



# **ALAGAPPA UNIVERSITY**

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**PART - II: ENGLISH PAPER - II**

<b>Reviewer</b>	
Dr. D Baskaran	Assistant Professor of English, Department of Education, Alagappa University, Karaikudi

#### **Authors**

**Dr. Jyotsna Pathak**, *Assistant Professor, Dayal Singh College, Delhi University*  
Unit (1)

**Dr. Shuchi Agrawal**, *Assistant Professor, Amity University, Noida*  
Units (2, 5)

**Deb Dulal Halder**, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi*  
Units (4, 8, 9, 10)

**Aditi Sharma**, *Academic Writer & Content Specialist*  
Unit (6)

**Prof. Sanjeev Nandan Prasad**, *Associate Professor, Department of English, Hansraj College, University of Delhi*  
Unit (7)

**Dr. Joita Dhar Rakshit**, *Assistant Professor, Acharya Narendra Dev College, University of Delhi*  
Unit (11)

**R. K. Madhukar**, *Retired General Manager, Incharge of Business Communication and Public Relations, Canara Bank, Bengaluru & Former Chief Economist, Indian Banks' Association, Mumbai*  
Units (12, 13)

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• Website: [www.vikaspublishing.com](http://www.vikaspublishing.com) • Email: [helpline@vikaspublishing.com](mailto:helpline@vikaspublishing.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

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### NOTES

While the ability to communicate distinguishes human beings from animals, the ability to communicate effectively distinguishes one human being from another. Every human being faces the need to be well equipped with effective communication tools. In today's competitive environment, success depends to a great extent on good communication, i.e., the ability to not just speak or well but also listen well. If you are able to speak and listen correctly, you leave no scope for miscommunication. Good communication is also dependant on the correct usage of grammar. A person whose language is grammatically incorrect is bound to sound unpleasant. If you cannot speak correctly, chances are you will not be able to write correctly either. So, a sound knowledge of grammar is necessary for good communication, not just at the workplace but also at home.

Written communication, unlike oral communication, is more carefully thought out and the information gathered is processed logically. It involves a certain time factor. The writer can take his own time in formulating the message. Then it takes some time to reach the receiver. The receiver then takes his time in understanding and interpreting the message and responding to it. Written communication has fewer cycles than face-to-face communication, that is, in comparison to oral communication, the messages are sent to and fro between the sender and the receiver for a fewer number of times. This book will discuss the various aspects of written communication such as essay writing, report writing and note making. Along with it, it will also discuss a form of literature known as poetry.

This book has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with the Introduction followed by the Objectives for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with Check Your Progress questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit. The Summary and Key Words further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

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**BLOCK - I**  
**POETRY - I**

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**NOTES**

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**UNIT 1 SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS**

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

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William Shakespeare has profoundly impacted the world in areas of literature, culture, art, theatre and is considered one of the best English language writers ever. In this unit, we will read about his sonnets which are stories about a handsome boy and a mysterious and aloof 'dark' lady loved by both the poet and the young man.

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**1.1 OBJECTIVES**

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

- Describe the literary contribution of William Shakespeare to English literature
- Discuss the writing style of Shakespeare
- Explain the themes of the Shakespearean sonnets

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## 1.2 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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### NOTES

William Shakespeare is considered to be the greatest writer of the English language. He is England's national poet and is often called the 'Bard of Avon'. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on 26 April 1564. He was a prolific writer who wrote almost 38 plays (some of which were collaborations with other dramatists), 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, two epitaphs on a man named John Combe, one epitaph on Elias James, and several other poems.

There is very little biographical information regarding Shakespeare in the years 1578-82 and 1585-92. For this reason, they are called the 'Lost Years'. The first-time slot covers the duration from his leaving grammar school to his marriage to Anne. It is generally agreed that the second period covers the seven years he spent perfecting his craft and collecting sources for the plots of his plays.



*Fig.1.1 William Shakespeare*

He married Anne Hathaway and fathered three children named Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith. Shakespeare came to London and began a successful acting career between the years 1585 and 1592. During this period, he was also a writer of plays. As a result of commercial success, he was soon a part owner of The Lord Chamberlain's Men. From 1594 his was the only troupe to perform Shakespeare's plays and became London's leading playing company. When Queen Elizabeth died in 1603 it was re-christened The King's Men. The Globe, the company's theatre was built in 1599. Soon afterwards the Blackfriars, an indoor theatre was also purchased. Shakespeare retired to Stratford around 1613 when he was 49 years old and died there three years later.

### **His Work**

Shakespeare produced his best work between 1589 and 1613. He wrote plays in all genres, be it comedy, tragedy, tragicomedies or political plays. While he wrote plays in different genres all through his writing career for ease of reference we may classify his work along the following lines:

1. His early work primarily consists of comedies and histories. These plays are characterized by a youthful exuberance and imagination and were probably composed by the end of the 16th century. Some of the plays that he wrote during this period are *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II* and *Richard III*.
2. The second period of Shakespeare's creativity can be said to cover the years 1595 to 1601. These plays reveal an increasingly insightful understanding into human nature, one which would be sharply revealed in his great tragedies. These plays mark a progress in his dramatic art and are characterized by real power and little exaggeration in terms of characterization and situation. There seems to be a tone of sadness in his philosophy during these years and a greater appreciation of the growth of character. Some of the plays written during this period are *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and *As You Like It*.
3. The years from 1601 to 1608 were a period of turmoil in Shakespeare's life. His father died in 1601, the Earl of Essex was executed for treason by Elizabeth in 1601. In the same year the Earl of Southampton too was imprisoned in the Tower for a similar charge. It seems that the playwright himself was under suspicion of the same charge for a period of time. It should not be surprising then that this is the period when he produced the great tragedies, among which were *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*.
4. The fourth period of his creativity can be said to be between the years 1608 to 1613. It is conjectured that his mother's death in 1608 coupled with the memory of her kindness and love could have resulted in a mellowing in the man. It could be the reason as to why he looked at life with kinder eyes during this time which is reflected in the calm strength and sweetness in the plays of this period. The greatest plays of this period are *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. It was during this time that he also wrote tragicomedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights.

Although Shakespeare himself never came out with an authoritative edition of his plays, but the first such collection of his dramatic work was produced by John Hemmings and Henry Condell in 1623. It was this edition that came to be known as the 'First Folio' later. A poem by Ben Jonson was included in the Preface and hailed the bard in a prophetic manner as 'not of an age, but for all time'.

Ironically, though Shakespeare is acknowledged as the master of his art he was considered a lightweight by his contemporaries. They saw his commercial success as a mark of an average mind that catered to the tastes of the audience in the Pit. This was a period when classical ideas were in vogue. It is not surprising then that writers like John Fletcher and Ben Jonson who followed these ideas were looked at favourably. In contrast Shakespeare's penchant for mixing the

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## NOTES

comic and the tragic genre did not win him any friends. His rehabilitation began when the Romantics acknowledged him as a natural genius. Coleridge praised his work and critic August Wilhelm Schlegel translated his plays in the spirit of German Romanticism. Scholarly editions of his plays by Samuel Johnson in 1765 and Edmond Malone added to his growing acclaim. His reputation was further cemented by the Victorians who produced his plays as lavish spectacles on a grand scale. Soon his reputation also spread abroad and one can count the likes of Voltaire, Goethe, Stendhal and Victor Hugo as fans of his work. The modernist revolution of the 20th century only added to its relevance to our time. The impact of his plays can be seen in various art movements in Europe; be it the *Avant Garde* movement, the Expressionists in Germany, the Futurists in Moscow or the epic theatre of the Marxist director Bertolt Brecht. His work is not without its detractors like Shaw considered him primitive.

### 1.2.1 Characteristics of Shakespeare's Work

- His work explores the universal human condition. Human experiences are presented in a simple yet profoundly eloquent verse.
- He is a great story teller who presents his tale simply yet in manner that transcends time and culture.
- Although his plays are populated by numerous stock characters; it is his tragic heroes who stand out in all their complexity and vulnerability and ensure that his reputation at the master of human emotion swills stand the test of time.

### 1.2.2 Sonnet

'Sonnet' is an abbreviation of the Italian sonetto ('little song') recited to the sound of a musical instrument. It is a fourteen-line poem written in iambic pentameter. There are three types of sonnets. Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) popularized the sonnet in England and gave rise to many imitations. By the time Shakespeare came to compose his sonnets an anti-Petrarchan mode of writing sonnets which satirized or exploited traditional motifs and styles had also developed.

The major types of sonnets are:

- The Italian (or Petrarchan) Sonnet: Italian Sonnet is divided into two sections. The first eight lines are the octave (consisting of 2 quatrains). The octave presents a problem or question, or situation and rhymes Abba Abba. The final six lines are the sestet (consisting of 2 tercets). The sestet presents the resolution to the octave. It has a looser rhyme scheme and can rhyme as: cdc dcd; cdd cdc; cde cde; cde ced; or cdc edc. typically, the ninth line of the sonnet marks the movement from the problem to the resolution. Since this marks a change in tone of the poem this line is called the 'turn' or volta.

- The English (or Shakespearian) Sonnet: The Shakespearian Sonnet is so called since he was the most famous practitioner of this form. The theme, generally, is the poet's love of a woman. This sonnet comprises of three quatrains of alternating rhyme and a couplet: abab; cdcd; efef; gg. Here the sestet is divided into a four-line stanza and a couplet which sums up the poet's conclusion.
- The Spenserian Sonnet: The Spenserian sonnet, invented by Edmund Spenser can be seen as a variation of the Shakespearean sonnet. It too has a 3 quatrain and a couplet structure; but with an interwoven rhyme scheme: abab; bcbc; cdcd; ee.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. Who was Shakespeare and where was he born?
2. Name the three major types of sonnets.
3. Give any one characteristics of Shakespeare's work.
4. What might have led Shakespeare to write calm and sensitive poetry between 1608 and 1613?

## 1.3 SONNETS OF SHAKESPEARE

His Sonnets, numbering 154 in all, are Shakespeare's most popular works and were probably composed over an extended period from 1592 to 1598. It is very likely that some of them were in circulation in manuscript form as early as 1598. They were first published in quarto form in 1609 by Thomas Thorpe along with *The Passionate Pilgrim*. They are dedicated to an anonymous W. H. The general consensus is that this W. H. is William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke. This argument gets bolstered by the fact that Shakespeare's First Folio (1623) was also dedicated to him. The arrangement of the sonnets, however, is a contentious topic. Since they circulated only in manuscript form during his lifetime it is very difficult to say whether the arrangement of the sonnets as it occurs in the quarto had Shakespeare's approval or not. When one reads the sonnets, one is struck by their passionate rationality. This has led many critics to believe that even if the sonnets in the quarto were not arranged sequentially by Bard himself, their arrangement in the quarto edition does draw on some provisional arrangement that Shakespeare himself must have done in the manuscript itself.

### 1.3.1 Sources for the Sonnets

Shakespeare drew inspiration from various sources for his sonnets. It is clear that Petrarch is an influence, but it is the Petrarch who is preoccupied with fame and with thoughtful solitude. Some sonnets are addressed to the male beloved. Michelangelo wrote poems along these lines as well and can be seen to have

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influenced Shakespeare. *Astrophil and Stella's* influence is clearly discernible in the sonnets concerned where the inner secretcies of the mind are the theme. Some sonnets contain exhortations to marry and are clearly influenced by Erasmus's speech on the topic. It is not as if we can discern the influence of older forms or themes in all sonnets as some do not seem to have any source at all while others have no clear analogies in the English sonnet tradition.

The most clearly identifiable models for Shakespeare's sonnets are structural rather than verbal. Shakespeare drew inspiration from Daniel's *Delia* the conception of a series of sonnets which resonated with the concern for time and its thievish passage to eternity.

### 1.3.2 Characteristics of the Sonnets

Shakespeare's use of formal elements including rhetorical devices, syntax, and diction is very unique. He brings multiple associations to his words and phrases which lead to ambiguity in his figurative language and results in a diversity of tone and mood in the sequence. The poet brings a huge variation in the structure of the sonnets itself. As demanded by the Petrarchan tradition, not all couplets of his sonnets present a conclusion or a resolution of the themes raised in the sonnet.

Though the speaking subject is the poet, the addressee is not always clear, sometimes it is the young man and at others it is the Dark Lady. This obfuscates the issue and makes it difficult to know. This is precisely what Shakespeare is attempting to do in the sonnets—how to escape the certainty of death and how to judge the truth and the depth of one's feelings. The sonnets are addressed to the Dark Lady. But to appreciate them better they need to be viewed as a single poem and not as a series of songs explicating an idea. When we do this, we can see that the sonnets take on a narrative aspect. In fact, the narrative tone is stretched so far that at one time it becomes impossible to say who the speaker is, whether he is male or female, who is being addressed by this ambiguous speaker and why, or even what the respective social roles of the speaker and the listener are. This chaos and inversion of social roles adds another dimension to the complexity of the sonnets.

Shakespeare is humorously conscious of the clichés of the sonnet tradition, like mistresses have cherry lips and hairs of golden wire, and artfully seeks to differentiate his mistress from the tired blondes of Petrarchan convention.

The majority of the sonnets (1-126) are addressed to a young man, with whom the poet has an intense romantic relationship. There is a strong homoerotic element to the sonnets. Shakespeare starts off his sonnets by trying to convince the young man to marry and have children. He avers that because the children will bear a strong resemblance to the father, he will become immortal. The sonnets seem to concern themselves with approaching death the 'all oblivious enmity' (55.9) and ways to defeat it. The poet suggests that it is only the creative power of poetry and the regenerative power of love, as it is manifested through one's progeny that can defeat death. It is important to note that only a few sonnets here are



actually addressed to a male audience. In fact, in both this sequence and in the one that follows (i.e. sonnets 127-154) there does not seem to be any subject who is being addressed at all. The final sonnets (127-154) are addressed to a promiscuous and scheming woman known to modern readers as the Dark Lady. In the sonnets, the poet claims that both he and the young man have become obsessed with the raven-haired temptress. However, he finds this state uncomfortable and is disgusted with his insatiable 'sickly appetite' (147.4). This discomfiture is evident in the tone of the sonnets that expresses his distress at his inability to control his urges. The imagery is one of sensual feasting and sinful consumption. The final two sonnets, 153 and 154 are free translations or adaptations of classical verses about Cupid. The two concluding sonnets, 153 and 154, some critics believe serve a specific purpose—though they disagree about what this may be—but many others view them as perfunctory.

Shakespeare's use of language in the sonnets is illuminating. He does not treat the sonnets as an occasion to advertise his creative and rhetorical skills. Instead language is used to transform the ordinary and the merely apparent to refer to something beyond. This attempt at DE familiarisation is extremely political and hints at the political nature of the creative process itself.

In Shakespeare's sonnets, language is mobilized not merely to say that things are so, or to move an audience through rhetorical skill, but to transform a situation and make something so merely in saying something. This is a political process. It attempts to rewrite the already scripted social relations of power and inequality through a force that lie not so much in the rhetorical rules of effective persuasion as the publicly available logic of the performative. This logic operates as a transformative power within certain utterances or in speech acts such as the force of promising, blaming, swearing, commanding, pleading, upbraiding, questioning, repudiating or foreswearing. While such a force is not as uncertain in its operation as its perlocutionary cousin, it does not act independently of how things are in the world, especially the world of social relations. There may be circumstances in which particular speech acts such as commanding or even blaming someone fail, because the relationship between the people involved in the speech act is inappropriate by social convention. Shakespeare's sonnets, with their situations of deep inequality, offer equally complex negotiations of such discursive and social intricacies via illocutionary uses of language.

They do so by deliberately exploiting the formal ambiguities of language which have flummoxed philosophers for so long that what looks like a statement may in fact be doing something other than stating. Equally, what looks like a merely rhetorical appeal may transform a relationship in its very utterance. Being independent of any contingently personal affect, unlike rhetorical or perlocutionary force, the illocutionary force of an utterance is essentially public. It is shared and given the appropriate constitutive circumstances and it takes effect at once, independently of the 'private' states of mind of the participants. It is, in this broadest sense, interactive. This fact transforms another debate that has been raging

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recently—the vexed question of privacy or interiority. The issue has many tangled strands. The question of whether Shakespeare's sonnets, as lyrics, are essentially, by virtue of the 'normativity' of their genre, solitary or private in the sense that they eschew all social determinations; and the historical debate about whether Elizabethans had access to a concept of interiority at all.

The sonnets are very dramatic in their own right. The dramatic nature is such that even as the speaker's words are placed in a wider social context the listening subject does not become a passive recipient and is not reduced to the status of the other. 'In so far as they are the centre of their own lives', Berthoud remarks, 'individuals belong to themselves; but insofar as they are members of a community, with its history, its institutions, and its social and cultural divisions, they belong to others'. Viewing these intensely individual poems through the glass of the plays enables us to see how the sonnets enact, 'at the moment of its operation', the degree to which people belong both to themselves and to others. The voice that speaks in the sonnets is neither wholly 'solitary' nor entirely 'public'. It is both the centre of a singular manifold of feelings, attitudes and passions, and at the same time continually displaced by its necessary acknowledgement of a world of others.

The first few sonnets are directed at the young man. They have been labelled homoerotic, but they serve another purpose. They throw into the spotlight the tenuous nature of the actor-poet and the patron-aristocrat relationship through hate per formative use of language. In this context, the poet actor speaks not so much to persuade careless nobility as to transform the very nature of the relationship between them. The speaking act then becomes the act of creating; in fact, in such a scenario it is akin to the boring individual, which Shakespeare anticipates marriage to culminate into. This creative process is important since the two share an unequal political and social relationship. A rebirthing is important because only this will ensure that they treat each other as equals. This reveals the poet's realization of the fact that social avowals of affection and equality and private enactments of the same are different things.

Negotiations between power and weakness, authority and subordination in the sonnets are bound up with performative or illocutionary rather than descriptive or even rhetorical or perlocutionary uses of language. The player-poet uses such performatives to negotiate politics of self-authorization. The illocutionary force of the performative constitutes a major part of that 'dynamic, unending slippage between power and powerlessness and between their principal sources, success and failure' that Heather Dubrow has characterized as being typically Petrarchan.

### 1.3.3 Subject of the Sonnets

The subject whose life is at the centre of the sonnets has elicited more controversy than any other in these much-disputed poems. After a period in which biographical quests overshadowed all others, there has for some time now been a decisive turning away from biography in any form. The collection of poems contains no

proper names. One might quibble about 'Will', but that name is hardly a designator like 'Romeo' and 'Cressida'. Shakespeare's sonnets can do without proper names because, in a delimited sense, the text designated by this name is not fictional. It can do so because of its original rootedness in space, time, event and social purview. This means that it assumes a contemporary, shared knowledge of its physical, historical and human referents. It does not have to name names, certainly not in the way in which a fictional world has to call itself into being through nomination and denomination. The (inevitable) loss of its original, shared purview, which made the systematic recourse to the deixis possible, is precisely what has made Shakespeare's sonnets so frustratingly opaque

### **1.3.4 Themes in the Sonnets**

Shakespeare has written sonnets mostly on conventional topics such as love and beauty, time and mutability. He treats these themes in his own distinctive fashion like addressing the poem on love and praise on a young man rather than a maiden and by including a second subject of passion—a woman not so attractive and with a questionable virtue. Critics have discussed Shakespeare's paradoxical representation of love in the sonnets and that Shakespeare has also tried to immortalize the young man's beauty by defying destructive nature of time. The nature of the relationship between the youth and the speaker is as important as the themes of friendship and betrayal of friendship which are critical issues. The eroticism of the sonnets has elicited various responses. Some say that the two men had an asexual relationship whereas others say that they had sexual relationship. It is due to the slow involvement in the sonnets and the change in the emotions in the sonnets that one realizes that it is about the history of love which anyone might have known, mortal or immortal love that lovers at any time must have experienced or are still experiencing. We should not forget that it is an unconventional love which was rare during the Elizabethan period than it is now. It is this unconditional love that forces us to question the meaning of the word love.

Since the lyrics are so intense, emotionally vivid and passionate that many readers and commentators assume that it must be autobiographical but there is no evidence that it is so. There has always been a lot of speculation on finding out the people on which the sonnets were based. The fact remains that no one knows to what degree Shakespeare's personal experiences are reflected in his sonnets or if the characters are solely imaginary and a product of Shakespeare's observation, imagination and understanding of human heart and relationship.

Shakespeare's sonnets did not resemble anything that was written in the early 1600s. It was his choice to write on a young man than writing about a beautiful lady. He maybe wanted to shock the audience in choosing a topic that was different from the usual themes that were taken by the writers of that time. Shakespeare departs from the established Petrarchan despairing lover, and explores several different moods, such as delight, pride, melancholy, shame, disgust, and fear.

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## The Player-Poet Persona

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Contradictions and uncertainties are implicit in Shakespeare's sonnets. Both individually and as a collection, these poems resist generalities and summations. Their complex language and multiple perspectives have given rise to a number of different interpretations, all of which may at times seem valid—even when they contradict each other. Few critics today read the sonnets as personal allegory. Indeed, most commentators assert that speculation about what these verses may imply about Shakespeare's life, morals, and sexuality is a useless exercise. The speaker is as closely identified with each reader as he is with the writer who created him. His confused and ambiguous expressions of thought and emotion heighten our own ambivalent feelings about matters that concern us all: love, friendship, jealousy, hope, and despair.

The sonnets give deep information about self-consciousness of the player-poet of his lowly status. Despite these drawbacks the poet as a player dramatist has been able to bring to the poet's task an extraordinarily developed sense of language as a performative force. Shakespeare's dramatic art made possible the extraordinary uses of language in the sonnets. The plays themselves also render more palpable circumstances of address that escape inclusion within the restricted body of the sonnet. The concrete situation of address that is the condition of the Petrarchan sonnet is clearest in the plays in which sonnets are represented, not as disembodied texts, but as a performative discourse in which embodied characters seek to transform their circumstances and relationships. Approaching Shakespeare's sonnets through the staged worlds of his plays enables one to interrogate two sets of critical assumptions. The embodiment of addressee, the sonneteer and the sonnet itself through the plays counters the recent tendency to dissolve the corporeality of the referent in a solution of textuality and subjectivity, either through a formalist concentration on their verbal or lyrical complexity, or through a more theoretical interest in their forging a new poetic subjectivity. Such embodiment also questions the assumption that the primary work of the sonnet in general and Shakespeare's sonnets in particular, is to praise their subjects through description.

To take into account the fact that the Quarto was the only body of sonnets written by a dramatist opens a wider passage between the poems and the plays via the rootedness of their common author in a particular community at a particular time. Such a passage will naturally reveal their differences, among the most obvious being the fact that the sonnets, unlike the plays, are written in an autobiographical mode of poetic persona in the sonnets. Whether we approach them sociologically or internally via the fiction of a poetic 'persona', the poet of the sonnets is clearly a player-poet. He suffers from social and personal vulnerability of someone whose role as a poet is always informed by his position as an actor and playwright. At the same time, the sureness of his poetic art arises out of the practice of theatre. He might consequently be said to be playing at being a poet proper in purely sociological, though not aesthetic, terms pretending through writing to the superior poetic and

social status of a Sidney, a Greville or a Surrey. Shakespeare's role as a man of the theatre thus conditions his sonnets in both sociological and aesthetic sense. They are products of a powerful hand steeped in the aesthetic practice of the stage, but they are also marked by the perceived social inferiority of that practice.

### Check Your Progress

5. How many sonnets has Shakespeare written?
6. What inspired Shakespeare to write sonnets?
7. What are the sonnets based on?

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## 1.4 SUMMARY OF THE SONNETS

Let us now discuss some of the sonnets.

### Sonnet 12

This is one of the most famous of Shakespeare's sonnets. It describes the passage of time and its destructive impact on all things and he does so with such devastating effect that the reader is forced to confront his own mortality and come to terms with it. The placement of the sonnet further reminds the reader of the inexorable march of time—there are twelve hours in the day and the sonnet is numbered 12. Structurally too the running of one line and its associated idea into the other reminds the reader of the passage of time. The overall tone of the sonnet is very sombre. The concluding couplet seems to imply that even in the face of the inevitable march of time the poet will try to protect something. This brave stand only underlines the fact that nothing will be saved and that time destroys everything. It hints at the mortality of all of creation and that the reality of what the poet has been urging all along is as slight as breath and water.

This sonnet is part of the sequence wherein the poet tries to convince the young man that he must marry and have children. The transience of existence that the twelfth sonnet implies makes the idea of progeny even more precious that is if we are all condemned to fade and die despite all our toil then children become even more precious. They are the only proof that we ever existed and in their very presence guarantee immortality to the parents and thus an escape from death. Sonnet 12 focuses on the incessant movement of time, and the only way to defy Time is to beget children.

The first quatrain starts out in first person; it is the first time in this sonnet sequence that the speaker is putting himself into the narrative. The poet watches the ticking of the clock as it marks the passage of time. As he watches the clock the sense of being trapped within time and of being immovable and powerless in relation to it further intensifies. The contrasting images of 'brave day' (bright/splendid day) and 'hideous night' (evil, dark image) show the progression of a day filled with joy to a night filled with horror.

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The sonnet then moves on to describe the ninth hour of the day—the ‘violet past prime’ is the twilight. This passage of the day is indicative of the ageing process in man and traces his transformation from a young man to an old decrepit creature a shell of what he was once. This process is mentioned again when he mentions the dark hair turning silver. It also refers to the dark night sky turning silver under the moonlight and the starlight. The mention of the moon brings into play its cycle. The moon transforms every fortnight from a no moon to a full moon. This process is a sign of regeneration which can happen only through children which the poet is asking the young man to have. He seems to be implying that one day the man’s head of dark hair will turn silver and he shall perish. The only way to escape this fate is to have children so that he may survive in their appearance. The second quatrain continues to rely on natural imagery to show the passage of time, but it begins to connect them with humanity. There is a mention of tall lofty tress, akin to the tall young man so confident of his prowess in the first flush of his youth. The once tall trees are now barren and devoid of all greenery. It serves to highlight the inevitability of death. Once the tree stood tall with a magnificent array of leaves, but now all the green is gone and all that is left are the brown branches. Its huge canopy protected herds and men from the heat but all that is a mere memory now. The green covering has been shed and abandoned just as the old man has abandoned his increasingly sick and frail body in death. These first two quatrains follow a metaphor about the progression of a man’s life (provided that the man has not married or procreated) using natural images. A man begins his life by exploring the world around him and tries to learn as much as he can. After reaching his prime, he begins to sink into twilight years and his hair and beard begins to grey. He is not much in demand now and to get things he has to make a lot of effort. He is no longer surrounded by girls and his beauty is replaced with wrinkles and grey hair which is a mark of old age. A man continues to live like this till he dies leaving behind no one to keep his memories alive.

The third quatrain marks a shift in the sonnet as the poet turns his attention and speaks to the young man directly. He tells him that his youth and beauty have beguiled him into thinking that he will never age when nothing can be farther from the truth. Using the imagery of flowers he tries to tell him that even the prettiest and sweetest of flower decays and is thrown away. Similarly old age culminating in death is a truth and this is what life is about.

The rhyming couplet posits the only resolution to the dichotomy of life resulting in death which is inevitable; it is children and breeding.

### **Sonnet 19**

This sonnet too deals with the ravages of time. Critics have noted an interesting facet to the sonnets. The poetic voice is obsessed and dismayed by the ageing process only when it contemplates its effects on the young man, who in many ways may be seen as the homosexual lover. This sense of agony and despair is absent when he contemplates the Dark Lady. This further gives weight to claims of

homoeroticism in the text. In this sonnet the poet shows his anguish over his lover getting old. This indicates that his relationship with the young man is based on lust whereas his relationship with his mistress is based on love and mutual understanding.

The poet declares that he is granting immortality to the young man through his verse. He will be young and virile as the poet paints him for all eternity and stakes claim to the creative faculty of literature. Just as the children are created in the union of man and woman and impart immortality to both parties in the very act of creation; similarly, poetry grants immortality to both the poet and the topic that he refers to in his poetry. In this case it is the young man.

In other words, the young man will live forever and he will be eternally young, and the ravages of time will not touch him. The poet tries to build a conceit wherein he tries to suggest that even the young man's physical body will escape decay through the sonnet and that it is a talisman. He soon abandons this and acknowledges it to be a temporary prohibition. Nevertheless, he avers that the man's youth will survive in the verses made to celebrate his beauty and the poet's love for him.

### **Sonnet 29**

In this sonnet, the poet feels insecure and is troubled. He feels unlucky, shamed, and fiercely jealous of those around him. The cause of this misery remains a mystery since it is never addressed in the sonnets. This sonnet was written around 1592, the year London theatres were ordered closed by the authorities due to an outbreak of plague. The poet may have toured the provinces and the outlying reaches of the city! But it cannot be denied that the plague must have made earning for a living difficult. This was also the year that Robert Greene, jealous of his growing popularity, launched a scathing attack on Shakespeare from his deathbed. This attack of his creative faculties by a man nearing death must have been a difficult pill to swallow. It is very possible, though there is no proof to support this claim either in the sonnet or elsewhere that the sorrow the poet mentions in this sonnet is a result of impending poverty and crises of faith in his creative prowess and a fear of rejection by his contemporaries after Greene's attack. It is very possible that the sorrow quoted here might be more rhetorical than real, being part of the sonnet tradition, in which many misfortunes contrive to make the lover unhappy. It also serves to highlight the great joy which ends the poem, when he thinks once more of his beloved, as in the psalms, and rises above the clouds. The sonnet ends with a positive affirmation that the poet can combat his anguish with the 'sweet love' of his dear friend.

### **Sonnet 30**

Critics believe that the poet's lover was the Earl of Southampton and this sonnet is a tribute to a lover and a friend. It continues with the theme of sonnet 29 and further amplifies the role of the young man as the poet's redeemer. He mentions that every time he is lonely and away from the young man's company, memories of

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dead friends return to assail him and he becomes depressed. These sad thoughts can only be removed in the brightness of the lover's company. Here Shakespeare uses the traditional conceit of the lover as a brace and a spiritual and emotional anchor, but with a twist. The lover is not heterosexual and this is a highly charged homosexual relationship raising issues of social conventions and morality.

This is one of the more sombre sonnets as the poet surveys his life and is riddled with feelings of loss and lost opportunity. The quasi legal terminology (words like waste, expense, grievance, cancelled, tell o'er, paid before) only highlight the feeling of loss. There is a sense that the balancing of the ledger is taking place and the poet is fearful of the result. The sonnet however ends on a joyous note since he realizes that the presence of the young man as his lover more than makes up for any losses he may have suffered in his life.

### **Sonnet 64**

This sonnet deals with the theme of time's swift passage and the destruction of all things that this passage brings. This sonnet builds on the ideas presented in Horace's odes and in Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the sonnet, the poet records his reactions when he first saw the elaborate monuments to the dead in churches. He observes that despite being ornate and expensive these monuments are as prone to decay and destruction as the subjects they are meant to commemorate were. This reminds him that his beloved too is subject to the same forces of decay and will one day cease to exist. This causes him great sorrow and adds a deep sadness to the unclouded joy of loving. It is easy to imagine Shakespeare contemplating himself, or his beloved as the victim of the next purge or calamity.

The sonnet describes historic and actual events as well as elemental forces at work, the sea eating away at the land, the land regaining lost territory, and these elemental forces seem to overtake the human world of states and governments. It is this unique picture station and the very personal tone of the sonnet that gives immediacy to the poet's fears and his feelings of joy in the lover's company.

### **Sonnet 106**

This sonnet harks back to the age of chivalry when knights and ladies led lives of romance and mystery. The representation of this age appears to foreshadow in some sense the youth's excelling beauty. The poet suggests that the poet's of antiquity were cognizant of a beauty that surpasses all others and celebrated it in their work. He goes on to point out that it is ironical that these poet's did a better job of celebrating this beauty than his contemporaries; especially given the fact that the said youth, the older poets celebrated, was walking among them now in the garb of his beloved. Through this image Shakespeare raises his lover in stature and compares his beauty to the most beautiful of men and women in antiquity. By doing so he also stakes claim to be the best artist of all times. This sonnet was No 50 in the *Sonnets to Delia*, published in 1594.



**Sonnet 116**

This sonnet is an idealized presentation of love. It praises the glories of lovers who have come to each other freely and has entered into a relationship based on trust and understanding. The first quatrain expresses the poet's untainted pleasure in being part of a loving relationship that is constant and strong, and will not 'alter when it alteration finds'. He then goes on to say that what they are experiencing is true love because only true is an 'ever-fix'd mark' which will survive any crisis. He then goes on to hint at the mysterious and divine nature of love. He suggests that though we may grasp its depth to some extent we will never fully understand it. Love's actual worth cannot be known – it remains a mystery. The third quatrain reaffirms the perfect nature of love. It is perfect because it is unshakeable even in the face of the passage of time and death. Thus, love becomes desirable since it helps the individual transcend the fragility of human existence. This statement becomes even more interesting if we see it through the lens of a homoerotic relationship that seems to exist between the poet and the young man. In the final couplet, the poet avers his faith in the idea of true love. He says that if such an emotion does not exist then all his writings on love, truth and faith are meaningless and he would have no option but to recant them. He further points out that if he has judged inappropriately, no man has ever really loved, in the ideal sense that the poet professes.

Here Shakespeare uses the familiar conceit of poetic creativity to suggest that he has greater insight into the human soul and that true love does exist. In other words, he is trying to suggest that like the universally accepted idea of true love, one day his work will also be universally acknowledged. This sonnet follows ones which discuss the essential question of love's capacity to deceive man's rational faculties. It also follows a sonnet wherein the poet tries to rationalize his unfaithfulness. Seen in this framework one can see in this sonnet a loss of innocence. Instead of celebrating an intellectual idea of true love which is untested; this sonnet seems to suggest that disavowals and acts of unfaithfulness are inconsequential. This sonnet can be seen as a direct rebuttal of the young man's cynically declared view of love in which change and betrayal are expected and necessary and truth is of no importance.

**Sonnet 129**

This sonnet explores the impact of sexual urges on the human psyche. The poet uses a plethora of adjectives to describe the build-up of desire. The image of the fish is especially apt. When the fish is caught in the hook, it tries its utmost to escape. Paradoxically it is this disparate attempt for escape that kills it. Similarly, the victim of lust is a frenzied animal who dooms himself even as he exerts himself to satiate this lust. Here Shakespeare builds up on classical images found in Euripides, especially in *The Bacchae* and *Hippolytus*.

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The treatment of desire is different vis a vis the young man and the Dark Lady. When he talks of his feelings for the young man there is no hatred for sexuality. Instead we find the expression of undying and lofty emotions, although often intermingled with sexual humour and puns. Horror is felt only when sexuality is seen in heterosexual terms. This makes for an interesting reading of the text. One cannot help but ask whether the poet is suggesting that heterosexual relations with their power struggles are unnatural. This is more so since every time the Dark Lady is mentioned an emasculation of the male occurs. The inversion of sexual mores and norms is an integral part of the sonnets. The extreme sexual pessimism may be viewed as a temporary aberration on the part of the poet, or as an essential element of his personality, or simply as an expression of the prevailing opinion of the time. It is tempting to see this outbreak of sexual melancholia as stemming directly from the passions aroused by the dark lady. That would undoubtedly increase the fascination with her and has no doubt helped to fuel speculation as to her character.

The fact that the sonnet is placed here leads one to think that there is some link with his mistress whom he dotes even though she is both metaphorically and morally as black as hell and as dark as night. There is no historical and biographical evidence to confirm if the woman was real or fictitious. The sexual pessimism that is portrayed is not alien to the Christian tradition which adapted some harsh tenets of asceticism of the ancient Greco-Roman world.

By the time Shakespeare wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* he appears to have put this blackness aside and he was able to celebrate sexuality as a glorification of nature.

### **Sonnet 133**

There is a mixture of sexual preferences and roles here. In the sonnet both the poet and the young man, who share a loving relationship, fall for the Dark Lady's charms. Both are ensnared by her sexual allure. The poet hopes that his avowal of love will be enough and that the Dark Lady will not cause a fissure in their relationship by responding to both men. But even as he expresses this wish, he realizes that it is a vain one, and that his mistress will be as harsh and frivolous with the friend as she is with him. In the face of this complicated love triangle he anticipates a triple loss. He fears that the Dark Lady will stop responding to his overtures and turn her affections towards the young man. He also anticipates that his friend will disown him if he is forced to choose between the Dark Lady and him. Finally, he fears a loss of the sense of self since he fears that if he is forced to face the loss of both the friend and heterosexual lover he will no longer be in control of his feelings. This loss that the poet anticipates in the near future is doubly tragic since he knows that the other two parties will also be required to make this choice soon.

## Sonnet 140

This sonnet continues the theme the poet first addresses in sonnet 139. In the earlier sonnet, he made a plea to the Lady to be faithful to him and not to look at other men, especially the young man, while she was with him. This theme continues, albeit in a less docile form in the sonnet under consideration. He fears that he will no longer be able to maintain his patient no 'tongue-tied demeanour' and his true feelings of contempt, disgust and hurt will burst forth and he will lash out at the Dark Lady. He does not want this situation to unfold and so begs her to hide all traces of her promiscuity both physical and emotional. He wants her to pretend that he is the centre of her existence and that no other men exist for her. Therefore, he doesn't want her to acknowledge the presence of other men in her vicinity. In other words, he wants to deny the precarious situation as it exists. Denial is a theme that permeates the twenty-four sonnets dealing with the dark lady and in the last few sonnets addressed to his mistress, the poet finally realizes that he must accept the futility of their affair. In other words, the relationship has become unhealthy. In fact, love as a sickness is also a primary theme in sonnet 140. This theme runs through all the sonnets that deal with the Dark Lady. Shakespeare's word choices further highlight pain, sick, death, health, physicians, and ill.

The sonnet presents the various aspects of being in love—the agony of uncertainty, the pain of knowing that the depth of feelings one feels is not reciprocated, the knowledge that the lover wants to acknowledge the depth of his feelings even as he knows he can't because this will make him a pawn in her hands, his knowledge that even as he is loved the beloved also feels disdain for him. There is also the tussle going on in the poet where he doesn't want to acknowledge his love even when he knows that such an avowal is inevitable.

The sonnets dealing with the Dark Lady are problematic. On one hand, they rip the facade of the idealized love that the poet feels for the young man and make those emotions more real. True love is that which can stand the test of the real world and does not feel apologetic for itself. At the same time, the poet's feelings for the Dark Lady leave him prone to self doubt and despair. Neither is a positive emotion. He seems to be suggesting that love is not without its shares of problems. In fact, his treatment of the Dark Lady contains shades of a desire for revenge. This feeling soon passes and he succeeds in bringing the experience of love back to a more human level, where the pains and despairs do not have to be exaggerated to make them real.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

8. What does the poet say about time in Sonnet 12?
9. Write what the poet means by 'violet past prime'.
10. What is the theme of Sonnet 29?

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## 1.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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### NOTES

1. William Shakespeare is considered to be the greatest writer of the English language. He is England's national poet and is often called the 'Bard of Avon'. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on 26 April 1564.
2. The major types of sonnets are the Italian (or Petrarchan) Sonnet, the English (or Shakespearian) Sonnet and the Spenserian Sonnet.
3. Shakespeare's work explores the universal human condition. Human experiences are presented in a simple yet profoundly eloquent verse.
4. The fourth period of his creativity can be said to be between the years 1608 to 1613. It is conjectured that his mother's death in 1608 coupled with the memory of her kindness and love could have resulted in a mellowing in the man. It could be the reason as to why he looked at life with kinder eyes during this time which is reflected in the calm strength and sweetness in the plays of this period. The greatest plays of this period are Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest.
5. Shakespeare's Sonnets, numbering 154 in all, are his most popular works and were probably composed over an extended period from 1592 to 1598.
6. Shakespeare drew inspiration from various sources for his sonnets. It is clear that Petrarch is an influence. Some sonnets are addressed to the male beloved. Michelangelo wrote poems along these lines as well and can be seen to have influenced Shakespeare. *Astrophil and Stella's* influence is clearly discernible in the sonnets concerned where the inner secretcies of the mind are the theme. Some sonnets contain exhortations to marry and are clearly influenced by Erasmus's speech on the topic. The most clearly identifiable models for Shakespeare's sonnets are structural rather than verbal. Shakespeare drew from Daniel's Delia the conception of a series of sonnets.
7. The majority of the sonnets (1-126) are addressed to a young man, with whom the poet has an intense romantic relationship. There is a strong homoerotic element to the sonnets. The final sonnets (127-154) are addressed to a promiscuous and scheming woman known to modern readers as the Dark Lady. In the sonnets, the poet claims that both he and the young man have become obsessed with the raven-haired temptress.
8. Sonnet 12 is one of the most famous of Shakespeare's sonnets. It describes the passage of time and its destructive impact on all things and he does so with such devastating effect that the reader is forced to confront his own mortality and come to terms with it.
9. Sonnet 12 describes the ninth hour of the day—the 'violet past prime' is the twilight. This passage of the day is indicative of the ageing process in man

and traces his transformation from a young man to an old decrepit creature, a shell of what he has once been.

10. In Sonnet 29, the poet feels insecure and is troubled. He feels unlucky, shamed, and fiercely jealous of those around him. The cause of this misery remains a mystery since it is never addressed in the sonnets. The sonnet ends with a positive affirmation that the poet can combat his anguish with the 'sweet love' of his dear friend.

## NOTES

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### 1.6 SUMMARY

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- William Shakespeare is considered to be the greatest writer of the English language. He is England's national poet and is often called the 'Bard of Avon'. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on 26 April 1564.
- He was a prolific writer who wrote almost 38 plays (some of which were collaborations with other dramatists), 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, two epitaphs on a man named John Combe, one epitaph on Elias James, and several other poems.
- He married Anne Hathaway and fathered three children named Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith.
- Shakespeare produced his best work between 1589 and 1613. He wrote plays in all genres, be it comedy, tragedy, tragicomedies or political plays.
- His early work primarily consists of comedies and histories.
- The second period of Shakespeare's creativity can be said to cover the years 1595 to 1601. These plays reveal an increasingly insightful understanding into human nature, one which would be sharply revealed in his great tragedies.
- Ironically, though Shakespeare is acknowledged as the master of his art he was considered a lightweight by his contemporaries. They saw his commercial success as a mark of an average mind that catered to the tastes of the audience in the Pit.
- The 'sonnet' is an abbreviation of the Italian sonetto ('little song') recited to the sound of a musical instrument. It is a fourteen-line poem written in iambic pentameter.
- His Sonnets, numbering 154 in all, are Shakespeare's most popular works and were probably composed over an extended period from 1592 to 1598.
- Shakespeare's use of formal elements including rhetorical devices, syntax, and diction is very unique. He brings multiple associations to his words and phrases which lead to ambiguity in his figurative language and results in a diversity of tone and mood in the sequence.

## NOTES

- The majority of the sonnets (1-126) are addressed to a young man, with whom the poet has an intense romantic relationship. There is a strong homoerotic element to the sonnets.
- Shakespeare's use of language in the sonnets is illuminating. He does not treat the sonnets as an occasion to advertise his creative and rhetorical skills. Instead language is used to transform the ordinary and the merely apparent to refer to something beyond.
- Shakespeare has written sonnets mostly on conventional topics such as love and beauty, time and mutability. He treats these themes in his own distinctive fashion like addressing the poem on love and praise on a young man rather than a maiden and by including a second subject of passion—a woman not so attractive and with a questionable virtue.
- Sonnet 12 is one of the most famous of Shakespeare's sonnets. It describes the passage of time and its destructive impact on all things and he does so with such devastating effect that the reader is forced to confront his own mortality and come to terms with it.
- Sonnet 19 too deals with the ravages of time. Critics have noted an interesting facet to the sonnets. The poetic voice is obsessed and dismayed by the ageing process only when it contemplates its effects on the young man, who in many ways may be seen as the homosexual lover.
- In sonnet 29, the poet feels insecure and is troubled. He feels unlucky, shamed, and fiercely jealous of those around him. The cause of this misery remains a mystery since it is never addressed in the sonnets.
- Sonnet 64 deals with the theme of time's swift passage and the destruction of all things that this passage brings.
- Sonnet 116 is an idealized presentation of love. It praises the glories of lovers who have come to each other freely and has entered into a relationship based on trust and understanding. The first quatrain expresses the poet's untainted pleasure in being part of a loving relationship that is constant and strong, and will not 'alter when it alteration finds'.
- There is a mixture of sexual, preferences and roles in sonnet 133. In the sonnet both the poet and the young man, who share a loving relationship, fall for the Dark Lady's charms. Both are ensnared by her sexual allure.

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## 1.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Performative:** It means something relating to or being an utterance that performs an act.
- **Obfuscates:** It means unclear or unintelligible.

- **Perlocutionary:** It means an act (as persuading, frightening, or annoying) performed by a speaker upon a listener by means of an utterance.
- **Textuality:** It refers to the property of written material to form a coherent whole; the nature or identifying quality of a text.
- **Swill:** It means excess.

## NOTES

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### 1.8 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on William Shakespeare.
2. Who is Shakespeare's Dark Lady?
3. What is a sonnet?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss the salient features of Shakespearean Sonnets.
2. How does Shakespeare give depth of character to the speaker? Discuss.
3. Shakespeare has laid stress on the importance of having children. Why?
4. Examine the writing style of William Shakespeare.

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NOTES

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## UNIT 2 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S *LINES COMPOSED UPON WESTMINISTER BRIDGE*

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### Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 *Lines Composed Upon Westminster Bridge: Critical Analysis*
- 2.3 Wordsworth as a Poet of Nature
- 2.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 2.5 Summary
- 2.6 Key Words
- 2.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 2.8 Further Readings

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### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

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The most dominating literary genre of the Romantic Age was poetry. The age consisted of two generations of poets. The elder romantics were William Blake, William Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. The younger or later romantics were Byron, Shelley, Keats and Leigh Hunt. Although these poets wrote very different kinds of poetry constituting a large variety of poetic forms, the entire body of poetry produced during the age was informed by certain common characteristics:

1. The urge to give vent to personal feelings and emotions, desires and longings, dreams and fantasies, ideals and inspirations.
2. The glorification of the pure and ideal human nature which finds expression through the innocent child, the simple rural folk, the platonic beauty, the ideal society and the beauty of the being.
3. The spirit of love desiring union between man and man; man and nature; and the man and the entire universe.
4. The lyrical mode relying on unity and harmony of the subject; on the organic growth of the poem; on the uniformity of the rhythm.
5. The symbolic language relating matter to spirit; body to soul; physical to spiritual; one to many; man to nature.

This unit is devoted to William Wordsworth's poem *Lines Composed Upon Westminster Bridge*. He was a great lover of nature. He believed that nature could bestow peace, sympathy, love, joy and other virtues on man. He did not like to depict nature 'red in tooth and claw'. He believed that nature gave



purity to man and ennobled his heart. He was a great lover of the common man and the rustic and rural life. He loved the child and thought that because of its innocence, purity of thought and nearness to God, childhood was the golden period of human life. He loved all creation and all kinds of creatures, including the smallest and most insignificant animals and insects. He believed that ‘nature never did betray the heart that loved her.’ He himself practiced what he preached and spent most of his time in the company of nature.

*William Wordsworth's  
Lines Composed Upon  
Westminster Bridge*

## NOTES

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### 2.1 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you would be able to

- Discuss the William Wordsworth style of writing
- Examine William Wordsworth’s contribution made to the Romantic Age of poetry
- Describe the poem *Lines Composed Upon Westminster Bridge*

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### 2.2 *LINES COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE*: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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William Wordsworth is an English poet born in the Lake District. The beauty of the land where he grew up inspired spiritual feelings in him, and he equated its breath-taking beauty and power with God. The poet believes that when a child is born, he is close to celestial glory, but with the passage of time, that child gets engrossed in materialism.

The year of the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798, is usually considered the most important date of the Romantic Period in England. Wordsworth’s theory of poetry, as expressed in his famous preface to the second edition (1801), became the doctrine of the new poetic era. This theory and Wordsworth’s philosophic views are important for understanding his poetry on nature. In the preface, Wordsworth explains the purpose of the new poetry collection in the *Lyrical Ballads*, considering it a successful endeavour in correcting the artificiality of neo-classical poetic diction. A change in the subject-matter parallels the simplification of form. Nature and man’s relationship with nature are the worthiest poetic themes. Poetry should deal with simple pleasures and sorrows, and should focus on man enjoying his natural surroundings.

Wordsworth’s doctrine of nature, as expressed in the *Preface* and his poetry, is rather complex. From the basic concept of the supremacy of nature, Wordsworth arrives at the doctrine that all things should bear a close resemblance to nature. It is Wordsworth’s personal experience with nature that led to his interest in its philosophical aspects. In contrast to James Thomson’s *Seasons*, Wordsworth’s poetry on nature is not confined to a single poem. Wordsworth distinguishes

## NOTES

between the emotional experiences of the child and those of the adult poet. Through a combination of both, he arrives at a more complete awareness of all aspects of life. According to Wordsworth, this influence is felt more strongly during childhood. In the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* and *The Prelude*, he regrets the fact that human senses are dulled as the years progress. Of his experiences during childhood, he writes:

*All that I beheld  
Was dear, and hence to finer influxes  
The mind lay open, to a more exact  
And close communion. Many are our joys  
In youth, but oh! what happiness to live  
When every hour brings palpable access  
Of knowledge, when all knowledge is delight.  
And sorrow is not there!*

The question of Wordsworth's alleged pantheism is still relatively unsettled. The pantheistic concept seems so typically Romantic that it is tempting to interpret Wordsworth's poetry from this aspect. It is also a known fact that the poet was criticized for pantheistic tendencies during his own lifetime. Wordsworth's feeling towards nature is more closely related to mysticism than to pantheism. He describes the following mystic experience in *Tintern Abbey*:

*... And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.*

Wordsworth no longer endeavours to give the reader a complete and detailed account of what he has seen or felt. The emotional aspects of nature have become increasingly spiritualized since the pre-Romantics. While Thomson revered in the glory of creation and creator in nature, Wordsworth believes outward nature to be the dwelling of a mystic power. The influence of this power is beneficent to man. It sets the rules for human society. *Three Years She Grew*, a beautiful poem, contains a vital part of Wordsworth's nature philosophy. It expresses his belief that nature has the power to form, mould and shape the character and personality of man and is the best nurse, guardian and mother of man. In *Three Years She Grew*, nature declared her resolve to bring up Lucy and carried out her intention. Nature said that under her watchful influence, Lucy would not only develop an attractive and

graceful figure, but also develop a moral sense and the capacity to differentiate between right and wrong.

*Three years she grew in sun and shower;  
Then Nature said, "A lovelier flower  
On earth was never sown;  
This Child I to myself will take;  
She shall be mine, and I will make  
A Lady of my own.*

The poem contains numerous beautiful and sensuous pictures. Images of the frisky fawn leaping gleefully, the stately floating clouds, the stars of midnight and the rivulets dancing their way are all brought before our eyes. All these, along with the other objects and forces of nature, contributed to the physical and moral development of Lucy.

In *The Solitary Reaper*, the poet feels that an object of sheer beauty provides an everlasting joy to man. A beautiful scene or a sweet sound remains in the heart eternally.

*Behold her, single in the field,  
Yon solitary Highland Lass!  
Reaping and singing by herself;  
Stop here, or gently pass!*

Wordsworth's nature poetry expresses his belief that a profound love for nature has a healing and nurturing effect on man.

*Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* is one of the famous sonnets of Wordsworth. It describes the quiet, calm and silence that prevails in the city of London early in the morning when the sun has just risen. Wordsworth was inspired to write this poem by the view he beheld from Westminster Bridge on the morning of 31 July 1802, when most of the residents were still in bed and factories had not yet started to produce smoke and polluted the air. It was the time when he and his sister, Dorothy, were crossing the bridge for a trip across the English Channel to France.

The beginning of the poem is quite contrary to a romantic beginning. The line, '*Earth has not anything to show more fair*', is surprising because Wordsworth is not speaking of nature, but of the city. He also describes the beautiful manmade entities such as 'ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples.' This is an interesting addition to Romantic poetry, since most works of that time expressed the beauty of nature. Contrarily, *Composed upon Westminster Bridge* praises the coexistence between nature and civilization. As the poet is standing on the bridge, he describes the beauty of London. According to him, it is the most charming sight in the world. He feels that no onlooker can remain unimpressed by this sight. However, if one is not affected by the beauty and tranquillity of the sight, it implies that he has lost all aesthetic sense and is devoid of all finer emotions.

