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## **Fiction in English**

For M.A. 1<sup>st</sup> Semester

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# Unit – 1: Introduction to Fiction in English

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## 1.0 Introduction

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Fiction has two known subgenres: novel and short story. The novel is the most popular literary genre of the modern age. Roughly, it can be described as a fictitious prose story of book length. The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* defines it as a “fictitious prose narrative of considerable length in which characters and actions representative of real life are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity”. It is also described as a prose fiction - an extended narrative that has a plot, a theme and portrays characters. Clara Reeves defines it as “a picture of real life and manners and of the times in which it is written”. Professor Warren says, “The novel is a fictitious narrative which contains a plot”. The word novel has been taken from the Italian *novella* (meaning a little new thing), which is a short tale in prose. We have many of such collected novels in fourteenth century Italy. The “Picaresque narrative” of Spain is another predecessor of

the novel. These basically were adventure stories, tales about the escapades of a rogue who lives by his wits. They were collections of different episodes loosely held together by some character. Similarly, short story rose to prominence lately but established itself in the vast expanse of literature in English.

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## 1.1 Objectives

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Objectives of the Unit are as follows:

- Provide an overview of Fiction in English
  - Introduce important genres and types of fiction in English
  - Offer a brief survey of some salient features and fiction writers
  - Familiarize students with English novel, short story, and types of fiction while introducing various writers of fiction.
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## 1.2 Fiction in English

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### 1.2.1 The Beginnings of the English Novel:

In England the beginning of novel can be traced back to the sixteenth century Elizabethan prose Lyly's (1554-1606) *Euphues*, Sydney's (1554-86) *Arcadia* and Thomas Lodge's (1558-1625) *Rosalynde*. All these have a fictional framework and are written in prose. These prose works have a lot of poetic element in them. But still, we can consider them to be the beginnings of the novel.

Robert Greene's (1560-92) *Pandosto*, Nashe's (1567-1601) *The Unfortunate Traveller*, and Thomas Deloney's (1543-1600) *Gentle Craft* are some of the Elizabethan prose fictions which can be considered the precursors of the novel. More interesting is the work of Aphra Behn (1640-89) whose *Oroonoko* introduces the theme of racial conflict. This is a speedy adventurous story of grand passion of the ideological conflict between the lofty pagan morality of the African natives and the selfish, unprincipled attitude of the European settlers. The length of this work and its style comes nearer to what we call the novel. And in Daniel Defoe's (1660-1731) *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* we find the first complete novel shape.

*Robinson Crusoe's* story is based on the experiences of Alexander Selkirk, who spent five years on an uninhabited island. In the novel, Crusoe is shipwrecked but is able to salvage basic tools from the wreck and using his ingenuity he is able to manufacture means of shelter and livelihood. *Robinson Crusoe* makes delightful reading for children. And in recent days it has also been interpreted as a novel that reflects the White man's imperial design, his assumption of racial superiority over the natives.

### **Richardson (1689-1761)**

After this period of infancy, the English novel took a leap in the work of the three great novelists of the eighteenth century - Richardson, Fielding and Smollett. Samuel Richardson is known for his *Pamela* or *Virtue Rewarded* and *Clarissa Harlowe*. Both the novels employ the epistolary technique i.e., the form of letters. *Pamela* is a string of letters written by Pamela, a servant girl, to her parents to tell how she had to resist the advances of her master Mr. B and how he ultimately makes amends by marrying her. The novel is basically about her strength and integrity of character and her self-defence. *Clarissa Harlowe* is again a novel narrated by a girl - a day-to-day record of her harassment at the hands of her own family who for monetary advantage want to marry her to a man she dislikes. In the hands of Richardson the epistolary method grew into a technique that depicted a story with immediacy and ensured the reader's involvement.

### **Fielding (1707-1754)**

If Richardson explored what was later called the “sentimental novel”, Fielding went on to experiment with the burlesque fiction. Sudden discoveries, timely rescues, deathbed confessions and near misses by people chasing one another make his novels interesting. He experiments his method with *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* and perfects it in his best known novel *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*. This novel is about Tom Jones who has been brought up by Squire Allworthy unaware that he is his sister Bridget's son. Blifil, Bridget's legitimate son becomes his rival for the love of Sophia Western. He even discredits him in Allworthy's eyes. Finally however, the plot is deftly manipulated and the novel moves towards a happy ending. It is interesting to note how similar these novels are to the plots of our Hindi films. Even closer to the Bollywood tradition is Fielding's *Jonathan Wild the Great* where we find an ironic glorification of delinquency, cruelty and crime.

### **Smollett (1721-71) and Sterne (1713-68)**

Tobias Smollett was a Scotsman who chose the picaresque form for novel writing. His *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Ferdinand Count Fathom* etc are a series of separate adventures loosely connected in the continuing life story of the hero. In the preface of one of his novels he describes the novel thus:

“A novel is a large diffuse picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groups and exhibited in various attitudes, for a purpose of a uniform plan, and general occurrence, to which every individual figure is subservient.”

The other well-known writer of this age is Laurence Sterne who is known for *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. The first novel is the unfinished record of the eccentric Shandy family. The chief strength of this work lies in its brilliant style and remarkable characterization. *A Sentimental Journey* is a work of fiction besides containing travel sketches and random essays on old subjects.

### **1.2.2 Emergence of Women Novelists:**

One interesting fact about the novel of the eighteenth century is the emergence of women novelists. Though women have always been writing and creating literature, for the first time in the eighteenth century they entered the realm of public writing and publishing. And in prose fiction they discovered a medium in which they could flourish. Probably, this was because the feminist movement was already under way under the leadership of Mary Wollstonecraft and others. The question of women's rights was being actively debated. And all this made it relatively easier for women to fight their way into the world of publishing.

#### **Fanny Burney (1752-1840)**

Fanny Burney was one of the first women novelists who was widely read. Her *Evelina* or *The History of a Young Lady's Entry into the World* was anonymously published in 1778. Set in the epistolary style, the novel is the story of a young girl's life and her eventual access to heiressdom. Burney is also known for her diary and letters which make interesting reading. Mrs. Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), writing at a slightly later point of time was another successful novelist. She belonged to the very popular school of writers whose novels contained elements of exaggerated romance: azure-eyed heroines, haunted castles, trapdoors, bandits and ghosts. Her best work is *Mysteries of Udolpho*. It is narrative of a young heroine confined in a gloomy castle over whom looms the shadow of an ancestor's crime.

After the eighteenth century, the Romantic age saw the rise of a host of women novelists like Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Porter.

### **Jane Austen (1775-1817)**

Of Jane Austen it is said that she did for the English novel what the Lake poets did for poetry. She refined it, simplified it, and made it a reflection of the English life. But she hardly found any encouragement during her lifetime. In fact, while her contemporaries Wordsworth and Coleridge's joint work *Lyrical Ballads* was an instant success, her best novel *Pride and Prejudice* had to wait for sixteen years before it found a publisher. The general opinion about Jane Austen is that she had a very narrow field of work. She limited herself to the household interests, the country gatherings and the only "happening" thing in her novels is matrimony. Her widely read novels, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey* in a way do center themselves around these themes. But if we look at the characters closely we find Austen trying to break out of the set mould of the feminine stereo type. Though not radically different, her heroines within their limited scope of action do show remarkable strength of character, reasoning and intelligence, which set them apart.

### **Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849)**

Maria Edgeworth, writing around the same time, concerned herself with broader social problems. Her novels represent the plight of the Irish tenantry at the hands of the unscrupulous landlords and their oppressive deputies. She is at her best in *Ormond* where we are introduced to the decadent Irish feudalism of the eighteenth century, the Catholic-Protestant dissension and the struggling Irish aristocrats sustained by opportunistic politics.

### **Sir Walter Scott and the Historical Novel (1771-1832)**

Sir Walter Scott, the creator of the English historical novel is known to have been largely influenced by Maria Edgeworth. In his work, we find a wide range of action covering diverse fields of human interest. Some of his well known novels are *Old Mortality*, *The Talisman*, *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Waverley*. In all of them the locale forms an important part of the action, describing very often the life, men and action of Scotland.

### **1.2.3 Novelists of Victorian Age:**

The novelists and the novels of the Victorian age are perhaps the most well known and representative in the history of English literature. To this group belong Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte and Thomas Hardy.

### **Charles Dickens (1812-70)**

Dickens rose to fame with the publication of his *Pickwick Papers*. It began as an illustrated series of episodes on the lives of the members of Pickwick club. But it gradually evolved into a loosely knit picaresque novel. The object of this novel was to amuse the public. But Dickens is primarily known as the exponent of the evils of child labour - a theme he superbly handled in *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. Some of his other well-known novels are *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House*. A very strong point in all these novels is his keen eye for character portrayal, the idiosyncrasies of habit, speech etc, which make them life like. Dickens purpose was to make his novels the instrument of morality and justice. And definitely, they did play a major role in exposing the social evils of Victorian England.

### **W.M. Thackeray (1811-63)**

Another important novelist of the same time is W.M. Thackeray well known for his *Henry Esmond* and *Vanity Fair*. The first novel has a historical flavour, giving us a wonderfully detailed and realistic picture of the eighteenth century, the court and camps of Queen Anne's reign. *Vanity Fair* is a portrayal of the social life around him, a critique of the dishonesty and crime we find all around. He calls this work "a novel without a hero". It is centred around two women-Amelia a meek creature and Becky Sharp an unprincipled intriguer.

### **The Bronte Sisters**

Among the women novelists of the period we have the three sisters – Charlotte (1816-55), Emily (1818-48) and Anne Bronte (1820-49) who are well known for their novels. *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* respectively. *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, especially, are interesting for their strong women characters around whom the novels move. And very often they have been interpreted as attempts to redefine the position of women and challenge the patriarchal order within which these heroines try to gain fulfillment and self-realization.

### **George Eliot (1819-80)**

Many critics give George Eliot - the highest rank among the women novelists of her century. She is a preacher, a moralizer and also a deeply religious person at heart. But at the same time she was engaged with the questioning, scientific, spirit of her age. In all her novels we find the play of universal forces shaping and determining her characters. At the same time she also tries to emphasize social laws, rules that make society better. Well known among her novels

are *Adam Bede*, *Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Marner*, *Middlemarch*, and *The Spanish Gypsy*. She describes her novels as depicting “psychologic realism” i.e., representing the inner struggle of a soul, and revealing the motives, impulses and hereditary influences that govern human action. In all her novels it is the development of a soul, the slow growth or decline of moral power that interests her.

### **Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)**

The last of this group of eminent novelists is Thomas Hardy who, it is said belongs more to the age that followed than to his own generation. Hardy is known for his pessimism, his gloomy philosophy of life. In his novels he shows man as an insignificant part of the cosmos struggling forces greater than himself - sometimes against systems he cannot reach or influence and sometimes against a grim world spirit that delights in making human affairs go wrong. His early novels *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* depict idyllic love stories. *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Return Native* and *The Woodlanders* are regarded as Hardy's masterpieces. But the last two novels *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* are better expressions of his tragic art and his pessimism.

#### **1.2.4 The Modern Novel: Changing Trends**

The Modern novel can be traced to the beginning of what is called the “Stream of consciousness” novel - a term coined in 1890 by the American philosopher and psychologist William James. He used it to describe the flow of thought within the waking human mind. It is used particularly with reference to the work of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. It represents a technique where the narrative unfolds in the narration of the flux of thought and feeling within a character without resorting to objective chronologically sequenced description or conventional dialogue.

### **D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930)**

D. H. Lawrence for the first time broke open the doors of fiction urging readers and writers to explore hitherto unseen territories. He rejected the outward form of writing and thinking, secularized Christianity and centred his novels on the theme of the realisation of the self and the liberation of sexuality from the dominating forms of social repression. Lawrence was a direct inheritor of the romantic prejudice against machines. In his works thus, we find a critique of industrial England that is contrasted with vivid evocations of a working countryside. Among his better-known novels are the semi autobiographical *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow* and its



successor, *Women in Love* - three of which stress a distinction between nature and anti nature, between freedom and control, between instinct and will. Among his later day fictional experiments was *Lady Chatterley's Lover* which was published in its complete form only in 1960 after facing prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959,

### **Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)**

Virginia Woolf, talking of modern fiction says, “each day the mind receives a myriad impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel... if the novelists could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy in the accepted style; the task of the future novelist will be to convey an impression of the 'luminous halo' of life - this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit”. In her novels *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, the specific characterization or plot construction melts into the discontinuities, the fragmentation, the disintegration of a larger, freer reality. Basically, her novels are a depiction of women's sensibility and sensitivity in sharp contrast with the materialism of a world dominated by men. Her *Mrs. Dalloway* is a detailed representation of the life of a woman character's mind narrated through the technique of interior monologue.

### **James Joyce (1882-1941)**

The next interesting author who figures in this category is well known in literary circles as the exponent of the stream-of-consciousness technique. With the publication of *Ulysses* the Irish novelist James Joyce stormed into renown as “the best living prose writer” a title given to him by T. S. Eliot in 1918. His collection of twelve stories, *Dubliners* was first rejected by publishers, but appeared finally in 1914. *Ulysses*, too, ran into legal trouble on the grounds that it was pornographic but subsequently was made available around 1937. The *Dubliners* collection is based on a particular sequence. The stories show the character moving forward from being the passived, feeler and observer to being the doer and maker. Later they trace out the adolescent explorations of his personality before breaking the narrative into a series of diary entries of the potential artist ready for the flight. *Ulysses* is a narrative of three individuals. Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom and Bloom's wife, Molly. The thought and action of all three are interwoven with the diverse life of Dublin on a single day, 16 June 1904. The characters cross and recross the city exploring and experiencing brief, transient intimacies. Underneath each of the eighteen

episodes around which the novel is built lies a Homeric allusion where Bloom is a later - day Ulysses, Stephen his lost son Telemachus and Molly his Penelope.

### **1.2.5 The Social Novel: Further Experiments**

Apart from these, there was a body of social novels in the twentieth century that explored the changing society and further experimented with the form of fiction.

#### **Henry Green (1905-73)**

Important novels are *Party Going*, *Loving* and *Living*. *Party Going* describes the four-hour delay experienced by a young and smart set of party goers. *Loving* deals with social class, problems of class - division in 20<sup>th</sup> century England. And *Living* his most impressive achievement is a study of the common place factory life in Birmingham. In his novels he evolves a startlingly abbreviated narrative style that eliminates definite articles and adjectives and experiments with verbless sentences.

#### **P.G. Wodehouse (1881-1975)**

Wodehouse described his own method of writing as “making a sort of musical comedy without music and ignoring real life altogether”. In reality, however, he ignores neither the “real” life nor the socio/political currents of his time. He published around 120 volumes of novels and short stories. In them he very interestingly mocks at eccentricities, oddities, fads and fashions of upper class England. His art lay in telling a simple and amusing story simply and amusingly. His famous characters are Bertie Wooster and his man Jeeves whom he introduced in the collection *The Man with Two Left Feet and Other Stories*.

#### **Aldous Huxley (1894-1963)**

Another writer of renown in this period is Aldous Huxley who shot to fame with his fantasy *Brave New World*. The book is an evocation of a scientific future in which “impersonal generation will take the place of Nature's hideous system. In vast state incubators, rows and rows of gravid bottles will supply the world with the population it requires. The family system will disappear; society, sapped at its very base, will have to find new foundations; and Eros, beautifully and irresponsibly free will flit like a gay butterfly from flower to flower to flower.” (*Brave New World*. 1932).

#### **George Orwell (1903-50)**

George Orwell is another well known writer of this age. His two novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four* express his profound disillusionment with Soviet communism, *Animal*

*Farm* is a novel in the form of a fable that almost sentimentalizes the working class strength and good nature (characterized by the horse Boxer) as against the pigs noted for their greed and laziness. They are also held responsible for the undoing of the revolution. *Nineteen Eighty Four* is a thinly veiled picture of Stalin's Russia, its oppression and its totalitarian logic.

### **Samuel Beckett (1906-89)**

Among the well known novels of the 1950's is Samuel Beckett's trilogy *Molly, Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, published together in 1959. All the three works are experiments with the narrative form, written in the form of a monologue, a gushing "stream of consciousness". Each of the narrators here contradicts himself, stumbles over the contradictions of his syntax, pauses to reflect on what he has to say. The narrative as well as the form threatens to almost break under the strain of contradiction. The trilogy ends thus: "In silence you don't know, you must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on".

### **William Golding (1911-93)**

William Golding's most popular novel *The Lord of the Flies*, cast in the form of moral allegory, is not much of an experiment with form. It is set on a desert island on which a marooned party of boys from a choir fall away from the ways of civilization and regress into dirt, barbarism and murder.

### **Women Novelists of the Present Age:**

#### **Iris Murdoch, Meriel Spark, Jean Rhys and Margaret Drabble**

Iris Murdoch (1919-99) never wanted to be called a "woman writer" she preferred to be accepted as a writer in a man's world. This is significant, because she wrote in the first part of the twentieth century and it was not until the sixties and seventies that women felt the need to stress gender difference. She believed that good art should transcend gender difference. Murdoch in her range of novels from *The Flight from the Enchanter* to *The Sea*, *The Philosopher's Pupil*, through her themes and characters suggests that any attempt to impose nets, theories or artistic arrangements upon reality will fail. For reality of necessity eludes all predetermined human systems of control.

Muriel Spark (1918-2006) a Catholic convert of Jewish descent conveys a passion for moral issues and their relation to fictional form. Dorris Lessing falls in the category of a radical feminist. Her novel "The Golden Notebook" echoes the feminist struggle of the 60's. She says, "The Russian revolution, The Chinese revolution - they're nothing at all. The real revolution is

women against men". The novel is shaped around a series of notebooks, Black, Yellow, Red and Blue kept by a woman writer, Anna Wulf, as a means of separating and analyzing different aspects of her life, both private and public. But her evolving perception of herself finally breaks down all such categorizations into a new pattern, an inevitable yet welcome formlessness.

Jean Rhys (1890-1979) novels generally portray women determined to explore the implications of their sexuality and ultimately exploited by the society. In her well-known *Wild Sargasso Sea* these themes are replayed with renewed intensity. She explores here the nature of loneliness, exploitation and victimization set against the Caribbean, its decaying plantations, untrimmed gardens and tropical storms.

Margaret Drabble (b.1939), writing in the early 1960's focused on the tensions and problems of a woman's existence. Her novels *A Summer Birdcage* and *The Waterfall* show the predicament of the educated heroines desiring to find fulfillment while caring for the children.

### **1.2.6 The Short Story and Its Evolution:**

A short story can simply be defined as a story that is short. H.E. Bates, one of the most successful storywriters of our age says: "The basis of almost every argument or conclusion I can make is the axiom that the short story can be anything that the author decides it shall be".

The shortest of the short stories may be no more than a page or two and sometimes the longest like D. H. Lawrence's *St. Mawr*, for example, may run to over a hundred pages. Sometimes, in fact, it is impossible to draw a line between the long short story and the short novel.

H.G. Wells, another famous writer of short stories, says: "A short story is, or should be, a simple thing; it aims at producing one single vivid effect; it has to seize the attention at the outset, and never relaxing, gather it together more and more until the climax is reached. The limits of the human capacity to attend closely set a limit to it. It must therefore explode and finish before interruption occurs or fatigue sets in."

Generally, the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century are considered to be the time when the short story developed and flourished. This was largely because of the demand for "periodicals" that appeared at this time. Many novels appeared in serial form but most of the periodicals used short stories as the main way of filling up pages, offering a ready market to the writers of the time.

Although the short story did not reach the height of popularity till the beginning of the present century, it is one of the oldest types of literature. *The Bible* and especially the “Old Testament” is full of short stories that are read over and over again. Even older are the stories found in the *Histories* of Herodotus (480-425 B.C). Herodotus was basically a historian. But history as we know it today- a chronicle of the events as they have occurred in time - started being written only in the nineteenth century. Like other historians of his time Herodotus was more concerned with the individuals involved than the chronicle of events. The result is that the book is a collection of highly readable tales that make him the master of direct and simple story telling. This in a way goes on to illustrate what Maugham had said about the art of narrative: “The desire to listen to stories appears to be as deeply rooted in the human animal as the sense of property. From the beginning of history men have gathered round the camp fire, or in a group in the market place, to listen to the telling of a story.

### **Writers of Short Stories**

It is difficult to have a survey or history of the short story. Instead, in this section we shall discuss some of the well-known short story writers and their work.

#### **Maupassant (1850-93)**

Maupassant, along with Chekhov is among the greatest short-story writers of the world. He wrote some three hundred tales, *The Necklace* being the most famous among them. This is the story of a necklace of imitation diamonds, which a girl borrows believing it to be real. Having lost it, she goes to desperate lengths to obtain enough money to repay its owner. But finally, at the end of the story she learns that the diamonds are in fact, worthless imitations.

Maupassant's approach is that of the naturalist writer: direct, detached, almost scientific. His stories are placed before the readers without comment or attempt at psychological depth.

#### **Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49)**

Poe's stories like *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of Marie Roget* and *The Gold Bug* show him as the father of the detective story as it developed in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. He is excellent at portraying the horrible, the psychopathic, the fantastic and the mad. These elements appealed to his romantic imagination and he incorporated them skillfully, making his tales the forerunner of the “psychological thrillers” and the “horror films” which fascinate us. In stories like *The Black Cat*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, *The Pit and the Pendulum* and *The Gold Bug*, we find Poe's imagination at its best, splendidly

creating an atmosphere of terror and suspense. After Poe there were many later writers who developed this tradition of writing ghost stories and detective fiction. Some of the well known writers are Wilkie Collins (1824-89), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) and M. R. James (1862-1936).

### **Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)**

Kipling is one of the short story writers most Indian students are familiar with. He was born in Bombay and he spent a good part of his life in different parts of India. His writings therefore carry a lot of Indian influence depicting Indian life and surroundings with a touch of genius. One of his best stories is *Without Benefit of Clergy* which is a moving tale of a young Englishman's love for a Muslim girl Ameena in India, and how it ended with the tragic death of their baby and of the girl herself. Some of his best stories are part of his collection titled *Soldiers Three*. The stories here give a fascinating picture of Indian life under English rule at the end of the nineteenth century.

Among his stories with settings other than India are: *The Finest Story in the World* and *Wireless*. In both, Kipling uses the idea of reincarnation, which again could have been the outcome of the influence of Indian culture and religion on him.

Although Kipling was greatly influenced by India, his writings are often interpreted as being colonial in nature, illustrating the English hegemony - the ideological superiority of the White over the Indians. Yet, his stories are ranked as among the best.

### **D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930)**

Unlike Kipling, who in many ways belongs to the previous century, Lawrence without question belongs to the present age. As a short story writer, he added a new dimension to the art of story writing. Before him, short stories were primarily plot centered, depending on action to sustain their interest. In Lawrence's stories, however, the plot is of secondary importance. What matters is the situation or atmosphere, the evocation of nature and the complex psychological depths of his characters.

*The Odour of Chrysanthemums* is one of the stories that are typical of Lawrence. It a moving story of the death of a miner in a pit accident and the bitter effect of this on his mother, wife and children. The atmosphere and the setting are those of Lawrence's own childhood - the harsh poverty - stricken colliery surroundings. *The White Stocking* is a story which illustrates his favourite ideas - sexual jealousy, the hidden conflict between the civilized and the spontaneous

side of man. *The Prussian Officer*, *England and England* and *The Virgin and the Gypsy* are some of his other well known stories where we find Lawrence exploring the psychological depths of man, studying the life force that expresses itself in so many known and unknown ways.

Talking of storytelling in general Frank O'Connor wrote, "Story telling is the nearest thing one can get to the quality of a pure lyric poem. It doesn't deal with problems; it doesn't have solutions to offer; it just states the human situation", And this is what we find in the stories of Lawrence. He presents before the readers what could be called "a slice of life" without any comment or value judgement. The plot doesn't altogether disappear in his stories but remains secondary to the situation and the atmosphere.

### **Somerset Maugham (1874-1965)**

Maugham again is a very popular short story writer who is referred to as a "cynical and detached Observer of the strange ways of the world". His stories range in length from a novel like *The Letter* down to sketches two or three pages in length like *The Raw Material*. The varied settings and the wide variety of characters he portrays reflects his love for travel, his knowledge of places and people. He even served as an agent of British Intelligence in Russia and other places. Many of his earlier stories are based on his experiences at that time. Particularly, Maugham is known for his narrative technique - telling a story in the first person.

### **Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923)**

Katherine Mansfield, the next author we shall discuss here is one of the most remarkable short story writers of her generation in England. In fact some critics would even place her among the three or four most important short story writers of the present century. The collections of short stories that have made her famous are: *Bliss*, *The Garden Party*, *The Dove's Nest* and *Something Childish*. As in Lawrence, plot is the least important area of Mansfield's stories and very little happens in her stories. She takes some small incident of everyday life and builds details into it. The texture of a dress, the effect of light on a tree, the colour of flowers in a vase etc go on to create the atmosphere of her stories. Very frequently children appear in many of her stories and she writes of them with understanding. One such story is *The Voyage* which is a description of a little girl, Fenella, being taken for a sea voyage with her grandmother. Fenella's mother has just died and the child is going to stay with her grandparents for a time. This simple situation, seen through a child's eyes, makes one of her best and most typical short stories.

Mansfield is also good at picturing people who are lonely, misunderstood or social misfits, like Ma Parker in *Life of Ma Parker*, Miss Brill in *Miss Brill*, William in *Marriage a la Mode* or Reggie in *Mr and Mrs Dove*.

### **H. E. Bates (1905-74)**

H. E. Bates has been a successful writer since 1926 when his first story *The Two Sisters* was published. He worked as a journalist for some time and later joined the war as a squadron leader. Some of his stories like *The Purple Plain* and *The Jacaranda Tree* show his war experience. But as a writer H.E. Bates is so varied that it is impossible to describe or categorize him. Sometimes he deals with themes of war. And in stories like *The Mower*, *Dulcima* and *The Wild Cherry Tree* he shows a Lawrence - like power of inventing “earthy” characters, setting them in an atmosphere of emotional tension. Bates is also known for his fluent, simple style and most of all his understanding of the English people. In fact, his stories provide us with one of the best and truest pictures of ordinary life in England.

### **1.2.7 Types of Fiction:**

#### **Romantic Fiction**

The theme of lovers meeting, separating and finally being reunited has been enduringly popular in western literature. This idea unites diverse works ranging from the romances of Alexandrian Greece circa 2nd Cent. AD. the Arsthurian cycles 13-15 cent AD. the Italian pastorals 14-15 Cent AD. to the psychologically realist novels of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Popularized through the women's magazine the circulating library and the appearance of the cheap single volume, from the mid-eighteenth century, romantic fiction (both reading and writing) has been the stronghold of women. From this beginning, the genre of romantic fiction has travelled a long way, passing through various incarnations. These have included the lurid melodramas of seduction and ruin of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century fiction of Marie Corelli, Onida, E. M. Hull, etc. grounded in religious/patriotic/imperialist ideologies. The phenomenal novel of the Deep South and the Civil War, *Gone With The Wind*, 1936 epic popular novels and family sagas such as those by Catherine Gaskin, Danielle Steele, Colleen McCullough, Judith Krantz etc, eventually lead us to the Mills & Boon romances, the Dell and Harlequin romances which flood the market and are avidly devoured by women all over the world.



The romance has been variously described as the “formula of ‘love triumphant’”, “the domestic romance myth” an “affirmation(s) of the ideals of monogamous marriage and feminine domesticity” etc. A fairly comprehensive definition of romances would be “novels which deal with love rather than sex, with courage rather than cowardice, with clean living rather than crime, with questions of right conduct rather than social problems.”

Like other types of popular fiction, romantic fiction also works at a formulaic level employing certain conventions which are easily identifiable. These conventions work at every point and every level, from the plot to the sentence, from the moral and ideological to the formal and aesthetic.

The vast majority of romances are straight forward and easily definable: set in contemporary times, in places which are easily recognizable (the Australian outback, the English countryside, places in U.S.A. or Canada), with a hero and heroine who are contemporary figures. The settings may be various: the world of fashion designing, the sheep farms of Australia, the world of big business and jet setting executives. But there are also other types of romantic fiction which are more specialized.

### ***The Historical Romance***

These may focus on a particular period, evoking its context and using it as a backdrop, without focusing on a historical character or a major event. Such are the novels of Georgette Heyer (1902-1974) who wrote love stories set in the Regency period of British history without using any major historical figure as a character. Writers of other historical romances have chosen to build on the meagre personal details of the private life of historical figures, creating love stories around them - the authenticity of which is highly doubtful. These include the works of Jean Plaidy (1906-?) who wrote about Mary Queen of Scots, etc.,

### ***Gothic Romances***

These, though still love stories, bring with them an element of the Gothic: terror, darkly disturbing atmosphere and a heightened awareness of untold horrors and brooding evil. The happy ending serves to dispel this darkness and gloom and with the declaration of love, there is break in the evil atmosphere and goodness and light are restored. It is also interesting to note that the heroines who come into this gloom and dark are caught in a nightmare world where they are unsure of everyone including the hero. Trust is not possible until the end of the novel. Authors such as Mary Stewart (1916-?) and Victoria Holt (1906-?) specialized in Gothic Romances.

### ***Family Sagas***

Many authors of romantic fiction have not ended their tales with mutual declarations of love by one couple. Instead, they have gone on to write about the loves and hates, the marriages and the separations and the often almost-incestuous relationships in three generations or more of a single family. These, though still categorized as romantic fiction, do not end in marriage but use the institution of marriage as a way of commenting upon other relationships. Authors such as Catherine Cookson and Judith Krantz and Colleen McCullough are pastmasters at this type of romance.

### ***Other Types***

Hospital romances are yet another category among romantic fiction. Set in hospitals and nursing schools, these provide readers with additional pictures of the tender nurturing aspects of the heroine, usually a nurse, though occasionally a doctor.

Some popular romances provide the readers with travelogues-the Middle East, Africa, New Zealand, the far East-all these are explored by various authors even as the story follows the same hackneyed route. But ultimately whatever the type may be all romantic fiction is moored in explorations of love and sexuality.

### ***New Directions and Developments***

Much of what has been discussed in the previous sections is typical of romantic fiction of an earlier day. Though still popular today, it is interesting to note that feminism has had its effect on this form of writing too. Though most popular romances take a shot or two at feminists by mocking the attitudes of the heroine or by making the hero an out-and-out chauvinist, romances of the last decade and a half have incorporated feminist attitudes. Now the heroines do not automatically give up their careers at the end of the novel. Many novels include a negotiation regarding this before the final embrace. The traditional seducer/virgin roles also no longer hold. The heroine's sexuality matches that of the hero and there are more sexually explicit scenes to be found. (However, it is also true that violence is also more common in romantic fiction in recent years. It is quite common for the heroine to be raped by the hero). In the way love and marriage is portrayed also a big change has come about - the novels do not necessarily end in marriage. Declarations of love, yes, but the relationship does not necessarily move on to marriage - Sometimes the ending is left ambiguous in that it is made clear that the relationship between the lead pair, though stable in the here and now, may not last forever.

## Detective Fiction

Before studying other aspects of the detective story, it is essential to have some idea as to what exactly we mean when we speak of the “detective story” as it is also necessary to look at the origins and early examples of the form.

Definitions of detective fiction have varied over the years. Earlier it was defined according to formulaic terms which means that if a piece of fiction had all the features of a detective novel/story it was considered to be one. Today, detective fiction is defined in terms of the satisfaction it gives. W. H. Auden defined it thus: “The basic formula is this: (1) a murder occurs (2) many are suspected (3) all but one suspect, (who is the murderer) are eliminated (4) the murderer is arrested or dies” – a definition which interestingly enough does not mention the detective at all. Others have defined it as a form having “an Aristotelian perfection of beginning, middle and end” of being “impeccably classical in form” of differing from other types of fiction in giving the reader “primarily an intellectual satisfaction” and even “the most moral kind of literature there is”.

Detective fiction includes not just detective stories concerned with solving “murder mysteries but also the police story, the spy story and the thriller. Indian Symons, one of the foremost critics of detective fiction, wrote that in detective stories “interest in the nature of motives for, and results of a crime are at the heart of a story”.

Though the detective story is often traced as far back as *The Bible*, these are not really detective fiction, in the sense that the solving of a puzzle is not the main object of these books. Among the earliest precursors of detective fiction is *Calef Williams* (1794) by William Godwin – a book about a murder, its detection and the unrelenting pursuit by the murderer of the person who discovered his guilt. But the ‘father’ of the detective story is indisputably the American writer Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49) in the three short stories he wrote with a detective as the ‘hero’ or protagonist “*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*”, “*The Mystery of Marie Roget*” and “*The Purloined Letter*”. In these stories, Poe introduced many of the themes and forms that later detective stories would employ. Amongst these is foremost of all, the figure of the brilliant detective M. Dupin - whose brilliance is highlighted through the obtuseness of his friend who tells the story - a convention which was to become one of the main pillars of detective fiction. We find it again in Sherlock Holmes and the characters of Hercule Poirot and his friend Dr.

Watson. Themes such as the locked - door mystery, the laying of false clues, the most unlikely person being the murderer etc., are all found in Poe's stories.

In England Wilkie Collins wrote the first English detective novel *The Moonstone* (1868), combining “great ingenuity in devising a puzzle with the ability to tell an absorbingly interesting story”. Another writer who created many of the patterns traditionally found in detective fiction was Smile Gaborian: his detective was a policeman with an amateur as a partner.

### *Early examples till World War II*

The detective story of the twentieth century could not have been what it was without Sherlock Holmes, the greatest of “Great Detectives”, who first made his appearance in 1887 in *A Study in Scarlet* in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*. Though neither *A Study...* Nor *The Sign of Four* (1890) were accounted successful detective stories, their main character, Sherlock Holmes was a triumph from his very first appearance in print. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) the creator of Holmes, borrowed some of his ideas from Poe and Gaborian but out of the borrowings he fashioned an original who still towers over the entire range of detectives who have figured in fiction before or since. Though disparaging critics have stigmatised the Sherlock Holmes stories of being “obvious, initiative, trite...” etc., they retain their charm and are read voraciously by admirers not just for the ‘detection’ but also for the atmosphere, and of course for the character of Sherlock Holmes.

Till World War II the detective short story enjoyed great success. During this period (from about 1890 to World War II) some of the greatest practitioners of the detective story were working: G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) whose Father Brown stories continue to hold the attention of readers even today; Ernest Bramah (1868-1942) who showed distinctive originality in creating the blind detective max Carrades; E.W Hornung (1866-1921) (who created the criminal hero, A. J. Raffles and of course, Arthur Conan Doyle whose short stories about Sherlock Holmes are accounted amongst the best of all time.

In 1920 there appeared in print Agatha Christie's first novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and with it started a flood of detective novels, many of them by the greatest writers of the form: Agatha Christie (1890-1976), Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957), Ellery Queen (1905-1982), Nicholas Blake (the pseudonym of C. Day Lewis (1904-1972) and Michael Innes etc. The second quarter of the twentieth century saw a large number of detective novelists churning out detective fiction with amazing prodigality and very little originality. This also caused writers to

try and mock the form by writing detective fiction which used the conventions and codes while also mocking them. Though many of the writers of this period continued writing into the next quarter, World War - II marked a turning point in the kind of detective fiction that was written.

### ***Detective Fiction after World War - II***

The most significant change that occurred in the world of detective fiction after World War-II was that the “Great Detective” (those in the mould of Sherlock Holmes or Christie's Hercule Poirot) disappeared, or if not, was toned down so much that he was no longer recognizable as a Holmesian figure. Other changes also occurred and the detective story after World War II bore little resemblance to that which existed prior to 1945. From being a “puzzle” it developed into a form which probed psychology and personality patterns, in which sexuality and violence were depicted, often graphically, in all of their manifestations.

Thus, in the last few decades though the detective story continues in its old form, the exciting work has come from writers such as Ruth Rendell (1930-2015), Umberto Eco (1932-2016) or Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) who bring the unfamiliar into the traditional, experimenting with times, themes and backgrounds, investigating and exploring the human personality, attitudes towards in society etc.

Many detective novel writers have also used the form as a vehicle to examine and comment upon society, its codes and the way in which society, the criminal and the detective are connected. In the last few decades of the twentieth century, the society portrayed in detective novels has undergone a change from one where moral judgements were in black and white, to one where there is no clear ethical or moral system. Increasingly, the change shows a world wherein criminality and corruption are the norm and the detective, though honest and on the side of law and order, has to use the methods of the underworld to achieve the desired results.

### ***Common Characteristics***

The figure of the detective has evolved considerably from its earliest representation. The earlier version of the detective possessed a keen moral sense and a razor-sharp mind in addition to being an ethically upstanding citizen. Virtue vs vice with the detective and the criminal embodying each value. Though the detective recent years is still morally upright, he is so with the addition of unsentimental toughness and a willingness to bend rules and use loopholes in the system to his own advantage. Where earlier narratives operate on the basis of fair play and sportsmanship, more recent ones have subjected these codes to an ironic subversion.

### ***Types Within the Genre***

Detective fiction is an ‘umbrella’ term having under it various types and varieties. These include the detective story for children, the thriller, the spy story, the police procedural, the Gothic and of course the detective ‘puzzle’ narrative or the “whodunit”. Though all of them share certain features there are also elements which vary: thus the Gothic relies on “atmosphere” to a larger extent than other detective novels, the thriller “builds up tension through crimes” which need not be murder. But which may lead towards murder, the emphasis being on “adventures” with an element of suspense thrown in the spy story focuses on threats to national security, professionally organized spying and works on the level of the political in addition to the moral and the personal.

### **Science Fiction and Fantasy**

The two genres of Science Fiction and Fantasy begin by creating a context in which the fantastic is made plausible. In the world of Science Fiction this is done through science and the use of technology while in the world of heroic fantasy, the elements of the fantastic arise from magic and wizardry.

Though the term “Science Fiction” (SF) is well known today it was first used in 1851 in the work of William Wilson, where he also gave a brief description of what it was: works “in which the revealed truths of science may be given interwoven with a pleasing story which may itself be poetical and true”.

The very term SF consists of two parts ‘Science’ and ‘Fiction’. The science in an SF tale may be at various levels in terms of technological advances or hard science, social or human sciences which may be called the ‘soft’ sciences. The story may be only a framework for introducing the scientific concepts to the reader or the reverse may be true where the fiction may be a melodramatic adventure fantasy with a very flimsy basis in science.

It can however be said that “a work belongs in the genre of science fiction if its narrative world is at least somewhat different from our own, and if that difference is apparent against the background of an “organized body of knowledge”. This “organized body of knowledge” may be ‘hard’ science, may be the social sciences, may even be “scientific” habits of mind”.

In the century after *Frankenstein*, writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, Edward Bellamy and Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote tales that indicated the varied direction in which SF would develop in the twentieth century.

## ***Fantasy***

The basic motive of Fantasy as a genre is to present and consider the fantastic. Much of literature deals in the fantastic creating a world of wonder and strangers, but not all such literature can be termed 'Fantasy'. Fantasy is located at the point at which the writer creates a complete 'secondary world' one which may be adjacent to the primary world of reality but which functions according to its own laws and principles. The world of Fantasy may be peopled by talking animals, strange creatures, enchanted weapons, terrifying witches, wizards, etc. But this secondary world cannot be whimsical and arbitrary in the way it works. It has to function with consistency and logic and though its rules may not resemble the rules of the 'real' world, they are nonetheless seen as operating inescapably.

Fantasy has its roots in early religious systems and mythologies and epic literature. With the rise of Christianity many of these were altered, some devalued, others had Christian elements incorporated into their earlier forms, etc. but they survived in the form of legends, folklore and fairy tales. The tales of pre-Christian Northern Europe (The Celtic and Scandinavian) are the earliest precursors of the genre of fantasy as it is known today. *The Prose Edda*, *The Volsunga Saga* and *Beowulf* are the ancestors of Fantasy.

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## **1.3 Learning Outcomes**

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Upon completion of the Unit, students would be able to:

- Know the origin of Fiction in English
- Identify some novelists from different periods
- Know different types of fiction and novels.
- Familiarize themselves with short fiction and its evolution
- Able to discuss in detail a origin of English novel, short story and various salient features of fiction in English.

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## **1.4 Glossary**

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**Bildungsroman novel:** A novel that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood

**Bronte Sisters:** Three English novelists—Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte and Anne Bronte—known with pseudonyms Currer Bell, Ellis Bell, Acton Bell respectively

**Gothic novel:** A pseudomedieval fiction having a prevailing atmosphere of mystery and terror

**Picaresque novel:** A fictional work that depicts adventures of a roguish but appealing hero from low social class

**Romanticism:** A movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual

**Realism:** A literary movement that stresses on the faithful representation of reality in works of art and literature

**Satire:** A humorous way of criticizing people or ideas to show that they have faults or are wrong, often using exaggeration, irony, and other devices

**Sentimental novel:** A novel that exploits the reader's capacity for tenderness, compassion, or sympathy to a disproportionate degree

**Victorian period:** The period of Queen Victoria's reign, from 20 June 1837 until her death on 22 January 1901.

**Wit:** The ability to use words in an amusing and intelligent way

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## 1.5 Sample Questions

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### 1.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Sydney's *Arcadia* appeared in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Ann Radcliffe is known for \_\_\_\_\_.
3. *Tristram Shandy* is a novel by \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Which novel is NOT written by Jane Austen  
(a) *Pride and Prejudice*      (b) *Sense and Sensibility*  
(c) *Vicar of the Wakefield*      (d) *Emma*
5. Who is NOT a modern novelists \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(a) James Joyce      (b) D.H. Lawrence



(c) Virginia Woolf

(d) Horace Walpole

6. Match the following:

(A)

(B)

(a) P.G. Wodehouse

(i) *The Lord of the Flies*

(b) Aldous Huxley

(ii) *The Man with Two Left Feet and Other Stories*

(c) George Orwell

(iii) *Brave New World*

(d) William Golding

(iv) *Animal Farm*

7. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is published in the year \_\_\_\_\_.

(a) 1813

(b) 1919

(c) 1731

(d) 1819

8. Match the real name of Bronte Sisters with their penname.

(A)

(B)

(a) Currer Bell

(i) Charles Bronte

(b) Ellis Bell

(ii) Ellis Bronte

(c) Acton Bell

(iii) Anne Bronte

9. George Eliot's first published novel is \_\_\_\_\_.

10. Name the author of short story *The Necklace*.

(a) Maupassant

(b) Edgar Allan Poe

(c) Rudyard Kipling

(d) Thomas Hardy

### 1.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Write a brief note on social novel.
2. Bring out the contributions of women to the English novel.
3. Discuss life and works of any two Victorian novelists.
4. Explain science fiction and fantasy.
5. Romantic fiction in English. Discuss.

### 1.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Write a detailed note on the origin of the English novel.
2. Discuss salient features of the modern novel.
3. Explain evolution of the short story in English.

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## 1.6 Objectives

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1. Abrams, Meyer Howard, and Geoffrey Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage Learning, 2014.
2. Arata, Stephen, et al., eds. *A Companion to the English Novel*. John Wiley & Sons, 2015.
3. Caserio, Robert L., and Clement Hawes, eds. *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
4. Eagleton, Terry. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
5. Richetti, John. *The English Novel in History 1700-1780*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
6. Trotter, David. *English Novel in History, 1895-1920*. Routledge, 2003.

## Unit – 2: Life and Works of Emily Bronte

“A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.”

— Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929)

### Structure

#### 2.0 Introduction

#### 2.1 Objectives

#### 2.2 Life and Works of Emily Bronte

##### 2.2.1 The Historical Background to Women's Writing

##### 2.2.2 The Bronte Sisters

##### 2.2.3 Emily Bronte

##### 2.2.4 Wuthering Heights: A Novel of Emily Bronte<sup>1</sup>

##### 2.2.5 Poems of Emily Bronte

#### 2.3 Learning Outcome

#### 2.4 Glossary

#### 2.5 Sample Questions

#### 2.6 Suggested Readings

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### 2.0 Introduction

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One of the biographers of Emily Bronte(1818 – 1848), Lyn Pykett writes, “The life of Emily Bronte is shrouded in mystery, and she remains an elusive and mysterious figure, despite the efforts of her latest and most scrupulous biographer, Edward Chitham, to unravel the myths and legends that have surrounded her life and work” (1). The life of Emily Bronte who lived justfor thirty years is no less than another novel – woven with different themes of family, childhood, adulthood, love, romance, death, creativity, etc. Her life is as gripping, revealing, interesting, intriguing, complex, and affectionate as her novel *Wuthering Height* (1847) and poems. Her struggle for survival, literary space and fate can be seen through her biography and works. These resulted in making Emily one of the most famous writers and her novel as one of

the classic novels of all time in the history of English literature. Emily like her sisters Charlotte and Anne wrote a single novel that has received huge success. Although they had to struggle to write and get it published due to patriarchal perceptions and social and literary conventionalities. Fate also did not support Emily like Christopher Marlow she also died around the age of thirty. John Hewish writes in his preface to *Emily Bronte: A Critical and Biographical Study* (1996), “Emily Bronte died young. Such unfulfilled prodigies present special difficulties of judgment. But difficulties arise also from the kind of person and writer she was. Her work is introspective and is characterized by a clash between a rigid and orthodox moral background and a tendency to emotional extremes. The cryptic, private expression of her moral originality in the poems resembles [William] Blake's” (9). Despite all the difficulties that Emily faces she left her footprints on English literature. Studying such a genuine, inspiring, classic, and interesting personality would certainly enhance students’ ability to understand the complexities in English society, how to nurture creativity, and inspired from day to day lives.

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## 2.1 Objectives

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One of the reasons behind prescribing Emily Bronte in this paper is to introduce the Victorian society and how the women writer emerged on the literary scene in general and in English society in particular with special reference to Emily Bronte and her two sisters Charlotte and Anne. Almost all members of her family were creative writers including her brother, sisters, mother, and father. The Bronte siblings inherited creativity from their parents but at the same time, they explore and nurture it further. Going through the early lives of the Bronte sister one would understand that how storytelling can enhance children’s imaginative spaces and how poverty adds ingredients to the story of life and real touch to narration and literary composition. This unit also introduces a brief history of the Victorian Age (1837-1901), how women writers emerged on literary screen not only in England but also in some of the major world languages and cultures. It also covers a brief history of women’s writing in England and how the Bronte sisters contributed to the vast fabric of English literature. The unit also provides a detailed biographical, intellectual, and literary account of Emily as one of the earliest woman novelists and as a poetess.

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## 2.2 Life and Works of Emily Bronte

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### 2.2.1 The Historical Background to Women's Writing:

*England has had many learned women . . . and yet where are the poetesses? ...*

*I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none.*

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Creative writing was not considered a suitable profession or a cup of tea for women for centuries. This intellectual experiment was consciously and unconsciously dissociated and discouraged for women in all cultures and traditions. The patriarchic assumptions and gender roles always perceived and projected women merely as an object of beauty and the vice president of domestic affairs. These are some of the reasons why there was the invisibility of women writers in history. If one excavates literary history, one finds remarkable female writers amidst such a discouraging environment. In ancient Greece Sappho (c. 630 – c. 570 BCE) was a well-known poetess she was also considered as the “tenth muse” for her Hellenistic lyrical style. She was one of the earlier women writers who were somehow documented but most of her poems were lost. In Rome, Sulpicia wrote satires and poems in 1<sup>st</sup> BC in Latin. Similarly, in the early days of Islamic revival, the Arabian Peninsula witnessed the emergence of some courtly Muslim poetess. There must have been some more poetesses or women writers in history but because of the lack of documentation awareness, they dissolved into the history of inattention. One of the notable poetesses was Al Khansa (Tumadirbint Amr Ibn al Harith ibn al-Sharid al Sulamiyah) of 7th Century AD who wrote *marsia*/elegies. She was also considered a poetess of the pre-Islamic and the early Islamic time. It was a tradition in some of the Arab tribes to sing elegies on the death of a person since she was the composer of those – she received acclaimed and fame. She has also sung elegies for Prophet Mohammed in Medina and accepted Islam. Ali Samer writes,

In retrospect we can discern four overlapping persona types for poetesses in the Middle Ages: the grieving mother/sister/daughter (al-Khansā', al-Khirniq bint Badr, and al-Fāri'ah bint Shaddād), the warrior-diplomat (al-Hujayjah), the princess (al-Ḥurqah, 'Ulayyah bint al-Mahdī, and Walladah bint al-Mustakfī), and the courtesan-ascetic ('Arīb, Shāriyah, and Rābi'ah al-'Adawīyah). Rābi'ah's biography in particular projects a

paradoxical persona that embodies the complementary opposites of sexuality and saintliness. (653)

Qusmina bint Ismail around the 11th century Al-Andalus was another women writer who wrote in Arabic and holds her belief in Judaism. In the Chinese culture too, Xue Tao (c770-832) was a poetess and well a courtesan of the Tang Dynasty (618 to 907 AD). This period was considered as a golden age for poetry in Chinese literature because poetry was considered as a means of knowledge and those who were capable of writing and reading poetry were eligible to appear and qualify for the civil service exams at that time. Poetry was regarded as a source of knowledge therefore some women also participated in writing and reading. Akka Mahadevi (1130-1160 AD) was a mystic poetess from the Kannada language in India. She was considered as one of the early women writers in India. Similarly, many languages of the world witnessed the sparks and invisible presence of women writers. But unfortunately, only 'his-story' was documented, and 'her-story' was neglected in the literary history.

Like other cultures and languages, in the context of English (England, Scotland, and Ireland) too, there was no visible presence of women writers till the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. This does not mean that women were not experimenting with their hands in the clay of literature. They were writing one of the best, finest, outstanding and classical texts in English literature. There was a rich and diverse tradition of writing by women writers in English starting from Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672), Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Delarivière Manly (1663-1724), Fanny Burney (1752-1840) Marry Wollstonecraft (1759 – 1797) et al. to Patricia Hall (aka Maureen O'Connor), A.S. Byatt (Dame Antonio Susan Duffy) and present-day women writers in English from different part of the world.

During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century a fresh interest emerged in literary scholarship and some attention was paid to trace women's voices in literature and society. Interestingly, this interest in feminist literary historiography came from men such as John Duncombe and George Ballard. George Ballard published *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain Who Have Been Celebrated for their Writing or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts, and Sciences* in 1752 and Duncombe's *Feminead* published in 1754. Mary Scott was one of the earliest gynocritics to engage in history, evolution, and evaluation of women's writings. Her *Female Advocate: A Poem*

*Occasioned by Reading Mr. Duncombe's Feminead* (1774) tried to trace the history of flourishing women writers and it also studied how Duncombe looked at early women writers. Another important attempt to historicize and document women's writing was Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication on the Rights of Women* (1792). This was one of the earliest critical treatises on women's writing. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) highlights the social and literary injustice that happened to women, how she lacks the agency of choice and economy. She uses the room as a metaphor for women's autonomy and writes, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction". Dale Spender's *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* (1986) tried to trace some important writers who were neglected before Jane Austin. Many women writers of the early writing in English wrote under disguise, pseudonyms, and anonymously because women were not easily given space in literary circles. It was also due to avoid direct criticism and hide identity. Leah Orr observes,

Surveying the use of names on title pages reveals that approximately 50 percent of the fiction in the period 1660–1750 lists no author on the title page, and a further 20 percent has another tagline or pseudonym (and so is functionally anonymous). This corresponds with Raven's finding that "over 80 percent of all new novel titles published between 1750 and 1790 were published anonymously."<sup>60</sup> With so many anonymous works, eighteenth-century readers could not rely on the identification of known writers to determine whether a work claiming to be true was indeed factual. (80)

Even acquiring a space in literary circle, women's writing was feminized and considered as loaded with feminist sensibilities, emotion, irrationality, exoticism, romance, etc. But in reality, the writing of women explored the unexplored areas of the human psyche, society, and experiences which deserted for centuries, not yet explored or unavailable in the mainstream patriarchal imaginations and discourses. Their writing was multidirectional and more advanced, realist, and engaging these were some of the reasons why their writing was recognized and celebrated lately and posthumously. The Bronte sister is one of the earliest and finest examples of this claim. When Emily and her sisters also wanted to get published as authors they had to face many difficulties from the readers, publishers, critics, and also from society. Many times writers wanted to depict the naked realities of society and life but how far society would accept

those realities and that too the realities projected by the women writer who is no longer considered as capable of writing and intellectual exercise. To skip the social criticism after mirroring social realities could also be one of the reasons why women of this time wrote under pseudonyms.

