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UNIT 1 SRI AUROBINDO: “WHO”, “A DREAM OF SURREAL SCIENCE”

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INTRODUCTION

In Book I you were introduced to Drama. Book II deals with Poetry which is yet another interesting genre of literature. Both Drama and Poetry are distinct forms of creative writing. Whereas Poetry is primarily an expression of emotions and imagination of the poet, Drama is largely a performance art, with intensity of action and plot development as its key makers. Poetry is usually written in a rhythmic pattern whereas Drama involves dialogues with serious or comical themes between the characters.

In this book you will be acquainted with some of the finest poets of all times. In British poetry, you will read some of the leading British poets of the various literary ages. Besides British poets, you will also get a taste of some major American and Indian poets. The First Block deals with Indo-Anglian poetry, which means poetry written by Indian writers in English. The roots of Indo-Anglian poetry can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Tagore and Sri Aurobindo were some of the pioneers of Indo-Anglian poetry who established Indo-Anglian poetry as an important genre in the canon of literature. The later age poets like Dom Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das too added their own flavours to Indo-Anglian poetry, thereby enriching it further.

In this block you will be introduced to four major Indo-Anglian poets namely, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das. A study of these poets will give you a taste of Indo-Anglian poetry and will enable you to understand and appreciate their poetry.

Let us now begin this block by reading about Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo was revolutionary, a poet, a philosopher and a Seer whose poetry was “an invocation to the transcendental consciousness.”

OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to introduce you to Sri Aurobindo who is “one of the finest flowers of Indian Renaissance”. Over the course of reading this unit, you will also be acquainted with the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, which resonates in his poems. It is essential for you to get a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy as it primarily focuses on the individual’s inner journey, which in reality is the only journey that one can undertake. In this unit we shall also be discussing Sri Aurobindo as a poet. Furthermore, two of Sri Aurobindo’s early poems, “Who” and “Dream of Surreal Science” will also be discussed at length. A reading of these poems will provide you an incentive to explore Sri Aurobindo further.

SRI AUROBINDO: A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

Sri Aurobindo once wrote, “No one can write my life for it has not been in the surface for men to see.” Indeed, Sri Aurobindo’s life can be likened to an unfathomable ocean, whose depth cannot be examined on the surface as his life was nothing but a quest for introspection and reflection which he undertook to understand the nature and purpose of his own life.

Sri Aurobindo was born on 15 August 1872 in an affluent Bengali family at Calcutta. His father, Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghosh, was a surgeon who had taken his degree in Medicine from Aberdeen University and desired English education for his children. The young Aurobindo was brought up in an Anglicized atmosphere. He received his elementary education at Loreto Convent, Darjeeling, before moving to England along with his two brothers, at the tender age of seven. In London the three Ghosh brothers were kept under the care of Reverend W.H. Drewett and his wife who imparted “secular” education to the brothers privately. It was under the tutelage of the Drewett couple that Sri Aurobindo copiously read

Western literature. Furthermore, besides English, Sri Aurobindo also acquired a sound knowledge of Greek and Latin. Right from his early years the young Sri Aurobindo exhibited exceptional talent as a writer. He read avidly and wrote copiously. His first poems came out at the age of ten in the Fox's Weekly. Later on, in England, Sri Aurobindo went to the prestigious educational institutions like St. Paul's School and King's College, Cambridge. Sri Aurobindo was passionate about literature and even in his adolescence emerged as an extraordinary scholar of literature and philosophy. It is worthy to note here that the young Aurobindo always fared better in English than the native English speakers. G.W. Prothero, one of Sri Aurobindo's mentors at Cambridge acknowledged his dedication towards the study of English literature in the following words, "Besides his classical scholarship he possessed a knowledge of English literature far beyond the average of undergraduates, and wrote a much better English style than most English gentlemen." Sri Aurobindo won various illustrious prizes for his writings, both at the school and University levels. Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghosh had high hopes from his sons wanted to see them as civil officers, but Sri Aurobindo did not have a liking for civil services. Thus, when he was forced to appear for the prestigious ICS exam, which he cleared easily, he on purpose got himself disqualified in horse riding.

After spending his formative years in England, Sri Aurobindo finally left the shores of England and set sail for India at the age of twenty-one to join the service of the Maharaja of Baroda. As Sri Aurobindo reached the shores of his native land, he could "feel a strange peace descending upon him"; a tranquility and assurance one experiences in familiar shores. Sri Aurobindo spent the next thirteen years of his life in Baroda working in various capacities including that of lecturer in French, Professor of English and Vice Principal and acting Principal of the Baroda College. Only when Sri Aurobindo came to India did he realize much to his shame that he was ignorant of the Indian culture and literature and Thus, took it upon himself to acquire a firm grounding on the Indian culture. This initial phase of his literary sadhana is termed as the "intense jnana yoga" phase. During this phase, Sri

Aurobindo translated major portions of the Sanskrit classics including the Bala and the Ayodhya kandas from the Ramayana, the Sabha and Udyog Parvas from the Mahabharat, Meghduta and the first canto of Kumarsambhavam of Kalidas into English.

