rebuild the shattered national and social structure. But inside it was also hidden the intention of erasing the realities of the heinous past. There was

the widespread prevalence of a restorative climate that aimed towards constructing a false historical discourse.

More than seven decades have passed since the end of the Nazi Holocaust. Many of the survivors have already passed away and their children constitute a new generation of post-Holocaust lives. The Holocaust now has come to be regarded as the long and systematic extermination of the Jews, which had thousands of passionate and impassionate participants, passive observers and supporters.

3.3 Holocaust Literature

The post-war literary scene was directly influenced by the socio-political trends that were prevailing. A great deal has been said and written about the Holocaust but the credibility has often been subjected to scrutiny. There are documents and records that function as a witness and at the same time, there are statements that deny that the Holocaust had ever taken place. However, one has to understand that it is only the survivors and those who were present in the Holocaust could ever comprehend the meaning and experience.

The number of literary materials such as memoirs, autobiographies, books and articles dealing with the various aspects of the Second World War II emerged at a phenomenal rate after the end of the hostilities. Yet amongst all of this, the Holocaust has received the most attention because it is an event beyond human understanding. The Nazis' program for the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" is a subject of agony to survivors, laypersons, witnesses, and scholars alike. The sources for the literary materials that were published during the immediate postwar period were a large number of notes, diaries and personal narratives collected from survivors and ghetto dwellers from all over Europe. Such materials gave the Holocaust a central position in the scholarly study of the Third Reich and the Nazi ideologies. Holocaust literature honestly and crudely reflects the trauma of the Holocaust at a personal, individual level and provides space to analyze and understand the perpetrators, participants and the victims.

The historian Henry Feingold writes: "the Holocaust is a central event for our time in history ... because what died at Auschwitz was the promise and hope embodied in Western civilization." (Feingold 16). In a similar vein, the philosopher Emile Fackenheim has stated that "the Holocaust is not only a unique event; it is epoch making. The world ... like the Jewish world ... can never be the same." (Fackenheim 279). The famous novelist and lecturer Elie Wiesel, who was a survivor of the Holocaust testifies that: "At Auschwitz, not only man died but also the idea of man." (Wiesel 190). Such thoughts abound in the corpus of Holocaust literature, thus generating a paradox in trying to understand the Holocaust as an event that meaning or whether it is meaningless.

The atrocities that were committed by the Nazis defy comprehension. An understanding of the same shows the failure of humanity and the extent to which humans are capable of evil. The systematic murder of millions destroyed the people's trust in the foundation of culture as well as on language. In writing about the same, as witnesses and post-Holocaust survivors, language falls short as an adequate medium. Language has become limited as it could not provide words to grasp and describe the heinous atrocities. In this context, Emil Fackenheim has argued that: "All writing about the Holocaust is in the grip of the paradox: the event must be communicated, yet it is incommunicable; and the writer must accept this paradox and endure". Works such as John Berryman's *The Black Book*, Albert Speer's *Inside the Third Reich* and Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* are some of the most impactful literary historical accounts of the Holocaust.

In 1987, the Holocaust scholar Terrence Des Pres listed down three rules to be followed in the representation of the Holocaust:

1. The Holocaust shall be represented, in its totality, as a unique event, as a special case and kingdom of its own, above or below or apart from history.
2. Representations of the Holocaust shall be as accurate and faithful as possible to the facts and conditions of the event, without change or manipulation for any reason—artistic reasons included.
3. The Holocaust shall be approached as a solemn or even a sacred event, with a seriousness admitting no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonor its dead.

The production of Holocaust literature involves truth and honesty as the corpus continues to broaden historical understanding, and heighten critical sensitivities whilst familiarizing the reader with a discourse of intense trauma and suffering.

Stop to Consider

“The Boy in the Warsaw Ghetto” is one of the most recognizable photographs ever taken during the Holocaust. In the image, one can see a crowd of women and children who were being marched away at gunpoint. All of them were dressed in ragged clothes and were unarmed. At the front of the group stands a young boy in dark knee socks, shorts, coat, and hat. He holds his hands in the air and there is a soldier behind him. The image makes the viewer understand that all the people in the image will be taken towards the concentration camps and will be murdered. There is a look of sheer terror on the little boy’s face and one can only imagine the atrocity the innocent boy and all other children like him were subjected to. The photograph holds profound emotional and visual power to be able to bring to mind the horrors of the Holocaust.

The photograph “The Boy in the Warsaw Ghetto” first appeared in a Nazi report and was taken in the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto in around late April or early May, 1943. The questions about the image’s origins, who took the photograph and the identities of the people it depicts remain unsolved.

The photograph has greatly gone towards influencing photojournalism. From many other war-torn countries such as Vietnam and Afghanistan, several powerful photographs have emerged which have great explanatory power about the magnitude of inhumanity and violence. In the context of “The Boy in the Warsaw Ghetto” one can only ponder.

3.3.1 Holocaust Poetry

The German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno wrote in the essay “Cultural Criticism and Society,” (1951) that “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” A statement as such was made as there was

a conundrum in the poetic tradition after the war. Most of the poets chose to break away from conventional style of writing poetry and they produced unique writing styles that suited their art. In the context of the Holocaust, the tragedy and the atrocity challenged the traditional modes of poeticizing death. The poets were challenged with the limitations of the language and they had to break away from the structures of poetry. They had to ensure that their work would act as witness and secure lasting impact because any attempt to represent the Holocaust, will fail to convey the magnitude of the event.

The canon of Holocaust poetry canon includes prominent poets such as John Berryman, Jerome Rothenberg, Randall Jarrell and Sylvia Plath. Poets like Dr. Alexandria Constantinova Szeman in her book *Where Lightning Strikes* has also written specifically about the lives of women and children during the Holocaust.

The references to God appear frequently throughout Holocaust poetry. This is because the Nazi persecution and genocide during the Holocaust caused the Jews to question their belief in God. In his poem "Never Shall I Forget" from his book *Night*, Elie Wiesel confronts his fading beliefs in God. Every line of his poem begins with "Never shall I forget" and then details a horrific memory from his childhood in the Auschwitz camp.

In this context Susan Gubar's book *Poetry After Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* (2003) is an important text that aids in the understanding of Holocaust poetry. Holocaust poetry voices the victims' yearning for a free and better life in the midst of the struggle for survival. Many Nazi victims wrote poetry to ease the pain of their sufferings. The poetic renditions function as Holocaust testimonies and they work to invite the reader to act as a witness to the events of the Holocaust as narrated. The poems can

also be considered as an attempt to keep the victim's integrity and voice intact.

SAQ:

Q1. What is the inherent complexity in the etymology of the word 'Holocaust'? (20 words)

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Q2. Why is the Holocaust an important event that must be documented honestly through literature? (30 words)

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Q3. How relevant do you think are the rules of Terrence Des Pres in the context of Holocaust Literature? (20 words)

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Q4. Do you think poetry functioned as a medium of hope for the Holocaust victims? (40 words)

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3.4 Nelly Sachs – Life and Works

The literary scholarship of Germany came late to studying German-Jewish Holocaust literature. The publication of any form of German-Jewish post-war writing be it poetry, autobiography, memoir or fiction was not encouraged. As a result of the pressures, a great deal of non-Jewish writing was published in the late 1950s and early 1960s that exclusively presented the perspective of the perpetrators and not the persecuted. The inclusion in the German literary canon of very limited writers that presented the alternative view was nothing more than a political gesture. Fritz H. Landshoff, who had established the publishing house Querido in Amsterdam in 1933, expressed his disappointment in a letter to Arnold Zweig in 1948, about how German publishing houses did allow the work of exiled authors to be published even after the end of the Second World War.

The prevalent myths and beliefs of German victimization, ignorance and resistance went towards preventing many writers like the poet Nelly Sachs from making an appearance in the German literary scene. Nelly Sachs was a German-Jewish poet who was a victim and survivor of the Holocaust. After escaping to Germany and restructuring her life, she took up the pen and utilized the medium of poetry to document her experiences and let the world know about the horrors of the Holocaust. Nelly Sachs had remained an unknown figure for a considerable period in the aftermath of the Second World War. She found initial readership for her work in the Soviet zone and received positive reception as both Jews and communists were victims of Nazi fascism. Her first volume of poetry, *In the Dwellings of Death* was published in 1947 in the Soviet zone by the Berlin publisher 'Aufbau'.

However, very limited publishers were willing to take responsibility of her work. This was because publishing literature about the extermination of the Jews was considered as a risky endeavor. It was not a financially viable venture owing to the post-war socio-political conditions. Also, the imagery that permeates Sachs' oeuvre greatly affected the reception of her work and did not promote her popularity. As such, publishing Sachs' poetry demanded a measure of courage.

Owing to the power of poetry and truth, her work gained recognition and garnered interest due to its honesty. Soon, as the events of the Holocaust receded in time, her poetry started to make appear in the German literary scene. The initial disregard for Sachs in the Federal Republic soon converted to a sudden discovery and growing popularity because of her skillful representation of the theme at hand. In her poetry, she dealt with the paradoxes that are inherent of the Holocaust and included all elements that define the event. The ethical gravity of the human tragedy in Holocaust lies at the core of Nelly Sachs' work. Sachs chose not to offer a coherent explanation for the war but rather she questions guilt and justice. The repressive tendencies that first met Sachs' poetry further encouraged her to make her voice heard.

After years of non-recognition, publishers greatly encouraged and welcomed her work. In a letter to Curt Trepte, she had conveyed her delight on the fact that her work was finally reaching her intended German audience. In Nelly Sachs' poetry, the representation mediates between a subject and its reader because the Holocaust is an event of acute moral magnitude. As such, there is an inevitable moral peril involved in its artistic rendering. She greatly involved Biblical references in her writing to try to question all theological explanations that were offered to justify the Holocaust. The men from the Bible such as Jacob, Job, Saul, and Daniel among others are used by her to express her own experience of betrayal, pain, and suffering.

She did not hold herself back in using vivid imagery that evoked blood, violence and emotions of terror and horror. None of her poems end on hope and positivity. A line from the poem "Jerusalem Everywhere" reads as: 'There in the madness gold is hidden', implying that pain and suffering shall continue to haunt even her happiest memories. Further, she frequently used the phrase "die Stummen" in her works which means a state of being mute or speechlessness. She does so to explain how the Jews were denied of a voice, their identity and their right to life. Her works expresses the aporia between the state of muteness and the indispensability of bearing witness. Also, her choice of words also expresses how great the suppressive tendencies were in Germany and Europe at large, in relation to Holocaust memory. She chose to write poetry to make the world take responsibility for the evils of the Holocaust, for allowing the Jews to be subjected to the atrocities.

Her poetry collections are titled *Eclipse of Stars (1949)*, *And No One Knows Where to Go (1957)*, *Flight and Metamorphosis, (1959)*, *Journey into the Dustless Realm: The Poetry of Nelly Sachs (1961)* and *Signs in the Sand (1962)*. She has also written the play titled *Eli: A Mystery Play of the Suffering of Israel (1950)*

The positive reception of Nelly Sachs' poetry in the late 1950s and 1960s finally culminated in Sachs being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966, jointly with the Israeli author Samuel J. Agnon. Initially unknown and disregarded, Nelly Sachs was suddenly hailed as a literary icon in Germany. In this context, a close understanding of how Sachs' poetry was received in West and East Germany, and of the socio-political factors which led to her becoming an icon sheds a fascinating light on human hypocrisy and the social and psychological trends that dominated the post-war German landscape.

3.5 Literature as Testimony

The author and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel famously wrote that his generation 'invented a new literature, that of testimony'. Holocaust testimony functions as a strong form of oral history. Literature of testimony requires the reader to understand the perils by connecting it to the larger human experience. It asks of the reader to bear patience while the author or the narrator tries to find consolation.

In Holocaust poetry, the poet addresses imagined readers who read the poem from the security of their homes. These readers are expected to have a sense of liability and to consider the dehumanization of male and female victims while trying to engrave peace in our hearts. There is a clear difference between an author who tries to record while coming to terms with traumatic experiences and the reader bears secondary witness to the actual act of witnessing. And in this differentiation lies the unique authority of the survivor–writer.

Poetry, as a genre, is inherently connected to memory. It is an art of recall as it has its origins in mnemonics. Don Paterson observes that a poem 'can be carried in your head in its original state, intact and perfect ... Our memory of the poem is the poem'. However,

memory is not only political, but also personal. All nations have exercised selective memory when it has come to recording the Holocaust. There have been deliberations on choosing to highlight some events and de-emphasize others. This has been done keeping in mind the country's role in the Holocaust in the past and its political needs in the present. Every national history that acknowledges the Holocaust representations are deeply influenced by individual circumstances.

A focus on Holocaust poetry as a distinct genre in its own right brings to the fore questions as to how do we react to such a heartbreaking testimony. It may probe the reader to negotiate with their feelings and understanding. At the same time, the poets also negotiate between trying to make a sustained representation and trying to identify with the lives that were destroyed, lost and shattered by the Holocaust. And to commit themselves to memory, to post-memory and to bear witness for posterity requires them to remember and testify what one never knew.

Such paradoxes are central in the discussions circling around the Holocaust. One has to understand that regardless of all efforts, it is impossible to shed justified light on the meaning of the Holocaust. The primary paradox however lies in the very event of Holocaust, which has claims that no meaning can be attributed to it. Yet it has happened and it is a part of history and a sign of the failure of humanity. Literature as witness, as testimony, as memory reveals that all such events that are considered to have no meaning, always have a side that hegemonic historical discourse do not record. By narrowing the gap between *us* and *them* as readers, we can begin to transcend the burden of witnessing inhumanity and the pain of mankind, which, as citizens of the world, regardless of temporal or regional origin, we all inherit.

Check Your Progress:

Q1. Elucidate your understanding of how the Holocaust re-shaped the ideal of humanity in the world.

Q2. How do you think did Holocaust Literature change the literary scene of the World?

Q3. Poetry as a genre has exercised a significant impact all around the world. How has the power of poetry helped the Holocaust victims and survivors to testify about their experiences?

Q4. Keeping in mind the post-war scenario, what do you make of the reception and impact of the poetry of Nelly Sachs? Do you think the reaction towards her poetry is justified?

Q5. Literature always provides an alternative perception of an event as it provides space to testify. How would you understand the impact of the testimonies in Holocaust Literature on the social and national scenarios of the world?

3.6 Summing Up

In this unit, you were familiarized with the Holocaust and how the event changed the dynamic of the world and the ideals of humanity. The victims and survivors of the Holocaust recorded their horrifying experiences and the brutality they were subjected to. After the end of the Second World War, these documents of witness fled to the emergence of the canon of Holocaust Literature which was further expanded by the works of post-Holocaust writers. Amongst these writers, the poetry of the German-Jewish poet Nelly Sachs stands out for the honesty and rawness with which she describes her experiences. A reading of her poetry provides an insight as to how literature can function as an important medium of testimony and contribute towards post-memory.

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UNIT- 4
NELLY SACHS: ‘LANDSCAPE OF SCREAMS’

Unit Structure:

- 4.1 Objectives**
- 4.2 Nelly Sachs and ‘Landscape of Screams’**
- 4.3 Reading ‘Landscape of Screams’**
 - 4.3.1 The Text**
 - 4.3.2 Summary**
- 4.4 Critical Appreciation**
- 4.5 Themes and Imagery in ‘Landscape of Screams’**
- 4.6 Summing Up**
- 4.7 Glossary**
- 4.8 References/Suggested Readings**

4.1 Objectives

Taking into consideration the complexity of Holocaust literature, the present unit aims to offer a reading of Nelly Sachs’ poem ‘Landscape of Screams’ and the writing style of the poet. By the end of this unit, you will be --

- *understand* the context of Nelly Sachs’ poetry,
- *uncover* the meanings in the use of imagery and themes,
- *evaluate* Nelly Sachs’ contribution to Holocaust poetry.

4.2 Nelly Sachs and “Landscape of Screams”

The Holocaust is the attempted extermination of the Jewish population of Europe by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. The Jewish people were kept in Nazi concentration camps where they were subjected to inhumane torture, violence and were massacred. The accounts, diaries, memoirs, etc. of the Holocaust survivors provide detailed accounts of their experiences. Many other

took the medium of poetry as well to document their sufferings and express their feelings.

Holocaust poetry emerged as testimonial literature because it puts forth first-hand accounts of lived experiences during the Holocaust. As such, close reading is very important in the context of Holocaust poetry as it allows the reader to understand the dynamics of the poem. Nelly Sachs was a German-Jewish poet who was a survivor of the Holocaust or the Shoah. She expressed her experiences through the medium of poetry in order to let the world know what the Jewish people had undergone. She won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1966.

Nelly Sachs was acutely conscious that it was difficult for a post-Holocaust writer to find sufficient and appropriate literary tools to express the horror of the Holocaust in artistic form. It was a formidable task yet Sachs' skills allowed her to write poetry that not only spoke for all the victims but also captured the suffering.

Nelly Sachs' poem "Landschaft aus Schreien" (Landscape of Screams) was first published in 1957. The poem is one of her longest works and is filled with vivid imagery that makes it powerful and evocative. The primary theme of her poem is to capture the violence and death in the camp and she uses the trope of 'screams' in her poem.

4.3 Reading 'Landscape of Screams'

4.3.1 The Text

The Original Poem

In der Nacht, wo Sterben Genährtes zu trennen beginnt,
reißt die Landschaft aus Schreien
den schwarzen Verband auf,

Über Moria, dem Klippenabsturz zu Gott,
schwebt des Opfermessers Fahne
Abrahams Herz-Sohn Schrei,
am großen Ohr der Bibel liegt er bewahrt.

O die Hieroglyphen aus Schreien,
an die Tod-Eingangstür gezeichnet.

Wundkorallen aus zerbrochenen Kehlenflüchten.
O, o Hände mit Angstpflanzenfingern,
eingegraben in wildbäumende Mähnen Opferblutes –

Schreie, mit zerfetzten Kiefern der Fische verschlossen,
Weheranke der kleinsten Kinder
und der schluckenden Atemschleppe der Greise,

eingerrissen in versengtes Azur mit brennenden Schweifen.
Zellen der Gefangenen, der Heiligen,
mit Albraummuster der Kehlen tapezierte,
fiebernde Hölle in der Hundehütte des Wahnsinns
aus gefesselten Sprüngen –

Dies ist die Landschaft aus Schreien!
Himmelfahrt aus Schreien,
Empor aus des Leibes Knochengittern,

Pfeile aus Schreien, erlöste
aus blutigen Köchern.

Hiobs Vier-Winde-Schrei
und der Schrei verborgen im Ölberg
wie ein von Ohnmacht übermanntes Insekt im Kristall.

O Messer aus Abendrot, in die Kehlen geworfen,
wo die Schlafbäume blutleckend aus der Erde fahren,
wo die Zeit wegfällt
an den Gerippen in Maidanek und Hiroshima.

Ascheschrei aus blindgequältem Seherauge –

O du blutendes Auge

in der zerfetzten Sonnenfinsternis
zum Gott-Trocknen aufgehängt
im Weltall –

The Translation

At night when dying proceeds to sever all seams
the landscape of screams
tears open the black bandage,

Above Moria, the falling off cliffs to God,
there hovers the flag of the sacrificial knife
Abraham's scream for the son of his heart,
at the great ear of the Bible it lies preserved.

O hieroglyphs of screams
Engraved at the entrance gate to death.

Wounded coral of shattered throat flutes.
O, O hands with finger veins of fear,
dug into wildly rearing manes of sacrificial blood –

Screams, shut tight with the shredded mandibles of fish,
woe tendril of the smallest children
and the gulping train of breath of the very old,

slashed into seared azure with burning tails.
cells of prisoners, of saints,
tapestryed with the nightmare pattern of throats,
seething hell in the doghouse of madness
of shackled leaps –

This is the landscape of screams!
Ascension made of screams
out of the bodies' grate of bones,
arrows of screams, released
from bloody quivers.

Job's screams to the four winds
and the scream concealed in Mount Olive
like a crystal-bound insect overwhelmed by impotence.

O knife of evening red, flung into the throats
where trees of sleep rear blood-licking from the ground,
where time is shed
from skeletons in Hiroshima and Maidanek.

Ashen scream from visionary eye tortured blind –
O you bleeding eye
in the tattered eclipse of the sun
hung up to be dried by God
in the cosmos –

Translated by MICHAEL ROLOFF

4.3.2 Summary

Lines 1-7

The poet begins the poem with the idea of death. The poet writes about how at night, the visuals of death and the dead comes back to the mind of Holocaust survivors like her. The “landscape” refers to the agonized mental conscious and the unconscious of a survivor. For such survivors of the holocaust, the landscape they had witnessed in the Nazi concentration camps had only visuals of death, torture, and pain as for which they could hear screams all around. The horror of the experience makes these screams embedded in the minds of the survivors. So, in the quiet of the night, the screams of the people who were tortured comes back to the mind. The scream also refers to the silent scream of the soul of such survivors when they recall their experiences.

The “black bandage” refers to when a bandage tied around a wound goes black with blood. This means that a wound is bleeding profusely. Thereby, the line “tears open the black bandage” means that when the survivor recalls the Holocaust, the wound in their soul opens again. The Holocaust experience is a wound that will never

heal and the bandage that has been put over it again “tears open”. This means that the wound is only superficially healed.

In these lines, the poet has used Biblical imagery. Mount Moriah is the place where Abraham takes his favourite son Isaac to be sacrificed after being commanded by God. While Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, God intervened and spared the life of Isaac by providing a ram instead to be sacrificed. “Abraham’s scream” refers to the silent torture his soul was undergoing when he was about to sacrifice his son. But nobody heard these emotional screams just as how deaf ears were turned towards the Holocaust atrocities.

Lines 8-12

In these lines, the poet writes about the trauma in fragments. Hieroglyphs are the formal writing style used in Ancient Egypt. The Book of the Dead was written in ancient hieroglyphs and the various funerary rituals and some spells were written in this book. The prayers and spells were written in hieroglyphs on the tombs of the dead. In this context, the poet writes that the screams of the Holocaust victims were engraved as “hieroglyphs” in the “entrance gate of death”. This implies that the atrocities were so extreme that their screams followed till the gate of death. The poet also speaks of the death of the victims in gas chambers where they would be screaming to be saved while being suffocated at the same time. The simultaneous screaming and suffocation would shatter their throats.

Lines 13- 20

In these lines, the poet speaks of the jaw injuries that the victims suffered in the concentration camps. While working they would be beaten with various objects such as spades and this would often lead to facial injuries such as the dislocation of the jaw. The poet also further continues to speak of the gas chambers and how even small children were put in these chambers along with the older people. The “woe tendril” of the children refers to how the hands of these small children would try to hold on to the older people around them out of fear in these dark chambers. The “screams” of all these people were “shut tight” which means that they were silenced

through torture and then death. The poet writes that these camps were “doghouse of madness”.

Lines 21 – 28

After speaking of the horrific experiences through the use of intense imagery, the poet states that these are experiences that make up the “landscape of screams”. Landscapes are usually beautiful and appealing but to the Holocaust victims, their immediate landscape was filled with horrific visuals, the consistent fear of death and, people screaming all around. Moreover, during the Holocaust, the bodies of the Jewish people were thrown in heaps and piles.

The poet again brings in another Biblical reference through the story of Job. Job was a prosperous man but everything he held dear was taken away by God through horrific disasters to test his faith. The poet also refers to Mount Olive which is a site of pilgrimage. The reference is used to imply that even a visit to Mount Olive will not heal the screams embedded in the soul and over time, the pain binds and hardens the emotions of the survivors.

Lines 29-37

In these lines, the poet again employs images of blood to imply the endless suffering and the amount of blood that was shed in the massacre. The poet also moves towards a universal concept of victimhood through the joint reference of Hiroshima and Maidanek. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were two Japanese cities on which nuclear bombs were dropped by the United States during the Second World War. The people in these cities were annihilated and they were innocent victims in the grand narrative of the war. Maidanek was a concentration camp in Poland and through the reference of these two places, the poet alludes to the innocent killings which have never received any justification.

The “visionary eye” can refer to the collective eye of every person who has witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust. This “eye” has been “tortured blind” by the evil it has seen thus implying, that the atrocities were inhumane beyond imagination. The “bleeding eye” can also be considered to refer to literary imagination which has

been disembodied and completely deprived of prophetic vision. The experience of the Jews has made the mind, emotion and, imagination go numb and bleed. Their lives have been eclipsed and enveloped in darkness. The collective “eye” that has witnessed the suffering has been “hung out to be dried by God in the cosmos” implying that, only God could provide an explanation of the suffering to the people who have been victimized.

SAQ:

Q1. What are the Biblical references in the poem? (30 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q2. Why has the poet made references to Hiroshima and Maidanek? (20 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q3. What is the “landscape of screams” that the poet speaks of? (40 words)

.....
.....
.....

4.4 Critical Appreciation

Nelly Sachs’ poem Landscape of Screams seems as an attempt to understand how the Holocaust is remembered and how it is represented and understood. Like the works of other Holocaust poets, the images of Sachs’ poem are derived from her lived experiences in ghettos and camps. In “Landschaft aus Schreien” attempts to portray the physical and psychological trauma of the survivors. There is a sense of hysteria and despair pervading each line of the poem.

In the poem the act of identification is between the narrator and the victims and not between the narrator and the reader. The subject matter is not only the historical calamity but also the failure of human morals. Through use of powerful words, images, rhetoric and disjointed sentences, the inexplicability of the slaughter is conveyed.

Sachs uses the trope of “screams” to imply the magnitude of suffering. Screaming is associated with emotions such as fear, grief and pain. Screaming is used for articulation when ordinary speech is not effective. The concept of synesthesia is played with by Sachs through her usage of “screams”. Screams evoke a sense of alertness and immediacy in the human mind. In this poem, the poet also refers to the silent screams within the souls of the survivors i.e. their inner turmoil.

A sense of chaos permeates the entire poem and is presented through the opening lines of the poem. The chaos begins from the night-time terror experienced by those who have survived the Holocaust. In a letter to Walter Berendsohn, Nelly Sachs has written about how the recollection of the horrific experience affects her mother every night.

Further, Sachs uses several Biblical archetypes in her attempt to present her opinions on the Holocaust. She does so to expose their vulnerability as analogues to be used to understand the genocide. As for which, she reverses the original message and fits it in her poem to encapsulate the unexplainable suffering. It is her attempt to refute any theological explanation for the Holocaust.

There is a sense of irrepresentability of the intensity of the suffering that Sachs tries to allude to through fragmented sentences, hyphens, reversed archetypes, distorted imagery, etc. Structurally, the poem alternates between sight and sound. Through this poem, Sachs tries to address and question all those responsible and were actively involved in the Holocaust. She asserts that no justification can be provided for the innocent bloodshed and inhumane prejudice and violence that the Jews faced.

4.5 Themes and Imagery in “Landscape of Screams”

The use of vivid imagery and symbols by Nelly Sachs in her poetry is what makes her work unique. The power of language is limited to fully capture the horrors of the Holocaust experience. As such, she does not hold herself back from expressing every aspect clearly and she does it while functioning within the limitations of language. She tries to take advantage of whatever she has at hand to write poetry that can jolt the reader into getting an idea of what she and other

people like her had undergone. In her poem “The Landscape of Screams”, Nelly Sachs employs a series of blood-drenched images and biblical references to describe the nightmarish Holocaust landscape of horror.

Nelly Sachs uses several Biblical references in an attempt to deconstruct the grand theological narratives. Her manipulation of the Biblical archetypes is part of the process of “figuration” which the poet employs in her work in an attempt to find meaning in the Holocaust. She uses the story of Abraham which is preserved with great importance in the Bible. Despite his soul “screaming”, he received deliverance by God. But to her, there was nobody to give any deliverance to these Holocaust victims. She tries to imply that the Jews were ‘sacrificed’ for a cause known only to God as no explanation would suffice the heinous torture. Similarly, the story of Job is used by her to showcase how like Job, all the Jews also lost everything dear to them. But they did not get any divine deliverance and the survivors were left to live with scars in their souls with nothing to sustain them. As such, through the poem, Sachs refutes the original consolatory conclusions that these Biblical narratives carry. She emphasizes that no sense of justification can be attributed to this massacre.