Although Emily wrote a single novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) under the pseudonym Ellis Bell – it became one of the greatest works of English literature. Her writing was of par excellence; in fact, it was beyond the creative and intellectual cavity of her time. Therefore, when she wrote her novel it was no longer considered as her own since she was a woman. One of the critics writes,

M.Heger's initial opinion of Emily's timidity is the nature of the language which he uses to describe his sense of her qualities. His admiration for Emily's imagination, reason, argumentative skill, resilience and determination can only, it seems, be expressed in terms of a masculine language of domination. Emily Bronte repeatedly poses this problem to commentators caught in this linguistic and cultural trap. Male discourse is not simply the dominant discourse, it is also a discourse of domination in which originality, argumentative *power*, *the force* of reason, etc. are linguistically represented as masculine qualities. The woman who possesses such 'powers' is thus almost inevitably spoken of as masculine. Hence, Emily 'should have been a man', she is nicknamed 'The Major' and serves as the model for Charlotte's ambiguously named heroine Shirley (who refers to herself as 'Captain Keeldar'), and she is the stuff of which 'heroes' are made. (Pykett 15)

But there was also a handsome number of women writers who were also being criticized because of their being writing within the existing framework of dominant stereotypes about women. The Victorian English novelist George Elliot (1819-1880) criticized such a notion of writing. She also criticizes those women novelists of her time in her anonymous essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists". She dislikes the writing which is loaded with sensibilities, sensuality, romance, feelings, and emotional fantasies.

The subjugation of women was common in English patriarchal society although the Victorian Age was named after the then Queen of England Victoria. On one hand science, modernization, and industrialization was taken place and on the other hand poverty,



predicaments, and exploitation of deprived classes of society continued. Women, children, and the poor were the most affected people. Amidst this, the discouraging women from literary spaces also continued. Lyn Pykett in her biography *Emily Bronte* writes, “Despite, or perhaps because of, the growing number of women writers – particularly novelists - in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, many commentators still thought that writing for a living was an intrinsically unwomanly activity”. (14) She continued,

When Charlotte Bronte sent some of her poems to Robert Southey in 1837 she was sternly reminded that 'literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it' (LL I, 155). Even in 1850, George Henry Lewes offered this 'Gender Hint to Writing Women': 'Women's proper sphere of activity is elsewhere. Are there no husbands, lovers, brothers, friends to coddle and console? Are there no stockings to darn, no purses to make, no braces to embroider? My idea of a perfect woman is one who can write but won't' (15)

But despite this rigid and conservative male chauvinist atmosphere writers like the Bronte sisters emerged and acquired ‘a room of their own’. Their writing and lives are one of the leading episodes of the struggle and existence of women writers on the shabby pages of literary history.

### **2.2.2 The Bronte Sisters:**

In 1812 Maria Branwell (essayist) married Patrick Brunty (Irish author and teacher) who later changed his name Brunty to the Bronte. It was a poor family and had five daughters out of which only Charlotte, Emily, and Anne survived. These three sisters are known as the Bronte Sisters in English literature. They were well-known poets and novelists. Their brother was also a painter and writer. The family was torn by poverty and faced many deadly diseases such as tuberculosis, cancer, and typhoid. Their mother died of cancer when these kids were just around the corner of ten years of their age. Since Maria died at an early age the children grew without a mother with a middle-aged father and her aunt. They face many difficulties in life. “Their attitudes to their home were mixed and provide an interesting of a special example of the position of women in the early Victorian period: they combined intense attachment and pride, with tension and revolt: 'pleasure and I had never met', relates Crimsworth, in Charlotte Bronte's

*The Professor*, 'no indulgence of hers had enervated or sated one faculty of my nature. Liberty I clasped in my arms for the first time.'" (Hewish 25). Mr. Bronte was also a clergy which has somehow improved the family's social status. This has also affected the life of Mr. Bronte and her daughters. John Hewish observes,

The atmosphere of the sisters' upbringing and their social background was thus profoundly influenced by the last great religious movement in England and by that earlier manifestation of Puritanism, Methodism (which influenced Mr. Bronte's own early life: it was the religion of his relatives by marriage and was strong in Yorkshire). This spiritual revival was related to romanticism. (Hewish 23)

After the death of Maria, their aunt looks after the children and is sent to school. The situation in school can be seen through the description of the Lowood School in the autobiographical novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte. Like many early English women writers these Bronte Sisters also wrote under a pseudonym; Charlotte as Currer Bell, Anne as Acton Bell, and Emily as Ellis Bell. One of the notable works Charlotte is her novel *Jane Eyre* (1847). This bildungsroman is one of the best fictions of English which describes the moral, social, and psychological developments of Jane. Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights* (1847) one of the best novels in English. Anne also wrote a novel, *Agnes Gray*, in the same year. And importantly these works became one of the all-time best works of English literature.

One of the interesting parts that I like the most about the life of the Bronte sisters' is their childhood creativity. As children, the Bronte sisters used to play with storytelling. They imagined and created their own place to express their feelings and creativity. They wrote juvenilia— set in imagined lands such as Angria and Gondal like R.K. Narayan's Malgudi and Thomas Hardy's Wessex. One can see how powerful these kids imagine that they are constructing the imagined places at the age of around ten and thirteen whereas we see that the big established writers like R.K. Narayan and Thomas Hardy constructing their imagined place/setting at a very mature time of their literary career.

For amusement the siblings invented imaginary worlds, drawing maps and writing stories and magazines – all in tiny micro-script as if written by their miniature toy soldiers. Charlotte and Branwell created the kingdom of Angria; always stubbornly independent,

Emily created the breakaway island of Gondal with her younger sister Anne. Surviving poems about this fantasy world show the influence of Wordsworth, Walter Scott, and Byron. By then Emily was the tallest of the sisters, slim and graceful within the words of family friend Ellen Nussey – ‘kindling liquid eyes’. She was, however, very reserved, and it soon emerged that she was unsuited to life away from Haworth. ‘Stronger than a man’, Charlotte wrote, ‘simpler than a child, her nature stood alone’ (*The British Library online*).

### **2.2.3 Emily Bronte:**

Emily was born on 30 July 1818 in the village of Thornton, an industrial moorland of Yorkshire 18<sup>th</sup> c. England. She was the second youngest child in her family before Anna and after Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, and Branwell. The first two daughters died due to different diseases which swiped a school which they attended. The Bronte family moved to Howarth where her father got a job as curate when Emily was three years old. The children sent to Clergy Daughter’s School at Crown Bridge which became a site of abuse and suffering which also became one of the themes of Charlotte’s *Jane Eyre*. Emily received a very less formal education. Her schooling experience was a hurting and tragic part of her life because this school took the life of her two sisters. Byron, Shelly, and Walter Scott were her favorite writers therefore one can see the Byronian influence on some of her poems. This was the time the Bronte siblings started composing poems and stories in their imagined land of Angria and Gondal. While studying “Charlotte and Branwell worked together on the chronicles of Angria, while Emily and Anne collaborated in the production of the saga of Gondal, a fictional island whose myths and legends were to preoccupy the two sisters throughout their lives” (Pykett 5).

Emily was also a teacher for some time. She taught at the Law Hill School and moved to Brussels along with Charlotte to study a foreign language. She taught at the Pension Heger School in Brussels and returned to Howarth in 1842.

Death was another dominant shadow of her family. After her mother’s early death, her two sisters also died quite early before the age of five. Many children in England died out of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, work hazards, and deadly diseases. “Joyce Irene Whalley, author of *Cobwebs to Catch Flies*, points out that “infant mortality was high [1700–1900] and the

number of children surviving in any one family was usually small, [with] many infants dying before they were five years old.”<sup>3</sup> She went on to express the gruesome reality in all levels of society that even the most gentle and loving parent shunned the thought of the vulnerability of youth” (qtd in Rogers 42).

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were notorious for children as we have seen in many works writers tried to depict the stark realities of childhood, predicaments, struggle, sufferings, and pain of children in growing industrial economies and sucking poverty. The growing demand for labor in industries forced children and females to face cruelties and exploitation at the workplace. Some of the works of this time depict the moralities and savage doctrines at schools and other conditions of children such as *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens and *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life* by Mary Anne Evans (George Eliot). And of course, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is the finest example of the children of Victorian middle and low class in society, at schools, and in families. The character of Mr. Brocklehurst represents Victorian morality which is drenched in patriarchy. He said, "My mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh; to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel; and each of the young persons before us has a string of hair twisted in plaits which vanity itself might have woven: these, I repeat, must be cut off."

Emily's earliest years were lived out in the shadow of a mother weakened by frequent pregnancies who finally succumbed to cancer at the age of thirty-eight in September 1821. Emily Brontë thus became one of those motherless daughters who figure so prominently in Victorian fiction. Indeed, as numerous commentators have observed, a significantly high proportion of nineteenth-century women writers seem to have lost their mothers in early childhood, a situation which perhaps fostered independence, self-definition, and creativity, by removing at least one of 'the constraints to female conformity which a mother so frequently imposes'.<sup>3</sup> Their mother's exile to the sick room and her early death, their father's concern for his wife, his duties in the parish, and his retreat to his study, forced the Brontë children to rely on their own resources, and led to that close bonding and mutual interdependence which has been noted by most observers of the family... On 25 November 1824, Emily Brontë followed the path taken by many

motherless daughters of her class at this time and joined her three older sisters at the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge near Kirkby Lonsdale, which was later to serve as Charlotte Brontë's model for Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*. (Pykett 3-4)

Emily too died so early of "tuberculosis in December 1848" (Tompkins n.p.). Lyn Pykett notes, "Before her own death on 19 December 1848 Emily suffered the loss of her mother and two of her sisters, and had to witness the moral and physical decline of a brother who was destroyed by a hopeless sexual infatuation, by equally deluded fantasies of literary success, and by drugs and alcohol". (Pykett 3).

#### **2.2.4 *Wuthering Heights*: A Novel of Emily Brontë**

Her only novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is one of the best and classical novels of English literature because of its gripping story, interweaving narration, gothic setting, romance, love, passion, and hate. The origin source of this novel can be traced back to the Gondal and moorland of Yorkshire. Initially, it was not appreciated and received "terrible reviews when first published but came to be considered one of the finest novels in the English language" (Tompkins). It has multiple narrative techniques flashbacks, first-person point of view, symbolism, etc. It was an unconventional novel. John Hewish points out that "Emily Brontë as a novelist could hardly have been less of a realist, but her materials in *Wuthering Heights* combine regional and literary elements. The melodramatic setting of the parsonage, between the churchyard and the moorland paradigm of elemental nature, seems particularly appropriate just at this period: it embodies the intellectual and spiritual preoccupations of the early nineteenth century" (24). The detailed introduction to this novel along with characterizations, themes, and critical appreciation is given in proceeding units of this book. [see next units]

#### **2.2.5 Poems of Emily Brontë:**

Apart from the classical success of her only novel *Wuthering Heights* Emily has also composed around 200 poems, plays, and essays. Her poems were somehow preserved but plays and other works set in the imaginary land of Gondal lost. C. W. Hatfield published a collection of poems by Emily Brontë in 1941 as *The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Brontë*. Like stories and juvenilia, the Brontë sisters were also composing poems which were published as a collection of poems of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne under the pseudonyms *Poems of Currer, Ellis, and*

*Acton Bell* (1846). Like her novel, these poems neither were also not received instant popularity nor were those recognized as poems.

As Lyn Pykett observes Emily Bronte's poems are also dramatic as her fiction. "The Gondal poems, and what little we are able to reconstruct of their context in the Gondal narrative, reveal Emily Bronte as a chameleon poet, creating and experimenting with a variety of dramatized situations, moods, and emotions. This is not to say that the Gondal poems are thoroughly dramatized in the manner, for example, of the dramatic poems of the later Victorian poet Robert Browning'" (18). Some of her poems also resemble a romantic tradition which may be a result of her liking of Shelly and Byron. Although the Romantic tradition was considered as much inclusive and celebrated for breaking the conventions the perceptions about women and their writing were reserved in the favor of patriarchy. In this age women "inspire poetry, either as Muse or as a feminized Nature, but she does not write it, because she is excluded from the role of 'speaking subject' which is identified as male'" (Pykett 18). But her poems were finding space in poetry to skip this reality of barring women thus creating alternate selves in the literary space. Her poems were also inspiring, motivating, transcending souls, liberty, etc. Emily writes

I'm happiest when most away  
I can bear my soul from its home of clay  
On a windy night when the moon is bright  
And the eye can wander through worlds of light -  
When I am not and none beside -  
Nor earth nor sea nor cloudless sky -  
But only spirit wandering wide  
Through infinite immensity.  
(H 44,63) [qtd in Pykett 22 ]

In her poems, she cradled between reality and escape from reality and from Romanticism to Victorianism. She led a path for women, slightly bifurcating from the existing male tradition of poetry. "She steers a path between the dominant male tradition and the marginalized female tradition, between the largely female tradition of didactic fiction, which invoked duty to God, the

family and the community, and the alternative traditions of Gothic and a poetic of the free spirit. (35 Pykett).

Emily's first twenty poems appeared in the collection of three sisters titled *Poems by Gurrer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* (1846). Their poems have not attracted the attention of the readers and received two loosely written reviews. This may be due to the theme, style, and gender of the poetry which was new to the conventional readers and writers of her time. She faced problems of lacking female English poetic tradition and writing against the conventional male-dominant poetic flow. These could be some of the reasons for their unpopularity of poems during her lifetime. Pykett writes, "Emily Bronte's poetry provides a very interesting case study of a particular woman in a particular time, place, and culture, trying to work within particular poetic conventions, and particular definitions of poetry" (37). Another reason could be Emily's poems were realists as a counter-narrative to the existing romantic vision of poetry of the eighteenth century. Her poetry can also be called transition poetry between Romanticism to Victorian realism.

The poems of Emily are also lyrical and known for their originality and simplicity. Initially, Emily divided her poems into two categories Gondal poems and non-Gondal poems. The Gondal was an imaginary place for the Bronte sisters to use their creativity, feeling, and expressions. It has a literary, personal, and social significance in their lives. As Hewish points out it was "siblings' dream-worlds" (31) and isolation from the outer Victorian world to nurture inner feelings and imaginations. This "Isolation is both vantage-point and prison". (31) As Emily writes in one of her poems:

A little while, a little while,  
The noisy crowd are barred away;  
And I can sing and I can smile  
A little while I've holiday!

There is also a dramatization of their inner life which is further reflected in their novels. Hewish wrote, that Gondal is a "growth of an imagination, of a cosmos, and an idealized, yet pessimistic conception of human relationships that was extended into *Wuthering Heights*" (31). Apart from the childhood imaginary invention, the construction of imagined Gondal is also a result of her gender being a woman. Because for women and her expressions the Victorian

society was not that much accommodative thus the Gondal became her a private space for her abundance of feeling, expressions, childhood and adult women fantasies of the Victorian society, and creative and complex compositions. Lyn Pykett argues that “Gender may well have played an important part in the construction of the Gondal framework. Ideas about gender have certainly played a key role in the critical debate about Gondal. On the whole, the anti-Gondalians see Emily Bronte's poetry about the dominant – that is to say, patriarchal-literary tradition, and they emphasize and value those aspects of the poet's work which fit most coherently into this tradition” (40). Fanny Ratchford observes that “Gondal is 'a tightly knit epic of the free, wild, grotesque world of imagination which nourished Emily's creative genius and brought it to its fruitage', has been taken up enthusiastically, if rather loosely, by recent feminist critics” (qtd in Pykett 41).

Emily has written few lyrical poems. Some of her known poems include 'The Prisoner, 'No Coward Soul is Mine, 'Remembrance', 'The Philosopher', 'Stars', etc. One of the first Gondal poems of Emily is 'What winter floods':

What winter floods, what showers of spring  
Have drenched the grass by night and day;  
And yet, beneath, that spectre ring,  
Unmoved and undiscovered lay

A mute remembrancer of crime,  
Long lost, concealed, forgot for years,  
It comes at last to cancel time,  
And waken unavailing tears. (H96)

One of her famous poems is 'No Coward Sothe ul is Mine. This poem shows her boldness, firmness, and proud feeling of her being herself’.

No coward soul is mine  
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere  
I see Heaven's glories shine



And Faith shines equal arming me from Fear

O God within my breast  
Almighty ever-present Deity  
Life, that in me hast rest,  
As I Undying Life, have power in Thee  
Vain are the thousand creeds  
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,  
Worthless as withered weeds  
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main

To waken doubt in one  
Holding so fast by thy infinity,  
So surely anchored on  
The steadfast rock of Immortality.

With wide-embracing love  
Thy spirit animates eternal years  
Pervades and broods above,  
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears

Though earth and moon were gone  
And suns and universes ceased to be  
And Thou wert left alone  
Every Existence would exist in thee

There is not room for Death  
Nor atom that his might could render void  
Since thou art Being and Breath  
And what thou art may never be destroyed (*Poetry Foundation*)

John Hewish also noted few poems of Emily. These are some of the poems which show Emily's love towards nature and hope:

There is a spot 'mid barren hills  
Where winter howls and driving rain,  
But if the dreary tempest chills  
There is a light that warms again.  
The house is old, the trees are bare  
And moonless bends the misty dome  
But what on earth is half so dear,  
So longed for as the hearth of home?

Her other poem also depicts the theme of escape from day to day world to her imagined world. Rather she asks,

Shall I go there? or shall I seek  
Another clime, another sky,  
Where tongues familiar music speak  
In accents dear to memory?  
Yes, as I mused, the naked room,  
The flickering firelight died away  
And from the midst of cheerless gloom  
I passed to bright, unclouded day-  
A little and a lone green lane  
That opened on a common wide;  
A distant, dreamy, dim blue chain  
Of mountains circling every side . . . (qtd in Hewish 50)

Charlotte and Anna also sued to write poems. Charlotte Bronte's "The Bluebell" also reflects the Gondal as a comfort zone and exile from the real world.

The bluebell is the sweetest flower

That waves in summer air;  
Its blossoms have the mightiest power  
To soothe my spirit's care.

There is a spell in purple heath  
Too wildly, sadly dear;  
The violet has a fragrant breath  
But fragrance will not cheer.

The trees are bare, the sun is cold,  
And seldom, seldom seen;  
The heavens have lost their zone of gold  
And earth its robe of green;

And ice upon the glancing stream  
Has cast its sombre shade  
And distant hills and valleys seem  
In frozen mists arrayed.

The bluebell cannot charm me now,  
The heath has lost its bloom,  
The violets in the glen below  
They yield no sweet perfume.

But though I mourn the heather-bell  
'Tis better far, away;  
I know how fast my tears would swell  
To see it smile to-day;                    (qtd in Hewish 51-52)

Here the bluebell represents the pleasantness as to escape from the summer which also symbolizes the Victorian outer world/society. Their poems and imaginations also serve as lullabies for their cradle between the harshness of life and the smoothness of imagination. John

Hewish also asserts, "Childhood's enduring hold on adult Victorian women has seldom been more strikingly revealed, or the Brontes' ability to move from unpleasant reality to fantasy" (76). By setting their stories in childhood imagined land – Gondal and Angira the Bronte sisters wanted to escape “some of the restrictions of the culturally conditioned female voice (Pykett 46). Emily has created many personas in the Gondal which are part of her repressed self and extended personality. These characters, especially women like Angelica and Augusta Geraldine Almeda aka A.G.A. are powerful, assertive, and bold. In fact, AGA was her favorite heroine. She was also referred to as Rosina/Princess of Alcona.

To conclude, like Emily Dickinson, the significance and relevance of the poem of Emily Bronte were realized after a long pause of her death. Her genuine and uniqueness was beyond her time. Her style was not common. As Janet Gezari editor of Emily's poems in her *Last Things: Emily Brontë's Poems* (2007) rightly calls her as the “forerunners of high modernism” (Janet Gezari 1). Like Emily, her poetry was also free and self-motivated. Janet further points out that, “As a writer, Emily Brontë didn't suffer from either an anxiety of influence or an anxiety of authorship. In her poems, she succeeded in authorizing herself as the subject of her own experience, apparently without wondering whether that experience was eccentric and trivial or, contrarily, profoundly relevant to others” (1-2).

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## 2.3 Learning Outcomes

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The present unit introduced the brief history of women's writing in general and in the context of English in particular. It shows how women were consciously and unconsciously discouraged for centuries to write but despite this, they were trying to write such outstanding works in history. One of such examples is Emily Bronte and her sisters. One of the interesting parts of the life of Emily is her childhood and how they acquired, nurtured, and developed their creativity. The unit introduced the brief life of her and her family and some of the known poems along with her most celebrated the only novel. While introducing her works, we are also introduced to her storytelling techniques, style of writing poetry, theme, the significance of her imagined place (Gondal) in her life as well as in her literary career.

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## 2.4 Glossary

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**Autobiographical Novel:** An autobiographical novel contains most of the actual events, settings, biographical details as it is or similar/parallel to those of the author. Thus, the life of the main character resembles the life of the author.

**Bildungsroman:** Bildungsroman is derived from the German two words 'building meaning education and 'roman' meaning novel. It focuses on a formative development of the protagonist/s' psychological, moral and physical development. The character keeps on gaining varied experiences and grows towards maturity or as a mature person.

**Feminism and Womanism:** Feminism is a social and political movement to champion women's rights, equality, and justice. It also aims to dismantle the gendered roles and stereotypes in society. But in 1983 an American writer and scholar Alice Walker distanced from feminism and coined womanism. She argues that feminism is being racialized and black women are not considered as women thus their issues remained untouched and discussed under this category. the rights of women mean the rights of only white women. The colored women's concerns and issues were neglected in white feminist scholarship. Although she comes up with this term concerning black women it has broader relevance to cover all women. It is a social framework to focus on womanhood and women's inclusive discourse and development.

**Gothic novel:** A Gothic novel is written with the themes of horror, romance, death, and ghosts. It also covers the mysterious or supernatural elements with the setting in dark – abandoned exotic and grotesque places.

**Gynocriticism:** Gynocriticism is a literary term coined by feminist thinker Elaine Showalter in 1979. She used this term to study women's writing critically, focusing on women as a writer. "Gynocriticism established the historical study of women writers as a legitimate field of academic inquiry and developed to encompass a broad range of methodologies of reading women's writing" (*Willy Online*)

**Juvenilia:** A juvenilia is a literary form of children. It is written by children between the age of ten to eighteen while dealing with the issues of their age, conflicts, and developments. It is also

written by modern writers dealing with the issue of teens. Some of the best-known modern fictions of this category are *The Silver Chair* by C.S. Lewis and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.

**Stream of Consciousness novel:** Stream of consciousness novels are those which have eponymous narrative techniques. It is a modern way of storytelling in a novel. It was initially championed by novelists like D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf et al. This kind of novels deal with the physical and mental activities of the character(s) and mostly unveils the inner working of conscious and subconscious of the characters.

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## 2.5 Sample Questions

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### 2.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The collection of a poem titled *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* (1846) is written by \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (a) Emily Bronte
  - (b) Charlotte Bronte
  - (c) Anne Bronte
  - (d) All of the above
2. How many Emily's poems included in the collection *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Action Bell* (1846)
  - (a) 20
  - (b) 10
  - (c) 50
  - (d) 200
3. The Gondal is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (a) Located in South London
  - (b) Located in Ireland
  - (c) Imaginary place
  - (d) A character in the novel of Emily
4. Match the correct pair
  - i. Currer bell
  - ii. Acton bell
  - iii. Ellis Bell
  - iv. George Eliot
  - a. Emily
  - b. Charlotte
  - c. Anne
  - d. Mary Ann Evans

- (a) i – a, ii – b, iii – c, iv – d  
 (b) i – b, ii – c, iii – a, iv – d  
 (c) i – c, ii – b, iii – a, iv – d  
 (d) i – d, ii – c, iii – b, iv – a
5. Emily was born in \_\_\_\_\_.  
 (a) 1819 (b) 1818  
 (c) 1820 (d) 1821
6. Emily Bronte died out of \_\_\_\_\_.  
 (a) Cholera (b) Cancer  
 (c) Depression (d) Tuberculosis
7. Which of the following is not a poem written by Emily Bronte  
 (a) The Prisoner (b) No Coward Soul is mine  
 (c) The Philosopher (d) The Bluebell
8. *Jane Eyre* is written by  
 (a) Currer Bell (b) Acton Bell  
 (c) Ellis Bell (d) All of the above
9. Which of the following critics says that the Gondal is a dream-world of the Bronte siblings?  
 (a) Janet Gezari (b) Lyn Pykett  
 (c) John Hewish (d) Leah Orr
10. Which of the following works is not written by women writers.  
 (a) *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain Who Have Been Celebrated for their Writing or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts, and Sciences* 1752  
 (b) *Female Advocate: A Poem Occasioned by Reading Mr. Duncombe's Feminead* (1774)  
 (c) *A Vindication on the Rights of Women* (1792)  
 (d) *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* (1986)

### 2.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What are the characteristic features of Emily's poetry?
2. Who were the contributors to the Gondal?

3. Write briefly about literary work produced by Emily's family.
4. Why was women's writing not recognized for centuries?

### 2.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Briefly sketch the social and literary atmosphere for women writers and how do they emergence on the literary scene?
2. What is the role and significance of the Gondal in the life of Emily Bronte?

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## 2.6 Suggested Readings

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6. David Daiches, *A Critical History Of English Literature* - Volume I, II, III, & IV Supernova Publishers; 1st edition 2011.
7. E. M. Forster. *Aspects of the Novel*. Rosetta Books, 2010
8. G.M. Young, *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age*. Oxford University Press; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1964.
9. Gezari, Janet. *Last Things: Emily Bronte's Poems*. Oxford University Press, 2007.
10. Pat Roger's *The Augustan Vision*. Barnes & Noble Books, 1974.
11. Pykett, Lyn. *Women Writers: Emily Bronte*. Macmillan Education Limited. 1989.
12. Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1830-1890*, Routledge, 1994.



## **Unit - 3: *Wuthering Heights*: Background, Plot, Characters**

### **Structure**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

#### **3.1 Objectives**

#### **3.2 *Wuthering Heights*: Background, Plot, Characters**

##### **3.2.1 Background**

##### **3.2.2 Plot**

##### **3.2.3 Characters**

#### **3.3 Learning Outcomes**

#### **3.4 Glossary**

#### **3.5 Sample Questions**

#### **3.6 Suggested Readings**

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### **3.0 Introduction**

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*Wuthering Heights* (1847) is considered an important novel for its highly imaginative literary expression, which solely rested on revenge and romantic love. Emily Bronte wrote this novel under the pseudonym Ellis Bell. The novel *Wuthering Heights* narrates the story of two families of the landed aristocracy living on the West Yorkshire moors. Besides the novelist's thematic concerns, it also vividly presents the accurate portrayal of life that offers glimpses of history. The novel's literary merit in its lyrical prose, distinct structure, style, and narrative technique made an uproar among the literary circles of the era to be counted among a few canonical texts.

The novel is known for its rich and complex structure. It presents two generations of characters and narrators that control the unravelling events of the novel. During the initial publication of *Wuthering Heights*, many readers went confused, obscure and challenging due to its improbable plot that enacted passionate and violent characters in a remote landscape. The readers of the era were not familiar with this sort of literary expression. Nevertheless, many

critics and readers considered it has exciting, powerful, and unique creation despite its unconventionality. The principal protagonists are infused with a strong sense of realism.

***Wuthering Heights* is centred on three most important aspects:**

Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* is structurally considered as a Gothic novel. In her childhood, the gothic novel as a genre was celebrated like never before; as a result of that, Emily was heavily influenced by Gothic novels tradition. She wrote *Wuthering Heights* by employing gothic elements prevalent in her time. She created a creepy environment, supernatural scenes, uncanny plots and wild and dark characters in *Wuthering Heights* to create a magnum opus of her own.

*Wuthering Heights* is famously known for the celebrated fictional couples it had portrayed in the fiction of all times. The couples Heathcliff and Catherine are compared with Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. While the love of Romeo and Juliet is separated by society, Heathcliff and Catherine's passionate nature is responsible for the failure of their union. It is this aspect of representation that attracted the readers to *Wuthering Heights*.

The novel's framing device is one of the experimentative techniques used by the novelist to tell a story. It is a narrative involving a story within a story of two narrators, namely Mr. Lockwood and Mrs. Nelly Dean, to offer outsider and insider perspectives of *Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange.

### **3.1 Objectives**

Objectives of the study of this novel are as follows:

- To read and understand the novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte
- To critically evaluate the text from various thematic concerns of the novel.
- To acquaint with the literary background of the text
- To comprehend the literary imagination of the women writers in the Romantic period.
- To enhance the love for reading the novel and aesthetically judge
- To evaluate the narrative strategies used by the novelist
- To provide the details of the historical and literary landscape of 19<sup>th</sup> century England.

## 3.2 Topics

### 3.2.1 Background

*Wuthering Heights*, the only novel by Emily Brontë was published in 1847. She published this novel under the pen name Ellis Bell. She confined her life to the village of Haworth, Yorkshire, till her last breath. Her passion for Yorkshire and its landscape takes a literary expression in the novel *Wuthering Heights*. The novel was written and published in the Victorian period that did not accept the harsh realities and violent characters in the literary representation. But subsequent audiences accepted the unsavoury aspects of human life in literature. Charlotte Brontë was the first person to praise the novel publicly. She became the first and foremost critic by writing a preface and introduction to the second edition of the novel in 1850 after the death of Emily Brontë. This preface brought popularity to the book by the end of the 20th century.

While commenting about the novel's merit, Charlotte wrote about the advisability of creating characters, especially of Heathcliff. She stated, “I scarcely think it is [advisable].” With a comment of this sort, Charlotte probably wanted to appeal to the Victorian readers to accept and respect *Wuthering Heights* by avoiding an unconvincing part within the text. Despite all the difficulties it had to face in the 19th century, *Wuthering Heights* is considered an important contemporary novel for varied reasons. The accurate and realistic portrayal of life in the novel provides a glimpse of history, condition of women, class and society even after two centuries.

As many critics have opined, *Wuthering Heights* is not just a sentimental romance novel. It is a novel made up of human subjects and human emotions. By creating the real characters with realistic events, Emily Brontë makes the novel a presentation of life, an essay on love, and a glimpse at relationships. Because of such pristine emotions and feelings communicated through the central characters -Heathcliff and Catherine and the supporting characters, the contemporary readers still relate to the emotions and feelings of the characters. Brontë, with her style, word choice and imagery, makes her readers feel that *Wuthering Heights* is a poem veiled as prose.

While reading the novel attracts the reader to the distinct structure and style of Brontë. Significantly, *Wuthering Heights* is about the ordered pairs: two families, two pairs of children and two generations. The distinct visible pair is that of the two households: *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*. One can make out the similarity that exists between nature and the characters of the two places. *Wuthering Heights* appears wild with windy moors and the

inhabitants too possess the same characteristics. While Thrushcross Grange and its inhabitants look the opposite with the calm and orderly parks.

The narrative too is primarily told from the paired point of view. Mr. Lockwood builds the initial story, narrating the beginning and ending chapters. Nelly Dean being an important narrator relates the majority of the action from the outsider's point of view. The isolated setting of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange is essential for Brontë's combination of realism and gothic symbolism.

### **3.2.2 Plot**

*Wuthering Heights* is a novel in 34 chapters. Emily Brontë has dexterously created this classic with a frame narrative technique and content. Despite the fact that it was not liked by the Victorian audience after its publication, the novel attracted an audience of its own over the past few centuries. The novel is structurally centred on two families throughout the text. Mr. Lockwood as a second-hand narrator, mediates between Nelly Dean, and the reader presents the story in an astounding manner. Nelly, as the main narrator, provides the minute details of the two families as an insider to add more authenticity to the story. *Wuthering Heights*, written in the frame narrative technique, offers a glimpse of two households in the form of a story within a story.

At the outset of the novel, Lockwood, a new tenant at Thrushcross Grange, arrives at Wuthering Heights to pay a visit to his landlord, Heathcliff. In this visit, Mr. Lockwood is strangely attracted to Mr. Heathcliff, the landlord of Thrushcross Grange, his curiosity to know more about the house at Wuthering Heights prompts him to pay a second visit the next day. During the second visit, he meets other mysterious occupants of Wuthering Heights is attacked by dogs when he tries to leave. Lockwood was put up for the night in an unused childhood room of Catherine Earnshaw and endures a ghostly visitation overnight. Lockwood later vows never to bother his neighbours again.

Lockwood, after reviving himself in the evening, engages his housekeeper at the Grange Nelly Dean to tell him about the inhabitants at Wuthering Heights. Nelly Dean, having served the Earnshaws for many years, recounts a complicated story of two families, the Lintons and the Earnshaws. Mrs. Dean begins to narrate the history of the family of Earnshaws and recounts the incident from the past. Mr. Earnshaw, a gentleman and the owner of Wuthering Heights, has two

children, Hindley and Catherine. Later, he brings home an orphan later named Heathcliff to be raised as his own child. As the father and sister became more fond of the youngster, it grew jealous in Hindley. Noticing the growing hatred of Hindley towards Heathcliff, to avoid further strife, Earnshaw decides to send Hindley away to college. The strong bond between Catherine and Heathcliff become intense as they left to roam around the countryside. The tranquil time of Wuthering Heights changed drastically with the death of Mr. Earnshaw. Hindley returns to Heights with his new wife and assumes the charge of the master in the house. Still bitter with hatred, Hindley Earnshaw banishes Heathcliff from the family and forces him to stop his education to work as a servant. Despite all the difficulty, Catherine and Heathcliff manage to sneak away to roam on the moor. In one of such excursions, they both grow interests in the Lintons and spy on the Linton family at Thrushcross Grange. While they are spying on the Linton family, the watchdog bites Catherine's leg. She is attended by the Lintons while Heathcliff is sent home in disgrace.

After spending five weeks with the Lintons family in the Thrushcross Grange, Catherine returns home. She is now a refined "lady" with a huge change in her appearance and manners. On her stay at the Lintons place she became more close to Edgar. She was enticed by Edgars wealth and blonde beauty. Heathcliff on the other hand has grown more ragged and dirty. Still, Catherine's feeling for Heathcliff are far more passionate. But, Heathcliff envies Edgar, his appearance and prospects with Catherine, and decide to avenge Hindley for the present condition of him.

At this juncture, Nelly Dean interrupts her story, Lockwood insists her to narrate it with minute details and requests not to leave out any details.

Nelly Dean continues the story of the Earnshaw family. In the following summer, Hindley's wife Frances Earnshaw gives birth to a baby boy. As she was sickly and consumptive she passes away within a year. Later, Hareton was raised by Nelly Dean. Hindley grieving the passing away of his wife addicts to alcoholism.

Catherine on the other hand, attempts to balance the relationship with Heathcliff and Linton Children. It became very difficult for her to handle the relations as neither sides like the other. At this moment, Catherine quarrels with Edgar, paradoxically they become more intimate thereafter.

Catherine looking for advice reveals to Nelly that Edgar has proposed to her for marriage. She has accepted the proposal, even though she loves Heathcliff. Given the social situation, Catherine cannot marry Heathcliff. She believes that marrying Edgar would secure Heathcliff's future. Heathcliff overhears the conversation of Nelly and Catherine, except for her declaration of love for him. Heathcliff, with the feeling of rejection, leaves the Heights. Devastated by the absence and loss of Heathcliff, Catherine becomes seriously ill. For the next three years, Catherine heard any word from Heathcliff, and she marries Edgar. Here ends the first of Mrs. Dean's story.

After four weeks after a prolonged illness due to his walk in the snow, Lockwood approaches Nelly Dean to continue the story. When she starts the story again, Edgar and Catherine's joys of the marriage ends with the return of Heathcliff to Wuthering Heights. He is now a transformed, well-mannered man. He is tall and muscular now; the changes are visible in his appearance. Overjoyed by his presence, Catherine insists Edgar accept him into the family. But Edgar is jealous of her feelings for Heathcliff. Edgar's sister, Isabella, becomes infatuated with Heathcliff and accuses her sister-in-law of dominating him. Meanwhile, Heathcliff stays at Wuthering Heights with Hindley Earnshaw, who, even after knowing the danger, has included Heathcliff in the card games, hoping to win some money from him.

On his next visit to Linton's, Heathcliff meets Isabella and kisses her in the garden. Catherine is upset and quarrels with Heathcliff, and the entire scene becomes violent with Edgar and Heathcliff. Edgar orders him not to come to the house again. Catherine being so upset, locks herself in her room. By the Nelly Dean enters Catherine's room, she is feverish with restlessness. Taking advantage of the illness of Catherine, Isabella elopes with Heathcliff to escape the sight of the family members. Nelly Dean could make out her absence in the house but told no one as the family was already in pain. Catherine begins to slowly recover after the long illness. Meanwhile, Heathcliff and Catherine return to Wuthering Heights. Apparently, now Isabella realised the cruelty and evil nature of Heathcliff.

Though Isabella's brother does not want any communication between the two families, Nelly Dean often visits Wuthering Heights to see Isabella. Heathcliff desires to see Catherine, and he always wants her to miss him. He says to Nelly Dean that Edgar can never love Catherine as passionately as he does and indicates that he would kill Edgar if she didn't miss him. Nelly

finally understands his threat and agrees to carry a letter. Having altered physically and mentally by the illness, Catherine is withdrawn and restless. Heathcliff, soon after seeing her, can make out the signs of early death. She complains of having broken her heart, and she wishes they would never be parted. She gives birth to a premature infant, young Catherine and dies. Heathcliff, who has been waiting in the garden vigilant, knew about the death of Catherine much before announced by Nelly Dean. He begs Catherine to haunt him, not to leave him alone in this world.

Isabella informs of the violent fight between Hindley and Heathcliff. She escapes from the Heights and five months later gives birth to Linton in the south of London. Hindley, now turned 27, dies. It is informed that Heathcliff owns Wuthering Heights and Earnshaw's son Hareton is penniless and completely dependent on Heathcliff for everything. Twelve years later. Cathy is now grown up. She confines herself to home and never goes far from the Grange. Isabella nearing death, calls Edgar and handover her son Linton to him.

Edgar returns home with his nephew Linton, and he is pale, delicate, sickly and quite moody. Cathy decides to take care of him. However, Heathcliff demands Edgar to return his son immediately. The next day Nelly takes Linton to Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff decides never to harm him as he is the only source to inherit the Linton's land. In the meanwhile, Cathy wanted to help Linton recover from his prolonged illness. However, Heathcliff demands her to visit him too often with the intention of letting them fall in love with one another to acquire the Linton's land. On the next visit, Heathcliff devices a plan to kidnap young Cathy and not to release her until she marries Linton. The devastating incident of Cathy's kidnap makes Edgar health deteriorate. The locked up Nelly was released at this moment to attend top dying Edgar.

Cathy also manages to escape from Wuthering Heights to attend to her father in his last hours. Edgar breathes his last. The evening after the funeral, Heathcliff demands Cathy to return. In the meantime, Heathcliff is haunted by Catherine; he can feel her spirit, he is tormented, and Catherine refuses to show herself to him. A very short time after this incident, young Linton dies, Cathy is forced to live in Heights. Heathcliff now owns the property at Heights and Granges. The chapter concludes with Nelly Dean's story.

Lockwood, after recovering from a long illness rides to Wuthering Heights and tell Heathcliff that he doesn't wish to stay any longer on the Grange at the end of this year. He also

notices the unchanged environs of Heights and the members of the household. Now, Catherine has found a new soulmate in Hareton, Heathcliff, over the years, has grown anxious, restless and troubled. Lockwood notices the drastic changes in the mental and physical attitude of Heathcliff. After eight months, in September, Mr. Lockwood visits Wuthering Heights to pay off his accounts. He learns that Heathcliff has been dead for three months now. Nelly describes Cathy and Hareton friendship, which has developed at the time of Heathcliff's alienation from the family. Nelly continues the tale and elaborates on how Heathcliff's behaviour changed on the verge of his death. Heathcliff was tormented by the presence of Catherine; he felt Catherine's presence in young Cathy, Hareton and whatever he saw.

Heathcliff turns restless and anxious. He stops eating and sleeping; he is seen restlessly roaming around the countryside and home. Finally, Nelly discovers Heathcliff dead on Catherine's bed. As he wished, he was buried next to the grave of Catherine. Back home, young Catherine and Hareton decide to marry in the next year and move to Thrushcross Grange to begin a new life.

### **3.2.3 Characters**

#### **Catherine Earnshaw:**

She is considered one of the finest characters of Wuthering heights. She is the daughter of Mr. Earnshaw. She is known throughout the novel as a beautiful, passionate and destructive heroine. She grows up with Heathcliff, an adopted child whom Mr. Earnshaw brings home from Liverpool. Under the tyrannical rule of her older brother, during their orphaned adolescence, their friendship strengthened. Catherine falls in love with Heathcliff so intensely that she claims they are the same person. She finds her soulmate in the brooding, dark Heathcliff but chooses to marry a much weaker man than destroys their happiness.

However, due to her desire for social advancement, dominance and impulsion, Cathy motivates to marry gentle, pampered Edgar Linton. She is torn between her wild passion and social ambition, which results in misery to both of the men who love her. She grows weak and emotional when rejected Heathcliff leaves the Heights. Upon his return a year later to the heights, arouses uncontrollable jealousy in her husband. Following violent arguments, Cathy embraces her own end through rage and hunger. Catherine dies in childbirth; the presence of her spirit figuratively and literally haunts the rest of the novel. Farmers claim to see her ghost in the moors, Heathcliff is tortured by her memory. The narrator, Mr. Lockwood, encounters the



frightening dream figure. Cathy's tragedy repetitively haunts till the last in the life of her daughter.

**Heathcliff:**

He is an orphan boy brought to Wuthering Heights by Mr. Earnshaw. He is considered one of the more passionate and revengeful hero in the novel. Mystery connected to his origin turns out to be a social outcast in the landed nobility. After the death of Mr. Earnshaw, Hindley abuses Heathcliff and treats him as a servant. His impoverished adolescence makes him ill-tempered. He is Catherine's spiritual and physical equal. However, when she accepts Edgar Linton's attention, he leaves the Heights. After a gap of one year, he returns rich and educated, his arrival destroys the steadiness of Cathy's marriage. His revengeful act is evident when he elopes with Isabella Linton to destroy her brother Edgar. Back in Wuthering Heights, he lures Hindley into gambling to hold the rights of Wuthering Heights. Further, he takes out his revenge on Hindley, Catherine and their respective children. He is a powerful, fierce and cruel man. He attains fortune and extraordinary powers to acquire Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights. He is seen as a weak man at the end of the novel as the memory of Catherine keeps haunting him. His thirst for revenge is sensed only when he nears his own death, a final reunion with his ghostly beloved.

**Lockwood:**

Lockwood's narration forms the frame narrative strategy used by the novelist. He is considered the second-hand narrator of the novel. *Wuthering Heights* involves a major part of the story recorded in his diary. The story that he heard from Nelly is recorded as a diary entry when he was Heathcliff's tenant. He acts as an intermediary between the reader and Nelly. Lockwood is a young gentleman from a more domesticated region of England. He rents the old Linton estate from Heathcliff and grows his curiosity towards the landlord. He is seen throughout the novel as a passive listener, confining to his bed with a cold. His role as an outsider and attempts at gaining the inside information affects the plot directly.

**Nelly Dean:**

Nelly Dean is the chief narrator of Wuthering Heights. As a housekeeper of the household, she is deeply involved in narrating the account of events that occurred at Wuthering Heights to Mr. Lockwood. She is a compassionate, intelligent and sensible woman. She is a strong local woman whose nature contrasts sharply with the passions of her subjects in the story. She grew up in the

Earnshaw household alongside Hindley and Catherine. She served as Catherine's maid in her marriage. She is a critical observer who narrates the occurrences of the Heights with minute details. After Cathy's death, she assumes the new charge as the nursemaid of Young Catherine. She is the main narrator of the novel; she has got strong feelings for her characters in the story that complicates the narration. She was also a witness to the ghostly and strange death of Heathcliff.

### **Edgar Linton:**

Edgar Linton is an ideal gentleman. He is a soft character controlled completely by his wife, Cathy. Catherine describes him as "rich," "handsome," "cheerful," and "pleasant to be with." His gentlemanly attitude proves useless when he clashes with Heathcliff. The gentle, fearful nature Edgar contrasts with the passions of vengeful Heathcliff. He is seen as a character who suffers from the illness and rages of his wife. When Catherine dies, he isolates and devotes his life to his daughter. Heathcliff kidnaps his adolescent daughter Catherine to destroy his happiness; this devastating incident leaves Edgar in grief to accept his death.

### **Isabella Linton:**

Isabella is the younger sister of Edgar Linton. She falls in love with Heathcliff despite Edgar's prohibitions and marries him. She is a selfish and irresponsible young woman. For her, Heathcliff is a romantic character. Having fallen in love with Heathcliff, she ignores Cathy's serious illness and ruins her life. After realising the cruelty of Heathcliff, she prepares to counter him with her viciousness and escapes from Heights during Cathy's funeral. She moves to the south and gives birth to a son. She dies twelve years later. Heathcliff never reciprocates the feelings and treat her as a tool to avenge the Linton family.

### **Hindley Earnshaw:**

Hindley Earnshaw is Cathy's brother and Mr. Earnshaw's son. He is jealous of Heathcliff. After the death of Mr. Earnshaw, he tries to ruin him and treats Heathcliff like a servant. He reduces Heathcliff to a very miserable condition by terminating his education and forcing him to work in the fields. He falls into bad ways after the death of Catherine. When Heathcliff returns to Wuthering Heights as a rich, educated man, Hindley takes him as a master to satisfy his greed for gambling. Hindley loses everything he had for cards. After the death of his wife Frances after giving birth to Hareton, Hindley leads a violent drunken existence under the rule of Heathcliff.

**Catherine Linton:**

Catherine Linton is regarded as the heroine of the second part of the novel. She is the daughter of Edgar Linton and Catherine. She manifests the gentleness of Edgar and the arrogance of Catherine. Her gentleness and arrogance are felt as a devoted daughter in her childhood and enforced residence at Heights, respectively. She was kidnapped by Heathcliff when she was sixteen to marry his dying son, Linton Heathcliff. The incident also had a profound effect on the death of Edgar. After the death of Linton Heathcliff, her miserable life at Heights begins, which is a sort of parallel to Catherine's under a tyrannical brother. She is soon widowed and orphaned with no inheritance. Later, she discovers a new love in rough and illiterate cousin Hareton. After marrying Hareton at the end of the story, she becomes Catherine Earnshaw.

**Hareton Earnshaw:**

Hareton Earnshaw is the son of Hindley Earnshaw. He is also Catherine's nephew. His mother, Frances Earnshaw, dies soon after giving birth; later, his father Hindley lapses into alcoholism. Hareton grows up unloved and angry. After Hindley's death, Heathcliff takes responsibility of Hareton. Heathcliff raises him as an illiterate servant, just as Hindley had done to Heathcliff. Thus, Heathcliff uses Hareton to avenge Hindley. One can make a parallel between the downtrodden Hareton and sullen young Heathcliff. Upon the arrival of Catherine Linton to Heights, ill-tempered and illiterate Hareton's desire to improve himself was brought to the fore. Before Heathcliff can destroy that reunion, he dies a ghostly death, Hareton marries young Catherine, and Wuthering Heights is returned to the rightful heir of the second generation's true hero and heroine.

**Linton Heathcliff:**

Linton Heathcliff is the sickly son of Heathcliff and Isabella. He is raised for twelve years by his mother in London and meets his father Heathcliff when he is thirteen years old when he was taken to Heights after her death. He is weak and constantly ill. He is looked like a product of an unhappy union of Heathcliff and Isabella. He helps his father Heathcliff in kidnapping young Catherine and marries against her will, which indicates his fear for Heathcliff. Heathcliff always despised him and treated him derisively. Heathcliff used Linton as a tool to take control over Thrushcross Grange.

**3.3 Learning Outcomes**

After reading this novel, students will learn about the overall analysis of *Wuthering Heights*. While reading the novel, the reader would be able to understand the social issues of the time, especially concerned with patriarchal power and brutality. The text exhibits the subordination of women and the injustice of inheritance law prevalent in the Victorian period.

*Wuthering Heights* is related to the extreme opposites present in *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*. The readers can easily comprehend the overarching binaries of human and animal, civilised and savage, love and hate, light and dark and life and death as a thematic concern of the novelist in the time of difficulties. The reader is also oriented in the traditions of writing present in the Victorian period, and the tremendous changes brought about by the women writers in the era in representing the social realities of the period.

The students can understand the narrative strategy used by the novelist to narrate a story of *Wuthering Heights*, wherein the novelist uses an experimentative frame narrative strategy. The frame narrative is a literary technique that serves as a companion piece to a story within a story. The two-narrative point of view of Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean provides insights about the two households of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* from insider and outsider perspectives.

The readers are expected to uncover the hidden elements of gender, class and race through the close analysis of the narrative of *Wuthering Heights*. The novel by and large explicitly speaks on the race, class and gender present in the Victorian period, the same is minutely narrated by the novelist in *Wuthering Heights*. The students will also learn about the prevailing customs related to inheritance law, the historical and legal documents indirectly referred to in the novel reveal the social and economic issues related to women's property rights and child custody.

### 3.4 Glossary

**Pseudonym:** a fictitious name, especially one used by an author.

**Canonical:** the works of a particular author or artist that are recognized as genuine.

**Realism:** an artistic or literary movement or style characterized by the representation of people or things as they actually are.

**Inheritance:** a thing that is inherited ((of money, property, or a title) received as an heir

at the death of the previous holder.

**Gothic:** often deal with something dark, and sometimes evil and satanic portents.

These symbols may have been adapted from various cultures, such as the Germanic, Pagan, Christian, and Celtic symbols.

**Frame Narrative:** a literary narrative strategy to tell a story within a story.

**Patriarchy:** a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it.

**Supernatural:** (of a manifestation or event) attributed to some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature.

**Magnum Opus :** a work of art, music, or literature that is regarded as the most important or best work that an artist, composer, or writer has produced.

**Pristine:** in its original condition; unspoiled.

### 3.5 Sample Questions

#### 3.5.1 Objective Questions

1. Earnshaw found Heathcliff in \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Boston                      (b) London  
(c) Gimmerton                (d) Liverpool
2. How is Heathcliff related to Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw?  
(a) He is an adopted orphan.      (b) He is their son.  
(c) He is caught on their land.      (d) He is their nephew.
3. What happens while Catherine is recovering from her illness?  
(a) Edgar flees from his home.      (b) Isabella gives birth.  
(c) Heathcliff and Isabella elope.      (d) Hindley kills Hareton.
4. How many chapters are there in the Wuthering Heights?  
(a) 54                              (b) 24

(c) 34 (d) 21

5. To which Shakespearean character does Lockwood compare himself when he is accused of stealing?

- (a) Macbeth (b) King Lear  
(c) Richard (d) Antonio

6. The main narrators of *Wuthering Heights* are\_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Catherine and Heathcliff (b) Mr. Lockwood and Nelly  
(c) Mr. Earnshaw and Catherine (d) Hindley and Edgar

7. Who is Linton Heathcliff's mother?

- (a) Cathy Linton (b) Nelly Dean  
(c) Isabella (d) Zillah

8. How long has Ellen Dean lived at Thrushcross Grange?

- (a) 10 years (b) 18 years  
(c) 15 years (d) 16 years

9. What happens to Cathy the first time she goes to Thrushcross Grange?

- (a) She catches a cold (b) She cuts her arm on a shard of broken glass  
(c) She falls down a rocky hill (d) A dog bites her

10. Who took care of Heathcliff when he had measles as a child?

- (a) Nelly Dean (b) Cathy Earnshaw  
(c) Hindley Earnshaw (d) Mr. Earnshaw

**3.5.2** Short Answer Questions (No of Questions - 05) [Questions that could be answered in 200 words]

1. Discuss the theme of Love and Hate in *Wuthering Heights*?
2. How would you describe Heathcliff?
3. Discuss on the narrative strategy of *Wuthering Heights*?
4. Describe Hareton Earnshaw as a boy.
5. How is the bitterness and hatred in the story finally overcome?