*William Wordsworth's  
Lines Composed Upon  
Westminster Bridge*

## NOTES

## NOTES

While standing on the bridge, the poet can observe the ships sailing, the towers and domes of buildings as well as the different places of worship and amusement. Everything seems to be dazzling in the sunrays as the environment is free from pollution. The poet says that he has never enjoyed such a peaceful ambiance in his life. The River Thames is flowing gently and smoothly under the bridge. The entire city seems to be sound asleep. All the places which are full of hustle and bustle during the daytime are serene and peaceful during the wee hours of the morning. Wordsworth continues to surprise his reader by saying that the sun has never shone more beautifully, even on the objects of nature. He then personifies the scene, giving life to the sun, the river, the houses, and finally to the whole city which has a symbolic heart. The reader imagines that the heart of the city beats rapidly during the day with everything and everyone bustling about, but now, in the early hours of the morning, the city's heart is 'lying still'. By using personification in his poem, Wordsworth brings a kind of spirit to the city, which is usually seen as a simple construction of rock and metal.

*Never did sun more beautifully steep  
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;  
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!  
The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;  
And all that mighty heart is lying still!*

The feeling of peace and calm experienced by the poet is communicated to the reader's heart as well. The last line copiously brings forth the contrast between the noisy and rushed activities during the day and the calm and quiet that prevails at dawn.

The descriptive quality of the poem is noteworthy. The poet gives us a vivid picture of ships, towers, domes, theatres and churches lying silent and glittering in the smokeless morning air. These pictures are depicted in a most economical manner. The most striking figure of speech in the poem is personification. It dresses the city in a garment, giving it a heart, making the sun '*in his first splendour*' a benefactor and bestowing on the river a will of its own.

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### 2.3 WORDSWORTH AS A POET OF NATURE

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Wordsworth is a worshipper of nature, a Nature's devotee, a high-priest. Nature is an integral part of his poems. He presents nature in a positive manner. With Wordsworth, the poetry of nature takes a new range, passing beyond the sensuous presentation and description. Under the influence of nature, he expresses a mystical mood, a transcendental feeling. He finds joy in the presence of her calm and spiritual beauty. For him, nature possesses a soul, a conscious existence, an ability to make us feel joy and love. Nature is a divine presence, a sublime experience.

Wordsworth conceives that nature is alive and it has a living soul. Between this spirit in Nature and Man, there is a pre-arranged harmony which makes man feel every time a divine glory.

*William Wordsworth's  
Lines Composed Upon  
Westminster Bridge*

Wordsworth has a complete philosophy of nature. He conceives nature as a living personality. He tells us that he has felt the presence of a 'celestial light' in the setting sun, the round ocean, the blue sky etc. Wordsworth believes that nature is a benevolent force which fills human heart with joy. He feels a great ecstasy in the world of nature and realizes the sweet sensation in the hours of weariness.

## NOTES

Wordsworth emphasizes the moral influence of nature on man. He regards nature as a great teacher. He expresses his views about nature that it is the only power which has educated him in real manner. In the lap of nature, he has completed his education. In his poetry, nature is not a passive inert phenomenon. It is rather a dynamic force which activates, energizes and shapes the creative impulse of the poet. It is a guiding force.

For him, nature is a beacon light whose wisdom we can learn if we will. And without which any human life is vain and incomplete. This inter-relation between man and nature is very important in considering Wordsworth's views of both.

Wordsworth describes his love of nature as a boy, as a young man and as a mature man, As a boy, his love for nature is merely a fascination. There is nothing peculiar and distinct in nature at this time. As a young man, his love for nature is physical passion, an appetite. As a grown-up man, his love is intellectual and spiritual towards nature. His love is now reflexive as he is now so matured that even the ordinary objects of nature seem to be significant to him. In *Ode on Intimation of Immortality*, he says:

*To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.*

### Check Your Progress

1. Where was William Wordsworth born? What is the inspiration to his poems?
2. Which poem helped in differentiating between the Wordsworth pantheism with mysticism?

## 2.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. William Wordsworth is an English poet born in the Lake District. The beauty of the land was his prime inspiration, it ignited spiritual feelings in him, and he equated its breath-taking beauty and power with God.
2. Wordsworth's feeling towards nature is more closely related to mysticism than to pantheism this is emphasized in the poem *Tintern Abbey*.

## NOTES

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## 2.5 SUMMARY

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- William Wordsworth is an English poet born in the Lake District
- The year of the publication of the Lyrical Ballads, 1798, is usually considered the most important date of the Romantic Period in England.
- Wordsworth's theory of poetry, as expressed in his famous preface to the second edition (1801)
- Nature and man's relationship with nature are the worthiest poetic themes
- Wordsworth arrives at the doctrine of nature that all things should bear a close resemblance to nature.
- Wordsworth's poetry on nature is not confined to a single poem
- In the Ode on Intimations of Immortality and The Prelude, he regrets the fact that human senses are dulled as the years progress.
- Wordsworth's feeling towards nature is more closely related to mysticism than to pantheism
- William Wordsworth describes his mystic experience in Tintern Abbey
- Wordsworth's nature philosophy that expresses his belief that nature has the power to form, mould and shape the character and personality of man is well expressed in Three Years She Grew
- In *The Solitary Reaper*, the poet feels that an object of sheer beauty provides an everlasting joy to man.
- *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* is one of the famous sonnets of Wordsworth. It describes the quiet, calm and silence that prevails in the city of London early in the morning when the sun has just risen.
- The beginning of the poem is surprising because Wordsworth is not speaking of nature, but of the city.
- Wordsworth continues to surprise his reader by saying that the sun has never shone more beautifully, even on the objects of nature
- By using personification in his poem, Wordsworth brings a kind of spirit to the city, which is usually seen as a simple construction of rock and metal.
- The feeling of peace and calm experienced by the poet is communicated to the reader's heart as well.
- The descriptive quality of the poem is noteworthy. The poet gives us a vivid picture of ships, towers, domes, theatres and churches lying silent and glittering in the smokeless morning air.
- The most striking figure of speech in the poem is personification. It dresses the city in a garment, giving it a heart, making the sun 'in his first splendour' a benefactor and bestowing on the river a will of its own.

- Wordsworth is a worshipper of nature, a Nature's devotee, a high-priest. Nature is an integral part of his poems.
- Wordsworth has a complete philosophy of nature. He conceives nature as a living personality.
- Wordsworth describes his love of nature as a boy, as a young man and as a mature man.
- His love is now reflexive as he is now so matured that even the ordinary objects of nature seem to be significant to him

*William Wordsworth's  
Lines Composed Upon  
Westminster Bridge*

## NOTES

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## 2.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Ode:** It is a type of varied poem, rhyme written in order to address a particular subject.
- **Pantheism:** It means a belief or worship of universe as god.
- **Mysticism:** It means experiencing religion in the alternate state of mind.
- **Romanticism:** It is a literary, artistic movement started in eighteenth century focussing on the imagination of an individual

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## 2.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answers Questions

1. What is the interpretation of William Wordsworth on the *Three Years She Grew?*
2. Write a short note on the sonnet composed by William Wordsworth *On The Westminster Bridge*.

### Long Answers Questions

1. What is Wordsworth doctrine of nature? Describe.
2. Discuss Wordsworth as a poet of nature.

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## 2.8 FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 3 KEAT'S ODE ON A GRECIAN URN

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*Keat's Ode on a  
Grecian Urn*

### NOTES

#### Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 John Keats: A Note About the Author
- 3.3 *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: Critical Analysis
  - 3.3.1 Text and Interpretation
- 3.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 3.5 Summary
- 3.6 Key Words
- 3.7 Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 3.8 Further Readings

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### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit, you learnt about Wordsworth, in this unit, you will discuss the poetry of John Keats.

Unlike Byron and Shelley, John Keats was more committed to the idealism of art than to the idealism of politics or philosophy. Keats devoted himself to the worship of 'art for art's sake' and acquired an excellence in the art of poetry. Although famous for his odes, such as *Ode to Psyche*, *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and *Ode to Autumn*, Keats also wrote longer poems, such as *Endymion*, *Lamia*, *Isabella* and *Hyperion*, which were all masterpieces. His writing initiated a new kind of poetic movement whose chief slogan was 'art for art's sake'. The unit will discuss Keat's poem *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

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### 3.1 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to

- Discuss John Keats style of writing
- Critically Analyse Keats' poem *Ode on a Grecian Urn*
- Explain Keats' contribution towards poetry

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### 3.2 JOHN KEATS: A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*Ode on a Grecian Urn* is a poem written by the Romantic poet John Keats in 1819. John Keats was born in London on 31 October 1795. Thomas, his father, worked in the Swan and Hoop Inn Stables owned by his father-in-law. He

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continued his schooling in Dame school and later on in a school in Enfield whose headmaster was John Clarke, who went on to become a major influence in Keats life. Keats father died in 1804. His mother remarried, but her second marriage turned out to be unsuccessful. She died in 1810.

Keats became an apprentice to Thomas Hammond, and after completing his apprenticeship he became an assistant to a surgeon. However, all through this he was in touch with Charles Clarke, a teacher by profession and son of John Clarke.

Keats first poem to be published was *On Solitude* in 1816. It came out in Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*. His first book which was published was *Poems*; it was commercially unsuccessful. Next he started writing *Endymion*, an epic poem, which he finished only after the death of his brother, Tom. *Endymion* was published in 1818 and turned out to be another unsuccessful attempt. Immediately after this came his *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *To a Grecian Urn*, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *To a Nightingale*, *To Psyche* and *To Melancholy*. He started composing his next epic *Hyperion*.

In 1819, he met Fanny Brawn, the love of his life. In 1820, came out his final book *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems*. He died in February 1821.

In his last wish, Keats had mentioned that his grave should contain, apart from his body, unread letters received from Fanny Brawn, a lock of her hair and a purse designed by Keats' sister and his headstone would have the words 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water' etched out.



*Fig. 3.1 John Keats*

*Ode on a Grecian Urn* is one of John Keats most famous poems. The poem has been written in five stanzas each comprising ten lines.

Literary critic and historian Douglas Bush has pointed out that 'from first to the last Keats's important poems are related to, or grow directly out of...inner

conflicts.’ The poems chronicle Keats’ engagement with the various dichotomies of life — like sufferings and delight, sorrow and exaltation. All these feelings are interlaced with each other and life. It is difficult to separate each from the other.

*Keats’ Ode on a  
Grecian Urn*

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### **3.3 ODE ON A GRECIAN URN: CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

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### **NOTES**

*Ode on a Grecian Urn* begins abruptly in an apostrophic mode. The initial lines associate the urn with permanence and immortality. The word ‘still’ is used to highlight the fact that the urn is beyond the temporal effects of time. The poet cannot suppress his wonder as to how could this piece of art battle the effects of time and remain as a custodian to the last few centuries to which it has been a silent spectator.

Keats juxtaposes his excitement and amazement of this sudden encounter with a ‘Sylvain historian’ with his imagining sense of impermanence and transient life that he is leading. He portrays the urn as a feminine symbol which is accommodating, nurturing and is part of the ancient world. He calls her ‘bride’ and mentions about its shape and outer lines.

The closing lines of the poem have indeed drawn a lot of speculation and critical observations. The words seem to convey a multitude of contexts which could have led to this statement. In a letter to Fanny Browne, Keats mentioned that ‘I have loved the principle of beauty in all things.’ All of Keats’ works prominently highlights his love for beauty; Keats was an admirer of the ideal beauty, a concept which can trace its germination to the Greek Philosopher Plato. According to Plato, the mortal world that we exist in is a replica of the ideal and perfect image that exists in the ideal world.

In another letter to Bailey written on 22 November 1817, Keats asserts, ‘what the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth.’ It could also be that Keats had in mind P.B. Shelley’s ‘*A Defence of Poetry*’ where he advocates that ‘to be a poet is to apprehend the truth and the beautiful.’ Nevertheless, there was a difference in Keats’s and Shelley’s approach towards the notion of beauty. For Shelley, beauty was abstract but for Keats it was more physical, something that can be felt with senses. The link between ‘truth’ and ‘beauty’ might be because of the influence of the neoclassicists. The urn becomes the representative where the synthesis of truth and beauty takes place.

The use of the phrase ‘cold pastoral’ underlines that the poet is no longer traversing in his fantastical and ecstatic journey. He is back to the reality. However, at the same time, it suggests that the beauty of the urn and its symbolic manifestations are now part of the poet’s mind. The beauty of the urn is not only love but it is also perceived and internalized.

Keats, like all the Romantics, was strongly influenced by the Greeks who were lovers of beauty. Keats believed that any form of art is created to represent

## NOTES

beauty. For him, the artistic creativity is a wholesome representation of human perfection, which is the only solace for human mind. The poem first records the beauty that has a visual appeal:

*'What men or gods are these?'*

*What wild ecstasy?'*

Keats is so amazed on seeing the human figure and other inanimate objects that are painted in the urn that he gets involved in their joy. These lines reflect Keats belief that true beauty was 'joy forever'. From physical sensations, Keats gradually moves to perceptions which are beyond physical. He writes, 'Heard melodies are sweet ... of no tone'.

The melodious tune that the piper on the urn plays cannot be captured by the human auditory organs. Here, Keats affirms the significance and utility of imagination which has the ability to reconstruct the world that is beyond the grasp of the mortal senses. The word 'soft' used in these lines caters to both aesthetic as well as sensuous appeal. In the concluding lines, Keats insists that the urn holds a benevolent position in human world. By being free from the temporal world, it is able to draw human attention to one liberating aspect of human existence.

*'When old age... need to know.'*

### 3.3.1 Text and Interpretation

*Ode on a Grecian Urn* is one of the most memorable of all the poems to come from the Romantic Period. The poem is distinguished for its profound meditation and credible conclusions about the nature of beauty, above all as beauty is depicted in artistic media.

#### Text

*Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,  
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:  
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both,  
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?  
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?*

#### Interpretation

Keats addresses the urn as 'unravish'd bride of quietness' because it has managed to survive for centuries without undergoing any transformation in its appearance (it

is 'unravished'). He goes on to identify the urn as 'foster-child of silence and time' because it has taken recourse to silence and has transcended time; thus, acquiring this calm disposition. Furthermore, Keats refers to the urn as a 'sylvan historian'. The urn is 'sylvan'— because a design of leaves circumscribes the vase and also because the scene depicted on the urn is located among the woods. It is historian because it has been a witness to human lives for centuries and also because it depicts a pastoral landscape of an unidentified period.

The pattern on the urn depicts a story ('legend'). Keats presumes that the scene depicted is set on Arcadia or Tempe. Tempe is a valley situated between Mount Olympus and Mount Ossa in Greece that was a favourite location with Apollo. Arcady refers to Arcadia, a place in Greece popular for its scenic beauty which reflects the rustic life. Keats is taken aback on seeing the picture and wonders if the people reflected in the vase are actually humans or gods. He wonders who the maidens are and what kind of action is taking place in the lives of these people.

### **Text**

*Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:  
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;  
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!*

### **Interpretation**

Stanza two uses the figures of speech of paradox and oxymoron. Keats seems to be in awe of the silent music coming from the pipes and considers these 'unheard melodies' more appealing to the auditory organ than the real-life music one comes across. Keats then realizes that the characters painted on the vase have transcended time and have received an immortal status. The young man who is playing the pipe under trees will always keep his hands stretched. He, like the leaves, has defeated time. They will always remain as they are. Keats rightly observes that the young lover will never be able to embrace the girl despite sharing such close proximity. However, Keats suggests that there is no reason for the lover to be sorrowful because though the embrace can never materialize yet their love for each other will always remain intact and the beloved will remain as beautiful forever.

## **NOTES**

## NOTES

### Text

*Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
For ever piping songs for ever new;  
More happy love! more happy, happy love!  
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,  
For ever panting, and for ever young;  
All breathing human passion far above,  
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,  
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.*

### Interpretation

Keats shifts his focus to the tress, the 'happy, happy boughs' and wonders at the eternal spring they will enjoy as they will never shed leaves. He calls the young musician, 'happy melodist' because his song too will remain forever melodious just like the unquenched yet unchanging nature of love of the young man for this maiden — 'warm and still to be enjoy'd / Forever panting, and forever young...' In contrast to this ideal depiction, Keats points out that the lovers in real world are imperfect, causing distress and sorrow. The lovers are always faced with 'burning forehead, and a parching tongue.'

### Text

*Who are these coming to the sacrifice?  
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,  
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,  
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?  
What little town by river or sea shore,  
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?  
And, little town, thy streets for evermore  
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell  
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.*

### Interpretation

Keats wonders about the people and the nature of the occasion when he sees the approaching crowd moving towards an altar to sacrifice a 'lowing' (mooing) cow. Keats speculates about the background of these people. However, then he realizes that it does not matter whether they are from a town or village because the entire place will be vacant now as all the people are now participating in the ritual. Just like the lover and the beloved, they are also caught in the framework of time.

## Text

*O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede  
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,  
With forest branches and the trodden weed;  
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!  
When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."*

## Interpretation

Keats calls the urn as 'attic shape' because the urn was created in Attica, a place in Greece. The urn is beautiful because of its 'brede', the decorations. Keats refers to the urn as 'cold pastoral' partly because it is made of marble, partly because it is unaffected by time or surrounding. Keats argues that even after he or his generation is dead, even then the urn will remain, reminding all that 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'.

## Poetic devices

The line 'bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time' is an example of assonance. Assonance is the repetition of the similar vowel sounds in quick succession 'Thou foster-child of silence and slow time, / Sylvan historian, who canst thus express' an example of alliteration. In alliteration, consonant sounds recur in quick succession. The lines

*What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?*

*What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?*

*What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?*

These lines are an example of anaphora. Anaphora is the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of consecutive clauses or verses.

The line 'Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter:' is an oxymoron. It implies in setting side by side two contradictory terms (here, heard-unheard). The poem is written in iambic pentameter.

### Check Your Progress

1. Where was John Keats Born?
2. What was Keat's last wish?
3. How does John Keats describe the urn in the poem, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*?

## NOTES

## NOTES

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### 3.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. John Keats was born in London on 31 October 1795. He continued his schooling in Dame school and later on in a school in Enfield whose headmaster was John Clarke, who went on to become a major influence in Keats life.
2. In his last wish, Keats had mentioned that his grave should contain, apart from his body, unread letters received from Fanny Brawn, a lock of her hair and a purse designed by Keats' sister and his headstone would have the words 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water' etched out
3. Keats portrays the urn as a feminine symbol which is accommodating, nurturing and is part of the ancient world. He calls her 'bride' and mentions about its shape and outer lines.

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### 3.5 SUMMARY

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- *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is one of John Keats most famous poems. The poem has been written in five stanzas each comprising ten lines.
- *Ode on a Grecian Urn* begins abruptly in an apostrophic mode. The initial lines associate the urn with permanence and immortality.
- He portrays the urn as a feminine symbol which is accommodating, nurturing and is part of the ancient world. He calls her 'bride' and mentions about its shape and outer lines.
- The line 'bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time' is an example of assonance. Assonance is the repetition of the similar vowel sounds in quick succession
- For Shelley, beauty was abstract but for Keats it was more physical, something that can be felt with senses. The link between 'truth' and 'beauty' might be because of the influence of the neoclassicists. The urn becomes the representative where the synthesis of truth and beauty takes place.
- *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is one of the most memorable of all the poems to come from the Romantic Period.
- The poem is distinguished for its profound meditation and credible conclusions about the nature of beauty, above all as beauty is depicted in artistic media.
- Keats addresses the urn as 'unravish'd bride of quietness' because it has managed to survive for centuries without undergoing any transformation in its appearance (it is 'unravished').
- The pattern on the urn depicts a story ('legend'). Keats presumes that the scene depicted is set on Arcadia or Tempe.



- He wonders who the maidens are and what kind of action is taking place in the lives of these people.
- Keats suggests that there is no reason for the lover to be sorrowful because though the embrace can never materialize yet their love for each other will always remain intact and the beloved will remain as beautiful forever.
- Keats points out that the lovers in real world are imperfect, causing distress and sorrow. The lovers are always faced with 'burning forehead, and a parching tongue.'
- He realizes that it does not matter whether they are from a town or village because the entire place will be vacant now as all the people are now participating in the ritual. Just like the lover and the beloved, they are also caught in the framework of time.
- Keats argues that even after he or his generation is dead, even then the urn will remain, reminding all that 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'.

## NOTES

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### 3.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Grecian:** It means something related to Greece.
- **Urn:** It means a vase.
- **Paradox:** It refers to an extremely contradictory statement.
- **Oxymoron:** It is a phrase/statement when contradictory terms appear in conjunction.

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### 3.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answers Questions

1. Write a short note on the poems written by John Keats throughout his lifetime.
2. What is assonance? Explain briefly.

#### Long Answers Questions

1. Critically analyse various poems of John Keats.
2. Kindly interpret the following

*Who are these coming to the sacrifice?*

*To what green altar, O mysterious priest,*

*Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,*

*And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?*

*What little town by river or sea shore,*

*Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,*

Keat's Ode on a  
Grecian Urn

## NOTES

*Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?  
And, little town, thy streets for evermore  
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell  
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return  
Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
For ever piping songs for ever new;  
More happy love! more happy, happy love!  
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,  
For ever panting, and for ever young;  
All breathing human passion far above,  
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,  
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.*

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## 3.8 FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 4 BROWNING'S *ANDREA DEL SARTO*

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### NOTES

#### Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Robert Browning: A Biographical Note
  - 4.2.1 Dramatic Monologue
  - 4.2.2 Robert Browning as a Dramatic Monologist
- 4.3 *Andrea Del Sarto*: Critical Analysis
- 4.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.5 Summary
- 4.6 Key Words
- 4.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 4.8 Further Readings

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### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

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Robert Browning is a Victorian poet who is famous for his dramatic monologues. The great achievement of Browning was to break away from the post-Keatsian handling of sensory images and bring back a colloquial vigor to English poetry. Browning developed a remarkable ability to explore character argumentatively and his characters in dramatic monologues are studies of 'psychology of abnormal characters' who are caught at a critical moment of their life and they justify their actions by logic which seems apparently absurd. Dramatic monologue as a genre finds its best exploration in Browning's creativity and the poems we have in syllabus are greatest examples of it, whether it is *Fra Lippo Lippi* or *Porphyria's Lover* or *The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's Church*. In this unit, you will study Browning's *Andrea Del Sarto*.

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### 4.1 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to

- Describe the poetry style of Robert Browning
- Critically analyse the poem *Andrea Del Sarto*
- Discuss Browning's contribution in poems and literature

## 4.2 ROBERT BROWNING: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

### NOTES

Born in Camberwell, South London, Robert Browning (7 May 1812 – 12 December 1889) was raised in a household of significant literary resources. In March 1833, *Pauline, a fragment of a confession* was published anonymously by Saunders and Otley at the expense of the author. In 1838 he visited Italy, looking for background for *Sordello*, a long poem in heroic couplets, presented as the imaginary biography of the Mantuan bard spoken of by Dante in the Divine Comedy, canto 6 of *Purgatory*. Next was *Bells and Pomegranates* (1841-1846), a series of eight pamphlets. In 1845, Browning met the poet Elizabeth Barrett, six years his elder, who lived as a semi-invalid in her father's house in Wimpole Street, London and got married to her on 12 September 1846. In Florence, probably from early in 1853, Browning worked on the poems that eventually comprised his two-volume *Men and Women*, (1855) for which he is now well known. In 1868, after five years work, he completed and published the long blank-verse poem *The Ring and the Book*. Browning is often known by some of his short poems, such as *Porphyria's Lover*, *My Last Duchess*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *How they brought the good News From Ghent to Aix*, *Evelyn Hope*, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, *A Grammarian's Funeral*, *A Death in the Desert*. Browning's fame rests mainly on his dramatic monologues, in which the words not only convey the backdrop and action but also reveal the speaker's character.

### 4.2.1 Dramatic Monologue

From M. H. Abrams, *Glossary of Literary Terms*, Ninth Edition, Wadsworth Cengage Learning, Boston, 2009

A monologue is a lengthy speech by a single person. In a play, when a character utters a monologue that expresses his or her private thoughts, it is called a *soliloquy*. Dramatic monologue, however, does not designate a component in a play, but a type of *lyric poem* that was perfected by Robert Browning. In its fullest form, as represented in Browning's *My Last Duchess*, *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*, *Andrea del Sarto*, and many other poems, the dramatic monologue has the following features: (1) A single person, who is patently *not* the poet, utters the speech that makes up the whole of the poem, in a specific situation at a critical moment: the Duke is negotiating with an emissary for a second wife; the Bishop lies dying; Andrea once more attempts wistfully to believe his wife's lies. (2) This person addresses and interacts with one or more other people; but we know of the auditors' presence, and what they say and do, only from clues in the discourse of the single speaker. (3) The main principle controlling the poet's choice and formulation of what the lyric speaker says is to reveal to the reader, in a way that enhances its interest, the speaker's temperament and character. In monologues such as *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister* and *Caliban upon Setebos*, Browning omits the second feature, the presence of a silent auditor; but features 1 and 3 are the necessary conditions of a dramatic monologue. The

third feature—the focus on self-revelation—serves to distinguish a dramatic monologue from its near relation, the dramatic lyric, which is also a monologue uttered in an identifiable situation at a dramatic moment. John Donne's *The Canonization* and *The Flea* (1613), for example, are dramatic lyrics that lack only one feature of the dramatic monologue: the focus of interest is primarily on the speaker's elaborately ingenious argument, rather than on the character he inadvertently reveals in the course of arguing. And although Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* (1798) is spoken by one person to a silent auditor (his sister) in a specific situation at a significant moment in his life, it is not a dramatic monologue proper, both because we are invited to identify the speaker with the poet himself, and because the organizing principle and focus of interest is not the revelation of the speaker's distinctive temperament, but the evolution of his observations, memories, and thoughts toward the resolution of an emotional problem. Tennyson wrote *Ulysses* (1842) and other dramatic monologues, and the form has been used by H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), Amy Lowell, Robert Frost, E. A. Robinson, Ezra Pound, Robert Lowell, and other poets of the twentieth century. The best-known modern instance is T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915). See Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (1957); Ralph W. Rader, *The Dramatic Monologue and Related Lyric Forms, Critical Inquiry* 3 (1976); and Adena Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre* (1985), chapter 2, *The Dramatic Monologue*.

## NOTES

### 4.2.2 Robert Browning as a Dramatic Monologist

In a dramatic monologue, even though there is only one speaker speaking (therefore monologue), it is still dramatic as there is an actual or implied listener whose questions and queries are anticipated by the speaker and answered making the monologue dramatic. It is an unusual form of poetry in the sense that it is dramatic and yet there is only one speaker. The silence of the listener is not a problem for the readers as the listener's presence is manifest in the poem through the speech of the speaker

It is similar to soliloquy in some sense, but in a soliloquy, there is no implied or actual listener in front of the speaker. In a soliloquy, the speaker talks to himself at a critical juncture of his life when he is undecided about what action he or she should follow thereafter; whereas in a dramatic monologue, the speaker not only talks to himself but also to the speaker at the same time. Thus, this form of poetry is interesting at it allows readers to find out what the speaker is telling himself and what he intends the listener to understand.

For example, in *Porphyria's Lover*, Browning's dramatic monologist, the lover is speaking to the readers explaining why he has murdered his beloved and at the same time making himself understand that he is justified in his actions. As mentioned before, the monologist enters the scene at a critical juncture of his life to justify some act that he has committed. The action of the monologist is mental, psychological and verbal, that is, the speech includes pleading, informing, reminiscing, meditating and justifying oneself. The monologist asks the readers to suspend his or her sense of judgment as it thrives on reader's sympathy. In most cases, we see that the Browning's dramatic monologist is an obsessive and neurotic

*Browning's Andrea Del Sarto* character suffering from 'I' syndrome and has great rhetorical capability. The dramatic monologue form is 'a fusion of two kinds of poetry into one – the lyric and the dramatic, subjective and pictorial.'

## NOTES

Browning's dramatic monologues are not just concerned with passions, but with the 'psychology of passions' of unstable characters who at some critical point of their life sets into a rhetorical mode to justify his action through a dramatic monologue. Browning's monologues grow out of some critical situation in the life of the principal figure and embody the reactions of that figure to that particular situation. Placed in such a situation, the speaker indulges in self analysis and self introspection and in this way his soul is laid bare in the poem.

Let us take two examples: *Porphyria's Lover* and *My Last Duchess*. Both the dramatic monologues deal with man- woman relationships, both the speakers are male and murderers. Porphyria's lover is a soliloquy in isolation as there is no listener though the lover speaks dramatically. The lover of Porphyria lives in a world of obsession and nightmare. He kills his beloved for he suspects her fidelity. To him, she is a 'bee' and the moment this 'bee' surrenders and begins to worship him (the bud) – her deity – he shuts her forever. She is strangled to death. He justifies his crime by saying that he strangled his beloved while she did not feel any pain and her smiling head was glad to rest itself on his shoulders. He fondly believes that god by remaining silent has accepted his superiority and condoned this sinister act. But the readers are able to discern that in his attempt to reassure himself the mad lover has betrayed his anxiety, his sullenness and his vexation. We get to know that he has not only a great rhetorical competence but also suffers from the 'I' Syndrome.

In *My Last Duchess*, the Duke, the dramatic monologist, is a polished, sophisticated Italian aristocrat, an autocrat, a product of renaissance, arrogant, avaricious, status-conscious, and connoisseur of art. Like all the other speakers of dramatic monologue, the Duke is aggressive, socially and intellectually superior to his listener. From the very beginning he asserts his superiority over the listener by forcing him to observe the last duchess' portrait, to hear what he has to say and not to read the meaning of her life, like painted countenance with passionate glance and cheerful blush and half flush. The Duke in his own typically narcissistic self delineation puts himself in the spot light and turns the listener into a shadow. The envoy is compelled to listen to his story suspending all his power of judgment. The dramatic monologues are basically concerned with human psychology. George Santayana thought that Browning's personae always displayed 'traits of character and never attains character at all.'

### Check Your Progress

1. Why is the monologue considered as dramatic?
2. Describe the dramatic monologist of *My Last Duchess*.

### 4.3 *ANDREA DEL SARTO: CRITICAL ANALYSIS*

But do not let us quarrel any more,  
 No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:  
 Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.  
 You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?  
 I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,  
 Treat his own subject after his own way,  
 Fix his own time, accept too his own price,  
 And shut the money into this small hand  
 When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?  
 Oh, I'll content him,—but to-morrow, Love!  
 I often am much wearier than you think,  
 This evening more than usual, and it seems  
 As if—forgive now—should you let me sit  
 Here by the window with your hand in mine  
 And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,  
 Both of one mind, as married people use,  
 Quietly, quietly the evening through,  
 I might get up to-morrow to my work  
 Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.  
 To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this!  
 Your soft hand is a woman of itself,  
 And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.  
 Don't count the time lost, neither; you must serve  
 For each of the five pictures we require:  
 It saves a model. So! keep looking so—  
 My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds!  
 —How could you ever prick those perfect ears,  
 Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet—  
 My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,  
 Which everybody looks on and calls his,  
 And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,  
 While she looks—no one's: very dear, no less.  
 You smile? why, there's my picture ready made,  
 There's what we painters call our harmony!  
 A common greyness silvers everything,—  
 All in a twilight, you and I alike

### NOTES

**NOTES**

—You, at the point of your first pride in me  
(That's gone you know),—but I, at every point;  
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down  
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.  
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;  
That length of convent-wall across the way  
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;  
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,  
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.  
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape  
As if I saw alike my work and self  
And all that I was born to be and do,  
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.  
How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead;  
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!  
I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!  
This chamber for example—turn your head—  
All that's behind us! You don't understand  
Nor care to understand about my art,  
But you can hear at least when people speak:  
And that cartoon, the second from the door  
—It is the thing, Love! so such things should be—  
Behold Madonna!—I am bold to say.  
I can do with my pencil what I know,  
What I see, what at bottom of my heart  
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—  
Do easily, too—when I say, perfectly,  
I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,  
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,  
And just as much they used to say in France.  
At any rate 'tis easy, all of it!  
No sketches first, no studies, that's long past:  
I do what many dream of, all their lives,  
—Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,  
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such  
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,  
Who strive—you don't know how the others strive  
To paint a little thing like that you smeared



Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,—  
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,  
(I know his name, no matter)—so much less!  
Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.  
There burns a truer light of God in them,  
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,  
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt  
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.  
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,  
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,  
Enter and take their place there sure enough,  
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.  
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.  
The sudden blood of these men! at a word—  
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.  
I, painting from myself and to myself,  
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame  
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks  
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,  
His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,  
Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?  
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?  
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey,  
Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!  
I know both what I want and what might gain,  
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh  
"Had I been two, another and myself,  
"Our head would have o'erlooked the world!" No doubt.  
Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth  
The Urbinate who died five years ago.  
( 'Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)  
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,  
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,  
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,  
Above and through his art—for it gives way;  
That arm is wrongly put—and there again—  
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,

## NOTES

**NOTES**

Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,  
He means right—that, a child may understand.  
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:  
But all the play, the insight and the stretch—  
(Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?  
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,  
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!  
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think—  
More than I merit, yes, by many times.  
But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,  
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,  
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird  
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare —  
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!  
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged  
“God and the glory! never care for gain.  
“The present by the future, what is that?  
“Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!  
“Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!”  
I might have done it for you. So it seems:  
Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.  
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;  
The rest avail not. Why do I need you?  
What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?  
In this world, who can do a thing, will not;  
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:  
Yet the will's somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—  
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,  
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.  
'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,  
That I am something underrated here,  
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.  
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,  
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.  
The best is when they pass and look aside;  
But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.  
Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,  
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!

I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,  
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,  
In that humane great monarch's golden look,—  
One finger in his beard or twisted curl  
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,  
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,  
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,  
I painting proudly with his breath on me,  
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,  
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls  
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—  
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,  
This in the background, waiting on my work,  
To crown the issue with a last reward!  
A good time, was it not, my kingly days?  
And had you not grown restless... but I know—  
'Tis done and past: 'twas right, my instinct said:  
Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,  
And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt  
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.  
How could it end in any other way?  
You called me, and I came home to your heart.  
The triumph was—to reach and stay there; since  
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?  
Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,  
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!  
“Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;  
“The Roman's is the better when you pray,  
“But still the other's Virgin was his wife—”  
Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge  
Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows  
My better fortune, I resolve to think.  
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,  
Said one day Agnolo, his very self,  
To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .  
(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts  
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,  
Too lifted up in heart because of it)

## NOTES

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“Friend, there’s a certain sorry little scrub  
“Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,  
“Who, were he set to plan and execute  
“As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,  
“Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!”  
To Rafael’s!—And indeed the arm is wrong.  
I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see,  
Give the chalk here—quick, thus, the line should go!  
Ay, but the soul! he’s Rafael! rub it out!  
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,  
(What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?  
Do you forget already words like those?)  
If really there was such a chance, so lost,—  
Is, whether you’re—not grateful—but more pleased.  
Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!  
This hour has been an hour! Another smile?  
If you would sit thus by me every night  
I should work better, do you comprehend?  
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.  
See, it is settled dusk now; there’s a star;  
Morello’s gone, the watch-lights show the wall,  
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.  
Come from the window, love,—come in, at last,  
Inside the melancholy little house  
We built to be so gay with. God is just.  
King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights  
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,  
The walls become illumined, brick from brick  
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,  
That gold of his I did cement them with!  
Let us but love each other. Must you go?  
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?  
Must see you—you, and not with me? Those loans?  
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?  
Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?  
While hand and eye and something of a heart  
Are left me, work’s my ware, and what’s it worth?  
I’ll pay my fancy. Only let me sit

The grey remainder of the evening out,  
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly  
How I could paint, were I but back in France,  
One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face,  
Not yours this time! I want you at my side  
To hear them—that is, Michel Agnolo—  
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.  
Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.  
I take the subjects for his corridor,  
Finish the portrait out of hand—there, there,  
And throw him in another thing or two  
If he demurs; the whole should prove enough  
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,  
What's better and what's all I care about,  
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff!  
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,  
The Cousin! what does he to please you more?  
I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.  
I regret little, I would change still less.  
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?  
The very wrong to Francis!—it is true  
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,  
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.  
My father and my mother died of want.  
Well, had I riches of my own? you see  
How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot.  
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died:  
And I have laboured somewhat in my time  
And not been paid profusely. Some good son  
Paint my two hundred pictures—let him try!  
No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,  
You loved me quite enough. it seems to-night.  
This must suffice me here. What would one have?  
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—  
Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,  
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,  
For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me  
To cover—the three first without a wife,

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While I have mine! So—still they overcome  
Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.  
Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love.

## NOTES

### Critical Appreciation

The poem *Andrea del Sarto* is another of Browning's dramatic monologues which deals with a historical Renaissance painter who is the monologist and his wife Lucrezia is the silent listener. Andrea del Sarto, like Fra Lippo Lippi, lived and worked in Florence, a little later than Lippo, and was appointed court painter by Francis, the King of France. Andrea del Sarto left France for Italy with the money from the French King Francis to buy Italian artworks for the court. With that money and the money of his own for his commissioned paintings, he bought a house in Italy and never returned to France. This poem starts when Andrea is in the house he has bought with the stolen money, as he thinks back on his career and laments that his worldly concerns have kept him from fulfilling his promise as a great artist. He laments how the nagging of his wife for earthly concerns has made him a material being that had to care least about his artistic life. He and Lucrezia are now sitting at their window of their newly acquired house and he talks to her of his relative successes and failures. Although Michelangelo (here, Michel Agnolo) and Raphael (Rafael) enjoyed higher inspiration and better patronage and achieved greater heights in art, he thinks that he had better talent than them. He moreover comments that they lacked nagging wives. Andrea del Sarto is a better craftsman, a better artist, and therefore he is able to point out the problems with the Great Masters' work. Thus Andrea may be a technically superior artist (therefore the subtitle *The Faultless Painter*), but it is the works of other great artists that has triumphed at being successful as they have emotional and spiritual advantage over Andrea's work of arts.

Andrea del Sarto is now at the twilight of his career and his marriage (as Lucrezia's Cousin—probably her lover—keeps whistling for her to come). Lucrezia apparently either owes the man gambling debts or has promised to cover his own. The worried Andrea gives his wife Lucrezia some money and even promises to sell paintings to pay off her debts, and sends her away to her 'Cousin.' For himself, he decides to sit quietly and dream of painting in Heaven. It can be said that *Andrea del Sarto* is a poem which provides the musings of a defeated man.

Though the poem is set in the time of Renaissance, it can also be read as a poem of the Victorian era. On the one hand, Browning is making a commentary on the Renaissance—the beginning of modern day capitalism, where materialism as a way of life was getting significant day by day. It was at that time the poem is set, when Andrea left his artistic endeavours in the court to live a materialistic life. Materialism in the Victorian Era became much more significant as it was an age when Capitalism was at its peak. At such a juncture of history Andrea del Sarto's monologue concerning his relative success and failures is significant as it tells the significance of materialism in life and where materialistic pursuits take a person. It

makes one mean and leads to a situation when one day the person realizes that what he was running after was nothing but material things which can in no way satisfy the soul. The same thing has happened to Andrea. He may compare himself with the great artists of the day and say that he was better than them, but today nobody knows him. The reason being that in his material pursuits he has forgotten that everything in life and cannot be understood and weighed according to the material things one possesses. Therefore in some way or the other the poem is a critique of Victorian materialism. It is not only true of the Victorian age, but also true about today's world. Even today we do the same when we run after material accomplishments, forgetting the fact that we will leave all and die one day. And when we die, no one will remember us for the material things that we have gathered in our life time, but if people remember then that would be for the things that we have given to humanity. Andrea did not and could not (as he proclaims) give much, instead he had stolen for the sake of material pleasures. Now at the end of it all, he weighs his life and finds that such accomplishments that he has achieved are of no value.

Moreover, the poem can also be seen as deeply male chauvinist. One of the reasons that Andrea says that motivated him to carry on with the material things in his life is his nagging wife who forced him to leave his artistic pursuit and take up materialistic pleasures. The fact that he himself wanted it in his life is camouflaged under the garb of nagging wife. His own failures are not accepted by him. Moreover, he tries to say that it is because of his wife Lucrezia that he is in such a state. Being patriarchal he tries to locate fault with his wife, as one does not give credit to a female when one is successful, but when one is defeated, the discredit goes to the female. This is a deeply patriarchal attitude and Andrea shows it throughout the poem. He feels a deep sense of melancholy, in which 'a common grayness silvers everything' (line 35), and desires that Lucrezia would pull him from it. He tells her that if she were to smile for him, he probably would be able to come out of the sadness that is enveloping his soul. Andrea considers himself a failure as an artist, both because Lucrezia has lost her 'first pride' (line 37) in him and because he has only one talent: the ability to create faultless paintings. Though many praise him for creating flawless reproductions, which he admits he does easily, with 'no sketches first, no studies' (line 68), Andrea is aware that his work lacks the spirit and soul that bless his contemporaries Rafael and Michel Agnolo (Michelangelo). Considering himself only a 'craftsman' (line 82), he knows they are able to glimpse heaven whereas he is stuck with earthly desires.

As he surveys a painting that has been sent to him and says that it has imperfections which he could easily fix, but a 'soul' (line 108) he could never capture as he does not have the ability to do so. He blames Lucrezia for denying him the soul that could have made him great, and while he forgives her for her beauty, he accuses her of not having a 'mind' (line 126) that could have inspired him. He wonders whether what makes his contemporary painters greater is their lack of a nagging wife.

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Andrea then reminisces about the past lives of the Masters. Long before, he had painted in France for the royal court, producing work of which both he and Lucrezia were proud. But when she grew 'restless' (line 165), they set off for Italy, where they bought a house and he became less inspired. However, he contemplates that it could have gone no other way, since fate intended him to be with Lucrezia, and he hopes future generations will forgive him off his choices.

As evidence of his talent, he recalls how Michelangelo once complimented his talent to Rafael, but quickly loses that excitement about himself and focuses on the imperfections of the painting in front of him and his own failings. He begs Lucrezia to stay with him more often, sure that her love will inspire him to greater achievements, and he could thereby 'earn more, give [her] more' (line 207).

Lucrezia is called from outside, by her cousin, who is implicitly her lover, and Andrea begs her to stay. He notes that the cousin has 'loans' (line 221) that need paying, and says he will pay those if she stays. She seems to decline the offer and to insist she will leave.

In the poem's final section, Andrea grows melancholic again and insists that he does 'regret little... would change still less' (line 245). He justifies having fled France and sold out his artistic integrity and praises himself for his prolific faultless paintings. He notes again that Lucrezia is a part of his failure, but insists that she was his choice. Finally, he gives her leave to go to her cousin.

The poem is a psychological study of a renaissance painter whose defeat makes us evaluate our own life. It is a poem where materialism is being scrutinized. Moreover, when we read the poem along with other dramatic monologues of Browning we see that Andrea del Sarto is not similar to the other dramatic monologists – whereas the Lover in *Porphyria's Lover* or in *Fra Lippo Lippi* are men who try to assert themselves as superior individuals and therefore are justified in all that they are doing; Andrea is presented as a resigned defeated man who accepts defeat in life and reflects upon it.

### Check Your Progress

3. In which era was the poem set in?
4. Why is the poem considered as a male chauvinist poem?

## 4.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. In a dramatic monologue, even though there is only one speaker speaking (therefore monologue), it is still dramatic as there is an actual or implied listener whose questions and queries are anticipated by the speaker and answered making the monologue dramatic.



2. In *My Last Duchess*, the Duke, the dramatic monologist, is a polished, sophisticated Italian aristocrat, an autocrat, a product of renaissance, arrogant, avaricious, status-conscious, and connoisseur of art.
3. Though the poem is set in the time of Renaissance, it can also be read as a poem of the Victorian era. On the one hand, Browning is making a commentary on the Renaissance – the beginning of modern day capitalism, where materialism as a way of life was getting significant day by day. It was at that time the poem is set, when Andrea left his artistic endeavours in the court to live a materialistic life. Materialism in the Victorian Era became much more significant as it was an age when Capitalism was at its peak
4. The poem is considered as a chauvinist poem because, one of the reasons that Andrea says that motivated him to carry on with the material things in his life is his nagging wife. The fact that he himself wanted it in his life is camouflaged under the garb of nagging wife. His own failures are not accepted by him. Moreover, he tries to say that it is because of his wife Lucrezia that he is in such a state.

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### 4.5 SUMMARY

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- Born in Camberwell, South London, Robert Browning (7 May 1812 – 12 December 1889) was raised in a household of significant literary resources.
- Browning is often known by some of his short poems, such as *Porphyria's Lover*, *My Last Duchess*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *How they brought the good News From Ghent to Aix*, *Evelyn Hope*, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, *A Grammarian's Funeral*, *A Death in the Desert*.
- Browning's fame rests mainly on his dramatic monologues, in which the words not only convey the backdrop and action but also reveal the speaker's character.
- In a dramatic monologue, even though there is only one speaker speaking (therefore monologue), it is still dramatic as there is an actual or implied listener whose questions and queries are anticipated by the speaker and answered making the monologue dramatic.
- In a soliloquy, the speaker talks to himself at a critical juncture of his life when he is undecided about what action he or she should follow thereafter; whereas in a dramatic monologue, the speaker not only talks to himself but also to the speaker at the same time.
- Browning's dramatic monologues are not just concerned with passions, but with the 'psychology of passions' of unstable characters who at some critical point of their life sets into a rhetorical mode to justify his action through a dramatic monologue.

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- The dramatic monologues are basically concerned with human psychology.
- The poem *Andrea del Sarto* is another of Browning's dramatic monologues which deals with a historical Renaissance painter who is the monologist and his wife Lucrezia is the silent listener.
- This poem starts when Andrea is in the house he has bought with the stolen money, as he thinks back on his career and laments that his worldly concerns have kept him from fulfilling his promise as a great artist.
- Andrea may be a technically superior artist (therefore the subtitle *The Faultless Painter*), but it is the works of other great artists that has triumphed at being successful as they have emotional and spiritual advantage over Andrea's work of arts.
- It can be said that *Andrea del Sarto* is a poem which provides the musings of a defeated man.
- Though the poem is set in the time of Renaissance, it can also be read as a poem of the Victorian era
- the poem can also be seen as deeply male chauvinist. One of the reasons that Andrea says that motivated him to carry on with the material things in his life is his nagging wife
- Andrea considers himself a failure as an artist, both because Lucrezia has lost her 'first pride' (line 37) in him and because he has only one talent: the ability to create faultless paintings.
- Andrea then reminisces about the past lives of the Masters. Long before, he had painted in France for the royal court, producing work of which both he and Lucrezia were proud
- As evidence of his talent, he recalls how Michelangelo once complimented his talent to Rafael, but quickly loses that excitement about himself and focuses on the imperfections of the painting in front of him and his own failings
- In the poem's final section, Andrea grows melancholic again and insists that he does 'regret little... would change still less'
- The poem is a psychological study of a renaissance painter whose defeat makes us evaluate our own life. It is a poem where materialism is being scrutinized.

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## 4.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Melancholy:** It is a state of relentless sadness without any perceived reason.
- **Male Chauvinism:** It means a state of male prejudice against women and feeling males are superior in every aspect of mental, physical than women.

- **Monologue:** It refers to a long single one sided speech by the actor/ *Browning's Andrea Del Sarto* character without being addressed to anyone.
- **Soliloquy:** It is an act of saying or acting of one's thoughts aloud.

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### 4.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note of Robert Browning's life.
2. what is different between a dramatic monologue and a soliloquy?
3. Who is Andrea del Sarto?
4. Briefly analyse the following verse: *But do not let us quarrel.....go rounds and rounds.*

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Explain the nature of Robert Browning as a dramatic monologist.
2. Critically appreciate the following verse  
*So free my love.....Go My Love.*

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### 4.8 FURTHER READINGS

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- Prasad B. 2014. *A Background to the Study of English Literature*. India: Macmillan.
- Albert, Edward. 1979. *History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Drew, Philip. 1970. *The Poetry of Robert Browning: A Critical Introduction*. London: Methuen.
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**BLOCK - II**  
**POETRY - II**

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**NOTES**

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**UNIT 5 READING ROBERT  
FROST'S *THE ROAD NOT  
TAKEN***

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**Structure**

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 About the Author
- 5.3 Critical Analysis of *The Road Not Taken*
- 5.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 5.5 Summary
- 5.6 Key Words
- 5.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 5.8 Further ReadingS

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**5.0 INTRODUCTION**

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The American poet Robert Frost is regarded as one of the best Modernist poets. However, initially he was not accepted as one, but when his poems were studied and understood, it was discovered that his poems were laced with all the Modernist features that existed. His poem *The Road Not Taken* depicts the dilemma of the poet wondering which road he should tread on.

This unit discusses the features of Robert Frost's poems so as to substantiate his writings as those of a modern poet. Frost's philosophy of life and a critical analysis of his poem *The Road Not Taken* is also discussed in this unit.

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**5.1 OBJECTIVES**

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

- Describe Robert Frost's contribution to poetry as a modernist poet
- Explain Frost's philosophy of life
- Discuss *The Road Not Taken* as a modern poem
- Analyse the poem *The Road Not Taken*

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## 5.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Reading Robert Frost's  
*The Road Not Taken*

Critics have regarded Robert Frost as a traditional 19th century poet, and have emphatically denied his modernity. It has been pointed out that his poetry has a disarming simplicity while modern poetry is characterized by complexity and intricacy. According to the critics, in Frost's poetry, we do not find irregular verse, fragmentary sentences, learned allusions and references, ironic contrasts, and erudite and abstruse symbolism, all of which are regarded as the hallmark of modernity.

Frost writes of mountains, fields and brooks, and of farmers at their humble task; these things have become part of our imaginative inheritance and one must be insensitive, indeed, not to be conscious of the beauty in them. But, there are other subjects now more frequently before our eyes such as factories, skyscrapers, machines, etc. One of the most serious limitations of Frost's poetry is that he is out of tune with modern age and all its problems. Moreover, Frost admires man as a creature of impulse and instinct, and ridicules the idea of man as a reasoning being, and this is in contrast opposition to modern thought. In this respect, he has his affinities with the great 19th century romantics rather than with the great moderns. Some say his work is rural and leads folks not to seek to solve complex problems, but only to escape from social responsibilities. Robert Frost was neither radical nor conservative.

However, such views arise from a one-sided, superficial reading of his poetry. Cleanth Brooks, John Lyden, Lionel Trilling and a host of other competent critics have now conclusively shown that Frost is essentially a modern poet, and that the surface simplicity of his poetry is deceptive and misleading. There is no doubt that he withdraws into rural New England and writes of New Englanders, of their simple occupations carried on in their primitive setting, away from the haunts of modern civilization, and the concerns of modern life. However, John Lyden points out, 'his retreat into country side is not a romantic escape from the harsh, unpleasant realities of modern life, rather, it provides him with a point of view, a frame of reference, for studying and commenting on the facts of modern life.'

It is the same method of indirection as is used by such modern poets as T.S. Eliot. Just as Eliot in his poems, for example, *The Waste Land*, juxtaposes the present; and the past is made to reveal and interpret the present, in the same manner, Frost juxtaposes the rural and the urban. And, as is in Eliot, the comment is implicit rather than explicit. A simple everyday situation from rural life is presented, and the situation is such that it serves to illuminate and clarify some aspects or problems peculiar to the modern age. Thus, in the *Mending Wall*, the necessity of fences is emphasised, 'Good fences make good neighbours'.

Frost is modern in his attitude towards nature. Nineteenth century poets picture nature as benevolent and kind, they emphasised the harmony, the oneness, of man and nature. Modern science, on the other hand, conceives of nature as merely matter, soulless and mechanical, and so entirely different from, and alien to,

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man. Frost, too, constantly emphasises this, 'otherness' of nature. He is a great poet of boundaries, and he shows at every step that some fence or boundary ever separates man from nature. Another sense in which Frost is truly a modern poet is his portrayal of the disintegration of values in modern life and disillusionment of the modern man. Most of his poems deal with characters who suffer from frustration and isolation for instance in poems like, *The Waste Land*.

Frost's poetry reflects modern life not in the events and conditions, but it brings out the central facts of 20th century experience—the uncertain and painful sense of loss. The poem *The Road Not Taken* depicts the confusion which prevails in modern life. The modern man does not know which way to go and it is difficult for him to make a choice of the means he should adopt in order to come out of the present impasse. He is confused and his life does not have a clear purpose. The protagonist in the poem (the poet himself) represents the modern man, who habitually wastes energy in regretting any choice made but belatedly sighs over the attractive alternative which he rejected:

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Some ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood and I—  
I took the one less travelled by  
And that has made all the difference.*

There are several levels in Frost's poetry. The common man may read him for charming depictions of rural scenery and rural life. They may go to him in order to escape from the 'urban murk and roar', on the other hand, some may read him for his presentation of the human predicament in an alien, if not hostile, environment. They may read him for the clarification and illumination which he provides. A careful reading reveals that Frost's simplicity is deceptive, that his poetry has layers within layers of meaning. This expressiveness and richness of texture becomes possible only because Frost, like the modernists, employs a metaphysical-symbolist technique of expression. In the manner of the metaphysical poets and their 20th century admirers, he juxtaposes such opposites as man and nature, the rural and the urban, and the regional and the universal. He seeks the synthesis of such opposites in the same way as, 'my two eyes make one sight'.