Sri Aurobindo also made immense contributions during the Indian independence movement. Sri Aurobindo, who was also a ‘karm yogi’ plunged into the Freedom Movement. He contributed in awakening a patriotic fervor among the people by writing a number of revolutionary articles in various journals like Indu Prakash and Yuganta. Furthermore, he also associated himself with some of the revolutionary groups of the country. The partition of Bengal in the year 1905, can be marked as a watershed period in Sri Aurobindo’s life as it brought him into the mainstream Freedom Movement. It was during the time of the Partition of Bengal that Sri Aurobindo left Baroda and settled in his home town of Calcutta. In Calcutta Sri Aurobindo took up the editorship of Bandemataram, an English daily started by Bipin Chandra Pal. Later he also took up the principalship of the newly established Bengal National College, Calcutta. It was during his Calcutta days that he started being hailed as a prominent extremist leader and paid the price for his outspokenness on several occasions. On 4 May 1908, he was arrested in the Muzzafarpur bomb case and was detained at the Alipore jail. During the trial, Sri Aurobindo had his first full-fledged mystical experience of ‘Narayan Darshan’ which he recounts in the Uttarpara Speech. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell, but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door, and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the course

blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arm of Sri Krishna around me, the arm of my Friend and Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me. I looked at the prisoners in jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, as I looked at them, I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in the darkened souls and misused bodies.

Eventually Sri Aurobindo was acquitted in the Muzaffarpur bomb case. Once out of the jail he launched a new weekly the Karmayogin. However, after the above-mentioned mystical experience at the Alipore jail, Sri Aurobindo was no longer a man of this world and his spiritual yearnings became even more pronounced. In 1910, he finally gave up politics for spirituality, left Calcutta and finally reached Pondicherry, then a French colony, where he practiced Integral Yoga "a path of integral seeking of the Divine" and through which man is "liberated out of the Ignorance...into a Truth beyond the Mind, a Truth not only of highest spiritual status but of a dynamic spiritual self-manifestation in the universe".

In the year 1914, Sri Aurobindo along with his spiritual collaborators, the Richard couple, Mirra and Paul, launched the philosophical journal Arya, which was "devoted to the exposition of an integral view of life and existence." A series of his monumental works like The Life Divine, The Synthesis of Yoga, Essays on The Gita, The Secret of The Veda, Hymns to the Mystic Fire, The Upanishads, The Renaissance in India, War and Self-determination, The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity and The Future Poetry were published in the magazine. Later when the Richards left for France, the onus of bringing out the magazine fell on the shoulders of Sri Aurobindo. As Sri Aurobindo was unable to bring out the magazine singlehandedly, he had to discontinued it in the year 1921.

At Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo developed a spiritual practice which he called Integral Yoga. The central theme of his vision behind the Integral Yoga was the evolution of human life into a Life Divine. Gradually Sri Aurobindo started gaining wide recognition on the basis of his integral yoga and a number of disciples from

all over the world came to him to learn integral yoga. Although Sri Aurobindo had many disciples, it was Mirra Richards nee Alfassa who became his spiritual collaborator and later on 'The Mother' of the Ashram. The Mother was no ordinary human being and Sri Aurobindo knew this from his very first meeting with her. He held her in high esteem and considered her to be an incarnation of the 'Supreme Shakti'. In his words, "The One whom we adore as the Mother is the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence, one and yet many-sided that to follow Her movement is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence."

The Mother, right from her childhood was drawn into an inner life like Sri Aurobindo and had studied occultism in France with Max Theon, the famous Polish Jewish Kabbalist and Occultist. She had come to Pondicherry on a spiritual quest but after spending some time in the Ashram, she along with her husband, Paul Richards, had to leave for France as during those days Europe was on the brink of the First World War. However, Europe was not her final destination and she returned to Pondicherry within six years, in 1920. In 1926, when Sri Aurobindo retired into seclusion to work on the "Descent of the Supramental", which is considered to be the highest realization that could be attained on Earth, the Mother, took charge of the Ashram upon herself and continued to work for the Ashram till she passed on, on 17 November 1972.

As mentioned earlier, Sri Aurobindo was the propounder of Integral Yoga, and to realize it fully he withdrew from public life, confined himself to a room and came out of his room only on the four 'Darshan' days, ie. (15 August, 24 November, 21 February and 24 April) in a calendar year to meet and bless his disciples. It is believed that for the Ashramites(disciples) each Darshan was "an experience, nearly a super-realization." Although, besides these four days Sri Aurobindo did not come out of his room, he maintained a contact with the outside world,

particularly with his disciples, through letters. These letters later came out in the form of a book called Letters on Yoga.