**3.5.3** Long Answer Questions (No of Questions - 03) [Questions that could be answered in 500 words]

1. Comment on the significance of the novel's dream sequences?
2. Discuss the role of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. Is he a protagonist or an antagonist?
3. Comment on the representation of Gender and power in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*?

### 3.6 Suggested Readings

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## **Unit – 4: *Wuthering Heights*: Themes, Narrative Technique, and Critical Appreciation**

“A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.”

— Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929)

### **Structure**

4.0 Introduction

4.1 Objectives

4.2 *Wuthering Heights*: Themes, Narrative Technique, and Critical Appreciation

4.2.1 The Historical Background to Novel

4.2.2 *Wuthering Heights* as a Novel

4.2.3 *Wuthering Heights*: Themes

4.2.4 *Wuthering Heights*: Narrative Technique

4.2.5 *Wuthering Heights*: Critical Appreciation

4.3 Learning Outcomes

4.4 Glossary

4.5 Sample Questions

4.6 Suggested Readings

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### **4.0 Introduction**

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The importance and creative genius of Emily Bronte (1818-1848) attracts the readers across time and age even after two centuries. Her interesting themes, plot, gripping and unputdownable narrative of her only novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) always intrigue students of literature. This is one of the best classical novels of English literature such as *Great Expectations* (1862) by Charles Dickens, *Middlemarch* (1871) by George Elliot, *Joseph Andrews* (1742) by Henry



Fielding, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte, etc. Although this novel did not receive wide popularity in its initial days due to its unexpected content in Victorian English society and as it was written by a woman writer. The novel started getting popular posthumously. It was after the introduction and preface by Charlotte Bronte, Emily's sister, the novel started receiving the attention of the Victorian readers. It depicts the real picture of society, the growing industrialization and importance of England on the colonial world map led to the massive human mobility from rural to urban. The development projects, townships, industries, required a labor force from the rural areas. The upper classes continued to prosper whereas the middle class maintained morality and the low class faced poverty. The class consciousness continued to exist during the Victorian time as it reflects in the treatment of Heathcliff by Catherine and Hindley in this novel and Catherine's rejection to Heathcliff. Under the rule of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) the social and religious values become more important. The novel tried to capture dominant themes of this era. The novel is known for its vivid picture of industrial Victorian society which was, on the one hand, reigning and gaining world power on the other hand it was also suffering from the perils of industrialization, poverty, disease, exploitation of workers, children, and women. Amidst all these childhoods, love, sufferings, and revenge intrigued readers. Besides these themes, the novel has organized multilayer and modern narrative techniques, themes, and settings. It is "a highly imaginative work of passion and hate set on the Yorkshire moors. It received terrible reviews when first published but came to be considered one of the finest novels in the English Language."

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## 4.1 Objectives

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The present unit aims to introduce the major themes, narrative technique and critical appreciation of this novel. It intended to enhance student's critical ability while enjoying reading this novel. The discussion began with historical background and how Emily emerged as creative writer. What are the factors that influence the life of the author and how does her life influence her literary creation? It also introduces narrative techniques in novel writings, what are the characteristics and what technique did Emily Bronte apply while writing this novel? The ultimate

purpose of this unit is to generate critical thinking among the students of English literature to apply existing theories, concepts, and develop self-thinking while studying any text. For example, who narrates the story, why, and how and what was the socio-cultural conditions of that time and how it is relevant in the contemporary context, what approach or theory can be applied or can be configured, etc. These some of the self-assessments while reading any text will help students to develop a more critical understanding of the text.

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## **4.2      *Wuthering Heights*: Themes, Narrative Technique, and Critical Appreciation**

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### **4.2.1 The Historical Background to Novel:**

The Bronte family was a family of God-gifted creative genius. Emily's family members were the artists and writers. Emily Bronte was born on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1818 as the fifth child out of six children of the Bronte family in a village of Thornton near the west of Bradford in Yorkshire. Maria and Elizabeth were eldest to her but died early. Her brother named Patrick Branwell was a painter as well as a writer. Her father and mother were writers too. Charlotte and Anne were her younger sisters who contributed with her in poetry and other imaginative writings set in their imaginary counties/islands of Angria and Gondal under pseudonyms Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Like Christopher Marlow, Emily also died quite early of tuberculosis in December 1848. Emily and her siblings grew creative style through their childhood stories that they composed in the Angria and Gondal, the imagined places of the Bronte children like that of R.K. Narayan's Malgudi and Thomas Hardy's Wessex. But importantly very few elements are drawn from Emily's life in this novel unlike her sister Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Like the setting of desolate existence of the Bronte family in Howarth, Yorkshire becomes the moor site and their orphan life remains dominant in *Wuthering Heights*.

### **4.2.2 *Wuthering Heights*: Themes**

*Wuthering Heights* is loaded with the various theme of the Victorian era and yet it can be read and interpreted through the lens of contemporary critical approaches such as formalism,

historicism, feminism, psychoanalysis, etc. It engages in the theme of love, revenge, industrialization, child predicaments, bildungsroman, patriarchy, middle-class morality, class structure, etc. Her personal life did much influence her novel at least. Hild D. Spear (1985) writes, “Unlike her sisters, Emily did not write her own experiences into her novel and neither Cowan Bridge nor the Pensionnat Heger has any significance in the plot of *Wuthering Heights*, though the history of Law Hill before it became a school undoubtedly provided the seeds for the story of Heathcliff. It is not necessary, however, to search for sources, for the novel is a great work of the imagination and should be appreciated as such” (6).

The novel is loaded with multiple themes. Hinda Spear observes, “It is about love and jealousy and revenge, about loss and desire; it is about selfishness and self-willedness, about cruelty, violence, and fear, about the evils of drunkenness, about the bringing up of children and education; ; it is about books and religion, about freedom and subjugation, about untamed nature and the conventions of society, about happiness and misery, about alienation, about sickness and death; it is about the strange and the supernatural, about the homely and the familiar; and finally, it is about a spiritual accord which defies separation and death to achieve reconciliation in a life beyond the grave” (37). The novel opens with a terrifying and mysterious scene with a bloody nightmare of Lockwood. He sees a nightmare while sleeping – he also sees the ghostly child who was trying to terrify him. We see the references to death and ghost in other chapters too.

Love is another important and dominant theme throughout this novel along with revenge. Heathcliff was “a dirty, ragged, black-haired child” whom Mr. Earnshaw picked up from the streets of Liverpool, a “gipsy brat” (Chapter 4). Although he was cleaned and dressed like a wealthy child and loved by Mr. Earnshaw, he was never accepted by the children in *Wuthering Heights*. He was always treated by his supposed siblings Catherine and Hindley badly. Heathcliff was nurtured as a blood son of Mr. Earnshaw when Hindley was sent to college for study. But the sky of sorrow falls on Heathcliff when Mr. Earnshaw died. Hindley returned to the *Wuthering Heights* as a head of the family and Heathcliff was reduced to merely a servant deprived of education and other privileges and sent to work on the farm. He was also banned from *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine has a soft corner for Heathcliff and his love for her is inviolable. Heathcliff was a hope and comfort for her but it all broke when he hears that Catherine will be interested to marry Edgar Linton for social prominence and marrying Heathcliff would be against the social standard of her time. Although he acquires a Victorian

standard – ‘a self-made man’ and a fortune but meanwhile Catherine married Edgar Linton. He intends to take revenge on Hindley, Catherine, and Linton and their children Hareton and young Catherine and ultimately acquire both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange of Edgar. Catherine and Hindley die unexpectedly early but the revenge of Heathcliff continues on their children. He mistreated and revenged on Hareton, son of Hindley, by upbringing him as ‘illiterate’. But there seems to be growing care and love between Hareton and Heathcliff in later part. Heathcliff warned Hareton not to love the younger Catherine, a daughter of Catherine, whom Heathcliff loved. Because he was afraid that she will also leave Hareton as elder Catherine ditch Heathcliff. But they continue to love each other. Moreover, rejecting the wishes and hurting the sentiment of Hareton was becoming difficult for Heathcliff because “for Heathcliff, Hareton becomes an alter ego, a second self” (Hilda 36). Heathcliff says that Hareton is “a personification of my youth, not a human being ... [his] aspect was the ghost of my immortal love, of my wild endeavors to hold my right, my degradation, my pride, my happiness, and my anguish” (Chapter 33). Hilda Spear further writes that “To destroy Hareton's hopes was like destroying his own. In the love of the two younger people, he finds a kind of vicarious fulfillment which seems to bring him closer to Catherine” (36).

Victorian England was class conscious which was reflected in the treatment of the children of Mr. Earnshaw, Hindley and Catherine, more obviously in Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton who was also the owner of Thrushcross Grange. Having estate, servant and lineage were dominant social factors in categorizing individuals and their decisions. Although we might see the natural responses and behavior of the characters (The Earnshaw, Catherine, Heathcliff, and Hindley) in Wuthering Heights which were later altered by other factors such as revenge, class, greed, and love, and the character of the Thrushcross Grange represents the culture, civility, reputation, and social status.

The supernatural elements are another one of the interesting themes that makes this novel outstanding. Hilda writes that there are scattered references of supernatural elements such as “magically devil ... a herd of possessed swine” (Chapter I) “ministering angel beneficent fairy ... good fairy ... devil's name ... Black Art ... modelled in wax and clay ... little witch. ... ghost ... cursing” (Chapter 2). In the nightmare of Lockwood, he sees the ghost. There are also references to Fairy Tales. Catherine sees her face staring at her. Heathcliff also had a ghostly encounter with the spirit of Catherine. She also haunted Lockwood in his narration. Nelly describes how the

people near Wuthering Hounds also witness that how Heathcliff is haunting the heights and moors. These elements also contribute to the gothic setting and construction of the story.

#### **4.2.3 *Wuthering Heights*: Narrative Technique**

The novel, *Wuthering Heights*, is narrated mostly by two narrators in the first person point of view i.e., the visitor cum tenant of Thrushcross Grange, John Lockwood, and the caretaker for Wuthering Heights, Nelly Dean. There are also multilayered narratives from other major characters. Lockwood's narration plays important role in introducing the background, locals, the nineteenth-century English society, and introducing major characters. His narration was like an old personal diary with sophistication and literary style of narrative language – noting or telling the story in back and forth – unconventional flashback manners. Foreshadowing is another important technique of narration that Emily used throughout the novel to engage the reader and create suspense. Foreshadowing gives a hint and leaves the reader to explore that hint in the latter part of the novel/story. Although they narrated the story of both Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights, here comes the question of the reliability of the narration. Did Lockwood narrate whatever Nelly told him or did he omit something which he may not have liked perhaps? Or did nelly tell everything as it is? This leads to the unreliability of the narrator. But overall, the readers enjoy the story of *Wuthering Heights*.

#### **4.2.4 *Wuthering Heights*: Critical Appreciation**

*Wuthering Heights* is one of the topmost novels of English literature for centuries because of its story, style, and society. The human nature reflected in the character's behavior shows the society of that time. Love, revenge, and class consciousness are three dominant themes that led to the ebbs and flow in the story. Although Heathcliff was brought up with the Earnshaw children and Catherine loved him so much, but it was the class that affected her decision to marry Heathcliff and she married an owner of Thrushcross Grange. He received some sympathy earlier but he turned out to be an anti-hero of this novel. His received sympathy because of his being orphan and humble background in the beginning of this novel, but the continues shadow of failure generated a monster in him in the later part. The unclear origin of Heathcliff created further suspense in the novel – is he really an orphan or gypsy or is Mr. Earnshaw is his father? This also led some critics to criticize this novel of being incestuous while addressing the Heathcliff and Catherine relation because they are somehow (half) siblings.

Gothic elements such as gothic architecture, moor side, ghost, spirit, blood, etc. contributed to the classical and more engaging and intriguing part of this novel. This novel can be read through the formalist approach where the themes, characterization, metaphor, narrative style, and structure becomes more important rather than looking for historical context or autobiographical details – as disseminated by the formalist critics during 1920s. there are also elements of psychoanalysis in the characters such as Catherine represents Id, Heathcliff Ego and Edgar represents superego in *Wuthering Heights*. the feminist reading of this novel is also possible as Emily Bronte as one of the early women writers has to face lot of difficulties to be established as writer or write a fiction which was considered as men centric domain. She along with her two sisters had to change name and publish novels and poems.

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### 4.3 Learning Outcomes

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This unit critically describes the novel, what are the major themes, narrative techniques, and critical appreciation. It discussed how love, revenge, gothic elements, social class, etc dominate theme story. It also introduces what are the narrative techniques applied in this novel and it also explains those techniques such as first-person point of view and foreshadowing. By introducing critical appreciation part in this unit, the readers are briefly introduced the application of various theories and approaches to this novel such feminism, psychoanalysis, and formalism.

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### 4.4 Glossary

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#### **First-person point of view:**

The first-person point of view/first-person narration is a technique of storytelling in the first person such as using “I” or “we” or “us” as the narrator of the event or incident of the story. For example, the novel is with the narrator Lockwood who says, “1801. - I have just returned from a

visit to my landlord—the solitary neighbor that I shall be troubled with. This is certainly a beautiful country!” In this, the narrator “I” [Lockwood ] is a first-person storyteller. In this technique, the first-person narrator could be a protagonist, re-teller of story, observer, witness, peripheral character, etc.

### **Foreshadowing:**

A foreshowing is a literary narrative technique or device which gives a hint/indicates something which is going to happen in near future in the story. It creates interest and suspense for the reader to get engaged in the story to know what happens next. It may trick readers' expectations.

### **Gothic Novel:**

Gothic novels are famous for their gothic architecture, mystery, terror, imaginations, supernatural elements, setting, and environment. It was quite popular during the time of the eighteenth century. Some of the notable novels include Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1765), Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *Italian* (1797), Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), and also *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Bronte.

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## **4.5 Sample Questions**

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### **4.5.1 Objective Questions:**

1. Match the correct pair

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| A. <i>Wuthering Heights</i> by Emily Bronte     | i. 1847   |
| B. <i>Great Expectations</i> by Charles Dickens | ii. 1861  |
| C. <i>Middlemarch</i> by George Elliot          | iii. 1871 |
| D. <i>Joseph Andrews</i> by Henry Fielding      | iv. 1742  |
- (a) a. i, b. ii, c. iii, d. iv.  
(b) b. i, a. ii, c. iii, d. iv.  
(c) c. i, b. ii, a. iii, d. iv.  
(d) d. ii, a. I, b. iii, c. iv.

1. The first line of the novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte begins with
- a. Month

- b. Year
  - c. Day
  - d. Time
- 2. Who tells the story of a strange denizen place of Heathcliff which becomes the first part of the novel *Wuthering Heights*?
  - a. Heathcliff
  - b. Nelly Dean
  - c. Lockwood
  - d. Earnshaw
- 3. Which of the following character is not an orphan?
  - a. Dorothea Brooke (*Middlemarch*)
  - b. Heathcliff (*Wuthering Heights*)
  - c. Joseph Andrews (*Joseph Andrews*)
  - d. Pip (*Great Expectations*)
- 4. Why did Catherine like Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*?
  - a. Because Heathcliff was a colored orphan, and she did not believe in racialism as her brother
  - b. Because she likes his boldness, independent nature and enjoys his company even in times of grief.
  - c. Her brother Hindley used to mistreat him and Heathcliff had revenge for Hindley.
  - d. Because Mr. Earnshaw instructed her to fall in love with Heathcliff
- 5. Which of the following is not the theme of *Wuthering Heights*?
  - a. Love
  - b. Revenge
  - c. Class
  - d. Homosexuality
- 6. Heathcliff inherited Wuthering Heights by lending money to drunkard Hindley and also inherited Thrushcross Grange by marrying Isabella now he is after the property and obsessed with the money of elder Catherine in such a way that he started\_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Plotting against her



- b. Torturing her
  - c. Speaking to her ghost
  - d. Speaking to the ghost of Earnshaw
- 7. Who said these lines to whom? “Mr. Lockwood, your new tenant, sir. I do myself the honor of calling as soon as possible after my arrival, to express the hope that I have not inconvenienced you by my perseverance in soliciting the occupation of Thrushcross Grange: I heard yesterday you had had some thoughts—”
  - A. Nelly Dean to Heathcliff
  - B. Lockwood to Heathcliff
  - C. Heathcliff to readers
  - D. Nelly dean to reader
- 8. Heathcliff, a notorious hero of the *Wuthering Heights* dies of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Immense greed
  - b. Immense emotional distress
  - c. Fear of the ghost
  - d. Severe physical illness
- 9. Match the correct pair from *Wuthering Heights*:
 

Edger – Catharine – Younger Catherine

Isabella – Heathcliff – Linton

Hindley - Frances Earnshaw – \_\_\_\_\_? \_\_\_\_

  - a. Nelly Dean
  - b. Joseph
  - c. Hareton
  - d. Zillah
- 10. The narrative stories of *Wuthering Heights* are not in chronological order. They are scattered and moving in between the past and present. What technique did the novelist apply while narrating this novel?
  - (a) Monologues
  - (b) Cliffhanger
  - (c) Forshadowing
  - (d) Flashback

#### 4.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. How is John Lockwood?
2. What is foreshadowing in the narrative technique?
3. Briefly sketch the character of Heathcliff.

#### 4.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. What are the major themes in *Wuthering Heights*?
2. What are the narrative techniques Emily Bronte applied in *Wuthering Heights*?
3. What is a gothic novel? Illustrate this with some examples from *Wuthering Heights*.

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### 4.6 Suggested Readings

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#### 2.5. Suggested Readings

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2. Arthur Pollard, ed., *The Victorians*. Peter Bedrick Books, 1987.
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## **Unit – 5: Origin and Development of English Novel**

### **Structure**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

#### **5.1 Objectives**

#### **5.2 Origin and Development of English Novel**

##### **5.2.1 Commencement of English Novel**

##### **5.2.2 Definition and Origin of English Novel**

##### **5.2.3 Rise of English Novel in 18<sup>th</sup> Century**

##### **5.2.4 Four Wheels of the English Novel**

##### **5.2.5 English Novel in 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

##### **5.2.6 20<sup>th</sup> Century Novel: Trends in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Novel**

#### **5.3 Learning Outcomes**

#### **5.4 Glossary**

#### **5.5 Sample Questions**

#### **5.6 Suggested Readings**

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### **5.0 Introduction**

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The novel form reached its pinnacle stage in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The Novel became the most sought and popularly read form of literature. The novel form in this Century was called the modern Novel. Indeed, it was not until the 18<sup>th</sup> Century that people began to read and write the sort of books we now call “Novels.” By about 1770, the reading of novels had become a fashion—almost a ‘mania’ with ‘upper class’ women. The Novel had become what cinema became in the 1920s and 1930s: a gateway into the world of pleasant dreams.

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## 5.1 Objectives

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Objectives of this study of the Origin and Development of English Novel are as below:

- To read and understand the definition and development of English Novel.
- To appreciate and enjoy the various genres of English Novels.
- To understand the factors which facilitated the Rise of Novels in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.
- To acquaint the reader with the Pioneers of English Novel.
- To develop an aesthetic sense in the reader to have pleasure from reading.
- To enhance love of reading and understanding novel.

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## 5.2 Origin and Development of English Novel

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### 5.2.1 Commencement of English Novel:

The term Novel is derived from the Latin term word Novellus. English Novel gained popularity in Eighteenth Century, but it was practiced back to 612 BC when world's oldest literature *Epic of Gilgamesh* was authored. The next popular work in this form of literature is **Malory's** *Morte De' Arthur* which marks the beginning of the novel in England. It is a sort of compilation of the various legends that had the legendary Arthur as their hero.

Another great work before the Elizabethan era in which we find the traces of modern novel is **Thomas More's** *Utopia* 1516. However, it owes its inspiration, basically, to Plato's *Republic*, the Greek philosopher's dream of an ideal state. The books also mark the shift in English thought. It is an epoch-making work which has been variously praised as a masterpiece of English humanism.

Medieval romance gradually died out, and about the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century its place was gradually taken by Italian prose tales or *novelle*. These tales were novels (miniature) not merely in name, but also in their nature. **Boccaccio** (1313-1375) collected short stories in his *Decameron*.

***Check your Progress:***

1. Which book marks the beginning of novel in England?
2. Which book inspired Thomas More to write *Utopia*?
3. Which novel is based on the legend of Arthur?

### **5.2.2 Definition and Origin of English Novel:**

The story-telling instinct is primordial to all mankind. First stories were told by the wandering singer, bards or minstrels, story-teller carried tales to all parts in the Middle Ages which is still into practice.

According to Oxford Learner's Dictionary, novel is "a story long enough to fill a complete book, in which the characters and events are usually imaginary". Stories first began to be written down in the late middle-ages and the early modern age. They were either romances or allegories. Allegories helped common man to understand the truth in Bible or any other religious book. There were other kinds of stories that circulated in England. Chiefly the story of King Arthur and his Knights of round table. These were stories which were part of the local English culture and about each knight. Even the story of the Legend of Troy which we get from Iliad and Homer and is given to us in various versions. Iliad gives us many heroes like Achilles, Hector, Ulysses or Agamemnon. So, it gives us a bunch of stories which one can connect it with in England to King Arthur, in France Charlemagne which were in circulation in European Continent. It later travelled from one culture to another or one country to another.

Prose was the most preferred style of language which was ordinarily spoken and accepted. Novel form started as a collection of short stories which later gained popularity.

As mentioned earlier that the romance came after epic form from France in 12<sup>th</sup> Century. The most popular work of this genre is Malory's *Morted' Arthur* which deals with chivalry, knighthood and honor. Chaucer wrote 'Tale of Melibeus' and the 'Parson's Tale' in prose form.

*Don Quixote*, from Spanish and Cervantes is novel *Don Quixote* is seen as central to the rise of the novel in England. It came to England in translation and it comes at the same time where Cervantes and Shakespeare living at the same time.

Later, comes Boccaccio who also produced prose works. Boccaccio produced "prose tales of amorous adventure, *The Decameron*" (Compton- Rickett, 1995,p.105). Hence, Italy is considered as home of Novel form.

### 5.2.3 Rise of English Novel in 18<sup>th</sup> Century:

Invention of printing press by William Caxton in the year 1476 helped people to publish and circulate stories. Then comes **Aphra Behn's** *Oroonoko: Or The History of the Royal Slave* (1688) is one major work of importance. **John Bunyan's** novel *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) which is allegorical in nature. It is an allegory about a pilgrim who is making his way to the city of God and the trials and the tribulations and the troubles that he encounters as he goes to heaven forms the story. Throughout his journey he meets people who are realistic. This novel has contributed in the rise of novel in English Literature.

We have three more writers of prominence in Elizabethan Age. They are **Thomas Delanie**, **Thomas Dekker** and **Thomas Nash**. **Thomas Delanie** and **Thomas Dekker** told realistic stories. Their characters were chiefly from Middle Class or Lower Middle Class. **Thomas Nash's** *The Unfortunate Traveler* is one of the most popular texts of the period. It is an account of a guy who goes travelling on the continent and all the adventures he encounters over there.

Later Sidney in *Arcadia* gave to prose some kind of formal order of verse. The other two significant developments were the founding of Royal Society and *The Authorized Version of*

*Bible* in 1611 authored by King James. It gave us a prose style which is particular to English and that prose rhythm shapes the prose rhythm of English prose for many centuries to follow.

Later on, Theatre dominated and Shakespeare, through his mixing of tragedy and comedy, introduced a similar strain in the traditional English novel.

**Daniel Defoe's** *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and **Jonathan Swift's** *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) perfected English prose as a vehicle for the novel. These are the earliest versions of novel genre. *Robinson Crusoe* is crucial because it tells us a story in prose about one man who was travelling get stranded upon an island, his life on that island and how he is rescued and how he comes back. This novel along with **Joseph Conrad's** *Heart of Darkness* (1899) becomes foundational texts for post-colonial critics and post-colonial writers. Robinson thinks that the island is uninhabited island. He meets the natives there and dominates them. He makes that island his and gets one native servant and names him as Friday. This as an earliest novel changed the way the novel was perceived during this time for its form and content. Many noteworthy novels came in abundance on similar topic and fashion. This novel and **Jonathan Swift's** *Gulliver's Travels* are emblematic also of the time. In 18<sup>th</sup> Century we could find were travelling all over the world. Not only explorers and discoverers but also ordinary men and women also travelled on ships across the world. This forms the beginning and shaping of British Empire. This text then reflects and endorses a mission that is civilizational and the one which is also connected to Empire building.

*Gulliver's Travels* is again a novel which tells the story of one-man Lemuel Gulliver who goes travelling and visits four places. He gives an account of how society is like and how it is different to the English culture. The novel is satirical of English society and the English human being. This novel is also promoted as children's book. In these two novels **Defoe** and **Swift** have exemplified as to how much can be done in a novel. They used prose as a vehicle to convey truths in the novel.

There were several reasons to make novel popular in 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

Many factors contributed to the rise of novel in the Eighteenth Century which made it a popular form of literature. Some of the major influencing factors are a) Industrial Revolution b) Literacy and c) Decline of Drama. It was in this century that reading novel became a matter of

status and fashion. It was ideal form to express and project the middle-class ideas, sense and sensibilities of those times. This age is also known for the characters like **Sir Roger De Coverley**, **Sir Andrew Freeport**, **Will Honeycomb** created and crafted by **Addison** and **Steele**.

Many critics are of the opinion that 18<sup>th</sup> century was the golden period of Novel. This age witnessed great advancement and experimentations in narration, plot, characterization, genres and so on.

- a) Industrial revolution helped in establishing more publishing houses. Books were published in cheaper rates and were first time affordable for middle class people. Even newspapers and magazines were easily accessible. Some novels appeared in magazines. Hasan (2015) observes, the industrial revolution “paved the way to the rise of the middle-class people”. Major writers selected characters from such section of the society with whom the readers could relate to.
- b) Literacy rate increased which was another major reason for the rise of novel. Many people started reading and visiting public libraries. Readers were coming to terms with the reality of life. The hardships of day today life made them more realistic. The characters too were portrayed in such a way that the readers used to emulate them. Major novelists like **Richardson**, **Fielding** and **Daniel Defoe** depicted characters naturally.
- c) Reading public were no more dreamers. They were idealistic and had given up reading romances which was left only for the royal or elite class of the society.
- d) The decline of drama paved way for the flowering of modern novel in 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Many writers and readers switched to novel. It was a remarkable shift from performance to reading.
- e) Periodicals also contributed for the popularity of English Novel. The ‘prose’ style adopted by Addison and Steele had an impact on the novels of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding.

As Ian Watts observes periodical essay, “Encouraged the rapid, in-attentive, almost unconscious kind of reading habit. It also further promoted reading culture in England.”

#### **5.2.4 Four Wheels of the English Novel:**



In 18<sup>th</sup> Century the genre of English novel reached its heights especially Four Writers i.e., Samuel Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne produced novels in abundance.

**Samuel Richardson** is considered as the “Father of English Novel”, who accidentally became a novelist at the age of 50 (fifty). He is revered for his two major works *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. His first novel *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded*(1740) became an instant hit. Richardson became popular overnight who has left indelible mark in the History of English literature and Novels in particular. He introduced ‘epistolary form of novel’ as a literary device. This type of novel is written in the form of series of letters for communication. This also ensured the development of character and the readers get an insight of the characters through these letters. It stands out of other novels because in this novel there is no third person narration. Narration can also be done through letters in which Pamela (eponymous) writes letters to her parents. She writes 7 volumes of letters to her parents in which she defends her beauty against her master Mr B who is determined to seduce her.

The novel ‘Pamela’ is studied as a sentimental novel, as it deals with the everyday life by sentiments but also as character study. It also enjoys as the first novel of feminine character i.e., *Pamela*. For this reason, also Richardson is called as the first modern novelist of 18<sup>th</sup> Century as his emphasis was on character development.

The novel is in two parts and is a story of Pamela who is 15 years old. She is the narrator of the story. She is working for a rich man known as Mr B. He is a rich man and a prodigal son who has a habit of seducing women repeatedly. He tries the same with Pamela too. He tries his best to seduce her including sexual assaults on her. Pamela doesn’t give her pioussness and she even doesn’t reveal it with others except Mrs. Jervis about the advancements of Mr. B. Pamela exchanges letters with Mrs. Jervis and Mr. B. Mr B gets so impressed by her virtue that he offers her a serious marriage proposal. Hence, it is subtitled as *Virtue Rewarded* because the virtue is rewarded.

His next novel ‘Clarissa’ (1748) is the longest novel in English Literature. In Indian English Literature **Vikram Seth’s** *A Suitable Boy* (1993) is considered as the longest novel. It is included among the 100 best novels in English Literature by the English daily newspaper, The Guardian. This novel is also an epistolary novel but this novel has a tragic end. In this novel

*Clarissa* is just 18 years old. In this novel too there is a male character named Mr H whose name is also not revealed like Mr B. It is also believed that these stories are real hence the real names are not revealed. She too goes through lots of hardships to prove her virtue. She shares her feelings and anxieties with her friends Anne Howe, Robert Lovelace and John Belford through letters.

**Henry Fielding** too is known for his two novels *Joseph Andrews*(1742) and *Tom Jones*(1749). Both these novels have the elements of the picaresque novel as well as the bildungsroman. Picaresque novel follows the character of a picaro or a rogue as he goes through various adventures. So, it's kind of episodic as well and eventually he comes to a happy ending where he succeeds or he is able to achieve some kind of some measure of happiness in life. The Bildungsroman shows us a child for young person growing up into adulthood and growing up into a society if initially he is at war with that society for the society is seen to be against him. Eventually he is integrated into that society he or she so both of his novels *Joseph Andrews* as well as *Tom Jones* features this young kind of hero who attend within the following this trajectory eventually becoming respectable members of the society. His novel 'Joseph Andrews' (1742) is considered as the first full-length novel in English literature.

*Tom Jones* by **Henry Fielding** (1749) is a classic English novel that captures the spirit of its age and whose famous characters have come to represent Augustan society in all its loquacious, turbulent, comic variety.

**Tobias Smollett**, introduced some new elements which were unutilized in English novel. He deals with the lives, incidents and adventures of sea and sailors. His first novel 'The Adventures of 'Roderick Random' (1748) which deals with the adventures of Rodrick, who is the author himself. Almost all his novels deal with the adventures of sea and sailors and are mostly autobiographical in nature.

**Laurence Sterne** is considered as the fourth wheel of a carriage, of the novel wain. His two novels are 'The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy' (1767) and second novel 'The Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy' (1768). He employed non-linear narrative technique unlike his contemporaries. In his novels we find no definite plot, neither beginning nor

middle nor an end. Such technique was named as 'Stream of Consciousness', which was further promoted by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

**Miss Fanny Burney** (1752-1842), the first of the women novelists, is an important figure in the history of English novel. She wrote four novels: *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, *Camilla* and *The Wanderer* but her fame rests mainly on the first two.

After the death of these for writers there was a barren period in English novel spanning 40 years other than **Goldsmith's** 'Vicar of Wakefield' we hardly get any novel of substance. Goldsmith is criticized that he took hints from Fielding's novels i.e., *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. *The Vicar of Wakefield* by **Oliver Goldsmith** is considered one of the best novels of the eighteenth century. Its plot is straightforward, if occasionally inconsistent; the characters are human and appealing, and humour and melancholy are expertly blended. Goldsmith has chosen to tell the story directly via the main character. In this work, Goldsmith paints the picture of English domestic life for the first time. It's also distinctive in that it paints a charming and idealized picture of English country life. It's all the more attractive because of the mix of laughter and pathos.

After sentimental novel, picaresque novel and epistolary novel Gothic novel emerged in late 18th century. **Gothic novel** is also popularly known as the novel of terror the novelist employed supernatural elements like appearance of ghost, dungeons and tombs.

**Horace Walpole** (1717-1797) wrote *The Castle of Otranto* which falls under the category of Gothic. Walpole gave to the Gothic romance the elements on which it was to thrive for a generation to come – a hero sullied by unmentionable crimes, several persecuted heroines, a castle with secret passages and haunted rooms, and a plentiful sprinkling of supernatural terrors.

**Mrs. Anne Radcliffe** (1764-1832) was the most popular of terror novelists. She wrote five elaborate romances of which the most famous are *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*. Her stories have well-constructed plots which contain medievalism, —a lively, if undisciplined imagination, and a skillful faculty of depicting wild scenery. She could successfully create an atmosphere of suspense and dread. What distinguishes her as a novelist is the fact that she rationally used the supernatural machinery.

**William Beckford** (1660-1844) wrote *The History of the Caliph Vathek*, which deals with the mysteries of oriental necromancy. Satire mingles with sensation in his novels. **Matthew Lewis** (1775-1818) wrote *The Monk*, which is the crudest terror novel.

**Miss Clara Reeve** (1729-1807) is remembered for *Old English Baron*. It is a Gothic story. **Maturina** is remembered for *The Fatal Revenge* and *Meimoth the Wanderer*.

**Mary Shelley** 's *Frankenstein* is the only terror novel which is still famous. It is the story of the ravages of manmade monster equivalent to the modern robot. It may be considered the first work of science fiction and the last one of the terror schools. Thus, at the close of the nineteenth century, we find the three types of fiction: first, the realistic novel which deals with social life and manners; secondly, the romance which represented the purely emotional interest in nature and the past; and finally, the humanitarian novel, which seriously undertook to right the wrongs sustained by the individual at the hands of society. —These three types, write **Moody and Lovett**, —...have defined three schools – the realists, the romanticists and the social novelists, which have continued, with innumerable cross divisions, until the present time. **Emily Bronte**'s 'Wuthering Heights' is the most popular novel of this genre.

The other two prominent writers in romantic movement were **Sir Walter Scott** and **Jane Austen**. **Sir Walter Scott** is popularly known for writing historical novels. Scott's treatment of history is not accurate but he takes liberties with facts and it alters them. His anachronisms are numerous some of his popular novels are: 'Ivanhoe' (1820), 'The Bethroned' (1825), 'The Talisman' (1825), 'The Siege of Malta' (1831) and so on.

**Jane Austen** has been the prolific writer who has been acclaimed as a social novelist. Her novels might be called 'novels of manners' as her novels are pictures of everyday existence. Her noteworthy novels are: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1816). Jane Austen enticements the characters and dialogues from the real world of the time. She represents the society in the forms of social group which is formed to resolve the matrimonial complexities. The presentation of the society in the form of parties, shopping, and dances is full of humor and irony. Jane Austen is the product of the transitional period which intervenes between the ideal of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and 19<sup>th</sup> Century. On the whole she belongs more to 19<sup>th</sup> than the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **Women Novelists:**

Few women novelists have also contributed in the Rise of English Novel. To name few, Mary Edgeworth, Susan Ferrier, and Mary Rusel Mitford.

### **Other Prominent Writers:**

**Thomas Love Peacock** reputation rests almost exclusively on the merits of his 7 novels *Headlong Hall* (1815), *Melincourt* (1817), *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), *Maid Marian* (1822), *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829), *Crotchet Castle* (1831), *Gryll Grange* (1861) in which he criticized the romanticists. Most of his works are ironical in nature. He wrote satirical novels, each with the same basic setting: characters discussing and criticizing the philosophical opinions of the day. Peacock's novels record the intellectual, social, economic, literary discussions and battles of early 19<sup>th</sup>- century England. His novels can be in one sense called as "conversational novels", and many of the characters who take part in the various conversations were modeled after the leading personalities of Peacock's Day. His novel *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) stands apart as its Genre are Gothic novella, Romance novella and Satire.

### **5.2.5 English Novel in 19<sup>th</sup> Century:**

18<sup>th</sup> Century and Victorian Age can be considered as ages of Novel. It was in these two ages that great pieces of Novels were produced in abundance. This age is popularly known as Victorian Age. This age is divided into two parts i.e., The Early Victorians and The Later Victorians. Advancement in science, technology and in novel form are quite evident. Novelist like: **Dickens, Meredith, Thackeray, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, the Bronte Sisters, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce** have occupied high place in English Novel.

### **Early Victorians:**

To begin with **Charles Dickens**, his novels are autobiographical and can be studied as a novel of social realism. He is considered as the pioneer of realism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He exposes the evil sides of Industrial Revolution and the exploitation of children in his semi-autobiographical novels like *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Great Expectations* (1861) through the most memorable character named Pip. Pip has left an indelible mark in the minds of the

readers. His other novels which expose the double standards and the materialistic life are- *The Bleak House* (1852), *Hard Times* (1854) and *The Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

The Victorian Age was dominated by Women Novelists of whom **Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell, the Bronte Sisters, Emily Charlotte** and **Anne** and **George Eliot** are prominent ones.

The Bronte Sisters have carved a niche for themselves in the pages of English Literature. These sisters all attempted to earn their livelihood by teaching.

**Charlotte Bronte** is the eldest of the famed Bronte sisters who survived into adulthood., was one of the most powerfully insightful writers of the early nineteenth century. She was the foremost romantic novelists along with her sisters **Emily** and **Anne Bronte**. Her first novel 'The Professor' failed to find publisher and only appeared in 1857 after her death. Her magnum opus 'Jane Eyre' (1817) was written under the pseudonym Currer Bell. She revealed her identity only after it was acclaimed by the readers. This was due to the notion that women writers were not accepted well during the Victorian Period. She Charlotte portrayed the women in Victorian England as a representation of her own life through the content of Jane Eyre.

**Emily Bronte** was the most powerful spirit of the three sisters. She was the model of 'Shirley' (1849) the heroine of her sister's novel. Her one novel 'Wuthering Heights' (1847) is referred to as one of the best novels in Gothic genre. The novel focuses on the mysterious or supernatural element and take place in dark, sometimes exotic settings. The novel is also unique for dual narrators for which it is rightly called "narrative within the narrative" frame which dominates the novel. Lockwood's narration, which begins in the first three chapters, the rest by Nelly Dean who is a servant in the mansion.

**Anne Bronte** who wrote under the pseudonym Acton Bell. Her two novels 'Agnes Grey' (1847) and 'The Tenant of Wildful Hall' (1848) are much inferior to those of her sister's, for she lacks nearly all their powers and intension.

Mary Ann Evans wrote under the pen name **George Eliot**. She is one of the leading writers of the Victorian Age. Her popular novels are *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Middlemarch* (1872), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Most of her novels are reflection of realistic and vivid portrayal of the provincial life of England.

**Elizabeth Gaskell:** She is one of those novelists, who has effectively used the novel as an instrument of social reform. Her popular novels are *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life* (1848), *Cranford* (1853) and *North and South* (1865). In her first novel *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life* (1848) she pricks the conscience of industrial England through her depiction and analysis of the working class. In her another novel *North and South* (1865), also deals with the relationship of workers and masters, strengthened **Lady Gaskell's** status as a leader in social fiction. She is also known as a biographer of her friend Charlotte Bronte. Gaskell was a vibrant new voice to the genre of **industrial fiction**. In 1853 she shocked and offended many of her readers with *Ruth*, an exploration of seduction and illegitimacy.

**W. M. Thackeray:** He was born in Calcutta. His father was an Indian Civil Servant. His notable works are: *Catherine: A Story* (1839), *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero* (1847), *The History of Pendennis* (1848), *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852), *The Virginians* (1859). He criticizes Newgate School of Crime Fiction exemplified by Lytton and Ainsworth. He also criticizes *Oliver Twist*. His novel *Vanity Fair's* title is taken from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. His novels are mainly satirical in nature.

### **The Later Victorians:**

**Thomas Hardy:** The first notable novelist of the Later Victorians is Thomas Hardy. His novels are the works of a poet. He himself considered poetry to be his true vocation in life. He wrote novels because he believed that writing novels was profitable business and the only way open for him to make his living. Hardy is popularly known as a Regional Novelist. His novels settings take place in region called Wessex. He is a Victorian realist in the tradition of George Eliot, he was influenced both in his novels and in his poetry by romanticism, especially by William Wordsworth. His novels are *Desperate Remedies* (1871), *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Trumpet Major* (1880), *A Laodécian*, or *The Castle of the De Stanceys* (1881), *Two on a Tower* (1882), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1881), *Tess of the D'urbervilles*, *A Pure Woman* (1891), *Jude the Obscure* (1895), *The Well-Beloved* (1897).

### **Some other novelists of this age:**

**Charles Reade** is known for his masterpiece, *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861), is a historical romance. Victorian critics hailed this work as the greatest historical novel ever written.

**Wilkie Collins** was a good friend of Charles Dickens and were fond of each other. He was another popular novelist who catered to the needs of the readers of this age. The Victorian Readers were fed up of the novels of social reforms and propaganda novels. His mantra was "Make'em laugh, make'em cry; make'em wait". Collins's works were classified at the time as "sensation novels", a genre seen nowadays as the precursor to detective and suspense fiction. He also wrote penetratingly on the plight of women and on the social and domestic issues of his time. His other important novels are *The Woman in White* (1871) and *Armadale* (1866).

**Antony Trollope:** He is rated highly among the novelists of Victorian Age. He is conspicuously free from the most characteristic Victorian faults. In Nineteen Thirties and Forties was inspired by his perfect studies of English Clerical life, *The Warden* (1855), *Barchester Tower* (1857), *Doctor Thorne* (1859), and *The Last Chronicle of Barcel* (1867).

**Charles Kingsley:** He is a novelist of second rank. *Westward Ho* (1855) is the most important novels written by him.

**Benjamin Disraeli:** His chief novels are *Vivian Gray*, *The Voyage of Captain Popomilla*, *Ixion in Heaven*, *The Infernal Marriage*, *Conningsby*, *Sybil* and *Tancred*.

**George Meredith:** He is a great psychological novelist of the Victorian age. In a way he is the founder of psychological novel. He opposed realism and the realistic school of novelists who aimed at the reproduction of life with scrupulous minuteness and fidelity. His major novel is *The Egoist* (1879).

### 5.2.6 20<sup>th</sup> Century Novel: Trends in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Novel

The one thing, which stands out prominently in the history of the English Novel, is its immense popularity at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It has eclipsed the poetry and the drama; it is the only literary form which has competed successfully with the radio and cinema and it is in this genre that work of the greatest merit is being produced.



Prominent feature of the modern English novel is its immense variety and complexity. Novels are being written practically on all possible themes and subjects. There are the traditionalists like **H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and Galsworthy**.

On the other hand, there are innovators, like Henry James, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Biographical novels, regional novels, satirical novels, sea novels, detective novels, war-novels and novels of humor continue to flood the market and the list is by no means exhaustive.

The Modern Novel is realistic. It deals with all the facts of contemporary life, the pleasant as well as the unpleasant, the beautiful as well as the ugly, and does not present merely a one-sided view of life. Some of the early realist novelists are Samuel Butler and Joseph Conrad.

**Samuel Butler** was the most original and brilliant thinkers of 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The fame of Samuel Butler rests chiefly on the three novels- *Erewhon* (1872) and its sequel *Erewhon Revisited*, and *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), which is his best-known work.

**H G Wells:** His novels such as *Time Machine* (1895), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), *The War of the Worlds* (1898) deal with scientific subjects in an imaginative way. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature four times.

**Joseph Conrad:** He is a curious phenomenon in the History of English novel. His best novels are *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), *Lord Jim: A Tale* (1900), *Nostromo- A Tale of the Seaboard* (1904), and *Under Western Eyes* (1911). His novel *Heart of Darkness* is discussed widely as a foundational text of Colonialism because it discusses the impact of Colonialism in Africa. **Conrad** breaks the narrative conventions of the Victorian novel adopting a novel style which connects it with the modernist narrative. He combines the values of Victorian period as well as the Modern Period.

**Somerset Maugham:** He is one of the prominent novelists and short story writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. *Of Human Bondage* (1915), is his master piece.

**E M Forster:** His novels are *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908), *A Passage to India* (1924) and *Maurice* (1971) are few

prominent works written by him. His novel *A Passage to India* is studied from the lens of India in the later days of the British Raj.

**D H Lawrence:** He is one of the most disputed geniuses in the History of the Modern English novel. He has been excessively praised as well as excessively abused. His pre-occupation with sex has resulted in his being condemned as a sex-maniac. His novels like *The Rainbow* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* were proscribed on the ground of immorality, his *Sons and Lovers* was condemned as a mass of sexuality and mother-love.

**Aldous Huxley:** His works are satirically the disillusionment and frustration with contemporary social life. His popular novel *The Brave New World* satirizes a scientific Utopia in which everything is controlled by science.

### **The Stream of Consciousness and Other Women Novelists:**

This form of novel is the peculiar product of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The rise of this art-form on the eve of the World War I, makes an epoch in the history of the English novel. This particular kind of novel is also called the novel of subjectivity or the psychological novel.

The phrase, “stream of consciousness” was first used by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to denote the chaotic flow of impressions and sensations through the human consciousness. The prominent practitioners were Dorothy Richardson in England, James Joyce in Ireland, and Proust in France. Virginia Woolf imparted form and discipline and made it popular.

**James Joyce:** He is the main exponent of the Stream of Consciousness. His novel *Ulysses* (1922) is the finest example of the use of this technique which forms the Modern Novel form. His other noteworthy works are *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), and *Finnegan's Wake* (1939).

**Mrs. Virginia Woolf** is another exponent of who has contributed to this school. She adopted the stream of consciousness in her third novel *Jacob's Room* (1922). Her writing got matured in her other novels which followed like *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931) represent the very consummation of the novel of subjectivity.

**Dorothy Richardson:** She's known for her one novel *Pointed Roofs* (1915) which projects feminine psychology diligently. She endeavored to give both the subjective and objective biography of a character in the novel.

**Katherine Mansfield:** She has mainly contributed five volumes of short stories in her lifetime. In her short stories she has tried to project the challenges and contrasting human emotions. *The Prelude, To the Bay, The Fly, The Garden Party* represent at its best the subtle psychological art of Katherine.

**Elizabeth Bowen:** She is close follower of Virginia Woolf. Her reputation rests on her two novels *The Head of the Day* and *Last September*.

### **English Novels (Post Two World Wars):**

The English Novel after World War II continues to be as prolific and vigorous as ever before. Some distinguished writers of this period are, Graham Greene, Elizabeth Bowen, C P Snow, Ivy Compton- Burnett, and Evelyn Waugh, Lawrence Durrell, Iris Murdoch, William Goldin, Doris Lessing, Angus Wilson and Philip Toynbee and several others.

**Graham Greene:** His popular novels are: *The Power and Glory, The Man Within, The Man of Action, Rumor at Nightfall, Stamboul Train, It's a Batterfield, England Made Me*, and so on. *The Power and Glory* (1940) he uses various and wide interests find a unified expression in a pure-style highly original and sinuous.

**Evelyn Waugh:** Evelyn Waugh is both humorous and a serious novelist whose fame rests on few novels. *Decline and Fall* (1928), *Black Mischief* (1932), *A Handful of Dust* (1937), *Put out More Flags* (1942), and *The Loved One* (1948).

**Ivy Compton Burnett:** Her novels are essentially domestic in nature and her characters are developed round the tightness of family structure. Some of her prominent novels are *Dolores* (1911) and *A Heritage and its History* (1959).

**Anthony Powell:** His first novel *Afternoon Men*, published in 1938 was a satire directed against the chic world of fashion and the arts, somewhat in the manner of Evelyn Waugh.

#### ***Check your Progress***

1. Write a note on the Rise of Novel in 18<sup>th</sup> Century.
2. What were the causes of popularity of novel genre in Victorian Period?
3. Attempt a critique of Romantic Age novelist.

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### 5.3 Learning Outcomes

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After gaining information about the Origin and Development of English Novel students will be able to get firsthand knowledge about the genre. It had its ups and downs throughout. This will also enable them to enjoy the novels prescribed in the syllabus authoritatively and with research bend of mind. The reader can compare and contrast each age about the causes of its rise and development. The Novel genre has gone through a lot of experimentation compared to the other forms of literature.

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### 5.4 Glossary

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**Genre:** A style or category of art, music, or literature.

**Picaresque:** Relating to an episodic style of fiction dealing with the adventures of a rough and dishonest but appealing hero.

**Bildungsroman:** A novel dealing with one person's formative years or spiritual education.

**Epistolary:** In the form of letters.

**Gothic:** Something that is characterized by mystery, horror, and gloom.

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## 5.5 Sample Questions

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### 5.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Utopia was written by:  
(a) Cervantes (b) Machiavelli  
(c) Poliziano (d) Thomas More
2. Who translated the New Testament into German for the first time?  
(a) Poliziano (b) Cervantes  
(c) Martin Luther (d) Alexander VI
3. The 18th century work "Tom Jones" was written by whom?  
(a) Samuel Johnson (b) Henry Fielding  
(c) John Donne (d) Tobias Smollett
4. Whose great *Dictionary*, published in 1755, included more than 114,000 quotations?  
(a) William Hogarth (b) Jonathan Swift  
(c) Samuel Johnson (d) Ben Jonson  
(e) James Boswell
5. Who is commonly known as 'Pip' in *Great Expectations*?  
(a) Philip Pirrip (b) Filip Pirip  
(c) Philip Pip (d) Philips Pirip
6. Vanity Fair is a novel by?  
(a) Jane Austen (b) Charles Dickens  
(c) W. M. Thackeray (d) Thomas Hardy
7. Which of the following is the first novel of D. H. Lawrence?  
(a) The White Peacock (b) The Trespasser  
(c) Sons and Lovers (d) Women in Love
8. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a?  
(a) Picaresque novel (b) Gothic novel  
(c) Domestic novel (d) Historical novel

9. The Bronte sisters wrote during this period.

- (a) Regency                      (b) Restoration
- (c) Romantic                      (d) Victorian

10. Joyce's novel 'Ulysses' takes place over what period of time?

- (a) A week                      (b) 24 hours
- (c) A lifetime                      (d) 6 months

### **5.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Discuss the origin of English Novel.
2. Write a note on the 'Four Wheels of English Novel'.
3. Who are the prominent women novelists of Victorian Age?
4. Discuss the contribution of Bronte sisters to English Novel.
5. What is 'stream of consciousness'? Mention few prominent practitioners of this genre.

### **5.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Trace the development of novel as a literary form in England.
2. What were the reasons for the rise of the English novel in the 18th century?
3. Write a note on experimentations in English Novel and its role in the development of English Novel.

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## **5.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Eagleton, Terry. (2012). "What is a novel?" *The English Novel: An Introduction*. UK: Blackwell.
2. Hale, Dorothy J. (Ed). (2006). *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*. UK: Blackwell.
3. MacKay, M. (2011). *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel*. UK: CUP.

## **UNIT -7: *The Outsider*: Background, Plot, Characters**

### **Structure**

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 *The Outsider*: Contexts
  - 7.2.1 Camus's Childhood memories
  - 7.2.2 The French-Algeria Context
  - 7.2.3 Modern Man and the Absurd
- 7.3 Camus' Critique of the Value System
- 7.4 The Plot
  - 7.4.1 Point of View
  - 7.4.2 Structural Design of the novel
- 7.5 Characterization
  - 7.5.1 The Characters
  - 7.5.2 Meursault and the Society
  - 7.5.3 Camus and the Notion of Justice
- 7.6 Setting of the Novel
- 7.7 Learning Outcome
- 7.8 Glossary
- 7.9 Sample Questions
- 7.10 Suggested Reading

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### **7.0 Introduction**

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Albert Camus's greatest interests were to walk the streets and observe the lives of ordinary people in the working-class district of Algiers, the capital of Algeria, then a French colony. He lived there with his mother and found great pleasure in swimming on the beaches outside the city, and playing goalkeeper for a soccer team. Unfortunately, Camus suffered from severe tuberculosis when he was very young. The serious illness forced him to stay inactive and forced him to redo a school year. The

experience of the illness increased his awareness of death. The inevitability of death and the insignificance of life was a major preoccupation of Camus and death as a topic pervaded most of his writings. Albert Camus often said that all his work came from some powerful and intense images deeply rooted in his early childhood imagination. Contrary to the images of death, the warmth of the sun, the pleasures of swimming and the cold Mediterranean evenings represented positive reasons for existence.