*Mending Wall* is a symbolic poem, in which the poet symbolizes the conflict between the new trend of bringing down barriers between men and nations, and the old view that for good neighbourly relations, fences and boundaries are essential. The poem relates as an anecdote typical of the conservative approach of the rural people in New England, but its implication has universal application. In this way, the poem becomes a symbol of the modern conflict in people's mind. The poet simply portrays that conflict, and does not give his judgment on it, because in spite of his standing for the bringing down of barriers, he appreciates the view of his neighbour who insists on following the old principle of his forefathers that 'Good fences make good neighbours.'

He may not depict the outward conditions and events of modern life, but the central facts of modern experience, the uncertainty, sense of loss, the disintegration are all there, and they seem more bleak and terrifying because they are presented in their nakedness, stripped of all their social, political and economic manifestations. And his mode of expression is symbolic and indirect. All this is the mark of a genuinely modern poetry.

### **Frost's Philosophy of Life**

Frost's poetry is a representation of his view on Man, God and Nature which are a measure of his sanity and profundity. As Wilfrid Gibson tells us, beneath his apparent simplicity and whimsicality, there runs, 'the clear stream' of his, 'rich and ripe philosophy'. Therefore, it would be justified in calling him a poet-philosopher. Frost has written a large number of poems which are essentially philosophical. By philosophical poetry, it is meant that the poetry that raises fundamental questions about life, death and man's destiny in this universe. Frost does certainly raise philosophical questions, though his answers are vague and often ambivalent. The reason for this vagueness and ambiguity is that Frost does not have any systematic or coherent philosophy to preach. It is impossible to reduce Frost's philosophical thinking to a diagrammatic accuracy. In this connection, it should be noted what Frost says in the following lines:

*We dance round in a ring and suppose,  
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.*

In other words, it is impossible to solve the mystery of the universe in which we live. Frost pictures man as a solitary, lonely figure, isolated and alienated from Nature, God, and his fellowmen. He conceives of Nature as soulless, mechanical and impersonal. Man and Nature are two different principles separated from each other by barriers. Nature may, on some special occasions, show some love or concern for Man, but such occasions are in the nature of a 'favour', and not the general rule. Man is a lonely and solitary figure in a vast and alien universe. He is also alienated from God, his maker. His reason, i.e. his rational-self, is the barrier that separates him from God. In the poem, *The Bear*, rational man is said to act like a bear in a cage in his attempts to understand the mystery of the universe. Man's reason is imperfect, and through reason he cannot understand either the ways of God, or the mystery of life.

Human life on this earth is a trial and, therefore, suffering is inherent in the human lot. In another poem, the poet goes to the extent of saying that there is no God at all to listen to human shrieks and cries:

*I turned to speak to God  
About the worlds despair;*

In short, God in Frost's poetry is either a creature of man's own imagination or so remote from him as to be meaningless. Frost is a realist. He studies the human predicament, examines its different facets, and then suggests ways and

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means by which the human lot can be improved and bettered. First, he suggests that we must respect the 'otherness' of individuals, and try not to impose ourselves upon anybody. Distances must be maintained. In *Mending Wall*, he teaches us that, 'Good fences make good neighbours'. Amicable human relationship is possible only in this way. Loneliness and alienation may be the subject of his inquiry in many of his poems, but this does not mean that he admires isolation, and dislikes democracy and brotherhood. Rather, he advocates the Aristotelian golden mean between self-centeredness and self-love, and society and companionship. A man must try to understand his fellow men and love and sympathy would follow upon such understanding. Healthy social life is possible only in this way. Frost's pre-occupation with the theme of alienation may be taken as a psychological expression of his intensely felt need for human society.

Second, he advocates devotion to work which, in his view, is necessary to make life bearable. Nature is imperfect and chaotic, and man must seek to perfect and order it through a constant process of 'gardening. Fact is the sweetest dream that labour knows, and one must do one's duty under all circumstances. For instance in his poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, the woods may be 'lovely and deep', but their enchantment must not make one forget that:

*But I have promises to keep  
And miles to go before I sleep.*

The true purpose of life is to test the heroism of the human soul. Therefore, one must struggle and dare and suffer the uttermost on Earth, for only in this way can man deserve the bliss of heaven, and the mercy of God. Third, he advocates that man must have faith in God. The mystery of life and the ways of God cannot be understood through reason. His salvation lies in absolute faith. While on earth, do your duty with sincerity and devotion and with faith in the divine. Fourth, it should be remembered that in postulating as soulless and mechanistic universe, he is merely echoing the teaching of modern science. Nature is pure matter and man has a soul or spirit. Frost repeatedly asserts the superiority of man over nature. Man is superior to the lower creatures and other objects of nature.

In short, Frost is a wise poet-philosopher who advocates not a rejection of life, but an acceptance of it with all its limitations. He loves the world and life in it, even though he often finds faults and quarrels with it as a lover. In *Birches* he tells us, 'Earth is the right place for love'. He does not regard the universe as chaotic, though he is conscious of many imperfections. He does not shut his eyes to the hardness of man's lot, but suggests ways and means for its amelioration.

### Check Your Progress

1. State one limitation of Frost's poetry.
2. What do you understand by philosophical poetry?



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### 5.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *THE ROAD NOT TAKEN*

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Reading Robert Frost's  
*The Road Not Taken*

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth; 5*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same, 10*

*And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back. 15*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference. 20*

#### Critical Analysis of the Poem

Robert Frost is one of the best poets of America and was awarded with the Pulitzer Prize four times. He is a romantic as well as a realist. Most of the themes of his poems revolve around man and nature. He is a poet of reconciling materialism and spiritualism, dignity and desire, aspirations and limitations. Most of his poems take place in pastoral setting.

*The Road Not Taken* is one of the finest and the most popular of the lyrics published in 1916 in the volume of poems titled *Mountain Interval*. It is one of those lyrics which combine 'inner lyric vision and the outer contemplative narration'. The poet's imagination is set at work by the difficulty of choosing one of the two roads, which diverge at a particular point, and he comments on the difficulty and significance of making a choice in general. As G.W. Nitcher points out, the problem of making a choice is a very significant theme in Frost's poetry.

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In the poem, *The Road Not Taken*, the narrator while travelling reaches a place where the road bifurcates into two. He looked carefully observed both the roads. Both of them were grassy and were covered with leaves. One of them seemed less trodden by the travellers. He could not decide which road to take. Finally, he chose one because it seemed a little less frequented though actually there was no such difference for he says, 'the passing there had worn them really about the same'. Yet, even at the moment of choice, the poet was of the view that the choice was important, that he would someday tell himself he took the less travelled road. And that has made all the difference.

The poem is didactic in nature. Many a times in life one faces situations where one has to decide and make a choice, and the choices that are made decides one's future. Thus, it is important to make choices that helps one grow as a person and adds to one's experiences in life. No one can go back to his/her childhood to start all over again. Thus, one should be very conscious while making choices in life. What is done cannot be undone. The same was done by Frost which has made all the difference. One can also argue that perhaps, he is indicating his choice of becoming a poet, and how despite the difficult path, chose it anyway. The road that Robert Frost took was not only the 'different' road, the right road for him, but it was also the only road he could have taken. As Untermeyer points out, 'it was the "choice" the poet made which determined his destiny, and made him a poet different from others. It is in this way that the future is determined. It is that even minor decisions have far reaching and life-long consequences. A step once taken, a way once chosen, can never be retraced.'

*The Road Not Taken* is a poem which has been much admired and much-quoted, as well as much misunderstood and criticized. It is a great lyric which records a personal experience of the poet but from the personal and the individual, the poet soon rises to the universal and the general. The poet's experiences becomes symbolic of human experiences in all ages and countries. The difficulty of making a choice is a universal one, and in this way the lyric is true to universal experience. However, some critics argue that, 'He regards it as the work of a spiritual drifter one who fails to make a definite choice. He writes, *The Road Not Taken*, for example, is the poem of a man whom one might fairly call a spiritual drifter; and a spiritual drifter is unlikely to have either the intelligence or the energy to become a major poet. Yet the poem has definite virtues, and these should not be overlooked. In the first place, spiritual drifters exist, they are real; and although their decisions may not be comprehensible, their predicament is comprehensible. The poem renders the experience of such a person, and renders the uncertain melancholy of his plight. Had Frost been a more intelligent man, he might have seen that the plight of the spiritual drifter was not inevitable; he might have written a greater poem. But his poem is good as far as it goes; the trouble is that it does not go far enough, it is incomplete, and it puts on the reader the burden of critical intelligence which ought to be borne by the poet.'

The language of the lyric is characterized by simplicity, clarity, and epigrammatic force and terseness. There are four stanzas each of five lines. Each line consists of eight syllables, though variations have been skilfully introduced to impart the informalities and casualness of the spoken tongue. It is a personal lyric and as such it does not have the parentheses, the dashes, the pauses and ejaculations which characterize the dramatic lyrics.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

3. When was *The Road Not Taken* published?
4. What is the language and structure employed in the poem *The Road Not Taken*?

## 5.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. One limitation of Frost's poetry is that he is considered to be out of tune with modern age and all its problems.
2. Philosophical poetry refers to that branch of poetry which raises fundamental questions about life, death and man's destiny in this universe.
3. *The Road Not Taken* was published in 1916 in the volume of poems titled *Mountain Interval*.
4. The language of the poem *The Road Not Taken* is characterized by simplicity, clarity, and epigrammatic force and terseness. There are four stanzas each of five lines. Each line consists of eight syllables.

## 5.5 SUMMARY

- Critics have regarded Frost as a traditional nineteenth century poet, and have emphatically denied his modernity. It has been pointed out that his poetry has a disarming simplicity while modern poetry is characterized by complexity and intricacy.
- According to the critics, in Frost's poetry, we do not find irregular verse, fragmentary sentences, learned illusions and references, ironic contrasts, and erudite and abstruse symbolism, all of which are regarded as the hallmark of modernity.
- However, such views arise from a one-sided, superficial reading of his poetry. Cleanth Brooks, John Lynen, Trilling and a host of other competent critics have now conclusively shown that Frost is essentially a modern poet, and that the surface simplicity of his poetry is deceptive and misleading.
- Just as Eliot in his poems, for example, *The Waste Land*, juxtaposes the

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- present; and the past is made to reveal and interpret the present, in the same manner, Frost juxtaposes the rural and the urban.
- Frost is modern in his attitude towards nature. The 19th century poets picture nature as benevolent and kind, they emphasised the harmony, the oneness, of man and nature.
  - Modern science, on the other hand, conceives of nature as merely matter, soulless and mechanical, and so entirely different from, and alien to, man. Frost, too, constantly emphasises this, 'otherness' of nature.
  - The poem *The Road Not Taken* depicts the confusion which prevails in modern life. The modern man does not know which way to go and it is difficult for him to make a choice of the means he should adopt in order to come out of the present impasse.
  - There are several levels in Frost's poetry. The common man may read him for charming depictions of rural scenery and rural life. They may go to him in order to escape from the 'urban murk and roar', on the other hand, some may read him for his presentation of the human predicament in an alien, if not hostile, environment.
  - *Mending Wall* is a symbolic poem, in which the poet symbolizes the conflict between the new trend of bringing down barriers between men and nations, and the old view that for good neighbourly relations, fences and boundaries are essential.
  - Frost's poetry is a representation of his view on Man, God and Nature which are a measure of his sanity and profundity.
  - As Wilfrid Gibson tells us, beneath Frost's apparent simplicity and whimsicality, there runs, 'the clear stream' of his, 'rich and ripe philosophy'.
  - Frost pictures man as a solitary, lonely figure, isolated and alienated from Nature, God, and his fellowmen. He conceives of Nature as soulless, mechanical and impersonal.
  - In the poem, *The Bear*, rational man is said to act like a bear in a cage in his attempts to understand the mystery of the universe. Man's reason is imperfect, and through reason he cannot understand either the ways of God, or the mystery of life.
  - Frost is a wise poet-philosopher who advocates not a rejection of life, but an acceptance of it with all its limitations.
  - *The Road Not Taken* is one of the finest and the most popular of the lyrics published in 1916 in the volume of poems titled *Mountain Interval*. It is one of those lyrics which combine 'inner lyric vision and the outer contemplative narration'.

- Frost's imagination is set at work by the difficulty of choosing one of the two roads, which diverge at a particular point, and he comments on the difficulty and significance of making a choice in general.
- The language of the lyric is characterized by simplicity, clarity, and epigrammatic force and terseness. There are four stanzas each of five lines. Each line consists of eight syllables, though variations have been skilfully introduced to impart the informalities and casualness of the spoken tongue.
- It is a personal lyric and as such it does not have the parentheses, the dashes, the pauses and ejaculations which characterize the dramatic lyrics.

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### 5.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Metaphysical Poetry:** It refers to a highly intellectualised poetry marked by bold and ingenious conceits, incongruous imagery, complexity and subtlety of thought, frequent use of paradox, and often by deliberate harshness or rigidity of expression.
- **Lyric Poetry:** It is a formal type of poetry which expresses personal emotions or feelings, typically spoken in the first person.
- **Epigrammatic:** Something that is epigrammatic is short and clever. An aphorism or maxim — a witty, concise saying — is epigrammatic.
- **Didactic:** It refers to something that is intended to teach, particularly in having moral instruction as an ulterior motive.

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### 5.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Frost's philosophy of life.
2. Is the poem *The Road Not Taken* didactic in nature?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Why was Robert Frost initially shunned as a modernist poet? Do you agree with the criticism? Substantiate your answer with examples.
2. Examine Robert Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken* as a modern poem.
3. Critically analyse the language of Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken*.

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## 5.8 FURTHER READINGS

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### NOTES

Perkins, David. 1987. *A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Potter, Rachel. 2012. *Modernist Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press  
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## UNIT 6 WILFRED OWEN'S *STRANGE MEETING*

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### NOTES

#### Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 About the Author
- 6.3 Critical Analysis of *Strange Meeting*
- 6.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 6.5 Summary
- 6.6 Key Words
- 6.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 6.8 Further Readings

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### 6.0 INTRODUCTION

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Wilfred Owen has not written many poems. Most of his poems were composed by him in a period of one year. The chief topic of his poems was war as he felt there was not much else to write about and the reason he could not write too many poems is primarily because all his time was consumed fighting the war. *Strange Meeting* was published after his death and as a result does on the whole present an uncanny feeling as it depicts that the narrator is in conversation with a dead soldier who as it happens was killed by the narrator himself. The poet through his poem is trying to elaborate the horror of the war and Owen has done full justice to such a depiction since he was a part of the horrifying First world war. In this unit, you will learn about the life of the author and the critical analysis of his poem *Strange Meeting*.

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### 6.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the life and works of the author
- Explain the important elements of *Strange Meeting*

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### 6.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Wilfred Owen in his poem *Strange Meeting* has dealt with the ferocity of the First World War. The poem was composed in 1918 and was printed after the death of Wilfred Owen in 1919. The narrator of the poem is a soldier who in order to escape the abyss of the battlefield goes to the underworld and there he comes across a soldier from the enemy side whom he had killed the previous day. The war poem is mentioned as one of the most intricate works of the poet.

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A specific feature about the poems composed by Wilfred Owen is that they all have pararhyme or double consonance and this feature is evident in *Strange Meeting* as well. Para-rhyming verses are observed throughout the poem. For instance, in following lines the pararhyme connects key terms and thoughts without deviating from the implication and the seriousness of the poem, which may happen when poets employ full rhymes- 'And by his smile I knew that sullen hall, / By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell'. However, pararhyming does not connect the two similar words as full rhyming does and the reader sometimes gets a feeling of disquiet and feels something is missing. However, in this poem it is a dissenting note which fits well with the distressing disposition prevailing in the poem. The poem is amid those established in the War Requiem of Benjamin Britten.

The line, 'I am the enemy you killed, my friend', is put on the memorial sculpture of Owen which is located in Shrewsbury Abbey. It is believed that Wilfred Owen was trying to depict his personal experiences while writing this poem. Though it is only a speculation but during the First World War, Owen was a soldier of the British army. Owen was very much a part of the First World War and had also killed several enemy soldiers. The war had left a great impact on Owen and he was so traumatized from its effects that he had to temporarily leave the war to be able to overcome his trauma.

Wilfred Owen is regarded as one of the chief English poets of the twentieth century. In his literary works, he has presented the most effervescent expression of the catastrophic First World War. He is considered in league of poet's such as John Keats, and critics strongly believed that had Owen not died at such a young age he would have surpassed his contemporaries and would have become the face of Modern English poetry.

Wilfred Owen was born on 18 March 1893 in Shropshire, England. He grew up reading the works of great poets like Keats and Shelley. He graduated from Shrewsbury Technical School and due to the financial problems of the family was unable to study further. He started working as a lay associate of the Reverend Herbert Wigan in Dunsden. While he was working at the church, he began to evaluate the role of church in the society and became compassionate towards the poor in the society. When the First World War started, he was working as a teacher in France in the Berlitz School of English. He joined the war in 1915. After he visited a war hospital, he got inspired to participate in the war. He returned to England in 1915 and joined the war. In 1916, he became an officer in the Artists' Rifle. He participated in the Battle of the Somme. After fighting the war for three years he went into a state of combat fatigue. He had to be shifted out of the war zone and was referred to Craiglockhart Hospital in Edinburgh for treatment. While at the hospital he came in contact with poets such as Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon. During the time of his treatment he wrote extensively and his work was greatly influence by these two poets especially Siegfried Sassoon. His major creations such as *Dulce et Decorum est*, *Arms and the Boy*, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, *Disability*, and *Futility* were all written during this period of one year. Owen observed 'the poetry is in the pity'.



By the end of 1917, Owen could confidently be called a poet, in fact, on the eve of New Year he wrote a letter to his mother saying that he is going to get out of the war as a poet even though he did not enter as one. During his lifetime, only five of his poems were published. Two were published in *Hydra*, the newsletter of the hospital, the newsletter was edited by Owen and three poems were published in the *Nation*. In 1917, Owen was presented the Military Cross for bravery at Amiens. He died in November 1918; he was leading his men through the Sambre Canal at Ors. One week after his death the Armistice was signed. In 1920, Owen's first edition was published by Sassoon. The work comprised collection of 23 poems to which one more poem was added in 1921. Though a very limited collection, but it had the power to establish Owen with immeasurable reputation as a poet. After the publication of his volume, Owen was recognized as a poet of the cadre of Eliot and Yeats.

Wilfred Owen verses are not many in number still some of the verses amongst his limited collection are regarded as the best war poems written till date in English Literature. His work is frequently associated with that of Keats and Shelley. His writing was influenced by poets like Alfred Tennyson and Gordon Byron. He grew up reading poetry and started writing when he was very young. He often wrote about conventional subjects but he had an ardent intelligence for rhythm and sound which is reflected in his poems as well. His poems are regarded as war poems as he had lot of live experiences to share and these influenced his verses. He mentioned about never ending marches, the dropping of shells, the mire of the trenches, and the bombshells of poison gas. He wrote about the horror of the war to his mother regularly but it was through his poetry that he was able to capture the spirit of the war and its senselessness and inhumaneness. While he was admitted in the hospital recuperating from shellshock, he spent most of his time in writing. His sessions with the psychiatrist as a part of his treatment facilitated him to deal with some of his key issues such as his cynicism about women, his contradiction about Christianity, his longing for comradeship and solidarity; some of these issues have featured in his poems as well. He experienced a burst of creative energy when he became close friends with poet Siegfried Sassoon who was a soldier like him. They both strongly felt that the war should end and the power-hungry rulers need to stop sending innocent men to die. According to a description of Owen provided by the Poetry Foundation, 'he revealed a technical versatility and a mastery of sound through complex patterns of assonance, alliteration, dissonance, consonance, and various other kinds of slant rhyme — an experimental method of composition which went beyond any innovative versification that Sassoon achieved during his long career.' Thanks to his friend Sassoon, he got introduced to prominent members of the literary community, namely, Robert Graves, Thomas Hardy and Edith Sitwell.

Critic George Stade had commented about his writings, 'this is as near as Owen would come to a theory of modern war poetry; its sense of pity and revulsion should be transpersonal and directed outward toward the condition of war and not toward one's own feelings.' The soldier who was projected in *Disabled* was

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meant to represent all those men who were injured and some even became disabled during the war, the chance meeting in *Strange Meeting* could happen to any of the soldiers who tried to face the reality about the war and all the gory actions done by them during the war. The poet was very skilled in his use of the meter and rhyme and the skill helped him to create the structure of the poem in such a talented manner that it evoked an apt atmosphere throughout the poem. His style of pararhyme and use of half-rhyme with vowel variation which was compatible with the configuration made him famous. He used his sonnets along with his poetry to send across his message. Owen's poems were mostly published after 1920, since the poet died very young in the battlefield.

In *Strange Meeting* the narrator got away from the war and escaped to hell. There, he gets into a conversation with a soldier who had also died during the war. They discuss the uselessness of the war and the destructive gloom caused by it. At the end of their discussion, the dead soldier reveals to the narrator that he was the one who killed him in the battlefield.

*Apologia Pro Poemate Meo* is a poem which deals with the violence during the First World War. 'In defence of my poetry' is the meaning of the title and it is considered Owen's reply to the remark made by Robert Graves in one of his letters, which read as, 'for God's sake cheer up and write more optimistically - the war's not ended yet but a poet should have a spirit above wars.' The poem referred to the horrors during the war and how, with so much bloodshed, death began to be viewed in a very unemotional and insensitive manner.

In *Futility* a dead soldier has been transferred to the sun. The narrator is unable to move his limbs and he is wondering that sun is a source of life and warmth yet it is not able to help him. The soldier is bitter because he feels that if he had to die so young then what was the purpose of growing up. He also wonders that with all its might the sun is not able to help him then where is the need for it to rise every morning and act as an interruption for people during their sleep.

In *Le Christianisme* a church Christ is knocked out by a shell and as a result the Christ is crushed and buried under the debris. Seeing this statue of the Virgin smirks and wears a tin hat halo. She as well is hit by a 'piece of hell'.

Another famous poem about the war and its impact is *Spring Offensive*. The poem consists of ten-syllable lines with a diversified iambic-trochaic meter along with irregular rhymes intermingled with stanzas. There are connections in the middle of peace and uproar, inaction and action, life and death, and peace and war.

*Arms and the Boy* is considered as the poet's most overwhelming and penetrating poems. It was written sometime in March 1918. It is structured in three stanzas containing pararhymes – blade, blood; flash, flesh; teeth, death. This poem was classified as a 'Protest – the unnaturalness of weapons' by Owen and was also listed as one of the poems to be included in his first collection of poems. The title of the poem may have been inspired from a play written by George Bernard Shaw featuring war.

*Greater Love* is an intricate poem and one that is not as easy to understand as rest of Owen's works. Most of his poems are straightforward portrayal of the judgments and struggles of soldiers during the war. The precise date of the composition is not available. The poet has used a very direct tone and rhyme scheme and has been accordingly positioned. A series of iambs and trochees are found in the meter. The title of the poem may have been taken from a letter written by Owen in May 1917, it carried a quote from the Gospel: 'Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life – for a friend'. In the first stanza, Owen starts with a contrasting image of red lips with blood stains of an English boy, with this contrast he is trying to depict the horrors of the war and the gross actions at the battlefield, in front of that romantic sentiments seem so shallow and trivial.

In *The Kind Ghosts*, Owen criticizes the women who carry on with their peaceful life and do not want to be affected by the bloodshed going on in the war.

In *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, the narrator declares that soldiers dying in the war are like animals as they will be deprived of the religious rituals which their families perform after their death. They are not entitled for prayer meetings, church singing or candles as they have the comfort of the bullets and bugle cries.

*Parable of the Old Man and the Young* is amongst one of the poems that feature in War Requiem by Benjamin Britten. It is inspired by the bible story of Abraham and Isaac which is given a fresh vivacity and character in the background of the First World War. It was published as a part of Owen's collection of poems after his death in 1921 by Siegfried Sassoon. Owen had written the poem in the starting 1918 and after writing the poem Owen showed it to Osbert Sitwell who had also written a similar poem titled *The Modern Abraham*. In his poem, Abraham, a prosperous arms maker, is willing to send all his sons to the war even after one of his son's death. Owen wrote the poem in iambic pentameter using blank verse instead of traditional rhyme.

*Disabled* is regarded as a very distressing and touching poem. He wrote the poem while he was getting treatment at Craiglockhart Hospital in Edinburgh. It is a poem about a soldier who has been disabled during the war. He is feeling sorry for himself as he had joined the war to become a hero and now because of his disability he will always be dependent on others.

*Insensibility* was written by Owen in 1918 and it is amongst his longest poems, the poem explains the mental devices used by the soldiers to bear the horrors of the war and continue to perform their duty in a sane manner. The poem has disjointed rhythm and asymmetrical meter. The length of the stanzas is also not equal. Nonetheless, Owen has used his renowned pararhyme regularly all through the poem. The poet gives details about how the soldiers have not only numbed their sanities but also suppressed their emotions so that they are able to survive the atrocities and senselessness of the war. In his conclusion, he questions the correctness of the technique used by the soldiers as he feels that numbing their senses is making them lose touch with kindness.

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*Dulce et Decorum est* is one of Owen's most notable and divergent compositions. Its vivacious imagery and intense tone makes it a memorable condemnation of the First World War. It is not only a part of literature but is considered as an essential textual illustration of the war horrors in history lessons. The poem was written in 1917 but got published in 1920. The poem depicts a scene during the war when the advancing soldiers were stopped by the poisonous gas. One soldier is unable to wear his helmet due to which he dies. The narrator lashes out at all those who had glorified the war and justified the loss of life as patriotism. The poem is an amalgamation of two sonnets which have been spaced in an asymmetrical manner. It has close resemblance to the structure of a French ballad. The asymmetrical sonnets emphasize the sense of incorporeality; Owen narrates the action which takes place in the present in the first sonnet and in the second, he views the scenes in a dazed manner and looks upon the scene, almost bemused and with thoughtfulness. The scheme of rhyme is presented in traditional way, and every stanza has two verses of rhymed iambic pentameter with many spondaic changeovers.

### General Themes of His Poems

From the above discussion, one can easily understand that war and its senselessness is the major themes of Owen's poems. Through his poems, Owen tried to explain the state of the soldiers fighting the war. Some of the general themes of his poems are the following:

- **The loss of innocence:** Owen was himself a young soldier and he fully realized the innocence of most young men who enrolled themselves to fight the war. The war made these young boys to grow up and mature much faster. They were not able to understand the bloodshed and irrationality of war. Owen in most of his poems deals with the superficial reasons which made many of these young men to join the war, like in *Disability* the soldier was only seeking to be a hero.
- **Comradeship and bonding:** Some of his poems portray the deep friendship bonds and empathy which nurtured among soldiers. The soldiers found companionship with each other since they were away from their family and loved ones for long. In his poem, *Greater Love* he has implied that fellowship and brotherhood was stronger than romantic love. Friendship with fellow soldiers helped the men fighting war to survive in such gruesome atmosphere.
- **The horrifying war:** This theme was a common feature in all his poems, if not actually present in the words, it was always present in the thoughts behind the words in the poem. One can easily get a grasp of all the action during the First World War by just reading Owen's poems. The poet mentioned the horror not just in terms of physical destruction but also all the emotional havoc created during and after the war.
- **Cynicism about religion:** Even though Owen was a believer in God but he has profoundly expressed his disenchantment with some aspects of the

church and the state. He has condemned the role of church in instigating war to some extent. He felt that the rituals of the church were no comfort for all those fighting the war or their families. However, Owen did not advocate atheism but at the same time he felt that believes of an individual cannot be dictated by priest since they were very personal and should come from within, and not forced up one.

- **Nature:** Owen has used nature as a theme in many poems and by depicting various shades of nature he has tried to depict the fury and the destruction of the war. Nature is one of the major themes of his poem *Spring Offensive*.
- **The senselessness of war:** This theme is an integral part of most of his poems. He has used his poems to tell readers that on many occasions the soldiers who were fighting the war could not rationalize the reason for the war or the loss of property and life due to it. The destruction during the war was not able to justify the supposed nobility of the war. Owen through his poems tried to vocalize his views about the absurdity and uselessness of the war.
- **Sentiments and emotions:** The poet who himself had suffered from shellshock was fully able to understand the inner state of his fellow soldiers. The soldiers fighting the war were not cruel or murderers but the atmosphere made them like that. Owen believed that the war was killing the humanity in these soldiers.

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### Check Your Progress

1. Name the poem by Owen in which a dead soldier is transferred to the sun.
2. Who are the authors whose works had influenced Owen's writing?

## 6.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *STRANGE MEETING*

The poem begins with when the narrator has escaped from the battlefield and reached a long tunnel which is made of granite which may have been accumulating since many years. While he is travelling into the tunnel he can hear crying and groaning sounds which he assumed was coming from the people in the tunnel. Some appeared to be sleeping while some seemed to be lost in their thoughts and they were so engrossed that they did not notice the narrator passing them. Suddenly one of the soldiers got up and looked at the narrator. The soldier seemed to have recognized him and he extends his hand to bless him, the narrator did not remember the soldier but the way the soldier looked and smiled at the narrator, the smile has been described as a 'dead smile' by the poet, the narrator realizes that he has reached the underworld (hell).

The narrator and the soldier start conversing with each other and the narrator tries to pacify the soldier that the horrors of the war would not reach the deep

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tunnel and he should not feel sad, to this the soldier replies that nothing can bring back the years which have been wasted fighting a war which is irrational. He tells the narrator that the war started with the hope that it would bring end to all conflicts and then there will be no wars at all. They both had hoped for the same outcome of the war. He tells the narrator he had joined the war in hope that after it ends, the world will become a better place to live but nothing of this has been achieved and the war seems to be never ending. So many soldiers have lost their lives and the one's remaining will continue to fight in the name of duty and soon they will also die. The soldier remembered his young days when he was courageous and intelligent. He wanted to achieve something in life and had high spirits which were just wasted in the war. Both the narrator and the dead soldier share their views about the senselessness of war and as a final point, the soldier tells the narrator that he was killed by the narrator when he was fighting from the enemy side. The narrator had killed him just the previous day, after telling the narrator he informs him that now it is time to sleep.

### Analysis

*Strange Meeting* is amongst one of the most famous and perplexing poems of Wilfred Owen. The poem was published after his death, first in Edith Sitwell's anthology and subsequently in collection of Owen's poems by Siegfried Sassoon in 1920. T.S. Eliot described the poem as a 'technical achievement of great originality' and 'one of the most moving pieces of verse inspired by the war.' The poem was inspired by the First World War which is the central theme of many of his poems. According to an observation made by poet Ted Hughes after reading the poem, 'few poets can ever have written with such urgent, defined, practical purpose.'

The poem is famous for its innovative technique. The poet has used pararhymes in the poem. (A pararhyme is an incomplete rhyme; in these words has analogous consonants before and after different vowels for example, escaped and scooped, groaned and grained, hair and hour). Nearly all the ending lines in the poem are pararhyme; the concluding line is prominently different. It has been observed by many critics that the rhyme structure used by the poet has enhanced the bleakness of the poem which was the intention of the poet. He wanted the feeling of melancholy to prevail while he described the horrors of the war. The description about the narrator meeting the enemy soldier in hell is intended to act as a criticism for the war. The dead soldier tries to imply that the soldiers who are fighting the war are the only ones who are able to comprehend the necessary truth of the experience.

There are critics who believed that Owen was trying to project his inner self in form of the dead soldier in the poem. The use of a double was a common feature in Romantic literature; this technique was applied by famous poets like Shelley, Dickens, Yeats and many more. According to some critics, the dead man could be the double in some ways but he is not just only a reflection of the narrator

since he has been described as the enemy soldier who was killed by the narrator. Elliot B. Gose, Jr. has stated that 'the Other...represents the narrator's unconscious, his primal self from which he has been alienated by war.' The poem has been inscribed in the first person; it will not be wrong to assume that the narrator and Owen are one and the same and it is often described as the personal journey of the poet to hell. There are many sources which have influenced the style of the poem. *Strange Meeting* echoes the pitiful resemblance of the tortured faces of hell seen in Dante's work, depiction of Landor's underworld in Gebir, and, the poem's style is definitely influenced by the style seen in the work of Keats and Shelley. Owen fervently admired both Romantic poets, their work, *The Fall of Hyperion* and *The Revolt of Islam*, together were instrumental in composing of his poem. *The Fall of Hyperion* depicts the goddess of memory who reveals her dying but eternal face and her blank eyes, permitting the poet to comprehend her enormous awareness of wars and past of the brave men. The stress in Owen's poem on reality and visions also reminds the readers of the works of Keats.

It is believed that Owen had taken the title of the poem from two of Shelley's work titled as *Canto 5* – 'And one whose spear had pierced me, leaned beside, / With quivering lips and humid eyes; - and all / Seemed like some brothers on a journey wide / Gone forth, whom now strange meeting did befall / In a strange land.' The second work from which the title has been inspired is *The Revolt of Islam*, the poem was initially titled as *Laon and Cythna*, the soldiers are instructed not to retaliate to the enemy in spite of the harm they have done to their camp, they are asked to put down their weapons and treat them with kindness. The two groups meet together in the 'strange meeting'.

*It seemed that out of the battle I escaped*

In this line, the narrator is conveying that he has managed to escape from the war. On close reading, words like 'seem' should make the readers realize that this could be a dream of the narrator as well.

*Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped  
Through granites which Titanic wars had groined.*

The narrator seems to have escaped the battlefield but has managed to reach a gloomy tunnel. The poet has mentioned word 'profound' to the tunnel, which could refer to the physical deepness of the tunnel or the emotional. In the next line, the poet is describing the tunnel and says that the tunnel is long and the stoned walls inside the tunnel have been craved during the war, the enormity of the war has been compared with the mighty ship Titanic. The Titanic ship had sunk in 1912, just two years before the war had started and with its reference the poet is trying to stress on the magnitude of the war.

*Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,  
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred*

The narrator finds people in the tunnel, some are sleeping and some are groaning. The narrator says that some of these people are so engrossed in their

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thoughts they do not even notice the narrator. The readers by now notice the rhyming scheme of the poet, the last words of the first two lines rhyme, and the lines are written in rhymed couplets. The poet has used slant rhyme to reduce the harshness of his words, moreover, he likes subtlety in his rhymes.

The rhyme scheme helps in building tension as it creates feeling of anticipation.

*Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared*

*With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,*

*Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.*

The narrator tries to probe one of the dead in the tunnel and suddenly one of them gets up and stares at the narrator. The narrator feels that the person gives him a look of sad recognition and lifts his hands as if to bless him. All the lines in the poem are of the same length consisting ten syllables each. The initial lines in the poem are in iambic pentameter, but they change later in the poem.

*And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall;*

*By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.*

The dead person in the gloomy tunnel smiles at the narrator and his smile makes the narrator realize that he is in hell.

*With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained;*

*Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,*

*And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.*

The narrator can see fear in the face of the dead person and he tells him that there is no reason to be afraid. They are safe as all the gunshots and bloodshed is happening outside the tunnel, here they are not able to hear the gunshots also.

*'Strange friend,' I said. 'Here is no cause to mourn.'*

He calls the dead person his friend and assures him that there is nothing to worry as they are away from the battlefield and they do not have to grieve about anything.

*'None,' said the other; 'Save the undone years,*

*The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,*

*Was my life also; I went hunting wild*

*After the wildest beauty in the world,*

The dead person does not agree with the narrator, for him there are many reasons to mourn. According to the dead person, the war has taken his youthful days from him and destroyed all his hopes of a beautiful world. The dead person tells the narrator that he is never going to get back his lost years and will never get the opportunity to see the world. The dead person says he is not just mourning for his lost hope but they are many who had similar hopes; he tells the narrator that our hopes are same.

*Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,*

*But mocks the steady running of the hour;*

*And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.*



These lines explain that the dead person was not seeking physical beauty; he was looking for beauty in terms of peace and truth. The beauty he is looking for will not be found in a place like hell also. Though he realizes that maybe one lifetime is also very short to be able to find true beauty. The intensity of his grieving has increased even more because now that he is dead he will not be able to ever find it.

*For by my glee might many men have laughed,  
And of my weeping something has been left,  
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,*

The dead soldier feels sad that he was not able to bring laughter to many people in his life. There were some secrets which he did not get chance to share and now he will never get any opportunity since he is dead.

*The pity of war, the pity war distilled.*

The truth which is left unsaid by the dead person is the reality of war. The war has only led to sadness.

*Now men will go content with what we spoiled.  
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.*

In these lines, the dead person is telling the narrator that the war which has been started now will affect the people of the next generation and they will have to bear the brunt of this bloody war. It does not matter who wins the war as even the victorious countries are going to suffer. Some groups or alliances will not be content with the outcome and they will continue to fight and hate each other.

*They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,  
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.*

The dead person is telling the narrator that even after such bloodshed, the soldiers of the next generation will continue to fight the war competently and loyally. The soldiers will not defy their seniors and not run away from the war. But then again these lines in a way are criticized by several scholars that if this continues to happen then how will the war come to an end. Everybody will continue to kill each other as that is part of their duty. Contrary to the opinion of the critics, Owen is strongly criticizing the war in 'though nations trek from progress'. Many times nations want to fight wars as they feel the outcome will be beneficial for the progress of the nation. The poet is completely condemning the war in spite of being a soldier himself whose duty is to fight wars.

*Courage was mine, and I had mystery;  
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;*

The dead person is remembering his young glorious days. He was a courageous and intelligent soldier. He was very loyal and sincere in carrying out his duties. The soldier was good at his work. The dead person says that he was not clear about the destruction of the war and because of the mystery of the reality about war he lost his life and reached the worst place on the earth.

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To miss the march of this retreating world  
Into vain citadels that are not walled.

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The poet while continuing to condemn the war says that the soldiers fighting the war are progressing towards the wrong direction as war will take the world towards backwardness and not progressiveness. The destruction caused by the war makes it retreat. The world that soldiers are living in gets ruined and the real world gets left behind. The poet has used the word 'vain' to stress that wars produce no positive results and the soldiers are moving towards a dead wall as they will not achieve any good. In the end, nothing is going to protect them from the destruction and damage which is the only outcome of the war.

*Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels  
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,  
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.*

In these lines, the poet is just trying to be metaphorical and creating a gory image of the war. The dead person is talking that during the lengthy war soldiers begin to feel that they have blood on their hands since they have killed many enemy soldiers. Some even feel guilty yet they have to learn to cope with this guilt. He says that he feels sad for these soldiers and would want to help by taking some of the guilt they are feeling if it was possible. And he would try to pacify them by telling the truth to them, since truth is very potent and cannot be stained by the goriest of wars. The poet is trying to focus on the prominence of truth in these lines.

*I would have poured my spirit without stint  
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.  
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.*

In these lines, the dead person is saying he would have done anything to help the soldiers and if it helped he would have given his life without thinking even once. He says that he would do everything in his power to help the soldiers but not fight a war for them. By using the word 'cess' the poet is emphasizing that war is a curse. By saying 'Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were' the poet means that soldiers have not only gone through physical pain but at the same time they have suffered psychological and emotional distress. And these two take even more time to heal than physical pain. The dead person says that he continues to suffer even after dying.

*I am the enemy you killed, my friend.*

The poet has very cleverly used words like enemy and friend in the same line which just exhibits his clever style. The poet has also build up the suspense till the end. In the initial lines, when the poet talks about the dead person looking at the narrator, 'with piteous recognition in fixed eyes', is clarified now that he had recognized his killer initially and he had still been talking with the narrator all this while. He calls the narrator his friend because he does not hold a grudge against him as after dying he considers everyone to be in the same situation.

*I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned  
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.*

*Wilfred Owen's  
Strange Meeting*

The dead person tells the narrator he recognized him instantly when he saw his frown because yesterday when he killed him, the former had the same frown. By stating that the narrator was frowning while killing the enemy soldier, the poet is trying to say that in the battlefield there is no other choice but to kill the enemy and while doing so, one is not really seeing the face of the killed soldier. However, now that he has seen the face of his enemy, the narrator realizes that there are many similarities between the two of them.

*I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.  
Let us sleep now. . . .'*

In these lines, 'parried' means attempting to stop and loath means unwilling or reluctant. The dead soldier says that he made an attempt to stop the narrator from killing him but his hands were not willing to move. The poet has used words like loath to stress that soldiers fighting the war get fed up with fighting and the only way they feel they can end their misery is by getting killed. The dead soldier had raised his hands as if to bless the narrator in the beginning was just his way of conveying that he has forgiven the narrator for killing him and again in the last line, he tells him that it is for them to sleep.

In the last line, the poet tried to establish that the dead soldier did not hold any grudge against the narrator and there is peace between them. But this peace is only while they are in hell. In the beginning, the narrator had heard people grumbling even in their sleep; by this the poet was trying to stress that in hell suffering is continuous. The poet's ellipses at the end of the last line also make the reader think that the suffering is going to continue.

### Themes of the Poem

- **War and conflict:** War is the central theme of all poems composed by Owen and *Strange Meeting* is no different. The soldiers suffering during the war and the inhumanity done by soldiers who are not otherwise murderers is depicted by the poet. According to Owen's poems, there is no gallantry or honour in the wars, he has highlighted suffering and death as outcomes of war. With this poem, he is trying to make people aware about melancholy and gloom caused by war. It was his effort to motivate people to end the war and prevent future wars. *Strange Meeting* was the end result of a transformation experienced by Owen and several other war time poets who were soldiers as well.
- **Distress:** The soldiers are physically and mentally distressed because of the war. They have experienced so much bloodshed. The poet has used the theme of distress to try and emphasize that many soldiers were poets as well. Initially, when the war started they composed poems on patriotism to boost the moral of the fellow soldiers but soon this changed when they became distressed due to the atrocities of the war.

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- **Sympathy and compassion:** The central theme of Owen's poems is mostly war and this theme is difficult to club with themes like compassion and forgiveness but in spite of war being the main theme in *Strange Meeting*, Owen has managed to pull off these two aspects as well. The compassion between the fellow soldiers gives them strength to remain sane in very inhuman circumstances. The dead soldier also forgives the narrator for killing him.
- **Remorse and guilt:** The soldiers are very remorseful for killing soldiers in the battlefield. The guilt remains with some of them even after the war is over. But they are helpless. Owen feels that the instigators of the war never felt any remorse or guilt.
- **Suffering:** The theme of suffering is an integral part of a war. The narrator escapes from battlefield to Hell, there was so much suffering because of the war that he felt that underworld would also be a better place to be. Though hell is supposed to be a place for making people suffer for their misdeeds after they die.

### Characters

There are only two characters in the poem— one of them is the narrator. The narrator is a soldier who is completely exhausted of the war and in order to get away he escapes to hell. Once he reaches hell, he meets a dead soldier who was from the enemy side. He gets into the conversation with the dead soldier and realizes that they both have very similar views about the war and towards the end of the conversation, he is informed by the soldier that the narrator only had killed him. The soldier has been assumed to be the doppelganger of the narrator. The second character is the dead soldier, who had been fighting the war from the German side and after being killed by the narrator he lives in hell.

### Critical Analysis of *Strange Meeting*

Wilfred Owen's *Strange Meeting* begins with the respite of the narrator who is a soldier and has managed to escape the war. After he interacts with one of the spirits in the tunnel, he realizes that he has reached hell. The poem continues as a long monologue by the spirit about the wastefulness of the war. The poet through the poem presents several relevant statements on war. It ends by accepting that death and sufferings of the hell are going to be the outcome of the war. In the concluding line of the poem, 'I am the enemy you killed, my friend' the poet is trying to state that enemies at war can be friends with each other away from the war.

Two-third of the poem is in the form of a monologue, yet there is some dialogue and narration as well in the poem. The starting of the poem has narration by the soldier who has escaped the war and reached a tunnel. He describes the tunnel and the people inside. There is dialogue between the narrator and the spirit

whom the narrator has got into a conversation. After that the poem is a monologue as the spirit starts his speech. Most of the subject matter in the monologue carries an important message about the irrationality of the war. Both the narrator and the spirit are unanimous in their viewpoint although the spirit has presented his views more clearly. The use of imagery in the poem adequately produces a gloomy and serious tone. In the starting of the poem, the gloom is established by describing hell as a huge tunnel which is dark and long, the poet manages to create a feeling of sadness by describing the people inside the tunnel. The poem comprises several kinds of metaphorical language and it is used frequently in the poem. Owen has used many euphemisms in order to convey some harsh facts about the war. The use of euphemisms allows the readers to realize the depth of the poet's thoughts. They also help in maintaining the poem's flow. The poem is a well-constructed composition describing death and war. The poet has manipulated the readers in a very thoughtful manner as it is not only able to convey its meaning but at the same time maintains the status that war is considered worse than hell, moreover, enemies at war are friends away from war. The poem has a rhyming scheme which helps in maintaining the intensity of the poem. The poet has used his words very cleverly and even the monologue is very strong and maintains the interest of the readers throughout the poem. The poet through the spirit's monologue is able to send the point across about the senselessness of the war. Overall the entire poem is presented very well and conveys a lot. For this reason *Strange Meeting* is often regarded as one of the bleakest war poems of its time.

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### Check Your Progress

3. When and where was *Strange Meeting* first published?
4. What does the poet try to establish in the last line of *Strange Meeting*?

## 6.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. In the poem *Futility* a dead soldier has been transferred to the sun.
2. Owen's writing was influenced by poets like Alfred Tennyson and Gordon Byron.
3. The poem, *Strange Meeting*, was published after his death, first in Edith Sitwell's anthology and subsequently in collection of Owen's poems by Siegfried Sassoon in 1920.
4. In the last line of *Strange Meeting*, the poet tried to establish that the dead soldier did not hold any grudge against the narrator and there is peace between them. But this peace is only while they are in hell.

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## 6.5 SUMMARY

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- Wilfred Owen has not written many poems. Most of his poems were composed by him in a period of one year. The chief topic of his poems was war as he felt there was not much else to write about and the reason he could not write too many poems is primarily because all his time was consumed fighting the war.
- *Strange Meeting* was published after his death and as a result does on the whole present an uncanny feeling as it depicts that the narrator is in conversation with a dead soldier who as it happens was killed by the narrator himself.
- A specific feature about the poems composed by Wilfred Owen is that they all have pararhyme or double consonance and this feature is evident in *Strange Meeting* as well. Para-rhyming verses are observed throughout the poem.
- Wilfred Owen is regarded as one of the chief English poets of the twentieth century. In his literary works, he has presented the most effervescent expression of the catastrophic First World War. He is considered in league of poet's such as John Keats, and critics strongly believed that had Owen not died at such a young age he would have surpassed his contemporaries and would have become the face of Modern English poetry.
- Wilfred Owen was born on 18 March 1893 in Shropshire, England. He grew up reading the works of great poets like Keats and Shelley.
- The general themes of Owen's poems include: The loss of innocence, Comradeship and bonding, The horrifying war, Cynicism about religion, Nature and The senselessness of war, etc.
- *Strange Meeting* is amongst one of the most famous and perplexing poems of Wilfred Owen. The poem was published after his death, first in Edith Sitwell's anthology and subsequently in collection of Owen's poems by Siegfried Sassoon in 1920.
- The poem, *Strange Meeting*, is famous for its innovative technique. The poet has used pararhymes in the poem. (A pararhyme is an incomplete rhyme; in these words has analogous consonants before and after different vowels for example, escaped and scooped, groaned and grained, hair and hour). Nearly all the ending lines in the poem are pararhyme; the concluding line is prominently different.
- The general themes of the *Strange Meeting* include: War and conflict, Distress, Sympathy and compassion, etc.

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## 6.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Pararhyme:** It is an incomplete rhyme; in these words has analogous consonants before and after different vowels.
- **Euphemisms:** It is a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing.
- **Monologue:** It is a long speech by one actor in a play or film, or as part of a theatrical or broadcast programme.

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## 6.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a brief note on the life of Wilfred Owen.
2. What is the imagery of the tunnel used in the poem *Strange Meeting*?
3. 'Two-third of the poem is in the form of a monologue...' Comment on the structure of the poem.
4. Explain the lines:
  - (i) *For by my glee might many men have laughed,*  
And of my weeping something has been left,  
*Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,*
  - (ii) *I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned*  
*Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.*

### Long Answer Questions

1. Explain the general themes of Owen's poetry.
2. Discuss the content and style of Owen's poems.
3. Describe the themes discussed by Owen in *Strange Meeting*.

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## 6.8 FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 7 TAGORE'S *GITANJALI*

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### NOTES

#### Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 About the Author
- 7.3 Critical Analysis of *Gitanjali*
- 7.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 7.5 Summary
- 7.6 Key Words
- 7.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 7.8 Further Readings

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### 7.0 INTRODUCTION

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Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* is one of the most celebrated works in modern Indian literature. The word *Gitanjali* combines two Hindi words 'git', that is, song, and 'anjali', meaning offering, and, thus, means 'prayer offering of song'. Its fame has been due, partly at least, to its having been instrumental in winning for its author the much-coveted Nobel Prize. As soon as it was published, it caught the imagination of lovers of poetry all over the world, and especially in the West. The Irish poet W. B. Yeats, whose reaction to the poem is detailed below, was ecstatic in his praise for these poems. In this unit, you will learn about Rabindranath Tagore and critically analyse the collection of poems, *Gitanjali*.

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### 7.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore
- Interpret Rabindranath's use of different themes in *Gitanjali*

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### 7.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Rabindranath Tagore, originally Rabindranatha Thakura (1861–1941), popularly known as Gurudev, was a *littérateur*, musician, and artist in the late 19th and early 20th centuries who achieved a synthesis between the Western and Eastern schools of thought. An instance of a flowering of an original genius, he was schooled, trained, inspired, and perfected by both the Western and Eastern traditions into a startlingly unique and original genius. He was the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. In translation, his poetry was viewed as spiritual and mercurial, and he is proudly referred to as 'the Bard of Bengal'.



A Pirali Brahmin from Calcutta (now Kolkata), Tagore started writing poetry at the age of eight and published his first substantial poems under the pseudonym BhanusiCha ('Sun Lion'). By 1877, he published his first short stories and dramas under his real name. Tagore modernized Bengali art by spurning rigid classical forms and resisting linguistic strictures. His novels, stories, songs, dance-dramas, and essays spoke to topics political and personal. *Gitanjali*, *Gora* and *Ghare-Baire* are his best-known works, and his verse, short stories and novels were acclaimed for their profundity of theme and lyricism. His compositions were chosen by two nations as national anthems: India's *Jana Gana Mana* and Bangladesh's *Amar Shonar Bangla*. Some scholars believe that the Sri Lankan National Anthem was written by Tagore, while others state it was inspired by a specific work of Tagore.

Tagore belonged to an illustrious family of intellectuals. The Wikipedia entry describes his family credentials, thus:

The youngest of thirteen surviving children, Tagore (nicknamed 'Rabi') was born in the Jorasanko mansion in Calcutta to parents Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905) and Sarada Devi (1830–1875). Tagore was raised mostly by servants; his mother had died in his early childhood and his father travelled widely. Tagore family was at the forefront of the Bengal renaissance. They hosted the publication of literary magazines; theatre and recitals of Bengali and Western classical music featured there regularly. Tagore's eldest brother Dwijendranath was a philosopher and poet. Another brother, Satyendranath, was the first Indian appointed to the elite and formerly all-European Indian Civil Service. Yet another brother, Jyotirindranath, was a musician, composer and playwright. His sister Swarnakumari became a novelist. Jyotirindranath's wife Kadambari, slightly older than Tagore, was a dear friend and powerful influence. Her abrupt suicide in 1884, soon after he married, left him for years profoundly distraught.

Tagore was enrolled at a public school in Brighton, East Sussex, and stayed there for several months at a house that the Tagore family owned near Brighton and Hove, in Medina Villas. Because his father wanted him to become a Barrister, he briefly read law at the University College, London, but did not complete his degree. He opted instead for independent study of *Religion Medici*, and Shakespeare's plays *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Lively English, Irish and Scottish folk tunes impressed Tagore, whose interest in the lyricism of language and music were sharpened through the College experience. In 1880, he returned to Bengal without having completed his Law degree, resolving to reconcile the best of European thoughts and practices with the ideals and traditions of the Brahmo Samaj. In 1883, he married Mrinalini Devi.

As a Zamindar, Tagore travelled on his family barge to collect rent from peasants, and in one of his trips, he met Baul Lalon Shah, whose folk songs greatly influenced him. Elements of the Baul tradition are evident plentifully in the *Gitanjali*. In 1901, Tagore moved to a small place near Bolpur called Santiniketan (or the temple of peace), which had some of his ancestral property. He founded an ashram with a marble-floored prayer hall—*The Mandir*—an experimental school and a library amidst a grove of trees. In November 1913, Tagore won the Nobel Prize

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in Literature. He was awarded a knighthood by King George V in the 1915 Birthday Honours, but he renounced it after the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. What was the pseudonym under which Tagore started writing poetry?
2. When did Tagore win the Nobel Prize in Literature?