There are various images of entrapment and constriction the poet employs in the poem such as Abraham’s scream is held preserved; screams are ‘sealed’ tight in the shredded mandibles of fish; saints and prisoners are trapped in cells, Job’s scream to the four winds is trapped and the insect is bound in solid crystal. All of these images point toward how the victims were trapped in the Nazi concentration camps and how the horrors are now trapped in the minds of the survivors. It is also a reference to the entrapment a writer feels in the limits of language to describe the Holocaust experience.

Furthermore, the image of the “flute” refers to the asphyxiation of the victims in the gas chambers. When a flute is deprived of the necessary air required to be played, it becomes choked and emits a scream-like sound. This parallel is drawn artistically by Sachs. The poet primarily uses ‘throat’ as a trope to refer to how the voices and identity of the Jewish people were shattered and replaced with them screaming as they were rendered speechless by their miserable predicament.

SAQ:

Q1. Read the poem as a testimony of the lived experiences of the Holocaust survivors. Can it be considered that the poet has been able to capture the essence of what she is trying to express? (40 words)

.....
.....
.....

Check Your Progress

Q1. How is the poem ‘Landscape of Screams’ relevant against the context of the Holocaust? Elaborate on the use of “scream” as a trope.

Q2. How do you think the imagery of ‘blood’ and ‘throat’ are employed by the poet to convey the meaning of the poem? Does it drive home the intention of the poet?

Q3. Do you think poem delves into the themes of identity, speechlessness and the necessity to have a voice?

Q4. Elucidate on your understanding of how language is used by Nelly Sachs to construct her experiences as a Holocaust survivor.

4.6 Summing Up

Nelly Sachs’ “Landscape of Screams” is an important work through which the poet tries to assert the need to chronicle the destructions caused by the Holocaust. The use of symbolism, language and the syntactic structure of the poem helps to understand Nelly Sachs and her literary skills. The impact of the Holocaust, the pain of oppression and the scars of the experience are very poignantly portrayed and captured by the poet. While ending, we can say that Nelly Sachs has very powerfully questioned the entire foundation of human values and her poetry serves as a testimony for posterity.

4.7 Glossary

1. Abraham – Abraham is a Biblical figure who is asked by God to sacrifice his favorite son Isaac to prove his faith and belief in God.
2. Asphyxiation – it refers to the state or process of being deprived of oxygen i.e.. suffocation which can lead to unconsciousness or death
3. Crystal-bound insect– It refers to amber which is fossilized tree resin. Amber is clear in substance and many insects like ants, beetles, etc. remain trapped inside it.
4. Job- Job is a Biblical figure from the Book of Job. He was blessed with great prosperity and a good family but in order to test his faith, God takes away everything from him through disasters.
5. Ghetto –It refers to Jewish quarters.
6. Maidanek – Maidanek was a large Nazi concentration camp in Poland. It had seven gas chambers and the place primarily was involved in exterminating the Jews.
7. Mandible –It refers to the lower jaw in vertebrates
8. Mount Olive–Mount Olive is a place of pilgrimage.

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Here are some URLs on the Internet which you may find useful:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_the_Dead

<https://www.mp.pl/auschwitz/journal/english/308797>, jaw-injuries-
auschwitz

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BLOCK- 4

Unit 1: Introducing Carlos Drummond de Andrade

Unit 2: Carlos Drummond de Andrade: Travelling in the family

Unit 3: Introducing Constantine Cavafy

Unit 4: Constantine Cavafy: Waiting for the Barbarians

UNIT- 1
INTRODUCING CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE

Unit Structure:

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Objectives

1.3 Biography of Carlos Drummond de Andrade

1.4 Themes in Andrade's Poetry

1.5 Writing Style

1.6 Historical Context

1.7 Comparative Reading of Andrade's Poems

1.8 Andrade in World Literature

1.9 The Reception of Brazilian Poetry Through Andrade's Works

1.10 Summing Up

1.10 References and Suggested Readings

1.1 Introduction

Carlos Drummond de Andrade is one of the most prominent Brazilian writers in the discourse of World Literature. His poetry had transversed political boundaries of nations and is also deeply rooted in the milieu of the 20th Century Modernism. It is his treatment of universal themes like loss, love, everyday existence and human nature that makes him relevant even in today's times. There is an overtone of melancholia and introspection that underscores his poetry enhancing its poignance for the readers. While dealing with the themes of existential anxieties that are inherent in the human condition, he uses a conversational language which is accessible to the masses. There is an abundance of stark imagery in his poetry and this is a testament to the poetic genius of Andrade.

It becomes pertinent to learn about him and his works in the context of world literature because of his use of universal themes and their treatment. In his poems, he carries an exploration of modern life through his use of irony and humour. Despite choosing to delve into universal themes, he manages to retain a Brazilian identity in his poems which makes it rooted in the local culture.

1.2 Objectives

After going through this chapter, the students will be able to

- learn the biography and historical context from which Andrade's works emerge
- articulate the themes in Andrade's poetry
- understand the significance of Andrade's poems as a part of World Literature
- discuss the trope of travel in his poetry.

1.3 Biography of Carlos Drummond de Andrade

Born in the year 1902 in the city of Itabira (which is a mining village), Brazil Carlos Drummond de Andrade has been a crucial figure in the literary canon of Brazilian poetry, through which he paved his path in World literature as well. He's a journalist, poet, and literary critic among many other things. His poetry has had a major influence on the modernist movement of the 20th century poetry and Brazilian poetry with his innovative style of writing. He's famously known for his ironic treatment of realistic themes in his poetry while reflecting on the perspective of a modern man in urban Brazil.

Carlos Drummond de Andrade was born into a farmer family with Portuguese origins. Due to the growing dissatisfaction with his career choices in pharmacy and later as a civil servant, Andrade switched to writing poetry. His earliest poems were a testament to his satiric genius as he wrote mostly formal, satirical poems before developing a modernist strain in his works that was flowing in Brazilian poetry during the 1920s following the footsteps of Mario de Andrade. At the onset of World War II, Drummond began leaning towards communism and became the editor of *Tribuna Popular*, the official newspaper of the Brazilian Communist Party. However, he eventually left the position because of his strong opposition to censorship and the resulting conflicts (Zenith 2015).

Considered as one of the best poets in Brazil, he turned to poetry in his early 20s where he became part of the modernist Brazilian poets who chose to write in their colloquial language in free verse departing from the traditional usage of syntax. As a literary critic, he was also the founder of a literary magazine called *A revista* or "Review". His alignment with the modernist movement in his

poetry has been made evident with the publication of the first volume of his poetry in 1930 called “Some Poetry” or *Algumapoesia*. What made his poetry modernist was the anguish over the pitfalls of urban centres in Brazil. He wrote specifically to voice the lamentation of the rural immigrants who shifted to these urban spaces only to be stuck in a loop of mundane and meaningless routines. He wrote short fiction as well which particularly dealt with the sufferings of children and the poor people in the cities (Britannica 2024).

Drummond de Andrade's poetry encompasses a diverse array of themes and styles, which can be categorized into different segments in his books. Despite this variety, a unifying thread runs through his work, connecting each individual poem to form a cohesive whole. His poetry spans everyday observations to political commentary, satire, and socialist themes, all of which seamlessly integrate into his broader metaphysical oeuvre. His style using irony is a scathing comment on the problems faced by his contemporaries and as Bastide says it is because the world itself is ironic Andrade's writings reflects these in his poetry. This interconnectedness and thematic diversity underscore Drummond de Andrade's ability to weave complex and multifaceted narratives.

Andrade worked as the director of the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service and as a civil servant just before he retired in 1962. During his lifetime, he accumulated authorship of around 15 poetry collections and 6 short fiction collections. He achieved particular fame among American writers like Mike Strand, Lloyd Schwartz and Elizabeth Bishop some of whom went ahead and translated his works into English as a tribute. The first-ever translations of his work to English were done by Virginia Araujo, who translated his *The Minus Sign and Other Poems*, published in 1980. Some of his other volumes of poems like *Traveling in the Family: Selected Poems* and *Multitudinous Heart: Selected Poems* were translated by notable poets like Elizabeth Bishop and Mark Strand. In memory of the poet, Dwight Garner says in a New York Times review that he is “a sophisticated and cerebral poet who...speaks in many registers. He is by turns melancholy and ironic, sentimental and self-deprecating, remote and boyish.”

Check Your Progress

1. Mention Drummond's style of writing in his poetry.
2. How does Drummond de Andrade's poetry reflect the socio-political climate of 20th-century Brazil?

1.4 Themes in Andrade's Poetry

Human Communication- One of the most prevalent themes in the poems of Drummond de Andrade is human communication. The era of modernity was characterised by a sense of alienation from the society and this was further aggravated by the loss of self. This led to an experience of a fragmented identity that ran across the generation of modern poets. Throughout his poetic journey, Andrade has consistently focused on the theme of establishing meaningful human communication that has the power to bring people together. This central preoccupation permeates his work, as he explores the nuances of human connection and the ways in which poetry can bridge the gaps between individuals.

Andrade's poems often reflect his deep desire to foster a sense of unity and understanding among people, transcending barriers such as social hierarchy, political ideology, and personal differences. By emphasizing the importance of dialogue and empathy, Andrade seeks to create a more harmonious and connected world through his literary contributions. This undercurrent on the theme of human communication runs through his early poetry as well as his later philosophical works. He writes on the theme and refers to it constantly although in different poetic guises (O'Brien 1969).

Carnal Love- Andrade delves into the theme of physical love in his poetry collections such as "Alguma Poesia" and "Brejo das Almas," where this subject is prominently featured. His work frequently addresses erotic desire and the experience of sexual rejection, exploring these complex emotions with sensitivity and insight. Additionally, Andrade's poetry often includes a critical perspective on women, reflecting the nuanced and sometimes contentious nature of romantic and sexual relationships. Through his verses, he navigates the highs and lows of love, capturing the intensity of passion as well as the pain of unfulfilled desire, thereby offering a rich and multifaceted exploration of human intimacy. However, upon further contemplation, he comes to the realisation that carnal

desire is just a way for him to cope with his loneliness set by modern culture. He then swiftly changes his poetic motif from an individual desire to fraternal love that can be felt on a collective level. His poetry was written as a cure for the ailment of the modern society.

After his departure to other themes however, he does return to the subject of carnal love as a mature poet where he deals with it without the previous humour and wit, like in *Licao de coisas*.

Fraternal Love- The fraternal love that he explores in his poetry marks his transition as a poet into the realm of social poetry. The increasing crises in the global landscape during the 20th century changed the aspirations of the poet regarding the themes of his poems. The impact of the fascist and communist groups among the literary intellectuals of the Modern period was monumental, especially as it drove the literary movements of the late 20th century. The works which establish the theme of fraternity in his writings are *Sentimento do Mundo*, *A Rosa do Povo* and *Jose*. Drummond had attempted to establish the self in relation to others through individual involvement and later collective involvement. However, even this couldn't provide a solution to all his problems which made him turn inwards rather than seeking it somewhere outside himself. Thus began his journey of self-exploration.

Self Exploration- His next phase of poetry writing indulges in a metaphysical state of things which he discovers with his exploration of self. It was a point of acceptance for the poet who has finally given in to man's loneliness and started to seek peace in that endeavour. In his collection of poems like *Clairo Enigma*, he discards all his futile attempts at communication with his contemporaries through the means of carnal and fraternal love and instead tries to dive more into self-understanding through a return to his origin. He does so by looking at the parallel pictures of the past and the present in an attempt to highlight how the coming up of urban societies has dehumanised man. His poetry in this phase of writing dealt more closely with the circumstances surrounding life and death. There is a constant search for the meaning of life and existence which he connects to his exploration of self. This leads him towards the poetic treatment of man not just in terms of their living existence but also as decaying matter. He explores this theme

further in his collections like *Novospoemas*, *Poesia ate agora* and *Fazendeiro do ar*, which were published after the World War II.

Check Your Progress

1. What are some of the themes in Carlos Drummond de Andrade's poetry?
2. Discuss the themes of Drummond de Andrade's poetry that make him a quintessential Modernist poet.
3. What are the key features of Drummond de Andrade's poetry and approach, and how do they differ from his contemporaries?

1.5 Writing Style

Carlos Drummond de Andrade has a distinct modern style of writing which is quite evident in the themes that he deals with in his writings. He was inspired by the foundations of Brazilian modernist poetry laid out by the works of Mario de Andrade and Oswald de Andrade who proposed that one should not constrain oneself to a dependence on the fixed meter and should rather explore one's creativity through the free verse form.

Within the modernist style, the type of writings can be characterised into two distinctive styles, lyrical and concrete. The lyrical style was more subjective as compared to the concrete style which was more objective in nature. Just like his predecessor, Oswald de Andrade, Drummond de Andrade wrote in a detached, objective style which added another layer of complexity in deciphering his writings. Even while writing autobiographical poems, there is a level of objectivity that helps maintain the distance between the poet and the poetic persona.

Due to his distinct writing style which celebrated free verse and linguistic freedom, Carlos Drummond de Andrade enjoyed a remarkable position among Brazilian modernist poets. To quote Alfredo Bosi, who was a Brazilian historian and a literary critic, "The work of Drummond reaches – as Fernando Pessoa, Jorge de Lima, Murilo Mendes, and Herberto Helder– a coefficient of loneliness that detached from the soil of history, leading the

reader to an attitude free of references, trademarks or ideological or prospective,".

According to Bosi, for ease of reading and analysis, Andrade’s poetry can be divided into three categories based on his style and technique. The first category called, “I, greater than the world” contains his ironic poetry and the second category, “I, lower than the world” marks his social poetry. The third and last category is the “I, equal to the world”, which covers the metaphysical poetry that he has written in his lifetime.

Although Andrade is considered a modernist poet, his work defies the conventions of the aesthetic hierarchy and moral high ground prevalent in traditional poetry, in contrast to modernism's general acceptance of these norms. His poetry finds the extraordinary within the ordinary which is a central element in his poetry.

Andrade's themes often reflect his affection for the rural and small-town environments of Brazil, which he juxtaposes with urban life and its challenges. Many of his poems address the struggles of urban living, particularly of the lower middle class and middle class. This focus is evident in his use of language that captures the essence of everyday life and resonates with the readers. Andrade's work explores the gap between the rural and the urban, highlighting the complexities within Brazilian society.

Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s poems are preoccupied with silence and non-communication and prone to psychological silences with a contradictory desire for expression. Drummond's poetry is more reflective than proactive. Rather than offering solutions, his work depicts the society's ennui and the profound suffering of its people. Irony frequently serves as a central theme in his poems. His writing is often confessional and autobiographical as he draws from his personal experiences. Drummond portrays a struggle between his inner world and the external society.

<p>Self Assessing Questions:</p> <p>1. Discuss the writing style of the Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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2. How does Drummond de Andrade's conversational language and accessibility impact the reader's engagement with his poetry?

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1.6 Historical Context

Carlos Drummond de Andrade hails from the age of transition, the age which heralded the onset of modernity in Brazil and all over the world during the first half of the 20th Century. The age of modernity was seen as an entwinement of the traditions set by the predecessors as well as a conscious departure towards establishing a new future. It was a time when the Brazilian mines served as an attraction for the English for their exploitative practices. Once the operation in these mines started, the landscape of the place transformed with the colonial intrusions. Their destructive practices ruined the natural habitats as trees were uprooted, the birds were displaced and the beaches became crowded with skyscrapers. The economy of Brazil prior to this was based on its agriculture but with these developments, it swiftly shifted to an industrial economy.

When Getulio Vargas ruled over Brazil in the 20th Century, there was a significant development with the coming of industries like the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Soon after that people started moving to these urban centers with the shifting economy from their rural homes. The congested city life was a far cry from the anticipated growth in living standards as compared to the people who became trapped in meaningless routines without any hope of escape. There was a sense of ennui that plagued society which was a common theme in poetry by many writers of the time. This was a state of transition from the previous world order to the new one which piqued the interests of the poets and writers of the modernist movement in Brazil.

It was around the 1930s when Brazil was going through this transition, which was further aggravated by the depression that beset the world economy due to the First World War. The turmoil of further political discord was also in momentum just as the West was nearing another World War in the next decade. It was during these tumultuous times when Carlos Drummond de Andrade began to

write his poetry. It was due to the ongoing crises going on in the world at that point of time that Drummond de Andrade shifted his poetic focus to a more social kind of poetry in his second phase as elucidated by Bosi.

The modernist movement in Brazil entered its second phase during the 1930s, which collided with the publication of Andrade's first collection of poetry. It was a movement of cultural renovation which started back in 1922, with people like Oswald de Andrade, Mario de Andrade, Cassiano Ricardo, Guilhermi de Almeida, Ronald de Carvalho, Menotti del Picchia and Renato de Almeida as its pioneering figureheads. The prominent members of the second modernist movement included people like Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Manuel Bandeira, Murilo Mendes, Jorge de Lima, Cecilia Meireles, Augusto Frederico Schmidt, and Vinicius de Moraes. Among all these notable poets, Drummond de Andrade was mostly recognised for his contribution to the canon of Brazilian poetry. The treatment of the human condition in Andrade's poetry has been profound making it a timeless experience for readers of all generations.

Towards the end of the Second World War, in 1945, Andrade found himself as the co-director of a Communist daily. However, his involvement was highly based on artistic creation rather than extreme politics.

Stop to Consider:

The modernist movement in literature, exemplified by poets and authors such as Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, Katherine Mansfield, and T.S. Eliot, emerged in the late 19th century and continued until the mid-20th century. This era was defined by innovative writing techniques, including the "stream of consciousness," extensively employed by fiction writers like Virginia Woolf.

Key features of modernist writing include a commitment to experimentation, which enabled writers to break free from traditional methods of storytelling. Themes of fragmentation and alienation were prevalent, and modernist works often focused on exploring the individual intricacies of self. Modernist writers eschewed rigid poetic structures, favouring free verse, and their

works were distinguished by heavy use of symbolism and rich imagery. These elements combined to create a distinctive and influential literary movement that profoundly shaped the landscape of 20th-century literature.

Modernism was an immensely influential literary and artistic movement that spurred the development of numerous other movements. These offshoots include Acmeism, which emphasized clarity and direct expression; Dada, known for its anti-establishment and avant-garde ethos; and Free verse, which liberated poetry from the constraints of traditional meter and rhyme. Futurism celebrated technology and dynamism, while Imagism focused on precision and vivid imagery in poetry. Objectivism sought a more concrete and clear approach to poetic form and content. Postmodernism emerged as a reaction to modernism, characterized by its scepticism, irony, and eclecticism. Surrealism delved into the unconscious mind, producing works rich in dream-like, fantastical elements.

1.7 Comparative Reading of Andrade's Poems

To fully appreciate Carlos Drummond de Andrade's writing, it is essential to familiarize oneself with his extensive body of work. Engaging in a comparative reading of some of his poems can provide deeper insights into the poet's themes, stylistic choices, and overall literary contribution. By examining multiple pieces side by side, one can discern recurring motifs, unique characteristics, and the evolution of his poetic voice. For that purpose, this section will deal with the discussion of some of his poems including *Family Portrait*, *Traveling with the Family*, *Sentiment of the World* and *Jose*.

In *Family Portrait*, a speaker comes across an old family photograph. There is a contradictory tension in the entire text as the portrait or the photograph shows just as much as it hides. Presence and absence are staged in a variety of forms that participate in the haunting effect provided by the photograph on its observer. According to Barthes, the haunting effect of a picture results first from the temporal blurring which the observer experiences while facing the photograph of dead people. In de Andrade's *Family*

Portrait, the dead relations that strike a pose correspond to what Barthes calls “spectrum”, that is to say, spectators who belong to an abolished past when they were still alive. There is a spectral effect that has been produced due to the superimposition of life and death. Besides, while the picture revives relatives bringing numerous associations to the observer’s mind with ulterior episodes or out-of-the-frame depths that the picture cannot register.

The visible elements of the picture co-exist with the invisible ones that the observer can also perceive. Finally, the way that the speaker goes to describing the past tells the readers about how he remembers it, blurred and fragmented as he says that his eyes are just as “dusty” as the photograph. (Bellehingue 2018)

In his collection of poetry *Jose*, the poetic persona sees himself as a mere actor in the landscape of the city. The motif of the city plays a vital role in the poems as the first poem, *The Moth*, starts with Rio and the last poem, *Travelling with the Family*, occupies the land of Itabira. Most of his poems in the collection preoccupy themselves with issues of urbanity that the poet deals with as a modern poet. In *Traveling with the Family*, the poet explores his relationship with his father while travelling down memory lane in the mining village of Itabira where he was born. There is a stark contrast between the present state of Itabira and the one he spent his childhood in because of the exploitation that occurred after the coming of the industries.

Sentiment of the World was written in the backdrop of war where the poet tries to draw parallels between the individual experience and the collective. He mulls over the meaninglessness of existence while bemoaning the terrible history of mankind with war. It is one of his more social poems. Keeping in with the modernist style, the structure of the poem follows a fragmented style that mimics the fragmented sense of self. The poem revolves round war and loss expressed in simple language as he presents the cyclical nature of the history of war.

In the poem *Jose*, after which the collection has been named, he addresses everyman in a dramatic monologue. He chooses a generic name which can be used to address any average modern man in Brazil, this also is used particularly because of its association with the myth of the crooked angel, the displaced. The poetic persona poses a series of questions to a silent Jose that brings out the

existential dilemmas of the 20th century. He brings attention to the hopeless environment that the modern man finds himself in, which has been ravaged with the onset of urbanization, through phrases like “What now, Jose?”. José is a man stripped of everything, both physically and spiritually, and is forced into a state of imposed humility that is evident even in his name. As "utopia did not come," José, now "a broken man," finds himself abandoned and engulfed in darkness. It is crucial to recognize that Drummond’s poetry unveils an existential struggle, delving deeply into contrasting elements and creating “a vast system of oppositions” (Sant’Anna, 1972, p. 17). José represents a political stance, aiming to align with the marginalized everyman, but the poem is also imbued with scepticism, doubt, and indecision (da Silva 2021).

In conclusion, Carlos Drummond de Andrade's poetry is a profound exploration of the human condition, marked by deep introspection and a keen awareness of societal issues. His work traverses the boundaries of Brazil, resonating with global audiences through its universal themes and innovative structures. By examining poems such as "Family Portrait," "Traveling with the Family," "Sentiment of the World," and "José," we gain a deeper understanding of Andrade's literary contributions. His poetry not only captures the essence of personal and collective struggles but also reflects the complexities of modern-day life. Andrade's ability to merge personal reflection with universal concerns, while maintaining a unique Brazilian perspective, solidifies his legacy as a cornerstone of modernist poetry and a pivotal figure in world literature. His influence continues to inspire and challenge readers, ensuring his place in the pantheon of great literary figures.

Self Assessing Questions:

- Discuss some of Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s concerns of modern life in his poetry.
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- Briefly discuss Drummond’s style and technique in his poetry.
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1.8 Andrade in World Literature

Andrade has been a central figure of modernist poetry of the 20th century Brazil. His poems travelled beyond the national boundaries and influenced new literary traditions. His poems are highly introspective in nature and question the nature of human existence. He deals with various themes pertaining to the human condition like those of love, loss and social injustices. Andrade's ability to blend personal reflection with universal themes allows his work to resonate with readers worldwide. His use of free verse and innovative structures aligns him with modernist contemporaries, yet his unique perspective as a Brazilian poet adds a rich, culturally specific layer to his contributions.

What makes Carlos Drummond de Andrade an essential part of world literature is the way his works contemplate the frustration of the modern man stuck in a world of despair. The modern man was alienated not only from society as there was a loss of the sense of community but also from himself. Andrade uses his poetry as a means of communication with his contemporaries and fellow modern men who are going through the same experience together yet individually.

His poetry has travelled across the globe in translations and proliferated among the masses. Andrade's influence extends beyond Brazil, impacting the broader Latin American literary scene, earning him international acclaim. His works have been translated into multiple languages, making his poignant explorations of life accessible to a global audience. By addressing both the specificities of Brazilian society and the broader human experience, Andrade bridges local and universal concerns, securing his legacy as a pivotal figure in world literature.

Stop to Consider:

Other than writing poetry, Carlos Drummond de Andrade was a prolific short fiction writer known as *Cronicas*. He was from a Portuguese family and wrote most of his works in either Portuguese or Spanish.

The genre of *cronicas* or short fiction was of Brazilian origin and is a distinct part of the Latin American literary scene, mostly to be

found in Brazilian and Portuguese literature. They are brief, casual essays or reflections that commonly appear in newspapers, magazines, or other periodicals. The word "crônica" can be translated into English as "chronicle" or "column."

1.9 The Reception of Brazilian Poetry Through Andrade's Works

Brazil lies at the periphery in the context of the world which centers itself around Eurocentric notions and hegemony of the US. The ethical challenges of world literature involve bringing together diverse perspectives, often resulting in clashes between the dominant Western view and the perspectives of marginalized regions. Especially the reading of texts from other parts of the world involves a forceful critical lens which quite often comes from the dominant discourses. However, these readings allow voices from the peripheral areas to be recognized and read by Western audiences.

The international reception of Brazilian literary culture in the 20th century is shaped by an established literary canon created by academics alongside an image of otherness deeply rooted in a colonialist mindset. The introduction of European intellectual agendas in Brazil highlighted a disparity between the country's socio-economic underdevelopment and its cultural status. While Brazil was materially poor, it possessed a wealth of intellectual richness.

Carlos Drummond de Andrade was quite popular among American readers and critics because of his relationship with Elizabeth Bishop, who translated most of his poems. His writings garnered a lot of attention from intellectual critics and readers all around the world making him one of the most formidable voices from Brazil.

Drummond received numerous literary accolades in Brazil for both individual works and his overall contributions in the field of literature. These awards included honors from the PEN Club of Brazil and the Union of Brazilian Writers. He was twice nominated for the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, in 1972 and 1978, by World Literature Today. Despite these accolades, Drummond modestly declined many other prizes and refused to pursue a chair

in the Brazilian Academy of Letters. His work has had a profound and lasting influence on generations of Brazilian artists, particularly shaping the development of lyric poets since the 1930s. Additionally, more than seventy musical adaptations of his poems have been created. Notable composers inspired by Drummond include Heitor Villa-Lobos, who set his poems to music as early as 1926, and popular vocalist Milton Nascimento. Drummond's work has also been the subject of extensive academic study, with hundreds of articles and numerous book-length analyses published in Brazil.

Self Assessing Questions:

How do you think the reception of Drummond de Andrade was influenced by the politics of his location?

1.10 Summing Up

Carlos Drummond de Andrade remains a towering figure in the landscape of Brazilian and World literature. His unique voice, marked by a profound exploration of the human condition, has left an indelible mark on poetry. Through his innovative use of language and ability to find the extraordinary in the ordinary, Drummond's work transcends time and cultural boundaries resonating deeply with successive generations. His contributions have not only enriched Brazilian literary tradition but have also inspired artists and scholars worldwide. From the rural heartlands of Brazil to the complexities of urban life, Drummond's poetry captures the essence of humanity in its multifaceted forms. His legacy continues to influence and inspire, affirming his place as one of the most significant literary figures of the 20th century.

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UNIT- 2
CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE’S
“TRAVELLING IN THE FAMILY”

Unit Structure:

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Objectives

2.3 Elizabeth Bishop and her Translation of the Poem

2.4 Autobiographical References in the poem

2.5 The trope of Psychological Travel in “Travelling in the Family”

2.6 Poetic Structure and Form

2.7 Themes in the poem

2.8 Analysis of the poem

2.9 Summing Up

2.10 References/Suggested Readings

2.1 Introduction

“Travelling in the Family” is a poem written by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, who is considered one of the most prominent poets in Brazilian literary canon. It was part of his collection of poems by the same name, *Traveling in the Family: Select Poems of Carlos Drummond de Andrade*, which was edited by American poets Mark Strand and Thomas Colchie. Written and published in the 20th Century, it is an autobiographical poem which follows the relationship of the poetic persona who is the son and his father as they travel down memory lane through the desert of Itabira. This poem is a prominent instance of World Poetry even with its specific socio-historic positioning in time and space. It speaks to people about the human condition and relationships that transcend boundaries.