### **7.1 Objectives:**

- To examine the significant contexts which shaped Camus's literary imagination
- To analyse the context of the novel *The Outsider*
- To discuss the structural design of the novel
- To look into, Camus' philosophy and his critique of value system
- To examine Camus' absurd and Existential view of life as depicted in *The Outsider*
- To discuss Camus' art of characterization
- To explain how the novel points up the concept of 'justice'

### **7.2 Context:**

#### **7.2.1 Camus's Childhood memories:**

When he was a year old, his father was called to fight for France in World War I and died in 1914 at the first battle of the Marne. Evidently, Camus had practically no direct recollection of his father, but his mother told him that his father had once witnessed the public execution of a murderer. When the father came home, he threw himself onto the bed and began to weep. Camus's father never told anyone why he was so upset at witnessing this event, but the story stayed with Camus and it appears in Chapter 5 of Part II, as a memory of Meursault's while he awaits his own execution.

Following the death of his father, Camus' mother took the family to the Algerian suburb of Belcourt, where they lived in an apartment. It was an industrial neighbourhood, with crowded apartment blocks and small factories. The apartment was on one of the main thoroughfares of the district, a crowded street where groups of teenagers would stroll in the evening on their way to one of the movie theatres. Both the neighbourhood and the street strongly resemble the neighbourhood and street that Meursault describes from his balcony in *The Outsider*. Belcourt's population was multicultural, French, Greek, Spanish, Italian and Arab at the same time. Like a young boy, Camus spent a great deal of his time on the streets. Such experiences sharpen the literary imagination of Camus.



### **7.2.2 The French-Algerian Context:**

Algeria had been under French control since 1830. By the first part of the twentieth century, the population of Algeria had increased considerably, and the world economic depression of the 1930s had resulted in an increase in Arab poverty. At the time that Camus was beginning work on *The Outsider*, the Arabs of Algeria were seeking to establish their own political and social identity in a country where they were treated like second-class citizens. The presence of so many Arabs and Europeans, living side by side, has created an atmosphere of tension all over the country. In *The Outsider*, Meursault's outbreak of violence is against an Arab, and the sequence of events on the beach leading to the murder are set against a backdrop of Arab-European conflict and hostility. As Camus continued to write, he began to develop more fully the notion of life as "absurd," which mainly centred on the idea that our awareness of the certainty and finality of death makes life meaningless. Camus's awareness of death gave his life and work personal meaning. He has also given, and still does, his readers an important and controversial legacy. His books bridge the gap between philosophy and literature and continue to address our concerns about the meaning of life in the anxious modern world.

### **7.2.3 Modern Man and the Absurd**

In order to enter the literary world of Albert Camus, it is first necessary to realize that he is a writer who does not believe in God. It is therefore to be expected that the main characters of Camus' fiction do not believe or struggle with the problem of belief. One's first response then, as a reader, might profitably be a brief consideration of what might happen to a character who comes to realize that there is no Divinity, no God. What happens when he realizes that his death is final, that his joys, deceptions, and sufferings are brief flickering preludes to a life after the death of nothingness? Like that of Kafka's Joseph K., the man in question understood in a staggering way that he is condemned to an eternal emptiness — and not because of any crime. It is only because it belongs to a cycle of birth and death without meaning that it is condemned; the fact of death and its mortality is everything. In a nutshell, he sees The End focused on the screen of his future, the screen on which he projected his dreams and hopes. Hope grounded in something superhuman is now futile. He sees an end to himself and to humankind. Then what is it? Suicide, if everything has no meaning? Or a blind return to an outward God, although always silent?

This preoccupation with death and its abyss of non-existence is the basis of most of Camus' literature. Condemned to an everlasting zero of eternity, Camus' characters often suffer their author's own involvement and anguish; and, for his readers, the recognition of the fact of their own deaths is the starting point for their confronting and experiencing Camus' concept of the Absurd. However, from despair and nihilism, the absurd of Camus embraces a positive optimism, an optimism in the sense that much emphasis is placed on the human responsibility to civilise the world. Fiction characters, therefore, who assume their new mortal responsibility, are often referred to as rebels. In revolt from both a cowardly suicide and an equally cowardly embrace of faith, the new optimism suggests man's returning to the center of a philosophical tightrope above an intensely physical death and, in his revolt, performing precariously. Over the threat of death, in confrontation with death, the metaphysical tightrope walker acts "as though" his actions mattered. It's obviously not the case in the long run. And, instead of ripping off the poles of hope or suicide, he knows that he will eventually fall, but stays midway through the centre. Evidently, his life, the life of all mankind, has no importance. Death is the ultimate. But, much like a clown, he creates new numbers, new entertainment — reaching out, making gestures. Exploiting his precarious posture in a new impulse of freedom, he restructures his actions, and in striking contrast with death, he spreads joy and a feeling of ridiculous responsibility. Knowing that man has only man to rely on, however, he can take renewed courage. He is now free from fearful superstitions and questioning theories; he can now cast aside religious confessions which suppose that man is subject to a divine and eternal thing. Man has no excuse to fail but himself. Man achieves or fails because of strength or lack of it.

### **7.3 Camus's critique of Value System:**

Albert Camus is not a philosopher and writer who sets out his views in a systematic and orderly fashion. However, Camus is deeply concerned by some of the complex issues related to life, society and value systems. Without a systematic articulation of his ideas, it is difficult to summarize them, and there have been conflicting interpretations of his vision. *The Outsider* was published at the beginning of Camus' career, in 1942, when he was primarily concerned with what he termed the "absurdity" of the human condition. People want and need a foundation for their lives and values, yet the world offers none, Camus believed. Because there is no overall value system, a person cannot make day-to-day value judgments, but is drifting into a meaningless world. The inevitability and

finality of death contribute to the absurdity of life, according to Camus. Camus' perspective was in part reflective of his inability to accept the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church has been a major pillar of French culture, providing strong support to life on land. Camus turned his back on religious teachings, like many others, drifted away, feeling that life had no meaning as well as meaning. Meursault can be seen as an embodiment of Camus' perspectives. Life for him has little meaning at a deeper level, and he does not care to make value judgments or to evaluate right and wrong. Yet, at the end of *The Outsider*, Meursault pulls a bit of order out of life. In an impassioned speech to a chaplain, who has been trying to convince him of the validity of the traditional Christian outlook, Meursault says life may have no deeper meaning but he indicates that he feels close to others who share life's predicament. Through this sense of solidarity, Meursault seems to be taking strength and adapting, at least partially, to the absurdity of life.

### **Check your Progress**

1. Discuss how the notion of the absurd interrogates the value system?
2. How does Camus connect the idea of death with the Absurd?
3. Explain how Camus's childhood experiences and memory influenced the composition of *The Outsider*?
4. Discuss the political context of the novel

### **7.4 The Plot**

The story line of *The Outsider* is not complicated, but there is considerable debate over what it means. The story is about Meursault, a rather passive man, who does not pass judgement on the quality of any action. He does not see patterns in the past or foresee consequences in the future. To act or not to act is one. He seems to be deeply concerned only with the feelings of the ephemeral present moment. He drifts in relationships and actions, and one of them is life-altering. It puts him in conflict with the moral ideas of the society which surrounds him.

**Part I:** When the story opens, Meursault, a shipping clerk in Algiers, North Africa, learned that his mother had died in a retirement home. He attends her funeral without showing the grief that society expects of a son or daughter. After the funeral, he returned to Algeria. The next day, Saturday, he goes swimming and meets Marie Cardona, a young woman who was previously working in her office. They watch a comedy film together and Marie goes home with Meursault. They make love. On Sunday, Meursault stays alone in her apartment, observing people on the street below. The next

day, Meursault met one of his neighbours, Raymond Sintes, who invited him for dinner. Raymond tells Meursault that his Arab girlfriend has been unfaithful and that he wants to take revenge. He asks Meursault to write her a letter (“a real stinker, that’ll get her on the raw,”) that will make her come back to him, so that he can then revile her and throw her out. Meursault agreed to draft the letter. The next week-end, Meursault and Marie go swimming. They return to the apartment of Meursault, make love, then hear the noise of an argument in the apartment of Raymond. A mob gathered on Raymond's doorstep. Meursault refuses to call the police, but another neighbour does, and when the policeman arrives, he notices that Raymond has beaten the girl. Meursault agrees to testify to the police on Raymond's behalf. The following Sunday, Meursault and Marie are to accompany Raymond on an excursion to the beach, where they'll spend the day with Masson, a friend of Raymond. Before they leave on the bus, Raymond points out two Arab men near the bus stop; he says that one of them is the brother of the girl he had beaten. Raymond seems concerned that they're trying to hurt him for beating the girl. On the beach, all three eat lunch. Then Meursault, Raymond and Masson walk around and meet the Arabs, who seem to have followed them from Algiers. After a brief battle, one of the Arabs draws a knife and cuts Raymond. The Arabs flee. Raymond is not badly wounded, and after being treated by a doctor, he insists on going back to the beach. He wishes to leave alone, but Meursault follows him. They meet the Arabs once again, and Raymond looks for an excuse to shoot the man who stabbed him. Meursault stops him from firing and gets the gun. As they argue over how to treat the Arabs, the Arabs disappear. Raymond and Meursault return to Masson's house, but Meursault does not enter. It is hot and muggy, and, sensitive to the weather, he feels strange and dizzy. He goes down to the beach alone, trying to refresh himself, and meets an Arab. The two men confront one another, and when Meursault moves ahead of him, the Arab pulls a knife. The sun is bright, blinding Meursault. He fired the gun once, killing the Arab. Then he fires four more times into the body. The killing of the Arab marks the end of Part One of *The Outsider*. Meursault recognizes that his action will have consequences. He has “shattered the balance of the day.”

**Part II:** At the beginning of Part II, Meursault is in prison. For the next eleven months, he was interrogated several times by the magistrate and his lawyer. The lawyer wants him to express regret for his mother's death as well as for his crime. The magistrate seems kind at first but becomes furious when Meursault tells him he does not believe in God, Marie visits him once but then, because she's not his wife, is not permitted to return. At the trial, Meursault's lawyer doesn't let him

speak in his own defence; so, except for a brief statement or two, Meursault listens to others talk about his past actions. The subject most often brought up is his behaviour at his mother's funeral. The prosecution portrays a man incapable of the most fundamental human sentiment, which is a danger to society. People from his mother's nursing home are called to testify, as are many of the characters we have seen earlier in the book. Again and again, Meursault's passivity and his statements about the flatness of his emotions are turned against him. When asked about his motive for the crime, he replies that he killed the Arab "because of the sun." The jury finds him guilty, and the judge sentences him to death. Back in his cell, Meursault thinks about death and about escape. He does not want to see the prison chaplain, but the chaplain visits him anyway and attempts to have him acknowledge his guilt and also the possibility of an afterlife. Meursault flies into a rage and attacks the chaplain in the only outburst of feeling he displays in the book. The book ends with Meursault's recognition that the universe is "benign" and "indifferent"- that no one, except himself, really cares whether he lives or dies. His last wish is that a large, hostile crowd attend his execution.

#### **7.4.1 Point of View:**

All the events of *The Outsider* are viewed through the eyes of the narrator, Meursault. The story is told in the first person and traces the development of the narrator's attitude towards himself and the rest of the world. In the beginning, Meursault refers to his inability to understand what is going on around him, but often what he tells us seems to be the result of his own sloth or indifference. It is often oblivious to his surroundings. His mind wanders among conversations. He seldom makes value judgements or expresses opinions about what he or the other characters do. We learn that he does not like the police- men or brothels, but otherwise he seems to accept experiences without distinguishing between them. In the second part of the trial, we find out what the other characters think of Meursault. However, even these testimonies are filtered through Meursault's observations, and sometimes we feel that he hardly listens. Some readers feel that the book would have been more successful had it been said in the third person by an omniscient narrator. The characters are merely fragments of what people really are, and readers find it difficult to empathize or identify with people about whose past they know very little. (Of all the characters whom Meursault encounters in the journey of his life, only Salamano's past is revealed in depth.) Some critics observe that the past of the characters is deliberately made irrelevant and that Camus's primary purpose would be lost if the story was narrated in a different way. *The Outsider*, they argue, is the unfolding of one person's perceptions about life and his sway of viewing and engaging with surroundings, rather than a study

of relationships between people and societies. Readers are not given the liberty to assume that Camus and Meursault are interchangeable. Nevertheless, Meursault can be considered to a fictional character who acts as the mouthpiece of the author's view of the world.

#### **7.4.2 Structural Design of the novel:**

*The Outsider* is composed of two parts. The first part deals with approximately three weeks in Meursault's life and ends with the killing of an Arab. In this part, one sees Meursault at the funeral of his mother, at his work, hanging out in his little apartment. He enters into a relationship with Marie and drifts towards a relationship with his neighbour, Raymond Sintes. Then he commits the murder which will culminate in a death sentence. The second part follows the murder directly and is completed eleven months later. We see Meursault in his jail cell and during his trial, and we are introduced to the various public officials: the lawyer, the magistrate, the prosecutor and the chaplain. Meursault compares his life in prison with his previous life, and we observe how his attitudes change. Does he look different? Or is he merely crystallized in his old model? If the high point of the first part is the murder of the Arabian, what do you think is the high point of the second part? Is this the verdict at the end of the trial or the breakup of Meursault when the chaplain visits him in prison? Are there any further possibilities? The two parts of *The Outsider* can be considered as forming some sort of duality. The first part is primarily a narrative, whereas the second part is mainly Meursault's commentary on his life in which he tries to understand the reasons for existence. In Part One, Meursault walks through the world largely unaware of the consequences of his actions on others and on himself; in Part Two he is much more conscious of every aspect of his experience, both the past and the present.

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. Critically evaluate the development of the plot of the novel
2. Comment the point of view and the structural design of the novel

### **7.5 CHARACTERISATION**

#### **7.5.1 The Characters**

##### **MEURSAULT**

Meursault is the main character and the narrator of the story; he is a 30-year-old shipping clerk who lives in an ordinary way of existence. We see him as a son at his mother's funeral; as a friend; as a lover, as a solitary creature pursuing simple experiences from moment to moment; and as a prisoner, first on trial, then awaiting execution. The physical sensations of sun and wind and physical

activities such as swimming or jogging are very important to him. Greater experiences in one's life, the death of one's mother, a chance of marriage and a change of job, mean relatively little. We learn nothing about his past, though he is a curiously and strangely candid person who engages in speaking of experiences in the present alone. He displays a detached attitude towards others. It annoys most people, but some are drawn to him because of his silence and his habit of not offering judgements. The central event in his life, at least to the extent that it affects others, is to kill an Arab. His most intense experience, however, was his assault on a chaplain in jail. Many readers consider Meursault as a hero and a martyr to truth. He refuses to disguise his feelings and, in the process, poses a threat to society. He accepts death for the sake of truth rather than playing games with society and abiding by what he sees as the illusions, lies and hypocrisies of society. At the same time, he does not judge others but tries to understand why they are acting and saying what they are doing. Some readers note, however, that Meursault occasionally compromises his loyalty to the truth, for example, by writing a letter to Raymond Sintes's girlfriend. He also tells lies to the police to obtain the liberation of Raymond after beating the girl. Other readers think that Meursault's sentiments are insensitive, not heroic. For instance, when Raymond beats an Arab girl, Meursault won't send for the police because he hates them. Her feelings take priority over the immediate threat to the girl. Meursault is a complex character, in a certain contradictory manner, and one of the most rewarding challenges of reading *The Outsider* is trying to understand his personality. We'll have to sift through a lot of evidence as we try to get a grip on Meursault. In order to do that we'll probably need to rethink and redefine some basic assumptions we internalised about people and their relation to society.

#### CELESTE:

Celeste, the owner of Meursault's favorite restaurant, usually expresses traditional sentiments: "There is nothing like a mother," he says when Meursault announces his mother's death. During his trial, he tried to defend Meursault. He says that the murder was definitely an "accident", which is close to the truth.

#### DOORKEEPER OF THE NURSING HOME:

The doorkeeper takes Meursault around the nursing home and tells him about his mother, her friends, and life at the old age home. He is more sympathetic to Meursault than the warden and sits with Meursault during the night vigil by the coffin. He offers coffee to Meursault in what appears to

be an act of kindness. At trial, however, Meursault's acceptance of coffee was presented as an example of his lack of grief over the death of mother.

**WARDEN OF THE NURSING HOME:** At the nursing home where Meursault's mother lived and is now being buried, Meursault is confronted by the doorkeeper and the warden. The warden represents social order. The Warden's job is to oversee the final years and funerals of seniors whose families cannot care for them. He usually expresses ordinary feelings and attempts to make Meursault feel guilty about leaving her mother in a home.

**THOMAS PEREZ:** Perez is a close friend of Meursault's mother. He is called her "fiancé" and, unlike Meursault, he mourns at her funeral. He appears as a witness during Meursault's trial in the court.

**MARIE CARDONA:**

Former typist at Meursault office, Marie becomes his mistress the day after his return from her mother's funeral. She, like Meursault, dedicates herself to sensuous pleasures. But her values are anchored in traditional norms, and she wants what most people claim to want: love, marriage, a conventional life. She intuitively understands the character of Meursault and remains loyal to him after he murdered the Arab.

**SALAMANO:**

Salamano, one of Meursault's neighbours, has a dog with which he constantly fights. When Salamano's wife died, He took the dog for company. He has some kind of love/hatred relationship with the animal which is no different than Raymond's relationship with his girlfriend. Salamano loses the dog in the course of story and turns to Meursault for advice and solace.

**RAYMOND SINTES:**

In the Meursault trial, Raymond, another of Meursault's neighbours, described himself and Meursault as "the best of friends." Raymond isn't just violent, he's also a sadist. However, his code of honor is as important to him as religion is to the chaplain or magistrate. According to the code, if someone treats him poorly, he will retaliate. Conversely, if someone does him a favour- like Meursault does, by writing a letter to his girlfriend- this person will be his friend. Raymond tells his neighbours that he works as a warehouse man, but it is implied that he is really a pimp, living on the incomes of prostitutes. He uses violence to prove his masculinity and is concerned with Meursault's opinion of him. For example, when he does not defy the police officer who arrives to end his quarrel with his girlfriend, he is concerned that Meursault may think he is a coward. Raymond does not



realize that Meursault often only spends time with him- as a matter of fact, he barely listens to him. He interprets the silence and passive nature of Meursault as a sign of intelligence.

MASSON: Masson is Raymond's friend and the owner of the beach house. He takes part in the first scuffle with the Arabs but essentially has a minor role in the story. During the trial, he attempted to create a favourable image of Meursault.

MAGISTRATE:

During the trial, Meursault was confronted with several persons who each represented an aspect of society and traditional attitudes towards morality and behavior. The magistrate is a figure of authority who believes in God and wants criminals to believe and regret their crimes. During their first interview, Meursault regarded the magistrate as an amiable and kind person. In a subsequent conversation, however, the magistrate became disturbed and excited when Meursault refused to answer his questions about the murder. He waved a crucifix on Meursault's face and tried to convince him that God existed. We sense that the magistrate is a religious person, who has found peace within himself, than a person who uses religion as a way of reassuring himself that he is able to derive meaning in life.

MEURSAULT'S LAWYER

Camus intentionally concealed the name of Meursault's lawyer. He's just a part of the judicial system that society has created, and he has little to gain or lose by the outcome of Meursault's trial. He was shocked by Meursault's indifference to the death of his mother, and realizing that it would be a key issue, he advised Meursault to remain silent during the trial.

PROSECUTOR

We see the prosecutor only in the courtroom. He interrogates each witness and carries out every detail on the disadvantage of Meursault. Meursault is fascinated by the competence with which the prosecution distorts information to create his case. He plays the game of justice, and he plays it well, but he has no desire to discover why Meursault killed the Arab man. He is evidently interested in the psychological link between Meursault's behaviour at his mother's funeral and the murder of the Arab, and it is on this link that he bases his case.

CHAPLAIN

After Meursault had repeatedly refused to see him, the chaplain arrived at Meursault's cell while Meursault awaited his death. He tries to persuade Meursault that there exists an afterlife. He becomes frustrated at Meursault's refusal to believe that a God exists, but he insists, hoping that he will eventually bring Meursault down. For Meursault, the chaplain was only the last of a long line of people who attempted to impose their ideas upon him. His insistence upon Meursault expressing a certain faith in God led to an attack by Meursault.

### **7.5.2 Meursault and the Society:**

Society as depicted by Camus is as deceptive, capricious and mortal as destiny, with a vital difference: destiny does not claim rationality, whereas society is one. When Meursault was labelled as 'criminal' all of his previous eccentric and non-normal actions are brought against him as evidence of a heinous personality by the witnesses, who gave no indication of judging him so harshly before his crime. There is implicit in *The Outsider* the theme that no matter how innocent a life one may have led, once he has been judged guilty of a crime, society sanctimoniously hastens to reinterpret all his past actions in a guilty light. It would be wrong, however, to interpret the novel, as the jacket note of an American translation made, simply as the story of "an ordinary little man... helpless in life's grip." Even if Meursault describes himself as "like everybody", this represents a certain irony on the part of Camus. For clearly Camus meant Meursault to be something more than a normal citizen. And his eccentricities turn against him because a strange twist of fate prompted him to commit a crime. Meursault is a social rebel or an 'anti-hero' of the novel. It is through him that Camus digs at social institutions.

### **7.5.3 Camus and the notion of Justice:**

According to Camus, justice is one of our social games. Neither the lawyer nor the magistrate seems to be showing, particularly, any interest in truth or in justice; what they want is to convince Meursault that he has to conform to society's rules. Justice, in Camus' words, seems to depend mainly on the skill of the party presenting the argument; it has little to do with the truth. One can explain how the prosecutor develops his case and how he interprets the testimony of the witnesses to get his point across. A comparison of the closing speeches of both the prosecutor and Meursault's lawyer. Write about the judge's description of himself as an "umpire" and how that relates to the notion that the participants in the trial are merely involved in playing a game.

Meursault is denied of justice in the sense that he should have allowed to defend himself and he should have given a chance to speak the truth about why he killed the Arab. The “games” of society, according to Camus, are the social institutions people adhere to blindly and uncritically, without interrogating their true worth. The chaplain’s social “game” is religion. The lawyer’s “game” is law. He advises Meursault to remain silent during the trial fearing that he might say something antagonizing or infuriating the jury. He makes no attempt to give a chance to self-defence, on Meursault’s behalf, and seems accepting to the fact that Meursault will be found guilty until or unless he shows some deep emotion on the death of his mother. Meursault’s explanation of the kind of relationship he had with his mother makes no impact upon him or on the jury. The magistrate, the final authoritative word of justice, is playing double “games”- law and religion. He needs reassurance from Meursault in order to confirm his own religious beliefs. He also acts as if Meursault is letting him down by refusing to believe in the existence of God. The three men affirm that they believe, with absolute certainty, in their ideals; yet they appear threatened by Meursault’s belief in himself.

## **7.6 Setting of the novel**

The city of Algiers, the principal setting of *The Outsider*, almost seems an active participant in the novel. The city is described as bathed in bright sunlight, scorching and intense at times that it makes Meursault feel dizzy. It is surrounded by white-hot beaches and vast sky and water. The street where Meursault lived was designed after the Rue de Lyon- the main artery of Belcourt, the Algerian suburb where Camus grew up. Meursault’s observations of the life outside standing on his balcony (Part One, Chapter II) offer the reader a good sense of the ambience in Algiers during the late 1930s. It was exactly the time when *The Outsider* was drafted, and the time that the action of the novel, as has been pointed out by many critics, takes place. Algiers is a city with busy streets, working-class life, restaurants and crowded apartment buildings, where the neighbours and shopkeepers all live closely, knowing each another. The streets are bifurcated with bars. Arabs, Europeans, and pied-noirs (people of European descent, born in or living in Algeria, side-by-side, just as Camus himself was) The storyline is set against this backdrop with of racial mix, political tension, conflict and unrest. Algiers is also a busy port city, known for trade, where ships come and go frequently, leaving footprints of multi-culturalism. The city has been popularly described as a “marriage” of East and West in their wakes. Camus has depicted the Algerians as a community with a serious distaste for stability and a lack of regard for the future. They are people in

a hurry to live. One can imagine the streets booming with life, all day. The natural climate of North Africa also sets a powerful background for the turns and shifts of action and mood in the course of the story- the sun, the beach, the heat, the vast space and the endless sky have its impact upon people and their mindset.

### Check Your Progress

1. Compare and contrast the characters of Meursault and Raymond
2. Discuss the major characters of the novel and their relationship to the social norms and conditions.
3. Consider Meursault as a rebel or anti-hero
4. Comment upon the notion of justice explored in the novel
5. Discuss the setting of the novel in relation to its political context

### 7.7 Learning Outcome:

- Demonstrate an awareness of the necessary background for engaging with Albert Camus's writings
- Draft articles, assignments, and projects on topics on Camus
- Sketch the various techniques of characterisation adopted by Camus
- Compare and contrast the various characters in the novel
- Discuss the philosophy of Camus and its relevance in the present times
- Relate characters with the social, cultural and political context of the novel

### 7.8 Glossary

**Franz Kafka:** A 20<sup>th</sup> century German-speaking Bohemian novelist. He is notable for his work *Metamorphosis*. He is known for modernist and postmodernist style, unique narrative techniques, his explorations of modern man's existential crisis, and also for his critique of Law and order.

**Joseph. K:** The name of the protagonist in Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*. Joseph.K was convicted for unspecified crime and underwent a series of trials which he could not make sense of. His existential crisis is similar to that of Camus' Meursault.

**Algiers:** the capital and largest city of Algeria in North Africa. It is the chief sea port, cultural and political centre of the country, particularly when Algeria was a French colony.

**Anti-hero:** Anti-hero is a character type popular in modern literature. This type of character is more complex and devoid of all conventional qualities of a hero. Meursault is a typical example of an anti-hero.

### 7.9 Sample Questions

1. Thomas Perez serves as a foil to Meursault by
  - a. representing age versus youth
  - b. grieving for Meursault's mother
  - c. getting lost on the way to the funeral
2. Meursault is criticized by the court for-----
  - a. for not grieving enough on his mother's death
  - b. for murdering the Arab
  - c. for being indifferent and passive
3. The prosecutor depicts Meursault as
  - a. a religious fanatic
  - b. a dangerous killer who is a threat to society
  - c. an insane man who should be locked up
4. Meursault's lack of enthusiasm and indifference is symbolic of -----
  - a. his impoverished conditions
  - b. the existential crisis of modern man
  - c. his lack of interest in value system
5. Meursault takes Raymond's revolver because he wanted -----
  - a. to kill the Arab
  - b. to commit suicide
  - c. to stop Raymond from firing at the Arab
6. Meursault agrees to marry Marie even though he doesn't love her because
  - a. everybody knows they are in love
  - b. she wants to get married to him
  - c. he is afraid of what the neighbours will say about their affair
7. Meursault writes a letter to Raymond's girlfriend because
  - a. he thinks she deserves punishment
  - b. Raymond won't be his friend if he refuses

- c. it doesn't matter much and he doesn't care about his actions
- 8. In the courtroom, Meursault says that he killed the Arab because ----
  - a. he was drunk
  - b. the sun's heat was scorching and it blinded his eyes
  - c. he wanted to revenge and help his friend
- 9. The major theme of *The Outsider* concerns -----
  - a. the consequences of living in an absurd world
  - b. the nature of Arab-French relations
  - c. the irrationality of human nature
- 10. Meursault is obsessed with -----
  - a. the physical experiences of the present moment
  - b. his relationship with his girlfriend
  - c. his friendship with Raymond

### **Short Essays**

1. Discuss how the setting of the novel informs the socio-political background of the novel?
2. Examine how Camus's childhood memories helped him shape his literary imagination?
3. How does the novel explore the concepts of justice and value system?
4. Critically examine Meursault as an anti-hero
5. Discuss the women characters of the novel
6. Comment on the course of the action and the structural elements of the novel.
7. How does the novel criticise the social and the Judicial institutions?

### **Essays:**

1. Discuss *The Outsider* in the light of its socio-political contexts
2. Comment on the various characters of the novel and their relationship with the social system around them.
3. Examine the elements of the Absurd with special reference to its characters and thematic aspects.

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## 7.10 Suggested Reading

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Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. Createspace Independent Publishing, 1942.

Camus, Albert, and Robert Emmet Meagher. *Albert Camus, the Essential Writings*. New York, Harper & Row. C, 1979.

Foley, John. *Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt*. Stocks field, Acumen, 2008.

Sagi, Abraham. *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd*. Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2002.

Showalter, English. *The Stranger: Humanity and the Absurd*. Boston, Ma, Twayne Publishers; London, 1996.

Zaretsky, Robert. *A Life Worth Living: Albert Camus and the Quest for Meaning*. Cambridge, Ma, TheHarvard University Press, 2016.

## **Unit – 8: *The Outsider*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation**

### **Structure**

#### **8.0 Introduction**

#### **8.1 Objectives**

#### **8.2 *The Outsider*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation**

##### **8.2.1 *The Outsider*: Major Thematic concerns**

###### **8.2.1.1 The Absurd**

###### **8.2.1.2 The Binary of Rationality/Irrationality**

###### **8.2.1.3 Decay, Mortality, and the meaninglessness of Human Life**

###### **8.2.1.4 The Significance of the Physical World**

###### **8.2.1.5 Observation and the Endless search for Purpose and Meaning**

###### **8.2.1.6 Poverty and the Working-class Sentiment**

###### **8.2.1.7 Religion, Secularism and Existentialism**

###### **8.2.1.8 Chance and Interchangeability**

###### **8.2.1.9 Silence, Passiveness and Indifference**

###### **8.2.1.10 Relationships**

##### **8.2.2 Language and Narration**

##### **8.2.3 Critical Appreciation**

###### **8.2.3.1 Jean Paul Sartre's Observations on *The Outsider***

###### **8.2.3.2 *The Outsider* or *The Stranger*?**

###### **8.2.3.3 Cultural Adaptations**

##### **8.2.4 Camus' Legacies**

#### **8.3 Learning Outcomes**

#### **8.4 Glossary**

#### **8.5 Sample Questions**

#### **8.6 Suggested Readings**

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### **8.0 Introduction**

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Camus' *The Outsider* (1942) was read as a reference point of the most significant trend in the 1940s' French thought. It was the feeling that man was trapped in a strange universe, and that he had to protest against the artificiality of existing social systems and against his metaphysical condition. In his preface to the English translation, Cyril Connolly described Meursault as 'a negative and destructive force', although he rightly pointed out that Meursault was 'profoundly in love with life.' After existentialism had swept Europe and the West, *The Outsider* was more widely read, both within and outside France. It became such an important part of western culture because it embodied a way of thinking and feeling which was and is still relevant. Another reason the novel is so successful is its narration and language. The background, publication and success of *The Outsider* have already been discussed in the preceding sections. In order to understand the thematic, narrative and linguistic aspects of the novel, one has to deal with existentialism and the absurd. However, the success of the novel brings readers' attention to a few other aspects that have not been much thought about. First, Camus has stated many times that his novel is not existentialist, in the sense of Jean Paul Sartre concept of existentialism. Second, Meursault was perceived by the West to be a hero rather than an anti-hero. The third was the manner in which the colonial question was conveniently forgotten, because Meursault was regarded as a universal figure rather than a pied-noir. Camus' narrative style and use of language helped to foster more optimistic interpretations of his novels and readers tended to look at his early work for the philosophical and universal values Camus addressed in them. This unit will briefly discuss the major thematic concerns, narrative techniques of the novel along with an examination of a few critical observations made by some of the critics and writers of the time. Indeed, *The Outsider* does not have any clear ancestors in French fiction, which led Sartre and many others to wonder if Camus had not been influenced by the American novel.

This Unit takes up a careful analysis of the novel's major thematic aspects, providing additional information to its analysis. The biographical sketch of Camus and the conflicting historical context of his life and works discussed in the previous units may be taken into serious consideration to understand the thematic aspects of the work. This unit also discusses some key critical observations about Camus. The perspectives on Camus' complex relationship with Algeria and its troubled history can add to readers' understanding of the linguistics of the work. *The Outsider* is regarded as a classic and the criticism on Camus and his oeuvre sets the

historical context in which the book can be read and scrutinised, and make suggestions for further reading.

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## 8.1 Objectives

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- To examine the major thematic preoccupations of *The Outsider*
- To analyse the narrative techniques and devices employed
- To close read the narrative structure and language of the novel.
- To look into, specifically, the Absurd and Existential storyline in the thematic design
- To discuss the 'Treatment of the Arab' as significant theme
- To bring key critical observations on Camus and *The Outsider*
- To discuss Camus' Cultural legacies.

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## 8.2 *The Outsider*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

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### 8.2.1 *The Outsider*: Major Thematic Concerns

Absurdity, alienation, Irrationality, and Mortality are among the most important themes in *The Outsider*. Meursault is the titular Outsider or Stranger, a young shipping clerk living in Algiers in the 1940s, when it was still a French colony. Meursault's life was dull and void, and he had little pleasure in living. He believes that the world is an absurd place without reason and that his actions, including the murder of the Arab man, do not mean anything. Meursault's beliefs are a reflection of Camus' existential philosophy.

#### 8.2.1.1 The Absurd:

In *The Outsider*, Camus creates a narrative that expresses his key concept, absurdity. This concept seemed to refer directly to the historical period in which the book was originally published. At the same time, the novel stood not just as a response to the horrors of expansive wars but as a vision of the timeless struggle of individuals making their way through life. More specifically, the absurd idea is that people live in a universe that is meaningless, in spite of an intense human desire for meaning for existence. In Camus's view, individuals must come to

recognize that this is the situation; with this recognition, people can then move to a new state, happy, despite the grim realities of the situation.

In *The Outsider*, the world of the protagonist expresses the vision of the absurdity put forward by Camus. The protagonist, Meursault, constantly asserts that things do not matter, not only to him personally, but to the whole world. In short, while people around him think that the world is guided by a natural logic, Meursault does not see things that way. It is this perspective that leads him to say, for example, that working in Paris or getting married really has no significance. The confrontation between Meursault's viewpoint and that of almost all the others takes place when he is arrested and judged. Since Meursault shows no remorse for killing the Arab and has no real explanation for why he did it in the first place, much less why he fired so many shots, the prosecutor and others piece together their own conclusion. They insist on a logical explanation, even if their logic may be imperfect or untrue. Their faulty thinking leads them to believe that Meursault has no morals and deserves the greatest punishment possible, the death penalty. Ironically, while Meursault kills the Arab and is seen as despicable, society kills Meursault and feels this is the proper response. A similar twist, in terms of violence, occurs earlier in the novel when the police come to Raymond's door because he is beating his girlfriend, and the police, in turn, slap Raymond for his behaviour. Meursault is pushed near his breaking point when he is condemned to death and the chaplain at the jail tries to turn him to God. Meursault insists he will not become a believer, though. After his outburst with the priest, Meursault realizes that the world is indifferent but, despite this conclusion, he has been happy and will continue to be. While Camus presented his absurdist perspective in *The Outsider*, he explains it more directly in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus." Sisyphus is condemned to the intense labour of pushing a huge stone up a hill. When he finally is able to reach the top, the stone naturally rolls back down again, and the process must begin again. Despite the recurring cycle of unending labour, he is subjected to, for Camus, Sisyphus is happy in his labour; there is pleasure in struggle. Camus imported this absurdist perspective to his famous play *Caligula*, too, which he worked on when he was writing *Sisyphus* and *Stranger*. In yet another of his renowned novel *The Plague*, Camus also assumes an absurdist viewpoint and the work is more about the individual facing the world's indifference. In *The Plague*, when sickness strikes, all of humanity is vulnerable and must face the world's indifference. Rather than humanity becoming ruthless, though, people recognize that their friends and families are of utmost importance, and they help

other individuals in need as well. After the threat has passed, though, people return to their previous self-centred state. Camus was not a writer invested in happy endings.

***Check Your Progress***

1. Briefly explain Camus' vision of Absurdity as projected in the novel.
2. Mention Camus' other significant works which takes up his concept of Existentialism and the Absurd

**8.2.1.2 The Binary of Rationality/ Irrationality:**

Though *The Outsider* is a work of fiction, it contains a strong resonance of Camus's philosophical notion of the Irrational and absurdity. In most of his essays, Camus states that individual lives and human existence, in general, have no sense or rational order. However, because people have trouble accepting this concept, they are constantly trying to identify or create a rational structure and meaning in their lives. The term "absurdity" refers to humanity's vain attempt to find a rational order where there is none.

Although Camus makes no explicit reference to the concept of the 'irrational' in *The Outsider*, the conflict between rational and the irrational work in the novel. Neither the outside world where Meursault lives nor the inside world of his thoughts and attitudes possesses a rational order. Meursault has no discernible rationale or reason for his actions, such as his decision to marry Marie and his decision to kill the Arab. Society, nonetheless, attempts to fabricate or impose rational explanations for Meursault's irrational actions. The idea that things sometimes happen for no reason and that these events sometimes make no sense is disturbing and a threat to society. The second part of the novel represents society's attempt at creating a rational order. Both the prosecutor and Meursault's lawyer explain Meursault's crime based on logic, reason and the concept of cause and effect. However, these explanations have no basis in fact and serve only as attempts to defuse the frightening notion that the universe is irrational. The entire trial is thus an example of absurdity, an example of humanity's futile attempt to impose rationality on an irrational world.

**8.2.1.3 Decay, Mortality and the Meaninglessness of Human Life:**

A second major element of Camus's absurd philosophy is the idea that human life has no redeeming significance or purpose. Camus contends that the only thing certain about life is the

inevitability of death, and, because all humans will eventually encounter death, all lives are equally meaningless. Meursault gradually moved toward this realization throughout the novel, but he did not fully grasp it until after his argument with the chaplain in the final chapter. Meursault realises that, just as he is indifferent to much of the universe, the universe is indifferent to him. Like everyone else, Meursault was born, will die and will no longer be important. Paradoxically, it is only after Meursault reaches this apparently gloomy realization that he can achieve happiness. When he fully comes to terms with the inevitability of death, he understands that it does not matter whether he dies by execution or lives to die a natural death at an old age. This understanding allows Meursault to put aside his fantasies of evading execution by filing an appeal. He realizes that these illusory expectations, which had previously preoccupied his mind, would only create within him a false feeling that death is avoidable. Meursault sees his expectation of a sustained life as a burden. His liberation from this false hope means he is free to live life for what it is, and to make the most of his remaining days.

The different characters in *The Outsider* hold widely varying attitudes toward decay and death. Salamano loves his decaying, scab-covered dog and he values its companionship, even though most people find it disgusting. Meursault did not express a great deal of emotion following his mother's death, but the society in which he lived believed that he should be afflicted by grief. Moreover, while Meursault was content to believe that physical death represented the complete and ultimate end of life, while the chaplain clung to the idea of the afterlife. An important part of the development of Meursault's character in the novel is his contact with his own attitudes towards death. At the end of the novel, he has finally embraced the idea that death is imminent and death is the only truth about human life, and he is able to accept the reality of his impending execution without despair.

***Check Your Progress***

1. How does Meursault accept the idea of Mortality?
2. Discuss the theme of decay and mortality in the novel.

**8.2.1.4 The Significance of the Physical World:**

*The Outsider* shows Meursault to be interested far more in the physical aspects of the world around him than in its social or emotional aspects. This focus on the outer world stems from the novel's assertion that there is no greater sense or order than human life. Throughout *The Outsider*, Meursault's attention focuses on his own body, his physical relationship with Marie, time, and other physical elements of his environment. For example, the heat of the funeral procession hurts Meursault much more than the thought of burying his mother. The sun on the beach torments Meursault, and during his trial, Meursault even identifies his own suffering under the sun as the reason for killing the Arab. The style of Meursault's narration also reflects his interest in the physical. Though he offers terse, plain descriptions when glossing over emotional or social situations, his descriptions become vivid and ornate when he discusses topics such as nature, the weather and other aspects of the outer world.

#### **8.2.1.5 Observation and the Endless search for Purpose and Meaning:**

Throughout the novel, there are instances of characters watching Meursault, or of his watching them. This motif recalls several components of Camus's philosophy of the Absurd and Existentialism. The constant watching or observing in *The Outsider* suggests humanity's endless search for a purpose and emphasizes the importance of the tangible, visible details of the physical world in a universe where there is no greater meaning. When Meursault stares at people in the street from his balcony, he does it passively, absorbing details but not judging what he sees. By contrast, the people in the courtroom observe Meursault as part of the process of judgment and condemnation. In the courtroom, we learn that many of Meursault's previous actions were monitored without his knowledge. The Arabs observe Raymond and his friends with implicit antagonism as they march toward the bus. Raymond's neighbours are the spectators of his argument with his mistress and the police officer, watching with uneasiness or petty curiosity. At times, watching or observing is a mysterious activity, such as when Meursault watches the woman at Celeste's, and later when she watches him in court. The novel's moments of watching and observation reflect humanity's endless search for meaning, which Camus found absurd.

#### **8.2.1.6 Poverty and the working-class Sentiment:**

Poverty as an unjust social condition had its impact upon Camus's life and his works. His family belonged to the poorer segment of the working class and most of his relatives were labourers or artisans. He could only attend secondary school and university because he received

scholarships, and he did not have to read Marx to appreciate the importance of the class. As a student, and later on, he supported himself by teaching or by tedious clerical work. When he travelled, he had to eat in the cheapest restaurants and purchase excursion tickets that could not be used on the most convenient trains. This is mirrored in his books as well. He has moments of tearful sentimentality when he depicts Salamano's dog in *The Outsider* or the figure of Grand in *The Plague*. But more frequently his working-class background inspires him with a caustic view of the universe: jobs are hard work rather than careers, while ideals are hypocrisy or veiled forms of oppression. *The Outsider* is a critique of all these and it strips the legal system and the French state of their legitimacy. Yet working-class life was also a source of happiness to Camus. He loved Algiers Streetlife: the boasting of boys and the unashamed sexuality of girls. In *The Outsider*, Marie is very much the working-class woman in her enjoyment of her own body. Moreover, honesty, loyalty and pride were values that were lived rather than imposed. From his working-class upbringing Camus learned to be similarly suspicious of ideals, to be sceptical of reason and introspection, and to believe that the coherent self and the coherent work of art were fabrications. With it came the realization that life should be lived rather than dreamed or reflected. Man existed, so Existentialism maintained, among or against others in a brutal adventure, to which he must by his actions give meaning.

***Check Your Progress:***

1. How does the novel synthesise the working-class sentiment with Existentialism?
2. Briefly examine the theme of poverty in the novel
3. How does binary of the rational and the irrational blur in the novel?

**8.2.1.7 Religion, Secularism, and Existentialism:**

Similarly, *The Outsider*, which may be read in the context of Existentialism. From Meursault's point of view, the world is meaningless, and it continually rejects the attempts of other characters to make sense of the human. He rejects religious and secular efforts aimed at finding meaning. From the director at the old people's Home who arranges a religious funeral for his mother Madame Meursault to the examining magistrate who tries to guide Meursault towards Christian faith to the Chaplain who lectures Meursault about repentance and the afterlife,

Meursault is often advised to embrace religion and place his faith in a divine world beyond this one. Meursault, however, is a staunchly atheist and insists that he believes only in this life and this physical experience.

Efforts to engage Meursault in secular structures of meaning are equally futile. When Meursault's boss offered him a job in Paris, he expected Meursault to take advantage of career development opportunities. Meursault, however, lacked any ambition and turned down the offer of the boss without considering it. As a student, Meursault recalls, "I had lots of ambitions...But when I had to give up my studies, I learned very quickly that none of it really mattered". When Marie asked Meursault if he would marry her, she expected that he would take the institution of marriage seriously. Yet Meursault is indifferent to this, he thinks "it didn't mean anything" to love a person, and accepts to marry Marie simply because she wants to marry her. Though he grows fond of her, he doesn't cultivate any attachment to her more meaningful than superficial attraction. Throughout his trial, Meursault is equally bemused by the meaninglessness of the justice system and finds its attempts to impose rational, meaningful structure on his actions ridiculous. He considers the guilty verdict he eventually receives entirely arbitrary and describes its "certainty" as "arrogant."

Meursault's steadfast nihilism frustrates those who attempt to convert him to their ways of thinking and they often feel Meursault's point of view as a threat to their ideas. "Do you want my life to be meaningless?" the examining magistrate bellows when Meursault refuses to accept his faith in God. The prosecutor passionately describes "the emptiness of a man's heart" as "an abyss threatening to swallow up society," casting Meursault as a threat to social order. This tension between Meursault's sense of life's meaninglessness and other characters' persistent efforts to impose structures of meaning demonstrates neither faith nor secularism can bring meaning to one's life. Meursault life is existential which holds the concept that the world is absurd and that looking for order or meaning of any kind is a futile endeavour. Humans must embrace the world's absolute indifference to human life. He spurns the notion of essential meaning and realises that death is a levelling agent which brings equal possibilities.

#### **8.2.1.8 Chance and Interchangeability:**

Meursault considers all experiences of human life interchangeable, arbitrary, absurd, and essentially meaningless. "One life was as good as another," he told his boss, explaining his lack of interest in the opportunity to move to Paris. For him, it is only a matter of chance that events



proceed as they do. His thoughts on the beach steps as he decides whether to return to Masson's bungalow or to go back down to the beach could summarize his attitude towards every life choice: "to stay or to go, it amounted to the same thing." His attitude in this instance is highly ironic as his choice to go back down to the beach leads to the murder that changes his life dramatically. Similarly, Meursault is thoroughly convinced of the arbitrariness of the events during his imprisonment and trial. Meursault's primary contention with the judicial procedure is its certainty, its unwillingness to embrace chance. After being convicted, Meursault believes that the verdict might as well have been the opposite, as all the factors that led to it were entirely arbitrary. He fantasizes about a new form of capital punishment which would leave the condemned a chance for hope and eliminate the unyielding certainty of death by guillotine.

Likewise, Meursault treats human relationships as incidental arrangements, believing that any person could replace any other person in a relationship without making a difference. He tells Marie that he would marry any other women with whom he had the same relationship he has with her. He kills the Arab for no personal motive and the man could have been anybody. Thus, though "The Outsider" of the title refers primarily to Meursault's own estrangement from society, it also refers to the man Meursault kills, by chance a stranger or an outsider whom the novel never names. Contemplating his own death, Meursault reminds himself that it doesn't matter when one dies, since other men and women will naturally go on living far into the future.

However, none of the people around Meursault views events as fluid and interchangeable. Throughout the trial, the prosecutor repeatedly portrays Meursault's murder as a premeditated crime, fundamentally connected to Meursault's prior behaviour. The prosecutor's determination to prove the deliberate malice of Meursault's actions reaches its highest pitch when his closing argument equates Meursault's disengagement and indifference at his mother's funeral to the act of another criminal who murdered his own father.

***Check your Progress***

1. How does the novel address the themes of secularism and faith?
2. Briefly examine Meursault's nihilistic views about life.
3. How does the novel perceive the interchangeability of human life?

### **8.2.1.9 Silence, Passiveness, and Indifference:**

The novel opens with Meursault's indifference at his mother's funeral and the consternation it provokes among the people around him. This dynamic returns much more strongly to the trial, where the story of Meursault's insensitivity towards his mother's death proves to be what ultimately turns the jury against him. The surprise and consternation of the people at the beginning of the novel implied that they judged Meursault on the basis of his indifference. The court scene in the latter half of the novel makes these judgements explicit. Meursault is equally indifferent towards his marital life and his wife Marie who, of all the characters, shows him the most warmth. Although he loves her and appreciates her company, he is indifferent to her essential being and does not love her as a unique individual. When Marie asks Meursault if he wants to marry her, he tells her that it makes no difference to him and that they could if she wanted to. In prison later on, he fantasizes about other women without imagining Marie specifically. Conversely, when Marie ceases to write to him, it is possible to imagine that she could have taken a new man or been dead.

Meursault's emotional indifference contributed to his overall passive attitude. Lacking goals and desires of his own, Meursault rarely seems to care how events turn out and acts simply to satisfy his immediate physical needs, allowing his life to flow by as it will. His passive observation of people from the balcony in chapter 2 provides a possible pattern to his philosophy of life. He watches others without doing anything. Even the crucial act of his murder is described in passive terms, "the trigger gave." As the prosecutor elaborates, Meursault's passive indifference threatens society because it can't be assimilated into social life. Social life is premised on care for relationships, careers, friendships, family. Thus, Meursault himself is the stranger or outsider to the social fabric of his world.

Meursault begins and ends the novel in a supreme state of indifference, yet his indifference at the novel's end is achieved after enduring the gruelling frustration he experiences in prison. His indifference at the beginning of the novel seemed like dull apathy, and his indifference at the end seems to be a kind of enlightenment. He embraces indifference as an active choice, opening himself to the indifference of the world itself. The English translations of the novel differ critically in characterising this broader indifference. The first translation by Stuart Gilbert translates, "I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe," while the second by Joseph Laredo translates, "I laid my heart open to the gentle indifference of the

universe.” Matthew Ward's most recent translation reads, “I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world.” Yet, despite their differences, each of these translations translates the indifference of the world as benign, as something to embrace and be “happy” among, rather than something to despise and fear.

#### **8.2.1.10 Relationships:**

Throughout the novel, Meursault remains unable to experience deep, complex relationships with the people in his life. All of his relationships from the filial relationship he had with his mother to his friendship with Raymond to his romantic and marital relationship with Marie are passionless, and determined much more by incidental, superficial impressions than by deep-felt emotional bonds. His casual, carefree and indifferent attitude towards those relationships allows him to treat people in his life according to his own desires without feeling any sense of duty to them. Once he no longer has anything to talk with his mother about, he sends her off to an old age Home and is puzzled to hear his neighbours disapprove of the decision. At his mother's vigil, he drinks coffee and smokes, as usual, not feeling obliged to act differently out of respect.

Although attached to Marie, Meursault does not feel bound to her as a unique individual and freely admits that he is not in love with her. Though he helps Raymond by writing the letter to his mistress and by testifying to her infidelity at the police station, Meursault does not feel these actions to be any sort of burden on himself and performs them in a spirit of indifference. Ironically, Meursault's murder could be viewed as a huge sacrifice made for the well-being of his friend Raymond, who has a problem with the Arab. Yet the Arab's connection with Raymond is, according to Meursault, entirely incidental and Meursault shoots the Arab without even thinking about Raymond.

Meursault's cool detachment from relationships is juxtaposed by several passionate bonds between other characters, including the tender warmth between Thomas Perez and Madame Meursault, the volatile resentment between Raymond and his mistress, and the excruciating love-hate relationship between Salamano and his dog. Though Meursault remains just as unattached to others at the novel's end as he was at the start, he glimpses the possibility of a deeper connection to others several times in the second part of the novel. The first occurs after Celeste's testimony on the witness stand when Meursault feels for “the first time in my life I...wanted to kiss a man.” The second occurs in the final chapter when Meursault realizes “why at the end of her life

Maman had taken a 'fiancé.' In the novel's last sentence, Meursault feels that even his estrangement from society can be capable of giving companionship, thinking that "to feel less alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate."

***Check Your Progress***

1. Bring out the ways in which the novel explores the theme of relationship.
2. Discuss Meursault's personality with special reference to his Silence and indifference to people and situations.

**8.2.2 Language and Narration:**

Two different kinds of language are juxtaposed as the narrator, an unidentified 'I', reads a text sent by 'the Home'. The telegram employs a euphemism, 'passed away, and ends with a purely formal greeting. It informs the reader of the event of his mother's death while concealing the significance of that death. It is also a command that the narrator obeys as he leaves to attend the funeral. The narrator-reader nevertheless does not accept the authority of the telegram without criticism." It doesn't mean anything," he says; the language is inadequate. In portraying the narrator as a reader, *The Outsider* is indicating to us, his readers, how we should approach it: we should beware of the pitfalls and commands it contains. As for the narrator's own language, it is less formal. It also conceals the reality of death, leaving open the question of whether the character-narrator is disturbed or not. But this language broadcasts its own inadequacy by the use of phrases like 'perhaps' and 'I don't know'.