## 7.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *GITANJALI*

*Gitanjali* is a collection of 103 English poems, created as well as translated by Tagore. In the English *Gitanjali*, Tagore has not included all the songs which are included in the Bengali original. It contains selections from that source and also a good many from different other works of his including 'Naivedya', 'Kheya' and 'Gitimalya'. Moreover, it is said, he has not made literal translations of the Bengali originals into English, but only given free renderings of them. Sometimes, two poems have been combined or telescoped into one, and, sometimes, lines and phrases have been either completely omitted or summarized or juxtaposed with others.

Though the songs which comprise it have been taken from different books, the English *Gitanjali* is not merely a miscellaneous assortment of poems. Tagore did not simply dump the poems he liked within the framework of a single work without any objective, order or purpose. The poems revolve around one central idea: the interrelationships among the poet, God, Nature and the world. The poet works out several delicate nuances of this relationship, revolving around the myriad moods, experiences and insights yielded by the relationship.

Traditional religion, that is, the way Hinduism has been codified by the Priests, is often under attack. What is suggested instead of this apparently decadent and fossilized form of religious practice is a religion of surrender and a mystic union with the Divine which, according to the poet, yields blissful happiness and harkens a new spirituality.

Tagore like a Sufi saint says through his lines about the concept of reaching God through Music and Meditation that involves surrendering to His Supreme Self. Nuances of this mystic union with surrender involve trials and tribulations but eventually yield blissful delight. All these are captured beautifully in this book. While one poem describes the relationship with God as a person waiting for the temple gates to be opened, the other describes beautifully a woman who is ready and awaiting her lord to come and embrace her.

It resembles the poetry of mysticism which presents the Divine as the great affirmation, the fountain of energy, and the source of life and death. Man in this scheme is like an instrument which can be tuned to be in perfect harmony with this

Divine source and energy. This is just one of the images which the poet uses to suggest the Man-God relationship. The poem contains hundreds of such minor and major images that help us reflect on the nature and pleasures of the relationship. Tagore picks up common day-to-day events and places in terms of which to speak of his relationship with God which helps us identify and relive those experiences, making them real for us.

M. Rama Rao, while discussing the reactions of certain luminaries like Dr Radhakrishnan to the poems, writes:

Dr Radhakrishnan tersely characterizes the poems of *Gitanjali* as the offerings of the Finite to the Infinite. To quote the words of Sri K. S. Ramaswami Sastry, 'In many places in this great book of poems, Tagore expresses in language full of the passion of God his aspiration, his keen desire for God-Vision, and conveys to us the message that such desire is the crown and glory of life'. And again, 'Tagore points out how this crown of life is to be won after a great deal of preparation of the inner life and after fullness of experience is acquired, sweetening the soul and purifying the heart. In other words, the poems of *Gitanjali* give impassioned expression to the aspiration of the human Soul—the 'jeevatma'—... for union with God, the Universal SOUL 'Paramatma', ...' The unique distinction of this book lies in the fact that it is intensely religious and at the same time enchantingly poetical.

### Summary

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to summarize this collection of poems in a couple of hundred words. What we have here is a collection of over 103 poems and each will have to be summarized individually because they are all interrelated yet uniquely different. Some of them you may have read as a part of your English lessons like 'Where the mind is held without fear...' and others which may have been quoted by others like:

*Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!*

*Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?*

The early poems in the collection inspire people to leave idol worship, while the middle ones speak about the poet's relation to God. Nuances of God and Man's tribulations with God are captured beautifully in this book. While one poem describes a person waiting for the temple gates to be opened, the other describes beautifully a woman who is ready and awaiting her lord to come and embrace her.

De-mystifying the joys of the nature is also one of Tagore's favourite subject in the set of poems. The eagerness to await the rain and the eagerness to see the sun, each of these moods has been captured beautifully in the book. However, Nature for Tagore is always a vehicle through which he speaks about the divine. This is perhaps because Nature provides a number of phenomena in terms of which the Divine makes sense. Or perhaps because Nature in the poet's mind is the instrument through which the divine manifests itself to Man.

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Rain forms an important feature of this book, with many poems dedicated to rain itself. While one poem explains the joy of oncoming rain, the other brings about the mysticism of a stormy night. Similar things can be said about the night and dawn. Flora and fauna are also dispersed liberally through the poems. From the beauty of small flowers to the shades of mighty banyan trees, these poems use Nature in a bewildering variety of roles.

### **The Genesis of the English Version of *Gitanjali***

Tagore in a letter to his niece Indiradevi Chaudhurani, written in Bengali, described the conditions in which the English version of *Gitanjali* was created. Indiradevi has herself translated that letter into English. The letter is divided into three parts: the first deals with Tagore's views on his own ability to translate into English, the second deals with the material and physical circumstances under which the translation took place, and the third by which it passed into the circle of his European friends. Some excerpts from the first part are given below:

You have alluded to the English translation of *Gitanjali*. I have not been able to imagine to this day how people came to like it so much. That I cannot write English is such a patent fact that I never had even the vanity to feel ashamed of it. If anybody wrote an English note asking me to tea, I never felt equal to answering it. Perhaps you think that by now I have got over that delusion. By no means. That I have written in English seems to be the delusion.

Some of the major ideas in this humble confession are as follows:

1. It is not that Tagore was not proficient in the English language. Given his erudition and scholarship, it is difficult to believe that he could not write in English in the conventional sense. That he did not feel confident expressing his emotions and ideas in English or rather he felt more comfortable in Bengali is a more acceptable reading of his statements. However, in this statement, Tagore stresses the importance of language in poetic creation. He could write this kind of poetry only in Bengali because it was only in this language that his thought and emotions found an exact equivalence or representation; it was the lyrical and rhythmic contours of only this language that he could manage best. This could also be because his emotions and thoughts had been framed in and through the Bengali dialect in the first place.
2. Tagore has no qualms in acknowledging that he can write best in Bengali and only in a workable manner in English. The colonial snobbery relating to the English Language, and sometimes associated with Tagore himself, is completely absent from this assessment.
3. That the English version suffers on a number of counts, especially when compared to the Bengali original, not only in the accuracy with which the words and phrases convey the thoughts and feelings but also because the English language is much less melodious and lyrical when compared to Bengali.

Let me now move on to the second part:

On the day I was to board the ship, I fainted due to my frantic efforts at leave-taking and the journey itself was postponed. Then I went to Shelidah to take rest. But unless the brain is fully active, one does not feel strong enough to relax completely; so the only way to keep myself calm was to take up some light work.

It was then the month of Chaitra (March-April), the air was thick with the fragrance of mango blossoms and all hours of the day were delirious with the song of birds. When a child is full of vigour, he does not think of his mother. It is only when he feels tired that he wants to settle himself easily in her lap. That was exactly my position. With all my heart and with all my holiday I seemed to have ensconced myself comfortably in, the arms of Chaitra, without missing even a particle of its light, its air, its scent and its song. In such a state one cannot remain idle. When the air strikes one's bones they tend to respond in music; this is an old habit of mine, as you know. Yet I had not the energy to gird up my loins and sit down to write. So I took up the poems of *Gitanjali* and set myself to translate them one by one. You may wonder why such a crazy ambition should possess one in such a weak state of health. But believe me, I did not undertake this task in a spirit of reckless bravado. I simply felt an urge to recapture through the medium of another language the feelings and sentiments which had created such a feast of joy within me in the days gone by. The pages of a small exercise-book came to be filled gradually, and with it in my pocket I boarded the ship. The idea of keeping it in my pocket was that when my mind became restless on the high seas, I would recline on a deck-chair and set myself to translate one or two poems from time to time. And that is what actually happened. From one exercise-book I passed on to another.

The journey referred to here is the one undertaken by Tagore to England. By then, the Bengali original was ready 'in his pocket'. The two important issues from this quote are as follows:

1. The spring of 1913 that enervated him physically and mentally also provided him with the opportunity to travel on the seas and exert himself so that he could relax through his writing and creative expression. The relationship that he works out between Nature and himself is interesting. Nature is the mother and he the energetic child. When he tires as a part of his rigorous daily life, he returns to Nature, the mother for relaxation. The English version of *Gitanjali*, Tagore would have us believe, was created in the relaxing folds of this mother's lap. This is starkly reminiscent of the British Romantics, notably Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley.
2. Given his health, it would have seemed 'reckless bravado' to attempt a project of this magnitude. But he makes it clear that the translation of the verses was done in response to an urge to recapture the joyful feelings and sentiments associated with the original work in another language, perhaps in order to share it with a larger audience. The creative impulse behind the translation was one of seeking pleasure and joy.

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The third section deals with the discovery of the script of the translation by Rothenstein and its eventual route through Yeats to global fame:

Rothenstein already had an inkling of my reputation as a poet from another Indian friend. Therefore, when in the course of conversation he expressed a desire to see some of my poems, I handed him my manuscript with some diffidence. I could hardly believe the opinion he expressed after going through it. He then made over the manuscript to Yeats. The story of what followed is known to you. From this explanation of mine you will see that I was not responsible for the offence, which was due mainly to the force of circumstances.

Two ideas are crucial here: Rothenstein's praise and Tagore's attribution of the translation to 'the force of circumstances'. The friend's praise and its eventual confirmation by Yeats points to the intrinsic merit of the piece which registers almost immediately in the minds of both the Englishmen. The text was to be finally published in the West in 1912 with a flattering but deeply felt introduction by W. B. Yeats. Tagore, however, insists, like Shelley, that his poetic work is not to be attributed to him but an external power which he here identifies as the force of circumstances.

### W B Yeats and *Gitanjali*

The original introduction to *Gitanjali* written by the Irish poet W. B. Yeats is as significant as the work itself as it glosses on some of the poetic merits of *Gitanjali* that are appreciable even today. Yeats' *Introduction* is divided into three parts. The first part deals with a Bengali doctor friend's opinion on Tagore and his poetry, the second the way the text moves Yeats' right within his European frame of reference and the third to a personal appreciation of Tagore's poetic greatness in a supposedly universal framework.

Referring to the comments of a distinguished Bengali doctor of medicine in the way *Gitanjali* had moved him, Yeats writes:

It seemed to him natural that I should be moved, for he said, 'I read Rabindranath every day, to read one line of his is to forget all the troubles of the world....' For all I know, so abundant and simple is this poetry, the new Renaissance has been born in your country and I shall never know of it except by hearsay.

Notice Yeats' reading of simplicity and abundance in the poems which move him with an intensity that remains inexplicable to him. This is indeed one of the striking features of the collection. The verses overflow with simplicity and joy to an extent that effects sensitive readers across cultures.

Yeats then moves on to documenting Tagore's reputation as a poet in India and he does it once again by recalling what the intelligent doctor had said:

We have other poets, but none that are his equal; we call this the epoch of Rabindranath. No poet seems to me as famous in Europe as he is among us. He is as great in music as in poetry, and his songs are sung from the west of India into Burmah wherever Bengali is spoken. He was already famous at nineteen when he wrote his first novel; and plays, written when he was but little older, are still played in Calcutta. I so much admire the completeness of his life; when he

was very young he wrote much of natural objects, he would sit all day in his garden; from his twenty-fifth year or so to his thirty-fifth perhaps, when he had a great sorrow, he wrote the most beautiful love poetry in our language....

The Introduction then goes on to explain the secret behind this abundance and simplicity, and locates it in the deep communion that Tagore establishes between himself, Nature and God in his meditative sessions. Arguably, it is these sessions that make him feel the kind of rapturous joy and overflowing emotions that spill over to other parts of his life and that he records in his poem:

Every morning at three—I know, for I have seen it—one said to me, ‘he sits immovable in contemplation, and for two hours does not awake from his reverie upon the nature of God. His father, the Maha Rishi, would sometimes sit there all through the next day; once, upon a river, he fell into contemplation because of the beauty of the landscape, and the rowers waited for eight hours before they could continue their journey.’ He then told me of Mr Tagore’s family and how for generations great men have come out of its cradles.

Notice the stress laid on the role of tradition and family or perhaps the traditions of a distinguished family in the creation of this kind of poetry. He realizes that talents of this kind are not an individual’s achievements but that of an entire tradition, and the East knows how to keep that tradition alive, evolving and dynamic all within a family:

I said, ‘In the East you know how to keep a family illustrious. The other day the curator of a Museum pointed out to me a little dark-skinned man who was arranging their Chinese prints and said, ‘That is the hereditary connoisseur of the Mikado, he is the fourteenth of his family to hold the post.’”

He answered. ‘When Rabindranath was a boy he had all round him in his home literature and music.’

For someone who is so deeply steeped in music and literature, poetry is the natural outcome. As per Yeats, the East knows this—to create professional excellence the culture has to develop a matrix that nurtures the profession, multi-dimensionally—and this is done most effectively within the family.

A touching paragraph from Part II throws considerable light on some aspects of *Gitanjali*:

I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the tops of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me. These lyrics – which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention – display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes.

The poem is a powerful record of emotions and speaks to its attuned readers in that way, effecting their minds and bodies profoundly.

In the third section, Yeats considers Tagore’s achievement in comparison with the achievements of the Western poets and finds something fundamentally different in their approaches to life itself:

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We write long books where no page perhaps has any quality to make writing a pleasure, being confident in some general design, just as we fight and make money and fill our heads with politics – all dull things in the doing while Mr Tagore, like the Indian civilization itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity. He often seems to contrast his life with that of those who have lived more after our fashion, and have more seeming weight in the world, and always humbly as though he were only sure his way is best for him...

This is a beautiful paragraph in which Yeats strikes at the roots of the difference between the Eastern and the Western civilization, and the source of the greatness of Tagore as well as the perceived penury of the West. The West's relationship with everything in the world is one of antagonism. Man in this world is trained to look at other people and objects as deserving to be in his service, of his benefit and use, mainly to enhance his pleasure of material acquisition and political domination.

The Eastern man, on the other hand, looks at the world, its objects and things as collaborators in the business of life. Through an act of deep identification with and surrender to the other, the East finds in the other an occasion to experience a profound pleasure and that, in turn, redefines the nature of the other. Instead of appearing like an exploitable resource, the other looks like a playmate, a collaborator in the game of life. Tagore was very well conscious of this difference himself. At the beginning of his essay on Kalidas and his works, especially *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, he writes:

We stand before this great world. The truth of our life depends upon our attitude of mind towards it—an attitude which is formed by our habit of dealing with it according to the special circumstance of our surroundings and our temperaments. It guides our attempts to establish relations with the universe either by conquest or by union, either through the cultivation of power or through that of sympathy. And thus, in our realization of the truth of existence, we put our emphasis either upon the principle of dualism or upon the principle of unity.

It is perhaps this relationship with the world, (so characteristic of children who are willing to turn everything into playmates and objects of pleasure) that the West characterizes as innocence and finds Tagore's family and poetry overflowing with:

An innocence, a simplicity that one does not find elsewhere in literature makes the birds and the leaves seem as near to him as they are near to children, and the changes of the seasons great events as before our thoughts had arisen between them and us. At times I wonder if he has it from the literature of Bengal or from religion, and at other times, remembering the birds alighting on his brother's hands, I find pleasure in thinking it hereditary, a mystery that was growing through the centuries like the courtesy of a Tristan or a Pelanore.

Yeats ends by stressing the absence of acquisitive materialism in the eastern sensibility, and once again Yeats can locate the only apt symbol of that absence in the child and equates this state of mind with that of a saint:



Indeed, when he is speaking of children, so much a part of himself this quality seems, one is not certain that he is not also speaking of the saints, 'They build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the sea-shore of worlds. They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.

Western modernity, of which Yeats was a part, is characterized by either priding or lamenting on the grand or transitory nature of the sand castles and a generally optimistic or nihilistic assessment of human achievements. Tagore's poetry knows how to use the positive potential of man without falling into acquisition or pessimism. Yeats' reading of *Gitanjali*, thus, becomes a gloss on western modernity and an interpretation of the poem from a western angst-ridden perspective.

### **The Religious Thought of Rabindranath Tagore**

*Gitanjali* is at its heart a deeply religious poem. If you question whom these songs or verses are being offered to, the only answer you are likely to receive is the divine. However, the concept of divine that inspires Tagore is very different from the concept of divine as it exists in conventional sectarian Hinduism that believes in worshipping a deity in the name of religion and follows a set of elaborate rituals in doing so. Tagore's concept of the divine is deeply humanistic and attaining communion with God is for him in a crucial sense attaining the perfect knowledge of and communion with one's own self.

This revised notion of divinity is born at the juncture of the profound spiritual insights of the East and the equally powerful humanism of the West. In this sense, Tagore represents an original and unique synthesis between the East and the West. As he writes, 'When the streams of ideals that flow from the East and from the West mingle their murmur in some profound harmony of meaning it delights my soul.'

What follows in this section is an analysis and detailing of what Tagore understood by that deeply humanistic religion. Broadly speaking, there are two elements involved in it: a questioning and even deriding of sectarian notions of religion, and the definition of a new humanistic religion and practices.

The first element in Tagore's definition of religion is a critique and rejection of some conventional forms of religion, specifically sectarian forms. Sectarianism is rejected because it is limited, localized and cuts man off from the free flow of meaningful cultural existence. A general indictment against all narrow-minded religious people is given succinctly in one of his 'fireflies':

*The sectarian thinks  
that he has the sea  
ladled into his private pond.*

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Literary critic Donald R. Tuck summarizes Tagore's negative critique of sectarian religions and other constricting religious forms, thus:

Tagore likes to compare the sectarian to the world of nature. He sees in the narrow man and the dewdrop reflections of the same incongruous claim. On the one hand there is a claim of absolute certainty, while on the other hand such assurance has been asserted from a very confining base of exposure.

His poetic firefly flits:

*The dewdrop knows the sun  
only within its own tiny orb.*

The sectarian is one who condemns others' reasons from a constricted world view and reaches conclusions ostensibly applicable to all men.

The religious man of action is scrutinized by Tagore, for he too stifles ultimate concern. Song and dance, offering and temple should become concerns in which men are grasped with ultimate meaning. The sects had recorded the notes, but had lost their meaning. Tagore writes:

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship  
in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?

*... Come out of thy meditations and leave  
aside thy flowers and incense!*

Who is it that men worship in darkened corners, by means of beads, incense and flowers? *Who* is the proper question, for both the object of worship and the worshipper himself are persons. The sectarians have depersonalized religion; their worship is directed to material objects.

Those who have rejected the world and live a life of renunciation also feel the poetic rebuke of Tagore. The daily life of sensual involvement is not to be negated in favour of retreat from the temptations of the senses. On the contrary, Tagore sings:

*Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a  
thousand bonds of delight.*

It is through the senses of sight, sound and touch that the desires of joy and love are set free. The mass of poor men, those lowly in status and those who search and travel on pilgrimage, whisper the sounds of religious concern in Tagore's poetry.

In lieu of these restricted and restricting views of religion, Tagore posits a liberated and liberating view of religion that celebrates the complete fulfilment of man through his own agency, using concepts like God to facilitate that fulfilment. This new view of religion is based on a particular view of man, his life and endeavours. An important quotation from Donald Tuck's analysis is as follows:

The basic element of religion is man, man not as some unchanging artefact of history, but as a living being in the process of becoming something else, something more satisfying. Man is searching for meaning. He has clues to meanings all about him. Taking those clues, he realizes that there are depths of satisfaction beyond his present limitations, and so he sets out on a pilgrimage with others to learn. This pilgrimage leads him to realms beyond the senses, and to a unifying experience with the ultimate, which is conceived as personal.

Why is man caught in this eternal quest for meaning? Many answers can be suggested to this fundamental question. This may be a function of human desire that moves on from one goal to another in a quest for fulfilling itself but always finds that fulfilment eluding. This desire for fulfilment is born out of man sensing his separation from other things, other men and even at his deepest level from himself. He, therefore, sets out in search for meanings yet unrealized. Deep inside, at an experiential level, he knows that it is only in love that he can find fulfilment for his eternal quest. Not knowledge but life experienced on his pulse has taught him this. It is only by the complete surrender of the desiring self to a cause or a divinity that this quest for meaning and fulfilment can be paradoxically achieved.

Tuck takes this argument further to explore the dynamics of such surrender:

The search for meaning is not confined to the intellect, but it is one which will engage the whole of his being. He also knows that the search will take the form of a human quest a person to person dialogue. The artistic talents and propensities as well as the experiences of human love will be employed in the search. Prior to man's departure on pilgrimage, he has uttered his first prayer, 'Lead me from the unreal to Truth.'...

The important point to notice here is that the individual's complete self occupies a central place of importance in this world-view. Fulfilment will come not because of divine intervention or because of the practice of some esoteric ritual but because the individual has struggled and evolved a path, unique to him, in the process of achieving this fulfilment.

Despite this centrality of focus on the individual in Tagore's view of religion, it does not cut man off from the social dimension of his life. When fulfilment is achieved, man is impelled towards an ever widening aura of activity and area of services which link that enlightened man to the affairs of other men. 'The religious man's sphere of activities is not to be isolated from the crowded marketplaces of the world, where most men live. Religion cannot cut itself off from other men because of wealth, class, status, or professed allegiance to religious labels. Rather, its sympathy is with all men, in order to teach, direct and lead them to the loving relationship with the loving Person', Trump concludes.

### Check Your Progress

3. How many poems constitute the collection *Gitanjali*?
4. What is the central idea around which the poems in *Gitanjali* revolve?

## NOTES

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## 7.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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### NOTES

1. Tagore started writing poetry at the age of eight and published his first substantial poems under the pseudonym BhanusiCha ('Sun Lion').
2. In November 1913, Tagore won the Nobel Prize in Literature.
3. *Gitanjali* is a collection of 103 English poems.
4. The poems in the work revolve around one central idea: the interrelationships among the poet, God, Nature and the world.

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## 7.5 SUMMARY

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- Rabindranath Tagore, originally Ravindranatha Thakura (1861–1941), popularly known as Gurudev, was a *littérateur*, musician, and artist in the late 19th and early 20th centuries who achieved a synthesis between the Western and Eastern schools of thought.
- Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* is one of the most celebrated works in modern Indian literature. *Gitanjali* is a collection of 103 English poems, created as well as translated by Tagore.
- The word *Gitanjali* combines two Hindi words 'git', that is, song, and 'anjali', meaning offering, and, thus, means 'prayer offering of song'.
- In the English *Gitanjali*, Tagore has not included all the songs which are included in the Bengali original. It contains selections from that source and also a good many from different other works of his including 'Naivedya', 'Kheya' and 'Gitimalya'.
- Tagore like a Sufi saint says through his lines about the concept of reaching God through Music and Meditation that involves surrendering to His Supreme Self.
- The early poems in the collection inspire people to leave idol worship, while the middle ones speak about the poet's relation to God.

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## 7.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Mysticism:** It refers to the belief that union with or absorption into the Deity or the absolute, or the spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect that may be attained through contemplation and self-surrender.
- **Sectarian:** It refers to one who condemns others' reasons from a constricted world view and reaches conclusions ostensibly applicable to all men.

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## 7.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the best-known works of Tagore.
2. Write a short note Tagore's imagery.

### Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss the life and works of Tagore.
2. Describe the concept of divine as per Tagore.
3. Discuss the genesis of the English Version of *Gitanjali*.
4. Examine WB Yeats's introduction to *Gitanjali*.

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## 7.8 FURTHER READINGS

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### NOTES

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## UNIT 8 SAROJINI NAIDU'S *THE COROMANDEL FISHERS*

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### NOTES

#### Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 Sarojini Naidu: Life and Works
  - 8.2.1 *The Coromandel Fishers*: Text and Summary
  - 8.2.2 *The Coromandel Fishers*: Critical Explanation
- 8.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 8.4 Summary
- 8.5 Key Words
- 8.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 8.7 Further Readings

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### 8.0 INTRODUCTION

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Sarojini Naidu's poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*' is a poem which celebrates the song of the fishermen as they are about to set a fishing expedition in the early morning hour. Each day they make such expeditions and catch fishes which to a normal everyday onlooker may seem to be very prosaic, hardworking and risky; but the poet through her poetic lens (language) is making an attempt in the poem to present the fishing activity in such a light so as to make the readers be aware of the beauty of it.

In this unit, you will study about the involvement and contribution of the celebrated Indian woman poet, Sarojini Naidu, to the field of literature and to the country's freedom struggle. This unit deals with one of her famous poetic works, namely *The Coromandel Fishers*. The poem is a song of the fishermen and about their fishing expedition. In addition to this, you will also learn about the life and other major works of Sarojini Naidu.

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### 8.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the life and works of the great Indian poet, Sarojini Naidu
- Analyse the poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*' by Sarojini Naidu
- Critically understand the poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*'
- Explain the significance of the poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*' in the colonial times

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## 8.2 SAROJINI NAIDU: LIFE AND WORKS

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Sarojini Naidu's *The Coromandel Fishers*

Sarojini Naidu (13th February 1879 – March 2nd 1949), also known as the Nightingale of India was an Indian freedom fighter and poet. She was born in Hyderabad to Agorenath Chattopadhyay and Barada Sundari Devi Chattopadhyay. Her father was a doctorate of Science from Edinburgh University and after receiving the degree he settled in Hyderabad State, where he founded and administered the Hyderabad College, which later became the Nizam's College. Her mother was a poetess and used to write poetry in Bengali.

Sarojini Naidu joined the Indian National Movement in the wake of partition of Bengal in 1905. During 1915-1918, she travelled to different regions in India delivering lectures on social welfare, women's empowerment and nationalism. She helped to establish the Women's Indian Association (WIA) in 1917. She was sent to London along with Annie Besant, President of WIA, to present the case for women's vote to the Joint Select Committee. In 1925, Sarojini Naidu presided over the annual session of Indian National Congress at Cawnpore (now Kanpur). In 1929, she presided over East African Indian Congress in South Africa. In 1931, she participated in the Round Table Conference with Mahatma Gandhi and Madan Mohan Malaviya. Sarojini Naidu played a leading role during the Civil Disobedience Movement and was jailed along with Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders. In 1942, Sarojini Naidu was arrested during the Quit India Movement and was jailed for twenty one months. After India's independence from British, Naidu became the first woman Governor of Uttar Pradesh. Sarojini Naidu died on March 02, 1949 at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

Sarojini Naidu began writing at the age of twelve. Her play, *Maher Muneer*, impressed the Nawab of Hyderabad. Her famous works are *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death and the Spring* (1912), *The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and the Spring* (1917), *The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India* (1943), *The Feather of the Dawn* and, *The Indian Weavers*.

### 8.2.1 *The Coromandel Fishers: Text and Summary*

#### Text

*Rise, brothers, rise; the wakening skies pray to the morning light,  
The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn like a child that has cried all  
night. Come, let us gather our nets from the shore and set our catamarans free,  
To capture the leaping wealth of the tide, for we are the kings of the sea!  
No longer delay, let us hasten away in the track of the sea gull's call,  
The sea is our mother, the cloud is our brother, the waves are our comrades all.  
What though we toss at the fall of the sun where the hand of the sea-god drives?*

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*He who holds the storm by the hair, will hide in his breast our lives.  
Sweet is the shade of the coconut glade, and the scent of the mango grove,  
And sweet are the sands at the full o' the moon with the sound of the voices we  
love; But sweeter, O brothers, the kiss of the spray and the dance of the wild  
foam's glee; Row, brothers, row to the edge of the verge, where the low sky  
mates with the sea.*

### Summary

In the poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*', Sarojini Naidu is making a simple statement to the fishing community in the eastern coast of India. The fishing community, like any other community, has songs which talk about their everyday lives. The poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*' is also similar to such a song which the people belonging to the fishing community sing early in the morning before they engage themselves into any fishing activity. It is a song which is inculcated in the hearts and minds of the people belonging to that community.

The poem (the song of the fishers) calls each and every fisherman at the dawn of the day to rise from their sleep and look forward to a great day ahead when they will have a great catch. The poet describes the wind as if lying asleep in the arms of the dawn like a small child who has cried all night. The song then asks the fisherman to gather their nets and reach out to their boats (catamarans) so that they can start their journey across the seas to catch their prey. The song describes the fishermen to be 'the kings of the sea' as they are the ones who rule over the sea.

The song further asks the fishermen to no longer delay their journey as the sea gull has given the call that it is morning and they should be setting out in their fishing expeditions. The sea is described as their mother and the clouds are as if their brothers and the waves are as if their comrades – so there is nothing to fear as they are going to their family and friends. What though they toss at the fall of the sun where the hand of the sea-god drives? He, who holds the storm by the hair, will hide in his breast their lives.

The song further adds in the third stanza that the shade of the coconut tree is sweeter and the open space in a wood or the forest or the scent of the mango grove is something which is most welcome. If these are sweet, then the sands at the full of the moon; the light of the full moon lightens the surface water of the sea are also sweeter and that would love to hear the voices of a triumphant day. So the song again makes the fishermen motivated so as to row towards the horizon (the point where the sea meets the sky) and come out victorious.

### 8.2.2 *The Coromandel Fishers: Critical Explanation*

The poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*' was written in the pre-independence era when India was under colonial rule. Colonialism is not only a political and economic subjugation of a nation by another, but it has its worst effects on the minds of the



colonized as the colonized are made to feel as second grade citizens who lose all self-respect. They start feeling that the colonial culture is superior and they look down upon everything that is native. The self-esteem is hampered to such an extent that it becomes difficult for them to feel that they have a culture of their own.

If colonialism or colonizing power is to be fought, then the fight needs to begin not merely with the zeal of ousting the colonial power (British in case of India), but moreover to make the native people feel that they have a culture of their own which is a matter of pride; that they are in no way inferior to the colonial culture and power, that they have a civilization which is as ancient and treasured as the colonial regime, and they are knowledgeable and self-respecting people who can stand in their own right.

Sarojini Naidu was not only a conscious poet, but also a freedom fighter whose role as a leader of the masses was not just to enthuse the zeal within them to drive out the British from India, but also to build up their self-esteem and to make them fall in love with things and culture which were their own. An Indian fair and selling of bangles in the fair is a common sight in India and all Indians are familiar with it. But Sarojini Naidu thought that it was essential to make the Indians take a mental tour of the lives of the fishermen as they live their lives within the world of seas. Apparently, it may seem that fishing amidst the seas is a risky proposition and there is much to fear; but these fishermen are brave souls who take the stride every day and they feel as if the sea is their mother, the clouds as their brothers and the waves are their comrades.

Sarojini Naidu is thus painting a colourful picture of the fishermen's lives so as to make the fishermen as well as the general public (the readers) aware that there is a certain poetic beauty in the everyday existence of these fishermen. That beauty is something that the poet wants the readers to experience as when they get aware of the beauty of this life, they will be respectful of themselves. The colonial authority makes the colonized lose much of their self-respect and confidence by making them believe that they live an inferior life which does not have much sense when compared to the Western civilization. One of the tricks that Sarojini Naidu employed in her poems is to take up the everyday objects and activities of Indian life and see them from the point of view of its extraordinary beauty so as to make people realize that there is immense beauty in things which one needs to be aware of.

### Check Your Progress

1. What is Sarojini Naidu's poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*' all about?
2. What was Sarojini Naidu also known as?
3. What is the main theme of Sarojini Naidu's poems?

### NOTES

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### 8.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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#### NOTES

1. Sarojini Naidu's poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*' celebrates the song of the fishermen as they are about to set a fishing expedition in the early morning hour.
2. Sarojini Naidu, a noted poet, was famously known as the 'Nightingale of India' because her poetry is lyrical and musical.
3. In her poems, Sarojini Naidu mainly focus on the everyday objects and activities of Indian life and see them from the point of view of its extraordinary beauty so as to make people realize that there is immense beauty in things which one needs to be aware off.

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### 8.4 SUMMARY

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- Sarojini Naidu, (13th February 1879 – March 2nd 1949), also known as Nightingale of India, an Indian freedom fighter and poet, was born in Hyderabad.
- Sarojini Naidu was born in Hyderabad to Agorenath Chattopadhyay and Barada Sundari Devi Chattopadhyay. Her father was a doctorate of Science from Edinburgh University.
- In 1905, Sarojini Naidu joined the Indian National Movement in the wake of partition of Bengal.
- Naidu also helped to establish the Women's Indian Association (WIA) in 1917.
- In 1942, Sarojini Naidu was arrested during the Quit India Movement and was jailed for twenty one months.
- After India's independence from British, Naidu became the first woman Governor of Uttar Pradesh.
- Sarojini Naidu died on March 02, 1949 at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.
- Sarojini Naidu's famous works are *The Golden Threshold (1905)*, *The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death and the Spring (1912)*, *The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and the Spring (1917)*, *The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India (1943)*, *The Feather of the Dawn* and, *The Indian Weavers*.
- The poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*' was written in the pre-independence era when India was under colonial rule.

- Sarojini Naidu in the poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*' is making a simple statement to the fishing community in the eastern coast of India. The fishing community, like any other community, has songs which talk about their everyday lives. The poem is also similar to a song for the people belonging to the fishing community who sing early in the morning before they launch themselves into any fishing activity.
- Sarojini Naidu thought that it was essential to make the Indians take a mental tour of the lives of the fishermen as they live their lives within the world of seas. Apparently, it may seem that fishing amidst the seas is a risky proposition and there is much to fear; but these fishermen are brave souls who take the stride every day and they feel as if the sea is their mother, the clouds are their brothers and the waves are their comrades.

## NOTES

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### 8.5 KEY WORDS

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- **Seagull:** It refers to a large bird that usually lives near an ocean or other large body of water.
- **Catamarans:** It refers to a yacht or other boat with twin hulls in parallel.
- **Colonialism:** It refers to the practice by which a powerful country directly controls less powerful countries and uses their resources to increase its own power and wealth.

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### 8.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a note on the major achievements of Sarojini Naidu.
2. List the famous works of Sarojini Naidu.
3. Summarize '*The Coromandel Fishers*' in your own words.

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Write a critical appreciation of the poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*' by Sarojini Naidu.
2. Do you agree that the poem '*The Coromandel Fishers*' deals with the beauty of the lives of the fishermen? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Why is it said that Sarojini Naidu had played a pivotal role in freeing India from British?

**NOTES**

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## **8.7 FURTHER READINGS**

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# UNIT 9 STEPHEN SPENDER'S *THE EXPRESS*

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Stephen Spender's  
*The Express*

## NOTES

### Structure

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 Stephen Spender: Life and Works
  - 9.2.1 The Modern Age
  - 9.2.2 Modern Poetry
- 9.3 *The Express*: Text and Summary
  - 9.3.1 *The Express*: Critical Analysis
- 9.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 9.5 Summary
- 9.6 Key Words
- 9.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 9.8 Further Readings

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## 9.0 INTRODUCTION

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Stephen Harold Spender (1909- 1995) was an English poet, translator, literary critic and also an editor. The poet primarily focussed on themes of social injustice and the class struggle in his work. In 1965, he was appointed Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the United States Library of Congress. Also, he was Professor of English at University College London from 1970 to 1977, and then became Professor Emeritus. The great poet died on 16 July 1995 owing to cardiac arrest in Westminster, London. He was buried in the graveyard of St Mary on Paddington Green Church in London.

In this unit, you will study about the life and works of a famous English poet, novelist and essayist Stephen Harold Spender. In addition to this, you will also discover some of the prominent traits of the modern age and modern poetry. Stephen Spender's poem '*The Express*' has also been covered in this unit in detail. The poem glorifies the express train and also it symbolises the modern industrial civilization.

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## 9.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the life and works of the English poet, novelist and essayist Stephen Harold Spender
- Describe the characteristics and traits of the modern age and modern poetry

- Analyse the poem 'The Express' by Stephen Spender
- Critically examine the Spender's poem 'The Express'

## NOTES

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### 9.2 STEPHEN SPENDER: LIFE AND WORKS

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Stephen Spender was born in London and educated at the Oxford, Spender was associated with the Auden Group which includes British and Irish writers, namely W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, C. Day-Lewis and Louis MacNeice. This association with Auden Group made him come out with many significant literary pieces for which he is still known today. His book *The Thirties and After* (1979) is an attempt to recall as the literary figures that he was associated with.

The social and the political realities of the then society interested him and therefore in his works we see a direct representation of the societal concerns. He is a very reflective and intellectual poet and therefore throughout his poetic career he showed his interest towards left wing politics. In his early poems, he was very 'personal' but as he grew up his interest towards politics became stronger and stronger and he started writing political poetry. In his finest poems, Stephen Spender showed much of political concern as well as a deep empathy for basic human condition. His major works include — *Poems* (1933), *Vienna* (1934), *Trial of a Judge* (1938), *The Still Centre* (1939), *Ruins and Vision* (1942), *Poems of Dedication* (1946). *The Edge of Being* (1949), *World Within a World* (1951) etc.

In his poetry, Stephen Spender showed a commitment towards leftist ideology and also presented deep personal feelings. He is a therefore considered as a poet who showed unusual concern as he modernized the sensibilities of the man from both the personal as well as the political ways.

#### Major Works of Stephen Spender

- *Poems* (1933)
- *Vienna* (1934)
- *Trial of a Judge* (1938)
- *The Edge of Being* (1949)
- *World Within World* (1951)
- *The Generous Days* (1969)
- *Love Hate Relations* (1974)
- *The Thirties and After* (1978)
- *Dolphins* (1994)

### 9.2.1 The Modern Age

*Stephen Spender's  
The Express*

Modernity and modernism are two different things – whereas ‘modernity’ refers to a set of philosophical, political, and ethical ideas which provide the basis for the aesthetic aspect of modernism’; ‘modernism’ generally refers to the broad aesthetic movements of the twentieth century. In the present unit we will be focusing on Modernism as an aesthetic movement and how it is represented in the literary history of English language and literature. Usually, the first half of the twentieth century is considered to be the modern period in the history of English Literature. With the end of the Victorian Age and with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, there is a change in the circumstances in England which produced certain changes in the literary outputs. It can be said that the modern period marks a sharp and clear departure from the self-complacency, compromise and stability of the Victorian period. The transition from the old to the new, from blind faith to rational thinking is very interesting to note.

The writers like James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and poets like W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Auden and others shaped the literary concerns of the age by portraying the spiritual and metaphysical vacuum created in the modern minds by various forces and events such as – industrialization, World War, etc. The age was also influenced by various thinkers and movements such as – symbolism, Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Frederick Nietzsche and others.

But before going into any discussion into the individual authors, let us have a brief understanding of the chief characteristics of the Modern Age. Some of the prominent traits of the Modern Age are being discussed below:

- (a) The biggest change that we perceive in the literature of the first half of the twentieth century from that of the earlier Victorian Age is that the literature of the age had shifted from the exterior realism to the inner aspects of the humankind. The writers and poets of the age looked within the human consciousness and human mind and portrayed the anxieties that the modern mind suffered from.
- (b) Modern age is also called the Age of Interrogation and Anxiety as humankind was suffering from immense loss of faith in God and also the fellow human beings. The loss of faith in God was something that was the natural outcome from the Victorian Age. In Victorian Age we have seen mankind suffering from the question of faith and doubt. By the time, we come to modern age mankind had lost faith in God and in the absence of God, humankind suffered from an anxiety which is best represented by W. B. Yeats in the poem ‘The Second Coming’ – ‘Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold.’
- (c) The World Wars and its effect had shaken the whole of the humankind and more so the whole of Europe. The effects of the World Wars were such that mankind lost faith in fellow human beings and therefore a sense of loneliness crept into the minds and consciousness of the modern man.

### NOTES

## NOTES

- (d) Modernist writers had a new 'subject matter' for literature as they believed that their new way of looking at life required a new form, a new way of thinking and writing. Consequently writers were more experimental, innovative and very individualistic in their writing. Therefore, they tried to do something pioneering in their writing as they were influenced by new ideas from the emerging fields of psychology (James Joyce in his novels *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegan's Wake*; Virginia Woolf with her 'Stream of Consciousness Technique' novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway*, D. H. Lawrence with his novel dealing with the theme of 'Oedipus complex' – *Sons and Lovers*) and sociology (such as the working class background of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, where the class background of the hero has much to do with his psychology and artistic temperament). One of the main focuses of the modernist writers is to probe the 'unconscious' as after Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* 1900, it is seen as one of the most significant aspect of our everyday existence.
- (e) The Modernist writers turned away from teleological ways of thinking about time to a sense of time as discontinuous, overlapping, non-chronological in the way we experience it; a shift from linear time to 'Duree' or psychological time. All the stream of consciousness novels, whether of Virginia Woolf or that of James Joyce deals with the psychological time.
- (f) Anthropological studies of comparative religion became one of the subject matter of writing (there are numerous examples of such work, but one of the best known is that of T. S. Eliot's famous poem *The Waste Land*, Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* where the novelist talks about inner illumination or enlightenment and compares it to Buddha).
- (g) If the Victorian art was more inclined to portray the external reality (Realism) then the modernists attempted to reflect the inner turmoil, the inner reality of man. Therefore, there is less emphasis on art's reflection of external reality and a greater emphasis on art's reflection of the perceiving mind; [it can be seen not only in fiction and poetry, but also there is a shift in painting such as, the shift from 'representational' Victorian painting (painting that represents identifiable, often narrative, scenes in external reality) through Impressionism (e.g. Whistler; the attempt to paint the quality of the sensations stimulated by the external scene) to Post-Impressionism (e.g. Matisse; painting the 'painterly' scene, the pure elements of colour and form—perhaps as a way of painting the perceiving mind, the aesthetic consciousness].
- (h) There was a growing concern for feminist cause – females are not anymore passive consumer of the male literature but they have already come to the forefront with a literature of their own and moreover talked about the feminist



causes and issues in details to create an awareness amongst people about the patriarchal victimization, oppression, suppression and silencing of the female voice. (Virginia Woolf, not only in her fictional works, but also in her non-fictional writings such as *A Room of One's Own* or *Three Guineas* emphasizes on all these issues)

- (i) Myth as 'collective unconscious' (Carl Jung) is one of the prime concerns of the modernist writing and the modernists were preoccupied with myth-making (James Joyce, W.B. Yeats).
- (j) The effects of the World War, imperialism and heavy industrialization on human psyche has been the subject matter of much of the modernist writings of writers like T. S. Eliot, Wilfred Owen, Virginia Woolf etc.
- (k) The drabness of everyday routine existence and metaphysical anxiety has been another significant concern of the writers such as T. S. Eliot, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett and others.
- (l) A focus on epistemological concerns (how do we know what we know?) and linguistic concerns (how is the way we think inseparable from the forms in which we think?); a sense of the break-down of a shared linguistic community; a reaction against the dominance of rational, logical, 'patriarchal' discourse and its monopoly of power.

## NOTES

### 9.2.2 Modern Poetry

The poems of the first half of the twentieth century break away from the romantic tendencies of the earlier period and present life in its darkest essence the modernist anxieties and worries. The poets such as T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats mark the greatest heights that the modernist poetry could achieve which brings to the fore the anxieties of the age and tries to provide a just representation of the modern man. T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* is thought to be the greatest of the modernist poetry for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize. In the following section of this unit you will come across some of the significant characteristics of the modernist poems.

Modernist poetry can be talked about as an experiment in the poetry. The poets reacted against the romantic tendencies of the earlier age and tried to write poetry in an objective fashion. For example, T. S. Eliot in many of his critical writings emphasizes the role of 'impersonality of the poet' and how the Wordsworthian tradition of 'outpouring of emotions' recollected in tranquillity needs to be overthrown to write poems where objectivity is the main criteria. Moreover, T. S. Eliot in 'Tradition and Individual Talent' emphasized on the role of 'tradition' in writing poetry.

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### 9.3 THE EXPRESS: TEXT AND SUMMARY

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#### NOTES

#### Text

*After the first powerful plain manifesto  
The black statement of pistons, without more fuss  
But gliding like a queen, she leaves the station.  
Without bowing and with restrained unconcern  
She passes the houses which humbly crowd outside,  
The gasworks and at last the heavy page  
Of death, printed by gravestones in the cemetery.  
Beyond the town there lies the open country  
Where, gathering speed, she acquires mystery,  
The luminous self-possession of ships on ocean.  
It is now she begins to sing—at first quite low  
Then loud, and at last with a jazzy madness—  
The song of her whistle screaming at curves,  
Of deafening tunnels, brakes, innumerable bolts.  
And always light, aerial, underneath  
Goes the elate metre of her wheels.  
Steaming through metal landscape on her lines  
She plunges new eras of wild happiness  
Where speed throws up strange shapes, broad curves  
And parallels clean like the steel of guns.  
At last, further than Edinburgh or Rome,  
Beyond the crest of the world, she reaches night  
Where only a low streamline brightness  
Of phosphorus on the tossing hills is white.  
Ah, like a comet through flame, she moves entranced  
Wrapt in her music no bird song, no, nor bough  
Breaking with honey buds, shall ever equal.*

#### Summary

Stephen Spender's short poem 'The Express' is about trains and it glorifies the express train which is presented in much overvalued fashion in the poem so suggest how trains are significant in the modern lives. We have to understand that the train here is used as a symbol of modern industrial civilization which harps on machines and speed.

The poem begins with the description of a train as it starts its journey from a station. Its horn suggests that it has just started its journey from the station and

the journey of the train is compared to slow royal movement as that of the queen. Like a royal queen who moves with slow grace, the train moved from the station with such a grace that the poet makes a grand expression of it in the poem. The phrase 'without bowing and with restrained unconcern' in the poem further suggests the royal nature of the train. Then the poet says that as the crowds line up to have a glimpse of the queen in the passage, similarly the train goes through royally through the houses, gas works and the grave yards.

As the train leaves the towns and reaches the countryside, the journey of the train instead of it being compared to the royal queen is now being termed as mysterious as the train behaves as if it is self-possessed and brilliant. Here the train begins to sing – the song has its own movement—loud, screaming and even deafening. In such a state, the train acquires a certain kind of lightness as the wheels seem to move through the air.

The train is further personified as it is presented to experience happiness as it passes by. Several strange shapes, broad curves and 'trajectories from guns' are conjured up to describe its movement. The Train thus carries on going and not only travels within England, but beyond Europe and it goes as if beyond the world. What the poet means here is that the train has a progress which is unchecked and nobody can stop its progress. The poet further adds that as the train goes far away and in dark, there is a low streams-line brightness that it creates to illuminate the hills as well as the darkness of the world.

In the last few lines, the poet Stephen Spender is much more poetic in his expression of the train as he compares the train to a flaming comet in the sky and even goes to the extent of saying that the music of the train is much better than a bird's song.

### 9.3.1 *The Express*: Critical Analysis

As we have already discussed in the summary of the poem, '*The Express*' by Stephen Spender is a poem which celebrates the express train in such a fashion which will make people look at the train in a different fashion. The first question which arises is 'Why does the poet celebrate an express train?' The answer is simple and yet complex – the poet is doing so as he wants to celebrate the modern invention – the glorious aspect of the Industrial Revolution which made machines like trains a reality.

Trains have revolutionized the way we moved – it is because of trains that long distance movement of people and things became a reality. It is one of the modern innovations which led to the progress of the world. It also led to further industrialization as movement of goods and finished products were possible because of railways. Not only industrialization, because of the faster means of communication and movement, trains also led to the modernization of the Western culture. Stephen Spender is a modernist and as a modernist poet it was his role to champion those things of his culture which made modernity a possibility.

## NOTES

## NOTES

Express train is being beautifully presented in the poem – first it is being compared to majestic queen and her slow movement as the train starts slowly from the station and as the train leaves the towns and reaches the countryside, the movement of the train is being called a mystery. Thus through various images, the movement of the train is being described throughout the poem to suggest the grace and majesty of the train. As suggested earlier, the train is talked about in such terms because the modernists were very much enamoured by the technological innovations of the nineteenth and early twentieth century which not only changed the way people lived, but also the way people thought and felt. These changes, as they manifest themselves in lives of the people, also find manifestation in the creativity of the people in their writings, especially poems.

If some modernists were trying to talk in terms of the inner lives of modern men such as T. S. Eliot, then poets like Stephen Spender were busy portraying the processes that happened outside which created those psychological changes. One of such change was the rapid changes in technology and the resultant change in the lifestyle of the people. Through the poem '*The Express*', one such technological advancement – the railways – is being talked about in great detail and is celebrated by the poet.

### Check Your Progress

1. Why was the modern age also called the age of interrogation and anxiety?
2. What does the train symbolises in the poem '*The Express*'?
3. To whom does Stephen Spender compare the journey of the train in '*The Express*'?
4. Why does the poet celebrate the grandeur of an express train in the poem '*The Express*'?

## 9.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The modern age is also called the age of interrogation and anxiety as humankind was suffering from immense loss of faith in God and also the fellow human beings
2. In the poem '*The Express*', the train is used as a symbol of modern industrial civilization which harps on machines and speed.
3. In the poem '*The Express*', Spender compares the journey of the train to slow royal movement as that of the queen. The poet says that the train moves with such a slow grace and elegant style as that of a royal queen who moves with slow grace.

4. The poet, Stephen Spender, is celebrating the grandeur of an express train so as to celebrate the modern invention – the glorious aspect of the Industrial Revolution which made machines like trains a reality.

*Stephen Spender's  
The Express*

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## 9.5 SUMMARY

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## NOTES

- Stephen Harold Spender (1909- 1995) was an English poet, translator, literary critic and also an editor.
- Spender was associated with the Auden Group which includes British and Irish writers, namely W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, C. Day-Lewis and Louis MacNeice.
- He is a very reflective and intellectual poet and therefore throughout his poetic career he showed his interest towards left wing politics.
- His major works include — *Poems* (1933), *Vienna* (1934), *Trial of a Judge* (1938), *The Still Centre* (1939), *Ruins and Vision* (1942), *Poems of Dedication* (1946). *The Edge of Being* (1949), *World Within a World* (1951) etc.
- The modern period marks a sharp and clear departure from the self-complacency, compromise and stability of the Victorian period. The transition from the old to the new, from blind faith to rational thinking is very interesting to note.
- The Modern Age was influenced by various thinkers and movements such as – symbolism, Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Frederick Nietzsche and others.
- There was a growing concern for feminist cause in modern age– females are not anymore passive consumer of the male literature but they have already come to the forefront with a literature of their own and moreover talked about the feminist causes.
- The effects of the World War, imperialism and heavy industrialization on human psyche has been the subject matter of much of the modernist writings of writers like T. S .Eliot, Wilfred Owen, Virginia Woolf etc.
- The poems of the first half of the twentieth century break away from the romantic tendencies of the earlier period and present life in its darkest essence the modernist anxieties and worries.
- Stephen Spender’s short poem ‘*The Express*’ is about trains and it glorifies the express train which is presented in much overvalued fashion in the poem so suggest how trains are significant in the modern lives. The train here is used as a symbol of modern industrial civilization which harps on machines and speed.

## NOTES

- Trains have revolutionized the way we moved – it is because of trains that long distance movement of people and things became a reality. It is one of the modern innovations which led to the progress of the world.
- Trains also led to further industrialization as movement of goods and finished products were possible because of railways. Not just industrialization, but because of the faster means of communication and movement, trains also led to the modernization of the Western culture.
- Stephen Spender is a modernist and as a modernist poet it was his role to champion those things of his culture which made modernity a possibility.

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## 9.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Teleological:** It refers to teleology, the philosophical doctrine that final causes, design, and purpose exist in nature.
- **Patriarchal:** It refers to or denoting a system of society or government controlled by men.
- **Imperialism:** It refers to a situation in which one country has a lot of power or influence over others, especially in political and economic matters.
- **Epistemological:** It refers to the study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge.

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## 9.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. List the major works of Stephen Spender.
2. Write a short note on the prominent traits of the modern age.
3. What are the characteristics of modern poetry?
4. Write a short summary of Spender's poem '*The Express*'.

### Long Answer Questions

1. How does Stephen Spender describe an express train in the poem '*The Express*'?
2. Describe the movement of the train as the poet Stephen Spender does through different imageries as it is being done on the poem '*The Express*'.
3. Write a critical appreciation of Stephen Spender's poem '*The Express*'.
4. Do you agree that Stephen Spender through the celebration of the express train is actually making a celebration of the modern industrial revolution? Give reasons for your answer.

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## 9.8 FURTHER READINGS

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*Stephen Spender's  
The Express*

Sutherland, John. 2005. *Stephen Spender: A Literary Life*. USA: Oxford University Press.

Leeming, David. 2011. *Stephen Spender: A Life in Modernism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

## NOTES

NOTES

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**BLOCK - III**

**DRAMA**

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**UNIT 10 SHAKESPEARE: *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE***

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**Structure**

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 William Shakespeare: Life and Works
  - 10.2.1 William Shakespeare: Plays
- 10.3 The Elizabethan Age: The Renaissance
  - 10.3.1 Renaissance: An Overview
  - 10.3.2 English Renaissance Drama
- 10.4 *The Merchant of Venice*: Plot
  - 10.4.1 *The Merchant of Venice*: A Romantic Comedy
  - 10.4.2 *The Merchant of Venice*: Title of the Play
  - 10.4.3 *The Merchant of Venice*: Characters
  - 10.4.4 *The Merchant of Venice*: Themes and Issues
- 10.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 10.6 Summary
- 10.7 Key Words
- 10.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 10.9 Further Readings

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**10.0 INTRODUCTION**

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*The Merchant of Venice* is one of the most popular plays by William Shakespeare. It has strong dramatic elements, immense variety to suit all tastes, and a number of themes to attract attention of the audience. The play explores such basic values as the nature of love and friendship, the relation of man to money, the morality of lending money at interest, the problem of loneliness, the limited value of civil law, the error of judging by external appearances (such as, cross-dressing), and the fact that even a right cannot be carried to an absurd end. Shakespeare combines all these elements in his play in dramatic units (Acts) which can be divided into sub-divisions or episodes (Scenes).