It is interesting to note that India's independence coincided with Sri Aurobindo's seventy-fifth birthday. Sri Aurobindo did not see this as something incidental "but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power". Sri Aurobindo had dedicated his life to his spiritual, literary and philosophical pursuit. Savitri, his magnum opus epic, a spiritual poem in blank verse of approximately 24,000 lines can be seen as the culmination of his life's sadhana.

Sri Aurobindo passed away on the morning of 5 December 1950 at the age of seventy-eight. His passing left a void in the lives of the Ashramites. As Sri Aurobindo shed his mortal coil, the Mother stood by his side watching his soul depart. As the Mother witnessed Sri Aurobindo's passing, she had a "material sensation" of Sri Aurobindo's Supramental force passing into her body" and though urging her to carry on the works that they had started together with honesty and dedication. After Sri Aurobindo's passing the Mother continued to work on the spiritual works the two had started together and provided motivation and guidance to the disciples.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

As mentioned in the introduction, Sri Aurobindo had many dimensions to his personality. He was a patriot, yogi, philosopher and poet, all rolled into one. Sri Aurobindo was a mystic- philosopher whose life's vision was to chart a course for human progress and spiritual evolution. Sri Aurobindo urged his fellow humans to aspire for a Higher State of Supramental existence which he believed could be attained by focusing on the inner life. Sri Aurobindo believed in leading by example. He retreated into seclusion in order to discover the meaning and true purpose of his life. By leading an inward and secluded life, Sri Aurobindo could perceive the ineffable mysteries of life. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy was not

abstract but was a blossoming of his own mystical experiences. Sri Aurobindo's mission in life was to understand the inner self and he believed in making the living experience a Divine experience. All these lofty thoughts are discussed by him at length in his principal philosophical work *The Life Divine*. The book begins with "man's awakening, proceeds through the process of creation and ends with the inner spirit gaining total mastery over the outer matter." *The Life Divine* can be seen as a theory of the spiritual evolution of man from a mental into a supramental being. According to Sri Aurobindo evolution of man is only possible because "the Divine reality has involved or hidden himself in the material universe. Involved in the world, the Divine, through His creative energy, gradually emerges in more conscious forms."

In Sri Aurobindo views man's purpose on Earth is to achieve oneness with the Absolute "by passing beyond the realm of the mental through a supra-mental change". Sri Aurobindo further confirmed that a Divine Life could be experienced on Earth by practicing Integral Yoga. Sri Aurobindo had firm faith that Integral Yoga had the power to transform man's state of mind and thereby his life. He urged his fellow countrymen to transform their minds into super minds so that they could experience a Divine Life on Earth itself. Sri Aurobindo laid stress on a Divine Life because he believed that through it a "new order of beings and a new earth-life" could be brought about on earth.

LITERARY ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo was a scholar of extraordinary calibre. Right from his formative years spent in England, he exhibited tremendous potential as a writer. His first body of literary output was published when he was just ten years of age. He won many accolades for his writings both at the school and the University levels. His well-known 'Songs to Myrtilla' and 'The Virgil of Thaliard' were written during his Cambridge days. On returning to India, he dedicated his time to the study of the

Indian classics like the Vedas, Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and translated major portions from these texts into English. Sri Aurobindo had a deep love for literature. Although he was much known to the world as a philosopher and a yogi but he primarily considered himself to be a poet. Sri Aurobindo's love for literature was so immense that during the independence movement too when he was involved in the freedom struggle, he took out time and wrote some of his finest literary works like 'Baji Prabhau', 'Vidula', 'Perseus the Deliverer' (a five-act play), 'Urvashi' 'Love and Death' 'Chitrangada' and 'Uloupie'. All these works were rife with patriotic themes and highlight the importance of the doctrine of karma. Sri Aurobindo's literary blossoming took place in his "Cave of Tapasya" in Pondicherry. More than half of his collected poems, including 5000 lines of 'Illion', an incomplete epic which traces the Trojan saga, his celebrated love plays Eric and Vasuvadutta and even his magnum opus Savitri were all written at the Pondicherry Ashram.

SRI AUROBINDO: THE POET

Sri Aurobindo was one of the most influential figures of the Indian Renaissance. Not only was he a nationalist, a philosopher and a yogi, but was also a man of letters; a literary scholar, critic and a prolific poet. Sri Aurobindo's poetic output includes two epics, narratives, various short and long poems and a number of sonnets. Sri Aurobindo poetry is largely based upon Indian myths, legends, symbols and images. However, the beauty of Sri Aurobindo's poetry lies in the fact that although like Shakespeare he borrows his plots from mythologies and histories, yet he makes them richer and profounder by linking these ancient stories with the eternal quest of man and this is what makes his works universal and timeless.