This enables us to define the connection between the language of the telegram and that of the narrator. The former is authoritative, sure of itself and closed to outside intervention; it does not tell us when the mother died, but it does inform us that it was itself composed 'today'. However, the latter is aware of an imprecision which it seeks unsuccessfully to correct. The two are in conflict and, although the narrator-character obeys the telegram, the narrator-reader fights back by turning it into a text written by himself. The telegram is 'the quintessence of writing' because it imposes abstract, arbitrary categories on the flux of human experience. Certainly, the

written language is an instrument of oppression in *The Outsider*. The narrator, whom we discover to be a French-Algerian called Meursault helps bring about the murder of an Arab by writing letter to his sister. Moreover, Camus emphasizes that this is written by omitting the content of the letter, but describing the tools that Meursault uses to compose it: the ‘squared paper’, the ‘small red wooden penholder’ and the ‘ink-pot with purple ink’ (54). However, the use of language and the distinction made between written and spoken are slightly ambiguous. For instance, in the second half of the novel the language of oppression is the rhetoric of the courtroom, a language that seeks to manipulate feelings rather than to reason. This is the spoken language associated with a privileged social class and the power structures of the society. Moreover, in the novel the language of the streets of Algiers can, where it occurs, be an instrument of oppression. The incident where Raymond beats up the Arab man is presented not by the narrator, but by Raymond who uses slangy French. What is significant is that it is the longest conversation in French in the book.

If the written/spoken categories are too simple, it remains true that there is a language of authority that is associated with the warden of the home, Meursault’s boss and the law courts, and hence with the state and with economic and political power. However, there is no working-class discourse that offers an instantaneous release from them. In the courtroom, the characters who belong to working-class like Marie and Celeste are enmeshed in the language of authority and unable to make themselves understood. But, even if the court laughs at them because they cannot express themselves, the reader knows that it is their inability to use language that is the mark of their honesty.

Similarly, the note of dissidence in the narrator’s language comes from its wariness. The conflict between the languages of authority and dissidence is present in the first half of the book and dominates the second half. There, the true nature of the language of authority is revealed at the end of the second part. In Chapter 4, Meursault tells the readers in a mocking tone that the judge ‘said in a bizarre way that my head would be cut off in a public place in the name of the French people (*Outsider*164). The pompous mention of ‘the French people’ is characteristic of what one might also call the language of the guillotine. These are not the only two language and narrative styles of *The Outsider*. The last chapter of the second Part is written differently: one half of it as a rigorous intellectual meditation and the other half as a cry of revolt. There is an instance of partially non-verbal language; it is the outburst of the Arab woman whom Raymond

beats. One cannot resist drawing the comparison with the primal scream. Another pattern of language used in the novel is Meursault's monologue in prison. It is portrayed as a stream of consciousness that allows him to cling to a kind of identity, which is fluid and schizophrenic. The authoritarian, pretentious, and totalitarian language of the courtroom is contrasted through the partially non-verbal patterns of narrative modes brilliantly employed by Camus in the novel.

Silence is presented as another pattern of language used in the novel. Silence is a form of resistance and protest. Certain social groups are forced to remain silent, which is therefore associated with oppression; the Arabs barely speak and their silence is an expression of authenticity in the novel. Meursault the character has been frequently silent and when questioned by the magistrate, he responds that 'the truth is I never have much to say. So, I keep quiet' (104). Here again, his taciturnity during his trial is presented as a protest against the language of the jurists. While the narrator of a novel can hardly remain silent and while narrating his own story, he makes his readers that silence contains authenticity. Meursault does so in the first paragraph by the brevity of his sentences and by the lack of subordinate clauses that imply causality and hierarchy. Not surprisingly, Roland Barthes concluded that the language of '*The Outsider*' 'exists as a silence.'

To explain the use of the lyrical or poetic language one might refer to Jean-Paul Sartre's discussion of the relationship between poetry and prose. Sartre says that 'the language of poetry rises upon the ruins of prose (*Situations* 86).' Conscious that his first language could not explain the world properly, Meursault decided to strive for a flood of images. Conversely, it could be argued that, the poetic language to which Meursault resorts to describe the world can defend itself against Meursault's distrust of habitual language. For instance, in the novel, Part 1, Chapter 2, depicts his joy of a day at the beach with Marie: 'I had all the sky in my eyes and it was blue and golden (*Outsider* 34)'. Man, and the universe merge, briefly and with ecstasy. Another example is the passage where the sounds and body sensations invade and catch the consciousness of the narrator. After the decisive evening when he writes Raymond's letter, Meursault stands in the darkness and it is explained thus: 'The building was calm and from the depths of the stairwell rose a dark, dank breath. I heard nothing but the throb of my blood which was booming in my ears (*Outsider* 55)'.

***Check Your Progress***

1. Comment on Camus' use of language in the novel
2. Briefly explain purpose of the poetic or lyrical language pattern employed.

**8.2.3 Critical Appreciation:**

A Critical appreciation of Camus' *The Outsider* is a complex process since the critical reception of the novel itself was diverse and conflicting. In the afterword of the 1955 edition of the novel, Camus himself wrote: "A long time ago, I summed up *The Outsider* in a sentence which I realise is extremely paradoxical. In our society, any man who doesn't cry at his mother's funeral is liable to be condemned to death." Critics opened serious discussions on Camus' art of fiction writing, the political implications of the novel, his profound humanism, and the untranslatable narrative of *The Outsider* and other related topics.

**8.2.3.1 Jean Paul Sartre's Observations on *The Outsider*:**

In his article "An Explication of *The Stranger*" Jean Paul Sartre points out the unexplainable nature of the novel. For this Sartre also draws on Camus' essay "The myth of Sisyphus." Sartre says the central idea conceived and executed in *The Stranger* can be seen explained in the essay by Camus. According to Camus' *Notebooks*, his essay on Sisyphus was completed first in 1941. Sartre in his explanation points out that there are a lot of questions answered in Camus' essay, especially to the accusation that *The Stranger* is less a novel because of its unconventionality. Sartre also says that Camus must have compelled to make a philosophical translation of his fictional message conveyed in the novel.

Sartre notes that *The Stranger* was met with a sudden reception. This work was unique and difficult to understand due to its gratuitousness, ambiguity and inexplicable nature. Rather than trying to prove anything Sartre puts his emphasis on the novel anti-hero Meursault who reacts to his mother's death indifferently by going swimming, starting a futile affair, seeing a film. He killed the Arab on account of the sun and the heat. Meursault declared the day before his execution that he was glad to hope that a great crowd would welcome him with cries of hatred on the scaffold. Sartre considers Meursault "an innocent man" for whom moral

categories do not apply. He is a man whose absurdity is, in Sartre's opinion, both a state of fact and a state of lucidity. The absurd man is the one who may inevitably draw conclusions from a basic absurdity. Sartre defines this fundamental absurd as the gap between the eternal condition of beings and the finitude of human existence. In other words, this is the divide between mind and body.

### **8.2.3.2 *The Outsider or The Stranger?***

*The exact title for the English translation of the 1942 classic by Albert Camus, L'Étranger, is not that self-evident.* The choice of a title is one of the most important decisions a literary translator has to make and it is difficult to summarize an author's work in a new language. The French term an *étranger* can mean a foreign national, an alienated outsider or an alien traveller. Here the issue is, why has the novel always been referred to in two titles in its English translation? The available answer is simple: *The Stranger* is the title in American editions, and *The Outsider* in British editions. The British were more excited about translating Camus than the Americans. Cyril Connolly, a magazine editor and influential literary critic, sees the Algerian tale of Camus as a new trend for fiction. Connolly brought *The Outsider* to the attention of the British publisher Jamie Hamilton right away. After buying the British rights from Gallimard in February 1945, Hamilton and the American editor Blanche Knopf decided to release the English translation of the book. Hamilton decided on the translator, Stuart Gilbert. Gilbert was a friend of James Joyce and had a good background in the translation of novels such as Andre Malraux's *Man's Fate*. Although Gilbert titled the translation *The Stranger*, British publisher Hamilton decided to switch the title to *The Outsider*. It was because in 1945 a rival British publisher Hutchinson's published the English translation of a Polish novel (Maria Kuncewiczowa's *Cudzoziemka*) that they unfortunately called *The Stranger*. Hamilton wrote to Knopf in New York advising him of the modification. but Knopf who had finished typing and printing the translation maintained the original title, *The Stranger*. Readers have not been made aware of the discretion that underlies both titles. It was purely accidental, and for years, no one could convincingly explain why Camus's *L'Étranger* is sometimes *The Stranger* and sometimes *The Outsider*. However, it must be admitted that the titles resonate differently, giving rise to conflicting political interpretations.



***Check your Progress***

1. Explain Jean Paul Sartre's critical comments on *The Stranger*.
2. Discuss the context which led to the release of the novel's first English translation in two different titles.

### **8.2.3.3 Cultural Adaptations:**

Camus' contributions to literature are of greater significance in the realm of culture too. The major cultural interpretations and the cinematographic adaptations on Camus tended to treat his works with much more seriousness. An example is the pop band *The Cure*, whose first hit single, titled 'Killing an Arab', was something of an anthem for segments of early 1980s European youth. However, although the song is a short summary of the central scene in *The Stranger*, it also reflects and amplifies the indifference to Arab life and culture already implicit in the novel. The death of the Arab serves as a pretext, an event that leads to existential reflections important to Western audiences. What is almost casually implied as obvious in both the song and the novel is that there are things of much greater import than the killing of an Arab. The outrage in the novel is not that Meursault killed an Arab, but rather that he was sentenced to death for not mourning his mother. The pop song brutally magnifies this outrage expressed in the novel. The changing political landscape and the globalization of *The Cure*'s success led the group to modify the lyrics and change the title to 'Kissing an Arab'. In the Cultural arena of French Republic, Camus is indeed a secular saint. He embodies its ideal. The ability to read stories in a colonial setting that conceal the oppression of indigenous people. Most 19th-century French writers either revel in colonialism or are anguished by it; Camus displays indifference to it in his two most famous novels, *The Outsider* and *The Plague*. He represses the colonial unconscious and this repression explains much of his lasting appeal. In 2013, the Algerian journalist, novelist, and chronicler Kamel Daoud wrote *The Meursault Investigation*, a daring and original sequel to Camus's *The Outsider*. In terms of structure, Daoud's novel resembles *The Fall* more than *The Stranger*, as it is a long monologue disguised as a dialogue between two men. The main character, Haroun, is none other than the brother of the Arab man Meursault murdered. The novel begins by challenging the unilateral European vision in the original novel. We learn about the man killed by Meursault, who was named Moussa, and about the grief of Moussa's family,

provoked not only by the event itself but by Camus's and French society's utter lack of interest in them and their side of the story. In turn we discover that Haroun himself killed a young white man seemingly at random—a crime for which he is arrested. However, *The Meursault Investigation* is not a work of denunciation, for we soon realize that the book is also a homage to *The Outsider*. Indeed, many themes and passages of Daoud's novel are singularly 'Camusian'. For example, Daoud challenges the one-party Algerian state in a passage in which Moussa, after being arrested, is harangued by an officer of the FLN who brandishes in front of him the new Algerian flag, just as the prosecutor did with a crucifix in front of Meursault in *The Outsider*. Both Daoud and Camus confront a set of cultural values associated with what they see as alienating regimes, be it the French Republic or the newly independent Algerian state. Daoud's novel is thus both a critique of Camus's colonial bias and a celebration of his ruthless critique of other aspects of French society and culture. Another example of a different kind of Camus renewal is *Yazgi (Fate)*, a 2001 Turkish cinematic adaptation of *The Outsider* directed by Zeki Demirkubuz. In *Fate*, Meursault is called Musa. After he murders two men, Musa is accused, convicted, and eventually exonerated for another murder he did not commit. The movie is set in Turkey, at a geographical and cultural crossroads between Europe and the Middle East, an environment which frees the story from the weight of colonialism. In this setting, where race is a non-factor, Musa's indifference is perhaps even more devastating. Demirkubuz transforms into art the deep social alienation produced by a world ruled by family values, work, and the fatherland, just as Camus did in *The Outsider* with Christian values, office life, and social climbing. Camus lives on Perhaps what makes Camus an extraordinary writer, one whose works millions across continents were and are able to relate to and identify with, is paradoxically his modest background. Unlike the majority of acclaimed French novelists, Camus came from a very poor family; before he became famous, money and how to earn enough to live comfortably were a constant source of worry. *The Outsider*, Camus's most famous work, reflects this background. Camus heralded a new kind of hero (anti-hero) in French fiction. Camus's greatest talent—his ability to translate a new set of rules, a new social reality, and a new way of life into art—is best illustrated by his notion of *bonheur*, a special relationship with nature.

Crucially Camus's concept and experience of the absurd heighten the significance of *bonheur* and as such they are inseparable. Another of his distinctive talent was to be able to transpose a new social reality of the world around him into his works with *bonheur*. His

conception of nature, as a crucial and precious source of sustenance in an otherwise hostile world, resonates intensely with readers because it corresponds to how many live their lives now. Camus is an extraordinary writer because he was able to capture the daily, ordinary moments of his own and his readers' lives and transform them into art. But he was also caught between colony and metropolis and his works at the same time reflect his colonial upbringing with all the shortcomings this entails, notably with respect to the lack of meaningful Algerian characters in his novels and plays. This tension between generosity and indifference powers his works and recognizing it is an indispensable tool to assess his oeuvre. This tension has also made him the literary embodiment of the contemporary cultural and political contradictions of Western powers, an enlightenment at once oppressive and liberating, idolized by some and attacked by others. Camus is too relevant a writer in the contemporary world.

#### **8.2.4 Camus' Legacies:**

In 1957, Camus won the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was not yet 44 years old and was the second youngest Nobel Laureate since Rudyard Kipling. Camus's response to this was interesting that he said the André Malraux, his role model and mentor, deserved the Nobel Prize more than he did. The year 1957 was a year of intense turmoil for Camus since it was the year of the war of Algerian independence was raging. The Nobel Prize created a huge uproar and became a worldwide controversy. Camus died only two years later in a car crash. He might have said that his death had no meaning, though it does offer a glimpse of his personal life. The crash occurred on the way from his countryside house, in Lour Marin in the south of France, to Paris. Before leaving for Paris, Camus wrote many letters. The various aspects of these letters part later gave rise to many publications, including a book-length account of his last days, which spans fifteen years and includes nearly 900 letters, notes, and telegrams. In 1960 and in the following days, all that mattered was that Camus had died and this was a national tragedy. The question of his legacy immediately arose. Some of his writings were secured by the authorities and later decided not to publish immediately on order of Malraux, including his close friends the poet René Char, Jean Grenier, and the novelist Louis Guilloux, as they believed it could be politically inflammatory in the midst of the Algerian civil war. It has to be mentioned that it was only after his untimely demise that he became not a famous writer, but a cultural phenomenon. His popularity reached a new level beginning with the fall of the Soviet Union. His works have been translated into numerous languages and *The Outsider* is a mainstay in the academic and literary

sphere across the Western world. Several of his novels and short stories have been adapted into films, his plays are staged around the world, and there are graphic novel adaptations of his works. Countless scholarly publications and research have been done on Camus' oeuvre.

*The Outsider* is the direct inspiration for a pop song and an Algerian writer penned an entire novel as its sequel to the novel. Camus' philosophical notions expressed through his works inspired many to quote, discuss, and use them as great lessons of life. One possible answer for Camus's current popularity is that the deep and abstract quality of Camus's thought makes it transferable. His writings subscribe to any particular belief system. Camus cannot be reduced into an ideology. Camus's perceptions led to misunderstandings, too. "The Rebel", is one of the striking misreading of Camus's works. Camus has been described as a humanist, an anarchist, an anti-communist, a social-democrat, a colonialist, even an anti-colonialist.

Today it is not only Camus's ideas and various commitments that make him prone to so many different interpretations, but also his popularity. Camus has been claimed across the political spectrum, not only by mainstream political parties, but also by radical Arab intellectuals and French anarchists. French anarchists are particularly insistent on depicting Camus as one of theirs. The Iraqi poet Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayyati publicly praised Camus as a supporter of revolution. Camus was portrayed as a revolutionary by Arab intellectuals and French anarchist groups in the 1950s and early 1960s. Camus serves as a useful stand-in for humanism. Camus refused to openly choose between France and Algeria. His compromise position in part explains why he is popular with Western leaders, who have intervened militarily and economically in the affairs of former colonies while simultaneously invoking humanitarianism and democracy as a justification. Essentially, this is Camus's contradiction. For many, he is the incarnation of the resolution of an impossible synthesis between enlightenment and colonial oppression. This is also why he is such an important figure in the Western world: he is the idealized vision of France's and Europe's colonial past and neo-colonial present. Eventually, some say Camus took the side of colonialism. But this does not match with Camus' with the popular vision of Camus as a concerned humanist rising above political concerns and preoccupations. Yet this contradiction between humanism and colonialism was present in many of his works from his earliest days, with varying degrees of intensity.

***Check your Progress***

1. Write a brief note on the significance of the cultural adaptations of *The Outsider*
2. Comment upon Albert Camus as a Nobel Laureate

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### 8.3 Learning Outcomes

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At the end of this module, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a critical conscience of Albert Camus' existential philosophy.
- Write critical essays, studies and projects on Camus' works.
- Identify Camus' contribution to world literature
- Compare and debate the themes and stylistic features of Camus's works with other writers.
- Discuss and relate the use of language and characterization with contexts.

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### 8.4 Glossary

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**Existentialism:** A philosophical movement often associated with the notions of human existence, meaninglessness of life, death, freedom. The major exponents are Jean Paul Sartre, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Albert Camus, and Simon de Beauvoir.

**Roland Barthes:** A Twentieth century French literary theorist and semiotician. He is associated with the schools of theory such as post-structuralism, deconstruction, and Semiotics.

**Andre Malraux:** A Twentieth century French novelist, critic and a contemporary of Albert Camus. *Man's Fate* (1933) was a famous novel by Malraux. He enthusiastically praised Camus' *The Outsider* for its powerful ideas and persuasive narrative technique.

**The Myth of Sisyphus:** A philosophical and acclaimed essay by Camus, published in 1942. It is in this essay Camus introduces his philosophy of the Absurd and Existentialism.

**The Cure:** The pop band which released the adapted pop song version of *The Outsider*. The title of the album was 'Killing the Arab'

**Camusian:** A term which refers to 'of or pertaining to Albert Camus'

**Bonheur:** This refers to Camus’ conception of nature. It expresses a new way of life and a new social reality which is a significant source of sustenance in a strange and hostile world. This concept is best illustrated in Camus’ theory of the Absurd.

**“The Rebel”:** A remarkable book-length essay by Camus. It is a passionate and philosophical work about politics, rebellion and revolution.

**Jean Paul Sartre:** A leading Twentieth century French philosopher, novelist and playwright. He is a chief exponent of Existentialism.

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## 8.5 Sample Questions

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### 8.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. *The Outsider* opens with the sentence:
  - (a) ‘Mother died today’
  - (b) ‘I received a telegram’
  - (c) ‘She had been ill for a very long time’
2. *Yazgi (Fate)* is a 2001 Turkish cinematic adaptation of *The Outsider*. Who is the director?
  - (a) Luchino Visconti
  - (b) Federico Fellini
  - (c) Zeki Demirkubuz
3. Which pop band released the 1979 hit single “Killing an Arab”?
  - (a) The Cure
  - (b) The Smiths
  - (c) Depeche Mode
4. The major theme of the novel is based on the philosophy of
  - (a) Nihilism
  - (b) Existentialism
  - (c) Idealism
5. What is the essay that primarily discusses Camus’s concept of existentialism?
  - (a) The Rebel
  - (b) The Myth of Sisyphus

- (c) A Happy Death
6. When did Albert Camus receive the Nobel Prize?
- (a) 1957
  - (b) 1956
  - (c) 1952
7. Who wrote the novel *The Meursault Investigation*?
- (a) Jean Paul Sartre
  - (b) Roland Barthes
  - (c) Kamel Daoud
8. What is the title of the pop song based on *The Outsider*?
- (a) Killing the Arab
  - (b) Execution in France
  - (c) An Arab murder
9. What is Camus's notion of 'Bonheur'?
- (a) A special relation to Nature
  - (b) Existential crisis
  - (c) The meaninglessness of life
10. Who translated *The Outsider* into English first?
- (a) Hamilton
  - (b) Gilbert
  - (c) Smith

### 8.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Write a note on the theme of indifference in *The Outsider*
2. Briefly examine Albert Camus's legacies
3. Comment upon the significance of the cultural adaptations of *The Outsider*
4. Examine the existential storyline in *The Outsider*
5. Discuss the significance of the physical world as projected in the novel through Meursault's perception.

### 8.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the peculiar features of the narrative structure and language of *The Outsider*.

2. Analyse Camus's Philosophy of Absurd as significant thematic preoccupation in the novel.
3. Examine the major thematic concerns in *The Outsider*

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## 8.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Camus, Albert, and Sandra Smith. *The Outsider*. UK ed., Penguin Classic, 2013.
2. Camus, Albert. *The Outsider; Translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert with an Introduction by Cyril Connolly*. First Edition, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2021.
3. Camus, Albert. *Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Tingle Books, 2021.
4. ---. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. Vintage, 1992.
5. *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Spectrum, 1969. Carroll, David. *Albert Camus the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice*. Columbia University Press, 2008.
6. Thody, Philip. *Albert Camus: A Study of His Work*. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Hamish Hamilton, 2021.



## **Unit - 9: Origin and Development of American Novel**

### **Structure**

**9.0** Objectives

**9.1** Introduction

**9.2** Origin and Development of American Novel

**9.2.1** The American Novel: Origins

**9.2.2** 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Novel

**9.2.3** 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Novel

**9.2.4** Contemporary Novel

**9.3** Learning Outcomes

**9.4** Glossary

**9.5** Sample Questions

**9.6** Suggested Readings

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### **9.0 Introduction**

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The novel appeared late in America. In the colonial period, those who had the skill to write served the cause of religion or politics. A few wrote verse, but hardly anyone attempted fiction. Surprisingly, within a hundred years the American novel became independent of the British novel. After World War I, the American novel excelled the British novel, a fact conceded by the British novelists themselves.

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### **9.1 Objectives**

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After going through this unit you will be able to:

- describe American fiction
- provide a short historical account of its origin and development
- discuss the major trends in American fiction
- give an idea of the contributions of major American novelists

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## 9.2 Origin and Development of American Novel

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### 9.2.1 The American Novel: Origins

There is a controversy about what should be considered an American novel. Does it mean the first novel written by an American or does it mean the first novel written with typical American themes? Both these are unsatisfactory explanations. Perhaps, it is more appropriate to confer the status of the first American novel on a work of fiction which deals with a characteristic American theme and technique. However, it is true that until almost the mid-nineteenth century, there is hardly any novel which qualifies as an American novel if we apply this definition. But a large number of novels were written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The early novels are William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), Susannah and Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1794). This sentimental fiction is based on Samuel Richardson's novels such as *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747-48). Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810) has been described as the first American novelist. He published five novels including *Wieland*, *Edgar Huntly* and *Ormond* between 1799 and 1801, and won the praise of British writers like Shelley, Keats and Scott. Among the Americans, Cooper, Poe and Hawthorne thought of him highly. Brown's fiction may be described as mood novels with loose plots. James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) wrote thirty-three novels most of which betray lack of craftsmanship and haste. Yet Cooper's novels were popular in America and Europe. How do we account for his popularity? These novels deal with romance of various types, of the sea, of the frontier, and of the forest. Americans looked upon the novels of Cooper as an epic of the frontier. His novels are novels of adventure, of action at sea, or in the wilderness. Americans loved adventure and action.

When we move from Cooper to Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), we see a different kind of artist at work. He was influenced by the gothic novel of terror; he was a romantic but not a transcendentalist. The Calvinistic tenet of damnation fascinated him; he was interested in a study of the impact of an awareness of sin on the human soul. This interest made him take up moral themes and analyse neuroses and fixations. He also considered the impact of environment on individuals. These are, as you know, very contemporary themes even today. Hawthorne uses

symbolism and allegory to communicate the moral significance of his stories. His settings have a supernatural aura. His symbols have multiple meanings. *The Scarlet Letter*, which is the title of his famous novel, is a superb example of different meanings in a single symbol. The letter A in scarlet which Hester Prynne wears round her neck is at once a symbol of adultery and of her pride. It is a token of her defiance of the bigotry of the community. The novel deals with the consequence of sin, of an adulterous relationship between Arthur Dimmesdale, the minister, and Hester Prynne, a married woman. The sinners suffer. Theirs is a sin of passion of genuine love. But Roger Chillingworth's (Hester's husband) calculated and relentless pursuit of vengeance is a greater sin. In Hawthorne's words, he has "violated, in cold blood the sanctity of the human heart." Melville said that Hawthorne depicted the "great power of blackness." In the decade, 1850-60, Hawthorne published his most important work: *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of Seven Gables* (1851) and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and *Marble Faun* (1860). He wrote a number of short stories. He called himself a romancer rather than a novelist. In his view, the novel aims at a minute fidelity to the possible and the probable. A romance gives a certain freedom to the writer. In a romance, the author can "retouch the photo" and add the supernatural events. The entire work is conceived as a poem in a romance. Hawthorne was not quite successful in maintaining this difference in his fiction.

A contemporary of Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) wrote her famous novel, *Uncle Tom & Cabin* in 1852. It was immensely popular. She dealt with the most dangerous issue of the time, namely, slavery. It was translated into many languages. Abraham Lincoln said with some exaggeration that this novel brought about the Civil War. Mrs. Stowe's knowledge of slavery and the laws in different states in the south was not accurate. But she had intuition which is the quality of a romancer. The novel has a double plot or two journeys: in one, the slaves escape to freedom in Canada; in the second, Tom goes to the South and becomes a martyr. Tom's life falls into three phases. In Kentucky, he lives with his first owners. In the second, his new masters treat him well. In the last phase, he is tortured by Simon Legree. Mrs. Stowe presents a charitable picture of the problem of slavery; she does not blame the South alone. Mrs. Stowe's great success eclipsed Herman Melville who had to wait to obtain recognition as America's greatest novelist. By coincidence Melville's and America's greatest novel, *Moby Dick*, was published in the same year as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

## Realism

A new phase in the development of the American novel started with Mark Twain, William Dean Howells and Henry James. They inaugurated the Age of Realism and represented several facets of realism. Let us first try to understand what realism is before we consider the work of these three novelists. Broadly, it is an accurate representation of actual life in literature. It includes both the selection of themes and the manner of presenting them. It developed somewhat as a reaction to the romantic movement. It is an attempt to record the ordinary experiences of daily life. The novel form was found to be particularly suitable for realistic expression. Some of the more important features of realism are: 1) Depiction of middle-class life; 2) Focus on ordinary rather than unusual events; 3) An objective presentation of facts; 4) Absence of didactic comments; 5) Stress on phonographic and photographic reality; 6) Absence of improbabilities; 7) Treatment of money as a strong driving force in the modern world; 8) Novel as a critique of society.

**William Dean Howells** (1837-1920), one of the exponents of realism, defined it as “nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material.” His novels such as *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), *A Modern Instance* (1882), and others depict the attractive side of American life. *The Rise of Silas Lapham* is the study of a self-made businessman. Although he was shrewd in business, he is awkward in social behaviour. The 'rise' of Silas Lapham is not success in business, nor is it an improvement in his social status, but a growth in his moral stature. He refuses to cheat for personal gain, goes bankrupt by remaining honest. The achievement of **Mark Twain** is far greater. He was America's greatest humorist. Most people took his writings to be funny. But he was serious and became a pessimist towards the end of his life. His most important novels are boys' books, but only apparently so. **Henry James** (1843-1916) is more sophisticated in the choice of his themes and in the development of his technique. His fictional canvas is much wider than that of either Howells or Twain. He invented the novel of Cosmopolitanism. While his predecessors, Cooper, Melville and Hawthorne were concerned with adventures in the wilderness or on the seas or the warping of the soul by Puritanism, James sought to study the moral and psychological problems faced by Americans in Europe. The picture is that of an American innocent confronting a complex, cultured and corrupt European civilization. James's models were Balzac, George Eliot and Nathaniel Hawthorne. He anticipated Proust and Joyce in fictional structure. He admired Turgenev. James's novels are usually put in

three phases. In the beginning he dealt with the international theme. *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) belongs to this phase. In the second phase, novels written under the influence of French naturalism such as *The Bostonians* (1886) were published. In the third phase novels such as *The Ambassadors* (1909) were written. He returned to the international theme in his last phase. James's novels are located in New York, London, Paris and Rome. His characters are an international elite. The world which James portrayed with great skill may not be seen today, but James has secured a permanent place in literature by virtue of his penetrating psychological analyses of character and by his attempts to elevate the novel to a respectable art-form. Edith Wharton (1862-1937) wrote in the manner of James. *The Age of Innocence* (1920) which depicts the New York society of the 1870s is her best novel. *Ethan Frome* (1911), another famous novel deals with three wasted lives.

### **Naturalism**

In the last decades of the century, a group of American writers were influenced by naturalism which was found in Emile Zola's novels. Among these are Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser. Let us try to understand the term, "Naturalism." It started in the late nineteenth century. It is found mostly in fiction and drama. It may be described as a heightened form of realism which we discussed earlier. The main difference between realism and naturalism is that realism is more a matter of technique of presentation whereas naturalism is a set of philosophical beliefs. It has its roots in biological and deterministic ideas based on Darwin's theories. According to "naturalism", man is an animal, a complex one. He is also influenced by heredity and environment. Man's environment is conditioned by social and economic factors. He is almost powerless against these forces. In naturalistic writing man is reduced to his material components. So there is a frank discussion on sex and hunger. They aim at a dispassionate (or scientific) documentation of 'a slice of life', a phrase used by Zola. They wish to "tell everything" and to "experiment" with characters as in a laboratory. They tried to explain human behaviour in terms of heredity and environment.

**Stephen Crane** (1871-1900) attacked romantic idealism and attempted to depict fighting a hostile world alone. He saw human beings as victims of environment and heredity. *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), a novel about the Civil War, is at least partly a study of the impact of environment in shaping the behaviour of Henry Fleming. **Frank Norris** (1870-1902) was the foremost exponent of literary naturalism in America. *McTeague* (1899) exposes greed and

inhumanity *The Octopus* (1901) also deals with the insatiable greed of railroad owners and growers of wheat. Norris portrays the lives of individuals who are in the grip of heredity and environment. He viewed fiction as a better medium of truth than painting, poetry, or music. It enabled him to reach the truth by piercing the “tissues and wrappings of flesh, down deep into the red, living heart of things.” **Theodore Dreiser** (1871-1945) is considered the greatest practitioner of naturalism in American fiction. His novels document a mass of details of human experience. His frank treatment of sex and social relations opened up new themes. In the portrayal of characters like Sister Carrie, he exploded the American myth that success depended on hard work and virtue. Dreiser invented the term, “Chemis,” by which he meant the inner urges which subjugate the human will. *Sister Carrie* (1900) is the story of a country girl who was driven by the ambition to possess things which were beyond her reach. She yearns for love, wealth and fame. She gets all these but loses her virtue. Charles Drouet, a travelling salesman, George Hurstwood, manager of a fashionable bar, and Robert Ames, a cultured young man, figure in her life as she climbs the ladder of fame. At the end, she remains dissatisfied in spite of her material success. *Sister Carrie* dealt with illicit sexual relations which were taboo when it was published in 1900. Dreiser's other novels like *An American Tragedy* (1925) also show man as a powerless victim in the grip of heredity and environment.

### **The Problem Novel**

Another trend in American fiction is the “problem novels.” They are allied to naturalistic fiction. They were popular in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Upton Sinclair (1878-1968) a socialist reformer and a propaganda novelist, wrote a series of novels which are exposés of American business and industry. *The Jungle* (1906) exposes the meat industry, *King Coal* (1917) and *Oil* (1927) are also in the same vein.

A new trend called muck-raking emerged and a variant of it is the sardonic realism of **Sinclair Lewis** (1885-1951) in novels like *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1922). In the first of these, he introduced the American small town to Europe. *Babbitt* portrays an American businessman, a perfect conformist. He is a typical salesman in a business-oriented civilization. The salesman becomes a recurring figure in American literature. One well-known example is Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*. In another novel, *Arrowsmith* (1925), Lewis exposed the malpractices of the medical profession. The picture one gets in this novel is that the entire country is focused on money-making, dishonesty, and quackery. Lewis's novels underscore that

material success does not necessarily bring happiness. Contemporaries of Sinclair Lewis were busy looking at American life from other angles and presenting their perceptions in fiction. For instance, **Sherwood Anderson's** (1876-1941) *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) deals with isolation and its sequel, alienation, in American life. The characters are “grotesques”; they fail because they are unable to communicate. The stories in Anderson's book are diverse, the isolated lives of different characters present a pattern of the underlying sadness of human life. He revolted against industrialized civilization and favoured a natural way of life. His influence not only on his contemporaries like Ernest Hemingway, but on succeeding generations of novelists is widespread. **F.Scott Fitzgerald** is called the spokesman of the Jazz Age. His novels like *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Tender Is the Night* (1934) give us a picture of that age. The characters in *Gatsby* pursue pleasure without bothering about the consequences. *Gatsby* symbolises America enslaved, in Fitzgerald's own words in “the service of a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty.” He is duped by material success. Fitzgerald was fascinated with the very rich and that was the undoing of his characters and himself. *Tender is the Night* testifies to the consequences of living with the very rich.

### **Women Novelists**

It is time to consider the work of some American women writers. Carson McCullers writes of isolation and its tragic consequences. Her characters are grotesques. Eudora's *Welty Delta Wedding* (1946) is a single novel by a short story writer. Katherine Anne Porter is a successful story writer, who wrote two connected stories in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939).

### **Southern Novelists**

The Southern novelists, Allan Tate, Robert Penn Warren and William Styron have been spokesmen of the South. In Tate's (1899) single novel, *The Fathers* (1938), an old man narrates the events around the start of the Civil War. It portrays the collapse of the Southern feudal structure, Warren's (1905-) *All the King's Men* (1946) is a political novel, depicting the career of Huey Long, the Governor of Louisiana. Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness* (1951) traces the change of fortunes of a fashionable family. It is more of an American story, than a limited Southern one.

### **African American Novelists**

The African American's privations have been voiced by white writers like Mark Twain and William Faulkner. They have been narrated by their own kind thus adding credibility. Richard Wright's (1908-1960) *Native Son* (1940) tells the story of a slum resident who becomes

a victim of his environment. William Faulkner and Ralph Ellison have also addressed African American problems. We shall discuss them later.

### **Experimental Novel**

We have the experimental novel pioneered by John Dos Passos (1896-). His trilogy, U.S.A. starting with *The 42nd Parallel* (1930) and 1919 (1932), and ending with *The Big Money* (1936) is a serial novel; here the USA is the hero, the villain and the victim. He calls his technique "Newsreel." It contains newspaper headlines, advertisements, etc. Then there is "The Camera Eye" which is the novelist's commentary on the events in the form of stream of consciousness. James T. Farrell (1904) an admirer of Dreiser, wrote a trilogy, *Studs Lonigan* (1932-35), on the Chicago Slums. John Steinbeck (1902-) wrote a number of novels on the migrant workers. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) stands above the rest of his fiction. It documents the sufferings of migrant workers just as Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* documents the iniquities suffered by the Blacks. Thomas Wolfe's (1900-1938) *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) depicts a hero seeking a home that eludes him. The hero's journeys take him across many cities and make him interact with different people. That is an absorbing story of America as Wolfe observed it. Saul Bellow achieved critical acclaim, but we shall consider his work later on. Nathaneal West's (1904-1940) *The Day of the Locust* (1939) depicts the boredom suffered by the Mid-western retired people who migrate to Los Angeles in search of glamour, but end in boredom, self-pity, agony and hate.

### **Other Trends**

Other trends in American fiction are:

1. The war novel attempted by Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) on the Civil War, by E.E Cummings, *The Enormous Room* (1922), by Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) on World War I, by Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) on World War II.
2. The historical romance produced by General Lew Wallace (*Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, 1880). Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) deals with the Civil War which became the greatest best-selling novel.
3. The superior type of Westerns such as Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1940).

We shall consider the work of other important novelists of recent times later.



The novel in America is just about two hundred years old. But it has achieved an eminent position in world fiction. Its contribution to themes and techniques is remarkable. Herman Melville, Mark Twain and Henry James and their novels are among the greatest in world literature. Henry James tried to enhance the status of the novel as an art-form.

### **9.2.2 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Novel:**

The American novel grew in stature in the nineteenth century. Some of the novels published in this century received international acclaim. Two novelists who became famous are Herman Melville and Mark Twain. The American novels which may be considered on par with the greatest works of fiction are Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Once, Somerset Maugham, a British novelist, was asked by a publisher to name the greatest American novel. He was unable to decide between these two. These novels are not only great but they reflect American values and culture. Therefore, it is worthwhile exploring these novels though in a precise manner.

#### **Moby Dick**

Melville's *Moby Dick* is a very unusual novel. It does not fit into the ordinary definition of a novel either in its theme or its treatment. It is a compendium of several narrative modes. Its setting is vast: all the oceans on earth. It is perhaps the greatest novel with the sea as its setting. There are no women among the scores of characters. But the characters represent almost every race and religion in the world. It is a story of adventure with an exciting chase and a great fight on the high seas. It is a story of relentless pursuit of revenge. There is mystery and terror as in a Gothic story. Elijah and Fedallah issue warnings and prophecies about the impending catastrophe. It is a novel on whaling; it can be called a treatise on the subject, especially because of the cetological chapters embedded in the novel. These chapters provide the necessary background to the reader and prepare him for the bloody battle between man and whale.

The novel's theme is difficult to grasp. However, there are a few clues to its meaning in the novel. One clue is Father Mapple's sermon in chapter IX. The sermon was delivered just before the start of Captain Ahab's voyage. The message of this sermon is: "If we obey God, we must disobey ourselves, and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists." Father Mapple urges the shipmates: "Sin not, but if you do, take heed to repent of it like Jonah." The second clue to the meaning of this novel appears in chapters 41 and 42. In chapter 41, Ishmael tells us what the White Whale means to Ahab. In the next chapter he explains

what the whale means to himself: “All evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick.” No wonder, Captain Ahab was “intent on an audacious, immitagable, and supernatural revenge.” In the very next chapter, Ishmael says: “Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright.” The idea in this sentence is at the core of the whole novel.

### **Adventures of Huckleberry Finn:**

The second novel for our study in this unit is Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This novel is ostensibly a sequel to Mark Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Both these are supposed to be “boys' books”. This term is rather ambiguous. It may mean books written for the enjoyment of boys. Another possible meaning is that these books deal with the adventures of boys. It may be a boys' book with the first meaning, but it is meant for adults. The book hits American society as no other American book does. It attacks a number of institutions, customs and culture in a devastating manner. It attacks the institution of slavery; it attacks organized religion; it attacks romantic fiction; it attacks sentimentalism; it exposes mob psychology. It is not surprising that one of America's greatest novels was banned from public libraries and schools on the plea that it would corrupt the youth by setting up Huck Finn as a role model. The criticism of American society in the novel is ingeniously embedded in the events which Huck Finn witnesses. He describes the incidents as he saw and understood them, he reports the conversations of several characters as he heard them. It is through the eyes and ears of an almost illiterate, backwoods boy, a teenager, that Mark Twain tells the story. Huck is the author's persona. He admires what he observes and experiences, but the reader knows the novelist's intentions. *Huckleberry Finn* is an attempt to write an anti-sentimental novel. Mark Twain is also critical of the historical romances of Sir Walter Scott and of James Fenimore Cooper.

*Huckleberry Finn* is perhaps the most humorous novel in American literature. At any rate, Mark Twain is recognized as the greatest humorist America has produced. The kind of humour that we notice in this novel is known as “deadpan” humour. Mark Twain's language stresses the concrete and shuns the abstract. That way he makes a direct, immediate impact on the reader. There are several dialects in the novel. Mark Twain belonged to a school of novelists who introduced “realism” and opposed “romanticism” in fiction. Realism demands use of language which is in vogue. Since Huck is barely literate, his vocabulary and sentence patterns are quite limited. The black people in *Huckleberry Finn*, notably Jim, speak the Missouri negro

dialect; an extreme form of the South-Western dialect is used for Mrs. Hotchkiss (chapter 41) and the gossiping neighbors at the Phelps farm; the "Pike county" dialect is used for Huck, Tom, Pap, Aunt Sally and others. Realism extends to the choice of incidents and characters also. Both these are common and taken from everyday life as it was in Mark Twain's time.

Let us consider the structure of the novel. It has certain picaresque elements. Huck and Jim travel down the Mississippi presenting us a cross-section of American society. Huck lies, but his lies are harmless. Neither Huck nor Jim is a picaro (or rogue). The king and the duke qualify as picaroes but these two are incidental characters. The novel is not a picaresque novel like *Don Quixote* or *Tom Jones*. The hero in a typical picaresque novel is callous and amoral. Neither Huck nor Jim is callous and amoral. In fact, Huck goes out of his way, to help those like the king and the duke who cheated him. Jim is too noble and dignified to be called a picaro. Moreover, Huck and Jim are not aimless loafers. They are strongly motivated to obtain freedom. Huck seeks freedom from a drunken and tyrannical father; Jim seeks freedom from his white masters. Huck wants to light out for the territory to escape the "civilizing" influence of Aunt Sally. From this point of view, the novel is one of escape. It also provides escape to the reader through its humour. The setting of the novel is also significant. Much of the action takes place during the voyage down the river. The river has such a central role in the novel that it can be called a character. The river has its moods: tranquil, stormy, floods, foggy. The river has hazards also: pirates, steam-boats crashing on rafts, etc. The river provides a contrast to the land. Whenever Huck goes ashore in his long journey, he encounters cheating, hypocrisy, violence or cruelty. Life on the shore is devoid of humanity, love, or sympathy. By contrast, life on the raft, (or on the river) is peaceful and happy. Mark Twain maintains this contrast to drive home the point that the raft is a paradise, at least until the king and the duke invade it.

The great humorist that Mark Twain was, he became increasingly disillusioned and a pessimist, almost a misanthrope, towards the end of his life. His pessimistic vision found full expression in *What is Man* (1906) and *The Mysterious Stranger* (1916). But the seeds of his pessimism may be noticed by discerning readers even in *Huckleberry Finn*. The novel is undoubtedly an attack on slavery; it is also an attack on the culture (of the South) which allowed and continued slavery. More than these, the novel is an expose of 'the damned human race', but in subdued and subtle tones. The inhumanity of man to other men is a sad commentary on the condition of mankind. Wasn't Mark Twain justified in calling it "the damned human race?"

### 9.2.3 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Novel:

This section deals with two great novelists, Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) and William Faulkner (1897- 1962). Both of them made their mark between the two World Wars. Both of them were near contemporaries. Both of them won the Nobel Prize, Faulkner in 1949 and Hemingway in 1954. Both of them made unique contributions to the American novel. Hemingway fashioned a distinctive style of his own which became a model for several other writers. Faulkner developed an involved narrative method using the stream of consciousness technique. Hemingway emerged as the spokesman of the “lost generation” while Faulkner became the narrator of the “saga” of the decadent post-Civil War society in the South.

We have chosen **Hemingway's** *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) for discussion. It is a novel in which his major concerns and stylistic achievement are displayed at their best. It is quintessential Hemingway, in theme, characterization, technique, and style.

The setting of *The Sun Also Rises* is Paris and Pamplona and other places in Spain. The time is after World War I. The characters are mostly American and British expatriates. The main characters in the novel are personally and grievously affected by World War I. Jake Barnes is an American journalist who was wounded in a strange fashion; he is a sexual cripple. He is the narrator in the novel. He is desperately in love with Brett Ashley and yet he could not fulfill his desire. Brett's fiancé died in the war due to dysentery. Although she is engaged to Mike Campbell, she is promiscuous and runs off with several people like Robert Cohn and Pedro Romero. To add to Jake's agony, he becomes an accomplice in arranging her affairs with other men.

The war has literally unmanned Jake Barnes as it did many more. Europe has become a waste land which was depicted poignantly in T.S. Eliot's famous poem, *The Waste Land*. Hemingway's novel was also written against the same backdrop of a sterile Europe. Alienation, a recurring theme in American literature, is an important theme in this novel also. The trauma of a violent, mechanized war alienated people from their society and environment. Jake is alienated because of his war wound, although he puts on a brave face, he is filled with despair and deep disappointment. In the privacy of his hotel room when he is alone, he has nervous breakdowns. We have already spoken of Brett's loss. She is unable to marry the man she loves, Jake Barnes. Her fiancé is alienated because he cannot manage money.

The characters live by a code to be able to survive and maintain some dignity. The traditional ethical values have crumbled in the war; such values are also rejected by the post-war generation. Their code has emerged from the demands of their situation. This has become famous in the fiction of Hemingway. This code is a touchstone of one's character in a crisis when moral choices are involved. The Hemingway code is a set of a few principles which are well understood by an in-group. They form a secret society and those who belong to this society instinctively recognize one another immediately. The discussion of the code of conduct raises the question of morality. What kind of morality prevails when people simply eat, consume lots of liquor, (passively) watch sports, and indulge in sex? Hemingway is depicting a situation, one which prevailed in post-war Europe. It is a situation which is full of despair. How can one come to terms with a harsh and hopeless world? Hemingway's characters seek to escape the trauma by a deliberate cultivation of a sensuous life. Eating, drinking and sex are part of that way of life. They also resort to ritual activities to forget the harsh world outside. Bullfighting is one such act of ritual. There are other forms of ritual like fishing.

Another important contribution of Hemingway is his innovative style. He found out through his personal participation in World War I that the high sounding rhetoric to win popular support for the war was empty. There was a wide gap between the ground realities of fighting and the idealism mouthed by the political masters. He distrusted the old rhetoric which no longer carried conviction. He deliberately fashioned a new style and a new rhetoric to make a dent on minds saturated with false propaganda.

The novel's structure is cyclical. It is divided into three books. In Book I, the characters are introduced, in Book II, they witness the bullfight and the fiesta at Pamplona and two of them go to Burguete for fishing. Brett goes off with Romero. Book III comes back to the starting point. Brett and Jake who love one another so much are together alone, but are unable to consummate their love.

The title of the novel comes from the epigraph which in turn comes from Ecclesiastes in the Bible: "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose". This passage stresses the circularity of all action in the universe and the lack of any new thing under the sun. The circular motions of the sun underscore the circular structure of this novel.

**William Faulkner's** *Light in August*, published in 1932, deals with the problems of the South after its defeat in the Civil War. It is a complex novel where the theme, the structure, the style and the technique are all complex. This complexity at different levels makes it a difficult novel to understand. But it is a rewarding experience to study the novel to understand the American South. Things have not changed much since the Civil War or the publication of this novel seventy years ago. So it has a contemporary relevance.

The main event in *Light in August* is the murder of a white woman named Joanna Burden by Joe Christmas, a man believed to have mixed (white and negro) blood (chapter 12). After the murder, the house was set on fire accidentally by Lucas Burch. The murder takes place on a Friday in August 1929. After the murder, Joe Christmas escapes from the scene and wanders on foot through the countryside. Later he is pursued and killed. Lena is unwed, but pregnant through Lucas Burch. She is in search of Lucas and narrowly misses meeting him. However, another man, Byron Bunch meets her and falls in love with her (chapter 42). Lena's child is born. Lena and Byron Bunch leave together. The novel starts with Lena travelling towards Jefferson. The implied conclusion is that evil is dead, and good is victorious. Lena's return journey provides a cyclical and symmetrical ending to the novel.

There are two opposite forces, that of good and of evil, in the novel. Lena Grove (who is introduced in the beginning of the novel) symbolizes virtues, health, light, and affirmation, broadly the forces of good. Joe Christmas stands for the forces of evil, which include alienation, perversion, hatred, sterility, and death. In Faulkner's presentation, the evil forces, their vengeful pursuits, and bigotry get more space than the affirmative forces. However, the novel begins and ends with the fountain of affirmation, that is Lena Grove. Thus the forces of affirmation are shown at prominent places, making up for the length of coverage.

Faulkner is not against religion, but only against rigid and fanatic pursuit of religion. He uses several Christian symbols in the novel to enrich the meaning. Joe Christmas has the same initials as Jesus Christ. Joe got his name because he was abandoned at the orphanage on a Christmas Day. The coincidence invests the event with spiritual significance. Joe's own life has some ironic parallels with Jesus's life. But these parallels suggest the opposites of Jesus's virtues and good deeds. Lucas betrays Joe like Judas for money. Joe's wanderings in his early life and his journey in the last seven days towards his cruel death are suggestive of events in Christ's life.

But Joe is not a redeemer. His death does not save any soul. Joe cannot redeem the South from its rigid religion. He becomes a scapegoat who suffers torment.

The title is ambiguous and can be interpreted in several ways. One meaning of the word is that some burden or weight is removed making someone or something light. If this is the intended meaning, Lena appears in the first chapter in an advanced state of pregnancy. In the last chapter, that is after ten days, she is unburdened, her child is born. The lightening takes place in August. Hence the title, *Light in August*. The second meaning of the word light is “enlightenment,” or the dawning of wisdom. Gail Hightower's enlightenment regarding certain realities also occurs in August 1929.

***Check your Progress:***

1. What is the most distinct feature of Mark Twain's writing style?
2. Which novel is considered magnum opus of Herman Melville?
3. Who popularized naturalism?

#### **9.2.4 Contemporary Novel:**

##### **The Postwar Novel**

The war has brought dislocation, both physical and psychological. Postwar life and values in the United States are different from prewar life and values. A large middle class has grown after World War II. So the problems of this class rather than those of businessmen and industrialists as in the past become the subject matter of fiction. The middle class is under pressure. It is driven to despair, even to nihilism. The new situation throws up new problems and they provide fresh themes for fiction. These are drug addiction, sex, and violent crime.

War has induced a desire for aggression, for power, for control. Such a mental stage leads to a search for escape through **drugs**. The relation between the drug addict and the drug pusher is one of a dependent and a controller. Drugs were used extensively during the war to kill pain and reduce physical suffering. Not surprisingly, drug addiction becomes a theme in American fiction. The drug addict is a new character in Nelson Algren's and William Burroughs' novels.

He is an oppressed man who expresses himself by his dependence on drugs. He commits violence on himself. The “noble sufferer,” a heroic type of the past, is replaced by the man who

wilfully inflicts suffering on himself. The disorder of an individual mind, rather of a society, becomes a theme for post-war fiction. The theme of drug addiction is significantly used by William Burroughs and Robert Stone.

**William Burroughs** uses drug addiction as a metaphor for other types of addiction such as addiction to power, to cruelty, to sex. His novel, *Naked Lunch* (1959) is an example. In another novel, *Nova Express* (1964), the power play is extended to outer space, where one star preys on another and becomes brighter leaving the second one dimmer. The novelist aptly summarises the situation: "First it's symbiosis, then parasitism." Burroughs' fictional world is dominated by the "wild boys," those who are drug-addicts or drug-pushers. It is governed by the law of the junkie jungle which states: "steal from him before he steals from you." This is the principle underlying power-politics in the world.

In **Robert Stone's** *Dog Soldiers* (1974), a Marine becomes a drug-pusher, but he dies as his heroin was stolen by a policeman who shot him. As Josephine Hendin puts it: "Heroin is the symbol of a corrupt society: it is peace, currency, and poison. It stands for American destructiveness, greed, and vulnerability". In another novel, *A Hall of Mirrors* (1966), Stone depicts exploitation and vindictiveness. The political system in the South is symbolized by Rheinhardt who has a compulsive urge to become a powerful boss. He oppresses others. He is also a drug-addict who feels nothing and who cares for nothing including the girl who adores him. In Stone's fiction those who care simply don't survive. Drugs are the metaphor for the corruption in American society. If it is not heroin, marijuana, or alcohol, it might be other metaphorical forms of drugs. A phony preacher makes money by preaching Christianity while Rheinhardt himself becomes rich as an announcer on a racist radio. Drugs are seen as palliatives for anger. Drugs, their necessity, addiction to them, and pushing them, have become a way of life in America. They have become powerful tools for gaining power at different levels of society. In Burroughs' novels, drugs may keep a person away from violence, in Stone's novels they are a protective shield for selfish people.