The poem has many autobiographical references as it alludes to Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s relationship with his father. One can see the modernist strand of objective writing in the poem despite its autobiographical nature. For readers, the poem offers an immersive journey into the depths of the poet's psyche. The poem

serves as a lens through which the poet revisits and reflects upon his past, particularly his strained relationship with his father. This exploration provides a profound insight into the poet's emotional landscape, allowing readers to witness firsthand the complexities of his familial interactions and personal struggles.

2.2 Objectives

This chapter will offer an in-depth analysis of the poem “Travelling in the Family”. After going through this unit, the students will be able to

- understand the historical context of “Travelling in the Family”
- discuss the poetic structure and writing style employed by Carlos Drummond de Andrade
- learn the politics of translation while analysing the English translation of the poem
- discuss the themes of the poem with reference to the authorial intention
- analyse the autobiographical references in the poem

2.3 Elizabeth Bishop and her Translation of the Poem

During her self-imposed exile to Brazil in 1952, Elizabeth Bishop discovered the rich landscape of Brazilian literature. She is often credited in popularizing Carlos Drummond de Andrade in the West through her English translations of his poetry. Bishop's profound understanding of Brazilian culture and language enabled her to create translations that preserved the integrity and depth of Andrade's original works. While she undertook many translation projects, primarily to learn Portuguese, her selection of texts was driven by her literary interests and personal affinities. As Bethany Hicok notes, “Bishop’s translations are important because they bring us closer to Brazil and its writers. They also bring us to Bishop” (Hicok 2140). By translating Andrade’s confessional and autobiographical poems like “Traveling in the Family”, Bishop not only brought his work to a wider audience but also used the process to explore and define her own autobiographical approach. Through these translations, she created a bridge between Brazilian literature

and the English-speaking world, enriching both cultural landscapes and offering insights into her personal and artistic development.

Much like her own autobiographical works, Andrade's "Traveling in the Family" grapples with the challenge of recalling childhood memories in an effort to revisit and reclaim one's lost identity. This process is an attempt to reconcile with the past, to become reacquainted with what has been lost, and to uncover words silenced by the fading of memories over time. Reminiscence, in this context, is not merely about recalling events but also involves the simultaneous act of burying them, often unconsciously, due to the fluid nature of memory that tends to dissolve details. This act of forgetting can also be intentional, as one might choose to keep certain memories hidden. As Myrium Bellehigue notes, "Oblivion is to be heard as both forgetfulness and omission." Bishop identifies with Andrade's poem which reflects the complex interplay between memory and oblivion, highlighting the inevitable gaps and silences that shape our understanding of the past. Through this exploration, the poem underscores the fragmented and selective nature of memory, revealing how the passage of time alters and distorts our recollections, making the process of remembering both a personal and universal struggle.

It is a poem where remembering involves gently revisiting the past without forcing it to resurface, while fully acknowledging the emotional impact of the recollected moments. This approach mirrors the strategy that Bishop appears to employ in her autobiographical writings. Thus, translating someone else's tropes becomes Bishop's way of articulating her own autobiographical method.

Check Your Progress:

1. Why did Elizabeth Bishop choose to translate certain texts, and what does this reveal about her literary interests and personal affinities?
2. What is common in both the poets, Bishop and Drummond in terms of time past? Explain.

2.4 Autobiographical References in the Poem

What many of Bishop's autobiographical texts show indeed is that writing about one's childhood consists of striving to visit a long-lost territory and identity. It consists of trying to regain a form of familiarity with what has become foreign and trying to find words for what often remained silent in the past. Oblivion is to be heard as both forgetfulness and omission.

Andrade had a conflicting relationship with his father with whom he hopes to reconcile through the act of writing his poem however the father remains silent throughout the whole psychological journey of the poem. In the dedication that appears on top of the poem, Carlos Drummond de Andrade specifically addressed the poem to his father, Rodrigo M.F. de Andrade.

In an interview, when Drummond de Andrade was asked about his parents, he depicted his father as a stern figure, likening him to a judge or avenger, while he described his mother in more affectionate terms, portraying her as sweet. There was a moment when he almost struck his father in self-defence, a tense encounter that revealed the fraught nature of their relationship. The father, in turn, harboured fears that his son might retaliate, reflecting the mutual apprehension and conflict between them. This complex dynamic underscores the autobiographical essence of the poem, revealing the poet's deep-seated need to reconcile and come to terms with his tumultuous relationship with his father. Through this lens, the poem becomes a vehicle for exploring and addressing the unresolved tensions and emotional struggles that characterize their interaction, offering a window into the poet's personal conflicts and his efforts to understand and reconcile his past.

Check Your Progress:

1. Can you consider "Travelling in the Family" as an autobiographical poem? Why?

2.5 The trope of Psychological Travel in “Travelling in the Family”

“Travelling in the Family” can be interpreted as a travel poem, but it diverges from the conventional notion of physical or geographical travel. Instead, it embarks on a psychological journey to the unconscious mind, inviting readers into the intricate and intimate realm of the poet's mind. This internal voyage delves into the poet's memories, emotions, and reflections, offering a deeply personal and introspective exploration of his experiences and perceptions.

Through this psychological travel, the poem transcends the boundaries of time and space, moving fluidly between past and present. The reader is taken on a mental journey that traverses the landscapes of memory, where the poet revisits his childhood in the mining town of Itabira and navigates the emotional terrain shaped by his relationship with his father. The poem's vivid imagery and reflective tone evoke the sensations of these mental landscapes, making the reader a fellow traveller in the poet's introspective odyssey.

In “Travelling in the Family”, the exploration of psychological travel inherently raises profound questions about time, memory, and representation. These themes are intricately woven into the fabric of the poem, creating a complex interplay between imagined reality and actual reality. The gap between these two realms invites readers to contemplate on the nature of perception and the reliability of memory.

Check Your Progress:

1. Discuss *Travelling in the Family* as a travel poem.
2. Write about the trope of psychological travel in Andrade's poem *Travelling in the Family*.

2.6 Poetic Structure and Form

The poet uses travelling as the central metaphor in *Travelling in the Family* while talking about the psychological journey that he undertakes with his deceased father. The past is the metaphorical

“lost kingdom” that he visits with the ghost of his dead father. The use of metonymy is a crucial element in the poem that highlights the poet’s creative output. Lacan presents metonymy as a diachronic movement from one signifier to another along the signifying chain where there’s a perpetual deferral of meaning. He uses interrogative sentences in the poem which shows his uncertainty. There is a problem of representation that arises here, how do you deal with forgetting while representing something?

When the traumatic episodes are brought back to the surface, the syntax of the poem becomes irregular with more pauses as if the poetic voice could no longer speak. The poem sounds like an incomplete puzzle and the lost kingdom can be reconstituted only partially, through furtive images separated and related by numerous blanks. It draws several fragmentary portraits through synecdochic associations, like “his clothes”, “his legal documents” and “his tales of love affairs”, creating part of the whole picture of the father by describing parts that make the whole.

As Bellehigue says- “The nominal list seems to be governed by alliterations and metonymic associations that do not reveal anything about personalities or relationships. The reader is simply left at the end of the stanza with the sound of rustling silks... Several questions remain unanswered: “A sigh? A passing bird?”; “what cruel hand...” (stanza 6). Several nouns have no clear syntactic referent (“remorse,” “pride,” “terror”). They seem to be suspended among other words, referring to either father or son or other relatives... so that it is impossible for the reader to establish any clear logical connection between people and events.”

The poem envelops the reader in a "spectral effect," where the boundaries between past and present, as well as between the dead and the living, become blurred, creating a spectrum of haunting images. This interplay of life and death adds a profound layer of complexity and depth to the narrative. Many terms and references within the poem lack a clear syntactic anchor, appearing to float ambiguously among other words. This ambiguity makes it difficult for the reader to establish any definitive logical connections between people and events. The identities of the father, son, and other relatives remain elusive, and the relationships between them are obscured, reflecting the fragmented and uncertain nature of memory. This deliberate vagueness compels the reader to engage

deeply with the text, piecing together meaning from the ethereal and often disjointed associations presented. The poem thus, mirrors the elusive and spectral quality of memories, where clarity is often replaced by a sense of fleeting and overlapping impressions.

Self Assessing Questions:

1. How does the poetic structure and form used in the poem align with its thematic concerns?

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2.7 Themes in the Poem

Memory- The poem illustrates the fluid and dynamic nature of memory, emphasizing the interplay between remembering and forgetting. As the speaker reminisces about past events, these recollections emerge in fragmented forms, highlighting the incomplete and selective nature of memory. The gaps left by forgotten details are often filled with imagined scenarios or predictable narratives, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. This process underscores the idea that memory is not entirely reliable, as it is shaped by both actual experiences and the mind's efforts to reconstruct the past. The poem captures this complexity, offering a nuanced reflection on how we recall and reinterpret our personal histories.

The poem illustrates the non-linear relationship between time and memory, highlighting the inherent difficulty of retrieving the past from one's recollections. Despite the speaker's attempts to reclaim past experiences, it proves impossible due to the nature of memory itself, which is perpetually in flux. The concept of oblivion is intrinsically woven into the fabric of memory, emphasizing that no matter how fervently one tries, the past remains elusive and cannot be fully recovered. This constant state of change and the intertwining of memory and forgetfulness underscore the transient and often unreliable nature of our recollections. The poem thus reflects on the inevitable fading and distortion of memories over time, suggesting that complete recovery of the past is beyond reach.

Time- The passage highlights the significant and intricate role that the passage of time plays in shaping memories. Time, being ever-changing and never stagnant, causes memories to blur and distort as it progresses. This concept is vividly depicted through the juxtaposition of past and present, illustrating how the relentless march of time alters perceptions and recollections. The poem underscores the transformative impact of time, showing how it can modify and sometimes even obscure the original clarity of past experiences. By contrasting the past with the present, the poem delves into the evolving nature of memory, emphasizing how the changes brought by time influence and reshape our understanding of personal history.

Revealing and Concealing- The poem presents a dichotomy between revealing and concealing, akin to the photograph in Drummond de Andrade's "Family Portrait," which simultaneously exposes and hides. This interplay is executed through the poem's language and form, utilizing metonymic and synecdochic associations to show only fragments of the larger picture. By employing these literary devices, the poem unveils certain aspects while keeping others obscured, creating a tension between what is disclosed and what remains hidden. This partial revelation reflects the complex nature of memory and perception, where only parts of the whole are visible, leaving much to the imagination and interpretation of the reader because it is not clearly given to us. The poem's structure and choice of language emphasize this dynamic, inviting readers to explore the layers of meaning beneath the surface.

Silence- The poem prominently features the theme of silence, exploring its various forms and dimensions. It delves into the different types of silences that permeate life, including the silence of the landscape, the father's silence which perhaps hints at an underlying sense of guilt, the silence of the past, the silence inherent in language, and the silence of memories. The silence in language is manifested through the pauses and gaps. Each type of silence is carefully highlighted, contributing to the poem's overall contemplative and introspective atmosphere. This multifaceted exploration of silence serves to deepen the reader's understanding of the poet's inner world and the broader human experience.

Oblivion- Another prominent theme in the poem is oblivion. Drummond's work can be seen as a testament written against the inevitability of forgetfulness. His poem is an effort to recover past memories and preserve those he wishes to retain, whether this act of forgetting is imposed upon him or chosen by him. The theme of oblivion deeply affects him, manifesting in the poem's imagery, rhythm, and syntax. The poem's structure and language underscore the tension between remembering and forgetting. The intricate layers of his writing serve to capture fleeting moments, emotions, and relationships, making them accessible to the reader. This act of poetic preservation highlights the universal human desire to hold onto what is precious and resist the encroachment of time.

Family- "Travelling in the Family" explores the theme of familial bonds and relations that the poet shared in his past. Central to the poem is his attempt to reconcile with his father, now deceased, while also reflecting on his broader familial history. As he traverses the lanes of memory to his childhood, he brings to light various issues and struggles that marked his family. The poem addresses the complications within marriages, including infidelities and financial burdens like mortgages. He poignantly mentions his consumptive cousins, his mad aunt, and his grandmother, who suffered profound disrespect and heartbreak due to her husband's infidelity with "slave girls" in "rustling silks."

Stop to Consider:

Freud's conception of the id, ego and superego is essential to understanding how memories are stored, retrieved and processed. Id refers to our primal instincts which operate based on the pleasure principle. It plays a vital role in deciding what memories need to be remembered based on which were traumatic and which were pleasurable.

Ego is the rational aspect of our psyche that operates on the reality principle. It helps in organizing memories into logical coherence for it to be comprehensible by the conscious mind. The ego also functions in order to repress certain aspects of memory into the unconscious or use defence mechanisms to protect from distress.

The superego is the moral and ethical component which takes into account the values and norms of society. It highlights the

experiences which align with the moral principles and contribute to Freudian slips are the errors in speech, memory and action which are linked to the unconscious mind. Like in the poem when the poet talks about “come back to life”, it is through these Freudian slips that memories come back “stiflingly, suddenly”.

2.8 Summary and Analysis of the Poem

Travelling in the family is devoted to the crucial part played by oblivion in the shaping of memories. The poem tells the story of a son, who is the poetic persona, who melts into the ghost of his ghost father. Given its autobiographical nature, one can assume that the poetic persona is the poet himself and his dead father in the poem is Robert M.F. de Andrade, to whom the poem is dedicated. Together, they revisit the land of the past which he describes as “a lost kingdom” that has turned into an unknown territory. The son has to catch up on “lost time”. He hoped to make amends with his father with whom he had a conflicting relationship but his father doesn’t have a voice in the poem. Even if the son wants to believe in some form of forgiveness, the final image of the poem is an image of flooding by the waters of time and “blood”. This proclaims that the ephemeral proximity with the father is over and the distance now seems impossible to bridge (Eizirik 2015).

Carlos Drummond de Andrade revisits a past that has been blurred, amputated, and distorted. His aim is not to reconstitute its chronology exhaustively but rather to recover a few moments whose emotional impact has been very strong and has left some kind of subconscious trace. He strives to recover diffused sensations and emotions that were not put into words in the past and are barely more articulated in the present. He presents the past as more like a puzzle that needs to be rearranged to make sense of it. Through his poem, he shows us the problems that arise while trying to recover from the past (Eizirik 2015).

The poem explores the notion of tropisms, which correspond to “inner turbulence/disturbances”, and “tiny and intimate dramas” taking place in one’s subconscious. They are related to something disturbing and kept secret such as fear, shame, and irrepressible urges. Years later, they can be grasped only through uncertain language. The present reconstitution of these disturbances does not

consist in explaining them. If the poet or the writer used more elaborate and rigid syntax, they would turn these fleeting instants into fiction because they would betray or stifle the recovered sensations. The poem is shaped by silences; this enables Andrade to resurrect a few sensory traces laying the emphasis on their frailty, their discontinuity and their opacity.

To quote Eizirik, “While reading this poem several times, as though I were listening to a patient’s dream, I was struck by its rhythm, by the repetition of the son’s request for a word from his father, receiving as an answer only silence, but at the same time feeling the father’s hand pushing him through the desert (a strong metaphor for their relationship) and remaining at his side throughout this sad family journey to forbidden places of the past.”

In the desert of Itabira
The shadow of my father
took me by the hand.
So much time lost.
But he didn't say anything.
It was neither day nor night.
A sigh? A passing bird?
But he didn't say anything

The opening line of the poem situates the poetic persona in the desert of Itabira, a mining town where the poet spent his childhood. This setting immediately underscores the poet’s preoccupation with silence, as the “desert of Itabira” symbolizes the profound quietness of the landscape. The subsequent line reveals that the father was not physically present with the poet, but rather, it was only a shadow that guided him. This shadowy presence implies that the father may be deceased, suggesting that the poet is encountering his father's ghost in the poem. The refrain “but he didn’t say anything” underscores the pervasive silence of the father, mirroring the silence of the landscape established in the first line. The poem, while providing a spatial context, remains vague about the temporal aspect of the situation, describing it as “neither day nor night.” This lack of specific time adds to the ethereal and timeless quality of the encounter. The stanza concludes with the repeated refrain, reinforcing the theme of the father’s silence and its parallel with the

silent landscape, highlighting the emotional and existential weight carried by this silence. This layered depiction of silence, both in the environment and in the relationship with the father, sets the tone for the poem's exploration of memory, loss, and the passage of time.

We have come a long way.
Here there was a house.
The mountain used to be bigger.
So many heaped-up dead,
and time gnawing the dead.
And in the ruined houses,
cold disdain and damp.
But he didn't say anything.

Here, the poetic persona draws a contradictory picture of the past and the present state of Itabira. The lines, “there was a house” , “mountain used to be bigger”, “heaped-up dead”, “time gnawing the dead” and “ruined houses” are all images that signify the passing of time which has been unkind to the landscape of Itabira. The cruelty of time is highlighted in the stanza which takes away things that can only be retrieved in fragments like the ruins of the houses.

The street he used to cross
on horseback, at a gallop.
His watch. His clothes.
His legal documents.
His tales of love-affairs.
Opening of tin trunks
and violent memories.
But he didn't say anything.

The next stanza establishes the figure of the father through synecdochic associations with “his watch,” “his clothes,” and “his legal documents.” These tangible items serve as fragments that piece together the father's presence and character, providing readers with a means to visualize and understand him. The poet's reference to “tales of love-affairs” further fleshes out the father’s personality, offering glimpses into his complex and perhaps contradictory nature. These stories reveal dimensions of the father that might

otherwise remain hidden, suggesting a life filled with passions and secrets.

The mention of “the opening of tin trunks” symbolizes the poet’s unconscious attempt to revisit and unpack the past. These trunks, likely filled with memorabilia and artifacts from his father’s life, act as vessels of memory, holding both cherished and painful recollections. By delving into these trunks, the poet metaphorically opens his mind to violent memories that emerge abruptly, confronting the turmoil and unresolved emotions linked to his father.

In the desert of Itabira
things come back to life,
stiflingly, suddenly.
The market of desires
displays its sad treasures;
my urge to run away;
naked women; remorse.
But he didn't say anything.

In the subsequent stanza, the poet describes how his memories have erupted "stiflingly, suddenly" as soon as he attempts to rehash them. This sudden eruption signifies the overwhelming and suffocating nature of these recollections, indicating that revisiting the past can be a jarring experience. The metaphor of “erupting” memories suggests a violent, uncontrollable force, emphasizing the intensity and unpredictability of revisiting traumatic or deeply buried events.

When the poet speaks of "the market of desires," he alludes to the capitalist exploitation that infiltrated the mining town of Itabira during colonization. This phrase signals the commodification and commercialization of natural and human resources, reflecting the economic and social upheavals brought by colonialist enterprises. Rich in iron ore, Itabira became a focal point for colonial exploitation, attracting enterprises that ravaged the landscape and oppressed its people. The mention of “naked women” serves as a stark image of vulnerability and exploitation, symbolizing the human cost of these capitalist endeavors.

The poet's urge to run away is a natural response to confronting such painful and distressing memories. This desire to escape reflects

the emotional turmoil and discomfort that arise when one faces traumatic events from the past. It underscores the instinctive reaction to avoid pain and the difficulty of grappling with unsettling truths.

The stanza vividly portrays the intersection of personal and collective trauma. The poet's memories are not only personal recollections but are also deeply intertwined with the historical and socio-economic context of his town. The exploitation of Itabira is a backdrop to his personal history, and confronting these memories involves acknowledging both personal and collective suffering.

Stepping on books and letters
we travel in the family.
Marriages; mortgages;
the consumptive cousins;
the mad aunt; my grandmother
betrayed among the slave-girls,
rustling silks in the bedroom.
But he didn't say anything.

He recounts his family's history by mentioning marital problems, financial struggles with mortgages, "consumptive cousins," a "mad aunt," and his grandmother, who was betrayed by her husband through his affairs with slave girls, subtly alluding to by the phrase "rustling silks in the bedroom." which is a metonymic usage to hint at sensuality.

What cruel, obscure instinct
moved his pallid hand
subtly pushing us
into the forbidden
time, forbidden places?
I looked in his white eyes.
I cried to him: Speak! My voice
shook in the air a moment,
beat on the stones. The shadow
proceeded slowly on
with that pathetic travelling

across the lost kingdom.
But he didn't say anything.

When referring to the forbidden time and forbidden places, the poet alludes to the past and the unconscious. These places are deemed forbidden due to their inherent inaccessibility—the past, which has been described in the poem as the "lost kingdom," cannot be revisited in its entirety because of memory gaps and distortions, while the unconscious remains elusive, operating in a language that is not easily understood. He talks about the Freudian slips through which it all “comes back to life”. The travelling is a pathetic attempt at trying to revisit a home that is now lost. This exploration highlights the poet’s struggle to access and make sense of these hidden aspects of his psyche and history.

The poem shows a gradual progression from the initial "sigh," a subtle expression of longing or resignation, to the more intense and frustrated demand "Speak!" directed at his father. Despite this impassioned plea, the father remains silent throughout the poem, underscoring a persistent barrier to communication and understanding. This silence reflects the poet’s ongoing struggle to reconcile with his past and to uncover the deeper truths within his own unconscious mind.

The father in the poem serves as a symbolic conduit for the poet to confront his unresolved issues. He represents the bridge between the poet’s conscious self and the hidden recesses of his memories and emotions. The ghostly figure with "white eyes" that appears in the poem can be seen as a manifestation of the poet's internal wishes and turmoil. This spectral presence embodies the unresolved conflicts and desires that haunt the poet, highlighting the tension between what is remembered and what is forgotten, between what is known and what remains mysterious.

I saw grief, misunderstanding
and more than one old revolt
dividing us in the dark.
The hand I wouldn't kiss,
the crumb that they denied me,
refusal to ask pardon.

Pride. Terror at night.
But he didn't say anything.

The poet revisits the old grief and lingering sorrow that arose from the misunderstandings, conflicts and revolts in his family involving everything traumatic in the past. Even though the father figure was present with him while he went through all of that, he still refused to say anything.

Speak speak speak speak.
I pulled him by his coat
that was turning into clay.
By the hands, by the boots
I caught at his strict shadow
and the shadow released itself
with neither haste nor anger.
But he remained silent.

There were distinct silences
deep within his silence.

The poet was clutching onto his father's clothes in an attempt to persuade him to speak but he turned into clay which made the poet realise that he was just a dummy from the past. He talks about the embedded silence within the silence trying to foreground the prominence of silence as a thematic concern in his poem.

There was my deaf grandfather
hearing the painted birds
on the ceiling of the church;
my own lack of friends;
and your lack of kisses;
there were our difficult lives
and a great separation
in the little space of the room.

The poet bemoans the love his father failed to provide him which only aggravated his loneliness that was already there because of his

lack of a social life or friends. He also mentions his deaf grandfather which also adds another layer to the theme of silence in the poem.

The narrow space of life
crowds me up against you,
and in this ghostly embrace
it's as if I were being burned
completely, with poignant love.
Only now do we know each other!
Eye-glasses, memories, portraits
flow in the river of blood.
Now the waters won't let me
make out your distant face,
distant by seventy years...

The poet reflects that only after his father's death have they truly come to understand each other, as during his lifetime, they were emotionally distant. Now, through the material possessions his father left behind, such as "eyeglasses" and "portraits," along with the remnants of his memories, the poet can piece together his father's essence and find a sense of reconciliation. The "waters" symbolize the passage of time, which has blurred and faded these memories, making it increasingly challenging to recall his father's face, last seen seventy years ago. The poet's journey through his father's possessions and memories is both an attempt to understand his father's life and a means to come to terms with their estranged relationship.

I felt that he pardoned me
but he didn't say anything.
The waters cover his moustache,
the family, Itabira

The whole poem centres on the poet's journey to reconcile with his father for their estranged relationship. A resolution is reached when he finally towards the end perceives his father's pardon, even though this forgiveness is a reflection of his own emotions. The passage of time, symbolized by the "waters," gradually envelops and obscures

"his moustache, the family, Itabira," all inexorably drifting towards oblivion.

Check Your Progress:

1. How does the poem "Traveling in the Family" address the theme of familial bonds and relationships?
2. How does the landscape of Itabira contribute to the overall mood and themes of the poem?
3. What role does silence play in the poem, and how is it represented through different forms?

2.9 Summing Up

Carlos Drummond de Andrade, in his poem "Traveling in the Family," addresses the themes of memory and time, specifically focusing on his relationship with his father. He navigates these personal issues through the act of writing, employing abrupt shifts and rhythmic contractions in the syntax within the poem's structure. This complexity mirrors the challenges of remembering and revisiting a past that has been long lost.

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xxx

UNIT- 3
INTRODUCING CONSTANTINE CAVAFY

Unit Structure:

- 3.1 Introduction**
- 3.2 Objectives**
- 3.3 Constantine Cavafy: Biography**
- 3.4 Cavafy's Location and Identity as a "City Poet"**
 - 3.4.1 Cosmopolitanism in Cavafy**
 - 3.4.2 Cavafean Philosophy in His Poetry**
- 3.5 Historical Background**
- 3.6 Modern Greek Literature vis-à-vis World Literature**
- 3.7 Cavafy's Position in Greek Literature**
- 3.8 The Position of Cavafy in World Literature**
- 3.9 Cavafy's Poetic Corpus**
- 3.10 Summing Up**
- 3.11 References/Suggested Readings**
- 3.12 Model Questions**

3.1 Introduction

Constantine Cavafy's name in the corpus of World literature holds a significant position with his individuality, heritage and historicity that comes through in his poetry. He is a late 19th and early 20th Century Greek poet whose works were circulated during the two World Wars. He developed his own brand of poetry with his individual style which swiftly gained popularity not just in Greek poetry but in Western literature as well. The cosmopolitan nature of his identity has been a crucial force in developing his poetry as the influences of his training in western philosophy is apparent. As a non-conformist, he was quite vocal about his critique of religions such as Christianity, patriotism and heterosexuality- institutions that propagated instilling traditionalist values in society.

His poetic style is barely ornamental as he prefers to keep it realistic and open to a diverse range of readers. He was a city poet who

wrote of Alexandria in a tone akin to modernist poetry with nostalgia for the long-gone Byzantium and its glorious past. This assertion is further supported by him as he preferred to look at himself as a “poet historian” whose poetry is reminiscent of the rich cultural history of Greece. According to the poet, history cannot be repeated since it never really goes away. His friend, E.M. Forster wrote about him that he is, “a Greek gentleman in a straw hat, standing absolutely motionless at a slight angle to the universe.” All of his poetry collection has been translated by Daniel Mandelsohn, which is available in two volumes- *C.P. Cavafy: The Collected Poems* and *C.P. Cavafy: Unfinished Poems*.

The purpose of this unit is to introduce Constantine Cavafy’s poetry to the students while also engaging them with the cosmopolitan nature of world poetry.

3.2 Objectives

This unit attempts to familiarize the readers with the poet Constantine Cavafy and his body of works in the field of World literature, particularly poetry. After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- Understand the politics in Cavafy’s poetry.
- Analyse how Cavafy’s poetry fits into the area of world literature.
- Discuss how Cavafy’s location informs his poetry.
- Learn about the body of poetry that he has created for a comparative study and better analysis of his works.
- Discuss Cavafy as a cosmopolitan city poet.

3.3 Constantine Cavafy: Biography

Constantine Petrou Cavafy or Konstantínos Pétrou Kaváfis was a Greek poet born in the year 1863 who brought about a cosmopolitanism in his poetry that secured his popular position in the field of world literature. He grew up amidst a repository of English and French literature around him which fuelled his inclination towards western poetry as well, apart from Greek. Writing during the turn of the century from Alexandria, he imbues his cultural and historical heritage in his poetry by using ancient classical myths, a characteristic found in modern Greek poetry.

His parents hailed from a Greek community back in Constantinople, which is present-day Turkey, Istanbul. His father was a businessman who conducted his business in both Constantinople and England along with his brother. Before the birth of the poet, the family moved to Alexandria where he was born but after his father's unforeseen death, they relocated to England. However, the failing family business, due to their inexperience, marked their return to Alexandria after about 7 years of their departure. It was in the year 1882 when their lives got disrupted again due to the British bombardment and occupation of Alexandria (Britannica 2024).