The first act in *The Merchant of Venice* provides the exposition which is designed to put the audience into the picture. It introduces characters and builds up dramatic situations. In the second act, we see the forward movement of the play as one situation leads to another. We see the chain of cause and effect (the plot) and the progressive development of character. The people, their characters



and their motives, drive the plot forward in a series of scenes which give pace and excitement. There are fast-moving and slow-moving episodes (incidents); there are tensions, fears and hopes as the characters move along. Each of the scenes present an event that changes the situation.

Shakespeare's characters use a wide range of speech-formal or colloquial; quick fire dialogue is followed by long speeches; and verse changes to prose. Songs, music and revelry add to the dramatic expression. The dramatic use of language is enhanced by skilful stage-management, costumes and gestures like kneeling, embracing and giving money. By these means, Shakespeare's characters are brought vividly to life and cleverly individualised. Though they are characters in a play, they have much to tell us about human nature.

The last act brings an unravelling of the complications, which is called a *denouement*. The first act of the play is an Act of complications leading to dispersal, and it is balanced in the last act by an Act of union. The ending of the play is a prime example of the romantic comedy. It abounds in lyricism, love, music, wit, good fortune and wedding bells. Finally, romance prevails: love, kindness, and nobility triumph; greed, hatred and revenge are banished and forgotten.

## NOTES

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### 10.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the most famous dramatist of the British Canon- William Shakespeare
- Discuss the basic features of romantic comedy
- Examine the characteristics Elizabethan Age, i.e. The Renaissance in England
- Explain and comprehend the play *The Merchant of Venice*
- Critically understand the various themes of the play *The Merchant of Venice*
- Assess the characters of the play *The Merchant of Venice*

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### 10.2 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: LIFE AND WORKS

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William Shakespeare's plays are read, performed, and enjoyed throughout the world. Yet they were written by an ordinary Englishman about four centuries ago. Ben Jonson, a literary figure during Shakespeare's time, said that Shakespeare was not for any century, but for all time. One might add that he was for all places and all races. Surprisingly, little is known of the life of Shakespeare, and the little we know is derived mainly from brief references to his name in documents or records. Such documents include baptismal and burial records, business and theatre papers, and his will. From all these sources we can build up a picture of Shakespeare's life. Although we have discussed Shakespeare's life in Unit 1 as well, this brief recapitulation will help us analyse his plays.

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Shakespeare was born at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564. He was baptised on 26 April, and the tradition has grown up that he was born on St. George's Day, that is, 23 April, but there is no evidence for this. John Shakespeare, his father, was a prominent businessman in Stratford, who rose to the position of high bailiff (or mayor) in 1568, but who later fell into debt. Mother of William Shakespeare, Mary Arden, was of a higher social standing than that of her husband, she being the daughter of a gentleman landowner from Wilmcote, near Stratford.

William Shakespeare, the third child of John Shakespeare, was said to have been educated at King's New School in Stratford where he acquired some knowledge of Latin and Greek. He did not have the benefit of the university education because his father's business had begun to decline from about 1577 and Shakespeare had to give up his studies in order to help his family. In November 1582, at the age of 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of Richard Hathaway. Anne was eight years senior to Shakespeare. Shakespeare had three children: Susanna born in 1583, and twins born in 1585.

Almost nothing is known about Shakespeare's life between 1585 and the early 1590's, though there are many legends about his life during this period. For example, it is said that he stole deer from a rich man's estate and had to escape to London; that he worked as a school master, a lawyer's clerk, a printer, and a seaman. However, it is known that during one of these years he went to London and became an actor and a playwright. By 1594, Shakespeare was a member of one of the groups of actors called the Lord Chamberlain's Men. By 1598, he was famous for writing comedies, historical plays, tragedies and poetry.

Shakespeare wrote on an average two plays a year. He wrote 37 plays, 154 sonnets and two longer narrative poems: *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece*. His genius was soon recognized because of a few influential personalities like the Earl of Southampton were among his friends and patrons. Shakespeare was influenced by several people's writings which include Puttenham's *Art of Poetry*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, translations from a number of writers of antiquity. However, it was Marlowe, Shakespeare's contemporary, who had the most far-reaching influence on him. Marlowe's influence is felt in all his early works.

Shakespeare was not only a great dramatist, but also was a shrewd man of the world. He was able to manage his affairs so well that he became famous, rich and prosperous. Towards the end of the 16th century, he purchased one of the best houses in his native place. In subsequent years he purchased other properties, and became a gentleman of status.

As far as we know, Shakespeare did little writing after 1610. Thereafter he made Stratford his home; but visited London from time to time in connection with his work. He obtained a share in *The Globe Theatre* in which most of his plays were staged. This increased his profits. However, he preferred to live in the countryside, although he was a man of wide experience in the larger world of

town and city. His works reflect both town and country life. In his will he remembered his family, old friends and some ordinary people of his native town. He died on 23rd April 1616, and was buried two days later in the church in which, fifty two years earlier, he had been christened.

*Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice*

### **10.2.1 William Shakespeare: Plays**

Shakespeare wrote his plays over a period of 24 years from 1588 to 1612. During this time his style steadily developed towards greater freedom of expression.

#### **Comedies**

- *The Tempest*
- *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*
- *The Merry Wives of Windsor*
- *Measure for Measure*
- *The Comedy of Errors*
- *Much Ado About Nothing*
- *Loves Labour Lost*
- *Midsummer Night's Dream*
- *The Merchant of Venice*
- *As you Like It*
- *The Taming of the Shrew*
- *All is Well That Ends Well*
- *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*
- *The Winter's Tale*

#### **Histories**

- *The Life and Death of King John*
- *The Life and Death of Richard the Second*
- *The First Part of King Henry the Fourth*
- *The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth*
- *The Life of King Henry the Fifth*
- *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*
- *The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth*
- *The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth*
- *The Life and Death of Richard the Third*
- *The Life of King Henry the Eighth*

## **NOTES**

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### Tragedies

- *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*
- *Titus Andronicus*
- *Romeo and Juliet*
- *Timon of Athens*
- *Julius Caesar*
- *The Tragedy of Macbeth*
- *The Tragedy of Hamlet*
- *King Lear*
- *Othello, the Moore of Venice*
- *Anthony and Cleopatra*
- *Cymbeline, King of Britain*

#### Check Your Progress

1. What are three types of plays William Shakespeare wrote?
2. What are some of Shakespeare's most famous works?

### 10.3 THE ELIZABETHAN AGE: THE RENAISSANCE

'Renaissance' is an Italian word, meaning re-birth. Renaissance as we understand it today is associated with major social and cultural developments in Europe between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries. The contribution of the Renaissance to the emergence of modernity in early modern Europe, and especially England, has been for many years an appropriate entry point to the history of the modern world.

The period of reign of Queen Elizabeth in British throne (1558—1603) is usually termed as the Elizabethan Age or the Elizabethan Era. The term is often used synonymously for Renaissance or for The Early Modern Period of English literature and culture. Many literary scholars and historians often used the term 'renaissance' or the early modern period to refer to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. The term 'Renaissance' – meaning 'rebirth' or 'reawakening', applies to the socio-political and cultural development that happened all over Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In case of England, the term Renaissance applies to the sixteenth century when England witnessed a socio-cultural upheaval and a change that affected the lives of all. This period witnessed a rapid growth in English Commerce, naval power and nationalist feeling, along with it being the greatest age of English literature, especially plays and poems. The prominent writers of the age were William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Francis Bacon, Walter Raleigh and others. The

age is considered to be one of the most fruitful periods in terms of literature and art. Elizabethan age is also considered by many literary historians as the first Modern Age, as the development in terms of science and the rise of capitalism and mercantilism led to a new outlook towards life. The focus of study shifted from God to man as 'man' became the centre of literary and cultural concern. Religion, that is, Christianity, still played a great role in man's life, but God was not the centre anymore, leading to a new and fresh outlook, often termed by literary historians and scholars as 'Renaissance Humanism'.

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### 10.3.1 Renaissance: An Overview

Renaissance ('rebirth') is a term applied to the period of European history following the Middle Ages; it is commonly said to have begun in Italy in the late fourteenth century and to have continued in Western Europe through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In this period the art of painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature reached an eminence not exceeded by any civilization in any age. The development came late to England in the sixteenth century, and did not have its flowering until the Elizabethan and Jacobean period; sometimes, in fact, Milton (1608-1674) is said to be the last great Renaissance poet.

Many attempts have been made to define the 'Renaissance'. It has been described as the birth of the modern world out of the ashes of the dark ages; as the discovery of the world and discovery of man; as the era of untrammelled individualism in life, thought, religion, and art. Recently some historians, finding that these attributes were present in various people and places in the Middle Ages, and also that many elements long held to be medieval survived into the renaissance, have denied that the Renaissance ever existed. It is true that history is a continuous process, and that 'periods' are invented not by God but by historians; but the concept of a period is a convenience, if not a necessity, of historical analysis, and one is able to identify, during the span of the Renaissance, a number of events and discoveries which in the course of time radically altered the views, productions, and manner of life of the intellectual classes.

All these events may be regarded as putting a strain on the relatively closed and stable world of the great civilization of the later Middle Ages, when most of the essential truths about man, the universe, religion, and philosophy were held to be well known and permanently established. The full impact of many of these Renaissance developments did not make itself felt until the later seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, but the very fact that they occurred in this period indicates the vitality, the audacity, and the restless curiosity of many men of the Renaissance, whether scholars, thinkers, artists, or adventurers.

- (1) **The New Learning:** Renaissance scholars of the classics, called Humanists, revived the knowledge of the Greek language, discovered and disseminated a great number of Greek manuscripts, and added considerably to the number of Roman authors and works which has been known to the Middle Ages.

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The result was to enlarge immensely the stock of ideas, materials, literary forms, and styles available to Renaissance writers. In the mid-fifteenth century the invention of printing on paper from movable type made books for the first time cheap and plentiful, and floods of publications, ancient and modern, poured from the presses of Europe to satisfy the demands of the rapidly expanding literate audience. The speed of the inauguration and spread of ideas, discoveries, and types of literature in the renaissance was made possible by this technological development.

The humanistic revival sometimes resulted in pedantic scholarship, sterile imitations of ancient works and styles, and a rigid rhetoric and literary criticism. It also bred, however, the gracious and tolerant humanity of an Erasmus, and the noble concept of the cultivated Renaissance gentleman expressed in Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano (The Courtier)*, published in 1528. This was the most admired and widely translated of the many Renaissance courtesy books, or books on the character, obligations, and training of the man of the court. It presents the ideal of the completely rounded or 'universal' man, developed in all his faculties and skills, physical, intellectual, and artistic. He is trained to be a warrior and statesman, but is also capable enough as an athlete, philosopher, artist, conversationist, and the man of society. His relations to women are in accord with the quasi-religious code of Platonic love, and his activities are crowned by the grace of sprezzatura – the seeming ease and negligence with which he meets the demands of complex and exacting rules of behaviour. Leonardo da Vinci in Italy and Sir Phillip Sidney in England were embodiments of the courtly ideal.

- (2) **The New Religion:** The Reformation led by Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a successful heresy which struck at the very basis of the institutionalism of the Roman Catholic Church. This early Protestantism was grounded on the individual's inner experience of spiritual struggle and salvation. Faith (based on the word of the Bible as interpreted by the individual) was alone thought competent to save, and salvation itself was regarded as a direct transaction with God in the theatre of the individual soul, without the need of intermediation by Church, priest, or sacrament. For this reason Protestantism is sometimes said to have been an extreme manifestation of 'Renaissance individualism' in northern Europe; it soon, however, developed its own institutionalism in the theocracy proposed by John Calvin and his Puritan followers. England in characteristic fashion muddled its way into Protestantism under Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, empirically finding a middle way that minimized violence and hastened a stable settlement.
- (3) **The New World:** In 1492 Columbus, acting on the persisting belief in the old Greek idea that the world is a globe, sailed west to find a new commercial route to the East, only to be frustrated by the unexpected barrier of a new

continent. The succeeding explorations of this continent gave new materials and stimulus to the literary imagination; the magic world of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, for example, is based on a contemporary account of a shipwreck on Bermuda. More important for literature, however, was the fact that economic exploitation of the new world put England at the center, rather than as theretofore at the edge, of the chief trade routes, and so helped establish the commercial prosperity that in England, as in Italy earlier, was a necessary though not sufficient condition for the development of a vigorous intellectual and artistic life.

- (4) **The New Cosmos:** The cosmos of medieval astronomy and theology was Ptolemaic (that is, based on the astronomy of Ptolemy, second century A.D.) and pictured a stationary earth around which rotated the successive spheres of the moon, the various planets, and the fixed stars; Heaven, or the Empyrean, was thought to be situated above the spheres, and Hell to be situated either at the center of the earth (as in Dante's *Inferno*) or else below the system of the spheres (as in Milton's *The Paradise Lost*). In 1543, Copernicus published his new hypothesis concerning the system of the universe; this gave a much simpler and more coherent explanation of accumulating observations of the actual movements of the heavenly bodies, which had led to ever greater complications of the Ptolemaic world picture. The Copernican theory pictured a system in which the center is not the earth, but the sun, and in which the earth is not stationary, but one planet among the many planets which revolve around the sun.

Investigations have not borne out the earlier assumption that the world picture of Copernicus and his followers delivered an immediate and profound shock to the theological and secular belief of thinking men. For example in 1611, when Donne wrote in 'The First Anniversary' that 'new Philosophy calls all in doubt,' for 'the Sun is lost, and th' earth,' he did so only to support the ancient theme of the world's decay and to enforce a standard Christian *contemptus mundi*. Still later, Milton in *Paradise Lost* expressed a suspension of judgment between the Ptolemaic and Copernican theories; he adopted for his own poem the older Ptolemaic scheme because it was more firmly traditional and better adapted to his imaginative purposes.

Much more important, in the long run, was the effect on men's opinions of the general principles and methods of the new science of the great successors of Copernicus, such as the physicists Kepler and Galileo, and the English physician and physiologist, William Harvey. The cosmos of many Elizabethan writers was not only Ptolemaic, and subject throughout to God's Providence; it was also an animate universe, invested with occult powers, inhabited by demons and spirits, and often thought to control men's lives by stellar influences and to be itself subject to control by the power of witchcraft and of magic. The cosmos that emerged in the seventeenth century, as a product

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of the scientific procedure of constructing exact hypotheses capable of being tested by precisely measured observations, was the physical universe of Rene Descartes (1596-1650). ‘Give me extension and motion,’ Descartes wrote, ‘and I will construct the universe.’ This universe of Descartes and the new science consisted of extended particles of matter which moved in space according to fixed mathematical laws, entirely free from interference by angles, demons, human prayer, or occult magical powers, and subject only to the limited manipulations of scientists who, in Francis Bacon’s phrase, had learned to obey nature in order to be her master. In this way the working hypotheses of the physical scientists were converted into a philosophical world view, which was made current by many popular expositions, and – together with the methodological principle that controlled observation, rather than tradition or authority, is the only test of truth in all areas of knowledge – helped constitute the climate of eighteenth century opinion known as the *Enlightenment*.

### Two Terms – ‘Renaissance’ and ‘Humanism’ – its Origin

In 1860, Jacob Burckhardt articulated the significant concepts of ‘Renaissance’ and ‘humanism’, in his book on cultural history, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Burckhardt is confirming to the view that Renaissance is an age of revival of commerce and urban life which laid the foundations for a secular and even anti-religious vision of life. This new vision glorified the individual which was strongly reinforced by the rediscovery of the pagan literature of the Antiquity (the classical age). The new secular and individualistic values, which were somewhat incompatible with Christian beliefs, constituted a new worldly philosophy of life known as ‘humanism’, drawing its main ideas and inspiration from ancient Greece and Rome. Humanism subsequently became the inspiration for questioning the moral basis of the feudal and Christian inheritances in Europe.

### 10.3.2 English Renaissance Drama

The drama is a comparably the greatest cultural practice of the time. It is in Elizabethan Age that drama found an expression in bountiful terms. The greatest of the English dramatist, William Shakespeare, is a product of this age. Apart from Shakespeare there are host of other dramatists who made the age proud by their dramatic creations. Some of them are –

- **John Lyly’s** best known dramas *Alexander and Compaspe* probably played for the first time on New Year’s Eve 1581: *Sapho and Phao* – 1584
- **George Peele**, an actor as well as a writer of plays for had written *The Arraignment of Paris* 1584; *Edward I* 1593; *The Battle of Alcazar*, 1594, *The Old Wives’ Tale* 1595, *David and Fair Buthsheba* 1599, *The Hunting of Cupid* 1591, *Polyhmnia* 1590, *The Fall of Troy* 1589 and *A Farewell to Norris and Drake* 1589.



- **Thomas Kyd** – A dramatist and a translator, who achieved great popularity with his first work *The Spanish Tragedy*. His chief works are *Cornelia*, *Teronima*, *The Rose Triumphs of Love* and *Fourteen Salyman* and *Persoda* are supposed to have emanated from his pen.
- **Robert Greene** – An English author who achieved distinction in the vigorous characterization and could handle better a love story was born about 1560. His plays comprise *Orlando Furioso*, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bunguy*, *Alphonus Kings of Aragan*, etc. His most effective play *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, deals with partly with the tricks of the Friar, and partly with a straight forward romantic love story.
- **Christopher Marlowe** was educated at the King’s school Canterbury. In 1587, his first play *Tamburlaine* was produced and took the public ear at once by reason of its impetuous force, its splendid command of blank verse and its sensitiveness to beauty. It was succeeded by the *Tragical history of Doctor Faustus*. *The Jew of Malta*, a play rich, in fine episodes and with glorious opening, but lacking the grip and imaginative appeal of the earlier plays. *Edward II*, his last play, is from the technical point of view also his best. In 1593 Marlowe was here slain in a drunken brawl by a beauty serving man. All the above dramatists are also known as University Wits as their plays are influenced by their education of the classical works of literature.

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### Elizabethan Theatre

Elizabethan theatre derived from several medieval theatrical traditions, such as the mystery plays, based on biblical themes that were a part of the religious festivals in England and other parts of Europe during the Middle Ages, the morality plays that evolved out of the mysteries; and the plays by University Wits that attempted to recreate the Greek tragedy. The Italian tradition of Commedia Dell’arte (artistic comedy) as well as the elaborate masques frequently presented before the court also helped in the shaping of public theatre. But the Elizabethan theatre was different from the Medieval Age dramas as the theatre came out of the purview of the church to become secular and dealt with themes which are not typically religious as that of the Medieval Age. Shakespeare, and the playwrights of his time, took stories from English and European history, and from other poems and plays. In the sixteenth century, plays were first performed in the yards of inns (hotels) with a stage set up against a wall. Groups of actors used to travel around the country performing plays in inns and in the houses of the rich. In 1576, three theatres were set up in London. One was at Blackfriars and the other two, ‘The Theatre’ and ‘The Curtain’, were erected in Shoreditch fields. The City of London authorities, primarily Puritans, were generally hostile to public performances, but its hostility was overmatched by the Queen’s taste for plays. Theatres sprang up in suburbs, accessible across the Thames River to city dwellers, but beyond the authority’s control.

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All the theatres of London during the Elizabethan era had individual differences; yet their common function necessitated a similar general plan. The public theatres were three stories high, and built around an open space at the centre. Usually polygonal in plan to give an overall rounded effect, the three levels of inward-facing galleries overlooked the open center, into which jutted the stage — essentially a platform surrounded on three sides by the audience, only the rear being restricted for the entry and exit of the actors and seating for the musicians. The upper level behind the stage was used as a balcony. Since Elizabethan theatre did not make use of lavish scenery, instead left the stage largely bare, with a few key props, the main visual appeal on stage was in the costumes. Costumes were often bright in colour and visually entrancing. Costumes were expensive and so the actors usually wore contemporary clothing regardless of the time period of the play. Occasionally, a lead character would wear a conventionalized version of the more historically accurate garb, but secondary characters would nonetheless remain in contemporary clothing. Moreover, the Elizabethans did not have elaborate props for stage. Stage was primarily bare and the backdrop of the play was left for the audience to imagine. Mostly a placard was hung on the stage door to suggest where the scene is set. A flag was unfurled to suggest that the play has started. After some music, an actor through the prologue would give the gist of the setting of the play to make the audience understand the backdrop in which the play is about to be performed. If the play lacked a prologue then in the opening scene(s) the backdrop of the play is referred to make the audience know where the play is set. If the Royalists promoted literature and theatre, then there was a faction in England called Puritans who had a strong dislike for theatre, as theatre was seen as an immoral place. Though Queen Elizabeth herself was a great admirer and promoter of theatre, still women were not allowed to act in plays in the Elizabethan era. The women characters were mostly played by boys who used to cross-dress as females.

- **William Shakespeare** is widely regarded as the greatest dramatist of all time, and occupies a unique position in the world of literature. The prophecy of his contemporary, the poet and dramatist Ben Jonson, that Shakespeare ‘*was not of an age, but for all time,*’ has come true and probably will always be true.

### **Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare**

**The Early Plays:** The record of Shakespeare’s early theatrical success is obscure. His brilliant two-part play on the Wars of the Roses, *The Whole Contention betwixt the two Famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster*, is among his earliest achievements. *The Comedy of Errors* had hilariously comic situations. *Titus Andronicus* is a tragedy in the high Roman fashion. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was a new kind of romantic comedy. *The Taming of the Shrew* is famous for its wit. *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is a witty and satirical observation on the society. *Romeo and Juliet* combines a tragic situation with comedy and gaiety.

**The Histories:** For his English history plays, Shakespeare primarily drew upon Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, which appeared in 1587, and on Edward Hall’s earlier account of *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548). From these and numerous secondary sources he

inherited traditional themes: the divine right of royal succession, the need for unity and order in the realm, the evil of dissension and treason, the cruelty and hardship of war, the power of money to corrupt, the strength of family ties, the need for human understanding and careful calculation, and the power of God's providence, which protected his followers, punished evil, and led England towards the stability of Tudor rule. After the last group of English history plays, Shakespeare chose to write about Julius Caesar, who held particular fascination for the Elizabethans. After six or seven years Shakespeare returned to the Roman theme again in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*.

**The Great, or Middle Comedies:** The comedies written between 1596 and 1602 have much in common. With the exception of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, all are set in some 'imaginary' lands—Illyria, Messina, Venice and Belmont, Athens, or the Forest of Arden. In these plays, the lovers are young and witty. The action involves wooing; and its conclusion is marriage. Whether Shakespeare's source was an Italian novel (*The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing*), an English pastoral tale (*As You Like It*), an Italian comedy (the Malvolio story in *Twelfth Night*), or something of his own invention (probably *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and parts of each), he portrayed remarkable mastery in theatre.

**The Great Tragedies:** Shakespeare's greatness is nowhere more visible than in his tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Kings Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*. The tragedies deal with divergent themes and have distinctiveness of their own.

**The Dark Comedies:** *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* are known as dark comedies for their distempered vision of the world. They are questioning, satiric, intense, and very dark in respect to the comic essence.

**The Late Plays:** *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, and *Henry VIII*, written between 1608 and 1612, are commonly known as Shakespeare's 'late plays,' or his 'last plays.' One of the common characteristics of these plays is that, although they portray tragic or pathetic emotions, events move toward a resolution of difficulties in which reconciliations and reunions are prominent.

- **Ben Jonson** was another the leading dramatist of the age his chief works include: *Every man in his Humour* (1596), *Volpone* (1605) *Epicoene* or *The Silent Woman* (1609), *The Alchemist* (1610), *Caroline* (1611), *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). He is more a classicist than romantic. Unlike Shakespeare, he deals with human life in section rather than as a whole: being content to satirize men and women. In his dramas, he is a moralist first and foremost; afterward the artist. In the play *Every man in his Humour* (1598), he has first struck the anti-romantic note and sought to establish a satirical comedy of manners framed in a definite plan. In *Volpone* (1605-1606), he glories less in the hoarding of his treasure.

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- The other chief dramatists of this age are **George Chapman** works – *the Blind Begger of Alexanderia* (1596), *Two Comedies All Fools* (1599), *The Gentleman Usher*; *Two French Tragedies Buddy D’Ambais* (1613), *The Admiral of France*, *The Odyssey* (1616), *The Hymns* (1624).
- **John Webster** (1580 – 1625) was another significant dramatist of the age whose plays *The White Devil* (1612), *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614), *The Devil’s Case* ( 1623), *Appius of Virginia* (1654) were very popular in his age. John Webster is thought to be a master of revenge tragedy.

Though drama was very popular in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Age, but at the same time, as we have discussed there were also oppositions to the theatrical practices on moral grounds from the Puritans as they carried on writings pamphlets for banning the theatre as they thought theatre not only a centre of transgressive activities, but also a meeting place for whores and their customers (Stephen Gosson) and also as a place where excessive violence is portrayed which had a negative effect on the audience, etc. Following such tirades against theatre, theatre was ultimately banned in England in 1642, only to come back again in 1660 with the restoration of Charles II to the British throne after which under French influence English plays took a different turn to create some famous Restoration Comedies.

### Check Your Progress

3. What is meant by the Renaissance period?
4. Name the most admired and widely translated of the many Renaissance courtesy books.
5. Name a few dramatists, apart from Shakespeare, who made the Elizabethan Age proud by their dramatic creations.

## 10.4 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE: PLOT

Antonio, a wealthy and respected merchant of Venice, is sad without knowing why. Among his friends is a young man named Bassanio who owes him a good deal of money. Bassanio confides in Antonio, saying that he wants to marry a rich heiress of Belmont, the beautiful Portia; but he is short of the money to enable him to make the sea voyage to her palace and try his luck to win her hand in marriage. Antonio tells his friend that he would gladly lend him whatever money he needs; but at the present time, he himself is short of cash. All his money is tied up in his merchant ships, which are still at sea. However, he tells Bassanio, that he will stand surety for a loan from Shylock, a moneylender.

Antonio and Shylock personally dislike each other. Shylock hates Antonio because (a) he is a Christian, (b) Shylock has suffered racial insults from him and (c) the merchant, unlike Shylock, lends money free of interest, thus undercutting the Jew’s business. Shylock agrees to lend money without interest but on a special

agreement — a bond. If Antonio cannot repay his debt within three months, Shylock will remove exactly a pound, in weight, of Antonio's flesh. Antonio, confident that his ships with goods will safely return to Venice before three months, agrees to abide by the terms of the bond in spite of Bassanio's protests.

In the meantime, Portia, at Belmont, discusses with her maid Nerissa, the plight she is in. Portia's future is to be determined by a chance choice. Under the terms of her father's will, whoever chooses the correct casket from a choice of three caskets, wins her hand in marriage. Against this background, Portia faces her suitors, who include a pompous Moroccan prince, and later, a vain Aragonese prince. They enter the lottery, flatter their own self-images, choose gold and silver caskets respectively, and being rejected, quickly depart.

In Venice, Bassanio prepares for his journey to Belmont. Launcelot leaves Shylock's service bidding a tearful farewell to Jessica, Shylocks' daughter, who is planning to elope with Lorenzo. Preparations are underway for Bassanio's farewell party. Jessica dressed as a page, acts as Lorenzo's torch-bearer, elopes with Lorenzo taking with her Shylock's ducats and jewels. Bassanio leaves for Belmont. In course of time it is rumoured that Antonio has lost all his ships and will not be able to repay the loan in time. Obsessed by hate and revenge, Shylock has him arrested for debt.

In Belmont, Bassanio makes a good impression on Portia and chooses the lead casket which turns out to be the correct casket. Thus, he marries Portia and acquires her wealth. Gratiano declares his love for Nerissa; and Jessica arrives with Lorenzo in Belmont. Jessica announces that Shylock is insisting upon repayment of his bond. Portia agrees to pay the debt and suggests that immediately after their marriage, Bassanio returns to Venice to settle the matter. Portia makes a plan to assist Antonio. Leaving her house in the custody of Lorenzo and Jessica, Portia and Nerissa pretend to live in a monastery until their husbands return. In fact, Portia goes to Venice disguised as a young lawyer, with Nerissa disguised as her clerk.

The Duke of Venice presides at the trial to determine Antonio's contract with Shylock. Portia, unrecognised in her judicial robes, arrives to defend Antonio, pleading with Shylock to show mercy to the merchant; but the Jew is adamant and gets ready to cut off a pound of Antonio's flesh. Portia warns him that he is entitled to cut off exactly a pound of Antonio's flesh and not to a single drop of his blood; besides, Shylock is guilty of plotting to kill a Venetian citizen, which is a capital offence. The court rules that the Jew should lose all his assets but Antonio intercedes and asks for a lesser fine to be imposed on condition that Shylock is converted to Christianity and wills his estate to Lorenzo and Jessica. Overwhelmed and shocked, Shylock agrees and leaves the court. By way of legal fees Portia asks for the ring from Bassanio which he had sworn never to part with and Nerissa follows suit by asking Gratiano to give her his ring. Bassanio and Gratiano, not recognising their wives in disguise, reluctantly hand over the rings.

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Portia and Nerissa return to Belmont; and on the arrival of their husbands Bassanio and Gratiano, accuse them of unfaithfulness. After sometime, Portia reveals the truth about their disguise and their activities in Venice. Antonio then comes to know that three of his missing ships are safe. Lorenzo and Jessica are presented with Shylock's deed of gift. The merry company goes into the house for feasting and the romance ends in happiness and harmony.

**Plot Structure:** The structure of the play consists in the skillful weaving together of four stories two major and two minor, and all in the same way interconnected as shown below:

### Two Main Plots

1. The bond story involving Shylock and Antonio.
2. The lottery of the casket revolving around Portia and her suitors.

The two plots are closely intertwined because:

- (a) Bassanio needs money in order to win Portia by participating in the casket choice.
- (b) In order to obtain the necessary provisions to go to Belmont, Bassanio places Antonio in debt. Antonio, in order to please Bassanio, enters into a bond with Shylock whom he hates.
- (c) Portia disguised as a male lawyer defeats Shylock.
- (d) The caskets themselves point to the moral that appearances are deceptive. Bassanio chooses lead casket and wins Portia. Shylock chooses revenge, gains nothing, and is defeated.

### Two Sub-plots

1. The Lorenzo-Jessica story centring on Jessica's elopement.
2. The ring plot involving Portia and Nerissa (in disguise) and Bassanio and Gratiano.

Also involved is Antonio, who urges Bassanio to give the young 'lawyer' the ring.

Both are inter-related to each other and the main plot since:

- (a) Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo and her removal of valuables from her father's house furthers Shylock's lust for revenge.
- (b) Jessica's elopement unites different Venetian communities — the Jewish and the Christian.
- (c) The rings given by Bassanio and Gratiano to Portia and Nerissa, when they are disguised, stress the theme of deception, disguise and loyalty.
- (d) The rings represent wealth and emotional values — remember that the loss of his wife's ring causes Shylock enormous distress. This relationship between financial and emotional values echoes throughout *The Merchant of Venice*.

### 10.4.1 *The Merchant of Venice*: A Romantic Comedy

A comedy is generally defined as a play which has a happy ending and which aims at entertaining its audience by providing laughter. A comedy has other aims also. It aims at correcting human follies and at reforming human society. The corrective aims and methods differ in a classical comedy and in a romantic comedy.

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#### Classical Comedy

A classical comedy follows the rules of dramatic composition as laid down by the ancient Greeks and Romans: its models are the classical dramatists like Plautus, Terence, and Aristophanes. Salient points of a classical comedy are:

- (1) Observance of the three unities of time, place and action. The unity of time demands that the whole action of the play should extend over not more than twenty-four hours. The unity of place demands that the entire action of the play should take place at the same place. The unity of action demands that the play should develop a single plot or a single story.
- (2) The classical comedy deals with realism. It deals with the everyday familiar life of ordinary people.
- (3) It strictly separates the comic and tragic elements, so that both these aspects are not intermingled in a single play.
- (4) Its aim is corrective and satiric. Some human weakness or social vice is exposed and ridiculed. The play laughs at people and not with them. The most noted exponent of the classical comedy in England was Ben Jonson, a contemporary of Shakespeare.

#### Romantic Comedy

A romantic comedy is a play in which the romantic elements are mingled with comic elements. While the romantic elements delight, thrill, and enchant us, the comic elements make us laugh. Such a comedy appeals to our emotions, our imagination, as well as to our fancy; and it also makes us laugh. The romantic elements take us to a new world, which is more pleasing than the actual world in which we live. Shakespeare wrote romantic comedies. However, he did not observe the rules of the classical comedies in his plays.

In *The Merchant of Venice* Shakespeare does not observe any of the three dramatic unities.

- (1) In '*The Merchant of Venice*', the action covers not less than three months and it is not completed in a day as the classical unity of time demands. The unity of place is violated because the scenes shift from Venice to Belmont, and from Belmont to Venice. The unity of action is not found in the play as it has multiple plots. All the plots are harmoniously woven together.
- (2) Shakespeare writes according to the dictates of his fancy without being preoccupied with classical literary rules regarding the everyday familiar life

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of ordinary people. In *The Merchant of Venice*, he deals with nobility as well as with ordinary people.

- (3) Shakespeare does not hesitate to introduce tragic situations and pathetic characters in his comedies. *The Merchant of Venice* is not a pure comedy, but is a tragi-comedy, that is a play with double-ending — happy for the romantic couples, but tragic for Shylock. The general atmosphere is more tense, serious and tragic than in other comedies. However, the play in its total effect is a comedy which provides amusement.
- (4) The aim of the classical comedy was corrective as well as satirical; but the objective of Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* is to entertain his audience. Follies are exposed and ridiculed; but on the whole, the laughter is gentle and sympathetic.

*The Merchant of Venice* has great romantic appeal to the audience. It keeps up their curiosity by making use of suspense. It is a drama of averted threat, beginning in trouble and ending in joy. It appeals to the romantic sense of adventure and of wonder, and to complain that some of the situations are improbable is not in order because the improbability or the marvelousness, is a part of the pleasure. The play dramatises incidents of romantic love, accompanied by love-doctrine. It is a play in two tones — comic as well as romantic.

### 10.4.2 *The Merchant of Venice*: Title of the Play

Shakespeare was careful in the selection of his titles. He named his tragedies and history plays after the central figures who appear strong and powerful. In comedies, however, he named his plays in a rather fanciful manner or after a character who is passive and weak. *The Merchant of Venice* is named after a weak character, Antonio; but then, Shakespeare has taken care to ensure that the action of the play originates in the weakness of Antonio.

There has been a lot of controversy as to whether the ‘merchant’ in the title refers to Shylock or Antonio. Shylock, taken as an individual, is an important and dominant character. Like Milton’s Satan, he may be an embodiment of evil, but he cannot be regarded as the hero in the play. He is rather the villain who plots against the life of the hero and is frustrated and defeated in the end.

In the play itself, Antonio is referred to as the ‘merchant’ and Shylock as the ‘Jew’ or the money-lender. In the opening scene we are told of Antonio’s wealth and his rich ventures ‘tossing on the ocean.’ He is a rich merchant with a world-wide trade. In the trial scene Portia asks, ‘Which is the merchant and which is the Jew?’ — thus, indicating that Shakespeare clearly meant Antonio to be the ‘merchant’ in the play.

Shakespeare is justified in naming the play after Antonio who has the essential qualities of a hero. He is noble, generous, and kind-hearted. He is the ‘Royal Merchant’ and ‘good Antonio’. He is widely respected in Venice and is surrounded by a number of noble friends. Above all, Antonio, is the dramatic and structural



centre in the play. The play opens by examining the causes of his melancholy, with an account of his ships at sea; and the play ends with the good news that all his ships have finally returned safely to the harbour. Throughout the story, our attention is drawn to Antonio's fortunes and misfortunes.

Antonio's friendship and love for Bassanio are all beyond measure. He borrows money from Shylock to enable Bassanio to woo Portia. Eventually, Antonio becomes the victim of Shylock's hatred and revenge. At the end, he is saved from the clutches of the Jew by a clever manipulation of the bond by Portia. Thus, he is closely linked to the main plot and the subplot in the play.

Antonio, as the hero of the play, is too weak and passive. He suffers from a nameless melancholy. Even in the trial scene, while others struggle to save his life, he is resigned to his fate. Normally, a hero is a man of action. Here, one must remember that Antonio is depicted as a weak hero because his colourless personality is most necessary to the plot. Because of his weakness, he borrows money from Shylock, his enemy, thinking that he will be able to repay the loan in time. He forgets that all his ships are at the mercy of the high seas. Furthermore, he gives the money to Bassanio who is a 'prodigal' and who wants to try his luck on borrowed money. If Antonio were a strong man, he would not have committed such errors; consequently, there would not have been a plot for the play, *The Merchant of Venice*.

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### 10.4.3 *The Merchant of Venice*: Characters

#### The Duke of Venice

- Antonio** *a merchant of Venice*  
**Bassanio** *his best friend, suitor to Portia*  
**Gratiano** *another friend, in love with Nerissa*  
**Lorenzo** *another friend, in love with Jessica*

#### Salarino

**Salanio** *Other friends*

#### Salario

- Leonardo** *servant to Bassanio*  
**Shylock** *a rich Jew, and a money-lender*  
**Jessica** *his daughter*  
**Tubal** *another Jew, Shylock's friend*  
**Launcelot Gobbo** *A clown, servant to Shylock*  
**Old Gobbo** *Launcelot's father*

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<b>Portia</b>	<i>an heiress of Belmont</i>
<b>Nerissa</b>	<i>her lady-in-waiting</i>
<b>Prince of Marocco</b>	<i>Suitors to Portia</i>
<b>Prince of Arragon</b>	
<b>Balthazar</b>	<i>servants to Portia</i>
<b>Stephano</b>	

Merchants, Officers of the Court of Justice,  
Gaoler, Musicians, Servants to Portia and  
other attendants.

### Important Characters in the Play

Let us now discuss the important characters in the play.

#### Antonio

Theoretically, Antonio is the central character of the play because all the action is directly or indirectly centred around him. He is the main actor in the bond story which unifies all the elements in the play. The finest quality in him is his love for Bassanio which seems the strongest force in his life. Their friendships survive Antonio's state of bankruptcy. In discussing Antonio's ill-luck, Salarino says "A kinder gentleman treads not the earth". Antonio is a philanthropist, doing good to others. He lends money, without charging interest, because of which he becomes an object of Shylock's hatred. He, in his generosity, promises to pay Shylock the money borrowed by Bassanio; or else, will allow Shylock to cut off a pound of his flesh.

Antonio is introduced to us as a merchant of power and influence. His ships travel far and wide. His wealth is dispersed and he is esteemed for his reliability. However, he is a gambler who stakes all on fair weather at sea. He puts his fair flesh at risk in order to satisfy the wishes of the man he loves. In the trial scene he is willing to meet his death, not caring for life. His friends struggle to save his life; he urges that the court give its judgement. His inactivity is a flaw in his character. It is in his passive attitude, the action of the play has its origin.

Antonio has strong prejudice against the Jews which was widespread in the Elizabethan age. The Jews were hated for being Jews and lending money at high rates of interest. Antonio, though a thorough gentleman, fails to rise above racial and religious prejudices against Shylock. In this context it is noteworthy that Shakespeare does not give us a monster of goodness, but a credible human being with some human weaknesses.

#### Bassanio

Bassanio is a young and the most attractive man in the play. He is fond of splendid living; and in the beginning of the play he strikes us as being a spendthrift. He

hopes to restore his fortunes by marrying a rich heiress. It becomes necessary for him to borrow money so that he can appear rich when he courts Portia. Antonio for his sake, enters into a bond with Shylock. The attitude of Bassanio is to be judged in the Elizabethan context in which dashing noblemen, frequently in debt, led a life of extravagance on pomp and show.

Bassanio's love for Antonio is profound and sincere. He dissuades Antonio from the cruel bond, saying:

*'You shall not seal to such a bond for me,  
I'll rather dwell in my necessity.'*

He responds to Antonio's written request and decides in the court to settle his benefactor's debt. He even promises to sacrifice his own 'flesh, blood, bones and all.'

Bassanio is a self-confessed fortune-hunter. In the beginning, he appears to be a young adventurer who wishes to marry a 'lady richly left in Belmont' so that he may inherit her wealth, improve his financial prospects and repay his debts. He plans to borrow money for a blind adventure. However, he is not merely a fair weather friend to Antonio. As we come to know later in the play that his friendship for Antonio has depth and reality.

In his choice of the caskets, Bassanio sees the dangers of judging by appearances. He says, 'The world is still deceived with ornament' and chooses the dull lead casket. Bassanio is an intelligent judge of character; he urges Antonio not to accept Shylock's terms. He tells his friend, 'I like not fair terms, and a villain's mind.' Besides, money does enter into his calculations, as his love for Portia is genuine. It is for her sake he is prepared to 'give and hazard' all. His choice of the correct casket is the result of his inborn heroism and nobility.

Bassanio seems to be a contradiction, as motives are honest but questionable, his actions nearly cost the life of his best friend. He is prepared to spend large sums of money and run up debts when neither money nor the credit is his. He is a carefree Elizabethan nobleman, apparently frivolous, but in reality noble and generous, capable of profound love and heroism.

### **Portia**

Portia is the romantic heroine of the play and she is presented on the stage with beauty and intelligence. She is the lady of Belmont, richly left by her father. Bassanio describes her to Antonio as a lady as rare and unattainable as the Golden Fleece. The fame of her beauty has spread far and wide, and a number of lovers are eager to marry her. Besides her beauty, she is one of the intellectual heroines of Shakespeare. Her intelligence is shown when she chooses to marry Bassanio as soon as he makes his choice. She then counsels him to leave at once for Venice to help his friend Antonio. So she is able to think and act quickly when the situation demands it. She shows her presence of mind when she is dressed up in male costumes, to act out the role of a learned lawyer. Her conduct during the trial

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scene reveals rhetorical brilliance and a court-room alertness which could only come with years of experience or inherited ability.

Portia's intellect is seen in her wit and humour. The humorous touches with which she hits off her various suitors, display not merely a genuine wit and intelligence, but a sharp tongue. When Morocco makes his choice, and takes his leave, Portia says:

*'A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go,  
Let all of his complexion choose me so.'*

Though in the trial scene, Portia conducts herself with a rare masculine self-confidence, she is essentially feminine in nature. She loves Bassanio so deeply that she sends 'speechless messages of love' to him. In spite of being passionately in love, she is restrained and modest. Earlier, she has shown that as a dutiful daughter, she is determined to obey her dead father, and act according to his will in every respect. However, after the correct choice of the casket by Bassanio, her feminine nature is best seen in her absolute self-surrender to him. She wishes she had more of everything to give to Bassanio:

*'This house, these servants and this same myself  
Are yours, my lord: I give them with this ring.'*

Portia is truly well-bred and so she does not have an exaggerated sense of her own importance. She does not make her subordinates feel her superiority. She shrinks from discussing her own good deeds, because:

*'This comes too near the praising of myself;  
Therefore no more of it.'*

She does not praise her own generosity in providing money to save Antonio and sending Bassanio off. She wittily suggests that she will get her money's worth later:

*'Since you are dear bought, I will love you dear.'*

Shakespeare depicts Portia as a typical Renaissance heroine. She is well-versed in classical mythology and literature. She is cultured and refined, she is fond of music and arts. She, indeed, is 'the beauty of the play, as Shylock is its strength.'

### **Shylock**

Shylock is an important and dynamic character who arouses interest and a variety of conflicting criticisms. Shakespeare meant him to be humiliated and defeated. In order to achieve this objective it was necessary first to arouse interest in him before making it appear that his punishment was well-deserved. Shylock is a blood-thirsty Jew of medieval tradition; he is also a credible human being.

Shylock's function in this play is to be the obstacle, the man who stands in the way of the love stories; such a man is a traditional figure in romantic comedies. Something or someone must impede young, romantic love; here, it is Shylock

who stands as an obstacle against the lovers. The fact that he is a Jew, is by and large accidental. Shakespeare wanted to contrast generosity and kindness against selfishness and greed in terms of money and in terms of love.

Actions of Shylock originate from his passion for revenge, passion for money and his passion for race and religion. Shylock is revengeful; he wants to have his revenge on Antonio whom he hates. He nurses grievance; he is cunning and crafty, ever looking for an opportunity for harming Antonio. When Antonio comes for a loan of three thousand ducats, Shylock sees a golden opportunity for satisfying his passion:

*'If I catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.'*

Shylock's actions can be justified to a certain extent by the fact that centuries of oppression and ill-treatment have made him what he is. He is a foreigner and he has not been accepted in the Christian society in which he lives. Antonio has called him a dog and has spat upon him. All this hatred has embittered his soul.

Shylock loves money more than anything else. When Antonio turns to Shylock to borrow money, the points of emphasis of Shylock is money, interest and Antonio's credit rating — i.e. can Antonio repay his debt? For Shylock, the creation of money is creative. He is proud to make money 'breed as fast' as rams and ewes. He considers 'well-won thrift' what Antonio refers to negatively as 'interest'. Shylock appears to be a calculating, ruthless businessman. When Jessica elopes with Lorenzo taking away much of her father's wealth, Shylock wishes that his daughter were dead at his feet and his ducats in her coffin. However, he refuses to take 'ten times over' the borrowed money in the trial scene. Thus his passion for revenge overrides his passion for money.

Though Shylock is miserly, he is also a devout practitioner of his religion. As far as his attachment to his religion is concerned, he calls his people as 'sacred' and in his imagination he is constantly back in Palestine with the folk of the Old Testament. He quotes Jacob, thinks of Launcelot as the offspring of Hagar, and sees in Antonio a resemblance of the 'publicans'. His oaths 'by Jacob's staff', 'by our holy Sabbath,' 'cursed by my tribe' speak of Shylock's people and his faith.

In short, Shylock is an example of racial sufferings and racial sympathies. He becomes an object of bitter insult, being surrounded by enemies whom he is too proud to appease and too weak to oppose. He can have no life among them but money; no hold on them but interest; no feeling towards them but hate. By standing up for the letter of the law against all the appeals for mercy, he has strengthened his enemies' hands and sharpened their weapons against himself. Revenge and obduracy take possession of him until at the height of his wickedness he falls into the pit he had dug.

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### Nerissa

Nerissa is a foil to Portia, just as Gratiano is to Bassanio. Though she is Portia's lady-in-waiting, she is more like a confidential companion. She assists her mistress in all her plans. Like her mistress, she is young and possesses great common sense. Nerissa, in her matter-of-fact attitude, points out to Portia that the man who will choose the casket intelligently will be the man who will love her rightly.

Nerissa's character is drawn as a passive supporter of Portia. She merely echoes a sentiment or imitates an action. Thus when Portia expresses satisfaction after Arragon has failed, Nerissa echoes the sentiment by saying,

*'The ancient saying is no heresy*

*Hanging and wiving goes by destiny.'*

Furthermore, Portia, while giving the ring to Bassanio, tells him to take care of the ring, Nerissa also gives the ring to Gratiano and tells him to take care of it.

Nerissa is not merely a passive character. She also has a distinct personality of her own. She rejects Portia's melancholy pose just as Gratiano rejects Antonio's. It is she who takes the opportunity of grabbing Gratiano for a husband, since he falls in love with her romantically at first sight. She agrees to marry him, not before she has made Bassanio's success a condition of her betrothal. It is misleading to call her a 'maid' in the modern sense; 'lady-in-waiting' is a more accurate description of Nerissa.

### Jessica

Jessica, the only daughter of Shylock, plays an important role in the play. She links Shylock's world with that of Venice; and Venice with Belmont. For Lorenzo, Jessica is 'wise, fair, and true'. But in reality, Jessica is deceitful, extravagant, and disloyal to her father as well as to her religion. Most of her actions take place from her hatred of her father and her love for Lorenzo. The hatred for her father is intense:

*'But though I am a daughter to his blood*

*I am not to his manners.'*

Jessica is extravagant in spending 'fourscore ducats at a sitting' and exchanging a turquoise ring for a monkey. Her hatred for her father originates from the fact that she is bored at home, and she is opposed to Shylock as far as his attitudes are concerned.

Jessica is basically intelligent and cunning. She must have been clever to have arranged many secret meetings with Lorenzo in order to plan their elopement. She takes the lead in the plan for elopement. When Lorenzo comes for her, she confirms at once Lorenzo's identity before she opens the window. Her natural sensitivity suggests an artistic temperament.

Jessica is an ambiguous character open to several interpretations. She is a rebel but her rebellion is domestic — against her father. She is fickle, pleasure-

loving and childish, Shylock has to tell her not to rush to the window when the masquerade passes. Her lack of affection for her father, her lack of moral principles indicate her unprincipled nature. The only time she reveals an awareness of her crimes is before she commits them:

*'Alas! What heinous crime it is in me  
To be ashamed to be my father's child!'*

Jessica's character is difficult to evaluate. The audiences of Shakespeare's play would find her more justified in her actions than we do, simply because her father was a Jew.

#### 10.4.4 *The Merchant of Venice*: Themes and Issues

**Theme of Love:** *The Merchant of Venice* is a romantic comedy; and consequently, has love as one of its main themes. All drama depends upon some conflict. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the conflict is between the love on the one hand and some barrier to its fulfillment on the other. This barrier may be a parent, society or other elements which prevent the course of love from running smooth. Love in the play is threatened by Shylock, and so the play can be seen in terms of opposition between Portia-Bassanio and all they represent, and Shylock and all he represents. Portia and Bassanio are in the centre of the love theme; they are flanked by two other couples, Jessica and Lorenzo, as well as Nerissa and Gratiano. The heroines disguise themselves as men in order to facilitate the fulfillment of the love-theme. Portia's and Nerissa's disguises in Act IV both help to complete the plot and to produce more comic confusion in Act V. Jessica, too, elopes with her lover Lorenzo disguised as a torch-bearer.

**Theme of Friendship and Loyalty:** Friendship and loyalty is another theme highlighted in the play. Antonio is loyal to Bassanio and disregards Bassanio's shortcomings when the latter asks for a loan. Bassanio returns this trust when he journeys to Venice immediately after his marriage, in response to Antonio's letter of distress. Portia's loyalty to Bassanio is also extended to his friend Antonio, whom she has never met. In pursuing his revenge, Shylock is loyal to his traditions and Old Testament principles. On the contrary, we have disloyalty on the part of Jessica, who turns her back on her family and religion. Besides, Bassanio and Gratiano, in spite of their solemn promise, give away their rings thus showing their disloyalty to Portia and Nerissa. Shylock is isolated; he receives no human love and loyalty. His treatment of Jessica is without love and she repays him with disloyalty. Shylock has a friend, Tubal; but Tubal carries bad news so gleefully making one doubt if their friendship can be much more than a business association based on mutual self-interest.

**Theme of Love of Money and Wealth:** Love of money, wealth, and possessions forms another important theme in the play. Shylock is a usurer; he values money for its own sake, as an end in itself. Living in an alien country amidst hostile society, his money and possessions are his only security. His obsession for money is so

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strong that he considers everything, even human beings, as commercial objects. According to Shylock, Antonio's life 'Is dearly bought, is mine, and I will have it' (Act IV: 1). Even Jessica, his daughter is a material object to him. When he loses her and some money, Shylock's loss of his daughter is indistinguishable from the loss of his money. He says: 'My daughter! O my ducats ... my ducats and my daughter!' (Act II: 8).

Money is not an end in itself but only a means to achieve something as far as Antonio, Bassanio and Portia are concerned. Bassanio needs money to travel to Belmont to win his bride, but it is his love for Portia which has final value. Similarly, Portia, a wealthy heiress, offers all she has to Bassanio to enable him to save Antonio, who has risked his life to stand surety for a loan from Shylock. Antonio did this for his love for Bassanio. The money-theme is best represented in Bassanio's choice of the casket. He rejects the gold and silver caskets, which suggest wealth and riches. Instead, he chooses the poor lead casket, with the motto 'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.' His choice involves 'giving' rather than taking or gaining. Furthermore, he takes a risk in order to win the love of Portia - something more important than wealth.

**Theme of Justice and Mercy:** The play brings out clearly the theme of justice and mercy. Shylock demands strict justice; he comes to court to demand his pound of flesh from Antonio. Portia, on the contrary, requests him to show mercy. She extols the quality of mercy:

*'It is twice blest;*

*It blesses him that gives and him that takes.'*

Shylock has the power and the force of the law to demand strict justice; but he rejects mercy in favour of justice. 'I stand here for law', he says. Later on he demands absolute justice saying, 'My deeds upon my head! I crave the law.' The crowning irony of the scene follows. Portia finds him guilty of intended murderer, and also puts such conditions which prevent him from taking a pound of flesh.