A Mystic: Sri Aurobindo was a mystic and being a mystic, his poems abound in mystical themes. Sri Aurobindo laid great stress on the Awakening of

Consciousness. In his words, "So long as the soul is asleep, unconscious it remains a plaything in the hands of Nature." Sri Aurobindo firmly believed that the homo sapiens were still in the process of evolution and the next stage of evolution for him was that of a Superman. Through his practice Sri Aurobindo came to the realization that the attainment of this stage was very much possible here on the earth. "Man is a transitional being. He is not final. The step from man to Superman is the next approaching achievement in the earth evolution. It is inevitable because it is at once the intention of the inner spirit and the logic of Nature's process". He exhorted people to rise up above their petty existences and work towards a Greater Consciousness in order to experience the Divine Bliss – Satchitananda. Whenever one reads Sri Aurobindo's poems, especially the ones written during his Pondicherry phase, one needs to bear in mind that they are written by a seer and are not to be examined only on the surface. Sri Aurobindo saw divinity in each and every particle of the cosmos and recognized the presence of the divine omnipresence in many of his poems such as "Who" "Cosmic Consciousness" and "Because Thou Art".

Singer of Love: Sri Aurobindo was a Seer and saw Love as an essential force that brought about the Cosmic Creation. For him love was not just the narrow emotion that existed within the confines of the man-woman relationship but the Power that brought about a transformation even in the grossest of humans. He saw death as a redeemer and believed that "someday surely the world too shall be saved from death by love." Sri Aurobindo's opus Savitri delves into the intricacies and depth of love. Sri Aurobindo saw the mythical Savitri as someone who "brings down Love with her as an active force into the darkness of earthly existence to vindicate her right to be and to Love." Besides Savitri, there are other poems of Sri Aurobindo that also deal with various other aspects of love.

Love can be witnessed as a vital force in Sri Aurobindo's poems. Prof. Sisir Kumar Ghosh perceives Sri Aurobindo essentially as a poet of love. In the words of Prof.

H.P. Shukla, “The England poems give us a dreamy, somewhat melancholic youth, a Hamlet in Wittenberg, a hero-worshipper in love with poets and patriots. In the Baroda poems, the dreamy youth becomes a lover with a definite direction, the hero-worshipper is changed into a fiery patriot, and there is a new presence of a thinker, the source of clarity and direction. In Pondicherry, the thinker, the lover and the patriot fuse into one luminous figure: a lover who holds all knowledge and compassion in his vision.” Many of Sri Aurobindo’s early poems like ‘Night by the Sea’, ‘the Lovers Complaint’ “Love in Sorrow” deal with the sensuous aspect of love. ‘The Vigil of Thailand’s a chivalric romance set in Europe. Sri Aurobindo’s idea of love broadened during the Baroda days and the poems written during this period explore the vastness of Love. Poems like “Immortal Love”, “Kama”, “The Birth of Sin” “Epiphany” fall under this category. Love in Sri Aurobindo reached its zenith during the Pondicherry days as it was here that the earthly love in his poems culminated as Divine Love. Poems like “Bride of the Fire” “Flame-Wind” “The Dream Boat” and “Because Thou Art” are dedicated to the Supreme Being. In the poem “Because Thou Art” Sri Aurobindo expresses his Love for the Almighty in the following way:

Because thou art All-beauty and All-bliss

My soul blind and enamoured yearns for Thee... Behind all eyes I meet Thy secret gaze

All in each voice I hear Thy magic tune:

Thy sweetness haunts my heart through Nature’s ways; Nowhere it beats now from Thy snare immune.

Symbolism: Sri Aurobindo is one of the greatest modern symbolist poets. It is said of Sri Aurobindo that he matured into a Yogi by growing along his symbols. Symbols recur time and again in the works of Sri Aurobindo. He draws symbols from the past as well as the modern times and uses them in his poems with dexterity and finesse. He exploits the various myths and uses them in the modern context to make us realize the purpose of our existence, so that we are able to rise above our ordinariness and become “Superhumans”. It is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo exploits symbols not just from mythical and legendary tales but also from science and esoteric traditions which give his poems a distinct quality. Sri Aurobindo’s use of symbols is not superficial for through his use of symbols he wants the reader to experience higher realms of consciousness. For example, in his “Discovery of Science I” Sri Aurobindo uses symbols from science in order to show that even a modern discipline like science is a mere cog in the larger scheme of things.

“Only by electronic hordes your world is run? ... These surface findings –scene phenomenon-Are nature’s offered reason but behind

Her occult mysteries lurk safe unknown To the crude handling of empirical mind.”

“Discovery of Science I”

As a Philosophical Poet: Sri Aurobindo was an influential philosopher and a profound thinker. His reputation as a philosopher is so great that it sometimes overshadows his achievement as a poet. His ‘The Life Divine’ is a philosophical, mystical and a spiritual treatise which deals with “the salvation of human race.” Unlike Western philosophers who have an inherent tendency to compartmentalize things, Sri Aurobindo believed in a harmonious existence. Sri Aurobindo propounded the philosophy of cosmic salvation through spiritual evolution.