He worked as a special clerk in the Irrigation Service of the Ministry of Public Works when he was 29 years old after leaving his former job working at the Alexandrian newspaper and the Egyptian Stock Exchange. Cavafy maintained a small social circle living with his widowed mother and unmarried brothers until he came of age. He spent most of his adult life living alone and formed a 20 year old literary acquaintance with E.M. Forster. Throughout his entire life, Cavafy only confirmed two brief romantic relationships. His closest and most enduring friendship was with Alexander Singopoulos, whom he named his heir and literary executor at the age of sixty, a decade before his death.

There are around 200 poems that can be attributed to Constantine Cavafy. His poetry is known for its lyrical quality, an aspect which has made him more popular even after his death. His years in England fuelled the cosmopolitan character that he visibly inculcates in his poetry. His language combines the refined, formal Greek known as Katharevusa, which is derived from the Byzantine tradition, with the Demotic, or everyday spoken Greek. With his mix of language, he could strike a fine balance between historical continuity and contemporary relevance in his poetry. His deep engagement with historical themes and characters is pervasive in his poetry, particularly from Hellenistic, Byzantine and Greek history as he enmeshes it with personal and existential aspects of life. His style and tone are both intimate and realistic (Britannica 2024).

Lawrence Durrell's "The Alexandria Quartets", which is a series of four novels, is what introduced him to Western readers after which his works achieved more traction. Cavafy's poems were initially published without a date before World War II and were reprinted in 1949. Numerous English translations of his work exist, including

The Poems of C.P. Cavafy (1951), *The Complete Poems of Cavafy* (1961, expanded edition 1976), and *The Collected Poems of C.P. Cavafy* (2006). *Collected Poems* (2009) and *The Unfinished Poems* (2009), both translated by Daniel Mendelsohn, together form a definitive collection of Cavafy's published and unpublished works in English (Britannica 2024).

Check Your Progress:

1. How does Constantine Cavafy's biographical data help in reading his poetry?
2. What marks the cosmopolitanism in Constantine Cavafy's poetry?
3. How did Cavafy's time in England influence his cosmopolitan outlook and poetic style?

3.4 Cavafy's Location and Identity as a "City Poet"

As a Greek poet hailing from Alexandria, Cavafy was deeply influenced by the location of his origin and wrote about how the people in Alexandria are moulded by the city. As a city poet, his poems cannot be detached from the city life that he has experienced or lived. He spent his – years in Constantinople where he was growing up alongside his siblings and parents but had to move to London with his mother, where he received his education, after the sudden demise of his father. Within a few years abroad, the family became susceptible to deep financial ruin because of which he had to endure many hardships while growing up. It was during this time that he explored his homosexuality and had romantic encounters with his lovers while also writing most of his earlier poems at the same time.

The modern metropolis of the city, with the shift in economy after the Industrial Revolution, was a space where modernity manifested itself in terms of poetic sensibilities for poets such as Cavafy. It is a place where fragmented selfhoods are discovered which only worsens over time as life becomes more fast-paced. Documenting a life of alienation, loneliness, consumerism and a sense of emptiness is what encapsulated most of the writings of modern poets, and so did Cavafy's. As his long-time literary acquaintance, E.M. Forster describes him as an eccentric and writes about his writing style- "a

sentence-an immense complicated yet shapely sentence, full of parentheses that never get mixed and of reservations that really do reserve; a sentence that moves with logic to its foreseen end, yet to an end that is always more vivid and thrilling than one foresaw... it is the sentence of a poet.” (Forster pp. 13-14)

Many critics contend that the city that is depicted in Cavafy’s poetry is predominantly sensual, erotic, and hedonistic. Philip Sherrani notes, "Most of his erotic poetry speaks of episodes and relationships in contemporary Alexandria. Indeed, all the poetry which Cavafy wrote that is set in contemporary Alexandria deals exclusively with erotic themes." The coffee shop, the tavern, the hall, and the dimly lit part of a shop are Cavafy's favoured settings. "Here the love affair begins or ends; here the rendezvous succeeds or fails; here the young man enters or does not enter; here the protagonist waits, drinks, reminisces, and creates poetry." However, this does not imply that Cavafy’s city is confined within the realms of eroticism only, at least the city in general (if not Alexandria). There are various dimensions of a city that are explored within his poems, one of which would be his poem- “Walls”. This poem, unlike the ancient Greek concept of the city Polis, does not protect its citizens or provide any sense of security and power that comes from a sense of belonging to a community.

Self Assessing Questions:

1. What makes Constantine P. Cavafy a city poet?

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3.4.1 Cosmopolitanism in Cavafy

As a Greek diaspora poet, Constantine Cavafy enjoyed popularity for his poems towards the latter half of his life. It is cosmopolitanism which speaks in his poetry through the lived experiences in Constantinople, London and Alexandria. It is important to note that it is his cosmopolitan outlook that enabled Cavafy to project a unique outlook on the historical circumstances of the city he writes about.

In *La pensée de midi: Mediterranean Cosmopolitanism in the Work of Camus, Cavafy, and Chahine*, we see the re-emergence of cosmopolitanism in literature as a concept to address the complications of living in the city. “Both the Mediterranean and cosmopolitanism have re-emerged in the past decade as framing concepts to address the challenges facing cities worldwide whose populations are racially and ethnically diverse with competing religious beliefs. The need to foster greater harmony in cities around the world and decrease sectarian violence has inspired a re-examination of older concepts in light of the inadequacy of more recent frameworks such as multiculturalism, post-colonialism, and globalization.” (Lekatsas 125).

Cosmopolitanism acts as a counter-narrative to the homogenizing narrative of the nation which is why it becomes pertinent to look at poets like Cavafy whose voice provides a critical outlook towards society. His family faced a series of financial destabilisation on account of personal issues and the larger Greco-Turkish war that loomed over their heads after the First World War, which led to the migration of several Greek families out of their lands. However, Cavafy decided to remain in Alexandria and wrote poetry that mourned the loss of his homeland in Asia Minor. There is an attempt to escape the ennui that plagued modernist society in his poems where his characters seek solace from it. Lekatsas says that “the condition of cosmopolitanism in his work is defined by fin-de-siècle decadence” (*La pensée* 127).

The writings of Cavafy are similar to those of an Alexandrian filmmaker, Youssef Chahine, in their depiction of the city as their natural affinities are inculcated in them by the Mediterranean heritage. They both celebrate the freedom of expression and tolerance in their creative ventures instead of promoting the traditionalist concept of purity in cases of race, religion or sexuality.

Their works thrive in the diversity of the city. The homoeroticism that reeks in Cavafy's poetry was something that must have been more than frowned upon in early twentieth-century Alexandria, however, that didn't deter the poet from speaking his truth through his poetic imagination.

Stop to Consider:

Constantine P. Cavafy faced the life of a marginalised person being on the periphery of society as a poor homosexual man. He faced a lot of criticism during his lifetime as he was viewed as a vulgar poet. He gained popularity only posthumously as he lived a life of seclusion.

3.4.2 Cavafean Philosophy in His Poetry

He maintained a detached view of the world, which enabled him to keep his poetry largely removed from contemporary politics. However, it is challenging to separate art rooted in history and culture from political entanglements—an issue he grappled with in his poem “Those Who Fought for the Achaian League”. While the world he created in his poetry was imaginary, the figures populating it were often political and historical civic leaders. Though he was rarely engaged in the politics of his own time, his involvement in politics can be interpreted through a broader historical lens, as his approach to politics reflects a philosophy of history (Murphy 79).

Cavafy's realm of imagined meanings was deeply rooted in Hellenism, which was not merely a synonym for Greek nationalist concerns but a vital force in shaping world history. The core of Hellenism in the 19th and early 20th centuries was not the peripheral nation-building that followed the decline of the Ottoman Empire but the global reach of the British Empire. Nations, by their nature, rarely possess world-historic significance, unlike empires born of cities, federations, or constitutions, which often do. Since the era of Shaftesbury, the British Empire drew on Hellenic ideas to address pressing issues of historical responsibility, artistic expression, and political purpose. It is within this global historical framework that Cavafy's poetic vision takes shape.

His philosophy of history can be seen as a philosophy of fragments, where he seamlessly blends the imaginary with the historical in the poetic worlds he creates. Rooted in an Epicurean view of history, he embraces the impermanence of all things and dismisses the fear of death. He understands history as a realm of constant emergence and decline, marked by death and destruction. Many of his poems are set in periods of societal decline, yet they reveal an enduring element that survives the collapse of civilizations.

3.5 Historical Background

Greece was a place of marvel where thinkers, mathematicians, philosophers and other like-minded people gathered in a dynamic exchange of ideas and thoughts which transformed into lawmaking. However, modernisation in Egypt came through the ruler Muhammad Ali Pasha, whose revolutionary role in the Ottoman Empire led to significant shifts in the farming of cotton and tobacco in the nation by calling upon the agriculturalists, farmers and merchants. The Greek community thrived in Alexandria during his and his son's reign including other commercial hubs like Cairo, becoming one of the largest foreign populations in the country at that time. Since they did not represent a colonial power like the British and the French, the Greeks shared a friendly relationship with the Egyptians and together helped enhance the economy and culture of the place by constructing the cinemas, banks, and theatres and developing the trade of cotton.

Constantine Cavafy was born in the 1860s when Egypt was already a polyglot, the centre of cosmopolitanism and at the peak of a modern renaissance. The family was from the Greek community in Asia Minor and was well known in Constantinople where his father first worked as a clerk in the Greek commercial houses and soon started his own company with his brothers. In the 1870s, the Franco-Prussian war had a direct and devastating effect on Cavafy's family enterprise, shortly after the death of his father. Due to this reason, they had to dissolve the company and the family moved to Alexandria as they couldn't survive the era of the Great Depression. After a short stay of a few years, they had to again relocate to Constantinople for some time, when Cavafy reconnected with his extended family, due to the war that broke out in Egypt in 1882 (Anglo-Egyptian War). They returned to Alexandria in 1885 after which Cavafy rarely left the place. For him, the city of Alexandria

had been personified as a close family member who went through a reversal of fortune, in concurrence with his family history, as he traversed between the past and the present (Lekatsas 135). It is his affinity towards history that paved the way for his philosophical journey through poetry.

In his poems like “Ithaca”, one can sense the deep sense of historical reverence through his evocation of the tale of Odysseus and his decision to return home and face mortality that he chooses to focalise. As one can see, Greece provides a linguistic and historical basis for the development of the poet’s poetic personae (Lekatsas 135). Most of the characters in his works come from a humble background as he tries to highlight the instability in economic pursuits inspired by both his personal life and the history of the city of Alexandria. Alexandria, the metropolitan hub of the Greco-Roman world, was a vibrant centre of knowledge, trade, and cultural exchange. Even after all is lost, it still survives in the imagination of people, philosophers, artists and poets, like Constantine P. Cavafy, that it housed who keeps the image of the place as “The Golden City” alive, mixed with both- reality and fiction.

Cavafy was thoroughly familiar with Gibbon’s renowned 18th-century historical work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1788), which explores the enduring conflict between civilization and barbarism. As a result, he understood that the decline of civilizing states on the Eurasian periphery—whether situated by the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, or the North Sea—stemmed as much from internal stagnation and loss of vitality as from the strength of external invaders. The influence of Gibbon’s work can be seen clearly in Cavafy’s poem “Waiting for the Barbarians”, where the themes of societal decline and the tension between civilization and barbarism are explored. In the poem, Cavafy portrays a society waiting for an external force—represented by the barbarians—to bring about its downfall, reflecting the historical cycles of decline that Gibbon describes. However, much like Gibbon’s analysis of the fall of the Roman Empire, Cavafy suggests that the real threat to the civilization is not just the impending invasion, but the internal decay and loss of vitality within the society itself. The people in the poem are paralyzed by their own expectations of the barbarians, and in their waiting, they fail to recognize the deeper reasons for their own stagnation.

Check Your Progress:

1. Discuss the historical background of Constantine P. Cavafy.
2. How has Cavafy's social class determined his writings?
3. How did the historical background of Alexandria and Egypt influence Constantine Cavafy's poetry?
4. In what ways does Cavafy evoke Greek historical and mythological themes in his poems like "Ithaca"?

3.6 Modern Greek Literature vis-à-vis World Literature

Modern Greek literature, emerging from the late 18th century onwards, occupies a distinct yet interconnected position within world literature. It bridges Greece's rich classical heritage with contemporary global themes, offering unique insights into national identity, historical transitions, and universal human experiences. Modern Greek literature is deeply rooted in the nation's tumultuous history. The War of Independence (1821–1829) against Ottoman rule was a pivotal moment, fostering themes of freedom, identity, and cultural rebirth. Early works from this period were heavily influenced by European Romanticism, with writers like Dionysios Solomos, author of "Hymn to Liberty", blending classical Greek themes with modern nationalist sentiment.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the rise of realism and symbolism. Prominent writers like Alexandros Papadiamantis explored rural life and moral conflicts, offering a window into Greek traditions and social changes. The 20th century brought modernism, spearheaded by poets such as Constantine P. Cavafy (who we are discussing), whose nuanced exploration of history, identity, and desire resonated internationally. Nobel laureates Giorgos Seferis and Odysseas Elytis further elevated Greek literature on the world stage with their evocative poetry, reflecting the interplay of myth, nature, and existentialism.

Modern Greek literature's engagement with universal themes—exile, memory, and resilience—aligns it with broader global literary currents. Writers like Nikos Kazantzakis, known for *Zorba the Greek* and *The Last Temptation of Christ*, captured existential struggles and the search for meaning, gaining global acclaim. Greek literature's fusion of the personal and political often mirrors

struggles faced in other nations, making it relatable to diverse audiences. In recent decades, contemporary Greek writers have explored the impact of globalization, migration, and economic crises. Authors like Petros Markaris use crime fiction to critique social and political realities, while others, such as Christos Ikonomou, portray the human cost of financial instability. These narratives situate Greek literature firmly within discussions of modern global challenges.

Modern Greek literature continues to contribute a vital perspective to world literature by blending classical influences with innovative approaches to storytelling. It invites readers to explore the enduring connections between past and present, local and universal, maintaining its relevance and appeal in the global literary landscape.

3.7 Cavafy's Position in Greek Literature

Constantine P. Cavafy occupies a central and unparalleled position in Greek literature, celebrated for his profound exploration of history, identity, and human desire. His work blends personal introspection with universal themes, making him one of Greece's most influential modern poets and a key figure in world literature.

Cavafy's poetry is marked by its distinctive style—concise, meditative, and layered with irony. Unlike the grand romanticism of his contemporaries, his work embraces a restrained modernism that underscores the complexity of human experiences. Poems like “Ithaka” and “Waiting for the Barbarians” weave historical and mythological narratives with contemporary relevance, reflecting on themes of ambition, disillusionment, and the passage of time.

A significant aspect of Cavafy's work is its treatment of identity and sexuality. His candid portrayal of homoerotic desire was groundbreaking, bringing a personal and emotional dimension to his verse that was rare in his era. By intertwining sensuality with themes of memory and loss, Cavafy created a body of work that resonates deeply with diverse audiences.

Cavafy's influence extends beyond Greek literature, inspiring generations of writers and readers worldwide. His ability to bridge the ancient and the modern, the personal and the universal, cements his legacy as one of Greece's most enduring literary voices.

3.8 The Position of Cavafy in World Literature

What makes Constantine Cavafy a significant part of world literature is the multiple translations and editions of his works that have travelled globally amongst the readers of the world because of which he could share his Greek cultural and literary heritage at a broader level. Daniel Mendelsohn who translated all of his works says about him-

- the tendency to see him as one of us, as someone of our own moment, speaking to us
- in a voice that is transparently, recognisably our own about things whose meaning
- is self-evident, threatens to take a crucial specificity away from him – one that, if
- we restore it to him, makes him seem only greater, more a poet of the future (as he
- once described himself. (Mendelsohn 2012)

What Cavafy, the self-described "poet historian," brings to his literary body of work is a deep understanding of Hellenistic, Byzantine, and classical histories, along with their prominent and lesser-known figures. He possesses a sharp awareness of the ironies inherent in history and desire, which are intricately connected in his writing. Cavafy approached the study of history with enthusiasm and a scholar's precision, paying meticulous attention to detail and nuance (Mendelsohn 2012). This meticulousness is evident in his poetry, reflected in his careful handling of historical nuances, language, desire, and memory. Through his works, Cavafy travels back and forth in historical times while also travelling across various ethnic, regional and historical backgrounds. It is in the way how he negotiated the historical past with his present that Cavafy makes sense of the world around him as they are constantly at work with each other simultaneously.

Cavafy's poetry, with its literary and linguistic qualities and its awareness of its audience, broadens and deepens our understanding of the world. It also pushes the boundaries of our comprehension of world literature and the world it aims to describe and structure. His poetry provides a figurative response to the question of how to read, write, or perceive a world. This response can be seen as both a witty commentary on and a model for engaging with the contemporary

"world" within and beyond "world literature" (Layoun 2). Cavafy is a great addition to the world literary corpus because the world in his poetry is not homogenous and instead speaks of a diverse world with its intermingling of the myriads of cultural hues that can be found in a cosmopolitan city, a city at the edge of loss.

Edmund Keeley, while speaking of his poetry says, it “warns us against arrogance, self-deception, and complacency, while showing us that wisdom and courage are found in those who see things as they are and who recognise their limitations, especially when confronted by the inevitable end that awaits all things human” (Keeley 2000). Cavafy's poetry resonates deeply with readers due to his profound understanding of human nature. This ability to tap into universal human experiences and emotions elevates his work to the realm of world literature. By transcending cultural and geographical boundaries, his voice speaks to the shared aspects of humanity that connect people across different societies. Cavafy's exploration of themes such as desire, history, and identity highlights the common threads that bind us all, making his poetry relevant and impactful on a global scale. His work dives into the core of universal human experiences, allowing readers from diverse backgrounds to find meaning and connection in his words. This transcendent quality is what solidifies Cavafy's place in the canon of world literature, as his poetry continues to engage and inspire readers worldwide.

Stop to Consider:

The three intertwined problems of reading world literature, according to David Damrosch, are culture, language and the politics of global capitalism. World Literature is a bowl of pluralism where different voices from different locations represent different cultures and languages.

3.9 Cavafy's Poetic Corpus

Constantine P. Cavafy's extensive body of poetry delves deeply into the history of Byzantium, positioning his work as an integral part of world literature. His vivid imagination seamlessly intertwines reality with fiction, allowing him to explore historical themes while simultaneously engaging with contemporary issues. The

cosmopolitan essence of Alexandria is a recurring motif in his poetry, as he frequently pays tribute to the city that serves as his muse. Through his verses, Cavafy captures the timeless spirit of Alexandria, highlighting its cultural and historical significance. Apart from “Waiting for the Barbarians”, his collection of poetry includes several masterpieces including- “Ithaca”, “Days of 1896”, “To Have Taken the Trouble”, “Going Back Home from Greece”, and “Alexandrian Kings”, which are all translated by Keely.

In his poem “Ithaca” (also called “Ithaka”), Cavafy alludes to the Greek tale of Odysseus by Homer and personifies Ithaca to emphasise its role in Odysseus’s journey. Set on the Mediterranean coastline, it talks about the protagonist of the poem moving from one port to another as it is the journey that holds more significance than the destination. Here too, he marvels at the riches of the city while taking the readers through the Mediterranean journey.

Cavafy’s poem “Going Back Home from Greece” revolves around two young Greek men who belong to Asia Minor, much like Cavafy himself. Temporally, the poem is set in circa third century BCE where these two young gentlemen are happily seen leaving their homeland. The poem is reflective of what the poet’s views are on cosmopolitanism in the city. Cavafy demonstrated a keen awareness of posterity as a fundamentally classical endeavour characterized by idealizing elements.

In “Alexandrian Kings”, one of his other poems, he takes his readers back to the times of Cleopatra. He wrote the poem in the background of the Ptolemaic dynasty, which had governed Egypt for three centuries, which was in decline. The last Ptolemaic monarch, Cleopatra, took her own life in 30 BCE following the defeat of her forces by Octavian (later known as the Roman Emperor Augustus). The fall of the Ptolemaic dynasty signified the

end of one era and the dawn of another. It is within this historical context that Cavafy wrote “Alexandrian Kings”. Each section delves into a different facet of the decline of the Ptolemaic dynasty and the city of Alexandria. The poem is structured as a meditation, with the narrator contemplating the past and its importance.

Check Your Progress:

1. What criteria must a literary work meet to be considered part of World Literature?
2. What were some of the primary themes in Cavafy's poetry related to city life?
3. In what ways did Cavafy’s poetry differ from the pre-Cavafean and post-Cavafean literary traditions?
4. What were the key influences on Cavafy’s poetic style, and how did they shape his work?

3.10 Summing Up

The works of Constantine Cavafy offers a deep exploration of historical themes which stands as a powerful testament of his imagination and connection to the city of Alexandria. His works reflects his understanding of the classical legacy and the interplay between the past and present. He pays homage to the enduring cultural and historical heritage of Alexandria through his works while engaging with the currents of world literature. There is a sense of idealisation in his approach which makes his poetry a timeless treat for contemporary readers who can resonate with it.

There is a unique blend of personal and universal themes in his poetry which shows his cosmopolitan influence by the diverse and vibrant atmosphere of Alexandria. Through his poetry, he manages to capture the essence of the multiculturalism of the city that he’s seen growing up and its role in history which makes his work a crucial part of the world literary canon. His poems act as a bridge between the past and the present which highlights the relevance of the past to contemporary life. His idealization of historical figures and events, coupled with his realistic portrayal of human experiences, creates a dynamic interplay.

Ultimately, Cavafy's legacy lies in his ability to transcend the boundaries of time and place, crafting poetry that speaks to the universal human condition. His exploration of historical decline, cultural identity, and the interplay between memory and imagination ensures that his work remains relevant and thought-provoking. Through his poetic lens, Cavafy invites us to consider the ways in which history shapes our present and future, encouraging a deeper appreciation for the complexities of our shared heritage.

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3.12 Model Questions

- How does Cavafy's poetry reflect his cosmopolitan outlook and experiences in different cities?
- Discuss the role of cosmopolitanism in addressing the challenges of modern urban life as seen in Cavafy's poetry.
- How has Cavafy’s social class determined his writings?
- How does the idea of World Literature potentially homogenize diverse cultural experiences?
- Discuss the methodological challenges in critiquing World Literature and the implications of using Western critical theories on foreign works.
- Define the concept of World Literature according to David Damrosch.

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UNIT- 4
CONSTANTINE CAVAFY:
“WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS”

Unit Structure:

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Objectives

4.3 Historical Background

4.4 How to Read Cavafy

4.4.1 The Politics in “Waiting for the Barbarians”

4.4.2 Civilisation and Barbarity in Eurocentrism

4.4.3 Self and the Other

4.5 Poetic Structure of “Waiting for the Barbarians”

4.6 Analysis of the Text

4.7 Summing Up

4.8 References/Suggested Readings

4.9 Model Questions

4.1 Introduction

“Waiting for the Barbarians” is one of the most poignant poems written by the Greek diaspora poet Constantine Cavafy. The poem, penned in November 1898 and initially published in 1904, has been translated into multiple languages and has served as an inspiration for many other works. His works reflect his understanding of the quintessential human life, the essence of which he captures beautifully in his reflective verses. He’s known to weave together a perfect blend of the Hellenistic world and the modern times which makes his world timeless. It is the universal understanding of the human world that he projects onto his poetry, making it resonate across boundaries, that makes him a crucial part of the canon of World Literature. Known as a city poet, there is no known escape from the city itself in his poetry as everything is related to it based on his experiences as he spent most of his life in Egypt as an adult.

In the poem, he explores the themes of fear of the unknown which is depicted by the anxious wait for the arrival of the Barbarians. It sheds light on the power dynamics in human enterprises as the royal congregate waits for the arrival of the “Barbarians”, who are actually the conquerors, subverting the traditional notions associated with the term. Cavafy, with his poetry, deals with the Roman acquisition of the Greek empire while playing with the notion of barbarity while also dealing with universal human emotions.

It reflects on a society anticipating an invasion by barbarians, who ultimately never arrive. The poem can be interpreted in various ways, often seen as a commentary on the existential fears and uncertainties within a society. The poem can be seen as a metaphor for various aspects of human experience, including the fear of the unknown, the reliance on external threats to give meaning to life, and the disillusionment that follows when those threats fail to materialize. It highlights how societies and individuals often create or magnify external enemies to avoid facing internal issues. Cavafy's portrayal of the barbarians also questions the boundaries between civilization and barbarism, suggesting that these concepts are relative and constructed.

Cavafy’s poem served as the inspiration for a highly influential novel titled *Waiting for the Barbarians*, written in 1980 by South African novelist J.M. Coetzee. Coetzee's work, which explores themes of power, oppression, and the human condition, has garnered critical acclaim and significantly impacted contemporary literature. His novel's resonance and depth were further recognized when Coetzee was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003, highlighting the enduring influence of Cavafy's poetic themes on modern literary discourse.

4.2 Objectives

After going through this unit, students will be familiarised with Constantine Cavafy’s poem ‘Waiting for the Barbarians’. You will be able to-

- learn how to do an analysis of Cavafy’s poetry.
- understand the concept of “Barbarians” and how Cavafy attempts to subvert it in his poetry

- learn about the historical Greco-Roman relationship
- discuss Cavafy's preoccupation with the Byzantium past while dealing with the present through 'Waiting for the Barbarians'.
- analyse the politics that informs Cavafy's poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians'.

4.3 Historical Background

The political and cultural history of Alexandria informs most of Constantine Cavafy's poetry along with its economic experience. In the poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians', Cavafy builds upon the colonial experience of the nation under the Roman Empire. Alexandria was a rich multicultural space that thrived in its cosmopolitanism with its trade and exchange of ideas, knowledge and culture. People from different parts of the world would gather in the place for a dynamic exchange in this marketplace of ideas. Before the onset of the monotheistic religion of Christianity that came in through the colonisation, the citizens of Alexandria believed in a polytheistic metaphysics. It is this past culture of tolerance and diversity that Cavafy celebrates in his poetry, just like Alexandria promoted arts and culture while celebrating its poets.

The poet's city Alexandria was named after Alexander the Great, after whose death in 323 BCE, the Hellenistic age started. In Cavafy's poetry, we find a great celebration of the Hellenistic age as its onset marked a period of profound intercultural exchange and fusion, resulting in a richly diverse cultural landscape. This era saw the emergence of Hellenistic Judaism, which blended Jewish religious traditions with Greek culture and language, leading to new forms of religious expression and thought. Greco-Buddhism, another notable example, emerged from the interaction between Greek and Buddhist cultures, especially in regions like Bactria and India, creating a unique blend of artistic and philosophical traditions. The School of Alexandria, a renowned centre of learning and scholarship, epitomised the intellectual dynamism of the period, fostering advancements in science, philosophy, and literature through the synthesis of various cultural influences.

Meanwhile, their neighbouring nation Rome was a growing regional power that was developing through its architecture and engineering apart from its victories in the wars with Carthage and Macedonia through which they were gaining control over mainland Greece. While studying the history of Greece, the acquisition of the Roman empire comes forth after the defeat in the battle of Corinth in 146 BCE even though it had been gradual. The definitive Roman occupation of the Greek world was solidified after the Battle of Actium in 31 BC. Augustus emerged victorious over Cleopatra VII, the Greek Ptolemaic queen of Egypt, and the Roman general Mark Antony. Following this, he conquered Alexandria in 30 BC, which was the last major city of Hellenistic Egypt. The Roman era of Greek history continued when Emperor Constantine the Great established Byzantium as Nova Roma, the capital of the Roman Empire, in 330 AD. The city was subsequently renamed Constantinople. The Byzantine Empire, which evolved from this period, represented a fusion of Greek and Roman cultures. It was this colonial acquisition of the Greek empire by the Romans that forms the background of the poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians', however it is not the colonised that gets called barbaric. Cavafy questions the entire discourse of colonialism through his poetry at a time when the colonial empires around the world were expanding. The exploitation that comes with colonialism and the justifications behind the entire enterprise is ridiculed in his poem.