**Theme of Appearance and Reality:** According to Portia's father, judgement by appearances is not a true index to the character of a person. He devised the lottery of caskets in which the choice is to be made among three caskets judging by their metals and their inscriptions. This was necessary to ensure that a deserving person weds Portia. In fact the casket-device is not a lottery but threefold test of character. In the first place, a suitor who is not sincere in his love is not likely to make the choice, for the penalties of failure are quite severe. The unsuccessful candidate must take a vow of celibacy and depart at once from Belmont.

Successful suitors who pass the test of sincerity, must choose the casket, after examining its appearance and the motto inscribed on it. The Prince of Morocco is carried away by the outward appearance of the golden casket. The proud Prince of Arragon is moved by the inscription on the silver casket. He is proud of his royal birth and has contempt for ordinary men. The motto on the silver casket is meant to entrap and mislead such vain people as the Prince of Arragon. Bassanio



rejects the gold casket almost on the same grounds as the Prince of Arragon. He also rejects the silver casket with humility for the same reasons which made him reject the gold casket. Finally, he chooses the lead casket which threatens more than it promises. Because Bassanio is a true lover, chivalrous and discriminating, he chooses the lead casket. Bassanio voices Shakespeare's moral that we must not judge anything by external appearance:

*'So may the outward shows be least themselves:  
The world is still deceived with ornament.'*

### **Theme of Cross-Dressing**

Twice in *The Merchant of Venice*, daring deeds are done with the help of cross-dressing. Jessica escapes from Shylock's house by dressing as a page, while Portia and Nerissa rescue Antonio by posing as legal officers at the Venetian court. Shakespeare uses cross-dressing as a comic device in the play, but it has other implications. It is a structural necessity, as without cross-dressing Antonio could not be saved as females were not allowed to enter the court room which was primarily a male domain. Portia reveals that the donning of men's clothes is more than mere comedy. She says that she has studied a 'thousand raw tricks of these bragging Jacks,' suggesting that authority is not something that is an arena of the males, but women can also have it if they will. She feels confident that she can outwit any male competitor, declaring,

*'I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,  
And wear my dagger with the braver grace' (Act III. iv. 64–65).*

In other words, it can be said that by cross-dressing Portia enables herself to assume the power and position denied to her as a woman. Cross-dressing may question patriarchal standards in terms of showing that female needs to dress as a male in order to find her true manifestation of virtues, but it also reaffirms patriarchy as the female becomes powerless the moment she sheds her male attire.

### **Romantic Setting**

The action in the play takes place abroad in Venice or in Belmont. The remoteness of these places gives the play a romantic colouring. While Venice is certainly a reality, existing on the world map, Belmont is entirely a creation of Shakespeare's mind. The Venetians are portrayed like contemporary Elizabethans. Adventurous merchants like Antonio were highly honoured in Elizabethan age, an age known for travel and discovery. Such rich merchants had their own hangers-on as Antonio has Salarino, Salanio and Gratiano. Noblemen, in this period, lead a splendid and extravagant life much beyond their means. This led them to live on borrowed money. Bassanio represents such young spendthrifts. In a predominant Christian society, Jews were considered to be aliens-victims of isolation. In this society, money-lending was forbidden to Christians by the church in the Middle Ages, and as a consequence, money-lending was controlled by the Jews. It was usually the only occupation the law allowed them. Shylock is a traditional figure of the Jewish

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moneylender. He is not merely a Jew, but a Jew in the Christian society oppressed and hated. Venice is, in fact, Elizabethan England with its traditions. Shakespeare means to keep his audience at home no matter in what foreign country the scene is laid.

Belmont, which means ‘the hill beautiful’, is a poetic and romantic world, a world of love, friendship, music, and song. Here the scenes are set in the moonlit gardens. The world of Belmont is in contrast to the harsh realities of the world of Venice. Belmont is the world of wealth and luxury where Portia is ‘richly left’ to be wooed and wedded through the lottery of the caskets. It is here that lovers unite and the play ends happily with the ringing of the wedding bells.

### Check Your Progress

6. Why does Shylock hate Antonio?
7. Who was Jessica and with whom did she elope?
8. What is a classical comedy?
9. Is ‘*The Merchant of Venice*’ a pure comedy?
10. What themes are employed in *The Merchant of Venice*?

## 10.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. William Shakespeare’s plays falls into three main categories: the comedies, the tragedies and the histories.
2. *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Comedy of Errors* and *King Lear* etc. are some of the most famous plays of William Shakespeare.
3. Renaissance or rebirth is a term applied to the period of European history following the Middle Ages; it is commonly said to have begun in Italy in the late fourteenth century and to have continued in Western Europe through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In this period the art of painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature reached an eminence not exceeded by any civilization in any age.
4. Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano* (*The Courtier*), published in 1528 was the most admired and widely translated of the many Renaissance courtesy books, or books on the character, obligations, and training of the man of the court.
5. There are host of other dramatists, apart from Shakespeare, who made the Elizabethan Age proud by their dramatic creations, namely John Lyly, George

Peele, Thomas Kyd, Robert Greene, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, John Webster and George Chapman.

*Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice*

6. Shylock hates Antonio because Antonio is a Christian. Also, Shylock has suffered racial insults from Antonio. The other reason of his dislike for Antonio is that Antonio has rescued many people from their debts to Shylock as Shylock was a usurer who mercilessly exploits his victims.
7. Jessica is the only daughter of Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. She eloped with Lorenzo, a penniless Christian, taking with her Shylock's ducats and jewels.
8. A classical comedy follows the rules of dramatic composition as laid down by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Its models are the classical dramatists like Plautus, Terence, and Aristophanes. It primarily deals with realism and also with the everyday familiar life of ordinary people.
9. *The Merchant of Venice* is not a pure comedy, but is a tragi-comedy, that is a play with double-ending — happy for the romantic couples, but tragic for Shylock. The general atmosphere is more tense, serious and tragic than in other comedies. However, the play in its total effect is a comedy which provides amusement.
10. In the play *The Merchant of Venice*, various themes have been employed such as:
  - (a) Theme of Love
  - (b) Theme of Friendship and Loyalty
  - (c) Theme of Love of Money and Wealth
  - (d) Theme of Justice and Mercy
  - (e) Theme of Appearance and Reality
  - (f) Theme of Cross-dressing

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### 10.6 SUMMARY

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- *The Merchant of Venice* is one of the most popular plays by William Shakespeare. The play explores such basic values as the nature of love and friendship, the relation of man to money, the morality of lending money at interest, the problem of loneliness, the limited value of civil law, the error of judging by external appearances.
- Shakespeare was born at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564. He was baptised on 26 April, and the tradition has grown up that he was born on St. George's Day, that is, 23 April, but there is no evidence for this.
- Shakespeare wrote on an average two plays a year. He wrote 37 plays, 154 sonnets and two longer narrative poems: *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece*.

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- Shakespeare wrote his plays over a period of 24 years from 1588 to 1612. During this time his style steadily developed towards greater freedom of expression.
- ‘Renaissance’ is an Italian word, meaning re-birth. Renaissance as we understand it today is associated with major social and cultural developments in Europe between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries. The contribution of the Renaissance to the emergence of modernity in early modern Europe, and especially England, has been for many years an appropriate entry point to the history of the modern world.
- It is in Elizabethan age that drama found an expression in bountiful terms. The greatest of the English dramatist, William Shakespeare, is a product of this age. Apart from Shakespeare there are host of other dramatists who made the age proud by their dramatic creations.
- Elizabethan theatre derived from several medieval theatrical traditions, such as the mystery plays, based on biblical themes that were a part of the religious festivals in England and other parts of Europe during the Middle Ages.
- *Troilus and Cressida*, *All’s Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* are known as dark comedies for their distempered vision of the world. They are questioning, satiric, intense, and very dark in respect to the comic essence.
- A comedy is generally defined as a play which has a happy ending and which aims at entertaining its audience by providing laughter.
- A classical comedy follows the rules of dramatic composition as laid down by the ancient Greeks and Romans: its models are the classical dramatists like Plautus, Terence, and Aristophanes.
- A romantic comedy is a play in which the romantic elements are mingled with comic elements. While the romantic elements delight, thrill, and enchant us, the comic elements make us laugh. Such a comedy appeals to our emotions, our imagination, as well as to our fancy; and it also makes us laugh.
- *The Merchant of Venice* is named after a weak character, Antonio; but then, Shakespeare has taken care to ensure that the action of the play originates in the weakness of Antonio.
- *The Merchant of Venice* is a romantic comedy; and consequently, has love as one of its main themes. The other themes in the play include theme of friendship and loyalty, theme of love of money and wealth, theme of justice and mercy, theme of appearance and reality, and theme of cross-dressing.

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## 10.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Revelry:** It refers to a situation in which people are drinking, dancing, singing etc. at a party or in public.
- **Denouement:** It refers to the final part of a play, film, or narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together and matters are explained or resolved.
- **Romantic Comedy:** It refers to a film or play that deals with love in a light, humorous way.
- **Untrammelled:** It refers to a situation or condition which is not limited by rules or any other controlling influence.
- **Page:** It refers to a young person employed as a personal attendant of a person of rank.
- **Casket:** It refers to a small ornamental box or chest for holding jewels, letters or other valuable objects.
- **Prodigal:** It refers to a person who spends money in a recklessly extravagant way.
- **Celibacy:** It refers to a state of abstaining from marriage and sexual relations.
- **Cross-dressing:** It refers to the act of wearing the clothes of the opposite sex.

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## 10.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a character analysis of Shylock as we see him in the play *The Merchant of Venice*.
2. Do you think Portia is the main protagonist of the play *The Merchant of Venice*? Why do you think so? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Who do you think is the Merchant of Venice in the play *The Merchant of Venice*? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Write short notes on:
  - (a) Shylock
  - (b) Jessica
  - (c) Trial Scene
  - (d) Mercy as a theme
  - (e) Cross-dressing

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### Long Answer Questions

1. Critically discuss *The Merchant of Venice* as a Romantic Comedy.
2. What is the significance of the casket episode in *The Merchant of Venice*?
3. In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, is Shylock justified in seeking revenge from Antonio?
4. Discuss Cross-dressing as a significant theme of the play *The Merchant of Venice*.
5. Critically comment on the title of *The Merchant of Venice*.

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### 10.9 FURTHER READINGS

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**BLOCK - IV**  
**DEVELOPING LANGUAGE SKILLS**

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## UNIT 11 ESSAY WRITING

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**Structure**

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 Effective Writing Skills
  - 11.2.1 Characteristics of a Good Essay
  - 11.2.2 Essay and its Types
- 11.3 Parts of an Essay
- 11.4 Selected Essays
- 11.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 11.6 Summary
- 11.7 Key Words
- 11.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 11.9 Further Readings

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### 11.0 INTRODUCTION

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The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines an essay as ‘a literary composition (usually prose and short) on any subject.’ In fact, an essay is a short piece of writing on any topic which expresses the author’s personal opinion on it. However, the term may also be extended to any written composition which provides information on a given subject or a narrative or descriptive piece of writing. It may include statement of facts, explanation of a topic or can be based on imagination. Depending on the nature of writing, essays are classified into different types.

In this unit, we will be discussing certain skills that one must cultivate for effective writing, the characteristics of an essay, its parts and types. Some hints and guidelines for good essay writing along with sample essays have been given for the convenience of students.

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### 11.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Explain the term ‘essay’, its characteristics and types
- Define the characteristics of good writing skills
- Discuss the various steps in essay writing
- Analyse how to approach essays on different topics

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## 11.2 EFFECTIVE WRITING SKILLS

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Writing is that form of communication which reveals the sender's clarity of thought and expression in encoding a message. Barbara Tuchman, a well-known historian, has very aptly said that though effective communication needs both a sender and a receiver, this process can become more successful if the writer (who is the sender in this case) keeps the written form (the message) simple, concise and brief.

Effective writing does not happen just on its own. It is a skill which needs to be cultivated. In other words, it involves the practice of following what is commonly called ABC, i.e., Accuracy, Brevity and Clarity. Accuracy here means usage of correct facts and figures, language and tone. Brevity means the ability to express oneself in a few words, leaving out unnecessary details. Clarity refers to the expression of thought in a clear and simple language.

Since the success of communication, to a large extent, depends on the receiver and how he responds to the message, recognizing the needs, expectations, fears and attitudes of the receiver/s is very essential. In written communication, the feedback is delayed and the receiver cannot immediately clarify his doubts in case of an unclear message. Therefore, getting our written communication right becomes a matter of prime concern.

The next important task for effective writing is to identify and determine the purpose of communication. The purpose of written communication, as communication in general, is two-fold—to inform and to persuade. Informative writing presents information and is expository in nature. Its purpose is to disseminate knowledge, i.e., to educate and not to persuade. Therefore, maintaining maximum objectivity is very essential. Persuasive or argumentative writing aims at convincing the readers about a matter. It expresses opinions rather than facts.

Effective writing skills, therefore, entails planning before writing, identifying the purpose of writing, considering the needs of the audience, choosing appropriate language and effective tone. The ability to communicate a message in a simple, concise and accurate written form makes a person's writing skills effective.

### 11.2.1 Characteristics of a Good Essay

A good essay must have the following qualities:

1. **Unity:** Unity is the first principle of a good essay. This means that the essay must develop a single idea with a definite purpose. Though the idea must be dealt within a variety of ways and from different points of view, but all unnecessary details must be excluded.
2. **Order:** The essay should be so ordered in a logical sequence that it comes to a definite conclusion. Thus, planning the structure is important so that thoughts flow in an order without being haphazard and unorganized.



3. **Brevity:** Though the length of an essay depends on the nature of the subject, it must be brief, direct in style and expressed precisely.
4. **Style:** An essay has a literary value. Hence, the style of an essay must be dignified and formal. Colloquial terms, slang words and informal expressions that are non-conventional must be avoided as far as possible. The language used should be simple, clear and direct without any attempts at unnecessary embellishments.
5. **Personal touch:** An essay reflects the personal feelings and opinions of an individual.

Therefore, it must give expression to his unique individuality. One must not be afraid to express himself freely in an essay. The personal touch can be given despite maintaining one's objectivity.

Apart from the above mentioned features, appropriate subject-matter, proper organization and powerful expression of thoughts make an essay effective.

### 11.2.2 Essay and its Types

Essays can be classified as follows:

1. Descriptive
2. Narrative
3. Reflective
4. Imaginative
5. Expository
6. Discursive

However, they cannot be put into watertight compartments and some essays might include features of two or more types. For example, a narrative essay may contain descriptive elements and all essays will be more or less reflective.

1. **Descriptive essays:** A descriptive essay includes the description of some person, place or thing. For example, mother, father, friend (person), Delhi, Bombay, the Taj Mahal (place), cars, aspects of nature like the sun, moon, etc. (thing). As the word suggests, a descriptive essay primarily focuses on specific details and facts pertaining to animate and inanimate things. You could describe a particular creature, or types of clouds. Describing places, buildings and objects, requires familiarity with the subject or close observation. The selection and arrangement of facts should highlight specific characteristics and if there is anything unique or special, you could mention it. A descriptive essay has many images and the tone is usually objective and impersonal. However, the writer's response to the subject he is describing is evident from his choice of words.
2. **Narrative essays:** Narration is extensively used in fiction. It consists mainly in the narration of some event, or series of events. Narrative essays will

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include reflection and some imagination. It can be a historical story, biography of a great leader, incidents and accidents, a journey or voyage and a real or imaginary story. Narrative essays incorporate features of other styles of essay writing. While the primary emphasis is on narrating or talking about, 'recounting and relating' events in an orderly fashion, descriptive and reflective features are present. A narrative account of any historical event, individual or, episode has to be given in a logical and sequential manner. The narrative could be dramatically presented, but you have to keep an overall coherence in mind. Most newspaper articles tend to be narrative and students find it easier to write narrative essays.

3. **Reflective essays:** Reflection means pondering over a subject or idea. It can include qualities like heroism, honesty, patriotism, socio-political issues such as education, corruption, democracy, philosophical and religious topics.
4. **Imaginative essays:** In an imaginative essay, the writer is required to put himself in someone else's shoes and visualize a situation or experience. For example, an essay on 'If I were the Prime Minister of India' or 'The autobiography of a cow' would be imaginative in nature. Imaginative essays are among the most interesting because the writer gives rein to his imagination and the essay is often characterized by wit, humour, and originality. The writer has complete freedom to develop the topic in whichever way he wants to and the style can be personal and subjective. In an imaginative essay, you are visualizing a particular situation, which you may not have experienced, except imaginatively, for example, 'The day my father cooked dinner'. Such a situation may never have taken place, yet you can vividly imagine what might transpire if your father had to cook dinner. Imaginative essays are lively in tone, have an original perspective and are personal in expression.

Fictionalizing an episode and writing creatively about it, is also considered as an imaginative essay, for example, 'My summer holidays'. You can write about events that may not have actually taken place, but what you have imagined.

Imaginative essays are fun to write and students should be encouraged to use their imagination and express themselves.

5. **Expository essay:** An expository essay consists of explanation of a subject or topic. For example, institutions or occupations (parliament, farming), scientific subjects (global warming, evolution of man) and literary topics (nature of poetry, the plays of Shakespeare, the poetry of Keats). The word expository means 'to explain'. An essay that deals with the explanation of a particular process, for example, rain harvesting, an institution, (how legislative bodies function) or a natural phenomenon, (black holes in the universe) or the discussion of a particular text or style of writing, is classified as an expository essay. The writer attempts to explain why and how

something happens. Here, the writer is expected to demonstrate his familiarity with the subject, provide the necessary information, elaborate wherever possible. It is better to write in a linear, sequential manner and it is important to see that your material is well structured. If you are going to talk about rain harvesting, you need to first explain the term, tell the reader what is required and go through a systematic process, so that the reader understands the entire process and the importance of rain harvesting.

6. **Discursive essay:** Quite often, an essay requires that the writer to discuss a particular subject and come to a conclusion, after examining the merits and demerits of the topic, for example, 'Attendance should be compulsory in a university'. A statement like this challenges a response. You have to be clear about your own view and structure the essay such that the body of the essay examines the arguments that eventually lead to the conclusion.

As far as possible, it is advisable to objectively state both sides and then proceed to your personal conclusion. An essay like this tends to be more analytical as both arguments and counter arguments have to be rationally debated and concluded with a statement or point of view.

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. What is the ABC of effective writing skills?
2. How can a little personal touch make an essay more authentic?
3. What is an expository essay?
4. What do reflective essays express?

### **11.3 PARTS OF AN ESSAY**

An essay consists of paragraphs arranged in a sequence. A paragraph is a group of sentences linked together to form a unit. Each paragraph deals with a single idea. In an essay, each paragraph explains or demonstrates a key point or thought of the central idea, usually to inform or to persuade. The sentence which expresses the main idea of the paragraph is called the topic sentence. It is also known as key sentence or theme sentence. The topic sentence can come anywhere in the paragraph, either at the beginning, middle or end. All the other sentences in the paragraph are explanations or illustrations of the topic sentence.

In a paragraph, the sentences are in cohesion, i.e., they stick together in unison. Coherence is also an essential requirement of a paragraph. Coherence means the clear and logical linking of ideas in a paragraph. Thus, each sentence should be well linked with the sentence that precedes and follows it. There should be unity in the sense that all the ideas contained within a given paragraph 'hang together' in a way that is easy for the reader to understand. When the writer changes the idea, he must begin a new paragraph. This helps the reader to go

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along with the writer's thoughts and flow of ideas. The reader knows that the writer is dealing with one main topic and the beginning of a new paragraph signals that the writer is moving on to a new topic. Consider the following example:

*Employees' attitude at National Electric Company should be improved.*  
The workers do not feel that they are a working team instead of just individuals. If people felt they were a part of a team, they would not misuse the tools, or deliberately undermine the work of others.

*Management's attitude towards its employees should also be improved.*  
Managers at National Electric act as though their employees are incapable of taking decisions or doing their own work. Managers treat workers like objects, not human beings.

In the above example, two ideas are discussed in separate paragraphs. In the first paragraph, the writer deals with the subject of employees' attitudes. The first sentence is the topic sentence and the other sentences are linked together in a logical sequence and are illustrations of the topic sentence. When the writer changes his idea from employees' attitudes to management's attitude, he begins a new paragraph. This new paragraph has a different topic sentence which is written in italics. The second paragraph, too, displays the features of cohesion, coherence and unity.

Now that we are familiar with the idea of a paragraph, let us discuss the different parts of an essay. An essay basically has three paragraphs, namely, introduction, description (or body) and conclusion. The body of the essay may have more than one or several paragraphs depending on the topic. Before the conclusion, there can be a transitional paragraph.

The introductory paragraph introduces the topic and familiarizes the readers with the main idea of the essay. It should be brisk and to the point. The purpose of an introduction is to supply sufficient background information and orient the readers with the subject matter. It may consist of a definition, or a quotation, proverb, a brief story or a general remark, leading up to the subject.

Description means the discussion of the topic in detail. It can include explanations and illustrations on the main idea. The length of the description will depend on the topic in question, but the description should be proportionate with each part getting the due weight. It should be to the point and the use of unnecessary words should be avoided. Words and phrases should be carefully chosen so that they match the subject matter and best express the ideas in mind. The sentences should be so framed that they are quite clear and forcefully explain the topic. The paragraphs should be well-constructed and should be related to one another according to the direction of the essay.

After the body, comes the transitional paragraph which anticipates the conclusion and prepares the readers for the end. The concluding paragraph stems directly from the description and must sum up the whole discussion. An effective

and satisfying end to an essay is as important as an arresting beginning. An abrupt or feeble ending may spoil the whole effect of the essay. A good conclusion can include a suitable quotation or a striking sentence that would leave the readers satisfied.

The following essay will make clear the above discussion:

*Consumerism has killed our Humanitarian Values*

*Little Dorothy called her mother,*

*'Mama there's a penniless child,*

*His eyes filled with tears of hunger,*

*Why does no one feed him?'*

*'He's 'penniless' and 'hungry',*

*That's the very reason*

*They don't feed him,'*

*Replied she.*

A round ivory bed covered with golden linen, a walk-in closet, mink blankets, marble floor, a personal Jacuzzi, a huge hall lighted with Swarovski chandeliers, an elaborate meal with the most exotic dishes from different parts of the world, vacations in Paris, Switzerland, Australia, a black 'ROLLS' (Royce), a huge clock that chimes every hour. . . . . I open my eyes with a start as my alarm goes off, I wake up from my dream to face the stark reality of life. Each of us has been into a dreamland (at least once in a while) only to wake up and face reality.

Many of us are extremely brand conscious or rather 'brand freaks', but we forget that there are thousands who die of cold in the dark alleys of the city simply because they cannot wrap a single piece of cloth around their body. And all we do is pity them, but they do not need our pitiful glances. Where has all our compassion for mankind gone? Have we become so self-centered that we do not have a single tear in our eyes when we see penniless little creatures shivering in the cold?

We love going to fancy restaurants for a weekly dine-out. If our parents do not take us out on one Sunday evening, we become cranky and throw tantrums till they give in. But there are millions who cannot have even one square meal a day, countless people who starve to death and do not even have a respectable funeral.

Have you heard of concierge doctors? They are those doctors who tend to the 'needs' of wealthy people in town by paying them a home visit and treating them at home (even the most sophisticated machines are brought to their home), while there are people who die of undiagnosed diseases on the streets.

You would have heard the term 'Born with a silver spoon', it is then that I wonder why can we not, just collect the entire wealth of the world and distribute it equally amongst all the people? It is an absurd idea, but at the same time, it is a grotesque system which allows some people to have too much while many do not have enough.

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In the above essay, the introductory paragraph introduces the concept of consumerism through the use of a metaphor. The next two paragraphs constitute the description or body of the essay. The paragraph about the concierge doctors forms the transitional paragraph and marks a change towards the conclusion. The concluding paragraph aptly wraps up the whole essay.

### Hints on Essay Writing

The following are some hints for good essay writing:

1. **Preparation:** One of the chief difficulties that one faces while writing an essay is the lack of content. This difficulty can be overcome by extensive reading and powerful and alert observation. Francis Bacon has aptly said, 'Reading maketh a full man', i.e., a well-read man has a wide range of knowledge and is complete in all respects. For writing good essays, general knowledge on a variety of topics is very helpful. Apart from reading, a keen observation also adds to one's knowledge of things that are around him. Observation and a critical mind sharpen his intelligence and give him a grasp over any given subject matter. One also learns from other people's conversations and thoughts on a certain issue. Thus, interaction with people is also helpful in gathering information.
2. **Understanding the topic:** For good essay writing, the writer must have a clear and accurate understanding of what he/she is expected to write. In an essay, it is very important to come straight to the point instead of discussing unnecessary and irrelevant details. For example, if the topic is 'The influence of the media on Indian culture', the writer must understand that the essay has to talk about the specific influence that the media in India has on the culture of the country.
3. **Organizing the material:** The first thing to do is to read the topic a few times to get a clear idea of what is expected from the writer. Once you are clear about the subject, the next step is to reflect over it and think what can be written about it. Attempting to write down the first thing that comes to mind, without knowing what is to come next, is fatal to good essay writing.

As thoughts come in the mind regarding the topic, one must jot them down, lest they are forgotten. Once you have collected enough material, read it over and select the points that are most suitable for your purpose. Selection of points must be done very carefully, omitting repetitions, choosing relevant illustrations and so on. The process of selection will suggest to you the line of thought you may follow in the essay.

After selecting the points, one must arrange them in a logical order so that the essay is properly structured without being disproportionate or full of repetitions and irrelevant details. Hence, making the outline first and then filling in the details is a more effective method. What you are able to produce through this process is a well-articulated essay.

### Check Your Progress

5. What is a topic sentence?
6. State the difference between cohesion and coherence.
7. What is a transitional paragraph?
8. Apart from reading, what is essential for increasing one's knowledge of the world around?
9. How many paragraphs should an essay have?
10. What kind of a style should one cultivate for good essay writing?

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## 11.4 SELECTED ESSAYS

In this section, we will discuss some selected essays for the better understanding of the concept.

### ‘Women and Wives’ by Joseph Addison

#### **Light minds are pleased with trifles.**

When I was in France, I used to gaze with great astonishment at the splendid equipages, and party-coloured habits of that fantastic nation. I was one day in particular contemplating a lady that sat in a coach adorned with gilded Cupids, and finely painted with the Loves of Venus and Adonis. The coach was drawn by six milk-white horses, and loaden behind with the same number of powdered footmen. Just before the lady were a couple of beautiful pages, that were stuck among the harness, and, by their gay dresses and smiling features, looked like the elder brothers of the little boys that were carved and painted in every corner of the coach.

The lady was the unfortunate Cleanthe, who afterwards gave an occasion to a pretty melancholy novel. She had for several years received the addresses of a gentleman, whom, after a long and intimate acquaintance, she forsook upon the account of this shining equipage, which had been offered to her by one of great riches but a crazy constitution. The circumstances in which I saw her were, it seems, the disguises only of a broken heart, and a kind of pageantry to cover distress, for in two months after, she was carried to her grave with the same pomp and magnificence, being sent thither partly by the loss of one lover and partly by the possession of another.

I have often reflected with myself on this unaccountable humour in womankind, of being smitten with everything that is showy and superficial; and on the numberless evils that befall the sex from this light fantastical disposition. I myself remember a young lady that was very warmly solicited by a couple of importunate rivals, who, for several months together, did all they could to recommend themselves,

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by complacency of behaviour and agreeableness of conversation. At length, when the competition was doubtful, and the lady undetermined in her choice, one of the young lovers very luckily bethought himself of adding a supernumerary lace to his liveries, which had so good an effect that he married her the very week after.

The usual conversation of ordinary women very much cherishes this natural weakness of being taken with outside and appearance. Talk of a new-married couple, and you immediately hear whether they keep their coach and six, or eat in plate. Mention the name of an absent lady, and it is ten to one but you learn something of her gown and petticoat. A ball is a great help to discourse, and a birthday furnishes conversation for a twelve month after. A furbelow of precious stones, a hat buttoned with a diamond, a brocade waistcoat or petticoat, are standing topics. In short, they consider only the drapery of the species, and never cast away a thought on those ornaments of the mind that make persons illustrious in themselves and useful to others. When women are thus perpetually dazzling one another's imaginations, and filling their heads with nothing but colours, it is no wonder that they are more attentive to the superficial parts of life than the solid and substantial blessings of it. A girl who has been trained up in this kind of conversation is in danger of every embroidered coat that comes in her way. A pair of fringed gloves may be her ruin. In a word, lace and ribbons, silver and gold galloons, with the like glittering gewgaws, are so many lures to women of weak minds or low educations, and, when artificially displayed, are able to fetch down the most airy coquette from the wildest of her flights and rambles.

True happiness is of a retired nature, and an enemy to pomp and noise; it arises, in the first place, from the enjoyment of one's self, and, in the next, from the friendship and conversation of a few select companions; it loves shade and solitude, and naturally haunts groves and fountains, fields and meadows; in short, it feels everything it wants within itself, and receives no addition from multitudes of witnesses and spectators. On the contrary, false happiness loves to be in a crowd, and to draw the eyes of the world upon her. She does not receive any satisfaction from the applauses which she gives herself, but from the admiration she raises in others. She flourishes in courts and palaces, theatres and assemblies, and has no existence but when she is looked upon.

Aurelia, though a woman of great quality, delights in the privacy of a country life, and passes away a great part of her time in her own walks and gardens. Her husband, who is her bosom friend and companion in her solitudes, has been in love with her ever since he knew her. They both abound with good sense, consummate virtue, and a mutual esteem; and are a perpetual entertainment to one another. Their family is under so regular an economy, in its hours of devotion and repast, employment and diversion that it looks like a little commonwealth within itself. They often go into company that they may return with the greater delight to one another; and sometimes live in town, not to enjoy it so properly as to grow weary of it, that they may renew in themselves the relish of a country life. By this means they are happy in each other, beloved by their children, adored by



their servants, and are become the envy, or rather the delight, of all that know them.

How different to this is the life of Fulvia! She considers her husband as her steward, and looks upon discretion and good housewifery as little domestic virtues unbecoming a woman of quality. She thinks life lost in her own family, and fancies herself out of the world when she is not in the ring, the playhouse, or the drawing-room. She lives in a perpetual motion of body and restlessness of thought, and is never easy in any one place when she thinks there is more company in another. The missing of an opera the first night would be more afflicting to her than the death of a child. She pities all the valuable part of her own sex, and calls every woman of a prudent, modest, retired life, a poor-spirited, unpolished creature. What a mortification would it be to Fulvia, if she knew that her setting herself to view is but exposing herself, and that she grows contemptible by being conspicuous!

I cannot conclude my paper without observing that Virgil has very finely touched upon this female passion for dress and show, in the character of Camilla, who, though she seems to have shaken off all the other weaknesses of her sex, is still described as a woman in this particular. The poet tells us, that after having made a great slaughter of the enemy, she unfortunately cast her eye on a Trojan, who wore an embroidered tunic, a beautiful coat of mail, with a mantle of the finest purple. 'A golden bow', says he, 'hung upon his shoulder; his garment was buckled with a golden clasp, and his head covered with a helmet of the same shining metal.' The Amazon immediately singled out this well-dressed warrior, being seized with a woman's longing for the pretty trappings that he was adorned with:

- Totumque incauta per agmen,

Faemineo praedae et spoliolum ardebat amore.

AEn., xi. 781.

- So greedy was she bent

On golden spoils, and on her prey intent.

Dryden

### **'True and False Humour' by Joseph Addison**

#### **Nothing so foolish as the laugh of fools.**

Among all kinds of writing, there is none in which authors are more apt to miscarry than in works of humour, as there is none in which they are more ambitious to excel. It is not an imagination that teems with monsters, a head that is filled with extravagant conceptions, which is capable of furnishing the world with diversions of this nature; and yet, if we look into the productions of several writers, who set up for men of humour, what wild, irregular fancies, what unnatural distortions of thought do we meet with? If they speak nonsense, they believe they are talking humour; and when they have drawn together a scheme of absurd, inconsistent ideas, they are not able to read it over to themselves without laughing. These poor

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gentlemen endeavour to gain themselves the reputation of wits and humourists, by such monstrous conceits as almost qualify them for Bedlam; not considering that humour should always lie under the check of reason, and that it requires the direction of the nicest judgement, by so much the more as it indulges itself in the most boundless freedoms. There is a kind of nature that is to be observed in this sort of compositions, as well as in all other; and a certain regularity of thought which must discover the writer to be a man of sense, at the same time that he appears altogether given up to caprice. For my part, when I read the delirious mirth of an unskillful author, I cannot be so barbarous as to divert myself with it, but am rather apt to pity the man, than to laugh at anything he writes.

The deceased Mr Shadwell, who had himself a great deal of the talent which I am treating of, represents an empty rake, in one of his plays, as very much surprised to hear one say that breaking of windows was not humour; and I question not but several English readers will be as much startled to hear me affirm, that many of those raving, incoherent pieces, which are often spread among us, under odd chimerical titles, are rather the offsprings of a distempered brain than works of humour.

It is, indeed, much easier to describe what is not humour than what is; and very difficult to define it otherwise than as Cowley has done wit, by negatives. Were I to give my own notions of it, I would deliver them after Plato's manner, in a kind of allegory, and, by supposing Humour to be a person, deduce to him all his qualifications, according to the following genealogy. Truth was the founder of the family, and the father of Good Sense. Good Sense was the father of Wit, who married a lady of a collateral line called Mirth, by whom he had issue Humour. Humour, therefore, being the youngest of this illustrious family, and descended from parents of such different dispositions, is very various and unequal in his temper; sometimes you see him putting on grave looks and a solemn habit, sometimes airy in his behaviour and fantastic in his dress; insomuch that at different times he appears as serious as a judge, and as jocular as a merry-andrew. But, as he has a great deal of the mother in his constitution, whatever mood he is in, he never fails to make his company laugh.

But, since there is an impostor abroad, who takes upon him the name of this young gentleman, and would willingly pass for him in the world; to the end that well-meaning persons may not be imposed upon by cheats, I would desire my readers, when they meet with this pretender, to look into his parentage, and to examine him strictly, whether or no he be remotely allied to Truth, and lineally descended from Good Sense; if not, they may conclude him a counterfeit. They may likewise distinguish him by a loud and excessive laughter, in which he seldom gets his company to join with him. For as True Humour generally looks serious while everybody laughs about him, False Humour is always laughing whilst everybody about him looks serious. I shall only add, if he has not in him a mixture of both parents—that is, if he would pass for the offspring of Wit without Mirth, or Mirth without Wit, you may conclude him to be altogether spurious and a cheat.

The impostor of whom I am speaking descends originally from Falsehood, who was the mother of Nonsense, who was brought to bed of a son called Phrensy, who married one of the daughters of Folly, commonly known by the name of Laughter, on whom he begot that monstrous infant of which I have been here speaking. I shall set down at length the genealogical table of False Humour, and, at the same time, place under it the genealogy of True Humour, that the reader may at one view behold their different pedigrees and relations:

- Falsehood
- Nonsense
- Phrensy—Laughter
- False Humour
- Truth
- Good Sense
- Wit—Mirth
- Humour

I might extend the allegory, by mentioning several of the children of False Humour, who are more in number than the sands of the sea, and might in particular enumerate the many sons and daughters which he has begot in this island. But as this would be a very invidious task, I shall only observe in general that False Humour differs from the True as a monkey does from a man.

First of all, he is exceedingly given to little apish tricks and buffooneries.

Second, he so much delights in mimicry, that it is all one to him whether he exposes by it vice and folly, luxury and avarice; or, on the contrary, virtue and wisdom, pain and poverty.

Third, he is wonderfully unlucky, insomuch that he will bite the hand that feeds him, and endeavour to ridicule both friends and foes indifferently. For, having but small talents, he must be merry where he can, not where he should.

Fourth, being entirely void of reason, he pursues no point either of morality or instruction, but is ludicrous only for the sake of being so.

Fifth, being incapable of anything but mock representations, his ridicule is always personal, and aimed at the vicious man, or the writer; not at the vice, or at the writing.

I have here only pointed at the whole species of false humorists; but, as one of my principal designs in this paper is to beat down that malignant spirit which discovers itself in the writings of the present age, I shall not scruple, for the future, to single out any of the small wits that infest the world with such compositions as are ill-natured, immoral, and absurd. This is the only exception which I shall make to the general rule I have prescribed myself, of attacking multitudes; since every honest man ought to look upon himself as in a natural state of war with the libeller

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and lamponer, and to annoy them wherever they fall in his way. This is but retaliating upon them, and treating them as they treat others.

### **‘A City Night Piece’ by Oliver Goldsmith**

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The clock has just struck two, the expiring taper rises and sinks in the socket, the watchman forgets the hour in slumber, the laborious and the happy are at rest, and nothing wakes but meditation, guilt, revelry, and despair. The drunkard once more fills the destroying bowl, the robber walks his midnight round, and the suicide lifts his guilty arm against his own sacred person.

Let me no longer waste the night over the page of antiquity or the sallies of contemporary genius, but pursue the solitary walk, where Vanity, ever changing, but a few hours past walked before me, where she kept up the pageant, and now, like a forward child, seems hushed with her own importunities.

What a gloom hangs all around! The dying lamp feebly emits a yellow gleam; no sound is heard but of the chiming clock, or the distant watch-dog. All the bustle of human pride is forgotten; an hour like this may well display the emptiness of human vanity.

There will come a time when this temporary solitude may be made continual, and the city itself, like its inhabitants, fade away, and leave a desert in its room.

What cities, as great as this, have once triumphed in existence! Had their victories as great, joy as just and as unbounded, and, with short-sighted presumption, promised themselves immortality! Posterity can hardly trace the situation of some; the sorrowful traveler wanders over the lawful ruins of others; and, as he beholds, he learns wisdom, and feels the transience of every sublunary possession.

‘Here’, he cries, ‘stood their citadel, now grown over with, weeds; there, their senate house, but now the haunt of every noxious reptile; temples and theatres stood here, now only an undistinguished heap of ruin. They are fallen: for luxury and avarice first made them feeble. The rewards of the state were conferred on amusing and not on useful members of society. Their riches and opulence invited the invaders, who, though at first repulsed, returned again, conquered by perseverance, and at last swept the defendants into undistinguished destruction.’

How few appear in those streets which, but some few hours ago, were crowded! And those who appear now no longer wear their daily mask, nor attempt to hide their lewdness or their misery.

But who are those who make the streets their couch, and find a short repose from wretchedness at the doors of the opulent? These are strangers, wanderers, and orphans, whose circumstances are too humble to expect redress, and whose distresses are too great even for pity. Their wretchedness rather excites horror than pity. Some are without the covering even of rags, and others emaciated with disease: the world has disclaimed them; society turns its back upon their distress, and has given them up to nakedness and hunger. These poor shivering females

have once seen happier days and been flattered into beauty. They have been prostituted to the gay, luxurious villain, and are now turned out to meet the severity of winter. Perhaps, now lying at the doors of their betrayers, they sue to wretches whose hearts are insensible, to debauchees who may curse but will not relieve them.

Why, why was I born a man, and yet see the sufferings of wretches I cannot relieve! Poor houseless creatures! The world will give you reproaches, but will not give you relief. The slightest misfortunes of the great, the most imaginary uneasinesses of the rich, are aggravated with all the power of eloquence, and held up to engage our attention and sympathetic sorrow. The poor weep unheeded, persecuted by every subordinate species of tyranny; and every law, which gives others security, becomes an enemy to them.

Why was this heart of mine formed with so much sensibility! Or why was not my fortune adapted to its impulse! Tenderness, without a capacity of relieving, only makes the man who feels it more wretched than the object which sues for assistance. Adieu.

#### **‘The Sagacity of Certain Insects’ by Oliver Goldsmith**

Animals in general are sagacious in proportion as they cultivate society. The elephant and the beaver show the greatest signs of this when united; but when man intrudes into their communities, they lose all their spirit of industry, and testify but a very small share of that sagacity, for which, when in a social state, they are so remarkable.

Among insects, the labours of the bee and the ant have employed the attention and admiration of the naturalist; but their whole sagacity is lost upon separation, and a single bee or ant seems destitute of every degree of industry, is the most stupid insect imaginable, languishes for a time in solitude, and soon dies.

Of all the solitary insects I have ever remarked, the spider is the most sagacious, and its actions to me, who have attentively considered them, seem almost to exceed belief. This insect is formed by nature for a state of war, not only upon other insects, but upon each other. For this state nature seems perfectly well to have formed it. Its head and breast are covered with a strong natural coat of mail, which is impenetrable to the attempts of every other insect, and its belly is enveloped in a soft pliant skin, which eludes the sting even of a wasp. Its legs are terminated by strong claws, not unlike those of a lobster, and their vast length, like spears, serve to keep every assailant at a distance.

Not worse furnished for observation than for an attack or a defence, it has several eyes, large, transparent, and covered with a horny substance, which, however, does not impede its vision. Besides this, it is furnished with a forceps above the mouth, which serves to kill or secure the prey already caught in its claws or its net.

Such are the implements of war with which the body is immediately furnished; but its net to entangle the enemy seems what it chiefly trusts to, and what it takes

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most pains to render as complete as possible. Nature has furnished the body of this little creature with a glutinous liquid, which proceeding from the anus, it spins into a thread coarser or finer, as it chooses to contract or dilate its sphincter. In order to fix its thread when it begins to weave, it emits a small drop of liquid against the wall, which hardening by degrees, serves to hold the thread very firmly. Then receding from the first point, as it recedes the thread lengthens; and when the spider has come to the place where the other end of the thread should be fixed, gathering up with its claws the thread which would otherwise be too slack, it is stretched tightly, and fixed in the same manner to the wall as before.

In this manner it spins and fixes several threads parallel to each other, which, so to speak, serve as the warp to the intended web. To form the woof, it spins in the same manner its thread, transversely fixing one end to the first thread that was spun, and which is always the strongest of the whole web, and the other to the wall. All these threads, being newly spun, are glutinous, and therefore stick to each other wherever they happen to touch, and in those parts of the web, most exposed to be torn, our natural artist strengthens them, by doubling the threads sometimes six-fold.

Thus far naturalists have gone in the description of this animal: what follows is the result of my own observation upon that species of the insect called a *House-Spider*. I perceived about four years ago, a large spider in one corner of my room making its web; and, though the maid frequently leveled her fatal broom against the labours of the little animal, I had the good fortune then to prevent its destruction, and I may say, it more than paid me by the entertainment it afforded.

In three days the web was, with incredible diligence, completed; nor could I avoid thinking that the insect seemed to exult in its new abode. It frequently traversed it round, examined the strength of every part of it, retired into its hole, and came out very frequently. The first enemy, however, it had to encounter, was another and a much larger spider, which, having no web of its own, and having probably exhausted all its stock in former labours of this kind, came to invade the property of its neighbour. Soon then a terrible encounter ensued, in which the invader seemed to have the victory, and the laborious spider was obliged to take refuge in its hole. Upon this I perceived the victor using every art to draw the enemy from his strong hold. He seemed to go off, but quickly returned, and when he found all arts vain, began to demolish the new web without mercy. This brought on another battle, and, contrary to my expectations, the laborious spider became conqueror, and fairly killed his antagonist.

Now then, in peaceable possession of what was justly its own, it waited three days with the utmost patience, repairing the breaches of its web, and taking no sustenance that I could perceive. At last, however, a large blue fly fell into the snare, and struggled hard to get loose. The spider gave it leave to entangle itself as much as possible, but it seemed to be too strong for the cobweb. I must own I was greatly surprized when I saw the spider immediately sally out, and in less than

a minute weave a new net round its captive, by which the motion of its wings was stopped, and when it was fairly hampered in this manner, it was seized, and dragged into the hole.

In this manner it lived, in a precarious state, and nature seemed to have fitted it for such a life, for upon a single fly it subsisted for more than a week. I once put a wasp into the net, but when the spider came out in order to seize it as usual, upon perceiving what kind of an enemy it had to deal with, it instantly broke all the bands that held it fast, and contributed all that lay in its power to disengage so formidable an antagonist. When the wasp was at liberty, I expected the spider would have set about repairing the breaches that were made in its net, but those, it seems, were irreparable, wherefore the cobweb was now entirely forsaken, and a new one begun, which was completed in the usual time.

I had now a mind to try how many cobwebs a single spider could furnish, wherefore I destroyed this, and the insect set about another. When I destroyed the other also, its whole stock seemed entirely exhausted, and it could spin no more. The arts it made use of to support itself, now deprived of its great means of subsistence, were indeed surprizing. I have seen it roll up its legs like a ball, and lie motionless for hours together, but cautiously watching all the time; when a fly happened to approach sufficiently near, it would dart out all at once, and often seize its prey.

Of this life, however, it soon began to grow weary, and resolved to invade the possession of some other spider, since it could not make a web of its own. It formed an attack upon a neighbouring fortification with great vigour, and at first was as vigorously repulsed. Not daunted, however, with one defeat, in this manner it continued to lay siege to another web for three days, and at length, having killed the defendant, actually took possession. When smaller flies happen to fall into the snare, the spider does not sally out at once, but very patiently waits till it is sure of them; for, upon his immediately approaching the terror of his appearance might give the captive strength sufficient to get loose: the manner then, is to wait patiently till, by ineffectual and impotent struggles, the captive has wasted all its strength, and then he becomes a certain and easy conquest.

The insect I am now describing lived three years; every year it changed its skin and got a new set of legs. I have sometimes plucked off a leg, which grew again in two or three days. At first it dreaded my approach to its web, but at last it became so familiar as to take a fly out of my hand, and upon my touching any part of the web, would immediately leave its hole, prepared either for a defense or an attack.

To complete this description, it may be observed, that the male spider is much less than the female, and that the latter are oviparous. When they come to lay, they spread a part of their web under the eggs, and then roll them up carefully, as we roll up things in a cloth, and thus hatch them in their hole. If disturbed in their holes, they never attempt to escape without carrying this young brood in their

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forceps away with them, and thus frequently are sacrificed to their paternal affection.

As soon as ever the young ones leave their artificial covering, they begin to spin, and almost sensibly seem to grow bigger. If they have the good fortune, when even but a day old, to catch a fly, they fall too with good appetites; but they live sometimes three or four days without any sort of sustenance, and yet still continue to grow larger, so as every day to double their former size. As they grow old, however, they do not still continue to increase, but their legs only continue to grow longer; and when a spider becomes entirely stiff with age, and unable to seize its prey, it dies at length of hunger.

**‘Sights and Monsters’ by Oliver Goldsmith**

Though the frequent invitations I receive from men of distinction here might excite the vanity of some, I am quite mortified, however, when I consider the motives that inspire their civility. I am sent for, not to be treated as a friend, but to satisfy curiosity; not to be entertained so much as wondered at; the same earnestness which excites them to see a Chinese, would have made them equally proud of a visit from the rhinoceros.

From the highest to the lowest, this people seem fond of sights and monsters. I am told of a person here who gets a very comfortable livelihood by making wonders, and then selling or showing them to the people for money; no matter how insignificant they were in the beginning, by locking them up close, and showing for money, they soon became prodigies! His first essay in this way was to exhibit himself as a wax-work figure behind a glass door at a puppet show. Thus, keeping the spectators at a proper distance and having his head adorned with a copper crown, he looked extremely *natural, and very like the life itself*. He continued this exhibition with success, till an involuntary fit of sneezing brought him to life before all the spectators, and consequently rendered him for that time as entirely useless as the peaceable inhabitant of a catacomb.

Determined to act the statue no more, he next levied contributions under the figure of an Indian king; and by painting his face, and counterfeiting the savage howl, he freighted several ladies and children with amazing success: in this manner, therefore, he might have lived very comfortably, had he not been arrested for a debt that was contracted when he was the figure in wax-work: thus his face underwent an involuntary ablution, and he found himself reduced to his primitive complexion and indigence.

After some time, being freed from jail, he was now grown wiser, and instead of making himself a wonder, was resolved only to make wonders. He learned the art of pasting up of mummies; was never at a loss for an artificial *lusus naturae*; nay, it has been reported, that he has sold seven petrified lobsters of his own manufacture to a noted collector of rarities; but this the learned Cracovius Putridus has undertaken to refute in a very elaborate dissertation.



His last wonder was nothing more than a halter, yet by this halter he gained more than by all his former exhibitions. The people, it seems, had got in their heads, that a certain noble criminal was to be hanged with a silken rope. Now there was nothing they so much wished to see as this very rope; and he was resolved to gratify their curiosity: he therefore got one made, not only of silk, but to render it more striking, several threads of gold were intermixed. The people paid their money only to see silk, but were, highly satisfied when they found it was mixed with gold into the bargain. It is scarcely necessary to mention, that the projector sold his silken rope for almost what it had cost him, as soon as the criminal was known to be hanged in hempen materials.

By their fondness of sights, one would be apt to imagine, that instead of desiring to see things as they should be, they are rather solicitous of seeing them as they ought not to be. A cat with four legs is disregarded, though never so useful; but, if it has but two, and is consequently incapable of catching mice, it is reckoned inestimable, and every man of taste is ready to raise the auction. A man, though in his person faultless as an aerial genius, might starve; but if stuck over with hideous warts like a porcupine, his fortune is made for ever, and he may show himself with impunity and applause.

A good woman in my neighbourhood, who was bred a habit-maker, though she handled her needle tolerably well, could scarcely get employment. But being obliged, by an accident, to have both her hands cut off from the elbows, what would in another country have been her ruin, made her fortune here: she was now thought fit for her trade than before; business flowed in apace, and all people paid for seeing the mantua-maker who wrought without hands.

A gentleman showing me his collection of pictures, stopped at one with peculiar admiration: there, cries he, is an inestimable piece. I gazed at the picture for some time, but could see none of those graces with which he seemed enraptured: it appeared to me the most paltry piece of the whole collection: I therefore demanded where those beauties lay, of which I was yet insensible. Sir, cries he, the merit does not consist in the piece, but in the manner in which it was done. The painter drew the whole with his foot, and held the pencil between his toes: I bought it at a very great price; for peculiar merit should ever be rewarded.

But these people are not more fond of wonders, than liberal in rewarding those who show them. From the wonderful dog of knowledge, at present under the patronage of the nobility, down to the man with the box, who professes to show the best imitation of nature that was ever seen, they all live in luxury. A singing-woman shall collect subscriptions in her own coach and six: a fellow shall make a fortune by tossing a straw from his toe to his nose; one in particular has found that eating fire was the most ready way to live; and another who jingles several bells fixed to his cap, is the only man that I know of, who has received emolument from the labours of his head.

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A young author, a man of good-nature and learning, was complaining to me some nights ago of this misplaced generosity of the times. Here, says he, have I spent part of my youth in attempting to instruct and amuse my fellow-creatures, and all my reward has been solitude, poverty, and reproach; while a fellow, possessed of even the smallest share of fiddling merit, or who has perhaps learned to whistle double, is rewarded, applauded, and caressed! Prythee, young man, says I to him, are you ignorant, that in so large a city as this, it is better to be an amusing than a useful member of society? Can you leap up, and touch your feet four times before you come to the ground? No, Sir. Can you stand upon two horses at full speed? No, Sir. Can you swallow a pen-knife? I can do none of these tricks. Why then, cried I, there is no other prudent means of subsistence left, but to apprise the town that you speedily intend to eat up your own nose, by subscription.

I have frequently regretted that none of our Eastern posture-masters, or showmen, have ventured to England. I should be pleased to see that money circulate in Asia, which is now sent to Italy and France, in order to bring their vagabonds hither. Several of our tricks would undoubtedly give the English high satisfaction, Men of fashion would be greatly pleased with the postures as well as the condescension of our dancing girls; and the ladies would equally admire the conductors of our fireworks. What an agreeable surprise would it be to see a huge fellow with whiskers flash a charged blunderbuss full in a lady's face, without singeing her hair, or melting her pomatum. Perhaps, when the first surprise was over, she might then grow familiar with danger; and the ladies might vie with each other in standing fire with intrepidity.

But of all the wonders of the East, the most useful, and I should fancy the most pleasing, would be the looking-glass of Lao, which reflects the mind as well as the body. It is said, that the Emperor Chusi used to make his ladies dress their heads and their hearts in one of these glasses every morning; while the lady was at her toilet, he would frequently look over her shoulder; and it is recorded that not one was found whose mind was not even more beautiful than her person.

I make no doubt but a glass in this country would have the very same effect. The English ladies would undoubtedly cut very pretty figures in so faithful a monitor. There, should we happen to peep over a lady's shoulder while dressing, we might be able to see neither gaming nor ill-nature; neither pride, debauchery, nor a love of gadding. We should find her, if any sensible defect appeared in the mind, more careful in rectifying it, than plastering up the irreparable decays of the person; nay, I am even apt to fancy, that ladies would find more real pleasure in this utensil in private, than in any other bauble imported from China, though ever so expensive or amusing.