According to the philosophy of cosmic salvation, “the paths to union with Brahman are two-way streets, or channels: enlightenment comes from above (thesis), while the spiritual mind (supermind) strives through yogic illumination to reach upward from below (antithesis). When these two forces blend, a gnostic individual is created (synthesis). This yogic illumination transcends both reason and intuition and eventually leads to the freeing of the individual from the bonds of individuality, and, by extension, all mankind will eventually achieve moksha (liberation). Thus, Aurobindo created a dialectic mode of salvation not only for the individual but for all humankind.”

It is ironic that Sri Aurobindo did not see himself as a philosopher. Perhaps he holds this view because he did not see philosophy merely as a mental construct but as a way of life. Through his poems, Sri Aurobindo explores the meaning of everything that the cosmos holds; life, death, nature, matter, man, love, spirituality, to name a few, and he tries to develop an integrated and a holistic view of everything in the cosmos. Sri Aurobindo’s philosophical streak even finds way in his early poems such as “A Tree” in which he strikes an analogy between a tree and the earthbound man. His “Life and Death” views death as life disguised. This philosophy of Sri Aurobindo culminates in Savitri in which the true face and Supreme Lord of Life and Delight is revealed through Death.

WHO

In the blue of the sky, in the green of the forest, Whose is the hand that has painted the glow?
When the winds were asleep in the womb of the ether, Who was it roused them and bade them to blow?

He is lost in the heart, in the cavern of Nature,
He is found in the brain where He builds up the thought: In the pattern and bloom of the flowers He is woven,
In the luminous net of the stars He is caught.

In the strength of a man, in the beauty of woman, In the laugh of a boy, in the blush of a girl;
The hand that sent Jupiter spinning through heaven, Spends all its cunning to fashion a curl.

There are His works and His veils and His shadows; But where is He then? by what name is He known?
Is He Brahma or Vishnu? a man or a woman?
Bodies or bodiless? twin or alone?

We have love for a boy who is dark and resplendent, A woman is lord of us, naked and fierce.
We have seen Him a-muse on the snow of the mountains, We have watched Him at work in the heart of the spheres.

We will tell the whole world of His ways and His cunning; He has rapture of torture and passion and pain;
He delights in our sorrow and drives us to weeping,

Then lures with His joy and His beauty again.

All music is only the sound of His laughter, All beauty the smile of His passionate bliss;
Our lives are His heart-beats, our rapture the bridal Of Radha and Krishna, our love is their kiss.

He is strength that is loud in the blare of the trumpets, And He rides in the car and He strikes in the
spears; He slays without stint and is full of compassion;
He wars for the world and its ultimate years.

In the sweep of the worlds, in the surge of the ages, Ineffable, mighty, majestic and pure,
Beyond the last pinnacle seized by the thinker He is throned in His seats that forever endure.

The Master of man and his infinite Lover,
He is close to our hearts, had we vision to see;
We are blind with our pride and the pomp of our passions, We are bound in our thoughts where we hold
ourselves free.

It is He in the sun who is ageless and deathless,

And into the midnight His shadow is thrown;
When darkness was blind and engulfed within darkness, He was seated within it immense and alone.

The poem “Who”, a metaphysical lyric by Sri Aurobindo in which through a series of images, Sri Aurobindo tries to grasp the Creator’s ineffable and enormous nature.

In the first stanza, the speaker of the poem, captivated by the beauty of the natural world around him, is filled with a childlike curiosity. He wants to understand the force that breathes life into creation like the blue sky and the green forests. The poet is not satisfied to experience the Almighty through the natural objects around him, but wants to pierce through space and time and wants to understand even those nascent winds that first arose from the “womb of ether”; the Hiranyagarbha, or the “golden egg” which, according to the Vedic philosophy is considered to be the source of creation of the Universe. Thus, in the very first stanza the speaker hints that there is some divine force that is constantly at play, both within and without, which has been providing life to the grand design of the cosmos since the very Beginning.

In the second stanza, the speaker sees his resplendence in objects such as the hidden caverns of Nature, inside the human brain which is the seat of thought, among the pattern of flowers and also among the network of the many constellations that form a luminous maze in the night sky.

Passing through the caverns of Nature via the human brain, right through to the patterns of flowers and the constellations of the stars, the speaker continues to search this mysterious invisible force at some other places like the sinews of a man, the beauty of a woman, the laugh of a boy and the blush of a girl. He even rakes up the Roman myth of Jupiter, the god of sky and thunder, who was sent spinning

through heaven in a perfect parabola, and believes that it was this omnipotent and omnipresent force that had been responsible for Jupiter's fate as well. In other words, this invisible mysterious force also has the power to co-exist in opposites. Further, this stanza reminds us of William Blake's Theory of Contraries, which states that "without contraries there is no progression" and that paradoxes and contraries are essential parts of Nature. In his *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake states,

"Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate are necessary to Human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil.

Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell."

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

Although the speaker witnesses Him in various phenomenal manifestations which, if seen in the larger scheme of things, are nothing but veils and shadows that cover up His true identity, yet his search for His true identity persists. He wants to know whether He is Brahma, the Creator, or Vishnu the preserver? whether he exists as a man or a woman? if he is formless, nirakara or does he have a form, sakara? whether he is a single entity or does he exist in multiple forms? By raising such questions, the speaker wants to engage with the reader in his quest for the Absolute. Sri Aurobindo was a spiritually awakened soul and while he was serving his sentence in the Alopore jail, he had the divine "Narayana Darshan". Sri Aurobindo recounts this darshan thus: "I looked at the prisoners in jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, as I looked at them, I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in the darkened souls and misused bodies." And the same realization that God has the potential to exist in binaries is reflected in this stanza as well.

The speaker's spiritual hunger continues in the next stanza wherein he invokes the images of three prominent deities of the Hindu pantheon, viz. Krishna, Kali and Shiva, in order to understand the marvels of the cosmos. This stanza also reminds us of another of Sri Aurobindo's sonnet "Dance of Krishna, Dance of Kali", in which the same cosmic dance is mentioned in the following words, "Two measures are there of the cosmic dance. / Always we hear the tread of Kali's feet/ Measuring in rhythms of pain and grief and chance / Life's game of hazard terrible and sweet."

The speaker's mystical search for the Divine continues in the next stanza too as he tries to understand and thereby reconcile some of the paradoxes that co-exist in the Absolute's persona; "We will tell the whole world of His ways and His cunning;/ He has rapture of torture and passion and pain;/ He delights in our sorrow and drives us to weeping;/Then lures with His joy and His beauty again." Going by simple logic, we may feel that He is a sadist who derives pleasure from inflicting pain on humans. However, it is not so as pain and sorrow have very deep significance in the larger scheme of things.

Through a series of self-revelatory question and answers over the course of the poem, the speaker realizes that He is all pervasive and nothing in this phenomenal world remains untouched by his golden touch. The mysterious nature of the Absolute gradually unfolds over the course of the poem. The speaker comes to the realization that the sounds that ring out far and wide in the cosmos are nothing else but an echo of His laughter. The speaker also feels that the beauty of nature is also God's benediction. The speaker further suggests that God's presence can be felt when we experience ecstasy too.

The entire poem can be understood as a revelation where many of the mysteries surrounding His identity get resolved before the eyes of the speaker's mind. Once again imagery from the Hindu mythology is aroused as God is shown as a divine,

compassionate, metaphorical slayer who rides his chariot (secularized as car in the poem), and also slays the demons who wreaking havoc on the lives of innocent people in order to establish Truth. The last line of this stanza, “He wars for the world and its ultimate years” possibly hints at Sri Aurobindo’s dream to establish a realm of super-consciousness here on Earth, which would be the culmination of human evolution. He is eternal and the force present in everything and gives meaning to everything in the world, yet he is ineffable.

In the penultimate stanza the seeker calls God to be the Master of man, in whose image he is created. He is present everywhere even in the deepest recesses of our hearts where we can seek him through love. However, it is only because we are blinded with our pride, hypocrisy and selfishness that He remains veiled from us.

The final stanza of the poem describes the infinity of the Absolute. He is beyond time and space and transcends the abyss of the deepest depths, and has existed before the evolutionary journey of the cosmos began. He is that indestructible source of energy that can exist in diametrically opposites like light and darkness and bring about harmony among opposite forces of energy. Thus, it is His power that that creates the day as well as the night. He is immense and has existed even before pre-creation.

Thus, in a nutshell, in the poem “Who” Sri Aurobindo tries to unravel the mysteries of existence. Through the course of the poem the poet raises many questions which are left unanswered deliberately by the poet. The questions themselves are self-revelatory, the answers to which would be automatically revealed to anyone who is honestly seeking answers.

1.7.2. Glossary:

womb of ether: may refer to the classical term in Sanskrit “Hiranyagarbha”; the vast, cold, empty vacuum of outer space before the evolution of the cosmos.

blush: go red in the face

resplendent: characterized by glowing splendor

rapture: a state or experience of being carried away by overwhelming emotion

bliss: complete happiness

pinnacle: the highest point of development or achievement

A DREAM OF SURREAL SCIENCE

One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink At the Mermaid, capture immortality;
A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.

A thyroid, meditating almost nude Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal Light And, rising from its mighty solitude,
Spoke of the Wheel and eightfold Path all right.

A brain by a disordered stomach driven
Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled and fell,

From St. Helena went, perhaps, to Heaven. Thus, wagged on the surreal world, until

A scientist played with atoms and blew out The universe before God had time to shout.