The modern cosmopolitan Alexandria that Cavafy lived in during the 19th and 20th centuries was said to be akin to the ancient Alexandria with all its glory, it was seen as a revival of the glorious past. It was the end of the Ottoman Empire which led to the revival of the city after it had faced a long period of decline, because of the constant changes in empires. Mohammad Ali, an Albanian commander of the Ottoman forces, was sent to drive away the French from Egypt. He swiftly took the position of Governor of the empire after which he established a hereditary rule for his descendants, for the future generations to come until the mid-20th Century. He is known to be the one who brought about modernity in Alexandria during his rule. He restored Alexandria to its former splendour with International allies like Britain, Italy and France who aided in his endeavours. It reached its peak after the mid-19th Century and came to an end after the revolution of 1952. He uses his literary imagination to bridge the gap between the present and the

Hellenistic past by drawing parallels with the mirroring cosmopolitanism.

Check Your Progress

1. What is the historical background that informs the poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians' by Constantine Cavafy?
2. How does the poem use historical references to critique contemporary attitudes toward outsiders and change?
3. What historical events or periods does the poem evoke through its depiction of a city waiting for an unspecified threat?

4.4 How to Read Cavafy

To approach Cavafy's writings, one must familiarize themselves with the poet's poetic persona which is deeply influenced by his socio-historical milieu. As a city poet, Cavafy identifies himself with the city of Alexandria and its historical past which can be seen in his choice of language and the thematics of his writings. He distances himself from his writing through his diction. He maintains a kind of objectivity while writing which makes it difficult to analyse his writings and the intentions behind writing them as he buries himself in his words. His works are engaged in the urban, cultural space that he belongs to as he brings in self-reflexivity in the poems. Cavafy's poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians' is a postcolonial poem written with reference to diction, language and irony. He reviews the past of the city with an objective style of writing.

4.4.1 The Politics in 'Waiting for the Barbarians'

The politics in the poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians' centres around the concept of the barbarian. The term is used to propagate certain stereotypes against people from nations which are considered inferior or less civilized than the West. It can also be members from marginalised groups like tribal clans, primitive cultural groups or certain social classes that are deemed to be barbarians according to the standards set by usually the ones in power. The word is derived from the Greek word Barbaros which was used by the early Greeks to refer to any foreigners outside of their nation, particularly the

Romans. The term "barbarian" is likely derived from an onomatopoeic origin, with the "bar bar" sound mimicking the way Greeks perceived foreign languages. Initially, *bárbaros* was a neutral term, but it quickly acquired a pejorative connotation, reflecting the Greeks' view of their enemies as uncivilized and savage. The Romans later adopted this term to describe all people outside of Greco-Roman influence and control. Interestingly, the term "Barbary," which was once used to refer to North Africa, originates from the name of the region's Berber inhabitants rather than from the Greek word *bárbaros* (Britannica 2024).

The Greeks' disdain for foreign languages and cultures underscored a broader cultural and political superiority complex. They considered their language, customs, and societal structures to be the pinnacle of civilization. This ethnocentric view was perpetuated by the Romans, who used the term "barbarian" to solidify the boundaries between the civilized world and the unknown, often hostile territories beyond their empire. Over time, the term evolved to embody a sense of fear and condescension towards those who did not conform to Greco-Roman standards. The legacy of this term is evident in historical texts and has influenced modern interpretations of cultural and civilizational differences.

Self Assessing Questions:

- In what ways does the poem comment on the decline and transformation of empires throughout history?

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4.4.2 Civilisation and Barbarity in Eurocentrism

In Europe, during the 19th Century after the Industrial Revolution that followed the Enlightenment movement, the idea of cultural and moral superiority guided the missionaries into a self-assumed mission to civilize the rest of the world according to their standards. Western metaphysics, like Derrida talks about in his works, has always been defined based on binaries where one always assumes a superior position over the other. Within the Eurocentric framework

of international society and law, nations and peoples were categorized as either 'civilized' or 'uncivilized' ('barbarians'), using Europe as the benchmark. This came to be known as the 'standard of civilization.' according to which they established their colonising missions in the “barbaric” countries.

The concept of civilisation, as opposed to barbarity, arose as a concept during the 18th Century coined by Victor Mirabeau in a treatise that he wrote on population which later refashioned itself into the Eurocentric self-concept (Heraclides, et.al, 1888 p.31). The concept of civilisation that got enmeshed in hierarchy led to the classification of countries into the binaries of “civilised” and “barbaric” or “savage”. This distinction was upheld by Enlightenment thinkers like Montesquieu in "The Spirit of the Laws," Wolff, Smith, and Kant, who often referred to "civilized" versus "barbarous" or "savage" nations. A fourth category, "wild men," was also prevalent. In the 19th century, publicists—lawyers and influential commentators on international legal affairs—considered only "civilized nations" as full members of the family of nations, while "barbarous nations" had limited legal capacity, and "savages" even less. "Barbarous" nations received only partial recognition and inferior membership, while "savages" were seen as doomed to extinction. British Liberal politician Charles Dilke encapsulated this belief, stating that the gradual extinction of inferior races was a natural law and a blessing to mankind.

The gaps between the civilised and the barbarians began with the Industrial Revolution after the Enlightenment which further increased as the working class proletariat began to be associated with the marginalised other or the Barbarians. During the 19th C, the marginalised section of the society also included the people who didn't adhere to heteronormative ideas and were homosexual. Cavafy being a homosexual person facing economic ruin was writing from the margins of society where he was shunned, due to his identity and class.

Freud studied the notion of the barbarian in relation to understanding subjectivity. The coloniser defines himself in relation to the colonized as they are intimately related to each other. His notion of barbarity is closely tied to his understanding of the unconscious mind and the fundamental drives of human behaviour. Freud's notion of barbarity revolves around the idea that beneath the

surface of civilized society lies a set of primal, instinctual drives that are in constant conflict with the demands of social order. This tension between the civilized self and the barbaric id is central to his understanding of human psychology and the challenges of maintaining civilization.

The scientific rationalism emerging from the positivist movement during the Enlightenment was markedly different from the pagan spirituality of the East. Before the advent of monotheism brought by Christianity, Alexandria practised a polytheistic religion. Christianity is known for its role in spreading civilization through missionary activities worldwide. Cavafy subscribed to the Nietzschean notion of civilisation. According to Nietzsche, barbarians provide a more empowering and liberating sense of self-awareness compared to the rigid norms of civilization. For Nietzsche, the concept of barbarians represented a rejection of the constraints imposed by civilized society, offering a path to personal empowerment and liberation. This view posits that embracing the so-called barbaric elements can lead to a more authentic and self-determined existence, challenging the Enlightenment's emphasis on rationalism and order. The new barbarians were portrayed as strong and spiritually superior.

The standard for this “civilisation” was never clearly defined but it was understood and it adhered to cater to the Western world which was the dominant view. The states (mostly eastern) which did not enter into this exclusive list of civilised nations, could not participate in international conferences, were subjected to unequal treaties that went against their interests, and endured military interventions. The Ottoman Empire has always been the quintessential Other to Europe (Heraclides, et.al, 43). Ever since the Renaissance, the Turks were recognized as infidels who were unbelievers and termed as “barbarians”. After the fall of Constantinople in the year 1453, Turkey was defined as the “beast rising out of the sea described in the Apocalypse” by King Christian I of Denmark. The Turks were seen as “a pernicious force sent by God to scourge Christendom from its sins”. However, after the alliance with Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the image developed. During the 18th Century, the negative image superseded the earlier shift as Edmund Burke called them “wholly Asiatic”, and “worse than savages”.

In the nineteenth century, Lorimer expressed a common sentiment of his era, arguing that the 'rights of civilization' should not have been extended to the 'Turks' in Paris in 1856. He claimed that 'bitter experience' had shown they were incapable of fulfilling their duties and possibly did not belong to the 'progressive races of mankind.' He added that there were likely no other people who had been in contact with civilization for so long without producing a single individual distinguished in any intellectual pursuit, noting that the art of war was the only art they seemed capable of mastering. Towards the end of the 19th Century, Orientalists believed that the Turks could indeed follow the European model but, the Balkan crisis of 1875–78 and the Bulgarian atrocities were pivotal in persuading most of the European elite that the Ottoman Empire was likely 'incapable of reform.'

Check Your Progress:

1. In what ways does the poem address the concept of 'barbarian invasions' in the history of the Roman Empire?

4.4.3 Self and the Other

The concept of the self and the other emerges from the binary classification of Western metaphysics. The other is considered with scepticism as a threat because it's unpredictable, spontaneous and unfamiliar which generates fear within the self. It is because of the various distinguishing patterns of language, cultures and standards of civilization, that the other is susceptible to various assumptions and superstitions.

According to the concept of Otherness, the world is seen "as divided into mutually excluding opposites: if the Self is ordered, rational, masculine, good, then the Other is chaotic, irrational, feminine, and evil" (www.faculty.mccfl.edu). This construction of the Other is a process of demonization, which in itself expresses the 'ambivalence at the very heart of authority' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. 2002, P.3). Othering can be defined as the "set of dynamics, processes and structures that endanger marginality and persistent inequality across any full range of human differences based on group identities" (Menendian and Powell). In the binary of the

Occidents and the Orientals, it's always the latter which is Othered while the former assumes the role of the self. According to Hegel, Europe is the universal "self" according to humanist thought as they are rational and hence superior as in the dichotomy between the mind and the body, the former holds more dominance. The East has always been looked at as in an inferior position associated with the irrational feminine in juxtaposition to the masculine West.

In analysing the self and the other, Lacan traced the origins of this examination to the foundations of subjectivity. He likened it to a child viewing their reflection in a mirror, "the image must bear sufficient resemblance to the child to be recognised but separate enough to grand the child's hope for an anticipated mastery." and that's how the process of identifying the subject starts. Lacan says that there are various possible forms of alterity and plurality as there is no one "other".

The self and the other in the discourse of colonisation are characterised as good and evil in their characterisation. The coloniser was always given primacy over their worldview and culture above the colonised. The marginalisation of the colonised through the imperial discourse of othering is noted in postcolonial theory. Characterised by their difference from the centre, however, as Lacan points out, they are always defined through their relationship of dependency on the coloniser. But, the coloniser is also dependent on the relation with the colonised as its definition is also relational to the latter.

In becoming the symbolic child of the West through othering, it becomes a "primitive and degraded subject of the imperial discourse." While the colonized individuals are being shaped within the colonial context, the imperial and dominant 'Other' is also being established. In colonial discourse, 'othering' reveals how this narrative constructs its subjects. Within the framework of power dynamics, the other is seen as the "excluded and subjugated subject." Thus, othering is a dialectical process, as the identity of the 'colonizing other' is formed simultaneously with the 'colonized others.' This dynamic underscores the reciprocal nature of identity construction within colonial discourse, where each side defines and is defined by the other (Shash 9). There is an ambivalence in the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised that Bhabha talks about in his works.

In the poem, 'Waiting for the Barbarians', Constantine Cavafy subverts the colonial othering of the colonized as barbarians as in the context of the Hellenistic past, the Romans who were the colonisers were considered barbarians instead. The premise of the poem revolves around the anticipated invasion of foreign barbarians in domestic territory. Given that civilisation is associated with the West and assumes a superior position in the dichotomy, this poem shows that civilisation can only be understood with its relationship to the barbarians as they are "kind of a solution".

Stop to Consider:

J.M. Coetzee has written a novel by the same name which explores the themes of power and oppression that colonisation brings about in human civilization. The story is set in a nameless frontier town of an unnamed empire, where the Magistrate, the town's administrator, lives a quiet, routine life. This changes when Colonel Joll arrives, tasked with interrogating and suppressing the so-called "barbarians" who are perceived as a threat to the empire.

4.5 Poetic Structure of 'Waiting for the Barbarians'

The poem is structured in a dialogic pattern where there are a series of questions that are answered simultaneously. The pattern of "why-because" questions framed the narrative of the poem. It captures a moment of performance with the back-and-forth dialogues where one speaker questions the other and the other answers. The poem's narrative progresses through a dialogue between two speakers, who ask and answer questions. The poem consists of 35 lines that depict the turmoil in the Greek kingdom as they anxiously await the arrival of the Romans, perceived as the barbarians. However, the barbarians never arrive. The second speaker represents the voice of civilization, responding to the inquiries posed by the first speaker.

"Waiting for the Barbarians" starts with the following lines that establish the context of the poem-

What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum?

The barbarians are due here today.

While the entire piece revolves around the commotion caused by the waiting for the barbarians to come, it ends on an anti-climactic note as the barbarians never come. The closing lines of the poem-

Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians?

Those people were a kind of solution.

Beautifully captures the essence and thematic concerns of the poem. It doesn't offer any sense of closure and keeps it open-ended, to be deciphered. There is an attempt to cling to the previous order of things which is now dismantled by the use of the words "kind of".

The entire poem hinges on irony, as everyone acts based on their assumptions about the Barbarians rather than on any factual information. This approach highlights the flimsy nature of stereotypes and prejudices, which are built on unfounded assumptions and perpetuate harmful narratives. The people in the Senate wait passively for external intervention. In colonial discourse, this dynamic is typically reversed, with the formulation being that the barbarians await the intervention of the "civilised," as guiding them towards civilization is considered the white man's burden.

The poem is devoid of any poetic paraphernalia as he uses simple epithets like "beautiful". Despite the usage of simplistic nouns, it becomes difficult to understand his poems as it is not made apparent by the poet. The dominant theme in the poem is the politics and ideology that the poet is trying to bring across.

Check Your Progress:

1. What is the poetic structure of the poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians' by Constantine Cavafy?

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4.6 Analysis of the Text

The title of the poem itself refers to the act of anticipation where the people in the Senate are waiting for the Barbarians. Cavafy subverts the colonial gaze by calling the colonizers barbarians. By subverting the connotations of the word barbarian, the poet highlights that it is actually the foreign intrusion into domestic land which is barbaric or savage rather than it being the other way around. He brings forth the theme of the binary dichotomy between civilisation and barbarity, along with how it is interrelated. Written during the late 19th and early 20th Century, when the whole world was grappling with the repercussions of colonisation, the poem's anti-colonial stance marks its entry into World literature with its universal voice of human nature.

What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum?

The first line of the poem starts with an interrogative sentence that has a poignant effect on the readers. The first speaker seems to be unaware of the changes and the political situation which the second speaker enlightens them with. He uses the present tense in the poem which can relate it to any point in time, it isn't specified which makes it harder to contextualise the poem.

Barbarians are defined as people from primitive cultures as the notion of civilisation arose from the beginning of the new world which led to explorations and discoveries leading up to the Enlightenment which is seen as the crux of Western civilisation. This is an attempt to create a noble self-image by projecting the barbarity on the natives as something external to them. The image of the barbarian as someone threatening and destructive of civilisation is mired in colonial politics as it justifies their invasion of native land to create a nation that the West can control and "civilise". They justified their colonialism and rule over the natives based on pre-assumptions however they didn't even try to understand their language for proper communication before labelling them as violent entities. The term barbarian was applied to the European Others as well, the natives whom they marginalise.

The position of the first speaker is quiet, obscure and confusing as the readers are not made aware of his belongingness. He has no idea what's going on in the city and it's not apparent whether he's from the civilised world or the barbaric world as well. There is a sort of

ambivalence in the questions that he poses. The questions put forward by the first speaker, ironically ask what happens when the colonisers come. His belongingness to the city is something he shares with the poet as his social position is intersectional as well. There are autobiographical glimpses of the poet in the first speaker.

His confusion reveals the activities of the day as the questions can be taken as statements in itself. The role of the interrogative sentences was to reveal the confusion in the city and the poem as well. In the poem, the people wait for the Romans who are the colonisers and the barbarians. The term Barbarian entails the collective construction of the other- they become primitive, distant and inferior.

Self Assessing Questions:

- How does the poem reflect the anxieties and fears associated with the fall of ancient civilisations?

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Stanza wise Analysis:

What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum?

The barbarians are due here today.

The poem starts with the question of the first interlocutor and establishes the context of the poem. The forum was a place where meetings happened in the Senate, central in ancient Rome. The act of waiting has led to a political stagnation has every activity is halted in anticipation for the arrival of the Barbarians.

Why isn't anything happening in the senate?

Why do the senators sit there without legislating?

Because the barbarians are coming today.

What laws can the senators make now?

Once the barbarians are here, they'll do the legislating.

In the following stanza, the poet through his first speaker criticizes the apparent inactivity in the state, despite the urgent need for legislative reform. The Senators are depicted as passive, merely sitting back and not engaging in meaningful leadership. The fear and curiosity regarding the arrival of the Barbarians have attributed to this halt in legislation as any political reform seems useless now as it will be rendered moot by the colonisers. The Senate is depicted as ineffective in the face of an imminent threat or disruption, prioritizing the anticipation of the barbarians over their responsibilities as leaders. This situation challenges the nature of power, control, and the effectiveness of political structures when faced with external challenges.

Furthermore, the poet suggests that the arrival of the barbarians would mean a shift in the power of the legislation while also highlighting the ineffectiveness of the senators in such a situation where an outside force threatens to disrupt the stability of their rule. Established institutions are fragile in nature as there is a potential for dramatic shifts in power.

Why did our emperor get up so early,
and why is he sitting at the city's main gate
on his throne, in state, wearing the crown?
Because the barbarians are coming today
and the emperor is waiting to receive their leader.
He has even prepared a scroll to give him,
replete with titles, with imposing names.

The first three lines show how the emperor has been ready for the arrival of the colonizer/barbarians to welcome them which hints to a peaceful handover of powers. There is a sense of preparedness in the imminent confrontation with the barbarians. The scroll prepared by the emperor, "replete with titles, with imposing names," reveals his attempt to impress the barbarians with grandeur and extravagance. It's a formal interaction that the poet is indicating with such preparations instead of a violent turnover.

Why have our two consuls and praetors come out today
wearing their embroidered, their scarlet togas?

Why have they put on bracelets with so many amethysts,
and rings sparkling with magnificent emeralds?

Why are they carrying elegant canes
beautifully worked in silver and gold?

Because the barbarians are coming today
and things like that dazzle the barbarians.

The next set of questions that are put forward criticizes the opulent display of wealth and extravagance which the officials have adorned in an attempt to please the Barbarians. It's a deliberate attempt at trying to manipulate and distract the barbarians with spectacles. It's a vain attempt to show their wealth and material strength instead of anything substantial. There is a sense of passiveness about the senators.

Why don't our distinguished orators come forward as usual
to make their speeches, say what they have to say?

Because the barbarians are coming today
and they're bored by rhetoric and public speaking.

The first speaker questions why the orators aren't prepared with their usual speeches today while the audience remain waiting in such times of turmoil. However, they fail to provide any sense of security to the people. The arrival of the feared barbarians push the orators into silence highlighting their insignificance at such times. There is a disillusionment that fills the poem as the people realises that the barbarians have no interest in the eloquent speeches and orations. The phrase "they get bored with eloquence and orations" highlights the disparity between the community's societal aspirations and the barbarians' indifference.

Why this sudden restlessness, this confusion?

(How serious people's faces have become.)

Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly,
everyone going home so lost in thought?

Because night has fallen and the barbarians have not come.

And some who have just returned from the border say
there are no barbarians any longer.

There is a sudden restlessness and confusion among the people, as the once busy streets and squares are now emptying. The atmosphere has become somber, with everything coming to a standstill. The night brings a metaphorical darkness that has fallen over the community. A sense of ambiguity and fear pervades because the barbarians have not arrived, leaving the future uncertain. Those returning from the border report that no barbarians remain, adding to the anxiety.

And now, what's going to happen to us without barbarians?
Those people were a kind of solution.

In a tumultuous time of anxiety, the barbarians offered order and a kind of solution. Despite being the “other”, their existence provides a crucial element to the identity of the self. The open-endedness of the poem offers its readers a space to articulate the irony behind the dynamics of colonial power through postcolonial criticism. As Neimneh points out: “Post colonialism is conserved with how the subject conceives itself with the relation to the other, with how groups of “us” and “them” stand with relation to each other. European or imperial discourses portray the other in a way that makes it different, they also help found the self as its counterpart. In this process, they build a self justifying myth in which the self and the other are opposite and exclusive.”

Self Assessing Questions:

1. How does the poem's setting and mood capture the uncertainties faced by ancient cities on the brink of conquest or collapse?

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4.7 Summing Up

Cavafy, in his poem ‘Waiting for the Barbarians’, beautifully illustrates the anxieties and ironies inherent in the human condition. Through his exploration of fear, expectation, and the unknown, Cavafy challenges the reader to reflect on the nature of power,

civilization, and the constructs that define societal norms. His work continues to resonate with contemporary audiences, offering timeless insights into the complexities of human behavior and the perpetual tension between order and chaos. By blending historical context with profound philosophical questions, Cavafy's poetry remains a poignant commentary on the enduring struggles within both individuals and societies.

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BLOCK- 5

Unit 1: Introducing Boris Pasternak

Unit 2: Boris Pasternak: English Lessons

Unit 3: Alec Derwent Hope: Australia

Unit 4: Nazim Hikmet: A Sad State of Freedom

UNIT- 1

INTRODUCING BORIS PASTERNAK

Unit Structure:

1.1 Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 About the Author

1.4 Pasternak's Literary Contribution

1.5 The Nature of his Literary Works

1.6 Summing Up

1.7 References and Suggested Readings

1.1. Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to-

- *learn* about the author,
- *know* about his literary contribution,
- *understand* the socio-political condition of his time,
- *analyze* the nature of his writings.

1.2. Introduction

Boris Pasternak was one of the most influential Russian literary activists, a poet, a novelist, as well as one of the most popular translators of literary classics among the Russian readers. He is best known for his novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, which won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1958. Pasternak generally explored the themes of love, nature, and the human condition in his poetic works. Though he explored commonplace themes in his works, he also tried to extend beyond the boundaries of traditional literary creations. His works also amalgamated various socio-political issues of the contemporary times along with the confluence of art and morality. His works

significantly influenced twentieth century literature. His works were translated into many languages, introducing Russian literature to a global audience.

1.3. About the Author

Boris Leonidovich Pasternak was born on 10 February, 1890, in Moscow into a wealthy Jewish family. His father, Leonid Pasternak, was a well-known Post-Impressionist painter and a professor at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. His mother, Rosalia Kaufman, was a concert pianist. Boris Pasternak was the eldest among four children. His younger brother was Alex Pasternak and he had two sisters, Lydia and Josephine. Boris Pasternak's childhood home was frequently flocked by many influential literary artists like Leo Tolstoy and Rainer Maria Rilke. His father, a well-known painter of his time, made portraits of Tolstoy, Rilke, Lenin and many of his acquaintances. His mother's musical touch influenced him to take up a musical career. As evident from his parental lineage, Pasternak was raised in a particularly creative and a highly productive environment. He studied musical theory and composition for six years, from 1904 to 1910, under the influence of the composer, Scriabin. Later, he studied philosophy at Moscow University and the University of Marburg. He opted for military service, but was disqualified for physical debility. During World War I, he worked in a chemical factory in Urals. Later, he worked in the library of the Soviet commissariat of education. He began composing poetry at a young age and was influenced by Russian symbolism and futurism.

1.4. Pasternak's Literary Contribution

Boris Pasternak was one of the most versatile Russian literary artists. He was a poet, a novelist, a composer, as well as a translator of the classics. Pasternak's first collection of poetry, *Twin in the Clouds*, was published in 1914. However, his most famous poetry collection was *My Sister, Life*, published in 1922, in Berlin. It soon rose to fame and became one of the most significant anthologies in Russian language. He also translated a number of classical stage plays by William Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, and many others.

His most famous literary work was *Doctor Zhivago*, published in 1957. The novel spans the time frame between the Russian Revolution of 1905 and World War II.

He published several of his poetry collections during his lifetime. Some of them are-

- *Twin in the Clouds* (1914)
- *Over the Barriers* (1916)
- *Themes and Variations* (1917)
- *My Sister, Life* (1922)
- *Second Birth* (1932)
- *On Early Trains* (1944)
- *Selected Poems* (1946)
- *Poems* (1954)
- *When the Weather Clears* (1959)
- *In The Interlude: Poems 1945–1960* (1962).

He also wrote a number of prose, both fiction and non-fiction. Some of his prose work includes-

- *Safe Conduct* (1931)
- *The Last Summer* (1934)
- *Childhood* (1941)
- *Selected Writings* (1949)
- *Collected Works* (1945)
- *Goethe's Faust* (1952)
- *Essay in Autobiography* (1956)
- *Doctor Zhivago* (1957)

His most notable poetry collections are *My Sister, Life*, and *Second Birth*. He rose to fame as a novelist with the publication of two of his widely acclaimed books, *The Last Summer* and *Doctor Zhivago*. Let us study a few of his works in detail-

- ***Second Birth***

Second Birth is a poetry collection by Boris Pasternak, published in 1932. The collection marks a significant shift in his oeuvre as he turns from the futuristic approach and reflects inward and towards a more introspective and symbolist approach. The title of the collection might refer to the poet's own spiritual and artistic rebirth

as he struggles to find his voice and purpose in life. It reflects more on his personal transformation as well as transformation of Russia under the Soviet regime. Some of the notable poems of the collection include “The Second Birth”, “Summer”, “The Weeping Garden”, “The Earth”, and “In the Evening”. The poems in the collection mostly explored themes of personal growth, artistic expression, spirituality, love, and relationships, nature and the seasons, the changing landscape of Russia, among others.

- ***My Sister, Life***

My Sister, Life is another widely-acclaimed collection of poems by Pasternak, published in 1922. The poems showcase Pasternak’s poetic genius through his unique literary style, with blended elements of Symbolism, Futurism, and lyric poetry. The poems reflect on human condition and contemplate on the meaning and realities of life. Many of the poems in the collection revolve around nature and the seasons to explore the ever-changing dynamics of the journey of life. Pasternak also explores themes of love and relationships to reflect on personal connections as well as relationship between life and art. The titular poem of the collection, “My Sister, Life”, is one of Pasternak’s most celebrated works. Other notable poems of the collection include “Winter”, “Spring”, “In the Night”, and “In the Music”. This collection of poems by Pasternak is one of his most prominent literary works and is often considered a landmark of twentieth century Russian literature.

- ***Safe Conduct***

Safe Conduct by Boris Pasternak is an autobiographical work which explores the author’s life, relationships, and the struggles with the Soviet authorities. He wrote the memoir in 1931, but it was published posthumously, in the year 1989, long after his death. The book, written as a memoir, is basically a collection of essays, letters, and diary entries, which shed light on Pasternak’s personal life as well as his creative journey as a poet. The title of the work suggests the idea of seeking protection and the freedom of expression as an artist, despite the challenges and hurdles of living under a repressive, fascist regime. The memoir serves as a testimony to Pasternak’s courage and resilience as a writer and his allegiance to artistic expression.

- ***The Last Summer***

The Last Summer is a novella by Boris Pasternak, published in 1934. The book was originally written in Russian under the title, *Povest* (A Story), which was later translated into English by George Reavey. The English version was first published in 1958 in Cecil Hamley's magazine, *Noonday*. The book revolves around Serezha, the protagonist of the story, who visits his sister and her family who resided at the foothills of the Ural Mountains during the winter of 1916. Set in Russia, the plot of the narrative is mostly Serezha's reminiscence of the bygone summer days of 1914 when he worked as a tutor in Moscow. Serezha's sojourn in Moscow, where he resided with his employer, a wealthy Moscow merchant, brought him in association with various women which shapes major part of the narrative. The tiresome journey to his sister's place left him exhausted and drained. Worn out with the travel, he falls into a restless sleep and reminisces the bygone summer as he dwells amidst the liminal space between dream and reality. He dreams about the incidents of the previous summer of peace and happiness, before the First World War. He remembers his romantic fascination for Mrs. Arild, the merchant's paid companion, and Sashka, a prostitute he would often spend his nights with. The 'Introduction' of the book was written by Pasternak's sister, Lydia Slater.

- ***Doctor Zhivago***

Doctor Zhivago revolves around the titular character, Dr. Zhivago, and his tumultuous love life amidst the turmoil of World War II and the Russian Revolution of 1905. The protagonist, Yuri Zhivago, a Russian physician and poet, is torn between his love for two women; Tonya, his wife, and Lara, a woman he met on a few occasions. The novel, though fundamentally written as a love story, also reflects on the socio-political situation of the time and how the events shaped the narrative as well as influenced the lives of the characters of the novel. The plot is complex and intricate and the narrative is of considerable length, divided into fifteen parts and an epilogue. The story narrates the socio-political World War chaos and catastrophes and the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, the revolts, the killings, exile, and imprisonments, the epidemics, and the plight and predicament of the masses. The novel is often speculated by many readers and academicians to have autobiographical elements in it. Boris Pasternak himself confessed

that his mistress, Olga Ivinskaya, served as his muse, his inspiration for Lara in his book. The novel was first published in Italy because it was censored for publication in Soviet Russia. In 2003, *Doctor Zhivago* has been included among the academic literary canon and has been part of the main Russian school curriculum ever since. The novel was completed in 1955, two years after Stalin's death. The book was translated into 18 languages by 1958.