Another innovation in themes is the adaptation of an **old myth** to the modern context. **John Gardner's** *Grendel* (1971) tells the story of Beowulf from the monster's point of view. There is a clash between Grendel, an alienated monster, who would like to believe in civilized order and King Hrothgar who boasts of a magnificent palace as his great achievement. Grendel destroys the palace and all that belongs to the King. His bitterness and loneliness have not



diminished. Grendel expresses a doubt about the unlovability of the hero as killer. The experimental novel usually presents an argument over what is good and what is evil. Violence in contemporary world drives people either to drugs or to detachment.

Another contemporary theme is **passivity**. If one cannot win, one avoids such a situation. **Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.**, points out the futility of human endeavour. Setting his science fiction, *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), against the vast spaces of the universe, he illustrates how trivial human life and achievement are. In this novel, a Tralfamadorian “machine”, is stranded on a satellite for want of a spare part for his spaceship. He cannot continue his intergalactic voyages to deliver a message to all the planets. Vonnegut shows that the passage of civilizations on our planet was hindering the Tralfamadorian plan to fetch that crucial part. The message that Salo wishes to deliver to all the planets is a dot. This dot stands for “Greetings” in Salo's language. Vonnegut suggests in this science fiction that the inhabitants of earth suffer and strive for a mere dot; that is for nothing. He does not see any hope for earthlings. In *Cat's Cradle* (1963) three unhappy children are bequeathed ice-9 by their scientist-father. This last discovery of the scientist has the potential to solidify water or blood. The paternal legacy of ice-9 brings them the hope of happiness and control over the world. They want to be happy which is a legitimate and normal desire. But their simple desire for happiness destroys the world. Vonnegut's novels propose to offset helplessness in life by resignation and passive acceptance. In *Slaughterhouse - Five or the Children's Crusade* (1969), the novelist juxtaposes science fiction and realism. This novel is based on Dresden fire-bombing in 1945 during which the prisoners of war (Pows) including the author save themselves by hiding far below the earth's surface. In his fiction also, the characters survive by hiding beneath the surface. For instance, Billy Pilgrim, the hero of this novel, hides at the bottom of the swimming pool. That is a way of escaping violence on the surface. This blending of personal danger and public tragedy enables Vonnegut to improvise a defence strategy against suffering. Detachment and meaninglessness reduce the pain of suffering.

The traditional American values of hard work and perseverance are no longer important in the fiction of passivity. **Richard Brautigan** in *Revenge of the Lawn* (1971) cautions ordinary people from aspiring too high. Sheer hard work would not get them far if they do not have rich parents and powerful connections. Brautigan attempts to drive away the anxiety of the disillusioned by erasing such things as status, wealth and ambition.

The contemporary novelists use **art** as a theme, not for escape as in the past, but as a survival tool. The artist too has many masks. He too invents strategies for survival. In **John Barth's** novel, *The End of the Road* (1958), the central figure, Homer, stands for contemporary man. He is without any aim as he is without any feeling. When he finishes his college, he goes to the bus station with twenty dollars. But he is unable to decide his destination. He has no motivation to go anywhere or to do anything. He ceases to exist "I was without a character, without a personality: There was no ego; no I." The doctor who attends on an immobilized Homer tries his favourite "Mythotherapy." He believes that Homer cannot exist; he can be a parody of another. The doctor advises him to play roles and put on masks because the ego is also a mask. The doctor wants to transform life into drama, and making people aware of fiction if they fail in life. The implication is that for the doctor people are not human beings capable of personal emotions and attachments. They can be story tellers, actors, performers without any feeling, without any involvement. Tell a story, play a role, put on a mask - these are all the same. activities without personal involvement. The idea that life is an isolated episode rather than a logical narrative is brought out in Barth's novel, *The Floating Opera* (1956). If you stand on a river bank and watch a floating opera, you can see only the small bit enacted at the spot where you stand. Life, in Barth's scheme of things, is fragmented, episodic. Such fractured life will hardly have a coherent meaning. If life is fragmented, Barth's characters are bundles of ideas, roles and terms. The extension of this is that the world itself is made up of many fragments.

**Vladimir Nabokov**, a Russian immigrant, **revolts against history**, against the past. He alludes to the past literature, not like Joyce or Eliot to enrich his meaning but to substitute it. *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969) deals with incest between brother and sister who are mirror images. The artist is a narcissist who loves his own image. Art or literature is the artist's defence against the external world. One of Nabokov's novels is entitled *Invitation to a Beheading* (1974). One character in this book likens everything in the world to harlequins: "Trees are harlequins, words are harlequins. So are situations and sums. Put two things together - jokes, images - and you get a triple harlequin. Come on! Play! Invent the world! Invent reality!" Obsession is an important running theme in Nabokov's fiction. This is brought out clearly in *Lolita* (1958).

**Robert Coover's** *The Public Burning* (1977) focuses on the analogy between **politics** and nightmare. It deals with the events of the Eisenhower era and moves from New York to Washington, D.C. to California, and back again to New York's Times square. The trial and

conviction of the Rosenbergs for passing U.S. atomic secrets to the Russians was the hot topic then. Real-life politicians like Richard Nixon, who was then Vice-President, are portrayed in the novel. It depicts American vindictiveness at its worst. A variation on the theme of politics may be found in **E.L. Doctrow's** *The Book of Daniel* (1971). It also touches on the theme of spying for Russia. Daniel Lewin's parents, Jewish Communists, were executed for passing on atomic secrets to the enemy. The son attempts to find out the facts and his own relation to the U.S. The novelist re-creates the national mood of anger against the U.S. government in the 1960s with consummate skill.

**Thomas Pynchon's** *V.* (1963) is a record of the impact of **technology** in moulding the lives of Americans. Benny Profane is the messiah “machine” in this novel. In the strange fictional world, beer is supplied through taps which are shaped like large breasts made of foam rubber. Profane is interested in a woman who will be a self-contained machine. As a person living in a technology-conditioned world, Profane says: “Any problems with her you could look up in a maintenance manual. Remove and replace was all.” *V.* is that kind of an autoerotic machine. She cannot feel anything so she conquers her vulnerability. Men like Profane control their destructiveness through their passivity. In another novel, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), Pynchon a war-torn world where the lid on violence is taken off. There is a free-for-all and no control is effective. The questions which crave for answers are: “Why does destructive ambition control the world? Why does insane anger propel life?” The novel is also a satire on the expertise of scientists and psychologists. *Gravity's Rainbow* is described as “a novel of sexual and political aggression.”

#### **Women's Voices in Novel:**

**Joyce Carol Oates** (1938-) is a prolific writer. She depicts how the lives of ordinary people are filled with fear and derangements. Her characters are factory hands, school children, businessmen, teachers, and preachers. Theirs is a middle-class world. This world is filled with houses, barbeques in the backyard, shopping centres, drive-in restaurants, cars, and television. She uses sudden horrors and grotesque experience. It is a new kind of gothic in which we have not ghosts but haunted lives, not ruined castles, but ruined cities. Oates views the contemporary situation as grotesque and gothic. Because terror, horror and fear abound in her work, she has been nick-named “The Dark Lady of American Letters.” She communicates a vision of urban America as a swirling, nightmarish world of obsessions neurotic fears and grotesque brutality.”

Oates's characters are eccentric, sometimes they are rebels, at other times, puppets. These people are not like those who achieve fame, money, and success having been driven to those goals. Mered Dawe in her novel, *Do With Me What You Will* (1973), is a victim. He is arrested, assaulted, declared insane and driven to madness. But the society shown here is a machine which causes madness. In *Expensive People* (1968) and *Do With Me What You Will*, the characters are powerful. Ironically, their wives elope with other men; their children rebel against them, their powers weaken with advancing age. They look for an alternative reality. That reality may be a world "where nothing is human... a hard, vivid world emptied of people and therefore permanent." Alienation like the one described above, pushes one to madness. Joyce Carol Oates is among women writers who, according to Elizabeth Janeway, "are splitting open the atom to show us the mechanism inside. It is not a mechanism special to women. Understanding it enlarges our knowledge of psychological causation: another contribution to universality."

Let us now turn to the black woman writer, **Toni Morrison**. Black women writers depict poignantly the stresses and strains of living in what Elizabeth Janeway calls "a madness-inducing society." Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) records scenes from an underground where the inhabitants suffer from poverty and confused social demands. The fragmented form of the book reflects the fragmentation of life. That is so for every single individual. Blacks may go mad while aspiring for white standards of living. A black woman feels safe working in a white woman's house. Her work is valued; people treat her with respect. She seems to prefer the white child whom she baby-sits to her own child. Toni Morrison depicts this difficult situation where white standards and aims are presented to the blacks as very attractive. But they cannot achieve them.

### **Jewish Novelists:**

The Jewish contribution to American fiction is immense. It is also distinguished by the fact that two Jewish writers, Saul Bellow and Isaac Bashevis Singer received the Nobel Prize. The schlemiel (the inefficient, bungling man) represents the Jew to himself in Jewish fiction. He is found in most Jewish works. His is a story of lost opportunities. **Bernard Malamud** (1914-1986) uses the schlemiel in his fiction. This type of man is isolated; he is an orphan, he is a writer, he is a drifter. He wants to shake off his past and search for a fresh life. When he finds a new way of life, it is not happy or attractive because of physical restrictions. His dreams about the future turn out to be nightmares of the past. Suffering "makes good people better" is a

prevalent belief. Malamud's hero is in a ghetto wherever he may live. Somehow he is unable to break off his past. He learns to be a liberal. Frank Apline (in *The Assistant* 1957), belongs to this category. Malamud's characters are expected to learn cooperation and humility, qualities which are no longer of practical benefit. His novel, *The Assistant*, is described as “a grocery-store idyl” with pain on every side. But it is a very successful novel. Malamud achieves a dramatic effect through “implication, compression, and suggestion.” He narrates the stories of poor and suffering Jews with understanding. Such characters have become representatives of all mankind. There is suffering and loneliness in his fiction but he affirms that the human spirit can overcome all that.

**Saul Bellow** (1915-2005) is an outstanding novelist in the US. In many of his novels the marginal man, an alienated person, appears. He suffers on account of his own inadequacies and also by those imposed by society. His first novel, *The Dangling Man* (1944), contains several of his major themes. The title itself is symbolic of the position of the central character in his fiction. His second novel, *The Victim*, (1947) stresses a frequent theme of Jewish writing The Jew saw himself as a victim. The third novel, *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), is in the picaresque mode. Also, like several other American novels, it deals with the “adventures” of his hero. His other important novels are *Seize the Day* (1956), *Henderson the Rain King* (1958), *Herzog* (1964) and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1976). Excepting Henry James, Saul Bellow is unique among American novelists to describe the complexities and mores of city life. Three of Bellow's novels, *Seize the Day*, *Herzog*, and *Humboldt's Gift* may be described as novels of manners. Mark Shechner classifies Bellow's novels into two kinds:

- 1) Depressive novels. (Examples: *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, *Seize the Day*, *Mr Sammler's Planet*)
- 2) Expansive novels. (Examples: *The Adventures of Augie March*, *Herzog*, *Humboldt's Gift*).

Bellow lived in Chicago which provides the setting for his novel on *Augie March*. Bellow's descriptions of Chicago are similar to Dickens's London or Joyce's Dublin. Such cities have an impact on their citizens by shaping their attitudes and conferring on them a collective identity.

**Norman Mailer** (1923-2007) is one of the most important writers of the twentieth century. His novel, *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) is his first and most successful novel. He was a rifleman in World War II. This military experience is used in this novel. His second novel,

*Barbary Shore* (1951), depicts the constraints of political radicalism. Somewhat like Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms*, he questions such abstractions as honour, virtue, and order in the modern world. *The Deer Park* (1955) marks a departure. Here Mailer is concerned with self rather than society, the inner world of dreams and fantasy rather than the outer world of action. In this novel he shows Hollywood as a symbol of American society. He satirises the debauchery and sterility of Hollywood life. His later novels, such as *The Armies of the Night* (1968), portray a world filled with chaos, violence, and irrationality.

Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* is the best war novel based on World War II. The language in it may not sound polite to the prudish, but that only adds a realistic foil to the novel. Men on the battle field use such slang and vulgar expressions. Another way of looking at this novel is, as Mark Schechner says, to consider it as a study in power at two levels:

- 1) the irrational brutality of organised destruction
- 2) the sexual ferocity of the masculine contest

Also, Mailer's novel is a book on destruction slaughter of the enemies. In his later novels also the military is Mailer's favourite metaphor which stands for organised, national violence and collective repression. It is a senseless violence without courage, grace, or independent judgement.

### **Black Fiction: Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin**

Although Richard Wright's *Native Son* and James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* are adjudged very good novels, by black writers, Ellison's (1914-1998) *Invisible Man* (1952) is considered to be superior in several respects. It is not simply a novel written by a Negro about Negroes. It has a much larger scope; it is deemed to be a novel on mankind and not any particular race. Ellison's creative power and narrative skill are praiseworthy.

**Ellison's** *Invisible Man* is an established classic of modern American literature without any racial or regional labels. Like the Southern white novelists, Faulkner and R.P Warren, he howls and rages with laughter. He presents through fiction “the direct impression” of the world of man. He gives an absorbing account of Black experience in a white society. Harlem comes alive in the novel with its racy speech, street riots, etc. The pent-up anger of the Black nationalist and the ride of Mr. Norton to the country side with the horrifying tale of Jim Trueblood and the riot in the Negro bar add realistic touches to the narrative. The novel records accurately the manners, idioms and styles of Black life in the South as well as in the North.

**James Baldwin** is another important black novelist. He is Wright's successor; he is the “native son” who is the heir to black American fiction. Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), an autobiographical novel on his youth, was published a year after *Invisible Man*. Baldwin's themes in his novels are homosexuality, inter-racial love, and racial conflict. Baldwin became increasingly disillusioned with the United States and wrote several protest and angry novels. In his writings, both fiction and essays, he warned white America of the explosions to come. Similarly he told black America that excessive racial hatred would be self-destructive. He sought to give a wider meaning to Henry James's famous phrase, “complex fate,” by saying that the lives of the whites and the blacks in America are closely tied up in the twentieth century.

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### 9.3 Learning Outcomes

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Upon completion of this Unit, learners will be able to:

- understand American fiction and how it originated
  - give a brief account of origin and development of American novel
  - discuss major trends and themes in American fiction
  - provide a summary of the contributions of major American novelists
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### 9.4 Glossary

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**Calvinistic:** Of John Calvin and his theology

**Harlem:** A prominent Black neighborhood long known African-American culture, Renaissance and personalities like Malcolm X and James Baldwin.

**Jazz Age:** A period in the 1920s and 1930s in which jazz music and dance styles became popular across the United States.

**Myth:** A widely held but false belief or idea; a folklore genre consisting of narratives that play a fundamental role in a society.

**Naturalism:** A movement in literature and visual arts in late 19th- and early 20th-century that was inspired by adaptation of the principles and methods of natural science, especially the Darwinian view of nature, to literature and art.

**Realism:** In the arts, an attempt to represent subject matter truthfully, without artificiality and avoiding speculative fiction and supernatural elements.

**Schlemiel:** A Yiddish term meaning “incompetent person” or “fool”. It is a common archetype in Jewish humor.

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## 9.5 Sample Questions

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### 9.5.1 Objective Questions:

Answer the following in one sentence each:

1. Charlotte Temple is published in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Who wrote *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)?
3. Herman Melville's magnum opus novel is \_\_\_\_\_.
4. *The Sun Also Rises* is written by \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Who wrote *The Bluest Eye* in 1970?
6. Name the autobiographical novel of James Baldwin.
7. Who is nick-named ‘The Dark Lady of American Letters’?
8. A white woman named \_\_\_\_\_ is murdered in Faulkner's *Light in August*.
9. Stowe's *Uncle Tom & Cabin* is published in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Norman Mailer is known for \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) War novel                      (b) Romantic novel  
(c) Gothic novel                  (d) Picaresque novel

### 9.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Discuss important features of American realism.
2. What do you understand by naturalism? Explain.
3. Discuss 'problem novel' with reference to American fiction.
4. Explain works of Saul Bellow succinctly.
5. Write a short note on African American writers.



### 9.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Write a detailed note on Nineteenth Century American novel.
2. Bring out salient features of Contemporary American novel.
3. Compare and analyze works of Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner.

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## 9.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Barnard, Rita. "Modern American Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism* (2005): 39-67.
2. Fabi, Maria Giulia, and Giulia Fabi. *Passing and the rise of the African American novel*. University of Illinois Press, 2001.
3. Fisher, Philip. *Hard facts: Setting and form in the American novel*. Oxford University Press, 1986.
4. Hilfer, Tony. *American fiction since 1940*. Routledge, 2014.
5. Hoffman, Daniel. *Form and fable in American fiction*. University of Virginia Press, 1994.
6. Lee, Brian. *American Fiction 1865-1940*. Routledge, 2017.
7. Millard, Kenneth. *Coming of age in contemporary American fiction*. Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
8. Minter, David L. *A Cultural History of the American Novel, 1890-1940: Henry James to William Faulkner*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.
9. Petter, Henri. *The Early American Novel*. The Ohio State University Press, 1971.
10. Schaub, Thomas H. *American fiction in the Cold War*. Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1991.

## **Unit - 10: Life and Works of Toni Morrison**

### **Structure**

#### **10.0 Introduction**

#### **10.1 Objectives**

#### **10.2 Life and Works of Toni Morrison**

##### **10.2.1 Childhood and Early Life**

##### **10.2.2 Adult Life, Marriage and Literary Career**

##### **10.2.3 Toni Morrison's Works**

###### **10.2.3.1 *The Bluest Eye***

###### **10.2.3.2 *Sula***

###### **10.2.3.3 *Song of Solomon***

###### **10.2.3.4 *Beloved***

##### **10.2.4 Awards and Recognitions**

##### **10.2.5 Final Years and Death**

#### **10.3 Learning Outcomes**

#### **10.4 Glossary**

#### **10.5 Sample Questions**

#### **10.6 Suggested Reading**

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### **10.0 Introduction**

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Toni Morrison is the first woman of African-American descent to win a Nobel prize in literature in 1993. She is a critically acclaimed writer who unapologetically focussed attention by scrutinising the issues of African-American identity through the hitherto unexplored intersectional lenses of gender and race. Her novels confront us with the uncomfortable truth of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade initiating decades of inhuman dislocation and disintegration of Africans from their native land to an unknown alien country. With the complex interplay of memory, trauma, stories, myths, legends, supernatural elements and oral folk tradition, Morrison weaves intricate narratives of loss and recovery. Her novels centres on the issues of racial

alienation, racial hierarchies within the community, disempowerment, childhood traumas, the impossibility of assimilation and restoring pride in the lost legacy. The individual's unity and harmony with the family, community and the nation are integral to one's rediscovery of self. As Morrison's protagonist undertake the physical and emotional journey of self-affirmation, the past reappears through complex narrative, inviting readers to be part of the consciousness of the African-American identity. Rejecting stereotypes in favour of a nuanced self, Toni Morrison's life and work is a testimony to her single-minded pursuit and commitment towards her community. Her novels are an exposition of a humanity that was denied for a very long time.

Along with Zora Neal Hurston, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Rita Dove, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Emanuel, Jamaica Kincaid and many more Toni Morrison is credited with giving a new direction and force to the already burgeoning African-American Literature by celebrating its myths, stories, legends, music like jazz and blues and the black heritage.

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## 10.1 Objectives

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- To learn about Toni Morrison's life.
- To familiarise with the literary career of Toni Morrison.
- To understand Toni Morrison as an African American Writer.
- To appreciate Toni Morrison's literary contribution to the African American Literature.
- To analyse Toni Morrison's novels and their predominant themes.
- To examine Toni Morrison's as a novelist and her distinct story telling technique.
- To underscore the international awards and recognition bestowed on Toni Morrison for charting and mapping a new genre of African American literature.

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## 10.2 Life and Works of Toni Morrison

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### 10.2.1 Childhood and Early Life:

Toni Morrison was born on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. She was named as Chloe Anthony Wofford at her birth and was the second eldest daughter. Morrison's father George Wafford was originally from Georgia. He left Georgia and migrated to North along with many more during the Great Depression to support his family. He did multiple odd jobs like washing car, working at construction sites and a welding to support his family amidst the growing unemployment and poverty of the Great Depression. Morrison's mother Ella Ramah Willis was a strong, confident and a fearless woman. She was also from South, Alabama and moved to North in hope of better prospects. She once took little Morrison to the theatre to watch Superman in the White folks' section and then later advocated others to do the same. Acutely aware of the 'inhuman' condition of the Blacks, Ramah Wafford wrote a letter to President Franklin Roosevelt complaining about the poor quality and bugs infested free ration. Apart from raising four children and the household chores, she had to work at various places to make the ends meet. She worked at American Stove Works and later as a custodian at Lorain Public School and was also active in the choir of many church groups. Known for her singing, Ella Ramah was actively involved in her children's education.

Morrison's early life was beset with poverty as she recounts an abhorrent incident when the family could not pay the house rent, the landlord asked them to leave. George had nowhere to go and thus refused. The landlord out of anger set the house on fire with the entire family inside including Morrison. Fortunately, no one was harmed but this incident played a crucial role in shaping young Morrison's personality. As a young girl after school, Morrison worked as a house cleaner for a white family. When young Morrison faced the racist slurs at the White family, her father reminded her that her sense of self cannot be determined by others.

Morrison describes the marriages in her family as "comrade" indicating the equality between the sexes. Recalling the significance of storytelling, black lore, myths and rituals of black culture in her formative years, Morrison reminisces her childhood in one of the interviews (given to Nellie McKay, published in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol.24, No. 4 (Winter, 1993), pp.413-429, University of Wisconsin Press, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1208128>) as:

But in terms of storytelling, I remember it more as a shared activity between the men and women in my family. There was a comradeship between men and women in the marriages of my grandparents, and of my mother and father. The business of storytelling was a shared activity between them, and people of both genders participate in it at a very

early age. This was true with my grandfather and grandmother, as well as with my father and mother, and with my uncles and aunts. There were no conflicts of gender in that area, at the level at which such are in vogue these days. My mother and my father did not fight about who was supposed to do what. Each confronted whatever crisis there was (415-416).

Morrison's maternal grandparents John Solomon Willis and Ardelia migrated from South in Greenville, Alabama and relocated to Kentucky. Ardelia started the train journey alone with just 18 dollars while Solomon remains hidden in the train to escape the people who would have not allowed him to travel because he owed them money. John Willis worked as a coal miner in Kentucky. Disillusioned and disappointed, John Willis moved again to Lorain, Ohio and settled there with his family. Willis family despite the hardships for the African-American realised the importance of education for social mobility. Morrison's grandfather John Willis educated himself in the absence of regular school and narrated stories to Ellah Ramah, Morrison's mother. Morrison recollects those stories told by her mother in her novel *Songs of Solomon* (1977). Aging and forgetful Solomon would sometime lose his way and then young Morisson would find him and bring him home. During his last days, young Morisson would sit beside him reading bible. Reading, storytelling, folklore, myths and interpreting dreams was a rich creative canvas on which little Morisson mapped her childhood. As a big close-knit family, Morisson learnt the value of being together in the face of adversity. Undoubtedly her family stories and memories remain palpable in her novels.

Morrison's paternal grandparents died before she could spend time with them. The lynching of three African-American men compelled the Wofford family to move from Cartersville, Georgia to Lorain. The grave injustice and open brutality with impunity by White people made George Wofford hopeless and suspicious of every White person. However, Ramah Willis Wofford was not to be bullied woman. She never hesitated to register her protest against injustice. Morrison often talks about her mother fierce and feisty spirit as seminal to the development of her thoughts and beliefs as an African-American woman.

Morrison was the only African-American student in Hawthorne Elementary School. She was well groomed and mature beyond her years. She was the only student who knew how to read before joining the school. As a studious and diligent student, she helped many students to read because most of them were immigrants and had difficulty in learning English. Morrison was an

excellent and hardworking student. During her school days, she worked at Lorain Public Library which soon became her favourite place. Surrounded by books and intellectual conversations with the librarian, Morrison developed keen interest in the classics which she later pursued in her university education. The novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky shaped her intellectual life while still in school. Morrison graduated from Loraine High School with honours to nobody's surprise.

Despite excelling throughout her school years, it was not easy for Morrison to join the college. Morrison became the first person in her family to complete college. Her mother worked as ladies room attendant to pay for her university's fees and continued to do odd jobs to support her university education. Morrison graduated at Howard University in Washington D.C. in 1949. She majored in English and also minored in Classics. After her graduation, Morrison joined Cornell University in New York and completed her Master's degree with her thesis on suicide as a literary construct in the fiction of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf in 1955. Although her experience in the University was full of racism and class consciousness, Morrison made the best use of her university education. She explored her university days by engaging in various societies and groups. She joined African-American Sorority, and Alpha Kappa Alpha. She was also active in the theatre group called Howard University Players. She travelled with the group to the South and performed plays but did not witness the racial violence which constituted her memories.

It was here that she famously changed her name from Chloe to Toni because she found that her name was always mispronounced. She took the name Anthony on her baptism (becoming Roman Catholic at the age of 12) which was shortened to Toni. A decision she is known to have regretted later in her life as she felt that she has been writing in "other person's name".

Morrison upon completing her Master's degree joined as a university professor at Texas Southern University. Here Morrison began a nuanced and complex understanding of African-American identity. She spent two years at Texas University and joined Howard University at Washington D.C. in 1957 where she taught till 1965.

As a child Morrison never dreamt of being a writer. She wanted to be a dancer like Maria Tallchief, a Native American ballerina. She started writing much later in her life and after the publication of her first novel, she realised her true calling and never looked back.

### ***Check Your Progress***

1. How would you describe Toni Morrison's childhood?
2. What was so unique about Toni Morrison's joining University life?
3. How did Toni Morrison spend her days in the University?

### **10.2.2 Adult Life, Marriage, and Literary Career:**

Toni Morrison married Harold Morrison in 1958 who was a Jamaican architect. She met him at Howard University where she taught as an instructor. She guided many famous poets and writers as a faculty including big names like Andrew Young, Claude Brown, and Stokely Carmichael. Toni Morrison took her husband's name and from there upon came to be known as Toni Morrison. Her time at Howard was filled with the spirit of Civil Rights Movement. Morrison joined the writers' group and wrote her first draft which would be eventually published as her first novel *The Bluest Eye*. Her marriage with Harold was not happy and did not last very long. Although Morrison has not publicly discussed her marriage but she did attribute the failure of her marriage to cultural differences. In one of the interviews given to Collette Dowling of *The New York Times*, she reveals, "Women in Jamaica are very subservient in their marriages...they never challenge their husbands, I was a constant nuisance to mine. He didn't need me making judgments about him, which I did. A lot". Morrison ended her unhappy marriage in 1964. Harold Morrison returned to Jamaica with his architectural business and Toni Morrison went to her parent's home in Lorain, Ohio.

Toni Morrison gave birth to two sons within a short span of their marriage. Harold Ford was born in 1961 and Kevin Slade was born after her divorce in 1965 in Lorain. She singlehandedly raised her children while working full time at the same time. Morrison's long and fruitful career as an editor began when she joined as a book editor at Random House in Syracuse, New York. After years of hard work, Morrison was promoted to a senior editor post and sent to New York City. She was the first African-American woman to hold that post at Random House. Her writing career took an upward swing after that and she never looked back. While at Random House, she nurtured many African-American writers who were instrumental in shaping the African-American literature. Writers like Toni Cade Bambara, Henry Dumas, Michelle Cliff and Angela Davis.

Toni Morrison's literary career launched with the publication of her first novel *The Bluest Eye* in 1970. Along with many other African-American writers like Alice Walker, Gayle Jones and Shirley Ann Williams, Toni Morrison became a leading voice of the African- American Literary Renaissance of the 1960's. *The Bluest Eye* was critically acclaimed for projecting the story of a Black woman. As a bildungsroman, the novel charts the story of a young black marginalised girl called Pecola Breedlove's descent into insanity. Unloved and uncared, Pecola's desire to have blue eyes became her only way to escape her ugliness. The publication of the first novel and its critical success established Morrison's reputation as a critic and scholar of African- American literature and culture. She wrote numerous book reviews including an essay in *The New York Times Magazine* on African-American Women criticising the Women's liberation movement as primarily steered by White women and thus failed to include the plight of African- American women.

Her language was praised and described as 'poetic'. Morrison maintains that her writing style is deeply engrained in the African American oral story telling tradition where writing is akin to conversation moving back and forth. With the oral quality to her writing, Morrison consciously developed a unique facet of African-American narrative technique. She calls her writing as "participatory reading" where the reader is involved in the process instead of being a detached and distant observer.

Despite good reviews and relative success, Morrison was yet not a full-time novelist. She accepted a teaching position at State University of New York at Purchase as visiting Professor in 1971 along with her regular editing. In 1973, Morrison published her second novel called *Sula*. The novel explored the themes of good, evil and friendship. It is the story of two friends Nel and Sula who are stark opposite of each other. Nel is conservative and traditional but Sula is a rebel. Sula refused to conform to the norms of the society and lived her life at her own terms and condition. Plunging into hitherto unexplored themes like friendship between women, Morrison gives new insights into Black women sisterhood enriching the concept of womanism as propounded by Alice Walker. Morrison dedicated *Sula* to her sons whom she raised alone juggling with her work and writing. Morrison was praised for creating interesting characters in *Sula*. Many critics and reviewers commented Morrison's expertise in a nuanced portrayal of evil and negative characters. *Sula* was nominated for the National Book Award.



Morrison was the brainchild of the project of a Scrapbook called *The Black Book* presenting three hundred years of African-American history. The history of Black people was not written by any novelists or scholars but by common people and their lived realities. Morrison worked closely with collectors of African-American memorabilia. This included newspaper clippings, song's lyrics, advertisements, photographs and slave narratives. The book also showcased dramas and its interpretation, voodoo recipes, and ways to counter black magic. The grand project of the history of Black people exploring Black Aesthetic was published in 1974.

Morrison teaching career also progressed when Yale appointed her as a visiting professor to teach a course on writings on African American women.

With her third novel *Song of Solomon*, in 1977, Morrison now became a formidable African American novelist. *Song of Solomon* traces the legacy and heritage of African American culture and identity. It tells the story of Macon Dead Jr. Who is fondly called Milkman because he has been nursed by his mother for a usually long period. Milkman's journey to his past brings out African-American history especially the story of his great grandfather Solomon who escaped slavery. The novel has deep personal connections. Morrison not only used incidents and memories of her own childhood but also struggled in between after the death of her father. She is believed to have said that her father's death made writing both difficult and easy for her. She explains it as:

I remember being filled with melancholy. I was sitting at my desk; my children were in the room. Suddenly I got this incredible feeling of exhilaration and serenity at the same time. I think because I was so depressed, my defenses were down, I wasn't fighting anything. And it was like a gate that opened in me. I began to envision the things in the book. I started writing and writing—I think I wrote 30 pages that night. (10)

(Paula Giddings, "The Triumphant Song of Toni Morrison," *Encore American & Worldwide News* December 12, 1977, p. 30.)

Written after her father's death, *Song of Solomon* bears a single word dedication "Daddy". *Song of Solomon* became the first book to appear in the Book of the Month Club and Toni Morrison the first African-American writer to be such honoured. The book also won the National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction in 1977 and was Morrison's first novel to also achieve commercial success as it instantly became a bestseller. She bought a new house in

upstate New York on Hudson River. Her children Ford and Slade also shifted to the new house. The new house had a private dock on the river that Morrison used to write her future novels. The Success of *Song of Solomon* pushed Morrison to become full time novelist and editing work became secondary.

Morrison fourth novel *Tar Baby* came in 1981. It is based on the African-American folklore of Brer Rabbit and Tar baby. It was New York bestseller list for several weeks. Morrison actively promoted the book by doing tours and giving interviews. The story of Jadine as a tar baby remains inconclusive. Morrison's clever interplay of widely known folk story only proves her to be skilled craftsman. Extending her literary canvas, she now began to write plays. New York State Writers Institute at SUNY-Albany commissioned her to write plays. This led to the publication of her first play *Dreaming Emmett* which was based on the true story of Emmett Till. Till was an African-American fourteen-year-old boy who was brutally murder by a group of white men. The play *Dreaming Emmett* was performed to celebrate the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, birthday on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1986.

Morrison next novel, her magnum opus was about slavery. *Beloved* was published in 1987. *Beloved* was inspired from an article published in *The American Baptist* in 1856. The article discussed the story of Margaret Garner, a slave who tried to escape from the clutches of slavery. Under the Fugitive Slave Bill, Slave hunters were deputed to catch the runaway slaves. Garner was also caught by the slave hunters but before she was trapped again, she killed one of her three children. Garner later revealed that she killed her children because she preferred them to die in one blow rather than dying everyday as slaves. Morrison discovered Garner's story while researching for *The Black Book*. Morrison dedicated the book to "Sixty Million and More" being the number of Africans who died during their journey in the slave ships. *Beloved* is about the story of Sethe who escapes slavery with her children like Garner only this time, Civil war has ended and slaves were freed. The story moves back and forth in time. Morrison uses supernatural element and the reincarnated Beloved becomes a reservoir of memories of unnamed Black Africans who died on the way to the plantations. *Beloved* is hailed as Morrison's 'masterpiece' by *Newsweek* and was compared to the books written on Holocaust (the execution and termination of Jews in Nazi Germany in the concertation camps). Margaret Atwood praised *Beloved* as Toni Morrison's "triumph". Toni Morrison won Pulitzer Prize in fiction in 1988 for *Beloved*.

Morrison also became the first African American writer to be appointed as Robert F. Goheen Chair at the Princeton University in 1988. Her third novel, *Jazz* was based on the photographs taken by James Van der Zee titled *The Harlem Book of the Dead* where a young girl is shot dead by her jealous boyfriend. *Jazz* was followed by *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* which is a compilation of lectures given by Morrison at Harvard University in 1990. In her essays, Morrison re-examines the famous novels to expose the racial abuse and exploitation. She used the racial perspective in questioning the portrayal of Black characters in the works of famous writers like Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn. Morrison next essay entitled as "Race-ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality" was published in 1992 with 18 essays on sexual harassment charges levelled by Anita Hill who was a University of Oklahoma law professor on Thomas Clarence and his appointment in the Supreme Court.

Morrison's novel *Paradise* completes the trilogy that begins with *Beloved* and *Jazz*. The novel *Paradise* came out in 1997 and instantly occupied the pride of place in Oprah 's Book Club Section. *Paradise* accounts the histories of two town Ruby and Convent and is situated in antebellum South. It recounts the brutal violence and clashes between the two towns, each wants to create its own version of Paradise. The novel received mixed reviews. In 2003, Morrison published *Love* in which she experimented with a new writing technique in exploring the relationship of many women with a single man. Unrestricted in time and space, Morrison in her characteristic style employs supernatural elements in the novel.

*Mercy* came out in 2008 and was instantly declared as a "10 best books of 2008" of *New York Times Book Review*. In the novel, Morrison looks at the history of slave trade. Imbued with biblical references, *Mercy* traces the story of multiple characters who are uprooted from their environment and struggle to find new meaning to their identity beset with diseases and dangers. *Home* came out in 2012 and was Morrison tenth novel. It tells the story of an African-American veteran of Korean war. The novel received good reviews and was described as 'brutal and beautiful'. Morrison's last novel *God Help the Child* came in 2015. It is a story of Lula Ann Bridewell who is punished for her very dark skin. She is called as blue black skinned. The confessional account of the narrative adds poignance to Bridewell's story.

Morrison's illustrious literary career reached its apogee when she was awarded Nobel Prize in literature in 1993. Toni Morrison became the first Black woman to be bestowed with the

highest prize in literature. She was described in her Nobel Prize citation as the one “who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality.”

***Check Your Progress***

1. What is the theme of Morrison’s first novel, *Sula*?
3. Briefly describe the use of folklore and myths in Morrison’s works.
4. Why is *Beloved* considered as Toni Morrison’s magnum opus?

### **10.2.3 Toni Morrison’s Works:**

Toni Morrison Literary Oeuvre spans through decades exploring multitude facets of African- American identity. She wrote eight successful novels namely: *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1998) and *Love* (2003). Morrison wrote many children’s book with her son Slade Morrison which includes *The Aunt or the Grasshopper* (2003), *The Book of Mean People* (2002), *The Big Box* (1999), *The Mirror or the Glass* (2007), *The Lion or the Mouse* (2003), *The Poppy or the Snake* (2004), Her essays (non-fiction) include *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas and the Construction of Social Reality* (1992), *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993), *Birth of a Nation’hood: Gaze, Script and Spectacle in the O. J. Simpson Case* (1997), *The Black Book* (edited by Morrison, 1997) and *The House that Race Built: Original Essays on Black Americans and Politics in America Today* (1998).

This section is devoted to a detailed study of some of Toni Morrison’s famous novels that established Morrison as a formidable voice in mapping African-American Literature.

#### **10.2.3.1 *The Bluest Eye*:**

*The Bluest Eye* was Morrison’s first novel. It was published in 1970. The novel grapples with the questions of identity raised by many African-American women during that time. It rejects the cultural stereotypes and racial hierarchies within African American community. By giving first person account of their experiences, Morrison is able to develop deep insights into their lives. The novel traces the lives two primary character namely Pecola Breedlove and

Claudia Mac Teer. Pecola Breedlove is an African-American young woman who is alienated from the society and finds no love or support in her dysfunctional family. Claudia MacTeer is also an African-American girl who undergoes similar experiences of marginalisation and invisibilities but unlike Pecola her family support and faith in her, helps her to survive social oppression.

Through the stories of Pecola Breedlove and Claudia MacTeer, Morrison represents the realities of many African-American women at that time. As a bildungsroman, the novel traces the growth and development of these two girls from their childhood to womanhood. Being African-American girls, Pecola and Claudia's formative years are beset with humiliation and systematic disregard and denial of their self-worth. The novel also explores the horrifying prevalence of incest in the community. Morrison uses the cliché narrative of Dick and Jane to contrast with the real stories of Pecola and Claudia. Dick and Jane become a pivot against which the African-American characters evaluate their existence and identity. The Dick and Jane narrative serves to make the differences in the lives of African-American characters appear more brutal and jarring. Claudia becomes the primary lens through which the story of Pecola unfolds and which gradually enriches Claudia's understanding of the life and events for the African-American women. The novel begins with Claudia quest into Pecola's tragic life where horrid details of her childhood experience of neglect and denial by her own family which eventually culminates into her rape by her father.

The novel is divided into four sections named after the four seasons namely; Autumn, Winter, Summer and Spring. The first chapter Autumn begins with Claudia Mac Teer's life and family. Claudia's mother is Mrs Mac Teer who is constantly busy in providing for her family. Claudia recollects her mother's irritation only to realise later that it was indicative of her love and concern. Mac Teers are forced to have a paying guest, Mr Henry in their house to make their ends meet. Mr Henry and the girls, Claudia and Frieda become good friends and begins to spend time together. The sections also talk about their neighbour Rosemary Villanucci whom the girls envied. When Rosemary and the girls get into a fight. Rosemary removes her pants exposing her sexuality. Rosemary's response to Claudia and Frieda's violence shows that she has been sexually abused in the past and has offered her sexuality to avert violent attacks. And it has now become her normative behaviour in the face of violence.

The sections also break the cultural stereotypes in the narrative of Claudia. She destroys the white doll in order to find what's inside her while Pecola and Frieda are obsessed with white dolls. Claudia's inability to understand why Pecola and Frieda idolise and adore white child star Shirley Temple shows her rooted self and acceptance of her identity. Claudia instead enjoys simple more instinctual pleasures like playing violin, eating peaches in the garden and smelling violets. As Claudia refuses to confirm to the norms, she is able to forge her own distinct identity. She also rebels against the nightly bath routine of cleanliness which she finds unnecessary. She thinks of it as sanitisation of her unique self, comprising of her creativity and originality. Gradually Claudia matures and learns to accept the norms and conformity to the expectations and realities of being African-American woman. She accepts the white dolls and loves Shirley Temple. The transition of Pecola Breedlove at Claudia's house from girlhood to womanhood evokes much interest and curiosity in Claudia and Frieda. Pecola is told that she is ready to have a baby but she is filled with doubts about her undesirable body. The section also focuses on the Breedlove family and their life. Their house which is a store converted into a two-bedroom apartment is described with everything ugly and unpleasant not just by others but also by themselves. The family is marked by physical, emotional, verbal and sexual violence. Pecola's brother Sammy Breedlove tries to escape and run away from the surrounding ugliness. Pecola on the other hand, is conditioned into believing the ugliness as her only reality. Her self-hatred and intense longing to become invisible is the reflection of the way she has been raised in the family by the Breedloves. Pecola's desire to have deep blue eyes like that of Shirley Temple is the negation of self. Blue eyes are the symbol of White beauty and Pecola's desire to be loved and accepted can be fulfilled only by acquiring that. When the shopkeeper abstains from touching her while tending the change, Pecola takes refuge in the candy and imagines herself to be the desirable girl on the candy wrapper. The prostitutes who live upstairs and Mac Teer become Pecola's only happy retreat.

The next section entitled as Winter begins with Claudia's narration. She describes her father as loving and protective over the family in stark contrast to the Breedloves. This section introduces another character called Maureen Peal who is light skinned, green eyed and belongs to upper middle class. Everybody loves her because of her appearance. Pecola and Maureen represents two opposite side of African-American experience of acceptability and Claudia lies somewhere in between as she has experienced both rejection and acceptance. Claudia 's

perspective is thus more nuanced as she questions the superficial physical appearance as determining factor of one's place in the society. In one of the incidents in the novel, all four girls Maureen, Claudia, Pecola and Frieda are chased and taunted by the boys. The boys single out Pecola for her intense black skin colour by making fun of her, calling her names and suggesting sexually inappropriate behaviour of her father. The section also focuses on Mr Henry and his encounter with the prostitute. In the story of Geraldine, Morrison critiques the concept of assimilation where the individual identity is completely effaced. Geraldine is an African-American woman who is obsessed with her physical appearance. For Geraldine, her physical looks are more valuable than her family. Her son, Junior plays mischief on Pecola by making his cat attack her on the face. Bruised and hurt Pecola gets no sympathy from Geraldine who despises Pecola because of her dark looks and blames her for everything. Pecola becomes the reality from which Geraldine is trying to escape but it is the reality which will always haunt her.

The third section is ironically called Spring because there is no such revival of happiness as associated with the arrival of spring. The chapter Spring in fact shows the doom and gloom that awaits the African-American women. In this section, Frieda is molested by Mr Henry. While the Mac Teers throw Mr Henry out but the mental trauma of being sexually assaulted leaves Frieda confused and torn apart. Frieda is scared about being ruined as a result of molestation. In another incident, Pecola is beaten by her mother Pauline for an accident. The blueberry pie has fallen on the floor by mistake. Pauline's maternal instinct could not overpower her anger and hatred for Pecola. Pauline's story reveals that as a child she had been neglected due to an accident which resulted into a limp. She took recourse in cleaning the house which becomes her favourite past time. She marries Cholly but the marriage remains an unhappy one. Cholly escapes into alcohol and Pauline tries to be like movie stars. She gets obsessed with her appearances in trying to imitate the icons of beauty. Ignoring her own home and family, Pauline devotes all her energy and time into cleaning other's houses. Abandoned at birth by his mother due to some mental deficiency, Cholly is raised by her aunt, Jenny. Cholly's sexual act with Darlene in the woods is converted into a sexual spectacle when they are forced to copulate in front of the hunters. The incident psychologically fractures Cholly. He translates his frustration into violence. He rapes Darlene and towards the end of the section, Cholly rapes Pecola. Morrison describes Pecola's rape from Cholly's standpoint. Unable to express his paternal love and care for Pecola, Cholly uses the only emotion he knew and rapes her. Another character

Soaphead Church is paedophile and psychic. He feels that he is superior because of his relative light skin. He is distraught after the failure of his marriage. He tried different odd jobs and finally settles as a fortune teller. In Lorrain. Pecola innocently asks Soaphead for a pair of blue eyes.

The last section of the novel is called Summer. In this section, Claudia discovers Pecola's truth and Pecola's gradual descent into madness. Pecola's alter ego creates a set of dialogues where Pecola is convinced that she has blue eyes but is also fearful that her eyes are not blue enough. She longs for love, compassion and care. Claudia concludes the novel with the tragic plight of Pecola which is the systemic failure of the community and the society at large exacerbated by the dysfunctional and violent family. The broken domestic bonds in the family shatters and irreversibly damage the life Pecola and many others like her. Pecola remains mute and voiceless in the novel. Her story is primarily told by Claudia. Pecola's silent suffering and psychological fragmentation is suggestive of her rootlessness. Without any anchor for support, she exists in the liminal space where she is neither accepted by Whites nor Black. The novel *The Bluest Eye* depicts the coming of age of African-American female protagonist in a society where they are despised and coerced to forgo their real self in the mad pursuit of unattainable standards of perfection and beauty set by another culture. As young girls, Claudia, Pecola, Frieda, and Pauline childhood experiences determine their fate and destiny.

#### **10.2.3.2 Sula:**

Morrison's *Sula* is her second novel published in 1973 is a story of two friends Sula Peace and Nel Wright. Sula Peace is raised in the family where there is no male member. After the death of Sula's father, the house is managed and controlled by Sula's mother Hannah Peace and her grandmother Eva Peace. Living with strong women without any male interference, Sula grows up to be a confident and strong woman who refused to conform to the norms of the society. In stark contrast, Nel Wright is a daughter of Helene and Wiley Wright. Nel is raised in a perfectly ordered house and develops a feeling of lack and inadequacy which in turn necessitated to be fulfilled by someone else. Nel dreams of a handsome man to rescue her and complete her. Sula dreams of a lover with whom she rides the horse. The passivity of Nel is contrasted with the agency of Sula which reflects their decisions of adult life. The two girls become best friends sharing their thoughts and fantasies as they grow into adolescence. Sula cuts off the tip of her finger in one of the episodes to scare a gang of boys. Her passion and energy make her a rebel and an outcast in her own town. They dig a deep hole into the earth and fill it



with debris which has been interpreted by many as the affirmation of their emerging sexuality. The accidental killing of Chicken Little becomes the turning point of the novel. Sula and Nel played a prank on Chicken Little. Sula accidentally let go off Chicken little hand and he fell into the river, drowns and dies. His death is kept a secret between the girls and Shadrack who witnesses the act also promises to keep it a secret. On reaching adulthood, Nel who thinks herself to be morally superior choses the traditional path of getting married and settled. Sula on the other hand, choses a more unconventional path of travelling, going to the college and exploring the cities. Sula's unconventional way of living make her an embodiment of evil. Sula returns Bottom after ten years where she is shunned as she is looked down upon as negative and sinful. Sula's promiscuity is unacceptable to the community.

Sula sleeps with Jade, Nel's husband ending their friendship. For Sula, Jade is just another thing to be shared between friends. Nel blames Sula for her sufferings. Nel Clings to her grief like a 'gray fur' and refuses to move on. Sula sees life as constant movement and statis as hell. Sula is completely ostracised by the society at Bottom, rumours about her affair with Whites also do round. All calamities in the town are blamed on her morally corrupt presence. Her family chides her for her iniquitous life. Unashamed and unafraid, Sula continues to live her fearless life rejecting the only role available to women at that time that is, of a wife and a mother. Amidst this, Sula also falls in love with Albert Jacks and when he leaves her, she becomes sick and eventually dies. Sula questions Nel about her conviction that she is morally superior to Sula. Nel is unable to explain but begins to think about the question more deeply. She realises that Sula has been a scapegoat, personifying all that the community fears and wishes to escape. Nel visits the grave of Sula and comes to an understanding that it has been the loss of her friendship with Sula that has hurt her the most and not the relationship with jade. The novel concludes with Nel validating Sula's concerns as she realises that her friendship with Sula was more important than being self-righteous and wearing the halo of moral superiority. As Nel liberates herself from the narrow barriers of judgement, she reclaims and rediscovers her latent love and loss for her friend Sula.

#### **10.2.3.3 *Song of Solomon:***

*Song of Solomon* is Toni Morrison's third published novel. It came out in 1977 and has been the winner of prestigious National Book Critics Circle Award in 1978. It is Morrison's first

novel to have a male protagonist which admittedly Morrison found challenging but also seminal to her identity as a novelist.

*Song of Solomon* is a saga of African-American identity premised on numerous sources including biblical stories, mythos and African folk lore. The central narrative of the story revolves around the coming-of-age journey of 'Milkman'. He is called Milkman because he was over breastfed by her mother. Milkman's quest for the search of treasure takes him to the history of African-American people. The journey transforms him from his selfish hunt for treasure towards embracing his identity and history. Milkman's unity with his past matures his present as he realises his collective responsibility for a harmonious existence.

The story begins with the suicide of Robert Smith who is an insurance agent of the town. Robert Smith has posted about his public suicide for everyone to witness. Robert's suicide from the roof of Mercy Hospital and Ruth Dead's delivery of Macon Dead (who would be known as Milkman) happens almost at the same time. As Ruth rushes into labour due to the commotion and Milkman is born next morning. Living in an unhappy and unsatisfied marriage where Ruth is always bullied and harassed, she shifts all her love and care into feeding her little boy. Breastfeeding becomes a source of comfort and affirmation of her existence, away from the abuses of her husband, Mr Macon. Ruth's helper Friddie who stays with her is amazed at Ruth's obsessive breastfeeding way beyond the usual age and she christens the boy's name as Milkman. Milkman's father Macon Dead Jr is a wealthy man who cares only about money and his possessions. He has no love and compassion for anyone, neither for his family nor for his tenants. Macon's sister Pilates is stark opposite to her brother. She lives in the same town and makes her own living by selling wine. Pilates has no navel signifying her independent existence. She lives in one room without electricity with her daughter Reba and granddaughter, Hagar. Much to the consternation of Macon, Milkman goes to her aunt, Pilates and develops a strong bond with the family. Pilates informs about the family history and the death of Macon Sr. which left Macon Jr. and herself orphaned and alone. Pilates with her supernatural powers reveals that her father often comes and visit her. Macon is displeased with Milkman's the growing affection and intimacy with his aunt Pilates. Milkman is also attracted to Pilate's daughter Hagar, an affair that ends disastrously. As Milkman grows his deformity becomes more visible. His one leg being bigger than the other troubles him a lot. He spends all his time on his physical appearance and disguising his deformity. St the same time, Milkman also wants to stand apart and distinct from

his father. His emphasis on being different is sadly focussed only on the external appearance with very little soul searching.

In one incident, relationship between father and son worsens when Milkman hits Macon in order to protect his mother, Ruth. Macon justifies his anger by relating his anguish over Ruth's unnatural relationship with his father. Later in the novel, Ruth tells the truth that she loved her father as he was the only one who loved and cared for her. Macon on the other hand wanted to kill Milkman even before he was born. Milkman ends his love affair with Hagar leaving her emotionally distraught and also begins to distance with his only best friend Guitar. Guitar who began to reflect deeply on the African-American reality especially the racial violence joins an organisation called Seven Days. The terror organisation Seven Days is based on retributive justice which is committed only on a Sunday. With the belief of an eye for an eye, Seven Days avenges the death of Black men that goes unpunished. Guitar's growing concern about the community makes Milkman realise his inertia and aimlessness. He is led by his father to steal the green sack full of money. Reluctantly, Milkman steals the green sack and is surprised to find only rocks and bones in it. Pilates rescue Milkman who has been caught by the police while Macon continues to incite him to find the gold.

Milkman begins his journey and reaches his ancestral town called Shalimar where he meets Circe who recounts his family history. Morrison does not clarify whether Circe is a ghost or a real person. Milkman learns that his grandfather's name was Jake before they were mistakenly called Dead by the drunken Yankees. Milkman also discovers that his grandfather's body after his gruesome murder was hidden in the cave. Travelling with other men in the woods, Milkman realises that his name and money are useless in the new place. The visit to the town is instrumental in the growth and development of Milkman. He miraculously loses his limp and is able to connect with the people independently on his self-merit and worth. Like an initiation ritual, Milkman learns some very important lessons of life and returns home a matured, connected and rooted man. Milkman is more empathetic towards his father as he could rationalise his behaviour and his mother's deep personal loss and pain. He also regrets his unfair treatment of Hagar and her tragic demise. Through Susan Byrd, he learns about the legend of his great grandfather, Solomon, who could fly. Towards the end, Milkman sings the family song on the accidental death of Pilates in an encounter with Guitar. His singing of the lineal song is a symbolic reaffirmation of self.