### **'On Friendship' by A. Clutton-Brock**

Friendship is above reason, for, though you find virtues in a friend, he was your friend before you found them. It is a gift that we offer because we must; to give it

as the reward of virtue would be to set a price upon it, and those who do that have no friendship to give. If you choose your friends on the ground that you are virtuous and want virtuous company, you are no nearer to true friendship than if you choose them for commercial reasons. Besides, who are you that you should be setting a price upon your friendship? It is enough for any man that he has the divine power of making friends, and he must leave it to that power to determine who his friends shall be. For, though you may choose the virtuous to be your friends, they may not choose you; indeed, friendship cannot grow where there is any calculated choice. It comes, like sleep, when you are not thinking about it; and you should be grateful, without any misgiving, when it comes. So no man who knows what friendship is, ever gave up a friend because he turns out to be disreputable. His only reason for giving up a friend is that he has ceased to care for him; and, when that happens, he should reproach himself for this mortal poverty of affection, not the friend for having proved unworthy. For it is inhuman presumption to say of any man that he is unworthy of your friendship, just as it is to say of any woman, when you have fallen out of love with her, that she was unworthy of your love. In friendship and in love we are always humble, because we see that a free gift has been given to us; and to lose that humility because we have lost friendship or love is to take a pride in what should shame us. There are men who cannot be friends except when they are under an illusion that their friends are perfect, and when the illusion passes there is an end of their friendship. But true friendship has no illusions, for it reaches to that part of a man's nature that is beyond his imperfections, and in doing so it takes all of them for granted. It does not even assume that he is better than other men, for there is egotism in assuming that. A man is your friend, not because of his superiorities, but because there is something open from your nature to his, a way that is closed between you and most men. You and he understand each other, as the phrase is; your relation with him is a rare success among a multitude of failures, and if you are proud of the success you should be ashamed of the failure.

### **'The Origin of Species' by Charles Darwin**

Authors of the highest eminence seem to be fully satisfied with the view that each species has been independently created. To my mind it accords better with what we know of the laws impressed on matter by the creator that the production and extinction of the past and present inhabitants of the world should have been due to secondary causes, like those determining the birth and death of the individual. When I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings which lived long before the first bed of the Silurian system was deposited, they seem to me to become ennobled. Judging from the past, we may safely infer that not one living species will transmit its unaltered likeness to a distant futurity. And of the species now living very few will transmit progeny of any kind to a far distant futurity; for the manner in which all organic beings are grouped, shows that the greater number of species in each genus, and all the species in many genera, have left no descendants, but have become utterly extinct. We can so far take a prophetic glance into futurity as to foretell that it will be the common and

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widely spread species, belonging to the larger and dominant groups, which will ultimately prevail and procreate new and dominant species. As all the living forms of life are the lineal descendants of those which lived long before the Silurian epoch, we may feel certain that the ordinary succession by generation has never once been broken, and that no cataclysm has desolated the whole world. Hence, we may look with some confidence to a secure future of equally inappreciable length. And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection. It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws, taken in the largest sense, being growth with reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; variability from the indirect and direct action of the conditions of life, and from use and disuse; a ratio of increase so high as to lead to a struggle for life, and as a consequence to natural selection, entailing divergence of character and the extinction of less-improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

### **‘Of Parents and Children’ by Francis Bacon**

The joys of parents are secret; and so are their griefs and fears. They cannot utter the one; nor will they not utter the other. Children sweeten labors; but they make misfortunes bitterer. They increase the cares of life; but they mitigate the remembrance of death. The perpetuity by generation is common to beasts; but memory, merit, and noble works, are proper to men. And surely a man shall see the noblest works and foundations have proceeded from childless men; which have sought to express the images of their minds, where those of their bodies have failed. So the care of posterity is most in them that have no posterity. They that are the first raisers of their houses, are most indulgent towards their children; beholding them as the continuance, not only of their kind, but of their work; and so both children and creatures.

The difference in affection, of parents towards their several children, is many times unequal; and sometimes unworthy; especially in the mothers; as Solomon said, ‘a wise son rejoiced the father, but an ungracious son shames the mother. A man shall see, where there is a house full of children, one or two of the eldest respected, and the youngest made wantons; but in the midst, some that are as it were forgotten, who many times, nevertheless, prove the best. The illiberality of parents, in allowance towards their children, is a harmful error; makes them base;

acquaints them with shifts; makes them sort with mean company; and makes them surfeit more when they come to plenty. And therefore the proof is best, when men keep their authority towards the children, but not their purse.

Men have a foolish manner (both parents and schoolmasters and servants) in creating and breeding an emulation between brothers, during childhood, which many times sorted to discord when they are men, and disturbed families. The Italians make little difference between children, and nephews or near kinsfolks; but so they be of the lump, they care not though they pass not through their own body. And, to say truth, in nature it is much a like matter; insomuch that we see a nephew sometimes resembled an uncle, or a kinsman, more than his own parent; as the blood happens. Let parents choose betimes, the vocations and courses they mean their children should take; for then they are most flexible; and let them not too much apply themselves to the disposition of their children, as thinking they will take best to that, which they have most mind to. Younger brothers are commonly fortunate, but seldom or never where the elder are disinherited.

#### **‘How to Observe Nature’ by Elizabeth Brightwen**

There is all the difference between taking a walk simply for exercise, for some special errand, or to enjoy conversation with one’s friends, and the sort of quiet observant stroll I am going to ask my kind readers to take with me today. This beautiful world is full of wonders of every kind, full of evidences of the Great Creator’s wisdom and skill in adapting each created thing to its special purpose. The whole realm of nature is meant, I believe, to speak to us, to teach us lessons in parables—to lead our hearts upward to God who made us and fitted us also for our special place in creation.

In the nineteenth Psalm of the Bible, David speaks of the two great books God has given us for our instruction. In the first six verses he speaks of the teachings of the book of nature and the rest of the Psalm deals with the written Word of God. We acknowledge and read the Scriptures as the book which reveals the will of God and His wondrous works for the welfare of mankind, but how many fail to give any time or thought to read the book of nature! Thousands may travel and admire beautiful scenery, and derive a certain amount of pleasure from nature, just glancing at each object, but really observing nothing, and thus failing to learn any of the lessons this world’s beauty is intended to teach, they might almost as well have stayed at home save for the benefit of fresh air and change of scene. The habit of minute and careful observation is seldom taught in childhood, and is not very likely to be gained in later life when the mind is filled with other things. Yet, if natural objects are presented attractively to the young, how quickly they are interested! Question after question is asked, and unconsciously a vast amount of information may be conveyed to an intelligent child’s mind by a simple, happy little chat about some bird or insect. Our ramble might be indefinitely prolonged and still be full of interest and instruction, but in these simple remarks enough has been shown, I trust, to lead many to think and observe closely even minutest thing that

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catches their attention whilst out for a ramble in lanes and fields. Even a microscopic moss upon an old wall has been suggestive of many lovely thoughts, with which I will conclude our ramble and this chapter.

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### Smoking

It is not news that every third adult of the world smokes and it is a bad habit. It is bad because it causes harm to the smoker's health and puts his life at risk. The worker spends his hard earned money to buy only diseases like mouth cancer, lung cancer, asthma and heart diseases.

In other words, smoking causes cancers of oral cavity, larynx, esophagus and bladder, lung cancer and lung disorders, TB, bronchitis that leads to asthma causing severe breathing trouble, which is a significant factor in the development of coronary heart diseases, damage to the foetuses in women and Buerger's disease (a disease in the veins of legs that may lead to the gangrene of foot) to name a few. Seven people die of tobacco use every minute. A cigarette contains 49 carcinogenic compounds and 4000 other toxins. These toxins cause lung disorders like emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, bronchitis, lower immunity and the respiratory system becomes more prone to infections. These also cause high blood pressure, cardio-vascular diseases, stroke and brain haemorrhages. These cause both infertility in men and women, miscarriage, complicated pregnancies and early menopause. Nicotine damages the bones, joints and muscles of the body by causing osteopenia and osteoporosis. Smoking also causes loss of taste, bad breath, dental cavities, stained teeth, mouth sores and receding gums. Medical costs incurred on the diseases caused by smoking directly affects the national economy. Smoking causes lower work-efficiency which in turn affects the output of an individual in any field.

The capitalists engaged in the manufacture and supply of tobacco products are not only trying to justify the habit of smoking by hiding the above hard facts about its harmful effects but also glorifying smoking as a mark of modern life style in order to promote their business. They are least bothered about the health of the common people. They mint money by brainwashing the common people and exploiting their weakness. The labels of cigar packets are thrown away along with the phrase 'Smoking is injurious to health', printed on it just to comply with the government's mandate. Right thinking people are worried about the glorification of this bad habit. Governments fail to implement their mandate in letter and spirit because of the influence the capitalists wield. One approach is to ban tobacco products altogether and another is to educate the people about the harmful effects of smoking. Successful government authorities lack will power, and are morally weak and afraid of adopting the first approach. In order to hide their inability, the authorities put forward a hallow argument that the government gets huge income by the way of tax from the cigar manufacturers and suppliers and the tobacco industry offers employment opportunities. Also, such companies spend some money on social rehabilitation and philanthropic activities and make tall claims of

social cause. The authorities lack will power and are morally weak either to take firm policy decisions or to implement whatever decisions are taken in letter and spirit again because of rampant bribery and other lucrative favours. They conveniently hide the data on the social front as to how many people are inflicted with breath-related diseases and the cost on account of maintenance of public health. The medical expenditure on breath-related diseases caused by smoking is not less than the income the government derives from the cigar capitalists. Apart from public health, it also affects the public economy in a big way. By flashing fantastic advertisements on the mass-media they hide the truth about the harmful effects of smoking. Instead of opposing such anti-people advertisements, the mass-media rather shamelessly solicits such advertisements for money because it simply cannot sustain without such advertisements. Therefore, as a face saving formula, the authorities have no option but to take up the second approach—to educate the people against smoking. In the name of educating the people, the government spends crores of rupees by way of releasing advertisements in the mass-media indicating the harmful effects of smoking. These advertisements are useless, just like drizzling water in the desert. Many doctors, despite knowing the harmful effects of smoking, get addicted to the habit and willingly become chain smokers. This being the influence of the capitalists' advertisements, what change of mind can we expect from the general public? We are obviously in the grip of a capitalist cobweb. Every smoker is supporting capitalistic designs, which makes the rich richer and the poor poorer and reduces ten billion people to paupers to produce ten billionaires.

### **The 'Reality' Of Reality Shows**

Breaking News! A 'so called' celebrity slapped another in a reality show and in an extraordinary example of betrayal, a man was found cheating on his wife of ten years. Sounds pretty exciting? Bet it is! After all, its all this unusual cut-throat 'action' we crave for and the producers of the show know exactly what we want and therefore invest money into it. Today's reality shows are a total package of emotion and action. As the name itself suggests, reality shows are television programmes, wherein, the participant, one amongst the ordinary crowd, gets a chance to be in the limelight for a variable period of time—it could be a few minutes, hours or even days and during his brief stay, tries his luck at winning the sought after prize of the show. These programmes are like contests where many people battle it out till one of the contestants emerges as the winner in the end. Add some spice to a normal competition and you get the perfect recipe of a reality show.

Television today is flooded with reality shows that are based on every random theme one can think of. It all started with quiz and musical talent hunt shows, which initially appeared to be legitimate. But then the great Indian market woke up to a new concept—'reality and lifestyles of famous people'. Now this new product attracted people like bees to honey. After all, who would not want to peek into the

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lives of our favourite superstars and who, in turn, did not disappoint us to say the least. Countless viewers watch these shows eagerly with their eyes glued to the screen to see the drama unfold before their eyes, making them feel as if it is happening just in front of them and not on the screen. Thus, they are dependent on them for their daily dose of fun-filled entertainment, which even the popular melodramatic daily soaps sometimes fail to offer.

Several people have shot to fame overnight after winning the most coveted possessions these shows offer—name, fame, money—well, that is what the game is all about. But in reality, what is the reality behind these reality shows? Are they genuinely as real as they claim to be? While the general public goes on enjoying these shows, somewhere in the back of the mind, one is always suspecting the genuineness of the product being served. Actually, it varies from show to show. These shows are generally not scripted, but sometimes the organizers themselves break the rules and introduce controversial content in the show in order to achieve higher TRPs (Television Rating Points). It is in such situations that people begin questioning the transparency of such shows. Whatever the reality may be, the truth is that despite all these allegations, people never miss even a single episode of their favourite shows and continue to watch them every day without fail.

**‘Toru Dutt as a Pioneer of Indo-Anglian Poetry’**

The Indo-Anglian poet faces a two-fold challenge. The experience going into Indo-Anglian verse must be authentically Indian; the language employed, on the other hand, must not violate the fundamentals of English music. Toru Dutt is numbered among the pioneers of Indo-Anglian verse because she has met this two-fold challenge with care and felicity.

Toru Dutt, like Keats and Chatterton, died before her poetry could come into its prime. And like the poems of Keats, her slender body of poems have the distinct mark of a genuinely gifted poetess. Her feelings, her words, her keen eye for the beauties of nature and her uncompromising sincerity make her one of the most significant of Indian poets writing in English. Though not quite as skilled as Sarojini Naidu, as a pure craftsman, she used the eight-line octosyllabic stanzas with both grace and unconstrained felicity. Her keen eye and delicately sensitive perception of natural beauty make her poems a colourful tapestry of sense imagery. Perhaps, the most significant feature of her poetry is its complete and relentless commitment to the Indian tradition and heritage. Many of her poems deal with myths and legends drawn from the Hindu scriptures. Notable among these is *Sita*. The sonnet *Baugmaree* is splendid as an evocation of the trees in Toru’s garden. Apart from her lyrical grace and her astounding adept handling of the suggestive potentiality of words and images, the elegiac tone of many of her poems remind readers of Tennyson’s haunting melancholy.

T. S. Eliot has claimed that there is a wide gulf separating the man who suffers from the poet who creates. However, there are artists like D. H. Lawrence in whose works the man and the writer are inseparable. In most of Toru Dutt’s



poetry too, the poet is inseparable from the person. Her poems are at their best when they are intimately related to her own most intense experiences. Apart from the rich tapestry of images she employs throughout her poems, her accomplishments as a metrical craftsman is of singular significance. Toru Dutt has modelled her poems on those of the English Romantic poets. The subjective element present in her poetry has a strain of Keats's verse. However, her poetry is far more than a mere imitation. It is so achingly expressive because it accomplishes what Herbert Read has called 'the true voice of feeling' and is enough to establish her as one of the most sincere, expressive and significant of Indo-Anglian poets.

### **'Portrayal of The Lower Classes in Mulk Raj Anand's Novels'**

Though our country has produced profound novelists like Sarat Chandra, Premchand and Rabindranath Tagore, none of them have produced realistic or naturalistic fiction after the manner of Balzac or Zola. It is this gap in the realms of Indian fiction which is filled by the novels of Mulk Raj Anand. Tagore was chiefly interested in the upper and middle classes and Sarat Chandra in the lower middle classes and Premchand chose his themes from the peasantry and the humble folk of Uttar Pradesh. Mulk Raj Anand is perhaps the first writer who has written about the misery, the exploitation and the humiliation suffered by the lowest classes of Indian society. Anand is essentially concerned with exposing the exploitation of the lower classes at the hands of the caste Hindus. Like Dickens, Mulk Raj Anand is essentially concerned with the lowest classes and the underdogs of society. His ability of projecting actual slices of Indian life in the minutest of details brings his technique very close to that of the Realists and the Naturalists like Flaubert, Balzac and Zola.

Influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and Karl Marx, Mulk Raj Anand was a great humanist. He believed that by practicing love and compassion for the underdogs, misery and unhappiness can be reduced and removed from this world. According to him, victory over pain and misery should be the supreme goal of all persons and nations. He insisted on the dignity of man, removal of distinctions based on caste, creed and wealth and the practice of compassion as a living value. He added great significance to art and poetry as instruments for the development of all men and in his crusade against superstition, casteism and feudalism. Anand is a novelist with a mission and his novels are written with the purpose of arousing the social conscience and, by that method, to create in the affluent and powerful people a sense of responsibility towards the victims of injustice and exploitation.

Mulk Raj Anand had first-hand knowledge of the misery, the wretchedness and the squalor of the lower classes of Hindu society. His conscience had rebelled against the injustice meted out to them. His novels are novels of protest, dealing with some social evil, either poverty or injustice. And it is the unflagging realism of his manner and the naturalism of his technique which has made his novels a breakthrough in the world of Indian fiction. His novels do not employ a complex matrix of episodes and do not lead to a dramatic climax but they leave in us a rankling

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awareness of the evils of our caste-ridden society. Anand's naturalism is at the root of his triumph as an Indo-Anglian novelist. Though he lacks R. K. Narayan's sagacity and finesse and Raja Rao's sense of the metaphysical nature of man, he has a genuine and deep feeling for the deprived, a grasp of the social structure of his society and an extraordinary fluency of communication.

### **R. K. Narayan's Style of Writing**

R. K. Narayan was a great 20th century Indian novelist and short story writer whose wide range of representation of human life and society brought him fame both in India and abroad. He was a very keen observer of society and lover of human nature. He used simple language for his works which reflected an unaffected prose accompanied with humour. Throughout his life, he endeavoured to focus on the society through all his works. He portrayed the life of common man. His readers always saw his works as if it were their own life and society. His focus remained on ordinary life and people in everything that he created. He portrays the daily life of the Indian people with a psychological insight into their character and activities very intricately. He often used the contemporary description of the Tamil lifestyle. In fact, his stories focus on the life and culture of Tamil Nadu. But all the same, simplicity has the greatest part in the delineation of his characters which are universal types. Graham Greene compared him to Anton Chekhov because of his simplicity and lustre of prose, its gentle beauty, ironical portrayal of tragic situations interspersed with humour and vivid characterization.

**Realism:** Narayan used realism for all his narratives. He described what he saw around him. His novels and short stories tell the tales of men and women from our society. Malgudi, the backdrop of his novels is a fictionalized setting like any south Indian village. Malgudi acquainted the Indian readers with the local Tamil society where they could feel at home and relate to the incidents, people and their lives. It described the daily life of Indians in a small town. Anthony West of the New Yorker considered Narayan's style of writing full of realism and variety and likened it to Nikolai Gogol's art of storytelling.

**Transparency of Vision:** Narayan was a keen observer of people and society and he used the minute details of our lives with simplicity in his books. He was detailed and his language is easily understood by everyone. He had studied the life of ordinary man very closely. The conversation between Raju and the villagers in *The Guide* is an example. Jhumpa Lahiri, the Pulitzer Prize winner Indian author, says that Narayan's short stories have the same captivating feelings as his novels. They are short but they are very interesting and engrossing because of their complete expression and this is where the greatest reward of a story-teller lies. People take lot of time to enjoy its short length and simplicity. According to her, what Narayan encapsulates from the beginning till the end of a short story, others strive to achieve in more than hundreds of pages. In fact, his insight, presentation, full expression of the lives of characters in their entirety are all matchless. The depiction of life and characters with full and minute details are a gift of keen insight, sharp observation

and the capacity to read the life closely. It is because of these characteristics that he has been compared with O. Henry, Frank O'Connor, and Flannery O'Connor. Lahiri also compares him to Guy de Maupassant for his ability of precision without losing luster and interest in the narrative. Like Maupassant, the great French writer, Narayan also sketches commonplace characters of the middle class life and watches them as a silent spectator.

**Descriptive narrative:** R. K Narayan's style of prose is descriptive and not analytical. His style is objective where the author is expected to create his characters without involving his personal sentiments and emotions into their actions. He puts them in the story as they are in their real lives. However, he takes full interest in describing his characters with a mild touch of humour. His works, on the whole, show that he was an avid reader of human life. His commonplace incidents are arranged so peculiarly in all their native simplicity that the readers attach their sentiments with them so naturally. The most important part of his style is his capacity of being imaginative. His Malgudi is its greatest example. It is a sketch of a local small town where people still take pride in a traditional outlook towards life. They hold superstition in great awe and flinch from accepting anything new or modern. He chose this set-up as a background to show also how modernity had been making inroads into Indian society. The world of Malgudi has a wide range of characters

**Humour and irony:** Narayan's writings are interspersed with a soft touch of humour and irony. In his *The Guide*, he chooses an ordinary man Raju who is mean and petty; but the author views him with indulgence. Narayan describes incidents related to him with mild humour and sarcasm adding colour to the portrayal of his character and story. The undercurrent of humour and irony are in the texture of the novel. For example, there is a description in the beginning when Raju takes refuge in a temple by the river and poses as a sage. The writer has given the intricate details of the behaviour of Raju and the villagers with the touch of humour and irony. But there is pathos also in his stories which he handles with great care. It is pity that a man who has been jailed as Raju had done, comes out in the society to cheat people as a pretended sadhu.

Humour and irony walk side by side in his works supporting each other. Humour is used to enliven an incident or a character-sketch whereas there is pathos, pity and irony to highlight the atmosphere of the situation. In this manner, Narayan's writing style can be compared to that of William Faulkner. Both of them were humanists. They picked up an individual to describe the whole society through them. The juxtaposition of the conflict between man and society is a part of the works of Narayan. Though there is similarity between their subjects, especially their vision for humanity. Faulkner used rhetorical prose and illustrated his points with extraordinary descriptions whereas Narayan used simple language and realistic situations.

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**Humanism:** R. K. Narayan's works display a dedication to the cause of humanity. It is not patriotic or religious. But his descriptions touch the heart of his readers. His characters are chosen from ordinary life and the details about them are also commonplace, but the beauty lies in their description. Man and his behaviour are his prime interests. For instance, he depicts the character of Raju, the protagonist of his famous novel *The Guide*, from his journey as man of very ordinary and sordid interests to a man who is salvaged by supreme spirituality. Narayan feels that common man is born with qualities which can lead him to the supreme goal of life. But a man has his shortcomings and to overcome those is not easy. He deals with the life of a human being with details but his point of view remains humanitarian. All his works display a basic love towards mankind. He deals with even smaller incidents of a human life or a human character with neatness and objectivity to add charm and completeness to the characters.

**Conclusion:** Unlike his other contemporaries, Narayan was fond of simple prose. His style remained simple and precise. His narrative style is a descriptive type of prose. He looked deep into human life with sympathy and dedication and yet kept himself aloof while rendering his descriptions. His satires are mild and appealing to the readers. They are neither coarse nor uninteresting. All his portrayals may also be seen as psychological penetrations into a human heart. His artistic depth in character delineation is partly due to the fact that he was a great reader of human psychology and behaviour. Probably inspired by Thomas Hardy, a man who dedicated novels to the lost territory called Wessex, Narayan created the fictitious world of Malgudi, a small town in Tamil Nadu. This imaginary setting is used in all his works. He was concerned with the upliftment of the society also because he was humane to the core looks into the life and actions of his characters sympathetically. He was influenced by many great English novelists. With widely acknowledged simplicity, Narayan's style remains chiefly as that of a humanitarian but he presented life with a touch of humour, irony and depth. He loved the traditional way of storytelling with all its nuances.

### Check Your Progress

11. Who is the author of the essay 'True and False Humour'?
12. Name some of the essays of Oliver Goldsmith.
13. State R. K. Narayan's style of prose.

## 11.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The ABC of effective writing skills are Accuracy, Brevity and Clarity.
2. An essay expresses the writer's personal reflection, thoughts, opinions and feelings. Hence, it is natural that it will have a personal touch which makes it more authentic.

3. The word expository means ‘to explain’. An expository essay consists of explanation of a subject or topic. For example, institutions or occupations (parliament, farming), scientific subjects (global warming, evolution of man) and literary topics (nature of poetry, the plays of Shakespeare, the poetry of Keats).
4. Reflective essays express the thoughts of the writer which are recollected after much pondering.
5. The sentence which expresses the main idea of the paragraph is called the topic sentence.
6. Cohesion refers to the link between sentences in a paragraph while coherence refers to the logic which holds them together.
7. A transitional paragraph is one which anticipates the conclusion and prepares the readers for the end.
8. Apart from reading, a keen observation power and conversation with people around us is essential for increasing one’s knowledge of the world around.
9. An essay must have at least three paragraphs—introduction, description and conclusion—though the actual number of paragraphs depends on the topic of the essay.
10. For good essay writing, one must cultivate a style which includes simple and direct language, avoiding repetitions and unnecessary information.
11. ‘True and False Humour’ is written by Joseph Addison.
12. Some of the essays of Oliver Goldsmith are as follows:
  - ‘A City Night Piece’
  - ‘The Sagacity of Certain Insects’
  - ‘Sights and Monsters’
13. R. K. Narayan’s style of prose is descriptive and not analytical. His style is objective where the author is expected to create his characters without involving his personal sentiments and emotions into their actions. He puts them in the story as they are in their real lives.

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### 11.6 SUMMARY

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- Writing is that form of communication which reveals the sender’s clarity of thought and expression in encoding a message.
- Effective writing does not happen just on its own. It is a skill which needs to be cultivated.
- In written communication, the feedback is delayed and the receiver cannot immediately clarify his doubts in case of an unclear message.

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- The purpose of written communication, as communication in general, is two-fold—to inform and to persuade. Informative writing presents information and is expository in nature.
- Effective writing skills, therefore, entail planning before writing, identifying the purpose of writing, considering the needs of the audience, choosing appropriate language and effective tone.
- A descriptive essay includes the description of some person, place or thing. For example, mother, father, friend (person), Delhi, Bombay, the Taj Mahal (place), cars, aspects of nature like the sun, moon, etc. (thing).
- Narration is extensively used in fiction. It consists mainly in the narration of some event, or series of events. Narrative essays will include reflection and some imagination.
- Reflection means pondering over a subject or idea. It can include qualities like heroism, honesty, patriotism, and socio-political issues such as education, corruption, democracy, philosophical and religious topics.
- In an imaginative essay, the writer is required to put himself in someone else's shoes and visualize a situation or experience.
- An expository essay consists of explanation of a subject or topic. For example, institutions or occupations (parliament, farming), scientific subjects (global warming, evolution of man) and literary topics (nature of poetry, the plays of Shakespeare, the poetry of Keats).
- The word expository means 'to explain'. An essay that deals with the explanation of a particular process, for example, Rain harvesting, an institution, (how legislative bodies function) or a natural phenomenon, (black holes in the universe) or the discussion of a particular text or style of writing, is classified as an expository essay.
- Quite often, an essay requires that the writer to discuss a particular subject and come to a conclusion, after examining the merits and demerits of the topic.
- An essay consists of paragraphs arranged in a sequence. A paragraph is a group of sentences linked together to form a unit.
- Each paragraph deals with a single idea. In an essay, each paragraph explains or demonstrates a key point or thought of the central idea, usually to inform or persuade.
- In a paragraph, the sentences are in cohesion, i.e., they stick together in unison.
- Coherence is also an essential requirement of a paragraph. Coherence means the clear and logical linking of ideas in a paragraph.
- The introductory paragraph introduces the topic and familiarizes the readers with the main idea of the essay.

- Description means the discussion of the topic in detail. It can include explanations and illustrations on the main idea. The length of the description will depend on the topic in question, but the description should be proportionate with each part getting the due weight.

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### 11.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Descriptive Essays:** It includes the description of some person, place or thing.
- **Reflective Essays:** It means pondering over a subject or idea. It can include qualities like heroism, honesty, patriotism, socio-political issues such as education, corruption, democracy, philosophical and religious topics.
- **Imaginative Essays:** In an imaginative essay, the writer is required to put himself in someone else's shoes and visualize a situation or experience.
- **Expository Essay:** It consists of explanation of a subject or topic. The word expository means 'to explain'.

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### 11.8 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. What is meant by the term 'essay'? Evaluate essay as a component of communicative writing.
2. What is meant by the term 'accuracy' in effective writing?
3. Why is determining the purpose of communication considered necessary to effective writing?
4. How is informative writing different from persuasive or argumentative writing?
5. What is meant by a 'theme sentence' in an essay?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Identify and describe the various characteristics of a good essay.
2. Identify and explain the various types of essays.
3. What are the different parts of an essay? Distinguish between an introductory paragraph and the body of an essay.
4. What are the necessary steps for good essay writing?

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## 11.9 FURTHER READINGS

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### NOTES

- Chaturvedi, P. D. and Mukesh Chaturvedi. 2011. *Business Communication: Concepts, Cases and Applications*. New Delhi: Pearson.
- Brooks, Cleanth and R. P. Warren. 1979. *Fundamentals of Good Writing*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Raman, Meenakshi and Sangeeta Sharma. 2004. *Technical Communication: Principles and Practice*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Rizvi, Ashraf M. 2005. *Effective Technical Communication*. New Delhi: Tata McGraw Hill.



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## UNIT 12 NOTE MAKING

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### Structure

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 Note Making: An Introduction
- 12.3 Minutes
- 12.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 12.5 Summary
- 12.6 Key Words
- 12.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 12.8 Further Readings

### NOTES

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### 12.0 INTRODUCTION

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Note making is basically a productive interactive skill which integrates and enhances both reading and writing skills. It is the practice of recording information captured from another source. A writer takes notes with an aim to record the essence of the information which also frees one's mind to recall all the happenings and activities.

Office notes are another form of internal communication popular within business organizations. Office notes are put up by sections, departments or units to the higher authorities, head of the unit, department or institution. Office notes are put up for 'consideration and orders' or for 'information' where there are specific delegated powers for various sanctions, incurring of financial expenditure, changes in placements and assignments. Office notes incorporating all relevant details and seeking such sanctions are put up to the appropriate sanctioning authority. Such sanctions, through office notes, constitute a record of due permissions obtained before duly communicating or acting on them.

In this unit, you will study about the process of office notes. You will also study about the significance of minutes and note making in written communication. The process, format and example of meeting minutes have also been discussed in the unit.

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### 12.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Explain the process of note making
- Discuss the importance of note making and minutes in written communication
- Understand the process of drafting a minute
- Explore the format of meeting minutes

**NOTES**

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## **12.2 Note Making: An Introduction**

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Office notes are put up to the president, general manager, executive director, managing director or chairman, as the case may be. Alternatively, they may be put up to the Executive Committee, the General Managers' Committee, the Management Committee, Audit Committee and the Board of Directors as well. Some organizations also have some specific functional committees like the Legal Committee, Premises Committee, Credit Committee, Promotions Committee, Procedures and Systems Committee to whom office notes seeking deliberation and orders or reporting developments are put up.

Although there may or may not be any specific written instructions on the drafting of office notes or the details to be furnished therein, in practice, one can observe a well-established and widely followed method in putting up such notes. Sometimes, the size and colour of the paper, the nature of typing (single space or double space), the authority who should sign and time schedule for submission are clearly stated. Office notes often refer to policy guidelines or important sanctions and generally pass through various tiers and incorporate views or comments of different functionaries. Whenever inputs are sought from different departments such as legal, personnel and inspection, their views are incorporated in the office notes as well. Office notes are prepared and filed in serial order and serve as authoritative documents confirming sanctions or orders. While in some cases copies of the office notes are dispatched to the implementing units, in other cases the gist of the order or observations made by the authority concerned on the note are conveyed to the implementation levels.

Preparation of office notes too calls for relevant skills, as all relevant facts and figures will have to be furnished sequentially. Wherever necessary, other related matters and previous decisions will have to be cited for reference. The actual recommendation has to be clearly stated. In the end, the specific decision or instruction sought, or development being reported, has to be clearly mentioned. Unless the office note itself is clear, the observations or orders thereon may also become vague and unimplementable. This will create uncertainty at various levels and may necessitate the putting up of the note once again with additions and modifications. It is necessary, therefore, that the office notes prepared cover all relevant information and facilitate consequent decision making and orders by the authority concerned.

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## **12.3 MINUTES**

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Minutes are the written records of a meeting. They often give an overview of the structure of the meeting, starting with a list of those present, a statement of the various issues before the participants, and their respective responses. They are often drafted by a secretary or personal assistant present at the meeting, who may

record the meeting in shorthand, and then type the minutes and send them to all the participants and concerned people afterwards.

The minutes of certain entities such as a corporate board of directors can be used as important legal documents.

While drafting a minute, these points should be kept in mind:

- It should begin with the organization name, place, date, list of people present, and the time when the meeting was held.
- It should mention who presided over the meeting.
- It should mention the names along with designations and departments of all the people present at the meeting.
- It should also mention the names and designations of the people who were *not* present at the meeting in spite of being informed about it.
- Since the primary function of minutes is to record the decisions made, all official decisions taken or resolved to be taken must be included.
- It should record what actually happened at a meeting, usually in the chronological order, regardless of whether the meeting follows (or ignores) any written agenda.
- It may be as detailed and comprehensive as a transcription, or as short and concise as a bare list of the resolutions adopted or decisions made.
- It is written in simple past tense such as: ‘The Chairperson informed the members’ or ‘The meeting ended with a vote of thanks’.
- It may use the passive voice (if required) such as: ‘The members were asked to share their experience’ or ‘The presentation was given by Mr Asit Barua, the Assistant Manager, Marketing’.

See **Illustration 12.1** for the format of a minute and **Illustration 12.2** for a sample of a meeting minute.

**Illustration 12.1** Format of a Minute

Mohanlal & Sons Pvt. Ltd.  
 102, M.A. Road  
 Mumbai 400 007

**Tel: xxx xxx Fax: xxx xxx**

Names and designations of the members present in the meeting

1. A Designation of the Chairperson of the Meeting
2. B Designation
3. C Designation
4. D Designation
5. E Designation
6. F Secretary

**NOTES**

**NOTES**

Meeting activity 1

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Meeting activity 2

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Meeting activity 3

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.....

Meeting activity 4

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.....

**Illustration 12.2** Sample of Minutes of Meeting

Mohanlal & Sons Pvt. Ltd.

102, M.A. Road

Mumbai 400 007

**Tel: xxx xxx Fax: xxx xxx**

Minutes of the board meeting held on 27 March 2012, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:20 p.m., in the board room.

1. Mr Amit Anand Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chairperson of the Meeting
2. Mr Shayam Sethi Vice President – HR
3. Ms Sushil Batra Vice President – Marketing
4. Mr Balakrishna Director – Operations
5. Ms Shruti Garg Director – Finance
6. Mr Alok Kumar Secretary

The following points were discussed during the meeting:

Meeting activity 1 – Mr Amit Anand welcomed the members and invited them to share the problem faced by them in meeting the quarterly target.

Meeting activity 2 – Mr Shayam Sethi, Vice President – HR voiced his concern about the high rate of attrition in the organization.

Meeting activity 3 – Mr Balakrishna, Director – Operations, shared his concerns about the frequent labour strike in the factory.

Meeting activity 4 – In the end, Mr Amit Anand ended the meeting with a vote of thanks.

## Illustration 12.3 Sample meeting minutes

Note Making



### Meeting Minutes

### NOTES

#### ISB Taskforce Orientation

Date: 05/19/2010

Time: 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Location: City of Daytona Beach – City Hall – First Floor – Room 149B

#### Attendees:

Heather Blanck, Rich Walton, Pedro Leon, Becky Mendez, Greg Stubbs, Ken Fischer, Lance Decuir, Mike Marcum, Jean Parlow, Shannon Poritz, R. Sans Lassiter, Naomi Weiss, Peter McCarthy, David Catagnacci, Scott Bullock, Willis Walter, Emory Counts, Lori Campbell Baker (representing Janet Kersey)

#### Partners:

Lennon Moore, VP of Infrastructure Planning, Ghyabi & Associates, Inc.  
Bill Hartmann, Senior Transportation Engineer, Ghyabi & Associates, Inc.  
Dale Bucalos, Administrative Assistant, Ghyabi & Associates, Inc.

Time Meeting Began: 1:05 p.m.

Introductions of all members.

Agenda: See attached.

Presented by Lennon Moore, Ghyabi & Associates, Inc.:

- Background – ISB Coalition
- Membership
- Mission
- ISB Corridor Study
- Public Involvement Plan

Discussion:

1. How far North & South will this project cover? Will it include Beville Road?
  - a. Yes, it includes Beville Rd. A map of the study boundary was discussed. See attached.
2. Has the policy group defined any goal for the technical group?
  - a. Yes; to define alternative concepts, analyze & compare concepts, collaboration to determine preferred multi-modal concepts, and to recommend decisions to the ISB Coalition.
3. Define Multi-modal transportation.
  - a. Transportation by foot, bicycle, automobile, motorcycle, public transportation, etc.

**Illustration 12.4** Example of Meeting Minutes

**NOTES**

/MEETING MINUTES			
Meeting/Project Name:		Noxious Weed Management Advisory Council Meeting	
Date of Meeting:	January 9, 2012	Time:	9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Minutes Prepared By:	Carol Bearden	Location:	Heritage Inn, Great Falls
<b>1. Meeting Objective</b>			
Business Meeting			
<b>2. Attendees</b>			
Council Members: Jim Gordon, Jennifer Anderson Vermillion, Margie Edsall, Dan Jackson, Nico Cantalupo, Todd Wagner, Jack Eddie, Dick Zoanni, Jim Olivarez			
Agency Representatives: Joe Weigand, Jim Jacobs (conference call), Larry Beneker, John Gaskin, Steve Shelly, Peter Stevenson, Mike Miller, Steve Siegelin, Tracy Sterling (conference call), John Simons, Dan Dabler, Gary Adams			
Guests: Taelor Anderson, Joe Mererz, Celestine Duncan			
Montana Dept. of Agriculture (MDA) Staff: Greg Ames, Donna Rise, Dave Burch, Kim Johnson, Carol Bearden, Jeremy Seiditz, Craig McLane			
<b>3. Agenda and Notes, Decisions, Issues</b>			
Topic	Discussion		
<b>Welcome New Council Members</b>	Greg Ames opened the meeting and welcomed new council members, Jim Olivarez, Dick Zoanni, and Jack Eddie. Introductions were made.		
<b>Review June 22, 2011 Minutes</b>	The minutes from the June 22, 2011 council meeting were reviewed. <b>Margie Edsall moved to accept the minutes as written. Todd Wagner seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.</b>		
<b>Review November 21, 2011 Minutes</b>	The minutes from the November 21, 2011 council meeting were reviewed. <b>Margie Edsall moved to accept the minutes as written. Nico Cantalupo seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.</b>		
<b>Noxious Weed Trust Fund Budget Report</b>	<p>Greg Ames provided information on the funding estimated to be available for the 2012 Noxious Weed Trust Fund (NWTF) grant hearings. Greg stated that the NWTF grant budget for fiscal year 2012 included \$1,250,000 in Initial State Special Revenue Funding, \$101,159 in General Fund dollars, and \$665,000 from the United States Forest Service (USFS) Cooperative Forestry Assistance/Forest Health Program.</p> <p>Greg advised the council that the Missouri River Watershed Coalition Project (\$40,000) and the Weed Free Borders Project (\$40,000), both specifically designated for funding by the Forest Service, had already been awarded. Greg said that \$18,150 of the USFS funding had been committed for a summer intern cost share, and \$18,840 (three percent of grant funding) was allocated for operating expenses within the MDA Central Services Division.</p> <p>Greg reported that other budgeted expenditures for the year included \$450,000 that has been awarded for the FY12 Special County/Reservation Grants, (\$7,500 per grant), and \$100,000 of Department of Transportation funding that is passed through the Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) to the counties.</p>		

**Check Your Progress**

1. What is note making and why it is important?
2. What are the basic features of office notes?
3. How do you prepare office notes?
4. What are minutes of meetings and what purpose do they serve?
5. Who is responsible to draft minutes in a meeting?

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## 12.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Note making is a productive interactive skill which integrates and enhances both reading and writing skills. It is the practice of recording information captured from another source. Taking notes is important because it helps one to concentrate and it also frees one's mind to recall again and again.
2. Office notes are another form of internal communication popular within business organizations. Office notes are put up by sections, departments or units to the higher authorities, head of the unit, department or institution.
3. Office notes are prepared and filed in serial order and serve as authoritative documents confirming sanctions or orders. While in some cases copies of the office notes are dispatched to the implementing units, in other cases the gist of the order or observations made by the authority concerned on the note are conveyed to the implementation levels.
4. Minutes are the written records of a meeting. They often give an overview of the structure of the meeting, starting with a list of those present, a statement of the various issues before the participants, and their respective responses. Minutes capture the purpose of the meeting, these are clear and to the point and also they do not leave out any important information.
5. Minutes are often drafted by a secretary or personal assistant present at the meeting, who may record the meeting in shorthand, and then type the minutes and send them to all the participants and concerned people afterwards.

### NOTES

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## 12.5 SUMMARY

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- Note making is basically a productive interactive skill which integrates and enhances both reading and writing skills. It is the practice of recording information captured from another source.
- A writer takes notes with an aim to record the essence of the information which also frees one's mind to recall all the happenings and activities.
- Office notes are another form of internal communication popular within business organizations. Office notes are put up by sections, departments or units to the higher authorities, head of the unit, department or institution.
- Office notes are put up to the president, general manager, executive director, managing director or chairman, as the case may be. Alternatively, they may be put up to the Executive Committee, the General Managers' Committee, the Management Committee, Audit Committee and the Board of Directors as well.

## NOTES

- Office notes are prepared and filed in serial order and serve as authoritative documents confirming sanctions or orders.
- Minutes are the written records of a meeting. They often give an overview of the structure of the meeting, starting with a list of those present, a statement of the various issues before the participants, and their respective responses.
- Minutes are often drafted by a secretary or personal assistant present at the meeting, who may record the meeting in shorthand, and then type the minutes and send them to all the participants and concerned people afterwards.
- Minutes should record what actually happened at a meeting, usually in the chronological order, regardless of whether the meeting follows (or ignores) any written agenda. It may use the passive voice (if required).

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### 12.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Interactive Skills:** It refers to the general ability to interact with the external world to accomplish a task.
- **Minute:** It refers to a summarized record of the proceedings at a meeting.
- **Chronological Order:** It refers to the arrangement of things following one after another in time.
- **Transcription:** It refers to a written or printed version of something.

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### 12.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Mention a few advantages of note making?
2. What are office notes and what purpose do they serve?
3. What skills does one require for preparing effective office notes?
4. Why are minutes taken at a meeting?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. What are the basic features of a good and effective office note? Discuss.
2. What should minutes of a meeting contain?
3. Describe the points one should remember while drafting a minute.
4. How to write an effective meeting minutes? Explain with an example.



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## 12.8 FURTHER READINGS

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- Dagleish, Walter Scott. 2001. *Introductory Text-book of English Composition*. Edinburgh: Simkin Marshall and Company.
- Madhukar, R.K. 2018. *Business Communication, 3rd edition*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
- Raman, Meenakshi and Sharma, Sangeeta. 2012. *Technical Communication: Principles and Practice*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Strydom Wihelm, Johannes. 2012. *Basics of Business Communication*. New Delhi: Frontline Books.

## NOTES

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## UNIT 13 REPORT WRITING

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### NOTES

#### Structure

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 Report Writing: An Overview
- 13.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 13.4 Summary
- 13.5 Key Words
- 13.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 13.7 Further Readings

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### 13.0 INTRODUCTION

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Report writing is, in a sense, the ultimate in business communication. It calls for a considerably higher level of writing skills. Reports are of various kinds, varying in terms of complexity and size. Reports are such a common feature that people in organizations, businesses and institutions, at various levels, are called upon not only to read related reports, but also to write or associate with the preparation of the reports. It is desirable, therefore, that anyone who is keen on developing varied business communication skills acquires a good insight into the art of report writing.

In this unit, you will study about the meaning of report writing, its types and also about the process involved in preparing a report. Also, in this unit, you will read about the basics of good report writing, various forms of business communication, report structure, note-taking and summarizing skills and meaning of annual reports etc.

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### 13.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the process and importance of good report writing
- Assess the committee reports, annual reports etc.
- Analyse the structuring of a report
- Examine the drafting and summarizing skills of a report writer

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### 13.2 REPORT WRITING: AN OVERVIEW

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What is a report? English dictionaries cover several interpretations of the word 'report.' These include, bring back account of; state as an ascertained fact; tell as news; narrate or describe or repeat especially as eyewitness and relate as spoken

by another. While each of these interpretations has its relevance in the context of report writing, the most appropriate one would be, 'account given or opinion formally expressed after investigation or consideration'. In other words, a report refers to information that has been carefully gathered and logically presented. A report is a document that presents an account of what one has learned or done.

### **Types of Reports**

Reports are of various types and, in fact, come in endless variety. They could be big or small, individual or group, routine or special, formal or informal, internal or external, interim or final. An illustrative list of various kinds of business reports is presented below:

1. Routine reports such as monthly report, performance report, review report and progress report.
2. Research reports, survey reports and special reports.
3. Enquiry reports, audit reports and investigation reports.
4. Status reports and progress reports.
5. Sales reports.
6. Confidential reports.
7. Information reports and Analytical reports.
8. Feasibility reports.
9. Industry surveys and Marketing reports.
10. Technical reports.
11. Directors' reports.
12. Annual reports.
13. Committee reports.

Viewed from another angle, reports can also be classified as either individual reports or group/committee reports or interim and final reports. While individual reports may be drafted or written by the person concerned, other reports submitted by study groups, working groups and committees are written with the help of a specialized team or a secretariat. Further, whenever the subject coverage, or terms of reference are such that fact finding and detailed presentation is likely to take a long time, interim reports are submitted by the groups or committees. Each of these types of reports has its own characteristics and the report writer should learn to present the report in its appropriate format. Some of the routine reports such as review report, progress report, survey report, sales report or credit report may even have a regular printed format in organizations which call for them on a frequent or periodic basis. As far as the other types of reports are concerned, the report writer, in consultation with the authorities concerned, should structure the report to bring out all relevant facts and figures in their proper perspective.

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### **Essentials of Good Report Writing**

As noted earlier, each kind of report has its characteristics. An enquiry report or a survey report is essentially a fact-finding report and should bring out the facts clearly. A directors' report, on the other hand, is the detailing of the developments, or the progress relating to the business organization during a particular period. A committee report, however, may not only bring out facts and figures, but also cover the alternative viewpoints expressed by the members, and also the final recommendations made by the committee. Notwithstanding these features specific to the reports, we may take note of certain features relevant to any report writing as stated in the following paragraphs.

#### **Issue in Perspective**

The first essential for any good report is to bring out the issue in its proper perspective, duly emphasizing the pros and cons. Be it a progress report, a survey report, an analytical report or an enquiry report, the subject should be presented in an unbiased and objective manner. Both the positive and negative aspects of the issues studied should be covered in the report. The report writer should make conscious efforts to keep out any bias or exaggeration while stating facts and incidents, especially in the enquiry and investigation reports.

#### **Authoritative Facts and Figures**

Reports are sought as a fact-finding measure. The report writer should ensure that the facts and figures quoted in the report are authentic and reliable. Very often, the facts and figures quoted are from primary data sources and are taken on the basis of personal enquiries or surveys specially conducted for gathering information. The data quoted in the report are likely to be made use of by several other individuals and agencies who will gain access to the report. It is also very likely that major business-related decisions will be taken on the basis of details mentioned in the report. Even when the data quoted are taken from secondary sources, care should be taken to see that the sources are reliable and cross-verified.

#### **Maintain a Judicial Approach**

The report writer should keep to measurable facts and verifiable details. Impressionistic statements and inaccuracies will have to be scrupulously avoided. A good report calls for an effective assessment based on authentic facts and figures. Human errors, biases and any kind of selective reporting have no place in report writing. Good reports are those where the report writer maintains a judicial and non-partisan attitude.

#### **In-Depth Analysis**

It is expected that the reports provide an in-depth study. Any report that does not go into the details of the subject studied may turn out to be peripheral, necessitating one or more report, or additional information being sought. The reporting authority

or the report writer, as the case may be, should make it a point to meticulously go about collecting all related information for inclusion in the report.

### **Alternative Viewpoints**

The purpose of a report, as we have noted earlier, is to get the facts in proper perspective. When we refer to an enquiry report, an investigation report or a committee report, the intention is to get the inputs or views from different persons who are in a position to throw light on the subject or incident under study. In fact, when we talk of a committee report, a very important requirement for the report writer is to bring out alternative viewpoints. Although the final recommendations may be based on a consensus or majority view, the fact that some other views were also expressed during the course of deliberations or enquiries should also be mentioned. Further, in reporting deliberations or alternative viewpoints, the report writer should not be overly conscious of the hierarchical position of the members. In other words, the points made or the views expressed are to be covered, even if they are from relatively junior members, as long as they are relevant to the issue under consideration. It is worth noting here that when committees submit their reports, apart from giving a majority view, there is also a mention, in some cases, of the note of dissent.

### **Appropriate Annexures and Appendix**

Most reports also contain relevant annexures, which cover additional information that is germane or pertinent to the matter dealt with in the body of the report. Such annexures normally include charts, graphs, relevant statistics, questionnaires, list of centers visited, agencies, institutions and individuals contacted and interviewed. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that any such charts, maps and tables are relevant to the matter under study and enhance understanding. Well thought out annexures help assess the depth of the report and the extent of representativeness of the studies/surveys made in connection with the investigation or study taken up. While major findings and statistics are furnished in the main report, the questionnaire formats, detailed statistical tables and other similar details covered in the annexures provide supplementary information which is of particular value to a more discerning reader or researcher. Reports also contain Appendix at the end. Appendix refers to a section giving relevant additional information at the end of the report.

Appendix, like the annexure, constitutes an extra section of the report or a document. Any supplemental information relating to the report is given in the appendix. Appendix generally includes the following: illustrations, photographs, maps, surveys, statistical abstracts, diagrams, questionnaires and samples, pictures, and formulae and calculations.

### **Glossary**

Reports also contain glossary at the end. A glossary is a list of special or technical words used in the document or report. Along with the words, their meanings are

## **NOTES**

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also given in the alphabetical order for easy reference. Glossary helps the readers understand the meanings of key words or the jargon used in the report or book. Every domain or business has words specific to it and the glossary lists out the words and their meanings. It is particularly relevant when the readers are not familiar with the words used in the report.

### **Index**

Voluminous reports, large documents and books carry an Index at the end. Index presents the list of names or topics that are referred to in the report or document or book. They are usually arranged in the alphabetical order. Like the subject index, there can also be an author index. It is worth noting that this book presents Subject Index at the end. In the subject index, key words with the page numbers are given in the alphabetical order. Similarly, in the author index, the names of authors and the page numbers where they appear are mentioned. Microsoft Word, the word processing software, creates an index automatically.

### **Appearance**

Good appearance is of particular significance in presenting reports. Reports constitute an important business document. Their objective is to present a clear picture or objective account of what is learned or done or observed. Quite often, the reports tend to be lengthy. If a report has to be read by the audience, apart from the quality of contents, the manner of presentation assumes relevance. Notwithstanding the relevance and usefulness of the contents, the report may get discredited and ignored if the presentation is casual and shoddy. Good reports are those that are carefully prepared so as to present all the contents in a systematic, appealing and reader-friendly manner.

### **Committee Reports**

Committee reports constitute another common form of business communication. Appointment of committees has become a popular method of obtaining facts and decision-making inputs in an authoritative manner. Be it the implementation of a new idea, investigation of scams or irregularities, setting up of a new institution, prescription of standards or benchmarks or assessing the scope for improvements in a particular area like customer service, the committee approach is the most preferred one. Committees are constituted by the central and state governments, regulatory bodies like the Reserve Bank of India, monitoring and controlling authorities, associations, institutions, professional bodies and chambers of commerce who are keen on gathering relevant details about any particular incident, development or issue. Committees can be set up by individuals within the organizations as well. Committees can be either standing committees or specific purpose committees. There can be a syllabus committee, publicity committee, reception committee, enquiry committee, tariff revision committee or screening committee depending on the task being addressed. Not all committees need to be high-level or high-power committees. There can be smaller committees at the unit

level, which may study a specific area of concern or relevance and submit a report thereon. Reports of the committees may range from just a few pages to voluminous ones, running to hundreds of pages.

The very fact that committees generally comprise several members, ensures that the deliberations, findings and recommendations reflect collective wisdom. While constituting a committee, care is taken to ensure that people with all relevant diverse backgrounds, functional areas and interest groups that are germane to the subject under study are included. Further, as and when necessary, the committees also seek the views and services of specialists or experts on the subject. This will ensure that the committee reports are of a high order, duly reflecting the erudition of the members.

Keeping track of committee deliberations on an ongoing basis and presenting the views and recommendations in a comprehensive and cogent manner calls for tremendous skills. That is the reason why convenors, member secretaries and committee secretariats are selected with due care. They should extend requisite support to the chairman and other members by organizing relevant data, putting up appropriate background papers, ensuring the participation of all concerned, facilitating intense and fruitful deliberations and finally preparing a worthwhile report. All this calls for very systematic and organized efforts from the very beginning, i.e., from committee formation. Some key areas that need attention in the context of ensuring fruitful committee deliberations and bringing out authentic reports are presented below.

### **Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference constitute the starting point for any committee proceedings. They lay down the scope of the study in clear terms. They provide the mandate or authority for undertaking the business of the committee. Very often, committees covering areas of far-reaching significance are created with legal sanction and are vested with substantial powers to collect data, summon witnesses and interview people. The terms of reference framed by the authority constituting the committee clearly state the specific areas which the committee has to look into. The terms of reference are generally listed out one after the other in a brief and focused manner. As far as possible, the scope of the study as enumerated in the terms of reference should be complete and unambiguous. However, if there is any doubt regarding the scope of the study, or in the absence of a specific mention of related areas, the details are to be sorted out at the first meeting of the committee. Any good report should make sure that all the terms of reference are clearly dealt with by the committee.