Boris Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize on 23rd October, 1958. However, he declined the award due to fear of Soviet repercussions.

Check Your Progress:

- Q. 1. Name any two poetry collections by Boris Pasternak?
- Q.2. Mention any two poems from the collection, *Second Birth*.
- Q.3. Mention any two poems from the collection, *My Sister, Life*.
- Q.4. Name the protagonist of the novella, *The Last Summer*? When was the book published?
- Q.5. Who is Yuri Zhivago? Does the novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, resonate in any way with the author's own life? Discuss.
- Q.6. In which year is the novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, published?
- Q. 7. Who translated *The Last Summer* into English? What was the original Russian title of the book?
- Q.8. Mention any two socio-political events that form the backdrop of *Doctor Zhivago*.
- Q. 9. When was the English version of *The Last Summer* published? Name the magazine in which it was published.
- Q.10. Name any two prose work by Boris Pasternak?
- Q.11. When was Pasternak awarded with the Noble Prize? Why did he decline the honour?
- Q.12. Name the book for which Pasternak won the Noble Prize in Literature?

1.5. The Nature of his Literary Works

The nature of Boris Pasternak's literary works is characterized by his unique literary style of composition and his zeal to experiment as well as express his ideas and emotions through his creative endeavors. Boris Pasternak's poems were mostly influenced by symbolist and futurist style of writings. He was closely associated with Tsentrifuga (Centrifuge), a Moscow Futuristic group. He belonged to the literary circle of Post-Symbolist generation and his literary works contributed towards many Futurist publications. Initially, his works were often deemed esoteric as per the classical Russian poetic standard. However, later it began to be recited word-perfect by generations of Russian readers.

Boris Pasternak's family immigrated to England, but he refused to join them. Like many of his contemporary writers, Pasternak also accepted the Bolshevik regime. However, his relationship with the Communist government was complex and nuanced. While he did not actively support the regime, he worked within the system to maintain his artistic freedom and earn his livelihood. He refused to join the Communist party though he was a member of the Soviet Writer' Union, which was closely bound to the government. His literary works though never directly addressed the regime, his poems often contained subtle critiques of the political situation of his time. Pasternak often employed metaphors and allegories, used coded language and subtle allusions to express his disapproval of Stalin's policies as well as avoid censorship. He also befriended many writers and artists, like Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova, who were critical of the regime.

Stop to Consider:

The Bolshevik regime refers to the government of the Soviet Union from 1917 to 1991, led by the Bolshevik party, which later came to be popularly known as the **Communist Party of the Soviet Union**. The regime was led by **Vladimir Lenin** as it rose to power in the October Revolution of 1917. The Bolsheviks main aim was to establish a socialist state grounded on Marxist principles. Its primary objective was to achieve communism based on the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The state had the one-party rule where the Communist party held absolute power and controlled all aspects of

society, including economy, education, and the media. Strict censorship prevailed as the regime controlled all forms of media for suppressing dissenting voices and promoting their own propagandas. The major economic sectors such as industry and agriculture were all controlled and owned by the state under the Bolshevik regime. Any kind of opposition was not tolerated and the party appointed a secret police group or the Cheka (also known as KGB) to maintain order and control, thus conjuring a fearful atmosphere.

The Bolshevik regime was prodigiously known for its violence and oppression, a period of brutal totalitarianism, repression, and human right abuse that lasted for decades under the façade of achieving socialist goals and maintaining state security. During the Bolshevik regime, the period from 1918 to 1922 was known as **Red Terror**. It was during this period that Lenin's government executed thousands of Tsarist officials, nobles, and clergy whom they deemed as perceived enemies. The period from 1936 to 1953, known as **Purges**, was the time of Stalin's regime when he imprisoned and/or executed millions of people that included party members, intellectuals, and also ordinary citizens of the state. Millions of people, including political prisoners and dissidents, were imprisoned, tortured, and forced into labor camps, known as **Gulag**, often in inhuman conditions during 1930s to 1950s. The period from 1928 to 1940 was marked by **forced collectivization** that is consolidation of individual farms into state-controlled collectives. Such repressive policies led to widespread famine and economic devastation in the state. The oppressive regime also suppressed the cultures, languages, and religions, of the minority, often through violence or forceful assimilation. The Bolshevik regime had a profound impact not only on Russian but global history that molded the Soviet Union and influenced communist movements around the world.

Lyrical poetry was not much in vogue during that time as Russia was undergoing such intense socio-political turmoil under the Soviet regime. After the publication of *Themes and Variations* in 1923, Pasternak turned from lyrical to long narrative poems which seemed more consistent with the historical and epic themes associated with the period of ongoing revolutions. The Bolshevik government

controlled the economy by setting targets for production and resource allocation through five-year plans. The period of the first five-year plan, from 1928 to 1932, brought major changes in Pasternak's personal as well as professional life. With a renewed commitment to the regime and as a response to the Stalin revolution, he wrote *Second Birth*, a collection of poems published in 1932. This poetry collection marks a paradigmatic shift in Pasternak's oeuvre as he turns from the avant-garde Futuristic movement towards a more personal, introspective style as he delves within himself to reflect on his own inner turmoil, spiritual crisis and disillusionment, his identity as a poet, and a search for new meaning and purpose. The *Second Birth* is considered one of the most significant of Pasternak's poetic compositions as it showcases a unique blend of philosophical insight and emotional depth, and a masterful use of language. Boris Pasternak was proclaimed the premier Soviet poet at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. A year later, in 1935, he was sent to the antifascist First International Congress for the Defense of Culture, held in Paris, to represent the Soviet Union.

Towards the later years of 1930s, Pasternak produced little original works but mostly turned towards poetic translations. He initially started by translating contemporary Georgian poets and later produced classic translations of Shakespeare's tragedies along with Goethe's *Faust*. During the World War II, Pasternak's earlier poetry collections were reprinted along with the publication of two new volumes- *On Early Trains* (1943) and *Expanse of the Earth* (1945). After the War was over, Pasternak withdrew from the Soviet literary life. It was during this time, he began working seriously on his award-winning novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, which he had previously begun and abandoned several times. However, winning the Noble Prize was not approved by the Soviet government and Pasternak

was dispossessed from the Union of Soviet Writers in 1958. After Pasternak's death, the Union of Soviet Writers reinstated him in 1987, thus restoring back the legitimacy of his work since his expulsion. He also translated many European classics during this period.

SAQ:

Q.1. How did the socio-political situation of his time influence Boris Pasternak's literary works? Discuss.

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Q.2. What do you think about Boris Pasternak's political stance during the Soviet regime? How it affected his journey as a poet?

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Q.3. How did Pasternak expressed his disapproval or acceptance of the Soviet regime? Discuss with reference to his literary works.

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1.6. Summing Up

Boris Pasternak was one of the most renowned Russian poets, a novelist, and a translator. His poems showcases his unique blend of elements from futurism and symbolism, often replete with vivid imageries and metaphors that conjures a dreamlike atmosphere while at the same time subtly alluding to the oppressive socio-political condition of his time. His works are mostly characterized by his deep rumination of love, relationship, and the complexities of human condition, as well as his reflection on nature, art, and the spiritual realm. He also explored historical and philosophical themes and often contemplated on the essence of the Russian experience. His literary works influenced and inspired generations of writers and poets. His beautiful and thought-provoking poems, prose, and

translation, highlights his commitment to artistic expressions and continues to timelessly resonate with readers worldwide.

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UNIT- 2

BORIS PASTERNAK: “ENGLISH LESSONS”

Unit Structure:

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 The Poem

2.4 Summary and Analysis

2.5 Critical Reading of the Poem

2.6 Imageries and Symbols

2.7 Major Themes

2.8 Summing Up

2.9 References and Suggested Reading

2.1 Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- *understand* the poem,
- *analyze* the poem critically,
- *know* the poet’s nature of composition,
- *learn* about the characteristics of his poems.

2.2 Introduction

Boris Pasternak is one of the most influential and celebrated Russian poets, novelists, composers, and literary translators. He emerged as a prominent figure in Russian Futurism during the early decades of the 20th century, and his literary works are often known for its unique form and style. His poetic compositions often emphasized on human condition and experiences with a unique blend of intimacy and universality, counterbalancing personal feelings with broader human concerns. The lyrical intensity and nature imageries in his

poems often evoked vibrant and exhilarating dreamlike sequences of human life. His works usually draws on classical literary traditions, from Pushkin to Shakespeare. He translated Shakespeare, Goethe, and many other classical writers as well as composed many poems, heavily influenced by the classics. He published several collections of poems during his lifetime, solidifying his reputation as a distinguished Russian poet. His most famous and celebrated work of fiction is the novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, which earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1958. However, he declined the honor due to fear of Soviet repercussions. Though he often wrestled with personal struggles and political turmoil under the Soviet regime, Boris Pasternak left behind a legacy as one of the greatest 20th century poet and writer of Russian literature.

2.3. The Poem

English Lessons

When Desdemona sang a ditty-
In her last hours among the living-
It wasn't love that she lamented,
And not her star-she mourned a willow.
When Desdemona started singing,
With tears near choking off her voice,
Her evil demon for her evil day
Stored up of weeping rills a choice.

And when Ophelia sang a ballad-
In her last hours among the living-
All dryness of her soul was carried
Aloft by gusts of wind, like cinders.
The day Ophelia started singing,
By bitterness of daydreams jaded,
What trophies did she clutch, when sinking?
A bunch of buttercups and daisies.

Their shoulders stripped of passion's tatters,
They took, their hearts a-quake with fear,

The Universe's chilly baptism-
To stun their loving forms with spheres.

SAQ:

Q. Try to find out the poetic devices used by Boris Pasternak in the poem "English Lessons".

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2.4 Summary and Analysis

"English Lessons" is a beautiful poem by Boris Pasternak from his collection, *My Sister, Life*, published in 1922. The poem is a poetic and philosophical exploration of love, mortality, the fragility of human life, and the human condition. The poem juxtaposes the lives and death of two very significant and popular women characters in Shakespeare's plays- Desdemona from *Othello* and Ophelia from *Hamlet*. The poem narrates the final moments of both the tragic-heroines as they sing and laments about their lives as well as their approaching deaths. Desdemona laments her loss of beauty and youth while Ophelia resigns herself to her fate of utter hopelessness and despair.

The poem begins with Desdemona's melancholic song as she is getting closer to her impending death. As the poet says, she does not lament a lost love, nor does she blame her stars. Rather, it is a willow that she cries for in her song. She continues to sing her song of despair even though her voice chokes and breaks. Desdemona's song reflects on the transcendent power of love as well as the fleeting nature of life. The poet, through Desdemona's song tries to reflect on the passing of time, and how it slips away even though we try to clench it uncompromisingly. Just like passing time, human lives and experiences too slip away as we stand there and stare in vain, hopelessly trying to grasp it. In the poem, the willow in Desdemona's song symbolizes lost love, passing of time, as well as the fragility and vulnerability of human life, and also the human ability to be flexible and adapt them in every situation life brings

forth. The poet refers to the day of her death as “evil day” when the “evil demon” has in stored tears for her, symbolic of the grief and despair she have endured in her life and which have possibly led her to death.

Ophelia’s song in the poem denotes the transience of life. As her body mourns the last hours of life, all the dryness of her soul is carried away by the wind like cinders. The wind blew away the remnants of all her emotions, passion, and love, leaving her empty and lifeless as she embraces death. The poet questions about her possessions that she carries along as she surrenders to cruel fate. It does not include any trophies or treasures but “a bunch of buttercups and daisies” as she sinks underwater, symbolizing her innocence and naivety. Her lifeless body and her empty soul, torn and withered by grief and despair became so fragile that all it needed was the weight of a bunch of flowers to drown underwater. The flowers in Ophelia’s song can be seen as a poignant portrayal of the complexities of human emotions and the fragility of life.

The poem, “English Lessons”, is a meditation on the human experiences, the fragility of life, and the inevitability of death. Throughout the poem, Pasternak weaves a rich tapestry of imagery, metaphors, and allusion as he explores the intersection of art and life, subtly hinting at how artistic expression is a way to transcend death or mortality. The poet reflects on the faculty of love and how it can be deleterious and crippling, and leave one vulnerable and impuissant. The poem carries a melancholic undertone, one that of loss and grief. However, this fragility of life and inevitability of death also encourages us to seek life fully and cherish every moment of it. It teaches us to love deeply, and truly, and with all our heart, as well as to find solace in the beauty of art and poetry.

Check Your progress:

Q.1. Name the poetry collection which includes the poem, “English Lessons”.

Q.2. Name the two women characters discussed in the poem.

Q.3. Name the two Shakespearean plays from which the characters are taken.

Q.4. Discuss the emotional state of the two women in the poem, “English Lessons”.

Q.5. On what does Desdemona’s song reflects upon?

Q.6. What does Ophelia’s song denotes?

Q.7. What does the willow in Desdemona’s song represent?

Q.8. What is the trophy Ophelia carries with herself as she succumbs to death?

Q.9. What do the flowers in Ophelia’s song represent?

Q.10. From your reading of the poem, what does the poem, “English Lessons”, teaches us?

2.5 Critical Reading of the Poem

The poem “English Lessons” by Boris Pasternak explores the themes of mortality, love, and the human condition through the lens of two significant women characters– Desdemona from *Othello* and Ophelia from *Hamlet*, two of the greatest Shakespearean tragedies of Elizabethan drama. The two tragic heroines lament their lives and experiences in their last hours as they await death. Desdemona mourns the loss of her willow while Ophelia clings tightly to her trophies of buttercups and daisies, the ephemeral symbols of beauty and life on the brink of death. The poem explores the intersection of love and mortality, highlighting the transience of human life and connections.

In *Othello*, Desdemona sings the Willow Song in Scene 3 of Act 4 as part of conversation with her attendant Emilia. Othello has already begun to believe Iago’s allegations about Desdemona’s infidelity with Cassio, and his behavior towards Desdemona has become harsh and accusatory. Othello is driven by rage and distrust, and Desdemona is increasingly hurt and bewildered by her husband’s behavior. The melancholy tune of the Willow Song has for its subject the nature of love, fidelity, and marriage. Desdemona recalls the song from her childhood, when she heard the servant Barbary sing it – she had been abandoned by her lover, and dies mourning his betrayal. The song serves several purposes – it

heightens the tension in the atmosphere and foreshadows Desdemona's tragic fate; the repetition of "willow" reflects the sense of loss and lamentation that accompanies grief; the themes of love and vulnerability show us Desdemona as an innocent person caught in the deceit of Iago's lies. The song also serves to enhance the extent of Othello's emotional unraveling after he discovers Iago's duplicity and Desdemona's innocence.

In *Hamlet*, Ophelia's madness and eventual death are narrated in two scenes. Ophelia's descent into madness is portrayed through her singing of fragmented songs and distribution of flowers in Scene 5 of Act 4, while her death is reported by Queen Gertrude in Scene 7 of Act 4. In Scene 5, Ophelia sings about betrayal and death; she reflects on her grief over Hamlet's rejection and her father Polonius's death. In Scene 7, Gertrude describes how Ophelia fell into a brook while attempting to hang flower garlands onto the branches of a willow tree. While floating, her clothes buoyed her temporarily, preventing her from sinking. In blissful ignorance of the danger she was in, Ophelia continued to sing fragments of old songs as the waters surrounded her in an eventual, slow death.

Pasternak includes Desdemona and Ophelia in his poem to draw a parallel with the condition of the oppressed in contemporary Soviet Russia, as well as to reflect his broader interest in Shakespeare. Through Desdemona, Pasternak explores the complexities of human nature, suffering and love; he shows how beauty and innocence can fall prey to hostility in a world where truth and art are threatened, as in contemporary Russia. Through Ophelia, Pasternak highlights the transient yet recurring nature of human experiences. He shows us how there exists a delicate balance between life and death, and between love and despair. Literary scholar Jane Gary Harris notes that both Desdemona and Ophelia "sacrificed their lives by merging with the 'pool of the universe,'" (Harris) which suggests that death may function as a return to a larger, universal life force. Through these two female characters, Pasternak pays homage to Shakespeare as well as exposes his readership to shared cultural realities.

The poem is divided into three stanzas— two eight lines stanzas, each focusing one of the two Shakespearean heroines as they express their emotional turmoil through their songs, and a concluding four lines stanza emphasizing on the connection between the two women and their shared mutual experiences. The two

stanzas, though speaking of two different individuals, create a sense of fluidity and continuity between them. The structure of composition creates a sense of symmetry and balance, highlighting the shared themes of love, loss, grief, and mortality in the poem.

The poem weaves a rich tapestry of evocative imagery and symbolisms. Pasternak employs a vivid description of natural elements like willow, cinder, wind, buttercups, daisies, etc. symbolizing the beauty and fragility of life as well as the inevitability of death. The willow is often associated with grief and mourning, which represents Desdemona's despair and loss of love. The cinders and wind suggests Ophelia's hopelessness and her emotional desolation. The poet uses various poetic devices like metaphors, simile, and personification in the poem. He also makes use of enjambment and caesura to create an illusion of fragmentation in the poem to mirror the women's disjoint emotions.

In post-Revolution Russia, Shakespeare's plays were initially seen as counter-revolutionary and aristocratic. However, due to his global stature, an outright condemnation was not possible. Therefore, Soviet Russia endorsed Shakespeare; Russian critics viewed his plays through a Marxist-Leninist lens to align with socialist ideals. So, translations and play adaptations of Shakespeare were crafted to conform to the state-mandated artistic style, socialist realism, which emphasized on the portrayal of Communist values. Texts were modified to put greater focus on the class struggle, proletarian virtues, and anti-feudal themes in Shakespeare's texts. State-approved interpretations were the norm and any interpretation deviating from these were seen as potentially subversive. Hence, Shakespeare's work became a tool to propagate socialist ideals as well as a medium through which artists could explore themes of tyranny and resistance, albeit with caution.

The poem "English Lessons" is a masterful exploration of the human experience through the riveting accounts of two women singing melancholic songs as they await their impending death. Pasternak's poem invites the readers to reflect on the fragility and the fleeting nature of life and love, and the ways we cling to them to add beauty and meaning to our living experiences even in the most despairing moments of our life.

SAQ:

Q.1. What do the two women characters lament in their songs in the poem, “English Lessons”? Discuss.

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Q.2. Give a critical analysis of the poetic structure of the poem, “English Lessons”.

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Q.3. Discuss the various poetic devices with references to the poem, “English Lessons”.

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2.6 Imageries and Symbols

Let us discuss some of the significant imageries and symbols from the poem “English Lessons”—

- **Willow**

The willow in Desdemona’s song carries several layers of meaning as it explores the complexities of human emotions and experiences. Desdemona sings the Willow Song in Act 4, Scene 3 of *Othello*. It is a mournful ballad about a woman scorned by her lover, and shows that Desdemona realizes that Othello is growing increasingly distant from her. She can sense the loss of his love and trust, and seeks to perhaps prove her innocence in the face of the accusations that will soon follow. In literature and ancient folklore, willows are often associated with lost love, grief, and despair. Desdemona’s cry for the willow may signify a lost or unrequited love or a failed relationship that could not endure the ruthlessness of bad

times and fate. The willow branches grow and changes with the change of every season. The willows that Desdemona sings about may metaphorically represent the ever-changing dynamic of life and the inevitable passage of time and the changes it brings with it. The willow in her song might also symbolize flexibility and adaptation as willows are known for its ability to bend without breaking easily. Desdemona's lamenting the willow can be seen as symbolic of her longing for flexibility and resilience that she once had but now lacked as a woman whose life have changed like the willow branches do with the changing seasons. Though flexible and adaptable, the willow branches are also known to be very delicate and fragile. Desdemona's focus on the willow in the poem might represent her own vulnerability and fragility as she surrenders to whatever fate had in store for her in the face of death.

- **Cinders**

Cinders are basically remnants of something burnt, leaving behind soot and ashes. Cinders can be symbolic of loss of spark, warmth, and energy. Ophelia's comparison to cinders in the poem may indicate her loss of passion and vitality and her willingness to live, leaving her empty, hollow, and lifeless. Her soul being carried away as cinders by a gust of wind may suggest her hollowness as she is devoid of any emotions or expectations nor any attachment or vigor to live. Cinders can also be symbolic representation of decay and disintegration. Ophelia's soul being compared to cinder may metaphorically represent her loss of sense of self and individuality. Her soul being carried away as cinder suggests a decay of her inner emotions, strength, and resilience as she succumb to her inevitable and irreversible fate. The cinders also symbolize the fleeting nature of life and human emotions. Cinders are ephemeral and are easily blown away in the wind. Ophelia's song highlights the transience of emotions, signifying the fleeting nature and how it can fade away in no time. Pasternak's use of the imagery of cinders in the poem indicates the intensity of Ophelia's pain and

suffering. It signifies her grief and despair as she loses her individuality and give up on love and her life, waiting for death to liberate her.

- **Buttercups and Daisies**

In literature, flowers are often associated with innocence, beauty, love, purity, etc. Both the flowers, buttercups and daisies, symbolize childhood innocence, purity, and simplicity in the poem. Ophelia’s clutching to a bunch of daisies and buttercups represents her pristine beauty, innocence, and purity as she remains untouched by the evils of the world. Both the flowers are very delicate and fragile and can wither away in no time if not gently handled. In the poem, Ophelia holding them may signify her gentle and caring demeanor. The flowers may also be symbolic of Ophelia’s fragility and vulnerability as she withers away and succumbs to death, unable to bear the harsh realities around her. The flowers also symbolize ephemeral beauty and the indifferences of nature that continues to thrive and bloom despite all the sufferings of the world. Ophelia’s only possession before her death was the bunch of flowers she clutched closed to her heart before she drowns underwater. The bunch of buttercups and daisies can be seen as metaphoric representation of Ophelia’s maiden beauty, in stark contrast to her inner conflicts and emotional pain that was inflicted upon her by the cruel world. Both buttercups and daisies bloom for a very short period of time, denoting mortality and transience. Ophelia’s song and the flowers illustrate the transience of life and the inevitability of death. Pasternak attempts to add a poignant portrayal of the complexities of human emotions and the fragility of life through the imageries of flowers in the poem.

SAQ:

Q.1. Can you find other relevant imageries and symbols in the poem, “English Lessons”? Discuss.

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2.7 Major Themes

The poem, “English Lessons”, by Boris Pasternak explores several themes, creating a rich and complex exploration of human experiences. Let us discuss some major themes of the poem:

- **Mortality and transience**

The poet reflects on the fleeting nature of life and the inevitability of death through the songs of the two characters in the poem. It confronts the reality of the fragility of human emotions and experiences until death which is the ultimate destination of the journey called life. Desdemona and Ophelia’s lamentation through their melancholic songs serves as reminder about the unpredictability of life and unplanned and sudden encounter with death which brings an end to everything that one aspires for and holds dear all along. The poet reflects on the search for meaning and connection through their songs in the poem. The poem highlights the transience of human experiences, love, and beauty through the songs of the two women as they await their impending death. The poem grapples with fundamental questions about the purpose and significance of human existence.

- **The human experiences and vulnerability**

The poem touches on universal human experiences such as love, loss, suffering, grief, longing and fear. It highlights the shared struggles and vulnerabilities that define human existence through the songs of the two women as they approach death. Desdemona and Ophelia serve as testament of vulnerability and suffering in the poem which highlights the suffering of women in a patriarchal society. The poem reflects on the ways in which societal expectations can contribute to oppression and abuse of women through the loss and longing of Desdemona and Ophelia. Their experiences highlight the devastating consequences of lost love and the fragility of human emotions, connections and relationships.

- **Despair and disillusionment**

The poem describes the emotional desolation and inner turmoil of the two women through their melancholic songs, evoking a sense of disillusionment and despair in the face of death and loss. The speaker in the poem reflects on the past, invoking a sense of nostalgia and reminiscence. The poem showcases how memories can be comforting as well as painful; often reminding one of what has been lost. The poem captures the feeling of being overwhelmed by the hopelessness and despair from the harshness and cruelty of the world. The withering away of innocence amidst the gnawing darkness of the society has been highlighted through the use of various imageries in the poem as the two women perishes unable to withstand the sufferings imposed upon them by the world.

- **Beauty and Art**

The poem celebrates the beauty of life, while also acknowledging its fragility and impermanence and accepting the inevitability of death. Desdemona and Ophelia's songs serve as a reminder that beauty is fleeting and can be easily destroyed. Thus, the poet finds solace in art as a means to express and transcend suffering. The poem highlights the power of art to capture human emotions that otherwise remains inert and dormant. It blurs the lines between reality and art, highlighting the ways art can reflect as well as shape our understanding of the world. The poem shows how art can be comforting as well as serve as a means of expression to confront the harsh realities of life.

2.8 Summing Up

Boris Pasternak's poetry delves into fundamental human experiences such as love and loss, the fragility of life, the fleeting nature of human emotions, and the inevitability of death. He attempts a unique blend of classical and modern literary elements to create a unique structure and style of composition. Most of his

poems emphasizes on extensive use of imageries and symbols to create sensory details, drawing on nature, art, and the human condition. Pasternak's poetry is characterized by introspection and self-discovery and a quest to unravel the meaning and truth of life. He voraciously experiments with the use of language and often employs various poetic devices such as metaphor, metonymy, personifications, etc. Many of his literary works also vehemently confronts the historical and socio-political events including the Russian Revolution. Through his poetry, Pasternak creates a literary oeuvre that is personal as well as universal and easily resonated with the lived experiences of the reading public, establishing him as one of the most important poets of the twentieth century.

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UNIT- 3

ALEC DERWENT HOPE

Unit Structure:

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Objectives

3.3 Hope as a Satirist

3.3.1 Characteristics of Hope's Satire

3.4 Hope and Australian Nationalism

3.4.1 'Australia'

3.4.2 Interpretation

3.5 'The Wandering Islands'

3.5.1 Interpretation

3.6 Summing Up

3.7 References/Suggested Readings

3.1 Introduction

Alec Derwent Hope, who is popularly known as A.D. Hope was born on 21st July, 1907 to Australian parents in New South Wales. They later moved to Sydney where Hope attended Fort Street High School followed by his scholarship at the University of Oxford. He also lectured at the University of Melbourne and eventually moved to Canberra to be recognized as the foundation professor of English at Canberra University College which later became the Australian National University. From childhood, Hope had written poetry, publishing in the Bathurst High school magazine and various Sydney University magazines through the 1920s and early 1930s. He began publishing poetry again on his return to Sydney, especially in the new literary journals like - *Southerly*, *Meanjin* and *Australian Poetry*, and also reviewed books for these journals. He began broadcasting school talks while at the Teachers' College and adopted the pseudonym 'Anthony Inkwell' for the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Argonauts radio program for children.

Hope is considered to be one of the pioneers of Australian poetry who is noted for his patriotic inclinations and conservative poetic diction. He discards much of the modernist and post-modernist patterns in poetic forms and retraces his poetic imagination within the traditional structure of iambic quatrain. Such techniques were adopted to question the conventions of his contemporary times. The aversion of his poetic style from the current trends enhanced the acceptance of his poetic works as *avant-garde* of the period. The varied themes in his poetry are considered to be incorporated from his life itself but his expertise is not limited to his poems alone as he was also a critic, psychologist, essayist and academic. Hope's uniqueness arises from the fact that whereas others sought 'Australianism' amidst the landscapes of the Aboriginal legends, he incorporated cultural imagination within the European intellectual tradition. For him, the achievement of an intelligent and active personal voice is equally important to bring contemporary intellectual energies into Australian poetry. His respect for classic literary genres, neo formalism and distrust of modern mass society resulted in a form of Australian style that uses the almost perfect juxtaposition of conservative, romantic, nostalgic and surrealistic description expressed in precise and highly formalized verse. The endings of his poetry frequently include dramatic mirth directed at those who have made their own hell, contrast with their celebration of vitality, desire, and the uncompromising. Hope is concerned about modernity and how social life has fragmented in the twentieth century. He considers about the way literature and society are related, expresses societal values through his creative works, and examines how writing could advance culture.