The novel demonstrates through the journey of Milkman that reconnecting with the ancestral past and mapping the lost legacy is integral in developing a cohesive self. Milkman was lost, self-centred, without love and understanding. His maturation into a balanced self with responsibility and accountability was channelised through his union with his family legacy. Toni Morrison raises crucial concern about the African-American enslaved identity which has been uprooted and dislocated from its historic roots due to slave trade. Thus, the reconnection with the past is fundamental to the formation of an individual identity. Morrison's use of biblical references is in part the rejection of the western ideology that fails to validate the African-American existence. Macon's decision to call his daughter Pilates stems out of his desperation and disappointment with Christ because his wife died during the childbirth. In naming his daughter Pilates after the biblical Pontius Pilate who ordered the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Macon rejects the western Christian worldview which fails to empathise with their realities. The title *Song of Solomon* although refers to the Bible, Morrison adapts it to depict African-American experience of enslavement and the subsequent loss of African-American culture, customs and legacy. Morrison also rejects Macon's material pursuit in an effort to assimilate on one hand and Guitar's violent retributive nationalistic ideology on the other. Milkman towards the end is able to strike a balance by reclaiming his past as part of his identity.

#### **10.2.3.4 *Beloved*:**

Toni Morrison's fifth novel, *Beloved* published in 1987 after *Tar Baby*, catapulted her instantly into international fame. Winner of Pulitzer Prize along with many more, *Beloved* traces the existential crisis faced by African-American enslaved community in the absence of basic human freedom and dignity. The novel explores the lasting and dehumanising impact of slavery on the African-American people long after it was abolished by the Emancipation Proclamation. The horrifying memories of physical, emotional and sexual abuse continues to haunt and impair their lives. *Beloved* explores the psychological journey of its characters by taking the readers into the inner recess of their minds and exposing their fractured consciousness due to generations of violence, loss and disintegration of self.

The genesis of the novel can be traced to the story of Margret Garner who made the headlines by running away from her slavery in Kentucky in 1856. As a result of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, slaves escaped from their masters could be captured and restored to their rightful owners. In order to escape the slave hunters, Margret Garner tried to kill all her children

but succeeded in killing one of them. She believed death to be a better option than being enslaved. Her trial captured the national imagination and also pushed for Abolition of slavery. Beloved, the eponymous character represents fragmented psyche of the African-American lives. It tells the story of Sethe and Paul D who struggle to liberate from the manacles forged by the memory of slavery filled with emasculating and humiliating experiences.

The novel begins with the house at 124 Bluestone Road around which the narrative revolves. The readers are informed that the house is haunted with a spirit which has driven Sethe's sons Buglar and Howard away. Estranged and disconnected with the community, Sethe and Denver live alone in the house. Sethe carries the horrific memories of the sexual bestiality by the Nephews who suckled at her breast and beat her at the same time while she was pregnant. Halle, Sethe's husband, ashamed at his inability to intervene and save his wife from the brutal sexual assault, descends deep into insanity and is never seen. Halle remains a mystery in the novel.

The arrival of Paul D brings the memories of days when Sethe and Paul D were slaves at Sweet Home. Paul D and Sethe rekindle their old passion and consummate their relationship. Denver is curious to know more about her mother's escape from the Sweet Home, the stories that shape and fill up Denver's imagination. Paul D serves to establish the lost ties with the community which has made Sethe and Denver isolated from everyone. As Beloved arrives at the 124 Bluestone Road with no surname, Denver is convinced that she is her dead elder sister. Beloved is also the only word Sethe is able to engrave on her dead daughter's grave in exchange of sex. Sethe believes that Beloved has escaped from her enslavement by a White man. Beloved, Sethe and Denver establish deep familial bonds where Sethe shares all her stories of childhood and Sweet Home. Denver gets emotionally attached with Beloved as they spend more and more time together, dancing in the attic and sharing stories. Paul D, who has been initially suspicious of her, also gets under her influence and control. Beloved's seduction of Paul D brings back all his hidden memories of pain and turmoil at Sweet Home. As Paul D decides to take control of his life, he finds a perfect companion in Sethe with whom he wishes to have a family. Stamp Paid is a former slave who was called Joshua; he has now changed his name into Stamp Paid because he feels he has paid the price of his freedom. He has helped Sethe and her children in her flight to freedom and is privy to Sethe's secret of killing her own daughter. Stamp Paid unravels the well-concealed secret to Paul D about Sethe killing her daughter during her flight from

slavery. When confronted, Sethe is unashamed and least regretful about her decision and openly admits life as slavery to be worse than death and as a mother she chose a better life for her daughter.

When Sethe listens to Beloved humming a song that she used to sing while putting her children to sleep is convinced that Beloved is her dead daughter. Sethe is completely consumed and drained by Beloved. She is physically and emotionally devoted to her which leaves her weak and emaciated. Denver realises that Sethe is more vulnerable in her love, care and concern towards Beloved and not vice versa as she previously imagined. Towards the end, as women approach the haunted house and its inhabitants with prayers to cast away the spirit. Beloved emerges as pregnant, dark and naked. She disappears into the forest and is never seen or heard again. Sethe has descended into insanity as old memories of School teacher who brutally tried to recapture her after her escape resurfaces. She takes Edward Bodwin to be the school teacher and tries to attack him to save his daughters.

The non-linear narrative of the novel emphasises the role of memory in the formation of self. The structural fragmentation mirrors the fractures and broken sense of self and being. Although Sethe flees from the physical slavery but the circumstances trap her into self-inflicted mental slavery from which she is unable to liberate herself. The slavery perpetuated by guilt and responsibility of her past actions, her over maternal instincts deranges Sethe as she begins to lose grip with the real world.

Towards the end, Beloved vanishes and is forgotten, no one knows her traces as she exists in the liminal space between dreams and reality. Paul D visits the ailing Sethe and consoles and comforts her. The novel ends with Paul D affirming to Sethe that she is most important thereby forgiving the past in order to create a new future. Sethe has identified herself entirely as a mother forgoing other aspects of her being. Thus, the novel ends with the ray of hope amidst the dark and gloomy shadow of Beloved.

#### **10.2.4 Awards and Recognitions:**

The long and fulfilling literary career of Toni Morrison is interspersed with numerous awards, accolades and Prizes for her literary work and contribution to the society at large. Undoubtedly, Toni Morrison became a leading voice in the burgeoning African-American literature. Apart from being the first Black woman to receive the Nobel Prize for literature in

1993 after the stellar success of her novel *Beloved*. She was selected to receive the Matrix Award for Communication in 1970.

The prestigious National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977 was awarded to Morrison for her novel *Song of Solomon*. American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award was also awarded to Morrison in 1977 in recognition of her contribution to promote and foster American literature. Morrison critically acclaimed novel *Beloved* was showered with numerous awards namely; Robert F Kennedy Book Award, Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award, American Book Award, Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, Frederic Gershom Melcher in 1988.

The long list of the awards for the novel *Beloved* also included the coveted Pulitzer Prize in fiction in 1988. Many African American writers and scholars wrote a letter of protest in *The New York Times Book Review* because despite the thunderous success of the novel *Beloved*, it failed to win the National Book Award or the National Book Critics Circle Award. While Morrison expresses her gratitude for the support by the African-American writers, she did not think very highly of awards. She has famously stated “My rank in terms of writing is of no interest to me,” (*Chicago Tribune*, May 31, 1992).

Awarded Ordre des Arts et des Lettres' by the Ministry of Culture (Paris) in 1993 for her contribution in the field of art. In 1995, Morrison was felicitated by her alma mater, Howard University, with the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters in the presence of a huge gathering. She was also the recipient of National Book Foundation's Medal of Distinguished Contribution to American Letter.

Morrison has acquired international reputation and fame for her outstanding work. In expanding the understanding of humanities, Morrison was awarded the National Humanities Award in 2000 for her notable contribution in the African American literature. In 2002, she was listed in one of 100 Greatest African American, a list prepared by Prof. Molefi Kete Asante. Poised at number 67, Toni Morrison was placed way ahead of Rosa Parks and Oprah Winfrey. Morrison not only had successful career as a novelist but throughout her writing and editing work, she continued to teach at various universities. The long list of Honorary Doctorate awarded by prestigious universities to Morrison is a testimony to her active and devoted career as an academician and a novelist par excellence. She was feted with the Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Harvard University in 1989, from Oxford University in 2005. University of

Pennsylvania bestowed Honorary Doctorate of Laws in 1988 and Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters was conferred by Gustavus Adolphus College in 1997. Rutgers University and University of Geneva also gave her Honorary Doctorate of letters in 2011. Morrison was awarded with Norman Mailer Prize in 2009 celebrating her work. In 2013, Vanderbilt University endowed her with The Nicholas Chancellor's Medal in and Princeton University with Honorary Doctorate of Literature.

The Legion of Honour is the highest French order of merit bestowed on Morrison in 2009. The Presidential Medal of Freedom was awarded to Morrison for her distinguished work and contribution to the society. Awarded by the President, it is one of the highest civilian awards. National Book Critic circle awarded her Ivon Sandrof Lifetime Achievement award in 2014. She was also honoured with the Thomas Jefferson medal by the American Philosophical Society. She is also inducted in the historic National Women's Hall of Fame in 2020 for the lasting impact of her work in the field of African American literature and most importantly African American Women. 'Toni Morrison Day' day is also celebrated in Ohio on her birthday that is, February 18.

Amidst this glorious array of awards and recognition, one that deserves the utmost praise is perhaps the Nobel Prize awarded to Morrison in 1993. The Nobel Prize Citation described Morrison as "who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality." Morrison's Nobel Prize acceptance speech begins with a story, "Once upon a time there was an old woman. Blind but wise". The speech that begins with story of old, blind and wise women soon delves into the significance of language and its usage. She explains that oppressive language is violent and restricts knowledge. She calls for the rejection of such language with the 'racist plunder'. Morrison exclaims "Sexist language, racist language, theistic language – all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas". Morrison highlights the significance of language as "we die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives."

***Check your Progress***

1. List the various literary recognitions conferred on Toni Morrison.
2. What made Morisson figure in the 100 Greatest African American list?
3. When was Morrison awarded Nobel Prize?



### **10.2.5 Final Years and Death:**

Nobel Laureate who created unforgettable characters like Milkman, *Beloved*, *Sethe*, *Sula* Peace and Pecola Breedlove died on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019. She was 88 years old and her death was confirmed by her publisher Alfred. K.Knopf. Her brief illness and complications due to pneumonia has been reported to be the cause of her death. Morrison passed away at New York's Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx. Oprah Winfrey, Angela Davis and Michael Ondaatje along with many more literary figures and leaders who attended her memorial services. She is survived by her son Harold and three grandchildren.

In her Nobel Prize acceptance speech Morrison said “We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives”. In one of her interviews to NPR's Fresh Air in 2015, Morrison describes writing as healing process where she is freed of her pain. Morrison believed writing to be her best, “where nobody tells me what to do; it's where my imagination is fecund and I am really at my best. Nothing matters in the world or in my body or anywhere when I am writing”.

Overcoming her death through her works, the legacy of Toni Morrison perpetuates. US President Barack Obama hailed her a “national treasure”. He extolled her as “Toni Morrison's prose brings us that kind of moral and emotional intensity that few writers ever attempt”.

As a person who is never known to mince words, Morrison remained active and aligned to her cause till the very end of her life. She criticised President Donald Trump in her article “Mourning for Whiteness” in 2016 for keeping the white supremacy alive by stoking it for vote politics. 'Imagine – Toni Morrison Remembers' is a documentary film directed by Jill Nicholls featuring Toni Morrison who freely and fearlessly discusses her life, challenges, opportunities and success.

Lorain, Ohio, which is the hometown of Toni Morrison passed a resolution to celebrate February 18<sup>th</sup> as Toni Morrison Day for the generations to be inspired from her poetic and incandescent prose in humanising the African-American community.

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## **10.3 Learning Outcomes**

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- The students are informed about the life and works of Toni Morrison.
- The students are able to comprehend the significance of African-American Literature.
- The students are familiarised with Toni Morrison's literary work and famous novels as part of American literature.
- The students are sensitised towards the racial crimes and the plight of African American community.
- The students critically examine the intersection of race and gender in the violence and crimes against Black African-American women.
- The students appreciate and absorb the alternate narrative of African-American legacy rejecting the Eurocentric discourse.

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## 10.4 Glossary

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**Abolition:** Refers to the group of activists who worked to bring an end to the legalised slavery in American States. Slavery was being resisted by protest, suicides, escape and revolt. American Anti-Slavery society was formed in 1883, it included many former slaves who consistently campaigned against slavery. John Brown and Frederick Douglas were the prominent Abolitionist. It finally led to the Emancipation Proclamation.

**African American Literary Renaissance:** Refers to the growing number of African American writers writing in 1970 and 1980 along with the rise of Black Feminism in 1960. Writers like Alice Walker, Bambara, Toni Morrison was instrumental in re-articulating the Black woman experiences.

**Black Aesthetic:** Refers to the Black Arts Movement and its artistic exploration in reclaiming the meaning of blackness. It employs art to underscore social, economic and political problems faced by African American community.

**Blues:** Refers to unique African American Art form used to communicate their stories and experiences and is an integral part of Black Arts Movement.

**Civil Rights Movement:** Refers to the movement by African American community to achieve equality and citizenship. In order to achieve integration, the movement fought against racist and segregationist laws and practices like Jim Crow segregation.

**Dick and Jane reader:** Refers to a series of books to supplement young children reading ability. They first appeared in 1930 and were widely used in the schools. Toni Morrison uses Dick and Jane Readers in her novel *The Bluest Eye* to question the standards of family against the dysfunctional, violent and abusive families in African American Community.

**Emancipation Proclamation:** Refers to the official decree by Abraham Lincoln in 1863 to put an end to the slavery. Emancipation Proclamation freed African American from slavery yet their condition remained largely the same.

**Great Depression:** Refers to the large-scale migration after the First World War between 1910 and 1940 of African American people from southern region of the United States to the northern part in a hope for a better life and employment. As an important historical and cultural event, this vast movement of African American people led to the Harlem Renaissance.

**Fugitive Slave Law:** Refers to 1850 Fugitive Slave Act which empowered the slave owners to reclaim and recapture the slaves who managed to escape from the captivity. The Act also allowed the use of force and violence against those who helped the slaves to escape.

**Harlem Renaissance:** Refers to the increasing number of African American population in Harlem which soon became a culture epicentre of African American art, music, literature, films, and theatre.

**Jazz:** Refers to the unique music form of African American with African rhythms combined with European music. The merit of Jazz lies in its improvisation and it became a medium of expressing African American Jazz features in many of Morrison's novels like *The Bluest Eye* and *Love*.

**Slave narrative:** Refers to the first-person account of African American life as Slaves. The Slave narrative became a seminal historical document recording the physical, emotional and sexual abuse of the slaves. Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Nat Turner's slave narrative are few of the most famous slave narratives.

**Womanism:** Refers to Alice Walker's concept of Feminism which she found inadequate and limited as it failed to explore and incorporate the experiences of Black women. Alice Walker's famous explanation of Womanism, "Womanism is to Feminism and Purple is to Lavender".

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## 10.5 Sample Questions

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### 10.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Where was Toni Morrison born?  
(a) Lorain, Ohio    (b) Harlem  
(c) Nigeria        (d) Michigan
2. When was Toni Morrison awarded with the Nobel Prize?  
(a) 2003            (b) 1993  
(c) 1997            (d) 2000
3. Milkman is a character in which one of the Morrison's novels  
(a) The Bluest Eye        (b) Sula  
(c) Love                (d) Song of Solomon
4. Which one of them is a **FALSE** statement  
(a) Toni Morrison had an unhappy marriage.  
(b) Toni Morrison was the first Black woman to win a Nobel Prize.  
(c) Toni Morrison changed her name.  
(d) Toni Morrison coined the word Womanism.
5. Which one of the novels is hailed as Toni Morrison's magnum opus  
(a) *The Bluest Eye*        (b) *Beloved*  
(c) *Song of Solomon*        (d) *Paradise*
6. Toni Morrison in her early career worked as a  
(a) Librarian        (b) Dancer  
(c) Editor            (d) Singer
7. Which one of the themes are predominant in Morrison's novels  
(a) Poverty and unemployment    (b) Racial alienation, dislocation and loneliness  
(c) Trauma, Memory and Self affirmation        (d) Both b and c
8. How does Morrison describe her mother  
(a) Meek and scared        (b) Active, talented and unafraid  
(c) Sad and depressed        (d) None of the above
9. When is Toni Morrison Day celebrated every year.

- (a) 20<sup>th</sup> February                      (b) 5<sup>th</sup> August  
 (c) 18<sup>th</sup> February                      (d) 7<sup>th</sup> July
10. Which one of the novels of Morrison has a male protagonist
- (a) *Sula*                                      (b) *The Bluest Eye*  
 (c) *Beloved*                                      (d) *Song of Solomon*

### 10.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. How did Toni Morrison spent her childhood?
2. What was Morrison's experience in school and university?
3. Whom did Morrison marry and how was her married life?
5. In what ways Morrison's career as editor at Random house helped as a novelist.

### 10.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss Toni Morrison's contribution to the African-American Literature.
2. Critically analyse the dominant themes of Toni Morrison's literary work.
3. Elucidate the dehumanising aspect of slavery in the choice made by Sethe in the novel *Beloved*.

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## 10.6 Suggested Readings

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3. Basu, Biman. "The Black Voice and the Language of the Text: Toni Morrison's *Sula*," *College Literature* 23, no. 3 (October 1996): 88–103.
4. Conner, Marc C. "From the Sublime to the Beautiful: The Aesthetic Progression of Toni Morrison." In *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable*, edited by Marc C. Conner, 49–76. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000.

5. Heinze, Denise. *The Dilemma of 'Double Consciousness': Toni Morrison's Novels*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993.
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7. Humphrey, Catherine Carr. "Toni Morrison's Sermon: A Gospel of Love and Imagination," *Dissertation Abstracts International* 56, no. 3 (September 1995): 931A.
8. Ranveer, Kashinath. "African-American Feminist Consciousness in the Novels of Toni Morrison," *Indian Journal of American Studies* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 35–45.
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10. Warner, Anne Bradford. "New Myths and Ancient Properties: The Fiction of Toni Morrison," *The Hollins Critic* 25, no. 3 (June 1988): 1–11.

## **Unit – 13: Origin and Development of Indian English Novel**

### **Structure**

#### **13.0 Introduction**

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##### **13.2.1 Rise of English Language in India**

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###### **13.2.1.3 What is Novel?**

##### **13.2.2 Aspects of Novel**

###### **13.2.2.1 Theme**

###### **13.2.2.2 Plot**

###### **13.2.2.3 Characterization**

###### **13.2.2.4 Point of View**

###### **13.2.2.5 Place / Setting**

###### **13.2.2.6 Time**

###### **13.2.2.7 Narration or Dramatization**

###### **13.2.2.8 Style**

##### **13.2.3 Types of Novels**

###### **13.2.3.1 Picaresque Novel**

###### **13.2.3.2 Gothic Novel**

###### **13.2.3.3 Epistolary Novel**

###### **13.2.3.4 Psychological Novel**

###### **13.2.3.5 Historical Novel**

###### **13.2.3.6 Regional Novel**

##### **13.2.4 Rise of Novel in India**

###### **13.2.4.1 Male Writers**

###### **13.2.4.2 Female Writers**

#### **13.3 Learning Outcomes**

#### **13.4 Glossary**

#### **13.5 Sample Questions**

#### **13.6 Suggested Readings**

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## **13.0 Introduction**

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In the present module “Origin and Development of Indian English Novel” we will first discuss the emergence of English language on the Indian soil and reasons that paved the way for its emergence and the need for it. After this you will come to know how the Indian English literature began, its nature and scope or the various names that it received during all these years. Further, we will talk about the genre novel, its various aspects or characteristics and types of novels. After this we will discuss the rise of Indian English fiction, its development and not all but some of the important writers both male and female.

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### **13.1 Objectives**

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Objective of this module is to introduce you to the genre fiction, its origin and development on the Indian soil. Further, it also introduces you to the various fiction writers who contributed for the beginning of the genre and the sustenance of this language possible on this land.

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### **13.2 Origin and Development of Indian English Novel**

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#### **13.2.1 Rise of English Language in India:**

East India Company came to India primarily for the purpose of trade and commerce. However, circumstances of the land were such that after the Battle of Plassey in 1757 that the Company began to rule Bengal and later Buxar. With this the Company’s rule began from Benares to Calcutta. Further, Mughal emperor made the Company its divan of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. This led the Company to manage the finances of the Mughal Empire in these appointed places under the Treaty of Allahabad. It is from here began the official rule of the Company. It is during this period that in order to understand and know the culture of the land some officials of the Company began to take interest in its past, religions, cultures and so on and so forth. Later on



the British government wanted its officials to learn the language of the land in order to communicate with its subjects. For this purpose during 1800 began to appear the English language dictionaries, grammar books, teaching aids, translations, literary books and so on and so forth. Though there were books in English language to facilitate to learn the language and for the English readers in general.

However, English as a medium of instructions was in debate. People from both the lands, rulers and the natives, were debating about it. It went on almost for more than forty years. The debates and comments were made by social reformers and orientalist like in 1823 Rammohan Roy said that to keep the people of India in darkness Sanskrit education would be best. He took up the charge of English education on behalf of Indians against Horace H. Wilson. In 1835 during the Angliscist and Orientalist controversy the matter was resolved when Thomas Babington Macaulay's 'Minutes on Education' very famously said that "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."<sup>1</sup> Thus, all the arguments, discussions and debates were sealed by Macaulay's Minute and it made English language part of Indian education system.

#### **13.2.1.1 Beginning of Indian English Literature:**

Everything not always happens chronologically or the way we expect it might have happened. Literature began way before the language became part of our education system officially. The seeds of English literature on Indian soil were sown by the native speakers, that is, Britishers who were serving in India or outside of India and their writings were based on Indian themes.

Initially it is the poetry that dominated from 1880s and continued till more than hundred years. Among the Indians it was Henry Vivian Derozio, shares the Indian and Portuguese ancestry, laid the foundation of poetry and thereby began the journey of English literature on Indian soil. He was an English teacher at Hindu college, Calcutta. He instilled in the minds of his young students the love for English language and literature. Thus, during this time he was the torch bearer of the language and literature. Though he was considered as an Anglo-Indian but he considered himself Indian and it reflected from his poetry as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Macaulay's Minute on Education, February 2, 1835  
<http://home.iitk.ac.in/~hcverma/Article/Macaulay-Minutes.pdf>

Nevertheless, natives also began to express themselves in the language specifically in the form of poetry. The poets were like Kashi Prasad Ghose, Gooru Churn Dutt, Rajnarayan Dutt, and M. M. Dutt. Like any other writer of a literature that draws its inspiration from other well-known writer, Indian writers were also influenced by British writers. The probable reasons could be: they were unknown or new to the language, its expressions and other techniques of the language as well as literature. Due to this reason one may find the influence of Romantic poets in their works and their poetry was majorly based on the themes of nature. Like in the poetry of Derozio, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, M.M Dutt and many more. However, it was Toru Dutt's father Govind Dutt who was very much inspired by the Romantics more specifically by the writings of Wordsworth. In Rabindranath Tagore's poetry one finds the influence of Shelley. Derozio and M. M. Dutt were interested in Byron and Scott like many other poets.

Gradually there began the influence of Victorian poetry in the writings of Anglo-Indian poets. One can also say that the initially Indian English poetry had the influence of both the Romantics and Victorian specifically the lyric and lyrical narrative poetry began to be seen in Toru Dutt. "A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields" by Aru and Toru Dutt was published in 1875. Toru Dutt's "Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan" was published in 1882 followed by R.C. Dutt's "Lays of Ancient India" and his renderings of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* that were published in 1894, Manmohan Ghose's "Love Songs and Elegies" (1898) and Sri Aurobindo's "Songs to Myrtilla" (1895) and Sarojini Naidu's "The Golden Threshold" (1905). These were some of the prominent works that echoes sentiments of the Romantic and Victorian.

The influence of the Romantics, Victorians and even of Dryden and Pope was seen in the next quarter but the three poets like Manmohan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu were influenced by the decadence poetry and its reflection was seen in their works. It was because these poets have spent their considerable time in England specifically when this form of poetry was in vogue.

However, the poets gradually found their own voice and it began to reflect in their works like Sarojini Naidu. In her works she began to showcase the Indian themes. Sri Aurobindo's poetry also had influence of western poets. In one of his letters he says: "The influences I spoke of were of course influences only such as every poet undergoes before he has entirely found

himself.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, he broke the shackles of influence and began to write poetry with a fresh zeal.

This period, the last quarter, of nineteenth century is considered to be the golden period of Anglo-Indian poetry. They are the ones who initiated this process of writing or to say the formation of a new literature. However, it began as a foreign literature but it was accommodated and embraced by the prolific and eminent writers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Romesh Chunder Dutt, Aurobindo and the unforgettable Rabindranath Tagore. All these poets made the Indian Writing in English possible.

So far we have seen that the literature began to be written way much before then the rise of English language in India. It was majorly in the form of poetry that the literature began to emerge. However, it was not the natives who were creating the history of the literature initially rather it were the Anglo-Indians, both those who were residing in India as well as outside of India were creating the literature. It was because they were writing on the Indian themes. You must be waiting to know about the history of novel in India but before this it is pertinent to know what about those Britishers who were writing on Indian themes? Where will their work and how will is it categorised so on and so forth. In other words, now we need to understand the distinction between different names the Indian English literature has received in different time period or to discuss the history of its name, that is, how it came to be known as Indian English literature and what was it called before this so and so forth.

### **13.2.1.2 Issue Related to the Name:**

The name of this literature has been defined variously in different time periods like Indo-Anglian literature, Indian Writing in English, Indo-English literature. Apart from this it was also called Anglo-Indian literature, literature in the Indian languages translated into English and also original compositions by Indians in English.

The confusion and perhaps not paying attention to its name has also led to the creation of so many different names like E.F Oaten in his *A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature* (1908) included the poetry of Henry Lois Vivian Derozio. The term Anglo refers to “A white English speaking British....” So a British living in India is considered as Anglo-Indian. This confusion

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<sup>2</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghose. “Part 2. On His Own and Others’ Poetry Section 1. On His Poetry and Poetic Method Early Poetic Influences” from *Sri Aurobindo: Letters on Poetry and Art*. [https://www.sri-aurobindo.in/workings/sa/37\\_27/0230\\_e.htm](https://www.sri-aurobindo.in/workings/sa/37_27/0230_e.htm)

may be because of his mixed ancestry. However, literary historian and others perhaps considered him as an Anglo-Indian but he considered himself Indian. Nevertheless, Oaten once again seems to have not noticed that he has included Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghose's name in his essay on Anglo-Indian literature in the Cambridge History of English Literature. In the essay he has also included the names of the Anglo-Indian writers like F.W. Bain and F. A. Steel.

It was not only the foreign scholars who did not pay attention to the name of the literature but also the Indian scholars like Bhupal Singh whose *A survey of Anglo-Indian fiction* (1934) included both the Indian and non-Indian writers. Similarly, V.K. Gokak's *English in India: Its Present and Future* which came in 1964 went ahead and included the works written in English but also the one that got translated into English from the regional languages. This shows that they were paying attention to the Indian themes or they might have left the job of deciding the name of the literature on others. In the same manner K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar also included the translated works of Tagore into English in his work *History of Indian Creative Writing in English*. H.M. Williams did a survey title *Indo-Anglian Literature 1800-1970: A Survey* (1976) wherein he excluded the translated works. John B. Alphonso Karkala in his work *Indo-English Literature in the Nineteenth Century* published in 1970 wherein he used the term Indo-English literature. By this name he meant the literature which is produced by Indians in English. (M.K. Naik, P.no. 9-10)

Today we understand and know that the name of the literature should include the authors of Indian origin who have penned or pen their thoughts in English creatively. We know that neither the name Anglo-Indian literature nor the translated works from the regional literature should be part of it. It is majorly due to the fact that themes alone cannot decide the inclusion of an author into the literary history of an author but his ancestry or belongingness as well because it is then one will be able to have a sense, feeling, and expression of Indianness in their writings. Thus, the writers like Kipling, Forster, F.W Bain, Sir Edwin Arnold, F.A. Steel, John Masters, Paul Scott, and M. M. Kaye and so on cannot become the part of Indian literary history as they share a different national identity and ancestry. Now the issue of translated works is that they are originally written in regional languages but not in the English language if they had been transcreated by the writers themselves into English then those works can become the part of Indian English writing. (M.K. Naik, P.no. 10)

According to M.K. Naik:

However, since literature is not a science, there will always be a no man's land in which all attempts at strict definition are in danger of getting lost in a haze. Thus, there are exceptional cases like Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Ruth Praver Jhabvala. The former, born of a Sri Lankan Tamil father and an English mother was neither an Indian citizen nor did he live in India; and yet the entire orientation of his thought is so unmistakably Indian that it is impossible not to consider him an Indian English writer. As for Jhabvala, she is virtually an international phenomenon. Born of Polish parents in Germany, she received her education in English, married an Indian, lived in India for more than twenty years, and has written in English. This daughter-in-law of India (though a rebellious one, in her later work) shows such close familiarity and deep understanding of Indian social life (especially in her earlier work) that she has rightly found a place in the history of Indian English literature. On the other hand, V.S. Naipaul's Indian ancestry is indisputable, but he is so much of an outsider when he writes about India and the Indian and so much of an insider while dealing with Caribbean life and character, that there can be no two opinions on his rightful inclusion in the history of West Indian Writing...(M.K. Naik, P.no. 10)

Thus, it is evident that Indian English literature cannot become part of English literature or the English writers cannot become part of Indian literary history just because of their ancestry or the theme on which they write. They need to have a sense and feeling of Indianness in their writings. One will be able to decide and make a distinction and understand this argument only when he/she reads both the writers and compare their writings. Further, the literature also cannot be define or named as common wealth literature as the name Commonwealth indicates the political name. Apart from this, Anglo or Anglian there are many names prefixes added or names given to the literary writings like Indo-Anglian literature, Indo-English literature, Indian Writing in English and Indian English literature. Nevertheless, the matter is resolved by the Sahitya Akademi who decided to call this body of literature as 'Indian English Literature'. According to M.K. Naik this name indicates two major points: the first is that this body of literature belongs to the vast ocean of literature which is called Indian literature. The second important matter it

indicates towards the language that gradually became native or nativized by the writers as they begin to express their Indian thoughts, feelings and culture in it.

Before moving to trace the history of novel in Indian English literature it is pertinent to know and define what is novel, what are the major characteristics of a novel, and types of novel in brief.

### **13.2.1.3 What is Novel?**

“It is only novels in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties the liveliest effusions of wit and humor are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language.” Jane Austen.

Novel is a work of fiction in a long narrative form. It is in a prose form. The term novel comes from the Italian word ‘novella’ meaning “new”. The difference between short story and a novel is length of a story, number of characters apart from this they share the entire remaining characteristic like story line or plot, setting, characters, climax, conflict, dialogues, resolution. Nevertheless, it is not necessary that a good and successful novel should have all these characteristics but it should meet the basic criteria to fall in to the category of novel.

Novel is a modern art of fiction which came after print. Hence it is the byproduct of print. It became popular among the masses not only because it’s a long narrative form that can help in killing time and more importantly people began to relate or associate or identify themselves with the characters or stories. Further, the prose form of narrative also helped in making it popular genre among the readers.

The genre commenced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century initially in English and French. Initially it did not get much attention but it flourished in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. With the increase in readership the writers began to get paid handsomely and enjoyed freedom from their patrons. This helped them in experimenting in their style.

### **13.2.2 Aspects of Novel:**

There are various features of a novel without which it does not stand. The various significant aspects of a novel and as we know that a novel is nothing but a story about some event or person set in a specific time and place and it moves as per the narrative. This makes us understand that a novel has some of the basic elements that hook the interest of a reader in order

to make the story interesting, lively and realistic. This means a novel has some hidden aspects but a writer cannot be very conscious of those aspects while writing a story. He / She just write. It is the critics, scholars and readers who identify and look for them in a piece of fiction. It is also important to know that these features of a novel are significant part of a novel. One can just discuss these features but one cannot categorise a novel based on those features. More importantly one reads a novel to appreciate and enjoy it. Therefore it is futile to disturb the integrity of a novel which will result in nothing specifically a reader should not do it. Nevertheless, when one likes a novel one will surely discuss or like some of its features like characters, theme, plot and so on. However, one needs to be aware of these features in order to understand and appreciate a novel in a better manner. Apart from that in order to analyse a novel one needs to take all these features into consideration. Thus, it is pertinent for a reader as well as for a scholar to know the aspects of novel. The following are the features of a novel: theme, plot, characterization, point of view, place and time, narrative technique, style and structure.

#### **13.2.2.1 Theme:**

Theme is nothing but the major idea of a novel. Every novel consists of a theme or there can be various themes in a piece of writing. Theme is a major issue or an argument upon which the whole narrative is based. Once again it is important to note here that a writer does not take the theme and write rather she takes an idea and expands it into a story, put some characters, add some plot, characters, style, and technique.

#### **13.2.2.2 Plot:**

Plot is a sequence of events which has beginning, middle and end. It moves with the help of characters, action and events. A novel can have plot and sub-plot and both of them remains part of the main story. They run together and are interconnected with a story. For example take the novel *Binding Vine* (1992) by Shashi Deshpande. The story is about Urmi and how she copes with the loss of her daughter. It also narrates the story of Mira and Kalpana. The issues of all these character are brought under the theme of relationship and death. One can see that here plot in a story moves with the help of the characters or their actions.

#### **13.2.2.3 Characterization:**

Characters are the individuals in a piece of writing. They have moral, emotional, natural mood which is given by the writer. It is revealed through their actions like how they react, act, learn from their situations, and change is nothing but the art of characterization. If a character

leaves a huge impact and remains in our memory for a longer time than it is the effect of the characterization. In other words such characters are called memorable characters like the character from *Train to Pakistan* Jugga or Bakha from the novel *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand. In other words these are the characters that are etched in our memories very strongly. It is also pertinent to discuss here that there are different types of characters like flat, round, protagonist, foil, dynamic, stock and antagonist. It is important to know that a story reveals its different characters and their personality traits gradually as the story moves further.

#### **13.2.2.4 Point of View:**

There are various methods through which a writer narrates a story and the method is called point of view. It is a method in which a story is narrated or told. It shows the perspective through which the author reveals her characters, hide their action or events. When a character narrates his story then it is called first person narrative. In this case the narration begins with 'I' then a reader can understand the story is told from a first person narrative. She narrates her experiences as she has experienced them. The third person narrative tells the story from an omniscient point of view. He knows everything that is going to take place or happening in the story and he controls the narration, thoughts, actions and motives.

#### **13.2.2.5 Place / Setting:**

It is important to know that a story takes place in a proper place like village or district, city, house, country and so on. The writer tries to give the feel of the cultural, social, political, economic situation through a place. Place is a larger context whereas setting is very specific which includes ambience, characters, mood and time. Once the place is introduced then the writer cannot move its story out of that place. For instance in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* by Anita Desai's novel there are Indian characters living in abroad, England. So, here the society is English but it's a story about Indian characters and their actions or reactions. Thus, the writer here cannot go out of this place. Place helps in determining the setting where as time helps in structuring the events. Thus, a writer cannot ignore the place and time in a story. However, it is not necessary for the writer to talk about the place but the background information gives a reader enough clues to understand a place. For example in *Binding Vine* by Shashi Deshpande the writer has not described the city in detail but it is mentioned twice. Similarly, who can forget R.K Narayan's Malgudi which appears to be somewhere in Mysore. Place is used or act differently in different novels. Like in *Delhi* a novel by Khushwant Singh wherein the place



Delhi is the location and protagonist of the novel. In this novel it has a very significant role to play. Similarly in the novel in R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi*, the writer wants to give importance to the culture and tradition which comes from the place. Another example of place could be the Gothic novels wherein a place creates an ambience of fear and darkness.

#### **13.2.2.6 Time:**

In a narrative time can be of two types one is psychological and the other is the actual or clock time. The clock time is used to specify the hours, days, weeks, months and years. These two times do not have any relation with each other like psychological time is different from the actual clock time. Psychological time is related to an individual character of a novel. It has nothing to do with the outside world. Initially writers used to prefer the clock time. For instance if a novel begins with the protagonist's childhood then it moves towards teenage, adulthood the way it happens in the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce. With the use of new techniques and experiments with the characters and time or to reveal inner psyche of a character stream of consciousness technique was used by the writers. The technique presents the psychological time rather than the actual time. In this time, that is, psychological, a character moves back and forth in the past and returns to presents or can go to future situation mentally. Another technique to use the psychological time frame is flash back, fantasies and dreams. It is done in order to know, present and understand the inner psyche of a character. For example in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, *God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy and *The Binding Vine* by Shashi Deshpande are the good examples of psychological time.

#### **13.2.2.7 Narration or Dramatization:**

To narrate is to tell. Tell in a way that makes the listeners or readers to feel the story in manner that as if they can see everything happening in front of their eyes. Narrate means to tell a story. Dramatization means to show a story moving in an action or dialogue. Narration seems to have something to do with orality or traditional form of storytelling whereas dramatization indicates towards the action or characters performing in front of the audiences or readers. When one talks about orality then it indicates towards a tradition of storytelling which is filled with morality or didactic in tone. Dramatization does not try to be didactic rather it shows. It is also true that readers are interested in knowing not in morality. However, both the acts of storytelling are significant due to this reason writers tend to adopt both the methods.

#### **13.2.2.8 Style:**

Every individual has a style like style of speaking, writing and so on. Style is nothing but a manner in which an individual perform a particular task that makes him/her distinct from others. Like any other individual writers too have their style of writing. It is because of their style of narration that one writer is different from the other. How do we identify this? It is through their method of narration or storytelling method, usage of language, expression, diction, choice of words, structure of sentence, usage of figurative language and so on and so forth. It is because the characters, their actions, thoughts, situations, events are revealed through the usage of language. It is also important for a writer to be realistic as much as possible in terms of giving words or language to a particular character. If a writer is projecting a rural character he/she cannot give him a language with which a character cannot relate or identify herself. Language should suit the character and its behaviour and represent the class, region and so on from which they come. Generally Indian English writers have to face this problem specifically those who represent or whose stories majorly based on the rural areas, have characters from rural background like farmers, workers and the like. In this situation a writer has to use expression of their culture and use language as it is generally used by such people. This is in order to give a realistic feel to a character. There is no doubt during such contexts English has to leave its original garb and adopt the cultural expressions and become more native. One can find such language in R.K Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand's oeuvre to which Anand named 'Pigeon' English.

#### **13.2.3 Types of Novels:**

There are different aspects to a novel as we have seen above. Apart from this there are various types of novels. Initially the prose style gave birth to this genre and gradually writers began to experiment with their style of writing and themes and so on. This gradually led to the development of various forms of novels.

##### **13.2.3.1 Picaresque Novel:**

The term 'picaresque' comes from the Spanish word '*Picaro*' means 'a rogue'. This type of novel focuses on the adventures of a single male or female character. The characters are adventurous in nature and hence they keep moving from one place to another place. The protagonist of the novel travels to different places due to this reason the plot of the novel does not stick to one issue. It remains episodic in nature. The following are the examples of

picaresque novel *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, *Robinson Crusoe* Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe and *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding.

#### **13.2.3.2 Gothic Novel:**

The moment we hear or see the word Gothic it reminds us of dark buildings, horror stories and so on. The word Gothic comes from ‘Goths’ a word used to Germanic tribe. However, there is no connection between the tribe and the genre of fiction. The stories generally set in the medieval Gothic Architectural buildings, castles and so on. This type of novels generally deals with supernatural elements which scare or create an atmosphere of suspense and fear. This form of novel was first written and popularised by Horace Walpole who wrote *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* in 1765. Gradually other writers began to take interest in it like and Mrs. Ann Radcliff's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797). Mathew Gregory Lewi's *The Monk* (1796), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and so on.

#### **13.2.3.3 Epistolary Novel:**

The novel wherein the story moves further through the exchange of letters between the characters is known as epistolary novels. The word ‘Epistle’ means letter. This genre of fiction was made popular by Samuel Richardson who wrote *Pamela* in 1740 and *Clarissa* in 1747. Fanny Bumey's *Evelina* published in 1778 is another example of this genre of storytelling.

#### **13.2.3.4 Psychological Novel:**

It is a genre of fiction wherein a writer give importance to the inner thoughts or thought process of the protagonist. To reveal the inner thoughts and feelings of a character a writer uses the technique which is called stream of consciousness as it is seen in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) by Virginia Woolf another best example of this form of novel is *Ulysses* by James Joyce published in 1922. Among the Indian writers Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, and Shashi Deshpande have explored this technique.

#### **13.2.3.5 Historical Novel:**

This is another and most important form of novel wherein the setting, not all but some of the characters and events are taken from history. These features make the novel set in a historical time with some historical characters and incidents from real life situation that has already passed. Sir Walter Scott is the exponent of this form of genre in his famous work *Ivanhoe* published in 1819. Among the Indian writers like *The Devil's Wind* (1972) by Manohar Malgonkar, *The*

Sword of Tipu Sultan (1976) by Bhagwan S. Gidwani, Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie, Qurratulain Hyder's River of Fire are some of the best example of this form of fiction.

#### **13.2.3.6 Regional Novel:**

Regional novels are set in a specific geographical area either real or fictional. However, the writer have so far utilized or created fictional setting for their stories to take place. The most important writer of this form of writing in Thomas Hardy who presented the Wessex in many of his novels and among the Indian writers R.K. Narayan has done the magic by setting his novels in Malgudi.

The above mentioned novels of forms of novels were some of the examples from the large number of forms or sub-forms of literary writings. One can see that the novels in different forms have developed due to various reasons and in different times by different authors. Apart from those above mentioned novels we also have diasporic novel which were explored by the writers living away from their homelands but writing about their home country like Meena Alexander, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and the like.

Similarly there are writers who have written on post-colonial themes and issues, postmodernism, realism, socialism, feminist writings and so on and so forth. All these writings or forms of writings have emerged in different time period due to various reasons and movements. However, one cannot categories a literary piece in a water tight compartments because a work of art touches on various forms in its single stroke. For example the novel River of Fire by Qurratulain Hyder cannot only be called a work of fiction based on partition. She has also used various historical characters, settings, incidents from history in her novel. Apart from that it is a transcreation of her work *Aag ka Darya*. It is the work of scholars and critiques to dissect all the element of a literary work and analyse it but for writers it is their creative work of fiction. They do not begin writing nor approach their work the way critiques do. They just begin with a single idea and bring it into a literary form. Nevertheless, such understanding and approach is significant to understand the writers' art of writing and forte.

#### **13.2.4 Rise of Novel in India:**

Basic purpose of a novel is to narrate a story. The tradition of storytelling exists in India since ancient times. The sources of these stories are the Panchatantra, Hitopadesha, Jatakas, Vetala Panchavinshati and Katha-Sarit-Sagara and so on. These stories like in any other ancient

culture existed in the oral form and it was narrated in a frame narrative technique wherein the main story is connected with the other stories or it creates setting and mood and then the other stories are narrated. In this manner the stories hold the interest of the listeners. Further there is no dearth of other genres of literature in Indian culture like there are other genres of literature existed from a very long time like drama and poetry. However, novel as a genre of literature is a modern development and distinct from other forms of literature as well as genre.

The first novel of Indian literature is *Travels of Dean Mahomet* which was published in 1794. Dean Mahomed was an Indian Muslim Bengali but the history or the rise of fiction in Indian English writing does not actually count his work perhaps because it falls under the genre of Travel writing and in epistolary form or perhaps he went to Ireland and settled in a foreign land. Probably due to this reason the rise or history of novel in India begins with the work of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* published in the year 1864. Samarendra C. Sen opines that in the later nineteenth century the novel as a literary genre was taken into the umbrella of the Bengal literary tradition and then began the outpouring of the writings in novel form. K.R.S. Iyengar in *Indian Writing in English* says,

Novels have been, and are being published in a dozen Indian languages, and also in English; and the reciprocal influence between the novels in English and the novel in the regional languages has been rather more intimate and purposive than such influence in the fields of poetry or drama. And this has, of course, been facilitated by the comparative ease with which a novel can be translated from one to another of the many languages current in the country.

However, before this scenario it is important to know that initially it is not the Indian writers but mostly the British were the practitioner of the literature. If one keenly observes the fact then one can say that it could be because the people were not familiar with the language that they can easily express their emotions or culture in it. It was only the elite small pockets of Indians who were exposed to the language and the foreign culture. There is no doubt that later came a wave of literary exponents but in the beginning it were only the British writers like George Orwell, Rudyard Kipling and Jim Corbett who laid the foundation and it was further developed by other British writers. Further, the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Michael

Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, R.C. Dutt, Raja Rao, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and the like shaped the literature on this soil.

#### **13.2.4.1 Male Writers:**

The pre-independence Indian English fiction has been shaped by the contributions made by the pioneers of Bengali literature namely Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, R.C. Dutt and Rabindranath Tagore. The popular novels by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) include *Kopalkunda*, *Durgeshnandini*, *Krishankanta's Will*, *The Two Rings* and *Rajmohan's Wife*. Most of his novels are based on themes of social life which he delineated with realism. His historical novels representing ideas of patriotism and revolution provided an impetus to many other Indian English novelists. R.C. Dutt (1848-1909) wrote six novels in Bengali; four were historical novels called *Banga Bijeta* (Conqueror of Bengal), *Madhavi Kanan* (Bracelet of Flowers), *Rajput Jiban Sandhya* (Evening of Rajput Life) and *Maharashtra Prabhat* (Dawn of Maharashtra). The first two novels deal with the conquest of Bengal by the emperor Akbar. The third novel tells the heroic stories of Rana Pratap Singh and the fourth one depicts Shivaji's leadership and the rise of Maratha rule. All of these four novels were published in 1879. Dutt also wrote two social novels; *Samaj* (1885) and *Sangsar* (1893). The first one is based on the theme of widow remarriage and the second novel deals with the issue of inter-caste marriage. Most of his novels introduced the theme of social reformation. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is a major presence when one thinks of Bengal and its culture; a paramount figure in Indian English literature. A collection of poems, *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings), secured for him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. He excelled in various genres of art and culture and became renowned as a poet, dramatist, novelist, composer, actor, singer, editor of the Bengali literary journal (*Sadhana*). He wrote eight novels and four novellas among them *Chaturanga*, *Shesher Kobita*, *Chare Adhyay* and *Noukadubi*. Some of his famous novels that were rendered into English include *The Wreck* (1921), *Gora* (1923) and *Home and the World* (1919). Many of his works are the inspiration for filmmakers. Some hundred films have been made, out of which more than half in Bengali, are based on Tagore's works, making him one of the most adapted writers of all time.

The period of the freedom struggle and the influence of Gandhi were responsible for the growth and development of novel in its early stage. S.Jogendra Singh's *Nasrin* (1915), *The Love of Kusuma* (1910) by Balkrishna, Sorabji Cornelia's *Love and Life behind the Purdah* and *Sun*

*Babies* (1910) and *Between the Twilight* (1908) are some of the famous novels based on the theme of national awakening and political consciousness. The various momentous events of the Gandhian era like the boycott of the Simon Commission, the boycott of foreign goods, the Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre, Civil Disobedience Movement, Dandi March, Quit India Movement and many others forms of Gandhian movement are represented in many of the novels written during this period of the freedom struggle. Many writers of this period were influenced by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi who voiced against the injustice done towards the under-privileged, the marginalized and the suppressed. According to Amarnath Prasad the works dealing with the theme of either Gandhi or the contemporary freedom struggle are Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), K.S. Venkatramani's *Kandan the Patriot* (1932), D.F. Karaka's *We never Die* (1944), Amir Ali's *Conflict* (1947), Venu Chitali's *In Transit* (1950), K.A. Abbas's *Inquailab* (1955), R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1956), Nayantara Sehgal's *A Time to be Happy* (1955) and K.Nagarajan's *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961).

**Mulk Raj Anand** (1905-2004) was one of the most prolific writers of the period who is best known as a social realist and a humanist. His vision of a humanist and a reformist is seen in his novel named *Untouchable* (1935) which gave him immense popularity. His other humanistic novels *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves And A Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and *The Big Heart* in 1945. Anand has also written seven collections of short stories – *The Child and other Stories* (1934), *The Barber's Trade Union and other Stories* (1944), *The Tractor and the Corn Goddess and other Stories* (1947), *Reflections on the Golden Bed and other Stories* (1953), *The Power of Darkness and other stories* (1959), *Lajwanti and other stories* (1966) and *Between Tears and Laughter* (1973). His other works include *Indian fairy Tales* (1961), *The Old woman and the Cow* (1960). It was followed by *The Road* (1963) and *The Death of Hero* (1964). *Seven Summers*, *Morning Face*, *The Confession of A Lover* and *The Bubble* are his autobiographical novels.

**R.K. Narayan** is considered as one of the pioneers of regional novel in India. His based many of his novels on the fictional place called Malgudi which he created in his imagination. Some of his autobiographical works include *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1936) and *The English Teacher*. The novels placed on the locale of Malgudi are *The Dark Room* (1938), *Mr. Sampath* (1952), *The Financial Expert* (1955), *The Guide* (1958), *Waiting for*

*the Mahatma*, *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *The Painter of Signs* (1977), *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983) and *The World of Nagraj* (1990). Narayan's novels display his comic vision of life where his characters show a journey towards experience from innocence and they continue their journey until they are contended with wisdom. The language that Narayan adopts in his works is simple and lucid but his command over the language is remarkable. The Times Literary Supplement comments on Narayan's style,

His humour is woven into the texture of his prose. It never erupts in a detachable epigram or joke. He did his best to inject the spirit and tempo of Tamilian idiom into English speech in a natural and unaffected manner. In spite of the raciness and simplicity Narayan's style is rich in evocativeness and suggestiveness.

**Raja Rao**, one of the renowned novelist of pre-independent era, whose work has an influence of Gandhian movements. His works include *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) and *The Policeman and The Rose* (1978). He was much influenced by Gandhi's philosophy and this is evident in his two works namely *Kanthapura* and *The Cow of the Barricades* where Mahatma Gandhi never appears physically but his presence is felt everywhere. He received the Sahitya Academy Award for *The Serpent and the Rope*. He was also honoured with the Padma Bhushan for his literary achievements. His works show combination of eastern and western exposure. He was inspired by James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, Valmiki and Ved Vyas.

**Bhabani Bhattacharya** is another important writer but of post-independent India. He has written novels based on social issues like *So Many Hungers* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He Who rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow From Ladakh* (1967) and *A Dream In Hawaii* (1975). He has also explored the genre of short stories specifically that were based on of psychological interest. He received Sahitya Academy Award in 1967 for his work, *Shadow From Ladakh*.

**Khushwant Singh** another significant writer of post-Independent India and the recipient of Padma Bhushan award in 1974. He was a journalist who has served as an editor of *Yojana* (1951-1953), *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (1969-1979), *The National Herald* (1978-1979), *New Delhi* (1979-1980), and *The Hindustan Times* (1980-1983). He wrote four novels *Train to Pakistan* (1956), *I Shall Not Hear The Nightingale* (1959), *Delhi* (1989) and *The Company Of*



*Women* (2000). He also wrote two collection of short stories called *The Mark of Vishnu* (1950) and *A Bribe for the Sahib* (1967). He got the Grove Press Award for *Train to Pakistan*. The novel deals with the issue of partition and it reflects the human brutality and at the same time love and compassion. However, it is one of the significant novels on the partition of India that shows horrifying images of Partition of India. *I Shall Not Hear The Nightingale* is about a Sikh family of pre-Independent era where as *Delhi* and *The Company of Women* deals with sex and lust.