### **Steps in Committee Deliberations**

As stated earlier, committee work calls for systematic and organized effort from the very beginning. Committees are usually given a time frame within which the report will have to be submitted. In order to do so, it is necessary to make a clear

## **NOTES**

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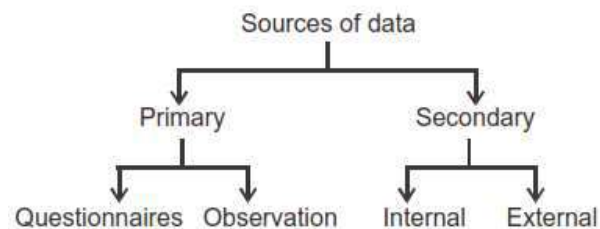
assessment of the work involved, and to break down the allocated time for different activities. While some activities can only be carried out sequentially, others can be done simultaneously. The time of the committee members, it should be noted, is a scarce and valuable resource, and every effort should be made to get the best out of it. Any disorganization on the part of the conveners, the member-secretary or the secretariat is likely to result in disruption or slowing down of committee work and will have to be consciously avoided. Keeping in view the terms of reference and the time frame, the deliberations and approach of the committee would be on the lines mentioned in the ensuing paragraphs.

### Recognizing and Defining the Problem

This is the first step to be taken by any committee. It concerns clarifying the problem or areas, which will receive the main attention of the committee. It relates to providing some kind of status report on the subject under study. It relates to providing the backdrop against which the issue is being examined. It also involves defining the scope and objectives of the study. It clearly follows the terms of reference already stated. It involves putting the problem or issue on hand in its proper perspective. It may involve scanning of available literature on the subject and deciding on areas that will have to be pursued further. These aspects set the direction for further deliberation and hence will have to be addressed in the initial meetings of the committee.

### Selecting a Method of Solution

Having identified and defined the problem, the next logical step would be to work towards finding a solution. It involves deliberating on the methodological issues. Taking into account the time frame and other relevant factors, the committee considers the availability of various methods or approaches and their relative merits and demerits. If data collection is involved, what would be the sources—primary or secondary? If primary sources have to be tapped, it may be necessary to design samples and questionnaires and methods of interview. The following chart sums up the method of obtaining the data:



The methodology followed in finding a solution to the problem has a bearing on the reliability or depth of the study. If the methodology adopted is not the most appropriate one, or if there are deficiencies in sample design, the quality of information gathered, collation and tabulation of the data, the findings and recommendations which are based thereon would also be undermined.



## Collecting and Organizing the Data

When primary sources of data are involved, the first step would be to design the sample and draw up a questionnaire. Having done so, the next step would be to administer the questionnaire and collect the response. Whether it will be mailed or administered in person is to be determined. Alternative sampling and statistical techniques will have to be evaluated. Similarly, wherever required, secondary data may also have to be collected with due concern for authenticity. The time factor in data collection again needs careful attention and proper planning. The data so collected will have to be properly processed. The work would involve validation, tabulation, stratification and analysis so as to arrive at meaningful observations. Sometimes it may become necessary to engage the services of external data collection and processing agencies. Such agencies will have to interact with the committee and the committee will have to give them proper briefings about the assignment.

## Arriving at an Answer to the Problem

This is obviously the final and the most important step in the work of the committee. Based on the research, findings and deliberations as outlined earlier, the committee will have to arrive at its conclusions. Inasmuch as the entire exercise has been a fact-finding mission or a problem-solving effort, the committee members should put their collective wisdom in throwing light on the facts and recommending further course of action. Depending upon the nature of issue addressed by the committees, these recommendations are likely to be widely reported and considered at various levels. The report writer should make sure that the solutions or recommendations adequately cover the problems or issues listed under the terms of reference. The committee should examine the pros and cons of alternative courses of action, if any, and make its recommendations.

## Structuring the Report

For any business communicator associated with report writing, structuring the report assumes great significance. It calls for superior skills in observing and absorbing the deliberations, making notes on an ongoing basis, getting doubts clarified and putting them all in an organized and light-bearing fashion while presenting the report. Report writing is somewhat akin to writing a book. While in a book the author puts forth his own thoughts, in a committee report the author will have to remain objective and present the consensus of the deliberations. All the same, the need for a thorough understanding of the subject, command over language, organization of chapters and elucidation of ideas are all equally relevant. In structuring the report, the following aspects need particular attention:

1. Outlining and report organization
2. Length of the report
3. Formal report

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4. Sequence of presentations
5. Annexures
6. Sub-committee report
7. Dissenting notes, if any

It is possible that the committee, in the course of its deliberations, may go beyond the terms of reference into unrelated areas. The report writer, while structuring the report, should clearly outline what the committee work consists of, and rule out any temptation to go beyond what is necessary, useful and relevant.

The chapter designing of the report would vary from committee to committee. However, if one were to suggest a standard format, the following chapters/coverage would be appropriate:

1. Table of contents
2. Executive summary
3. Background of the study
4. Scope and objectives of the study
5. Study methodology
6. Findings and observations
7. Recommendations
8. Annexures

The report writer should be familiar with the essentials of report writing and make it a point to refer, wherever need be, to some well recommended reports on the subject. Apart from the broad approach indicated above, there are certain other aspects to be covered, such as:

1. Acknowledgements
2. Summary of recommendations
3. Composition of the committee
4. Meetings and visits
5. Covering letter for report submission

Report writing not only puts to test the skill of the report writer, but also provides an opportunity to an accomplished writer to bring out a document of real merit by adding value.

### **Note-taking and Summarizing Skills**

As we have noted earlier, report writing is the last step in the committee's work. A report is the end product of a committee. The report should contain the essence of all the deliberations, viewpoints, surveys and observations made by the experts who make presentations. All this implies that the report writer must be associated with the committee meetings and take keen note of all the deliberations. All the

important points which emerge during the course of deliberations should be meticulously noted down. The points may or may not emerge in a readymade fashion. Not all members and participants would be articulate and cogent in expressing their viewpoints. The member-secretary, the convenor or the person who will be writing the report will have to be attentive throughout, and develop the skill of identifying the points which may or may not be clearly spelt out, but yet they are made during the deliberations and give a meaningful shape to them. While members may have their own areas of expertise, any committee would look to the report writer for drafting skills. At the end of every meeting, the report writer, in consultation with the chairman, should summarize and read out the main points which come out of the deliberations. Summarizing skills thus assume significance. Such points would also help in avoiding repetition in the subsequent meetings and would ensure that the deliberations are carried forward in a progressive manner.

Another important point to be noted by the report writer is that findings and recommendations of the committee do not always arise in a sequential order. Deliberations at the committee meetings often tend to go back and forth. It is incumbent on the report writer, therefore, to present the findings and conclusions in an appropriate sequence. The report writer should also develop good reference skills. Quite often, the members of the committee would expect the report writer to scan and collect relevant material from other sources, and place it before the committee to enable them to view the subject in perspective. A skilled report writer can add value to the committee's work and the reporting function in many ways. The report writer should develop not only written communication skills of a high order, but should also be good at listening, comprehending, noting down, summarizing, structuring and making the end product a valuable effort.

### **The Writing Style**

Committee reports are written in a certain style to make them authoritative and appealing. In writing the committee report, the report writer should give particular attention to the following:

1. Impersonal style
2. Active sentences
3. Appropriate headings
4. Proper tense
5. Accurate nouns and pronouns
6. Definition of concepts
7. Tabulation of data
8. Documentation
9. Objectivity

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10. Erudition

Similarly, the list of items to be avoided would include the following:

1. Excessive jargon
2. Verbosity and involved writing
3. Personal bias
4. Factual Inaccuracies
5. Grammatical blunders
6. Pedestrian approach
7. Absence of reasoning
8. Absence of sequencing and references

In order to ensure all the above, the draft report may have to undergo several modifications and will have to be carefully vetted by the chairman and other members.

**Annual Reports**

Annual reports are another type of business reports regularly brought out by business organizations. As the name suggests, these reports are brought out every year detailing the progress achieved during the reporting period. Annual reports are brought out by a variety of institutions—commercial, charitable, educational, supervisory and regulatory as well as associations and bodies. The idea in bringing out such reports is to reach out to their members, clients, patrons and the public in general, and share the progress achieved, and developments of significance and performance highlights.

In accordance with the company law, every registered company is required to publish its balance sheet and profit and loss account within a prescribed period. Public sector banks are required to publish their balance sheets within six months of the year end. Balance sheets and profits and loss accounts are generally published as part of the annual report booklet and distributed among all concerned. While the balance sheets and profit and loss accounts are figure oriented and follow generally accepted accounting principles and standards, the annual reports additionally contain narrative statements, comparative analyses, charts and pictures and all such presentation values aimed at putting the balance sheets and profit and loss figures and ratios in their proper perspective.

Annual reports, besides being mandatory, are also relevant as information sharing and image-building documents. A well brought out annual report that is widely distributed, can help create a favorable image or impression about the organization and its progress and performance during the year.

A typical annual report of a large organization would cover the following details:

1. Board of directors
2. Top management team
3. Names of auditors
4. Progress at a glance
5. Performance highlights and working results
6. Directors' report
7. Accounting policies adopted
8. Balance sheet
9. Profit and loss account
10. Schedules to be annexed to the balance sheet
11. Notes on account, wherever necessary
12. Auditors' report
13. Commentary on the financial statements
14. Ratios and statements
15. Remuneration paid to the top management
16. Changes in the board
17. Acknowledgement

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There could be some additions or deletions to this list depending upon the nature of the organizations and the regulatory requirements. The annual reports, it should be noted, cover not only the mandatory details, but also what the organization itself wishes to share. For example, chairman's statement or message is often included in some annual reports. In fact some chairman's statements, like that of Hindustan Lever, are so erudite and insightful in terms of providing economic and industry status reports and even management thoughts and HRD dimensions, that they are quite often looked forward to and widely read, including by those not connected with the industry or that particular institution. Recognizing this, such statements and highlights are also published in the newspapers for facilitating a wider readership. Nowadays, they are also put on the websites, facilitating greater access.

As a business communicator, one's concern would be with the entire document or the booklet, covering the contents as well as the overall get-up. Progressive organizations all over the world devote considerable time, effort and resources in bringing out their annual reports. In many organizations, the task of bringing out the annual report is entrusted to a specialized team of people in the economic research, public relations or communications department, facilitating continuity and dedicated efforts. Apart from the substance or the content, much attention is also directed at the design, printing, layout, pictures and charts all of which form part of the booklet. Like in any serious effort, here too, much advance planning needs to be done in obtaining performance details, verifying their accuracy, deciding on the layout and other presentation values concerning the report.

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The following are some relevant tips which, when followed, would help make the annual report elegant and appealing:

1. Clearly bring out the progress/strengths relevant to the reporting year. Avoid repetition of the previous year's sentences and paragraphs.
2. Take a re-look at the headings and sub-headings and make appropriate changes.
3. Good annual reports are distinctive in terms of language and expression used. One has to learn the skill of narrating even routine developments in a forceful manner.
4. Avoid using long sentences and combining several developments. Make the sentences brief and specific.

Given below is a verbatim reproduction of an opening sentence in a directors' report of a nationalized bank.

*'The satisfactory performance of the Indian economy during the year 1994-95 bears testimony to the inner strength of the fundamentals of the Indian economy to imbibe and digest structural changes emanating from the reform process after successfully negotiating transitional bottlenecks on the background of a stagnant growth rate of 4.3 per cent for the previous years.'*

The sentence is so complex and winding. In fact, it is a maze of thoughts. The writer has made it too difficult for the reader to comprehend so many developments, and that too in the opening sentence of the report.

5. Ensure proper grouping of various sub-heads under each main heading like business growth, profitability, HRD, international operations and subsidiaries.
6. Check the correctness of all figures, amounts and dates. If the figures are to be repeated under different columns, it should be ensured that they all agree with each other, and that there are no inconsistencies.
7. While reporting of relevant figures and ratios is inevitable for any such report, too many figures, repetitive ratios and percentages running into several decimals tend to hinder readability and comprehension. Wherever appropriate, figures should be rounded off.
8. In quoting figures relating to economic environment, industry-related progress and market developments, authenticity of the figures should be ensured. Further, the data quoted should be the most up-to-date. Stale data are best avoided, unless they are absolutely relevant.

These are some of the general guidelines. As one develops proficiency, there is considerable scope to make annual reports innovative and appealing. It would be a good idea to scan model reports or reports of organizations which are generally widely acclaimed. With conscious effort and attention to all the relevant

areas, annual reports can become not only informative and enlightening, but also aesthetically appealing. Business communication can indeed find a very meaningful expression in imaginatively brought out annual reports.

### **Finding, Evaluating and Processing Information**

In today's world, information is power. Modern businesses are often described as information processing units. Business organizations are always on the lookout for knowledge workers. As we have noted earlier, the first and foremost objective of any communication is to inform. The dissemination of information covers a wide range of areas, both internal and external. People within an organization have to be kept informed about the organizational goals, objectives, procedures, products, processes, systems, plans, priorities and strategies. They also need to be informed about the developments relating to the industry, competitors, changes in regulations and feedback from customers. Equally important is the objective of ensuring effective external communication with customers, prospects, collaborators, suppliers and the public about products, plans, services, initiatives, happenings, events, failures and achievements. Businesses have several stakeholders and each of them need be kept duly informed.

It is against this backdrop that organizations, depending upon their nature, size, diversity and spread engage themselves in the process of finding, evaluating and processing information. The information needs within the organization take on different nomenclatures—market-related information, product-related information, client-related information, employee-related information, executive information, management information and regulatory information. Each of these has its own purpose, and periodically such information addressed to each segment should be provided in measured doses and in an easily understandable language and format. Both too much and too little of such information would be equally counterproductive. When information provided is short of what is relevant, the purpose would not be achieved. At the same time, excessive information and dumping of memos, circulars, reports, studies and voluminous booklets and brochures will lead to information overload making the receiver wary of all such communication. In fact, with the increasing usage of copying machines, computer stationery and printers and e-mail facilities, people in organizations tend to overindulge in providing not so relevant information. If people keep receiving voluminous information at very frequent intervals through print, compact discs (CDs) and e-mail attachments, they tend to ignore most of it. An important principle to be observed while sending information is to ensure that more important information is not packaged along with other less relevant and voluminous data. The information provider should be cognizant of the degree of importance of every bit of information provided to the receiver and the most appropriate manner or format in which it should be made available. Information should be provided in a duly classified manner. Communication is essentially a participative process and excessive and irrelevant details fatigue the reader and result in diminishing returns. Effective communicators learn to limit their communication in line with the receiver's receptivity and avoid excesses.

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Information here relates to communicating or receiving knowledge or data in the form of facts, figures, news and events. All these have to be presented in a processed form to facilitate meaningful interpretation for analysis and decision-making.

Information also covers communicating or receiving knowledge related to data in the form of facts, figures, news and events that is presented in a processed form to facilitate meaningful interpretation for analysis and decision making. In business organizations, organized efforts are made to collect raw data from various sources, evaluate it in terms of its reliability and usefulness and thereafter present them in a processed form. Management information system (MIS) deals with the process by which raw data gets transformed into reliable information. Finding, collecting, storing, retrieving and processing data for the purpose of studies, analysis, exchange and decision making is indeed a very vital function in today's business organizations.

### **Finding Information**

When we talk of finding information, we are basically referring to collection of relevant, adequate and reliable information that is of value to the business organization. Depending upon their size, expanse and diversity, organizations need to find and collect varied and voluminous data. Some common areas for which organizations need to collect relevant data include markets, customers, prospects, competitors, products, pricing, employees, suppliers and several such details of significance that are helpful in running the business effectively. Data requirement generally covers physical data, economic data, financial data, market data and historical data. Each of these has its own sources, both internal and external. While most of the data are to be collected periodically, some information may have to be collected occasionally or on an ad-hoc basis.

As we have noted earlier, there are essentially two sources of data viz., primary and secondary. While the primary sources are collected through the questionnaire method and the observation method, the secondary sources are collected through both internal and external data sources. Large organizations are spread across varied functional departments and multitudinous regions and even countries. Hence, even internal data is widespread within the organization and will have to be collected in an organized manner. Data relating to employees, managers, budgets, goals, achievements, expenses and a host of such items has to be collected internally on an ongoing basis. This apart, data from numerous external sources such as studies, published reports, newspapers, trade and industry organizations and market bulletins should also be collected periodically, depending on the requirements.

Finding information consists of several steps such as planning, locating, collecting and capturing data. It is worth noting that, generally speaking, voluminous data are available on any subject of business value. What is essential is to seek and access the requisite data. In order to decide what information is to be collected, one must first study and understand the gaps in information. As the first step in



finding information, organizations need to make an information gap analysis. Given the cost of finding information, no information is located and collected without any purpose. Information is always required for a specific purpose. More often than not, it is for the purpose of decision making, analysis and comparison. The difference between the data required and the data available is information gap.

Planning of data collection is based on gap analysis. One should be clear about what information is required and for what purpose. Having identified data requirement, the next step would be to locate the data. The data, as we have noted already, may be inside the organization or it may be outside. Let us take the example of a bank. Some relevant details relating to its customers may be lying in the application forms at various branches. This may include the data of opening, occupation, residential address, contact number, outstanding balances and so on. Having located the data, the next step in finding information is to collect or capture the relevant data. In the example given above, it means collecting the requisite data from the branches manually if the branches are not computerized and by using appropriate software in a fully computerized environment.

### **Evaluating Information**

Data as we have noted are collected from numerous sources—primary or secondary, internal or external. Quite often, the sources of data may be biased and unreliable. Data may be polished to present a better picture than what exists. Or, when the source of data is not known, one cannot be sure of the quality and reliability of data. All this implies that any data that is collected and captured will have to be evaluated. Those who wish to use the data for the purpose of any worthwhile analysis or comparison or decision making have to necessarily do some evaluation.

Evaluation of data or information is done by verifying the sources of data and also by a process of validation. Different data sources have different degree of reliability. Some are very authentic and reliable, some are partially reliable and some are far from being reliable. The users of the data are often aware of the extent to which data can be relied upon. Validation involves studying the sources of data and assessing whether sufficient care has been taken in locating, collecting and interpreting data. If the data are based on a sample study, to that extent the reliability is limited. If the agency that has collected and presented the data is relatively unknown, the users may find the information not very dependable.

As we have noted in the chapter on ‘Charts, Graphs and Pictures’ (Chapter 15), mentioning the source of data at the bottom of every table or chart is extremely important. If this vital information is missing, the user cannot decide on the quality and dependability of the information. Similarly, when data are collected internally, it is subjected to a process of validation. Test checks are done to ensure that the data are captured, tabulated and presented correctly. If the process of validation suggests any lacunae or shortcoming in data collection, the information is not put to use till the shortcomings are set right. Data that are inaccurate or incomplete are obviously of little value. Proper validation is a must.

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Another important criterion determining the usefulness of the information concerns the age of data. If the data are stale and do not relate to the present, data quality suffers. Subsequent to the collection of data, if several developments have taken place, the available data lose their relevance. In a fast-changing and dynamic world, what was relevant 5 years ago or 10 years ago may not be so today. What happens this year, this month and now is current information and what happened last year may not be current information. Further, it may so happen that the data were collected or captured sometime in the past, but they have been tabulated and presented much later. Here again, the information becomes stale or dated.

### Processing Information

Processing means preparing and presenting the information for the desired use. Having collected the required information and having ensured that it is properly evaluated to ensure its authenticity and dependability, the next step is processing. Processing refers to various steps that will ensure that the information is shared with the appropriate authority for their knowledge and analysis or decision-making purpose, as the case may be. Processing of information may involve cleaning, conversion, classification and presentation.

When we refer to data or information, it may take many forms. It may include facts, events, figures or numbers, news and statements. All these need to be verified, converted into appropriate charts, tables, graphs, etc., segregated into relevant and irrelevant, and presented in an appropriate form. Businesses need voluminous data and classified information so that executives, managers and others can use them for their study and analysis. An executive or a manager may need to go through a number of reports, statements, returns, studies and so on. All these are data captured, validated, processed and presented as information. What in the past used to be statistics departments confined to just submitting statements, returns and reports have now been upgraded into very sophisticated management information systems (MIS) departments undertaking the job of finding, evaluating and processing information.

It is worth mentioning that in most business organizations, management information systems are fully computerized such that they are in a position to access, classify and present information through appropriate computer applications. Given the increasingly computerized environment concerning information processing, the business communicator should be familiar with the concepts and tools relevant to this subject. Let us look at some commonly used concepts:

1. **Databank:** A collection of databases
2. **Database:** A collection of computer data
3. **Data capture:** Any process of changing information from its original form into a form that can be fed into a computer
4. **Data processing:** The performance of operations on data by a computer system. More particularly, the arrangement of large amounts of data into a more useful form according to specified rules and procedures.

5. **Data protection:** Computing safeguards to protect the integrity, privacy and security of data
6. **Data communications:** The sending and receiving of computer- encoded data by means of telecommunication
7. **Information retrieval:** The process of obtaining selected information from data stored in a database
8. **Information science:** Relates to the inter-disciplinary field concerned with the collection, processing and dissemination of data by means of computerized systems.
9. **Information technology (IT):** The use, study or production of a range of technologies (especially computer systems, digital electronics and telecommunications) to store, process and transmit information
10. **Information superhighway:** Electronic communication systems such as telephone links, cable and satellite TV, and computer networks, especially the Internet, over which information in various digital forms can be transferred rapidly.

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### Check Your Progress

1. What is a report?
2. What is a routine report? Name a few routine reports.
3. What are the essentialities of good report writing?
4. Name the appropriate annexures covered in a report.
5. What do you understand by author index and subject index?
6. Why and who constitutes committees?
7. What skills are quintessential for a report writer?
8. List the points a report writer should keep in mind while writing a committee report.
9. What is Management Information System (MIS)?
10. What do you understand by processing information?

## 13.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. A report is an account given or opinion formally expressed after investigation or consideration. In other words, a report is an information that has been carefully gathered and logically presented.
2. As the name suggests, a routine report is prepared and presented as a routine work and at a regular period of time. Some of the routine reports

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are review report, progress report, survey report, sales report or credit report.

3. A few essentialities of a good report writing are:
  - (a) Issue in perspective
  - (b) Authoritative facts and figures
  - (c) Maintain a judicial approach
  - (d) In-depth analysis
  - (e) Alternative viewpoints
  - (f) Appropriate Annexures and Appendix
  - (g) Glossary
  - (h) Index
  - (i) Appearance
4. Annexures cover additional information that is relevant to the matter dealt with in the body of the report. Such annexures normally include charts, graphs, relevant statistics, questionnaires, list of centers visited, agencies, institutions and individuals contacted and interviewed.
5. Index presents the list of names or topics that are referred to in the report or document or book. In the subject index, key words are given with the page numbers in the alphabetical order. Similarly, in the author index, the names of authors and the page numbers, where they appear, are mentioned.
6. Setting up a committee has become a popular method of obtaining facts and decision-making inputs in an authoritative manner. Committees are constituted by the central and state governments, regulatory bodies like the Reserve Bank of India, monitoring and controlling authorities, associations, institutions, professional bodies and chambers of commerce who are keen on gathering relevant details about any particular incident, development or issue.
7. The report writer should develop not only written communication skills of a high order, but should also be good at listening, comprehending, noting down, summarizing, structuring and making the end product a valuable effort.
8. Committee reports are written in a certain style to make them authoritative and appealing. In writing the committee report, the report writer should give particular attention to the following:
  1. Impersonal style
  2. Active sentences
  3. Appropriate headings
  4. Proper tense
  5. Accurate nouns and pronouns
  6. Definition of concepts

7. Tabulation of data
  8. Documentation
  9. Objectivity
  10. Erudition
9. Management Information System (MIS) deals with the process by which raw data gets transformed into reliable information. Finding, collecting, storing, retrieving and processing data for the purpose of studies, analysis, exchange and decision making is indeed a very vital function in today's business organizations.
  10. Processing means preparing and presenting the information for the desired use. Having collected the required information and having ensured that it is properly evaluated to ensure its authenticity and dependability, the next step is processing. Processing of information may involve cleaning, conversion, classification and presentation.

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### 13.4 SUMMARY

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- The first essential for any good report is to bring out the issue in its proper perspective, duly emphasizing the pros and cons. Be it a progress report, a survey report, an analytical report or an enquiry report, the subject should be presented in an unbiased and objective manner.
- The report writer should ensure that the facts and figures quoted in the report are authentic and reliable. Even when the data quoted are taken from secondary sources, care should be taken to see that the sources are reliable and cross-verified.
- The report writer should keep to measurable facts and verifiable details. Impressionistic statements and inaccuracies will have to be scrupulously avoided.
- Human errors, biases and any kind of selective reporting have no place in report writing. Good reports are those where the report writer maintains a judicial and non-partisan attitude.
- When we refer to an enquiry report, an investigation report or a committee report, the intention is to get the inputs or views from different persons who are in a position to throw light on the subject or incident under study.
- Annexures cover additional information that is relevant to the matter dealt with in the body of the report. Such annexures normally include charts, graphs, relevant statistics, questionnaires, list of centres visited, agencies, institutions and individuals contacted and interviewed.
- Reports also contain Appendix at the end. Appendix refers to a section giving relevant additional information at the end of the report.

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- Reports also contain glossary at the end. A glossary is a list of special or technical words used in the document or report. It helps the readers understand the meanings of key words or the jargon used in the report or book.
- Voluminous reports, large documents and books carry an Index at the end. Index presents the list of names or topics that are referred to in the report or document or book. They are usually arranged in the alphabetical order.
- Good appearance is of particular significance in presenting reports. Reports constitute an important business document.
- Good reports are those that are carefully prepared so as to present all the contents in a systematic, appealing and reader-friendly manner.
- Committee reports constitute another common form of business communication.
- The terms of reference constitute the starting point for any committee proceedings. They lay down the scope of the study in clear terms.
- Committees are usually given a time frame within which the report will have to be submitted. In order to do so, it is necessary to make a clear assessment of the work involved, and to break down the allocated time for different activities.
- Structuring the report calls for superior skills in observing and absorbing the deliberations, making notes on an ongoing basis, getting doubts clarified and putting them all in an organized and light-bearing fashion while presenting the report.
- Report writing not only puts to test the skill of the report writer, but also provides an opportunity to an accomplished writer to bring out a document of real merit by adding value.
- The report should contain the essence of all the deliberations, viewpoints, surveys and observations made by the experts who make presentations.
- At the end of every meeting, the report writer, in consultation with the chairman, should summarize and read out the main points which come out of the deliberations.
- The report writer should develop not only written communication skills of a high order, but should also be good at listening, comprehending, noting down, summarizing, structuring and making the end product a valuable effort.
- Annual reports are another type of business reports regularly brought out by business organizations. As the name suggests, these reports are brought out every year detailing the progress achieved during the reporting period.
- Annual reports are brought out by a variety of institutions—commercial, charitable, educational, supervisory and regulatory as well as associations and bodies.

- The annual reports, it should be noted, cover not only the mandatory details, but also what the organization itself wishes to share.
- In many organizations, the task of bringing out the annual report is entrusted to a specialized team of people in the economic research, public relations or communications department, facilitating continuity and dedicated efforts.
- The first and foremost objective of any communication is to inform. The dissemination of information covers a wide range of areas, both internal and external. People within an organization have to be kept informed about the organizational goals, objectives, procedures, products, processes, systems, plans, priorities and strategies.
- Communication is essentially a participative process and excessive and irrelevant details fatigue the reader and result in diminishing returns.
- Information also covers communicating or receiving knowledge related to data in the form of facts, figures, news and events that is presented in a processed form to facilitate meaningful interpretation for analysis and decision making.
- Processing refers to various steps that will ensure that the information is shared with the appropriate authority for their knowledge and analysis or decision-making purpose, as the case may be. Processing of information may involve cleaning, conversion, classification and presentation.

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### 13.5 KEY WORDS

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- **Impressionistic:** It refers to a general view or idea of something instead of particular details or facts.
- **Consensus:** It refers to a generally accepted opinion or decision among a group of people.
- **Non-Partisan:** It refers to someone or something that does not shows support or favouritism towards a particular cause, person or party.
- **Annexure:** It refers to a separate part of a legal agreement, report, etc. that gives extra information.
- **Methodological:** It refers to the system of methods used in a particular area of study or activity.

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### 13.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. List a few characteristics of good report writer.
2. Write a short note on annexures and appendix with regards to report creation.

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3. What role does good appearance play in presenting reports?
4. Mention the different types of committees.
5. State the aspects that should be considered attentively while structuring the report.
6. What is an annual report and why it is important?

### Long Answer Questions

1. Why should a report writer be adept in drafting and summarizing skills? Discuss.
2. Examine the points and aspects being covered in the standard format of report writing.
3. Discuss the details being covered in a typical annual report of a large organization.
4. Describe the guidelines using which one can make the annual report elegant and appealing.

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## 13.7 FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 14 COMPREHENSION

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### Structure

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Objectives
- 14.2 Comprehension Passages: An Overview
- 14.3 Effective Reading
  - 14.3.1 Purpose of Reading
  - 14.3.2 Approaches to Reading
- 14.4 Reading Process
  - 14.4.1 Essentials of Effective Reading
  - 14.4.2 Tips for Improving Reading Skills
- 14.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 14.6 Summary
- 14.7 Key Words
- 14.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 14.9 Further Readings

### NOTES

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### 14.0 INTRODUCTION

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Comprehension, in the context of language learning, means a thorough understanding of a passage or text. It is an exercise which aims at improving or testing one's ability to understand a language. The purpose of comprehension passages is to measure the understanding of students. Through the given passages, students are tested on their understanding, their vocabulary and their language skills. Comprehension reading include passages, stories, poems, questions and answers that were unseen before the reader.

In this unit, you will study about the need of comprehension reading in examinations, the process of attempting comprehension passages. You will also study about the ways to get better at reading comprehension. In addition to this, the unit also explores on purpose and approaches of reading, reading process, essentials of effective reading, and tips for improving reading skills.

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### 14.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Define the concept of comprehension passages
- Discuss the ways to attempt comprehension passages
- Analyse the purpose and approaches of reading
- Examine the reading process in detail
- Explore the purposes and approaches of reading

- Assess the essentials of effective reading
- Describe the tips for improving reading skills

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### 14.2 COMPREHENSION PASSAGES: AN OVERVIEW

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Comprehension passages in examinations are designed to test the following:

- Your grasp of the main theme of the passage
- Your understanding of the important points in the passage in relation to the main theme
- Your ability to answer questions within the required word limit
- Your ability to rewrite the main ideas in the passage in your own words

#### How to attempt comprehension passages

While answering questions from a comprehension passage, keep the following points in mind:

- Read the passage carefully and try to understand the main idea.
- If necessary, read the passage more than once to form a clear idea of the meaning.
- Read the question first and go to the part of the passage which gives the answer.
- Understand the lines and then rewrite them in your own words.
- Now follow this process for the rest of the questions.
- Make sure that the number of each answer corresponds to that of the question.
- Your answers should be written in simple and grammatically correct language.
- Take care that your answers are within the required word limit.
- Do not use personal pronouns like 'I' or 'you' in your answers.
- The answer should be in the same tense in which the question has been asked.
- Finally, read each question and the answer again, to make sure that your answers are correct.

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### 14.3 EFFECTIVE READING

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Reading is an act of communication. It is a type of intrapersonal communication, that is, it involves communication between a person and herself/ himself. Reading serves the objective of discovering information, of expanding knowledge and understanding of a subject. It is often a very enjoyable activity. Though it is generally assumed that 'everyone knows how to read', not everyone does, and those who

do, often do not read as effectively as they could. Research shows that on an average people generally read 250–300 words per minute, comprehending about 65 per cent of what they read. However, individuals are capable of reading much faster, that is, almost double the speed but poor reading habits slow them down.

Reading as a skill is learnt after listening and speaking. Active reading, that is, reading with comprehension requires concentration, perception, comprehension and later interpretation and retention. Reading can be made more effective by working on enhancing reading skills, so that the speed of reading gets along with increased comprehension and retention.

In general, we read keeping a particular reason in mind, be it reading a newspaper or a course book. Why we are reading a particular written document determines the way we read it. Another thing that varies depending upon what/why you are reading is the speed at which you read. Good reading strategies help you to read in a very efficient way.

### 14.3.1 Purpose of Reading

Before actually beginning to read, it is important to know the purpose of reading, that is, why the reading is being done. Knowing the purpose greatly enhances the effectiveness of the reading. Also, knowledge of the purpose can help one adopt a style of reading best suited for the purpose. The basic purpose of all reading is to provide the missing link to the reader between what he knows and what he needs to know.

Reading can be done with various objectives in mind. Some of the objectives of reading are as follows:

- (i) **Pleasure and enjoyment:** This is probably the best reason to read anything. You have chosen the material for the purpose of enjoying yourself. Reading entertains you, even relaxes you. However, this will rarely be the purpose behind the reading one needs to do for academic purposes.
- (ii) **Practical application:** Here the purpose is to gain information that you can apply or use in a practical situation. Books such as laboratory manuals, computer manuals, instruction booklets and recipe books are all texts that you would consult with the purpose of gaining specific information.
- (iii) **To get an overview:** The point here is to get a general feel for the material, to determine whether it is relevant, useful, up-to-date, and to get a sense of how the topic is treated by the author. This is likely to be the main purpose behind your reading when:
  - You are given an extensive reading list for an assignment.
  - You are doing initial library research for an essay, tutorial, research report or similar assignments.
  - You need to decide which texts are most relevant or useful for your assignment.

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(iv) **To locate specific information:** Sometimes, you know what you are looking for but do not know exactly where to find it. For example, you might be looking for any of the following:

- A specific quotation
- Evidence to support a particular argument
- Details about a specific person or event
- A map
- A diagram
- A statistic or table of statistics

To find this sort of information might mean that you have to consult several books or sources. In these circumstances, you will be reading with the aim of finding the information you are looking for.

(v) **To identify the central idea of theme:** The purpose here is to extract the essence of what the written material is trying to convey. For example, you might want to identify the major finding in an experimental article in a journal, or the core issue of a discussion paper.

(vi) **To develop a detailed and critical understanding:** On many occasions, you will need to master fully the material in a book, journal article or manual so that you can evaluate its arguments, perspective, and/or evidence. This will require you to:

- Read the material thoroughly
- Make effective and relevant notes
- Keep an open mind by being aware of your own ideas and opinions regarding the issues involved.

### 14.3.2 Approaches to Reading

After one is aware of the purpose of reading, one has to decide on the style that needs to be applied to best suit the purpose and the reading material. The approach to reading determines the basic question—‘How to read?’ There are two approaches to reading:

- Fast reading approach
- Slow reading approach

To be an effective reader, one needs to use a mixture of the above techniques; varying the type of reading you employ, and the speed at which you read.

#### 1. Fast Reading Approach

This approach is best suited when the purpose of reading is to:

- Select the relevant material from a large quantity of reading material
- Get an overview of what is contained in the reading material

- Look for certain specific words, information, dates and so on
- Identify the core theme or message being conveyed

Scanning and skimming are two techniques which can be used for fast reading so as to serve one or more of the purposes of fast reading.

- (i) **Scanning:** Scanning is a fast reading style in which the reader examines the text to look for specific information. This type of reading is usually done for searching information through a list of numbers, addresses and supplies for a specific one. It is usually done very quickly. You just have to see the words on the page and not actually read. In fact, some people do not consider scanning as a reading technique but as a search technique. It involves merely spotting the required keywords or numbers.

Scanning is extensively used while browsing the web pages to look for specific information. The following are the steps involved in the scanning process.

- Look at the table of contents and look for the information in the chapter titles or subtitles.
- If the information is not found in the chapter, titles or subtitles go to the index at the back of the book.
- Search for the relevant topics or keywords in the index.
- Once you find the relevant topic/keyword either in the table of contents or in the reference index at the back of the book, go to the specified page/section and read the appropriate paragraph.
- Ascertain whether what you have read is relevant to what you need. It may be helpful to read the preceding and succeeding paragraphs as well.
- Scanning also includes spotting of keywords. Spotting of keywords means looking for keywords in the given passage or paragraph. Keywords are those words which are relevant to the subject of your search. While searching for keywords pay particular attention to:
  - (a) Opening paragraphs
  - (b) Subheadings
  - (c) Underlined/ Bold/ Italicized words

It is suggested to move your eyes in a 'Z' shaped fashion to locate the keywords, that is, begin from the top left hand corner of the page and move from left to right as you move down.

- (ii) **Skimming:** This type of reading is done when you want to identify the core/main idea of the material. It provides a broad overview of what is primarily contained in the material. It is useful for selecting relevant material which can later on be read in detail. It saves a lot of time by not spending too much time on reading what is of no relevance to the reader. It is also

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suitable when a lot of material has to be read in a limited amount of time. Here, one does not read word by word. It should be kept in mind that skimming is, by no means, a substitute for thorough reading; skimming should be used only to locate material quickly. No in-depth understanding of what is being read is required. Generally, it involves going through the chapter headings and subheadings, introduction and summaries.

Two basic skimming techniques have been identified:

- (a) **Start finish technique:** This technique involves reading the beginning and ending of each chapter, section or subsection. This technique is based on the assumption that written material is structured in three parts—introduction, body and conclusion. Also, the central theme will briefly appear in the introduction and the conclusion will be discussed in detail in the body of the text.

Therefore, reading the beginning and the ending of the text will give the reader an idea of the central theme of the text, that is, what the material is about. Here, it needs to be mentioned that to read the starting and finishing paragraphs, one may have to resort to the slow reading style so as to get a thorough understanding of the central theme.

- (b) **First sentence technique:** This technique involves reading the first sentence of each paragraph. This technique is based on the assumption that the first few sentences or the opening sentence of each paragraph introduces the main points that will be discussed in that paragraph. Thus, reading the first sentence of each paragraph gives a fairly clear understanding of the major contents and structure of the material being read.

## 2. Slow Reading Approach

Reading is an enjoyable activity but at times it becomes tedious, especially when a person reads in a language in which he is not yet familiar or fluent as his attention gets divided between the content of the message and the language itself.

Research also indicates that decoding a message is also very important, as without decoding the message the reader fails to ‘understand’ it. This is usually the case when children read without understanding what they are reading. It is only after decoding the message that learning can take place. Slow reading is required for an in-depth thorough analysis and understanding of the material. It involves paying attention to detail. Unlike scanning and skimming which take less time, slow reading requires more time and concentration. The level of comprehension is higher in this kind of reading. It is time-consuming and generally involves word by word reading.

This style is best suited when the purpose of reading is to remember what has been read, analyse what has been read, follow technical instructions, to gain

an in-depth understanding or to critically evaluate the material. It is used when the material being read is comparatively difficult to understand and requires to be carefully analysed. It is suitable for technical material, text containing unfamiliar words and so on.

Analytical reading and critical reading are two slow reading techniques. Analytical reading involves active reading in which the reader gains an in-depth understanding of what he is reading by simultaneously analysing it.

Critical reading involves evaluating the arguments presented by the writer.

To gain a deeper understanding of concepts it is useful to critically read the text. Critical reading provides an answer to the following questions:

- Are the arguments logical?
- Are the statements backed by adequate evidence?
- Are both sides of the case presented evenly?

Thus, a critical reader tries to answer the question of whether he agrees with the writer and if not what is his argument to counter the writer's point of view.

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. What purpose does comprehension fulfil?
2. Why is reading called a type of intrapersonal communication?
3. What do you understand by active reading?
4. Why is it important to know the purpose of reading, before beginning to read?
5. Name the two techniques which can be used for fast reading approach.
6. What are the benefits of slow reading approach?

## **14.4 READING PROCESS**

One of the popular methods of reading is known as the SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review) method. It involves the following steps:

- **Survey:** This is, in fact, a pre-reading step where you survey the material prior to your actual reading by scanning the title, headings and any summaries or abstracts. Before you actually begin reading the material, skim the entire reading material. Understand the organization of the reading material by going through the title page, table of contents, preface, appendix, bibliography, and other aspects. Next, survey each chapter, that is, go through the chapter objectives, chapter summary, headings and subheadings. Also go through the illustrations, tables, graphs, charts and so on. All this will help in getting an idea about what the author is trying to convey.

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- **Question:** Before reading, put down specific questions you would like to have answers to. This not only clarifies your purpose of reading, but also helps you focus and remember what you have read. Turn headings given in chapters into questions. The five cardinal questions—who, why, what, where and how—need to be answered. While reading, think of these questions as this will help you concentrate on reading. At the end of the reading, again think of these questions to get an idea of how successfully they have been answered. Use the same questions during revision to help you remember what you have read.

Be an active reader. Question the author's thoughts and ideas. Read critically and do not passively accept what the writer is presenting in the text. A questioning attitude also facilitates learning.

There are three stages in reading:

- o The first is the information that is being presented on the page for all to read. This stage is called literal recognition because it just involves drawing literal meaning from the words of the writer.
  - o The second stage is reading between the lines, that is, inferring what the author is trying to convey through the text. This is called interpretative recognition. It involves understanding what the writer means, that is, the writer's interpretation of the text.
  - o The final stage is going beyond the text and generating new and creative thoughts based on the reader's previous knowledge, learning and experience. This is called connective recognition. It results in generating new ideas, solutions, looking at things with a new perspective or a change of views. Try to move to this final stage while reading so as to actually benefit from the reading.
- **Read:** Read the material twice. Read the first time without making notes. Also compare the diagrams and illustrations with the written text. Re-read parts that are not clear. This may reduce your speed of reading a bit though. On your second reading, start to take notes, look for important details, supporting evidence and examples.
  - **Recall:** Try to recall what you have read by closing the book and making notes of what you remember of the book. Recalling will help the reader to commit them to long-term memory. You must recall at regular intervals to check your understanding of the material.
  - **Review:** Check to see that you have answered all the questions you wrote down at the beginning. Note down any other point that you think is important.

### 14.4.1 Essentials of Effective Reading

There is a plethora of information available to us which needs to be read. To gain a competitive edge over others, one needs to know more than others and to



achieve this, effective reading is vital. It is important to read quickly and also to remember and understand the information read. Some of the activities which contribute towards better reading have been summarized in the following sections. These include the following:

### 1. Selective Reading

Since a lot of information is available to us it is important to be selective, and thus choose only the material that is relevant to us. One of the strategies of selective reading is layered reading.

Layered reading strategy involves four stages—overview, preview, read and review.

- *Overview*: Spend about 5–10 minutes looking at the entire reading material rapidly and getting an idea about its organization, structure and contents. Overview determines whether you would want to read the material further or not.
- *Preview*: Preview each chapter at a rate of approximately 4–5 seconds per page. Mark out the relevant sections that you wish to read.
- *Read*: Read the relevant portions at a speed that you think is appropriate depending on the kind of material and the purpose.
- *Review*: After reading each chapter or section, review what you have read. This helps in better retention and understanding.

### 2. Reading Rate Adjustment

One of the keys to gain efficiency in reading is to adjust the rate of reading as you read along depending on the difficulty level of the material and the purpose. The rate is maximum when the reading material is easy, familiar and interesting or when the material needs to be scanned or skimmed. It is at the minimum when the material is technical, difficult, unfamiliar in content and language or when it needs to be critically evaluated, analysed or retained.

There are two kinds of reading rate adjustments which may be required to be done by the reader:

- (i) **Overall adjustment to the article as a whole**: This establishes the basic rate at which the article needs to be read depending on various factors like purpose, difficulty, level and familiarity.
- (ii) **Internal adjustment in the article**: This establishes necessary variations in the rate of reading for sections and subsections of the reading material.

One needs to decrease the rate of reading in the following situations:

- When the text contains unfamiliar words or technical jargons
- When the text has a difficult sentence and paragraph structure
- When the text consists of detailed technical information

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- When the text comprises material you need to recall or retain
- When the material is in a language you are less familiar with
- When the text contains an explanation of some complicated concept.

On the other hand, one can increase the rate of reading in the following situations:

- When the material is simple and easy
- When the text comprises familiar concepts
- When the text consists of unnecessary illustrations and examples which are not needed
- When the text contains summarization of what is contained in the previous paragraphs
- When the text contains detailed elaboration of concepts you are already familiar with

Thus, an ability to vary the rate of reading both from article to article and also within a given article is essential to become an effective reader.

### 3. Note Taking

Note taking is an important component of reading. The purpose of taking notes while reading helps you to remember what you read. It not only improves retention of the reading material but also enhances understanding. In fact, good notes can save you the trouble of having to read the text again. Some points to be kept in mind while taking notes are as follows:

- Notes should include the reference for the text: Include the author's name, the title, the name of the publisher, place and date of publication. Note the library classification number as well, if relevant.
- Notes should be taken down clearly and legibly because you will need to refer to them again.
- Highlight or underline the keywords as this helps in better recall. You can also underline some important sentences. However, be selective in what you underline. Highlight only those points or sentences which are essential.
- Marginal note taking is also an effective technique. This involves writing the keywords or the central idea pertaining to each paragraph in the margin next to the text.
- Avoid taking notes the first time you are reading the material. First read a part of the material and understand it. Locate the main idea and then paraphrase it in your own words.
- Avoid copying the text directly from the reading material.
- Review the notes to ensure they are logical, comprehensible and that they convey what is intended.

### 14.4.2 Tips for Improving Reading Skills

- Read with a purpose. In-depth reading may prove worthless if the material you are reading is not relevant to what you need.
- Remind yourself periodically of the question to be answered.
- Preview the material you are planning to read by scanning the table of contents, headings, introduction and conclusion before you actually start to read.
- While searching for specific information, follow the 80–20 rule, that is, get 80 per cent of the information in 20 per cent of the time.
- For better understanding, you can do the following as you read along:
  - Underline/highlight the main points.
  - Put a question mark next to the sentences that you are unclear about.
  - Use marginal noting technique to summarize key ideas in the paragraph.
- While reading a difficult text, divide the sentence into shorter parts.
- You can increase the speed of reading by focusing on groups of 2–3 words rather than individual words.
- Improve your vocabulary by familiarizing yourself with new words. This will help in better understanding and will also prevent you from getting stuck on new words.
- Read a lot. This will help you read better.
- Be an active reader. React to the reading—agree, disagree and question. This will help you understand and retain what you have read.
- Be prepared to read the material twice.
- Taking notes while reading helps one to remain focused and also improves retention.
- Reading speed can further be increased in the following ways:
  - Focus on the keywords and ignore filter words.
  - Skip what you already know.
  - Skip material which is of no relevance to you.
  - Material which seems particularly difficult can be skipped initially. You can come back to it later.
  - Use your index finger to move down the text at a pace faster than your reading speed.
- Re-read your notes on a regular basis to maximize retention of the information.

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**Check Your Progress**

7. What is the SQ3R method of reading?
8. When is the rate of reading maximum and minimum?
9. What is a marginal note?

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**14.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS**

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1. In the context of language learning, comprehension means a thorough understanding of a passage or text. It is an exercise which aims at improving or testing one's ability to understand a language. The purpose of comprehension passages is to measure the understanding of students. Through the given passages, students are tested on their understanding, their vocabulary and their language skills.
2. Reading is an act of communication. It is a type of intrapersonal communication because it involves communication between a person and herself/ himself. It serves the objective of discovering information, of expanding knowledge and understanding of a subject.
3. Active reading means reading something with a determination to understand and evaluate the concept. It is the process or technique of actively engaging with the text one is reading. Active reading requires concentration, perception, comprehension and later interpretation and retention.
4. It is important to know the purpose of reading before actually beginning to read because knowing the purpose greatly enhances the effectiveness of the reading. Also, knowledge of the purpose can help one adopt a style of reading best suited for the purpose. The basic purpose of all reading is to provide the missing link to the reader between what he knows and what he needs to know.
5. Scanning and skimming are the two techniques which can be used for fast reading approach.
6. Slow reading is required for an in-depth thorough analysis and understanding of the material. It involves paying attention to detail. The slow reading approach comes with various benefits like it is best suited when the purpose of reading is to remember what has been read, analyse what has been read, follow technical instructions, to gain an in-depth understanding or to critically evaluate the material. It is suitable for technical material, text containing unfamiliar words and so on.

7. SQ3R is one of the popular and powerful reading strategy that supports and enhances students' learning. The SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review) method offers a proven and strategic approach to learning and studying from textbooks.
8. The rate of reading is maximum when the reading material is easy, familiar and interesting or when the material needs to be scanned or skimmed. However, it is at the minimum when the material is technical, difficult, unfamiliar in content and language or when it needs to be critically evaluated, analysed or retained.
9. Marginal note taking is an effective technique which involves writing the keywords or the central idea pertaining to each paragraph in the margin next to the text.

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### 14.6 SUMMARY

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- Comprehension, in the context of language learning, means a thorough understanding of a passage or text. It is an exercise which aims at improving or testing one's ability to understand a language. Through the given passages, students are tested on their understanding, their vocabulary and their language skills.
- Reading is a type of intrapersonal communication, that is, it involves communication between a person and herself/ himself. Reading serves the objective of discovering information, of expanding knowledge and understanding of a subject. Research shows that on an average people generally read 250–300 words per minute, comprehending about 65 per cent of what they read.
- Reading as a skill is learnt after listening and speaking. Active reading, that is, reading with comprehension requires concentration, perception, comprehension and later interpretation and retention.
- Knowing the purpose of reading greatly enhances the effectiveness of the reading. Also, knowledge of the purpose can help one adopt a style of reading best suited for the purpose. The basic purpose of all reading is to provide the missing link to the reader between what he knows and what he needs to know.
- The approach to reading determines the basic question—'How to read?' There are two approaches to reading: Fast reading approach and Slow reading approach.
- Scanning and skimming are two techniques which can be used for fast reading so as to serve one or more of the purposes of fast reading.

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- Scanning is a fast reading style in which the reader examines the text to look for specific information. This type of reading is usually done for searching information through a list of numbers, addresses and supplies for a specific one.
- Skimming reading is done when you want to identify the core/main idea of the material. It provides a broad overview of what is primarily contained in the material. It is useful for selecting relevant material which can later on be read in detail. It saves a lot of time by not spending too much time on reading what is of no relevance to the reader.
- Slow reading is required for an in-depth thorough analysis and understanding of the material. It involves paying attention to detail. Unlike scanning and skimming which take less time, slow reading requires more time and concentration. It is time-consuming and generally involves word by word reading.
- Analytical reading and critical reading are two slow reading techniques. Analytical reading involves active reading in which the reader gains an in-depth understanding of what he is reading by simultaneously analysing it.
- One of the popular methods of reading is known as the SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review) method.
- It is important to read quickly and also to remember and understand the information read. Some of the activities which contribute towards better include selective reading, reading rate adjustment, note taking.
- Always read with a purpose. In-depth reading may prove worthless if the material you are reading is not relevant to what you need.
- While searching for specific information, follow the 80–20 rule, which is, get 80 per cent of the information in 20 per cent of the time.
- For better understanding, you can do the following as you read along:
  - o Underline/highlight the main points.
  - o Put a question mark next to the sentences that you are unclear about.
  - o Use marginal noting technique to summarize key ideas in the paragraph.
- Be an active reader. React to the reading—agree, disagree and question. This will help you understand and retain what you have read.
- Taking notes while reading helps one to remain focused and also improves retention.
- Re-read your notes on a regular basis to maximize retention of the information.

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## 14.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Journal Articles:** It refers to the articles that are shorter than books and written about very specific topics.
- **Scanning Reading:** It refers to a reading technique which involves reading rapidly in order to find specific facts.
- **Skimming Reading:** It also refers to a reading technique that involves reading rapidly in order to get a general overview of the material.
- **Analytical Reading:** It refers to an approach that probes more deeply to understand the message and goal of the piece one reads.
- **Critical Reading:** It refers to a process of reading that goes beyond just understanding a text which involves a deeper examination of the claims put forth as well as the supporting points and possible counterarguments.
- **Bibliography:** It refers to a list of the books referred to in a scholarly work, typically printed as an appendix.

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## 14.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. Why are comprehension passages given in examinations? Give reasons.
2. How can one make reading an effective and enjoyable process?
3. What is skimming and scanning in reading comprehension?
4. What are the two slow reading techniques?
5. Write a note on the three stages of reading.
6. Why is taking notes while reading beneficial for a reader?
7. What points should be kept in mind while taking notes?

### Long Answer Questions

1. Describe in detail the ways to attempt the comprehension passages.
2. Examine the some objectives of reading.
3. Explain the difference between fast reading approach and slow reading approach.
4. Discuss the steps involved in the reading process.
5. Elucidate the situations when one needs to increase or decrease the rate of reading.
6. Mention the tips for improving reading skills.

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## 14.9 FURTHER READINGS

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