Although, there is a tendency of Hope to distinguish himself from the prevalent trends in Australian poetry yet his selection of the description of the land and the people is a recurrent theme of the Australian poets. The landscape encountered by the Australian poets is seemingly strange and uncouth to them but they navigated their path with the passage of time. Moreover, parallel to the theme of assimilation of landscape is the theme of alienation or estrangement that the poets felt by distancing themselves from their native land due to their experiences in Australia's peculiar landscape and their memories of the British homeland. However, these feelings were eventually overcome by the subsequent poets. The pain of alienation and estrangement finds a powerful linguistic expression in

numerous poems of Hope depicting a poetic chronicle of the history of his land and its people. Australia saw the emergence of bushmen and bushrangers as the penal colony became a reality and more and more prisoners were shipped from British ports; in the early stages, most of these individuals were escaped convicts ranging in the shrub. Following their lonesome daytime trek across the parched terrain, the bushrangers settled for the night, met other travellers, set up camp in the bush, and eventually came to feel a sense of 'mateship' among themselves. The 'mateship' in Australia throughout the 1800s grew to become a cult phenomenon. It became an emblem of Australian national identity. 'Mateship' is further associated with the identification with the Australian flora and fauna, as illustrated in Hope's poetry as well. The following units shall discuss the various literary roles assumed by Hope and how his contributions shaped the overall Australian literary scene.

3.2 Objectives

The unit is an attempt to understand the significance of A.D. Hope in the Australian literary. After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- *understand* the various modes of his contribution along with the different roles he assumed throughout his lifetime,
- *explain* the defining characteristics of his poems and the clever infusion of myths and legends,
- *analyse* the unique position he assumed in reflecting the Australian reality,
- *discuss* two of his poems in examining him as a satirist.

3.3 Hope as a Satirist

The term 'Australian' poetry itself poses a problem to the self-evident ambiguity in the term as it encompasses the complex history along with writings in Italian, Greek and most importantly the Aboriginal languages. Hope is also a satirist but his works focus primarily upon the romantic and passionate impulses of humanity, seen through a lens of disillusionment in the mid twentieth century. Numerous observers have noted that Australia has a well-developed

inclination towards iconoclasm and satire: debunking is a recognized kind of critique, and sarcasm is a common way of discourse. However, in the past, this tendency has mostly been aimed towards either foreign subjects (particularly British and American) or at specific people whose minor social transgressions have infuriated journalists and poets. Australian satire has only recently expanded to a national and international audience; transcended petty criticism and personal attacks, and acquired distinctive literary qualities. This is in contrast to the early 20th-century efforts of Henry Lawson, Joseph Furphy, and Kenneth Slessor, in which humour predominates over satire. A few possible explanations for this late blooming are the homogeneity that characterised Australian society, the enduring influence of egalitarianism, and the Panglossian notion that Australia was the best country out of all of them. Over the past forty years, there have reportedly been significant improvements in all three that have improved the environment for national self-examination and promoted the creation of satire that ranges from the individual to the community. From such hospitable setting, has emerged A.D. Hope, a verse satirist with exceptional technical skill and unusual philosophic statement. Hope's entry into the Australian literary scene was more readily noticeable from his critical reviews but the bulk of the poems leading to the publication of *The Wandering Islands* in 1955 solidified his place within the tradition of Australian literature. The element of mythology is also indispensable in his creative endeavours, refashioning myths to serve his distinctive poetic style— 'The End of a Journey' offers a new, bleak light on Ulysses' homecoming while 'The Return of Persephone' evokes sympathy for Dis' character. The perception from which Hope views his poetic concerns becomes more definite from the mid-1950s, as revisions in space-time theory are assimilated into the poetry. Another seminal feature in his poetry is the relation of human nature to the metaphysical or the unknowable in time. In a number of poems, the theme of reconciliation of spirit, mind and body is expressed and there are poems in which temporality is celebrated because eternity is the gathering of the fruits of time. The focus on Australian reality is actually an allusion to the vivid sense of impression he had from the literature of the past. The discursive techniques of his poetic diction come from the belief that the past should be implemented in the present. Consequently, the presentation of myths as a process of recreation suggests his

insistence of considering the legends as complex elements symbolizing deep lying aspects of human existence. In this manner, Hope's poetry strategically offers a newer dimension to the already existing bulk of Australian poetry. The *Dunciad Minor* is often regarded as a tribute to the poet's unfaltering admiration for the neo-classical poet. It is ironic to note at the outset that Hope, a significant Australian poet and critic, appears to have taken inspiration from Pope's satire, which uses most of Pope's poetic machinery to mock the literary life of London and England at the time, specifically the decline of its intellectual values and art. To be sure, A. D. Hope places the utmost importance on poetry's traditional, Augustan qualities. But in this parody, he takes aim at the exaggerated rise in literary criticism in English and its impact with a great deal of intellectual wit and verve. Put differently, his target is the post-World War II academic sterility typified by A. A. Phillips's critical claims.

Self Asking Questions

Explain A.D. Hope's role as a satirist in the Australian literary scene.

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3.3.1 Characteristics of Hope's Satire

A. D. Hope rarely targets particular people or current events in his satirical writings. The exception to the trend is *Dunciad Minor*, which starts off as a caustic critique of the prominent literary critic and Melbourne schoolteacher Arthur A. Phillips (1900–1985) of the time, but later assumes a broader meaning, mocking the concept of *sui generis* in academic literary criticism as a whole. One could claim that Hope's satire blatantly and purposefully adopts the style established by Pope in his well-known mock-epic verse satire, *The Dunciad*, which was first published in 1728. Hope's poem is a verse satire written in heroic couplets and considered to be the most

important satirical poem where the protagonist, Goddess Dullness, elevates Phillips to be the king of duces. This poem of 1860 lines exercises a form of literary criticism which was quite unique for his age because the poem was a consequence of a private joke between the poet and his friend A. A. Phillips. For instance, the 'Argument' in the poem is simple; a messenger from the Queen of Dullness arrives there, claiming A. A. Phillips (Hope's friend) as the rightful heir to Ambrose Phillips's realm and in order to accomplish this she requests a spot in the *Dunciad* for him. As Pope, Gay, Arbuthnot, Swift, and the other Immortals read Four Quartets, Pope calls it: "Verse without number, statement void of sense, / Flat verbiage and verbal flatulence". But Swift exclaims that - "Yahoos at last have learned to hold a pen, / This is a Yahoo eclogue, gentlemen." In the poem, Hope takes aim at various subjects, including mediocre writers, pretentious academics, and the commercialization of literature. He mocks the shallow pretensions of those who seek fame and success through literary pursuits without genuine talent or substance. The poem is packed with vivid imagery, allusions, and deft wordplay. Hope captures the absurdities of the conditions he portrays with wit and insight, demonstrating his poetic ability at the same time. Through the poem, he laments the loss of true literary merit in favour of superficiality and commercialism, highlighting the detrimental effects of this trend on society as a whole. Such reworking of one of the most canonical poems and contextualized in the Australian scene reveals Hope's skill as a master practitioner of satire. A. D. Hope highly values the traditional Augustan characteristics of poetry; however, in this satire he, with great intellectual wit and gusto, attacks the exaggerated increase of literary criticism in English and its influence; in other words, he aims at the academic sterility of the post-World War Two era, as embodied in the critical contentions of A. A. Phillips. It should be pointed out from the outset that it is ironic that Hope, an influential Australian poet and critic, should, in one way or another, draw inspiration from Pope's satire, which in its turn mocks the then literary life in London and England. As with all satire, Hope's *Dunciad Minor* accomplishes its paradoxical impact of ridicule by causing the reader to experience a kind of "humbleness" in which they are expected to acknowledge and accept human limitations, including potentially their own. The poet explains the reasons for his decision as:

If I had any choice I should not be a professor but a poet But the damn truth is that if I tried to earn my living at poetry [...] should simply starve to death there is something uncommonly odd about a world in which thousands of academic persons are able to make more or less comfortable livings out of unsaleable verse. (Hope 1952, 3)

Moreover, in the satire, Shakespearean scholars struggle to get away from his vigilant lense. In the lines that follow, A. D. Hope skillfully and comically launches his satirical assault on them:

Now fetch me Hamlet - handle him with care

Now press this button and let in your clutch:

The play which Shakespeare wrote in Double Dutch,

Which lay dissolved in endless Wilson Knight,

Behold! Let Freud appear and all is light!

Was Hamlet mad or indecisive? Come,

He simply longed to go to bed with Mum;

And so did Shakespeare:

”to avoid worse rape.“

He found this mechanism of escape

Good-night, Sweet Prince; to dream, perchance to skid

Between your Super-ego and your Id! (Hope 1970, 65)

However, one cannot deny that Hope’s satire is more (structurally) self-contained than Pope’s. It is also more self-explanatory, since the helpful footnotes form an integral part of the humorous and comic effects. Pope uses too many obscure references in which, quite clearly, contemporary readers do not take the slightest interest and his footnotes are far from being helpful to understand them. And, there is evidently a big cultural horizon gap between the twentieth- and eighteenth-century readers. A. D. Hope’s deft usage of the heroic couplet deserves to be praised.

Stop to Consider

The prevalence of the Classical Period in the works of A.D. Hope can hardly be ignored. Such influences also portray the satirical mode he adopts in highlighting the concerns of his age. It might have been for such reasons that Kevin Hart states, “When A.D. Hope died in 2000 at the age of 93, Australia lost its living poet.” (*The Weekend Australian*- Review Section, 4)

3.4 Hope and Australian Nationalism

Hope’s urbane and anachronistic style embodies a provincial scorn for modernism. The poet’s style merged with the elusive identity of Australia enables him to provide a reinterpretation of the national consciousness. His poetry consists of profound patriotism and he seems to praise his country in most of his works. Hope underlines the ambiguity with which he invokes the idea of the culture by his doubtful anticipation that cultural heroism may, at some unknown period, epiphanically express itself in the poetic realm of his imagination. It certainly indicates that he is reluctant to present himself as a cultural hero—even more so than Field was. Instead, he has his character play the part of a Juvenalian anti-hero throughout ‘Australia.’ However, it is his descriptions that attract the attention of the readers because he is not only a blind patriot and nationalist but also equally aware of the glaring weaknesses and shortcomings of the Australian society. The sense of realism in his poetry is immensely felt and the mode of scrutiny that he provides to his readers is noteworthy as he frees himself from the shackles of the old customs and patterns of thought to produce a real picture of the contemporary Australian society. While not explicitly advocating for political nationalism, A.D. Hope’s poetry can be seen as contributing to a broader sense of cultural nationalism by celebrating the unique qualities of the Australian experience and engaging with the complexities of national identity. The merging of satire along with a conscious self of the poet mark his works in their unique modernist stance entrusted to the centre of all creative activity where he as a chief composer bears ultimate responsibility for the creation. His rather ambiguous position as a national writer does not reduce his sensitivity to the Australian identity and ‘method of poetry’. According to Hope in “Poetry,

Painting and Music,” the method of poetry implies the creation of an imaginative experience for the reader by the use of images which work by suggestion rather than by depiction (Cave and Spring, 194). In the poem, “Australia”, Hope chastises his country as being devoid of a historical background or culture but his derision is moderated by the belief that strong ideas are drowned among the ‘inland sands’. Again, “Lament for the Murderers” is an historical document in which Hope records the enhancement of video detective dramas, and other methods of escape from the mayhem of humanity’s illusion to peace while colliding with the reality of man’s inhumanity to one another. The intermingling of fact and fiction emerges as his recurring concern of elaborating human experience within the sphere of his consciousness. The anti-war poems of the 1960s are an expression by Hope of humanist attitudes but in the same period he was developing a wider humanist approach. His nationalism is layered with the conscience of placing himself away from any biased notion of eulogizing his own country and that is why his response to Australia is rooted in such ambivalence. Hope’s style can be considered to be mostly antiquarian but in *The Wandering Islands* (1955) the content, and the psychology, is modern. In the poem, “Soledades of the Sun and Moon”, there is a distinctive acknowledgement by the poet of Australia as his geographical place but the sense of spiritual exile continues to exist. It is a complex and persuasive demonstration of thinking through legendary symbols dedicated to the great Canadian poet P. K. Page and has the strong beauty of profoundly imagined figurative verse. The influence of Baudelaire is also apparent in his mature poetry such as the “Flower Poem”, loaded with introspection can be considered as a response to “Les Fleurs du Mal” while his “The Vampire” and “Necrophile”, published in 1946 echo Baudelaire in the title and re-working of the theme of sexual love and death. The distinctive qualities of his poems are the description of a geographic location without boundary, and a focus on humans in every aspect. Hope belonged to an age which was devoid of peace and such chaotic circumstances enabled him to develop an acute awareness amidst the moral decadence which he believed was at its peak during his age. The task of writing for him was in fact a form of mediation to impart knowledge of the meaninglessness in human affairs. Hope is regarded as an influential poet of erotic verse. Because of his numerous references to sexuality in his writing, he was derided as “Phallic Alec.” While he considers the

dual nature of love in “Imperial Adam,” he denies the pleasures of romantic connection and sexual relationships in other poems, such as “Phallus.” He emphasises the sensual experiences, the rush of emotion, and the beauty of the human body in some of his paintings. In addition, he composed allegorical and religious poems. His poetry covered everything from the glories of science to creativity, nature, and music. Hope's poetry was greatly influenced by Yeats, Auden, and Pope. He even composed a reply to the sonnet “To His Coy Mistress” by Andrew Marvell. His criticisms were insightful and harsh. They improved Australia's literary discourse standards. Among his well-known writings are *A Midsummer Eve's Dream* (1970), *The Cave and the Spring* (1965), and *Native Companions* (1974). He defended his idea of poetic expression and talked about the place of the artist in modern society. When asked, what poets might do for Australia, he responded by saying— “Oh, not much, merely justify its existence.”

Check Your Progress

1. When did A.D. Hope start his literary career?
2. Which was the first major published work of A.D. Hope?

3.4.1 ‘Australia’

Let us take the poem ‘Australia’. First of all, let us read the poem.

A Nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey
In the field uniform of modern wars,
Darkens her hills, those endless, outstretched paws
Of Sphinx demolished or stone lion worn away.

They call her a young country, but they lie:
She is the last of lands, the emptiest,
A woman beyond her change of life, a breast
Still tender but within the womb is dry.

Without songs, architecture, history:
The emotions and superstitions of younger lands,

Her rivers of water drown among inland sands,
The river of her immense stupidity

Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.
In them at last the ultimate men arrive
Whose boast is not: "we live" but "we survive",
A type who will inhabit the dying earth.

And her five cities, like five teeming sores,
Each drains her: a vast parasite robber-state
Where second hand Europeans pullulate
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
The Arabian desert of the human mind,
Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come,

Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
Which is called civilization over there.

3.4.2 Interpretation

The poem 'Australia' was written by A.D. Hope after his return to Australia in 1931 and it was first published in 1938 in literary periodicals that supported Australian culture on the local level. By the end of the 1930s, as Australians were being prepared to fight again in Europe, national identity was a prominent topic; the rise of Modernist ideas provoked reactionary attitudes in some Australians and inspired exuberant experimentation in others. The poem claims about the national image and has a lot of swiftly changing ironies. In this satirical poem, Hope challenged his insulted countrymen's illusions and assumptions, earning him criticism from them. It is interesting to note that rather than a place, Australia has been used as a space of exploring the poet's national consciousness but with an awareness of the deconfiguration of his nationalism and superficial

sense of. As discussed earlier, Hope's satirical mode is also found in the poem as he conveys his displeasure with the European "chatter of cultured apes" and his criticism of Australia's cultural scene in the poem, "whereas in Australia 'second-hand Europeans pullulate/timidly on the edge of alien shores.'" In the poem, the picture of a sterile woman draws attention to the physical vacuity. Since Australia is "the emptiest" of all countries and has passed the point of creativity because "the womb" is "dry" within, the distortion of the feminine symbol of fertility has a stronger impact here. In literature, this kind of assigning anthropomorphic stature to one's land is fundamental. The phrase "Without songs, architecture, history" (74), which highlights the gaps in Australia's cultural, geographic, and historical domains, highlights the significance of the next stanza. As a poet and scholar, Hope first attempts to acknowledge the shortcomings of his nation before using his vision to make peace with these realities. With introspection, candour, humour, and irony, he documents all these unsettling problems and implications. But using a comparison from Scripture, he believes that from Australian deserts, a fresh culture and "prophet" can appear. His mock-epic satire, which bestows noble and heroic traits on disdainful things or people, has the impact of a potent caricature. The poem contains 7 quatrains where the first line rhymes with the fourth and the second with the third. The rhyme scheme abba adds a gentle, easy-going flow to the poem that softens the poet's ironical tone dramatically. Hope uses linguistic devices such as alliteration to make the poem appealing. The nation is compared by the poet to a "Sphinx". A legendary figure from Egyptian mythology, the sphinx is always seen as a being of immense intelligence. The Sphinx's destruction suggests that the land has gradually lost its intellectual qualities and seen a sharp drop in its prestige. The land is also likened as an elderly woman. The metaphor "A breast still tender but within the womb is dry" effectively conveys the idea that the land is abundant on the outside but depleted of its inherent resources. The image of a dry womb represents waste and infertility. That is why the poet says, 'They call her a young country, but they lie'. The land is not only physically barren but it is a spiritual waste land as well. It is 'The Arabian desert of the human mind.' Hope's sensibility is essentially Yeatsian as he yearns for the glory of distant lands of the East. Hope has to look overseas for cultural models because he lived in a settler colonial nation like Australia. One of the most prevalent ironies of the cultures that the colonial

discourse condemns is reflected through the poem. As A. D. Hope discovers, the primary cause of his culture's aridity is the colonisers' encroachment, which supplants the indigenous culture. Hope's ambivalence may also be a result of his colonial schooling, which has a detrimental effect on the subjects. In other words, the inherent ambivalence between the ideological constructions of a nation and the quotidian experiences of its subjects is important to him.

Self Asking Questions

Do you think A.D. Hope was a poet of Australian reality rather than a nationalist poet? Give reasons in support of your answer.

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3.5 'The Wandering Islands'

Now let us take the poem, 'The Wandering Islands'.

You cannot build bridges between the wandering islands;
The Mind has no neighbours, and the unteachable heart
Announces its armistice time after time, but spends
Its love to draw them closer and closer apart.

They are not on the chart; they turn indifferent shoulders
On the island-hunters; they are not afraid
Of Cook or De Quiros, nor of the empire-builders;
By missionary bishops and the tourist trade

They are not annexed; they claim no fixed position;
They take no pride in a favoured latitude;
The committee of atolls inspires in them no devotion
And the earthquake belt no special attitude.

A refuge only for the ship-wrecked sailor;
He sits on the shore and sullenly masturbates,
Dreaming of rescue, the pubs in the ports of call or
The big-hipped harlots at the dock-yard gates.

But the wandering islands drift on their own business,
Incurious whether the whales swim round or under,
Investing no fear in ultimate forgiveness.
If they clap together, it is only casual thunder

And yet they are hurt—for the social polyps never
Girdle their bare shores with a moral reef;
When the icebergs grind them they know both beauty and terror;
They are not exempt from ordinary grief;

And the sudden ravages of love surprise
Them like acts of God—its irresistible function
They have never treated with convenient lies
As a part of geography or an institution.

As instant of fury, a bursting mountain of spray,
They rush together, their promontories lock,
An instant the castaway hails the castaway,
But the sounds perish in that earthquake shock.

And then, in the crash of ruined cliffs, the smother
And swirl of foam, the wandering islands part.
But all that one mind ever knows of another,
Or breaks the long isolation of the heart,

Was in that instant. The shipwrecked sailor senses
His own despair in a retreating face.
Around him he hears in the huge monotonous voices
Of wave and wind: 'The Rescue will not take place.'

3.5.1 Interpretation

This is an allegorical poem of ten quatrains and explains the difficulty of communion between distinct minds, which are like straying islands in the ocean; islands that are never mapped, occasionally colliding violently, but always breaking apart once more. These are not refuges of safety, nor the protective arms of a mother against the waves of hopelessness and desertion. It is a description of the realm of explorers and seafarers, within an Australian mentality set in a colonial context. On one of the islands, a sailor is shipwrecked and left alone for all time. The sailor doesn't think about the effort required to form and maintain an attachment; instead, he only thinks about himself. The poem thus addresses the inability to comprehend and get to know the "other." There are only wandering, unbridgeable, desire-driven, sinful, and without means of salvation islands; there is no marriage of real minds. It is possible to examine this poem from a psychoanalytic perspective. "Wandering islands" is a metaphor for the people who live among the vast populace, wandering aimlessly and alone. They represent isolated thoughts. Nobody notices (annexed) these islands. They lack a "fixed position" or set objective. In reality, their favoured independence of action contributes to their growing loneliness. Such secluded minds conceal the *self* that is preoccupied with self-gratification. These individuals continue with their own pursuits, uninterested in what is happening around them. They don't even feel fear regarding the final day of judgment. The moral and social ideals have no effect on them. They suffer whenever they disagree with other people. They are undoubtedly impacted by loss as well as unexpected displays of affection from others. Such socially isolated individuals occasionally cross paths with one another: "an instant the castaway hails the castaway," (line 31) They strive to "break the long isolation of the heart"(line 36) and understand each other during these extremely infrequent and small times. However, the wandering islands part again and the shipwrecked sailor i.e. 'the self' senses his own despair and grief in the face of 'the other'. There won't be any rescue from this loneliness for him. Additionally, this poem alludes to Hope's work's 'Swiftian influence.' We are familiar with the moving islands and the shipwrecked sailor from Gulliver. They represent the fundamental loneliness and indifference of man toward others, particularly when things are really bad. In this instance, the sailors represent the self, a

castaway on a lonely island, while the islands stand in for the lonely intellect. Humphrey McQueen examined the surrealist elements of Hope's early mature period poetry, twenty-five years after *The Wandering Islands* was first published in print and he saw an element of surrealist imagery in his works, claiming a reflection of the mature period in his literary career.

Stop to Consider

The use of landscape is a theme which is recurrent in Hope's poetic imagination. He uses a selected set of memories of the most formative place of influence in his life to provide mental scenery of his creative imagination.

Self Asking Questions

1. How is the symbolism of isolation reflected in the poem "The Wandering Islands"?

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2. How can the poem "The Wandering Islands" be read from psychological point of view?

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3.6 Summing Up

Australia was first colonised by the British in the late eighteenth century, and Australian poetry is one of its literary products. A whole new genre of English poetry emerged in the first hundred years of the nineteenth century in the new settings of Australia. Freedom is the primary element in contemporary Australian poetry.

Poets of the modern and postmodern eras are allowed to use any kind of structure while writing, including new hybrid forms, free verse, blank verse, and rhymed poetry. Their poetry is frequently distinguished by deeply intimate references and imagery that may be difficult for readers to understand.

Modern Australian poetry leaves a lot of the meaning up to the reader's interpretation; they have to bring themselves to the poem. Instead of a fully formed meaning, there can be a sensation, an experience, a thought-provoking shadow of an idea, or an embryonic idea. Despite being viewed as a great academic poet and intellectual wit, he consistently made an effort to reject the influences of academia. He is a prolific poet, and the intricacy of his works is evident. He wrote his early poems in an effort to shock the bourgeoisie and as a protest against some of the mental ugliness and illiberality he saw in Australian readers at the time. His skill at employing virulence and unforgettable wit in words is seen in 'Australia', 'Damnation of Byron,' and 'The Return from the Freudian Islands.'

In Australia, a new western culture was established by the white convicts, jailers, and other immigrants who continued to arrive, along with their descendants. Australian poetry started to take on a new, distinct shape and colour as a part of the cultural life that emerged among the new generations of white Australian residents. The smell of the Australian earth, water and sky and the flavour of life lived in the Australian landscape found a palpable embodiment in the Australian poetry that was written over the period of hundred years during the nineteenth century. From the above discussion, we have come to know that Hope's poetry was greatly influenced by Yeats, Auden, and Pope. He even composed a reply to the sonnet 'To His Coy Mistress' by Andrew Marvell. His critiques were insightful and scathing. They improved the calibre of literary discourse in Australia. Among his well-known writings are *A Midsummer Eve's Dream* (1970), *The Cave and the Spring* (1965), and *Native Companions* (1974). He defended his idea of poetic expression and talked about the place of the artist in modern society. Alongside Patrick White, Judith Wright, James McCauley, and Gwen Harwood, Hope has been regarded as one of Australia's leading poets, and his poetry captures the evolution of Australian philosophy that is influenced by European history but more sensitive to history and location of the area. He disapproved of

postmodernist and modernist poetry, especially free verse. Hope made use of both conventional structure and ancient mythology and folklore. In this sense, the insider-outsider tension is reflected in his style and content. His use of traditional writing skills and his direct criticism of the modern Australian society have been seen as unconventional, caustic viewpoints that define self-pity and have a belligerent tone in parts of his verse. He was also criticized as ‘Phallic Alec’ for his frequent allusions to sexuality in his work. In some poems like ‘Phallus’, he rejects the pleasures of sexual relationships and romantic attachment; while in ‘Imperial Adam’, he reflects on the dual nature of love. Thus, Hope’s poetry reveal that he attempts to give a vivid description of the human experience while clearly understanding his role as a creative force, a number of poems feature the reconciliation of spirit, mind and body.

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UNIT- 4

NAZIM HIKMET: A SAD STATE OF FREEDOM

Unit Structure:

4.1 Objectives

4.2 Introducing the Poet

4.3 Works of the Poet

4.4 Critical Reception

4.5 Context of the Poem

4.6 Reading the Poem “A Sad State of Freedom”

4.7 Summing Up

4.8 References and Suggested Readings

4.9 Model Questions

4.1 Objectives

The aim of this unit is to introduce you to Nazim Hikmet, who was one of Turkey’s foremost poets of the 20th century. The unit consists of the poet’s background and the powerful social and political messages that Hikmet conveys through his works. After reading this unit, you should be able to-

- *understand* the socio-political context of his work,
- *explore* the themes and stylistic features of Hikmet's poetry,
- understand his use of innovative style and imagery,
- *examine* Hikmet's contributions to Turkish and World literature,
- *discuss* the relevance of his poetry in contemporary times.

4.2 Introducing The Poet

Nazim Hikmet was born in Salonika, Ottoman Empire (presently called Thessaloniki, Greece), in the year 1902. He grew up in a time of political upheaval and transition. His father's government position

afforded him the opportunity to attend prestigious schools, such as the Galatasaray High School in Istanbul. However, his education coincided with turbulent times, as the Ottoman Empire entered World War I and aligned itself with Germany. Despite briefly serving in the Ottoman Navy, Nazim's military career was cut short due to illness, which led to his exemption from further service in 1920. In 1921, Nazim embarked on a transformative journey with his friends, Vala Nureddin, Yusuf Ziya Ortac, and others to join the Turkish War of Independence. Their travels took them to Ankara, which is in Turkey, where they encountered Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the leader of the independence movement. Atatürk tasked Nazim and his friend Vala Nureddin with writing a poem to rally support for the Turkish cause. Their poem proved successful, earning them admiration and a teaching position at the Sultani (high college) in Bolu. However, Nazim's communist beliefs clashed with the conservative atmosphere in Bolu, leading him and his friend to seek refuge in Batumi, Georgia, where they hoped to witness the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. Their journey eventually led them to Moscow in July 1922, where Nazim enrolled in the Communist University of the Toilers of the East to study economics and sociology.

Stop to Consider:

Nazim's Contemporaries:

In Turkey, he shared the literary scene with Yahya Kemal Beyatlı, a leading poet known for his impact on modern Turkish poetry, and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, a prominent novelist and essayist who explored themes of time and consciousness. Melih Cevdet Anday, another important figure in modern Turkish literature, contributed to the era's rich literary tapestry.