Analysis of the Poem:

Sri Aurobindo was a prolific writer. In his writings he covered a vast range of topics which include spirituality, philosophy, mythology, science politics, to name a few. In the sonnet, “A Dream of Surreal Science”, Sri Aurobindo explores how human physiology governs human behaviour and action. He illustrates this further by giving examples of a few well-known figures from history and shows how their physiology drives their respective passions and undertakings.

The poem is a Surreal Dream. A Surreal Dream is a dream which originates from some submerged reality. The objects that occur in a surreal dream are distorted and look unreal and strange, somewhat like a Chimera. In Greek mythology, Chimera was a fire-breathing female monster with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail, so a Surreal dream is also like a Chimera where various images coalesce in strange and unexpected ways.

Surreal dreams are more intriguing than normal dreams. The poem is a Sonnet. A sonnet is a fourteen-line poem in which expresses a single thought or idea. As we have already discussed Sonnet and other forms of poetry in the BAEL 201 course (Introducing Literature), so please refer to the unit on Sonnet for further clarification.

In this sonnet Sri Aurobindo discusses the role played by hormones and glands in determining human behaviour. This may sound absurd to a lay reader but it has medically been proven that human beings behave according to their physiological components. Interestingly Francis Crick in *The Astonishing Hypothesis* states, “You, your joys and your sorrows... your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.”

The poem is a satire which parodies the discoveries of Science and Physiology. In the first two lines of the first quatrain the speaker dreams about the ‘gland’ that wrote Hamlet and who drank at the Mermaid Tavern, obviously referring to Shakespeare who wrote Hamlet and often drank at Mermaid Tavern which was his favourite pub. Next ‘a committee of hormones’ on the edge of the Aegean Sea is given the credit for the authorship of Iliad and Odyssey rather than Homer whom the rest of the world recognizes to be the author of these two great epics. These lines on Homer also allude to the controversy that existed regarding the multiple authorship of Iliad and Odyssey.

The next quatrain depicts “thyroid” meditating under the Bodhi Tree and speaking of the Wheel and the Eight Fold Path. These lines clearly refer to Gautam Buddha who received Enlightenment. It is believed that Gautam Buddha possessed all the 32 major signs of a ‘Great Man’ and no thyroid dysfunction. This shows that Sri Aurobindo gave the credit of tranquil equanimity of Gautam Buddha to the flawless functioning of his thyroid glands. It is believed that “Ecological healing, spiritual meditative practices and mind-body harmonization are identified with optimum thyroid function. Also, in energy medicine, the throat or visuddha chakra over the thyroid is recognized as the life energy centre that deals with communication, self-expression and creativity.”

In the next quatrain the speaker discusses Napoleon Bonaparte and holds his sickly stomach responsible for his chaotic temperament. The poet says that it was because

of this unwholesomeness that set him on a plundering spree throughout Europe and which finally resulted in his final military debacle. Napoleon rose to prominence during the later stages of the French Revolution and led various successful invasions throughout the continent of Europe. However, Napoleon's defeat in the battle of Waterloo in June 1815 marked a turning point in his fortunes. Following his defeat, he was forced to abdicate power and was exiled to the island of St. Helena where he died on 5 May 1821. When an autopsy was performed on his body, it was revealed that he had died of stomach cancer. However, some scholars also believe that he was a victim of arsenic poisoning.

The poem ends with a couplet in which Sri Aurobindo further highlights the whims of human mind. He gives us the picture of scientists playing with atoms like curious children. The word 'play' suggests that the scientists while experimenting do not understand the consequences of their dangerous inventions like the devastating atom and nuclear bombs. The poem was composed in the year 1939, the year the Second World War began. However, Sri Aurobindo had the far-sight to foresee what dire consequences of the sweeping ambitions of science could bring about. And he was proven right when atom bombs Little Boy and Fat Man were dropped over two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively in the year 1945.

Glossary:

surreal: Something that is marked by the intense irrational reality of a dream, also something that is unbelievable and fantastic and emerges out of the sub conscious mind.

subconscious mind: Of or concerning the part of the mind of which one is not fully aware but which influences one's actions and feelings

gland: an organ in the human body or animal body which secretes particular chemical substances for use in the body or for discharging into the surroundings

hormones: a regulatory substance produced in an organism and transported in tissue fluids such as blood or sap to stimulate specific cells or tissues into action.

thyroid: a large ductless gland in the neck which secretes hormones regulating growth and development through the rate of metabolism.

wag on: rapid movement from side to side

Self-Assessment Questions:

In which event did Sri Aurobindo disqualify himself on purpose so that he may not be chosen for the prestigious ICS exam?

In which jail did Sri Aurobindo have the Narayan Darshan?

Name the philosophical journal that was launched jointly by the Richards couple and Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry.

Since which day did Aurobindo Ghosh start signing his name as Sri Aurobindo?

By which name is Sri Aurobindo's Birthday celebrated in the Aurobindo Ashram?