**Manohar Malgonkar** another significant writer who has served in Indian Army at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. His work includes *Distant Drums* (1960), *Combat Of Shadows* (1962), *The Princes* (1963), *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), *Spy in Amber* (1971), *The Devil's Wind* (1972) and *Shalimar* (1978). He has explored various themes and issues like life of princes, experiences of military life, and political upheaval during the partition of the country, the Sepoy Mutiny and so on and so forth. He wrote two collections of short stories named *A Tost in Warm Wine* and *Bombay Beware*.

**Chaman Nahal** a significant writer of post-Independent India who wrote like *My True Faces* (1973), *Azadi* (1975), *Into Another Dawn* (1977), *The English Queen* (1979), *The Crown and the Loincloth* (1981) and also a collection of short stories titled *The Weird Dance* (1965). *My True Faces* is about broken marriage; *Into Another Dawn* talks about the encounter between East and West, *Azadi* is based on the partition of India and *The Crown and the Loincloth* is about Gandhian philosophy. His skills as a writer are seen in his work *The English Queen*.

**Salman Rushdie**, a name that every literature student is aware about. He is a novelist of global importance not only due to his writings but also for controversial issues. His forte is historical fantasy and magic-realism. His novel *Grimivis* (1975) deals with politics and history. *Midnight Children* (1981) is all about history and magic-realism. He won the Booker of Bookers Prize for it. *Shame* (1983) is all about the creation of Pakistan after partition whereas his *Satanic Verses* (1988) is considered as a controversial novel as it hurts the sentiments of Muslims. Due to this reason the novel is banned. Apart from these widely known work of fictions he has also written *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), *In Good Faith* (1990), *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism* (1981-1991), *East-West* (1994), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001), *Step Across This Line: Collected Non- Fiction* (2002) and *Shalimar The Clown* (2005).

**Amitav Ghosh** worked as a journalist in the Indian Express and an eminent writer of post-Independent India. He debuted with *The Circle of Reason* (1982), a novel that deals with the issue of terrorism and covers two cities of Calcutta and Bombay and then it moves around the Persian Gulf to North Africa. *The Shadow Lines* (1988) is one of the significant novels is about family in Kolkata and Dhaka and their relationship with a British family. This novel brought him recognition as a writer and he won Sahitya Academy Award for it. His *In An Antique Land* (1992) deals with anthropological and historical survey and along with it he has used imagination. *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) is science fiction and it was popular because of his innovative work. This work brought him Arthur C. Clarke Award, a prestigious award given by Britain for best science fiction.

So far we have covered all the male novelist of pre and post-Independent times. There are large numbers of female writers who have also shaped the Indian literature in English and whose invaluable contributions always deserve mention. They have explored various themes and issues which are informed by their femininity that no one else can do. However, by that it does not mean that they were only talking about women issues or their concerns and so on. No one can limit their boundaries or compartmentalize the writers based on their gender as they have also explored various other issues and themes with ease.

#### **13.2.4.2 Female Writers:**

The early women writers of Indian English literature are: When one talks about women writing in Indian English literature then the first name that comes to our minds is of **Toru Dutt**. She is majorly known as a poet but she has also written two novels. Her first novel was *Bianca, or, The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878) in English and the second was in French called *le journal de mademoiselle d'Arvers* (1879). However, both the novels published posthumously. Therefore, one cannot be sure about the chronology as we do not know which novel she intended to publish first. Moreover, her novels one is in French that cannot be for the Indian English readers and the second is about a European protagonist in European setting. Therefore, how much one can count her works to be in Indian English writing is an issue or maybe she does not fall into the category of earliest women fiction writers. Nevertheless, after this comes **Raj Laxmi Devi/Debi** who wrote at a time when the pre-Independent India was struggling not only to achieve freedom from colonial master but also free their communities and women from age old meaningless traditions. She wrote *The Hindu Wife* in (1876). However, one should not get

carried away by the name. It is a **pseudonym of Sir William Jones** who wrote this novel. Thus, one cannot count this novel as well<sup>3</sup> or the writer. **Cornelia Sorabji** was a Parsee woman who was a social reformist, lawyer and she was the first woman to graduate from Bombay University and the first woman to go England from India. She was the first woman to practice law in Britain. She wrote *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901) a collection of short stories. Next comes **Kamala Markandaya**, post-independent prolific writer whose writings were focused on social and political issues. Her works include *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffers Dams* (1969), *Two Virgins* and *The Golden Honey*. **Attia Hosain**: She was a journalist, broadcaster, novelist and short story writer. Her first work of fiction was in the genre of short story. She wrote a collection of short stories called *Phoenix Fled* in 1953. It was followed by her only novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* which was published in 1961. Her works dealt with gender, class struggle, patriarchy and partition.

Every writer has a forte of exploring themes and issues in a different manner **Ruth P. Jhabvala** is writer who does not make or represent her characters' mistakes and stupidities serious. She is interested in presenting them in a humorous manner. She has written *To Whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *Esmond in India* (1958), *The Householder* (1960), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962), *A Backward Place* (1965), *A New Dominion* (1972), *Heat and Dust* (1975) and *My Nine Lives: Chapters on a Possible Past* (2004). She has also explored the genre of short stories and wrote *An Experience of India* (1967), *Like Bird, Like Fishes* (1963) and *A Stronger Climate* (1963). **Nayantara Sehgal** has always been interested in representing the political aspects of life of the country and its effect on its citizens. The following are some of her novels *Time To Be Happy* (1957), *The Time of Morning* (1965), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Day in Shadow* (1971), *A New Situation in New Delhi* (1977) and *Rich Like Us* (1985). **Anita Desai** is one of the prolific writers whose interest lies in probing mental or psychological issues of her characters. She focuses on trauma and pain. The following are some of her novels: *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), *Voices in the City* (1963), *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971), *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *The Village by the Sea* (1982) and *The Zigzag way* (2004). **Shashi Deshpande**, one of the prolific writers who write on women's issues, their psyche, identity, patriarchy and so on. Her work includes *The*

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<sup>3</sup> Susmita Roye. *Mothering India: Women's Fiction in English Shaping Cultural History* (1890–1947)

*Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983) for this she received the Thirumati Rangmal Award, *That Long Silence* (1988), won her the Sahitya Academy Award, and her other works are *The Binding Vine* (1992), *The Match Of Time* (1999), *Small Remedies* (2000) and *Moving On* (2004). **Arundhati Roy** is a writer and social activist who is known for her much acclaimed novel *The God of Small Things*. It is a story about a family living in Ayemenem town in Kerala. This work brought her Booker Prize in 1997. **Shobha De's** works deal with the themes like marginalisation of women and women empowerment. Her work includes *Socialite Evenings* (1989), *Starry Nights* (1991), *Sisters* (1992), *Strange Obsession* (1992), *Sultry Boys* (1994) and *Snapshots* (1995).

Apart from the above mentioned writers there are various other writers both male and female like Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Pankaj Misra, Chetan Bhagat, Jhumpa Lihiri, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Aravind Adiga, Chitra Banerjee Divakurni, Dominique Lepierre, William Dalrymple who have achieved international acclaim and some of them are diasporic writers.

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### 13.3 Learning Outcomes

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In this module students will learn various aspects of novel before its beginning in India like they will have a brief idea about the rise of English in India. Later they will come to know about the beginning of English literature in India more specifically in the form poetry. Further, the module talks about the issues related to the naming the literature and various significant points related to it.

After understanding all these aspects of the background now students are introduced to the meaning and concept of novel and various aspects of it like theme, plot, setting, characters and so on and so forth. After this students come to know about the various forms of novels like picaresque novel, gothic novel, historical novel and so on and so forth.

After this the main section of the module that is 'Rise of Novel in India' talks about the journey of the genre novel that travelled from a foreign land to another country under colonial regime. After this in the final section students will come to know the various Indian English writers both male and female.

Thus, the module provides in detail study about the genre of novel specifically in Indian literature. It does not cover the rise of novel in Indian regional languages' literatures. However, this is beyond the scope of this module.

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## 13.4 Glossary

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**Novel:** A long fictional story which is neither completely unrealistic nor realistic. It has both the aspects to it to some degree.

**Tradition:** Passing down of rituals, customs, beliefs and practices from one generation to another generation

**Fiction:** Something which not true and made up

**Short Story:** Short story is a short piece of prose fiction that deals with a single incident or event.

**Partition literature:** The writings based on the historical division of British India into two parts, India and Pakistan that took place in 1947 and in which while migrating from this side to other side and vice versa lakhs of innocent citizens of both sides died.

**Diaspora:** Diaspora is a group of people who belong or whose ancestors belong to some other country but now they live in another or foreign land which is culturally or linguistically is not of their or of their ancestors.

**Diasporic Writings:** Writings emerged from the people who have migrated and settled in a foreign land due to economic or any other reason is called diasporic writings. The themes of their works include cultural identity, ethnicity, homeland, displacement, feeling of loss and alienation.

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## 13.5 Sample Questions

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### 13.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Who wrote the Hindu Wife?

- |                    |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| (a) Raj Laxmi Debi | (b) Sir William Jones |
| (c) Henry James    | (d) Unknown author    |

2. Who wrote the novel Sunlight on the Broken Column

- (a) Anita Desai                      (b) Kiran Desai  
(c) Attia Hosain                      (d) Zakir Hussain
3. Who is the writer of *Bianca*?
- (a) Toru Dutt                      (b) Nargis Dutt  
(c) Govin Chunder Dutt                      (d) Aru Dutt
4. Arundhati Roy's novel set in a village called?
- (a) Ayemenem                      (b) Malgudi  
(c) Chittoor                      (d) Mysore
5. *Storm in Chandigarh* and *Rich Like Us* written by
- (a) Nayantara Sehgal                      (b) Anita Desai  
(c) Shashi Deshpande                      (d) Ismat Chughtai
6. *That Long Silence* (1988) brought her the Sahitya Academy Award. Who is this author?
- (a) Mulk Raj Anand                      (b) R.K Narayan  
(c) Shashi Desh Pande                      (d) Nayantara Sehgal
7. Name the novels of Kamala Markandaya
- (a) *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) and *Voices in the City* (1963)  
(b) *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901)  
(c) *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *A Handful of Rice* (1966)  
(d) *Strange Obsession* (1992) and *Sultry Boys* (1994)
8. *The Shadow Lines* and *In An Antique Land* published in the year
- (a) (1988) and (1992)                      (b) (1995) and (2000)  
(c) (1992) (2000)                      (d) (2000) and (2012)
9. Which of Amitav Ghosh's novel brought him the Arthur C. Clarke Award, a prestigious award given by Britain for best science fiction
- (a) *The Calcutta Chromosome*                      (b) *The Shadow Lines*  
(c) *In An Antique Land*                      (d) *The Glass Palace*
10. Which of the following is the K.A. Abbas's work?
- (a) *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1956) (b) *Kanthapura* (1938)  
(c) *Untouchable* (1935)                      (d) *Inquailab* (1955)

### 13.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What do you understand by the term Anglo-Indian writing?

2. Name some of the poets of pre-Independent India.
3. Name the Indian writers/poets who were influenced by the Romantic and Victorian writers/poets.
4. Name the author or poet and her works who wrote a French novel and an English novel.
5. Name some of the post-independent Indian novel writers

### 13.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Name the works that deal with the Gandhi / Gandhian philosophy /freedom struggle.
2. What is novel and what are the different types of novels?
3. Discuss some of the characteristics of novel.

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## 13.6 Suggested Readings

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- Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*. New Delhi: Permanent Block, 2003
- Attia Hossain. *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, London Chatto and Windus, 1961.
- C. D. Narasimhaiah. *The Swan and the Eagle*. Shimla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1969.
- E.M. Forster. *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Edward Arnold, 1945.
- K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1985: rpt. 1995.
- Manohar Malgonkar. *Devil's Wind*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1985.
- Meenakshi Mukherjee. *Twice Born Fiction*. 2nd Edn. New Delhi: Pencraft International 2001.
- M. K. Naik. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982.
- M. K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan. *Indian English Literature . 1980-2000, A Survey*. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2001. , .
- Mulk Raj Anand. *Apology for Heroism*. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1946; rpt. 1886.
- R.K. Narayan. *The Guide*. Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1960.
- Sisir Chatterjee. *Problems in Modern English Fiction*, Calcutta: Bookland, 1965.

## Unit – 15: The God of Small Things: Background, Plot, Characters

### Structure

#### 15.0 Introduction

#### 15.1 Objectives

#### 15.2 The God of Small Things: Background, Plot, Characters

##### 15.2.1 Historical Background

##### 15.2.2 Setting and Structure of the Plot

##### 15.2.3 Plot Summary

##### 15.2.4 Return of Rahel and Car Trip

##### 15.2.5 Present, Past, and Future of the Family

##### 15.2.6 Betrayal, Legacy, and End of Everything

##### 15.2.7 Art of Characterization

##### 15.2.8 Protagonists of the Novel

#### 15.3 Learning Outcomes

#### 15.4 Glossary

#### 15.5 Sample Questions

#### 15.6 Suggested Readings

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### 15.0 Introduction

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*The God of Small Things* is a novel that has been written by an Indian writer Arundhati Roy. It has been written in a semiautobiographical style. In this novel Arundhati Roy has inscribed her childhood memories and the incidents that she has gone through. She started her fictional journey in 1992 and it was her first novel which got published in 1997. The novel is set in her maternal town named Ayemenem which is situated in Kerala state of India. The story of the novel revolved around twins named Rahel and Estha. The twins remained isolated from each other for about 23 years. In the course of the story their mother love affair and forbidden relation with her lover is made known. Her lover is murdered afterward. Side by side the reunion of both Rahel and Estha is described. The description of the events is mostly in the past narration. It is



also narrated how their separation and isolation takes place. Hence, the story is operated in the past and hinted about the efforts characters in the novel in particular and human being in general make to fit themselves in this world.

The writing tone and manner of Roy is brilliant and touching. She has poured her heart and soul in order to make her story as well as the expression amazing. The very title of the novel is a question in itself. It is imperative that little; non essential and ordinary things have been described in detail in the book. They have been connected in our life in a wonderful manner. Bearing this fact in view and how the things are set in the novel indicate that the title is very apt. It was due to these qualities that the novel wins Booker Prize in 1997. The story takes place in the two weeks of 1969 and one day of 1993. It is a story that is rich in read and captivating both as far as its title page and story is concerned. The style and language of narration is also worth mentioning aspect of its fame among readers and critics. Roy utilizes small things to project and achieve big things. Through the utilization of apt language, literary devices, structural unity, historical background and hints of colonialism makes the novel a huge success.

It got published in 1997 and soon it takes Arundhati Roy to the apex of fame and critical appreciation. It soon wins the Booker Prize which is one the most renowned prize for the literary achievement. It is amazing fact that Roy was an architect and never deemed herself as a writer or novelist before. But her first effort wins her a good name and fame. Over six million copies of the novel have been sold and in addition it has been translated into 40 major languages of the world. It is indeed a great achievement and a big booster for a writer who comes up with her very first novel into literary horizon. It takes place in Ayemenem and there is a technique of flashback, foreshadow, and present narration in non sequential manner by the novelist frequently. Apart from the center plot, Arundhati Roy very artistically has depicted several serious and worth noticing social and political issues of the time in which novel is written.

The caste system though banned in 1950 in India yet is embedded in society and hence it makes its appearance time and again in the novel. The notion of untouchable makes its appearance is very critical in the narration of the main event. The rise of communist party in the state of Kerala and its consequences on landlord is also mentioned through its impact on family being depicted in the major episode of the novel. The concept of love as a social norm is also imperative in the society. It is essential to follow who can love with whom and how much. The otherwise situation will have consequences and this is what happened in the characters of the

novel as well. In addition, *The God of Small Things* throws light on the classical politics of Marxist and communist. The rise of lower class and fall of upper class is the key concept behind these ideologies and this is what is apparent in the novel. It is also significant to note that Arundhati Roy has political ideology about class politics. She has written numerous articles about the said topic and also was awarded Sydney Peace Prize in the year of 2004.

Apart from these major and serious things in the novel there are many things in the novel that most of the readers may relate to their own life. Almost in the life of everybody there are certain things that each one wants to undo in life. Most of the readers often wonder why bad things happen in their life. Almost everyone has some fears. Death is something that is unavoidable as far as human beings are concerned. Love, hatred, revenge, tragedy, and ill financial situation are not something that is merely limited to the characters of the novel *The God of Small Things*. Rather it is the tale of everybody. At the heart of everything in the novel is how the death of Sophie Mol has affected the lives of Rahel, Estha and other members of the family. The novel indicates that bad things are bound to happen. Either these will occur in random manner or for what these meant about. How we react to these and what consequences these have that are imperative.

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## 15.1 Objectives

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

- Know the historical and social background of the novel.
- Know few incidents and characters' names are from real life.
- Understand the setting and plot of the novel.
- Appreciate Arundhati Roy's art of characterization.
- Realize the consequence of illicit and forbidden act.
- Identify the important characters in the novel.
- Comprehend the novel is semiautobiographical.

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## 15.2 The God of Small Things: Background, Plot, Characters

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### 15.2.1 Historical Background:

As narrated before, the novel *The God of Small Things* is set in a maternal town of the novelist Arundhati Roy which is situated in Kerala, India. It is highly autobiographical in tone as well as in setting. It is also imperative that Marxist ideology grew up in Kerala soon after India got liberation from the colonial British rule in 1947. It was in 1967 that Naxalite party split off as a most communist political party of radical belief than the mainstream. There was mounting social unrest and discomfort among the worker and labor groups which led to a labourer movement. The initial setting and tone of the novel *The God of Small Things* is affected the way this movement acted upon. The old conventional rules that divided Hindus from untouchable to touchable caste system began to diminish in the 1950s, but there were so many Indians who still stick to those ancient worn out caste system and conventions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the novel was written. In addition, there were few characters who participated in the action of the novel and they belonged to the Syrian Christian. These were from old conventional people that belonged to Kerala and originated from St. Thomas.

The setting of the novel is set in a small town Ayemenem situated in Kerala state on the western coast of India. The novelist herself grew up there in a small village which name was akin to the fictional name she used in the novel. Minachil, which was a river beside that village, was perhaps also a driving force behind choosing that village as the setting place for the novel. She did not however reveal the name of that village. But rest of the places and events were based on actuality. These include the description of Kottayam, Cochin, flora and fauna. Buildings, environ and climate that she mentioned in the background was also based on reality. Kerala was popular among tourists as a visiting place and was called tropical paradise. It was also famous for animal like elephants, palm, and coconut trees. It was also enriched with fruits, vegetables, and flowers. In additions, numerous rivers flow through this state. Its beaches and mountains captured the attention of the people of that time which was perhaps as an influential source behind choosing it for the background setting for the novel.

Roy has amply and aptly described the lush landscapes in the novel. In the political sense India was divided into 28 states and Kerala was a significant state. It was also a state where there were a high educational rate and people were usually well off. In addition, it was the first state in India where communist party made their government in 1957. It was the first state which did not

remain true to congress party. E.M.S. Namboodiripad was the communist leader of the party at that time and it was mentioned by Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* numerous times. Although many reforms were introduced in the state by the communist party under his leadership but later on, a movement and protest were launched against the Govt. It led to violence and there are hints of that violence in the novel by Roy. After that the party was divided into two poles as Marxist and Marxist Leninist. E.M.S. Namboodiripad joined the Marxist and contributed towards the peace and social reformation.

But the other segment of the party who was known as Naxalites remained prone to violence. References with regard to Naxalites are also there in the novel *The God of Small Things*. In addition to the background there was a caste system that was very strong in India for almost 3000 years. Conventional and traditional people were divided into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Apart from this classification people were also divided among touchable and untouchable groups. This classification was based on the social role assigned with each group. The treatment that was associated in the society was also affixed due to this social classification. Although this caste system was banned in India in 1950 but in the novel there are still hints towards such caste system where marriage within own caste was made known. Refusing to accept food and drink from other class people was also made its appearance in the novel. In addition, touching untouchable was also highly caste specific hints that were found in both conventional Indian society and in this novel.

Apart from the historical context and caste system there were religious ritual associated with Hindu religion that were performed in Kerala also marked their appearance in the novel. Kathakali is a dance performance of dramatic nature that was derived from rituals being performed at holy temples. In this dance performance richly adorned and decorated male members in particular costume performed their singing, dancing and drumming skills. They also performed and played Cymbals. These acts were mostly written in Sanskrit that was the language of ancient Hindus; hence such acts were usually long. As a custom such performance began at the sunset and continued till sunrise. Actors in Kathakali were fully aware of the demands and expectations of their audience and hence they performed accordingly. In Kathakali, drumming was a signal that the actors were about to come and that performance was going to start. It was also deemed to be the call to call actors to come. There was mostly a satin curtain that was meant to hide the stage just before the arrival of actors.

Actors are the movers who are deemed to be moving from earthly world towards the world of gods. They are seemed to be praying before gods even when they are out of sight from the stage and audience. Then the singers join the drummer in order to inspire and capture the attention of the audience. As soon as the curtain falls action begins and it begins to unfold the main course hour after hour till the dawn. The action is culminating at the death of the evil character. At the culminating movement audience also join in singing and dancing along with eating and drinking as an emblem of the victory of good and death of evil. This is a conventional ritual that is portrayed by Arundhati Roy in this novel. As the story is depicted in the novel it is the tale of an illicit son of a queen. Despite being Royal he has to face the discrimination of caste system and untouchable. That result in his anger and it makes him a great warrior.

### **15.2.2 Setting and Structure of the Plot:**

The return of Ammu to Ayemenem with her twins Rahel and Estha was the beginning of the tale. The return of Margaret and Sophie to Ayemenem after the death of Joe, Ammu's illicit love affair with Velutha, Ammu is locked up in room, Velutha is charged, twins and Sophie attempt to cross the river was the rising of the action. Drowning of Sophie in the river during their attempt to cross the river and reach History House is the climax of the plot. Fallen action constitutes of Velutha death that is caught by the police and is put to death by beating him brutally. It also consists of Ammu being thrown away from the house and Estha is sent to his father away from the house and native town. The resolution of the plot consists of the returns of twins Rahel and Estha to Ayemenem after 23 years of separation. They fall in love with each other that culminated in forbidden act of making sex or love in a night at their house.

The narration of *The God of Small Things* is not in a situational narration as the incidents move backward and forward in a non sequential manner. At times it takes the readers into the past happening and then suddenly jumps back to present state of affair. In between foreshadow of the future are also depicted. For that diverse viewpoints have been kept in view by Arundhati Roy sometime childish and other time Adult like. This is the way the mental process of the people works in human life. Past events have consequences in present that foreshadow the happening in the time to come. In the story of human life paths are not even, smooth and in liner, rather they twist in non liner and uneven fashion. Similarly, the bouncing of mind in reaction to those happening is also not in line with pre defined reaction. In addition, the concept of Reality can also alter its meaning from childhood to adulthood.

The novel is divided into units and chapters, and tale and events are revealed and these are meant to be digested slowly. That is why narrative takes us to the events that are moving back forward and forward accordingly to the context and expectation of the readers. In order to understand the main course of action in true sense it is imperative to keep in mind that there are two major time frames that have been employed by Arundhati Roy in the novel; one is present and the second is past. The past time is what is related with 1969 and the present time is 1992 a gap of 23 years. The whole story constitutes in between them. At the time of separation both the twins were mere seven years old and after going through many tragedies and dramatic happening the reunion takes place after 23 years. After 23 years they are the lone survivors of the family and both are together at their family house in Ayemenem.

### **15.2.3 Plot Summary:**

The events of the novels are depicted in a fragmentary and scattered manner. These are jumping back or moving forth in between 1969 and 1993. The story revolves around a well-off land owning Syrian Christian family who was living in a small town of Kerala. Most of the story takes place in 1969. And the main event centers around twins Rahel and Estha who live with their mother Ammu, their uncle Chacko and their grandmother named Mammachi. Before 1969 in the back story it was revealed that their grandmother Mammachi was married to Pappachi who was an imperial Entomologist. He used to beat her widely. In 1969 Pappachi was dead and her wife Mammachi became blind. In the meanwhile, Chacko went to Oxford and married an English woman there. Her name was Margaret. They had a daughter whose name was Sophie Mol. Later on, Margaret left Chacko and married yet another man Joe.

Ammu married a man Baba as she tried to escape from the village but her husband turned out to be a bad alcoholic. Then twins were born to them. After their birth they got separated. Ammu returned back to Ayemenem. In the meanwhile, communist party was gaining popularity in Kerala state which was posing a threat to landlord. The family used to live near the house of untouchable who were deemed inferior in caste system. Then again action shifted when Sophie Mol came to visit Ayemenem. Joe died in between and Chacko invited her former wife Margaret to visit Ayemenem for holidays. In the meanwhile, Ammu, Chacko, Rahel, Estha, and Baby went to airport. But on the way their car was struck in the March of communist. When they are trapped then the family went to The Sound of Music. The next of that incident Margaret and Sophie arrived there and then the family returned back to their native town Ayemenem.

Estha who was molested by an Organ drink man feared from him. In the meantime, Rahel found a boat and rowed toward the river to reach a place known as “History House”. Then both the twin set out their hideout there. In between these incidents Ammu dreamt about Velutha. On that very night she had a meeting with Velutha by the side of river. They had a sex over there. They continued to meet and have sex for the next two weeks. It was then that the father of Velutha came to Ayemenem and revealed about his son relation with Ammu. She was locked in her room by her family but she screamed and said about twin’s millstone around her neck. After that twins decided and ran away toward History House and Sophie came along with them over there. In this journey their boat was tipped off when they were crossing the river and Sophie was drowned. Twins were able to reach the shore and fell asleep. They were horrified and were unaware of the fact that Velutha was also residing there in History House.

Baby Kochamma, in the meanwhile, went to police and complained to inspector that Velutha tried to rape Ammu. He had also tried to kidnap the children Rahel and Estha. At these six policemen came over, caught Velutha and beaten him severely in front of both Rahel and Estha. In the meanwhile, Matthew came to know about the innocence of Velutha and he threatened Baby Kochamma. She got terrified and in order to save Ammu she charged that Velutha had killed Sophie. Velutha died on that night in the jail. And in the funeral of Sophie Mol, Baby Kochamma tried to convince Chacko to ostracize Ammu out of the house. And in the same time Ammu was forced to return Estha to Baba. And then the twins were separated from each other for next 23 years. In that time Estha gave up speaking to anybody altogether. When he was of 31 year of age Baba re-retuned him to Ayemenem.

In between Rahel was kicked out from many schools and their mother Ammu died when Rahel was mere 11. Later on, she married an American. In that period Rahel lived in Boston but she got divorced. After the divorce she returned back to Ayemenem as she came to know that Estha was back into the town. In this way the reunion of twin took place in 1993 after 23 years. Baby Kochamma and her cook spent the entire day in watching TV. The house and inhabitants were fallen apart. History House had become a five-star hotel then. In the meanwhile, Estha who didn’t speak a word yet had gone through his old memories and notebook. Finally, it was revealed that they affirmed their closeness and reunion as having sex.

#### **15.2.4 Return of Rahel and Car Trip:**

The novel opens in the current time line. We come to know that Rahel has just come back from Boston to Ayemenem after an absence of long time. She is 31 years of age now. It is the season of monsoon. Both the climate and coming back to her family and native town makes her come across her old memories. She flashes across how their birth took place, then their visit to History House, drowning of her cousin, separation from Estha. As Estha was sent to live with his father Baba. But during that time the family has fallen apart and only survivor was Baby Kochamma who is 83 years of age now along with the family cook. Estha is also there back from his father but he doesn't speak now. He spends all the day in the long walks. Rahel life was also disrupted after getting separated from his brother. She twined between schooling to job and marriage to divorce. The life of Baby Kochamma is also disrupted. At this point the opening chapter of the novel comes to conclusion.

Then again, the action shifts towards the past. It is about the car ride that took place way back in 1969. It is made known that twins along with their mother, uncle and grandmother are traveling in a car towards Cochin. That trip is meant to take part in The Sound of Music. They spend the night over there and then travel towards airport and pick Sophie and her mother. Then the novelist describes about the appearance and different incidents that take place in the life of various characters. The most significant event that is explored is the marriage of Ammu and birth of twins. Her husband was an alcoholic and she leaves him and returns back to her native town Ayemenem. After this event she says that her life is over. No one in the family is happy the way she has approached these events, especially Baby Kochamma is unhappy with her. The car they are riding is an emblem of their business and class. Detail about their business and parents are also revealed. Velutha character that later plays a significant role in the story is also described.

After that the action yet again returns to present time and it is taken place in the house of Ayemenem. Baby Kochamma and her cook remain busy in watching TV all the daylong in a filthy house. Rahel watches and observes Estha when he is bathing or in a long walk. She wishes to reconstruct the old childhood connection. She used to touch him but he neither speaks nor responds. Then the trip of the family to the theater is depicted. Chacko drops the family in the show and goes to see the logging. The movie that is being shown has not impressed or captured the attention of the family as they have already seen it. In the meanwhile, Estha behaves strangely and his mother thinking he is unwell hires a taxi and they returns back to hotel. In the same chapter marriage of Chacko, his divorce and death of his ex wife Margaret's husband is



described. In addition, the current family business state under communist power and authority are also pinned down by Arundhati Roy.

After returning back to past and describing certain detail the story again shifts to present time. Rahel is seen walking and thinking how her native village Ayemenem has changed over the time. During her walk she comes across a communist leader Pillai. As they catch up Rahel remembers how her visit to the doctor is described. In their conversation Pillai takes out old photograph in which she is shown along with her brother Estha and Cousin Sophie before her death. It takes the action once again to the past as they after theater had picked up Sophie and her mother from the airport. During that visit everybody was dressed flamboyantly. When the children met, they were not very friendly with each other. Especially Ammu was unhappy with the twins but later on as the children met each other they became friendly with each other. Then again action shifts to present time. Rahel is shown trying to approach her brother and childhood memories in a different way. In the due course she remembers her mother and her death as she was “wild, sick and sad” at the time of her death.

#### **15.2.5 Present, Past, and Future of the Family:**

The narrative of the story again returns to present time. The celebration and amazing welcome are given to Sophie and her mother Margaret when they arrive at Ayemenem. Dishes are cooked and music is played to welcome them. In the meanwhile, Rahel is becoming intimate with her favourite friend Velutha. But her mother becomes known to their too much intimacy with each other that leads her physical attraction towards Velutha. And then they meet each other by the bank and have sex many a time before they are caught up and their relation is revealed. Then the narration moves towards the Rahel who is sitting in the garden and thinking about her future. She also remembers the days of her closeness with her brother Estha and her cousin Sophie before her death. She can see at present only her brother Estha who is in the room but he is unresponsive. She remembers how family has gone through the tragedy.

First of all, she remembers her cousin Sophie who was drowned during their visit to History House and then the death of her mother Ammu. Because of the events that take place in past Estha is unable to speak with anybody. He even does not response to love and care shown by his sister Rahel. He only spends his long day in walking around. As Rahel sits there in the garden thinking about the past, present and future of the family she hears the music of Kathakali and in order to change her mood she decides to go there in the temple. After that narrative again

goes back to past when Rahel had planned to hide herself along with her brother Estha in an abandoned house across the river. The name of the house was History House. She made a plan to sneak during afternoon nap as her mother fell asleep, she along with her brother and cousin sneaked away. But when they come to know that boat is not in a condition to be used to cross the river they decide to come back before their mother wakes up.

After that narrative goes back to current time as Rahel is shown to arrive at the nearby temple to see the Kathakali performance. All the details of the performance are depicted again. Rahel finds a close similarity between the tale of Kathakali and her family story. In the meanwhile, Estha also comes there and they witness the entire performance silently until they come back by the dawn. After that the narration is again turned towards past when Sophie and her mother is shown sleeping in Chacko room. Sophie is not sleeping, she is only lying with her mother and watching her. Then she comes with the photograph of her mother wedding with Chacko. At this it is revealed to her how they get married and how her mother left her mother for another man Joe. After his death she is again back to the Ayemenem. As both Chacko and Margaret are in close contact because of their daughter Sophie. After that another tragic scene of the family is described as the dead body of Sophie is shown floating on the water during her sneak with her cousins towards History House.

It is made known to the readers that in the morning the body of Sophie was found. Ammu is locked in her room after her illicit relation with Velutha is revealed. Rahel and Estha are missing. The father of Velutha came one day to reveal Ammu's relation with his son. After hearing the event two things are done. One, Ammu is locked and Baby Kochamma begins plotting how to prevent the family honor. It is made easy when Sophie is found dead. After his body is found, Baby Kochamma goes to police and claims that Velutha has raped Ammu and tried to kidnap the children. And in the consequence, he has killed Sophie. In the meanwhile, when Chacko and Margaret come back home after checking the airline ticket arrangement, they find the lifeless body of their daughter. The section ends up with the note that death of Sophie is actually the death of family business. Due to sorrow and grief Chacko is unable to look after the factory and run it effectively. In order to pay the bill land is sold and Chacko is shown shifting to Canada.

### **15.2.6 Betrayal, Legacy, and End of Everything:**

Then the narrative is shifted towards the betrayal that is done to Velutha by his own father. Velutha is shown to be in a city to arrange the parts needed to fix the factory machine when he is told by a factory worker to go into the house to see Mammachi. When he goes directly to house, she meets him in a bad temper and anger. She even split at him and threatens to kill him if he doesn't leave him forever. Finding himself helpless he decides to take help from Comrade Pillai. So, he visits his house but he straight away refuses to get into the matter. After his refusal Velutha swims across the river and reaches into History House. In the meanwhile, Rahel, Estha and Sophie sail a boat to reach the same place. Rahel and Estha are secretly sneaking away while Sophie is accompanied by them just to avoid any questions about their plan and whereabouts. On the way the boat is tipped off and Sophie is lost forever while twins are able to reach the History House.

Once again, the narration comes back to present time as Estha is seen sitting in his room in a rainy day. Baby Kochamma is in her own room while her cook is busy in watching TV. Baby Kochamma hears the sounds of both Rahel and Estha as they return home after seeing the performance at the temple. On that very night Rahel comes to Estha room when Baby Kochamma is asleep. Seeing Rahel, Estha remembers the day when he has to leave her and his mother. He also remembers the brutal beating that Velutha received from the police officer at History House. When twins were found the officer was sure that the entire tale of kidnapping did not suit the episode. After the investigation at the police station and keeping in view the figure of History House it is revealed that the story or version of Baby Kochamma is not based on the actual tale.

Once the police officer is sure of the matter, he calls Baby Kochamma that she had tried to charge an innocent man of the charge he has not committed. In addition, he informs her that he is going to file a criminal proceeding against her. The only way to avoid this that seems possible is if Ammu herself charges a suit against Velutha that he has raped her. Or in case, the children confess that they have been kidnapped by Velutha. She persuades Rahel and Estha to save their mother name and save her from going to jail. The twins agree to the plan. In the meanwhile, police officer takes Estha to the police where Velutha body was lying dead and asks him to put his question. The twins only say one thing yes and Baby Kochamma takes them home. When Ammu comes to know of the entire tale she tries to set things in the right direction by visiting the

police station. Here the plan of Baby Kochamma is completed. Chacko throw Ammu out of the house and sends Estha to his father away from his native home and town.

After remembering all this Estha breaks into a great sorrow and grief. The tale was culminated at that time by his departure by train. As the sorrowful tale engulfs him, he focuses on his beautiful sister that seems alluring at that time. They fall on each other in intimacy and commit a forbidden act that night. They make love and have sex that night. That night is symbolic of the forbidden act. The act their mother commits with Velutha by the side of bank which initiated the beginning of the family tragedy later on. It was those 13 nights which seem blissful to them but later on it ruined everything.

#### **15.2.7 Art of Characterization:**

The first thing that Arundhati Roy has employed in order to discern among different characters is the dressing sense and style they are carrying. It is very much obvious in case of Sophie Mol and Rahel when they come into contact for the first time. When she steps out, the first thing that is made known to the readers is the way she is carrying herself. It is depicted by novelist as “She walked down the runway, the smell of London in her hair. Yellow bottoms of bells flapped backwards around her ankles. Long hair floated out from under her straw hat”. It is a typical dressing of London clothes in which her hips are clearly indicated though she was a kid yet. On the other hand, the dressing of Rahel is typical of Ayemenem town as is described by Arundhati Roy as “In her stiff lace dress and her fountain in a Love-in-Tokyo, Rahel looked like an Airport Fairy with appalling taste”.

The difference of dressing sense and style is much obvious from the comment of Rahel’s brother as he depicts the clothing of Rahel as “Estha – with some basis, it must be admitted – said that Rahel looked stupid in her Airport Frock. Rahel slapped him, and he slapped her back.” It is also indicative of the culture and social setup in which characters come from. Other than dressing names are also very important. The names of the characters are not merely meant for identification, it is also meant for what they are and what they present. The first name that we come across is Baby Kochamma whose actual name is Navomi Ipe. But everybody calls her Baby keeping in view her age and persona as aunt. The very name Baby indicates how childish and immature she is. Even Rahel notices her persona from being kind and noble to self- and self-centered immature woman at the age of 83 even.

Mol was not the part of Sophie name. It just indicates her as a little kid. As we are aware that she dies at a tender age and she will always be remembered as a child hence Mol is affixed with her name which has a significant role in defining her persona with respect to her role in the novel. The concept of names even gets more interesting when it comes to nicknames being given to Rahel and Estha. Estha is described in the novel as “Elvis the Pelvis Nun” and Rahel as “Ambassador S. Insect.” These names indicate the sweet and loveable nature of the characters children in general and twins in particular are having. Usually last name of the father is affixed with the names of the children especially in landlord family. But that is different in case of twins as their mother seems hesitant in affixing the last name “Ipe” with them.

Twins having deprived of last or family name has affected their identity and legitimacy as the narration moves on in the due course of action in the novel. It is depicted in the novel as extracted from Estha’s notebook “On the front of the book, Estha had rubbed out his surname with spit and taken half the paper with it. Over the whole mess, he had written in pencil Unknown. Esthappen Unknown.” In addition, throughout the novel twins are addressed as Rahel and Estha without their family name. They are playing their role in silence as having no significance role. That is why we see that Estha becomes silent and unresponsive for the rest of his life. It is also made known to the readers that at the end of novel they are left with no legacy as they are useless and means nothing to the world in which they live for decades. It appears that they come to this world only to suffer and nothing valuable or worth mentioning happen to them. Lastly, the physical appearance of the character is very imperative as far as the character portrayal and their role in the story is concerned. The narrator pays a key attention in the physical description of the characters. Sophie Mol is appeared to be glamorous the way she is dressed up. In addition, her physical features are also keys for attention as far as her cousin Rahel and Estha are concerned. In addition, Sophie is more attractive to them as her mother was a white woman. Her physical attraction is depicted as “She was taller than Estha. And bigger. Her eyes were blue gray. Her pale skin was the color of beach sand. But her hated hair was a beautiful, deep red-brown. And yes (oh yes!) she had Pappachi’s nose waiting inside hers.” The physical beauty makes it apparent to her twins’ cousin that she has come from another world. While on the other hand the physical features of Rahel and Estha is dominated by the hair they are carrying.

#### **15.2.8 Protagonists of the Novel:**

Rahel and Estha are the protagonists of the novel *The God of Small Things*. We get to know the things through the eyes of Rahel as she spends more time in the events. She is more active and has much to do with the way events unfold. As far as the personas of both the heroes are concerned, they are in harmony and balance. Rahel is more active while her brother Estha is quieter and more serious by nature. Estha is more refined and a better person as compare to his sister Rahel. Rahel has always something in her mind and she cannot sit still for a longer period of time. In addition, unlike her brother she always wants to be in the world of imagination and far away from the world of reality. Reality is what that is the product of her mind. Not only the frame of mind and perspective of both the protagonist is different from each other their nature and sense of imagination is also distinctive from each other. The way they look, observe, and respond to different things happen around them indicate the exposure the experience that are different from each other at one hand and on the different direction on the other.

The nature of concerns and fears both have are also different. Rahel is anxious and concerned about whether her mother still loves her or not. On the other hand, the concerns of Estha are that he may not molest again. Hence the concerns and worries both faces in the novel indicate that tragedies, fears and concerns of Estha are more serious and having far reaching consequences as compare to that of Rahel. Rahel tries to hide herself but Estha is always ready to face the reality. In spite of all these difference in nature, character and insight the connection and bond between them is very intimate, close and strong which continues even after a separation of 23 years. We come to know that Rahel comes from Boston after her divorce merely because she has come to know that Estha is back at Ayemenem. Their reunion and intimacy are culminated in the concluding part of the novel where both are seen engaging in incest, forbidden and illicit love making affair in order to wade away all these bad and sorrowful memories that they had in the past.

**Rahel:**

Being a child and a twin, she has very close and loving relation with her brother Estha. This connection is as strong as is depicted in the novel that they are termed as “me”. The language and telephonic intimacy were unique to each other which only they can understand and comprehend. She is a character in the novel that is very sentimental and sensitive and easily gets hurt by little things in life. She has also very intimate and close feeling for her mother as well. But when turns a take and she have to live without both her mother and brother she becomes

somewhat unemotional to other people around her. She doesn't make any new emotional relation thereafter. Even her marriage in Boston is collapsed that adds more fuel to the injuries and suffering she is having in her life. She is brought up and has a frame of mind which is not fond of any relation in significance or to do any sort of work. That is perhaps the reason that she lives in the past feelings and tries to figure out the same closeness and intimacy with her brother Estha when they meet after a period of 23 years. Ultimately, she finds that union and closeness with him that resulted in a forbidden, illicit incest and sexual relationship between the two.

**Estha:**

Same is the case with Rahel's brother Estha who has a very intimate and close relationship with his sister Rahel. The bond means a lot rather more than anything else to him. He can have communication and talking with his sister without speaking. They live in their own unique world and have talking of their own. Most of his family members deem him as a practical and less talkative man but few are aware of the fact that like his sister, he is also a bit sensitive person. His life is more tragic as compare to his sister. He is molested, he is asked to cheat Velutha and above all he is forced to live with his father away from his mother, sister, home and town. All these things lead him to be a man who remains invisible and quiet and has no interest in anybody or anything. He lives in himself. When the reunion with his sister is set his inner stillness is again disturbed and he again becomes close and intimate with his sister. Though he doesn't still speak and spend the days in long walk but his intimacy and closeness with his sister Rahel culminated in an illicit love making relationship at the end of the novel.

**Ammu:**

As a young and adult girl, it is seemed that she has been deprived of having a happy and contented life she deserves. Her parents had an unhappy marriage and they moved towards Ayemenem where she is brought up and grown up as a young girl. That is why she always wishes to escape and during her visit to Calcutta in a marriage ceremony she is able to find the man whom she weds for the first time. But her choice seems to be inappropriate as Baba, her husband was a bad alcoholic and they do not have a happy relationship. She again comes back to Ayemenem but this time with twins. After that she becomes even more frustrated than before and when she finds Velutha she is attracted towards him as a console. That attraction results in 13 blissful nights with that untouchable Velutha. These blissful nights eventually turn out to be dreadful and culminated in the deaths of so many people and unhappiness which ruin everything

at the end. She herself dies in between these crises at an age of mere 31. But before death she has to face the lock up in a room, separation from her kids, and the hatred of her family.

**Velutha:**

Another significant character in the novel, a born untouchable which is an emblem of low social class and status yet he enjoys lots of privileges as having close association with a landlord family Ipe. When he was mere 11, he was known for his inborn and skillful abilities that is why he is sent to school as well as to German carpenter to have polished his skills. When he grew up as a young man, he was the one who can design furniture, decorate houses, and can make props. In addition, he has to look after all the machinery in the factory. He was a young confident and skillful person. But the fate takes a twist and he is entrapped by Ammu in an illicit and forbidden love affair that culminated in sexual relation for many nights. This act leads him to death as he was from untouchable class and it was the custom that such people seemed to be punished in the same way if they commit such crime. Ammu is saved in order to protect the family name but he is forced to die a wretched death in the jail.

**Baby Kochamma:**

She is the daughter of a Syrian Christian priest. When she was at the age of 18, she fell in love with the friend of his father who was an Irish monk. His name was Father Mulligan. As she was a full of youth and beauty at that time, she captures the attention of young monk too but nothing comes out practically from that flirt. She even converted to catholic school of thought and joined a convent to be in close with her love. This plan also collapses and she was unable to catch her love. Out of discomfort she leaves convent and goes to America. She gets a diploma in Ornamental Gardening and comes back to Ayemenem. But the flame of love is still burning in her heart. After her return she spent almost 50 years in gardening as her hobby. Then she leaves it and restricts herself to mere watching TV as her time pass. Although she is 83 years old yet she is vain and spoiled woman. She is still in love with her love Father Mulligan even after his death. She is still conscious about the family name and honor especially in case of Ammu.

**Sophie Mol:**

She is the daughter of Chacko and Margaret. She lives only for seven years before she drowned while crossing river in a boat with her cousins Rahel and Estha. But the impact she leaves on the family continues to affect the lives of all the members of Ipe family. She only appears when she comes to Ayemenem. She was dressed in a glamorous dress when she first



appears on the narration. She is always seen as wearing bellbottom pant of yellow in color. She has a “go go” bag that she always carries with her. She has dark hair while the color of her eyes is light. She is half English and half Indian. The twins though being close cousin and intimate but don’t like her as her appearance and dressing always make them realize their inferior notion before her. She makes efforts to make close intimacy and closeness with her cousins. Her role and persona in the novel are very limited yet the impact she carries is highly impactful and lasting. Her father becomes sorrowful and depressed after her death. Rather her death causes so many deaths and ruined everything.

#### **Baba:**

Baba is yet another character who makes appearance during the narration of the novel. He is the father of Rahel and Estha. He is an abusive choice of Ammu who leaves her when the twins are born to her. Although Estha is left to his drunken father yet there is no considerable relation between them. When Estha was with him he stopped talking to other and became unresponsive to others and things around him. He was a person when drunk could not control his sense and mind. His wife Ammu left him forever when he went on to offer her to his boss on bed in order to save his job security. His father was a well-off man who gave his son and bride a fancy wedding. His father died before the birth of twins.

#### **Chacko:**

Chacko is the husband of Margaret and father of Sophie and brother of Ammu. In his youth he was lucky enough to have all the love and attention of the family but later on he has faced the otherwise circumstance. The collapse of marriage coupled by the separation from his daughter makes him feel disturbed and after her death it is manifold. He deems himself to be Scholar and a man of high esteem but the fact is that he never does any decent and worth mentioning task in his life. He only manages the affair of his mother’s factory.

#### **Margaret Kochamma:**

Margaret Kochamma is yet another significant character that takes part in the course of action in the novel. She is the ex wife of Chacko and mother of Sophie Mol a small kid who lives only for seven years. She was British and was a waitress in a hotel where she met Chacko who went to study at Oxford. Both fell for each other and got married which was also the ultimate wish of her parents. But soon after the marriage she realized that Chacko is not the right person to stay in relation. Disturbed by him during pregnancy she fell in love with another man Joe and

after the birth of Sophie, her only daughter, she gets divorce from Chacko. When Joe died, she again come back to live in Ayemenem and she is welcomed greatly by the family at airport. But she was not aware of the fact that this decision of spending holidays will be what she will always regret for.

**Kochu Maria, Thomas Matthew and K.N.M. Pillai:**

Kochu Maria another figure in the novel used to live with Baby Kochamma in her house in Ayemenem. Although she is cook and maid but she has been spoiled to the extent that she spends the entire day just watching TV with Baby Kochamma. She is ugly and short in size. She is unaware of English and cannot speak or understand it so whenever the kids especially twins speak English in front of her she deems that they are making fun of her.

Thomas Matthew is the inspector in police and he is the one who leads the investigation against Velutha of the charges that are levied against him by Baby Kochamma. During the investigation he comes to know that Baby Kochamma is misleading him and the police about the charges levied against Velutha. Yet he protects the name of the family as well as the police and let's an innocent die in the jail only because Velutha belongs to untouchable class.

K.N.M. Pillai is a communist political leader who too makes his appearance in the novel. He also has a printing press and used to print labels of the factory. He was a man with an ambitious political aim and pursuits. Although he gets lots of labeling work from Chacko yet he makes him look like a villain in the eyes of factory workers. This is his way of dealing and figuring out the things.

In addition, numerous other characters take part in the narration and events of the novel in one way or the other. These include Joe, Mammachi, Reverend Ipe, Aleyooty Ammachi, Father Mulligan, Miss Mitten, Torch man, Taxi driver, nurse, Kari Saipu, Comrade Pillai's, Patriarch of Antioch, Vellya Paapen, Latha, Lenin, Kuttappen, Kottayam, Kalyani, Chella, Adoor Basi, Dr. Verghese Verghese, and Mr. Hollick.

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### **15.3 Learning Outcomes**

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The unit contains various consequent learning outcomes. After completion of the unit, the readers:

- Came to know the background of the novel.
- Realized the novel is semiautobiographical.
- Are able to appreciate the characterization skills of the author.
- Understood the different types of characters in the novel.
- Comprehended the political situation of Kerala.

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## 15.4 Glossary

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**Booker Prize:** A literary prize awarded each year for the best novel written in English and published in the United Kingdom or Ireland.

**Communism:** A theory or system of social organization in which all property is owned by the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs.

**Imperative:** Very important, Essential, Necessary

**Marxism:** The socialist and communist theory of the followers of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: a radical, revolutionary political philosophy that aims to capture state power, introduce a dictatorship of the proletariat, and then progress to communism.

**Naxalite:** A name given to several Maoist-oriented and militant insurgent and separatist groups that have operated intermittently in India since the mid-1960s.

**Entomologist:** A scientist who studies insects.

**Flamboyantly:** Gaudily, Ostentatiously, Colourfully

**Culminate:** Conclude, End

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## 15.5 Sample Questions

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### 15.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. *The God of Small Things* is a/an

- |                                |                      |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| (a) Biographical novel         | (b) Gothic novel     |
| (c) Semiautobiographical novel | (d) Epistolary novel |

2. The novel *The God of Small Things* was published in

- (a) 1979                      (b) 1997  
(c) 1897                      (d) 2007
3. For how many years Rahel and Estha remained isolated from each other?  
(a) 13 years                      (b) 30 years  
(c) 23 years                      (d) 15 years
4. In which year *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy received Booker Prize?  
(a) 1999                      (b) 2007  
(c) 2010                      (d) 1997
5. Arundhati Roy received Sydney Peace Prize in the year  
(a) 2004                      (b) 1904  
(c) 2008                      (d) 2010
6. In which state of India most of the story of *The God of Small Things* is set?  
(a) Delhi                      (b) Tamil Nadu  
(c) Kerala                      (d) Karnataka
7. For how many years the twins Estha and Rahel were separated from each other?  
(a) 15 years                      (b) 20 years  
(c) 10 years                      (d) 23 years
8. What did Baby Kochamma study in college?  
(a) English Literature                      (b) Marxism  
(c) Architecture                      (d) Ornamental Gardening
9. How old is Sophie Mol when she dies?  
(a) 9                      (b) 7  
(c) 11                      (d) 8
10. What film does the family go to watch in Cochin?  
(a) The latest hit from Bollywood  
(b) The Sherlock Holmes Movie  
(c) James Bond Movie  
(d) The Sound of Music

### 15.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Discuss *The God of Small Things* as a political text.

2. Describe the significance of the name Baby Kochamma.
3. Give a character sketch of Ammu.
4. Comment on 'the evils come out of evil' with special reference to *The God of Small Things*.
5. Discuss *The God of Small Things* as a semiautobiographical novel.

#### **15.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Comment on Arundhati Roy's art of characterization.
2. Discuss in detail the relationship between Estha and Rahel.
3. Comment on the setting and plot structure of the novel.

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### **15.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Balvannanadnan, Aida. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2007.
2. Bhatt, Indira; Indira Nityanandam. *Explorations: Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1999.
3. Dodiya, Jaydipsingh; Joya Chakravarty. *The Critical Studies of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 1999.
4. Pathak, R.S. *The Fictional World of Arundhati Roy*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 2001.
5. Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. India: IndiaInk, 1997.