Internationally, Hikmet's contemporaries included some of the most influential literary figures of the 20th century. Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet and Nobel laureate, and Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright and poet, were among those who also blended art with political activism. In the United States, Langston Hughes, a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance, shared Hikmet's commitment to social justice and artistic innovation. Spain's Federico García Lorca, known for his impact on literature and theatre, and Vladimir

Mayakovsky, the Russian Futurist poet and playwright, were also his contemporaries. These figures, like Hikmet, were deeply influenced by the political and social upheavals of their time, which shaped their artistic expressions and legacies.

It was in Moscow where Nazim encountered the artistic experiments of figures like Vladimir Mayakovsky and Vsevolod Meyerhold, as well as the ideological teachings of Vladimir Lenin. Nazim's time in Moscow helped in shaping his artistic and political outlook. Inspired by the revolutionary activities of the era, he began to develop his own distinctive voice as a poet and thinker. Despite facing political persecution and exile from his homeland, Nazim remained committed to his communist ideals and continued to advocate for social justice and equality throughout his life. Nazim Hikmet's journey from Salonica to Moscow reflects the revolutionary events and ideological shifts of the early 20th century. His experiences as a poet, activist, and thinker were deeply intertwined with the political upheavals of his time, as he struggled between personal conviction and external pressures. Through his poetry and activism, Nazim Hikmet left an indelible mark on Turkish and World literature, inspiring generations with his unwavering commitment to social change and human liberation.

Stop to Consider:

Nazim in World Literature:

“Nazim Hikmet has a unique place in Turkish literature with a record number of poems translated into English. Moreover, his works have been translated into more than 50 languages both throughout his lifetime and since his death in 1963. It is with these translations that Hikmet's poetry has been introduced and reintroduced to different literary systems at different world-historical points. The translation of Hikmet's poetry into English is important for the realm of translation studies for three reasons:

a) The Turkish poet whose poems have been translated into English most is Nazim Hikmet,

- b) Hikmet is the only Turkish poet whose poems have been translated into more than 50 languages,
- c) With the declaration of UNESCO as “The Year of Cultural Heritage” and celebration of Hikmet’s centennial by UNESCO, Hikmet’s translated poetry reached its culmination in 2002 when four books of the translations of his poetry into English were published.” (Lisans Tezi 1)

Nazim Hikmet's early life and intellectual journey were shaped by a rich tapestry of experiences and influences. Hikmet's intellectual curiosity led him to Moscow, where he emerged into the realms of economics and political science at the prestigious University of Moscow. It was during this time that Hikmet embraced Marxism, finding resonance with its principles and ideology. Returning to Turkey in 1924, following the establishment of the new Turkish Republic, Hikmet became deeply involved in Marxist circles, contributing to various journals and engaging in Communist propaganda activities. However, his radical convictions and subversive activities eventually led to his imprisonment in 1951, marking the beginning of his exile from Turkey. Settling in the Soviet Union and later Eastern Europe, Hikmet continued to support the ideals of world Communism, dedicating his life to the pursuit of social justice and equality. Despite the challenges and sacrifices he faced, Hikmet remained unwavering in his commitment to his beliefs, leaving an indelible mark on the landscape of Turkish literature and the global struggle for human rights and liberation. Hikmet writes, “I conceive of art as an active institution in society.” Nazim Hikmet's perspective on art reflects his deeply held belief in its transformative power within society. Describing art as an "active institution," he sees it not as a passive reflection of reality but as a dynamic force capable of shaping and influencing the human experience. Hikmet argues that the artist plays an important role as the engineer of the human soul, suggesting that their creative endeavours are instrumental in shaping individuals' thoughts, emotions, and perspectives. This view depicts the artist's responsibility in engaging with the socio-political realities of their time, using their craft to provoke reflection, inspire change, and foster collective consciousness. By positioning art as a catalyst for

social transformation, Hikmet emphasizes its potential to challenge established norms.

4.3 Works of The Poet

Nazim Hikmet's poetry is renowned for its emotional depth and commitment to social and political causes. Several major themes consist his work, reflecting his internal struggles, his love for his people and homeland, his opposition to tyranny, and his selfless dedication to romance. His works are celebrated for their lyrical beauty and their engagement with political and social issues. Some of his works include:

1. ***After Release from Prison:*** This poem by Nazim Hikmet was written in the 1950s, after Hikmet's release from prison. Nazim Hikmet spent a significant portion of his life in prison due to his political beliefs and activities. He wrote several prison poems after his release from imprisonment. He was a committed Marxist and his works often reflected his leftist ideology, which led to his arrest and imprisonment by the Turkish authorities. Hikmet was incarcerated multiple times, with his longest period of imprisonment lasting from 1938 to 1950. "After Release from Prison" reflects the personal experiences and emotions of a person who has recently been released from prison after thirteen years. The speaker finds himself at home, still struggling to adjust to the freedom and comfort of his own space, an environment that now feels unfamiliar. As he lies in bed, he reflects on the surroundings and the presence of his wife, who sleeps peacefully beside him. The wife's pregnancy is noted as a beautiful and positive change. The speaker checks the time and finds it is eight o'clock in the morning, a moment of reassurance that they are safe for now, as they recall that police typically do not conduct raids during daylight hours. This shows the lingering fear and anxiety from his years of incarceration, contrasting with the serene domestic scene around him:

"Awake.
Where are you?
At home.
Still unaccustomed-
awake or sleeping-

to being in your own home.
This is just one more of the stupefactions
of spending thirteen years in a prison.
Who's lying at your side?
Not loneliness, but your wife,
in the peaceful sleep of an angel.
Pregnancy looks good on a woman.
What time is it?
Eight.
That means you're safe until evening.
Because it's the practice of police
Never to raid homes in broad daylight.”(1-17)

During the mid-20th century, Turkey was undergoing significant political turmoil. The government was wary of communist influence, leading to the repression of leftist intellectuals and activists. The fear of raids and arrests mentioned in the poem is a direct reflection of the political environment of the time. The poem also touches on Hikmet's personal life, particularly his relationship with his wife. Their reunion after his long imprisonment and her pregnancy symbolizes new beginnings and hope amidst the shadows of past hardships. The reference to police raids symbolizes the ongoing threat of oppression and fear that lingers even after the speaker's release. It shows the political climate of surveillance and the constant danger faced by those who oppose tyranny.

2. ***Since I've been in Jail:*** The poem *Since I've Been in Jail* by Nazim Hikmet reflects on the passage of time and the changes that have occurred in the world during the 13 years of the speaker's imprisonment. The speaker contrasts the vast, indifferent perspective of the earth with his own deeply personal experience of time. The poem recounts the story of Osman, a fellow prisoner who was released, re-imprisoned, and then rebuilt his life outside, symbolizing the cyclical nature of life and the possibility of change and renewal. Significant historical and personal events are referenced, such as World War II, the Holocaust, and the bombing of Hiroshima, juxtaposing global atrocities with the speaker's personal narrative. The changes in bread quality from pure

white to rationed black crusts and back to free but tasteless brown bread symbolize the hardships and evolving conditions both inside and outside the prison. Despite the harshness and suffering, the speaker finds some hope in humanity, suggesting that people have started to stand up and fight back against oppression. The poem concludes with a reaffirmation of the speaker's initial passion and commitment to the human adventure, acknowledging that his years of imprisonment, while personally significant, are ultimately a small part of a larger, ongoing human story.

"They
whose number is as great
as ants on the earth
fish in the water
birds in the sky
are fearful and brave
ignorant and learned
and they are children,
And they
who destroy and create
it is only their adventure in these songs." (60-70)

In this part of the poem, Nazim Hikmet uses the imagery of ants, fish, and birds to represent the vast population of the world. These creatures symbolize humanity's large and diverse people. He describes people as having a wide range of qualities, from being fearful to brave, ignorant to knowledgeable, and retaining a sense of innocence like children. Hikmet emphasizes that humans have the power to both destroy and create, highlighting the significant impact of their actions. The phrase "adventure in these songs" refers to man's journey and experience, which the poet captures in his writings. Despite the speaker's personal hardships and the global events that have occurred, the essence of humanity's diverse and complex nature continues to be a central theme in his poetry.

3. *Some Advice to Those Who Will Serve Time in Prison:* Nazim Hikmet, imprisoned by the Turkish government due to his revolutionary communist beliefs, remained unshaken

in spirit. Despite the harsh conditions, he continued to read and write, becoming a voice for the common people through his literature. His dedication to his ideals made him a beloved figure among the masses. Critics often compare him to Walt Whitman, the renowned American poet, for his ability to capture the human spirit and struggle. Hikmet's life and work echo the sentiment expressed by Ernest Hemingway in "The Old Man and the Sea": "Man can be destroyed, but not defeated." In *Some Advice to Those Who Will Serve Time in Prison*, Nazim Hikmet offers a reflection on enduring imprisonment for one's beliefs without succumbing to despair. He urges the imprisoned individual to reject the thought of preferring death over the struggle to maintain hope and humanity. The poem emphasizes the importance of living purposefully, even in confinement, as a form of resistance against the oppressors.

Hikmet advises the prisoner to engage fully with life, to find meaning and purpose in the smallest details, and to preserve inner vitality. He warns against dwelling on sorrows and nurturing dreams that are too far removed from the reality of imprisonment. Instead, he suggests focusing on productive activities like reading, writing, and crafting, which can sustain the spirit and provide a sense of accomplishment. The poem also highlights the emotional struggles of imprisonment, such as the potential loss of love and the pain of isolation. Hikmet acknowledges these hardships but encourages the maintenance of one's inner jewel or spirit. The main message is enduring power of hope and human dignity in the face of adversity.

If instead of being hanged by the neck
you're thrown inside
for not giving up hope
in the world, your country, your people,
if you do ten or fifteen years
apart from the time you have left,
you won't say,
"Better I had swung from the end of a rope
like a flag" --
You'll put your foot down and live. (1-10)

In this lines, Nazim Hikmet reflects on the endurance required when faced with imprisonment for one's beliefs. Instead of succumbing to the despair of execution ("hanged by the neck"), he speaks to those who are incarcerated for hope in humanity, their nation, and their community. He conveys a powerful message of enduring spirit: even if one must endure a decade or more in prison, it is essential to reject the thought of death as a way to escape the confinement.

SAQ:

Discuss the significance of the repetition of the word "your" (e.g., "your country," "your people"). What effect does it have on the reader?

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4. ***Hymn to Life:*** Nazim Hikmet shows the primal connection between man and nature, and between a man and his wife. The poem begins with a vivid description of a night scene, where the natural elements like the wind, trees, and moon create an intimate and almost mystical atmosphere. The speaker senses the coldness of the night and the approaching moonlight, which symbolizes a deep, elemental force. This primal connection is portrayed as a right, as fundamental and natural as the rights of animals and plants. The poem culminates in a declaration of the desire for the basic rights of life and survival, symbolized by the red hair of the speaker's wife blowing across his face, the stirring ground, whispering trees, and the rising moon. This connection with nature and the fundamental act of touching his wife becomes a powerful assertion of the right to live fully and freely, in harmony with the primal forces of the world. "I want the right of the first man." (54)

In this poem, when Nazim Hikmet declares, "I want the right of the first man," he is expressing a yearning for the fundamental and primal rights intrinsic to human existence. This statement depicts his desire to reclaim the basic, unalienable rights inherent to humanity, linked to those of the earliest humans. It symbolizes the fundamental rights to live freely, to experience the world directly and sensually, and to engage with the essential elements of life—such as touch, nature, and survival—without societal constraints or artificial boundaries. It also reflects a longing to return to instinctual, natural states of being, where actions are guided by basic needs and connections rather than complex societal norms.

5. **Plea:** Nazim Hikmet's poem vividly captures the passionate love for his homeland, Turkey, and expresses a desire for freedom and unity. The poem describes Turkey as a dynamic and noble entity, likening it to the head of a mare galloping from Asia to the Mediterranean, signifying the country's rich history and strategic geographical position. Nazim uses imagery of "bloody wrists, clenched teeth, bare feet" to portray the struggles and sacrifices of the Turkish people. The land, depicted as a precious silk carpet, shows the country's beauty and value. Nazim describes his homeland as hell as well as paradise, which reflects the complex reality of Turkey—its blend of hardships and splendour. Hikmet voices a desire for national sovereignty and social justice, rejecting foreign control and internal oppression. This plea reflects the historical context of Turkey's struggles for independence and self-determination, particularly in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire's fall and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Finally, the poem's concluding lines, "To live! Like a tree alone and free / Like a forest in brotherhood," depicts Hikmet's vision for a society where individuals enjoy personal freedom while fostering a sense of collective solidarity. This yearning for liberty and unity echoes the revolutionary spirit and the aspirations for a better, more equitable future during a time of significant political and social change in Turkey's history.

Check Your Progress:

- 1) How do the historical and cultural contexts of Turkey during Hikmet's lifetime influence his poetry? Discuss how specific events or conditions are reflected in his work.
- 2) What recurring images and symbols can be found in Hikmet's protest poems? How do these elements enhance the themes of rebellion and defiance?

4.4 Critical Reception

Since the 1960s, the immense efforts of translators Mutlu Konuk and Randy Blasing have played a crucial role in making Nazim Hikmet's poetry accessible to English-speaking readers, particularly in the United States. Their dedication to translating Hikmet's work has helped bridge the cultural and linguistic gap, allowing a wider audience to appreciate the depth and significance of his poetry. Konuk and Blasing's translations have been instrumental in introducing Hikmet to worldwide readers. They have worked to convey not only the literal meaning of Hikmet's words but also the rhythm, tone, and spirit of his original Turkish poems. This attention to detail ensures that the translations resonate with the same intensity and authenticity as Hikmet's original works. Turkish poetry, especially in the 20th century, mirrors a blend of cultural heritage and contemporary influences.

“Nazim Hikmet's international dimension is put forward by Hirsch in depicting his poems as “human poems,” comparable to the poetry written by Federico Garcia Lorca, Miguel Hernandez, Cesar Vallejo, and Pablo Neruda.” (Alkan and Günay-Erkol 116). Hikmet's writing style is often characterized by its directness and clarity, aiming to convey complex ideas and emotions in straightforward language. In "Autobiography," this is evident in the concise and unembellished language used to depict significant moments in his life. Each line delivers a clear and succinct view of his experiences, allowing readers to grasp the essence of his autobiography without unnecessary elaboration. While Hikmet's writing style tends towards directness, he also employs symbolism and imagery to enrich his poems and convey deeper layers of meaning. In "Autobiography," symbolic references such as his birthplace in Aleppo and his experiences in Moscow serve as potent

metaphors for his personal and ideological transformation. These symbols are woven seamlessly into the narrative, adding depth and resonance to his autobiography:

“I was born in 1902
I never once went back to my birthplace
I don't like to turn back
At three I served as a pasha's grandson in Aleppo
At nineteen as a student at Moscow Communist University
At forty-nine I was back in Moscow at the Tchecha Party's guest”
(Autobiography)

"Letter to My Wife," a free verse poem by Nazim Hikmet, written in 1933 during his incarceration in Bursa Prison, stands as a testament to his revolutionary spirit both in form and content. Hikmet, known for his communist beliefs, crafts this poem as an intimate and poignant expression of love and longing addressed to Piraye Orfi, who would become his wife two years later in 1935:

“Death—
a body swinging from a rope.
My heart
can't accept such a death.” (Letter to my wife)

These lines show a departure from traditional Turkish poetic forms through its use of free verse and represents Hikmet's innovative approach and commitment to modernism. This stylistic choice mirrors the thematic core of the poem, reflecting Hikmet's personal and ideological struggles against the oppressive political environment of Turkey at the time. The absence of rhyme and meter allows for a raw, unfiltered outpouring of emotion, capturing the intense yearning of a man imprisoned for his convictions. Through "Letter to My Wife," Hikmet not only communicates his deep affection and enduring hope but also subtly critiques the socio-political constraints that seek to stifle freedom and creativity. This poem, therefore, is a powerful blend of personal and political, showcasing Hikmet's mastery in conveying profound sentiments within a framework of innovative literary expression. Hikmet's poems often address theme of love, human struggles, and social justice, reflecting his Marxist beliefs and his experiences of political imprisonment.

Pablo Neruda was greatly influenced by Nazim Hikmet and also wrote poetry dedicated to him. "The two had met for the first time at the Youth festival, which was held in East Berlin in 1951. In *Winter's Crown* for Nazim Hikmet he fondly addresses him as brother poet." (Alkan and Gunay-Erkol 114) Neruda's admiration for Hikmet is rooted in their common experiences and struggles as poets who were deeply committed to their political beliefs and who faced persecution for their political beliefs. Hikmet's use of free verse and his ability to blend personal and political themes resonated with Neruda, who saw in Hikmet's work a spirit of revolutionary fervour and poetic innovation. By addressing Hikmet as a "brother poet," Neruda acknowledges not only their personal bond but also their shared mission to use poetry as a tool for social change and to voice the struggles of the oppressed.

Hikmet's exploration of nature is not just about the physical landscape but also about the philosophical and emotional connections humans can forge with the world around them. His poetry invites readers to reconsider their own connections to nature, suggesting that love and appreciation for the earth can exist in many forms:

"I didn't know I loved the earth
Can someone who hasn't worked the earth love it
I've never worked the earth
It must be my only platonic love" (Things I didn't know I loved)

Hikmet expresses a profound appreciation and affection for it, labelling this feeling as his "only platonic love." These lines suggest an idealized, non-physical bond that transcends the need for direct interaction, implying that one can develop a deep love for nature through contemplation and admiration alone. Hikmet's nature poetry often breaks away from traditional forms, embracing free verse to capture the authenticity of his emotions and thoughts. This stylistic choice reflects his broader approach to poetry, where the form is as fluid and dynamic as the natural elements he describes. The rhetorical question "Can someone who hasn't worked the earth love it?" invites readers to reflect on their own relationships with nature, challenging the notion that physical labour is the only path to appreciation.

The impact of Hikmet's prison poems extends beyond their artistic merit, sparking dialogue and reflection on issues of social justice and human rights. In Turkey, where Hikmet faced persecution for his communist beliefs, his prison poems became symbols of resistance against political oppression. Hikmet, a committed Marxist, viewed literature as a tool for social change and used his poetry to advocate for socialist ideals and critique capitalist systems of oppression. In "Istanbul House of Detention," Hikmet provides a glimpse into the emotional and psychological turmoil experienced during his imprisonment:

In the Istanbul Detention House yard
On a sunny winter day after rain,
As clouds, red tiles, walls, and my face
Trembled in puddles on the ground,
I-with all that was bravest and meanest in me,
Strongest and weakest-
I thought of the world, my country, and you. (Istanbul House of Detention)

Set in the confines of the Istanbul Detention House yard on a sunny winter day after rain, the poem's imagery evokes a sense of both physical and emotional confinement, juxtaposed with fleeting moments of natural beauty. The trembling reflections of clouds, red tiles, walls, and the poet's own face in puddles on the ground symbolize a fractured sense of self and reality, where the boundaries between internal and external worlds get blurred. Amidst his personal turmoil, the poet's thoughts turn outward to broader existential concerns, contemplating the state of the world, his country, and a loved one. This shift from the personal to the universal highlights the interconnectedness of individual experience with larger social and political realities, echoing Hikmet's Marxist worldview. Through its evocative imagery and introspective narrative, "Istanbul House of Detention" captures the emotional and

existential struggles of imprisonment while offering a glimpse of resilience and human connection amidst adversity.

4.5 Context of The Poem

Nazim Hikmet's poem "A Sad State of Freedom" was written during his imprisonment in 1949, reflecting his experience of being physically confined yet spiritually and intellectually free. He was a committed Marxist and revolutionary who faced repeated incarcerations by the Turkish government due to his outspoken political views and activism. The early to mid-20th century in Turkey was marked by significant political upheaval and repression, especially against left-wing activists. Also, there were global tensions of the Cold War. Despite the harsh conditions, Hikmet remained creatively prolific, producing powerful works that revealed his unyielding hope. "A Sad State of Freedom" explores the paradox of feeling intellectually and spiritually liberated while physically confined, emphasizing that true freedom transcends physical boundaries. Despite the decline in the popularity of socialism and communism, Hikmet's poetry continues to be relevant due to its universal themes of freedom, resilience, and the human condition. His enduring popularity is evident through continuous readings, new publications, and exhibitions, making him a cultural symbol in Turkey and beyond. The poem stands as a reflection on political repression, the nature of freedom, and the power of the human spirit, embodying Hikmet's personal struggles and the broader political climate of his time.

4.6 Reading The Poem

A Sad State of Freedom:

You waste the attention of your eyes,
the glittering labour of your hands,
and knead the dough enough for dozens of loaves
of which you'll taste not a morsel;
you are free to slave for others-
you are free to make the rich richer.

The moment you're born
they plant around you
mills that grind lies
lies to last you a lifetime.
You keep thinking in your great freedom
a finger on your temple
free to have a free conscience.

Your head bent as if half-cut from the nape,
your arms long, hanging,
your saunter about in your great freedom:
you're free
with the freedom of being unemployed.
they may endorse it over to America,
and you, too, with your great freedom—
you have the freedom to become an air-base.

You may proclaim that one must live
not as a tool, a number or a link
but as a human being-
then at once they handcuff your wrists.
You are free to be arrested, imprisoned
and even hanged.

There's neither an iron, wooden
nor a tulle curtain
in your life;
there's no need to choose freedom:
you are free.

Nazim Hikmet's poem is a powerful and ironic critique of the concept of freedom in a capitalist and authoritarian society. The poem employs vivid imagery, metaphor, and irony to convey the stark reality of the supposed freedoms enjoyed by individuals. The poem begins by emphasizing the futility of the individual's effort:

You waste the attention of your eyes,
the glittering labour of your hands,
and knead the dough enough for dozens of loaves (1-3)

This metaphor indicates that workers work hard and produce so much (symbolized by the bread), but do not get to enjoy the fruits of their labour. This amounts to exploitation, in which the labour benefits others and not self. The speaker begins by highlighting the futility and exploitation of the individual labour. The "attention of your eyes" and the "glittering labour of your hands" evoke a sense of diligent and valuable effort.

SAQ:

Consider the imagery and phrases used in "A Sad State of Freedom" by Nazim Hikmet, such as "slave for others," "grind lies," "finger on your temple," "head bent as if half-cut from the nape," "freedom of being unemployed," and "handcuff your wrists." How do these elements contribute to the overall mood and theme of the poem?

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Through vivid imagery and biting irony, Hikmet exposes the stark reality behind the supposed freedom enjoyed by individuals. The notion of freedom is sarcastically addressed as:

you are free to slave for others-
you are free to make the rich richer. (5-6)

These lines point out how the products of the poor workers primarily benefit the wealthy. Hikmet shows the indoctrination that starts from birth, with "grind lies" surrounding individuals and shaping their beliefs. He mocks the illusion of free thought, suggesting that even as people ponder in their "great freedom," their minds remain influenced by falsehoods. The poem then critiques the economic insecurity in the "freedom of being unemployed," and extends its criticism to political betrayals where national interests are compromised for foreign powers, reducing individuals to mere tools. When people assert their humanity, they face immediate repression, symbolized by handcuffs, revealing the grim irony that

they are "free" to be punished. Despite the illusion of freedom, emphasized by the phrase "in your great freedom," individuals believe they possess freedom in their thoughts and conscience. However, Hikmet suggests that even in this perceived freedom, individuals remain trapped by the lies ingrained in them since birth, indicating the influence of societal conditioning of their worldviews. The notion of a "free conscience" is thus called into question, as individuals may believe they are acting according to their own moral compass while being unknowingly guided by the falsehoods perpetuated by societal institutions.

SAQ:

What emotion does the last line of the poem evoke, and how does it contribute to the overall message conveyed by the poet?

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But one day, for example,
they may endorse it over to America,
and you, too, with your great freedom-
you have the freedom to become an air-base. (21-24)

Hikmet also offers a critique of national sovereignty. The scenario presented, where a country may be handed over to a foreign power such as America, highlights the speaker's concern over the vulnerability of nations to external influence and control. By using the term "endorse it over to America," Hikmet suggests a sense of betrayal on the part of those in power, who willingly surrender their country's interests for their own gain or under pressure from stronger nations. The phrase "you have the freedom to become an air-base" is particularly striking in its irony. Hikmet emphasizes the illusion of freedom within such a scenario, where individuals are granted freedom to become nothing more than a strategic military base of a foreign power. Hikmet's political views, as reflected in this

segment, align with his broader critique of imperialism, colonialism, and capitalist exploitation. He highlights the dangers of political complacency and the need for individuals to resist oppressive systems that prioritize power and profit over the well-being and autonomy of nations. Through his poetry, Hikmet advocates for social and political liberation, urging readers to challenge unjust authority and work towards a more equitable and just society.

You are free to be arrested, imprisoned
and even hanged.

There's neither an iron, wooden
nor a tulle curtain
in your life;
there's no need to choose freedom:
you are free.

But this kind of freedom
is a sad affair under the stars. (29-37)

In the context of Nazim Hikmet's time, particularly considering his experiences and the socio-political landscape of the mid-20th century, this segment of the poem encapsulates his deep disillusionment with the state's oppression and the perversion of freedom. Hikmet lived during a tumultuous period marked by authoritarian regimes, political upheaval, and the suppression of dissent. The lines "You are free to be arrested, imprisoned, and even hanged" starkly illustrate the brutal reality faced by individuals who dared to speak out against oppressive regimes. Hikmet himself experienced imprisonment for his outspoken political views, enduring years of confinement for his commitment to social justice and his opposition to authoritarian rule. These lines reflect his firsthand understanding of the risks involved in challenging oppressive systems. The absence of physical barriers, symbolized by "neither an iron, wooden nor a tulle curtain," underscores the insidious nature of oppression during Hikmet's time. Unlike tangible barriers, such as prison walls or barricades, the constraints on freedom were often invisible yet omnipresent, pervading all aspects of daily life. Despite the absence of overt restrictions, individuals were still subject to surveillance, censorship, and arbitrary arrest, highlighting the pervasive control exerted by authoritarian regimes. The assertion that "there's no need to choose freedom: you are free" is a biting indictment of the hypocrisy inherent in regimes that

purport to champion freedom while simultaneously quashing dissent and violating human rights. Hikmet challenges the notion of freedom as a mere absence of physical constraints, emphasizing that true freedom encompasses the ability to express oneself, pursue one's aspirations, and live without fear of reprisal. Finally, the lament that "this kind of freedom is a sad affair under the stars" encapsulates Hikmet's profound sense of disillusionment with the state of the world. Despite the vastness of the cosmos and the beauty of the natural world, human society remains plagued by injustice, oppression, and the perversion of freedom. Through his poetry, Hikmet grapples with the complexities of existence, offering a poignant critique of the limitations of human freedom in the face of entrenched power structures.

Check Your Progress:

- 1) How does the repeated use of the word "freedom" in the poem affect the interpretation of the theme and concept of freedom presented by the poet?
- 2) Discuss the irony inherent in the juxtaposition of the title "A Sad State of Freedom" with the content of the poem. How does this irony contribute to the overall message?

Hikmet was highly popular among left-wing groups. Despite the decline in the appeal of socialism and communism over the past few decades, Nazim Hikmet has maintained his popularity. This enduring admiration can be credited to the exceptional quality of his poetry and his captivating personality and life story. His poems continue to be read, new books about him are published, and exhibitions showcasing his life and work are frequently held.

4.7 Summing Up:

Nazim Hikmet is a meticulous artisan of language, mastering the rhythm of speech and the essence of sound. He employs a variety of poetic devices such as alliteration, assonance, and repetition to enhance the lyrical quality of his verses. In this unit, you have been provided with an in-depth exploration of Nazim Hikmet's poetry, his

life story, the themes that underpin his work, and a critical analysis of his poetry. He has been regarded as a thought-provoking and influential poet. It is expected that after reading this unit, you will be able to fully appreciate the subtle intricacies of his poetry.

4.8 References/Suggested Readings

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4.9 Model Questions

- 1) In what ways can Hikmet's poetry be seen as a bridge between traditional Turkish literature and modernist influences?
- 2) How does Hikmet vary the tone and mood in his poems and to what effect?

3) How does the imagery and symbolism in Hikmet's poetry connect to the themes in his poems?

4) How does Hikmet's poetry reflect his views on love and human relationships?

5) In what ways does his experience of imprisonment and exile influence his poetic themes and style?

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