Discuss Sri Aurobindo as a poet.

Analyse the poem 'Who' in your own words.

ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

horse riding

Alipore jail

Arya

24 November 1926, Siddhi Divas

Darshan Divas

Refer to Section 1.6

Refer to Section 1.7

SUMMARY

In this unit you were introduced to the life of Sri Aurobindo. You saw the development and transformation Sri Aurobindo underwent during the three most important phases of his life, namely the England phase, the Baroda phase and the Pondicherry phase. These three phases acted as major milestones in Sri Aurobindo's life and were instrumental in transforming him from Aurobindo Ghosh, the charismatic revolutionary leader of the Indian Independence Movement into Sri Aurobindo, the philosopher and the sage.

The unit also discusses Sri Aurobindo's philosophy which focuses on man's inward journey which he believed is essential in order to understand one's true nature and attain a higher state of Supramental existence. In this unit we also discussed Sri Aurobindo as the poet and a philosopher. You examined how in his poems he drew upon the Indian myths, legends, symbols and images to examine the contemporary. A reading of the two poems, 'Who' and 'A Dream of Surreal Science' helped in developing in you a taste for Sri Aurobindo's poems.

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

Draw a biographical sketch of Sri Aurobindo's life in your own words.

Discuss "A Dream of Surreal Science" as a satire.

What is the central theme of the poem "Who"?

UNIT 2 SAROJINI NAIDU: “INDIAN WEAVERS”, “IN THE BAZAARS OF HYDERABAD”**Introduction**

Objectives

Sarojini Naidu: Life and Works

Sarojini Naidu as a Poet

Critical Study of “Indian Weavers”

Text

Critical Appreciation of “Indian Weavers”

Summary of the poem

Critical Study of “In The Bazaars of Hyderabad”

Text

Critical appreciation of “In The Baazars of Hyderabad”

Summary of the poem

Conclusion

Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

References

Terminal and Model Questions

INTRODUCTION

Popularly known as the “Bharat Kokila” or the Nightingale of India, Sarojini Naidu is the most famous lyrical woman poet. In her perfect lyricism and mellifluous melody she is indeed the Nightingale of India. She is a singer of India’s glory, India’s present, India’s fauna and flora. She pictures in melodious strains the landscape of the Deccan. Whereas the western critics would categorize her with Shelley, Keats, Mulk Raj Anand puts her into Persian tradition: “And although she has adopted a western language and a Western technique to express herself, she seems to me to be in the main Hindustani tradition of Ghalib, Zauk, Mir, Hali and Iqbal.”

OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will have a clear picture of:

Concept of Sarojini Naidu as a poetess.

An analysis of some of the major poems.

Critical evaluation of Indian Weavers and The Bazars of Hyderabad

SAROJINI NAIDU: LIFE AND WORKS

Sarojini Naidu was born in Hyderabad in a Bengali Hindu Kulin Brahmin family to Aghore Nath Chattopadhyay and Barada Sundari Debi on 13 February 1879. Her father was a carpenter of Science from Edinburgh University, settled in Hyderabad State, where he founded and administered the Hyderabad College, which later became the Nizam's College in Hyderabad. Her mother was a poetess and used to write poetry in Bengali.

Sarojini Naidu was the eldest among the eight siblings. Her brother Birendranath was a revolutionary and her other brother, Harindranath was a poet, dramatist, and actor. Sarojini Naidu passed her Matriculation examination from the University of Madras, but she took four years' break from her studies. In 1895, she travelled to England to study first at King’s College London and later at Girton College Cambridge.

Naidu began writing at the age of 13. Her Persian play, Maher Muneer, impressed the Nawab of Hyderabad. In 1905, her first collection of poems, named "The

Golden Threshold" was published. Her poems were admired by many prominent Indian politicians like Gopal Krishna Gokhle. Her collection of poems entitled "The Feather of The Dawn" was edited and published posthumously in 1961 by her daughter Padamaja Sarojini met Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu, a non-Brahmin and a doctor by profession, and fell in love with him. After finishing her studies at the age of nineteen, got married to him.

At this time, inter-caste marriages were not allowed, but her father approved of the marriage and her marriage was a very happy one. The couple had five children. Jayasurya, Padmaja, Randheer, Nilawar and Leelamani. Her daughter Padmaja followed in to her footprints and became the Governor of West Bengal, as well as a poet.

Naidu died of a heart attack while working in her office in Lucknow on March 2, 1949.

SAROJINI NAIDU AS A POET

Sarojini Naidu's first collection of poems was published in 1905 under the title Golden Threshold. It was followed by the publication of two other collections of poems—The Bird of Time and The Broken Wings. In 1918 came her famous collection Feast of Youth. Then after she published 'The Magic Tree', 'The Wizard Mask' and 'A Treasury of Poems'. Her published poems impressed Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru. There were thousands of admirers of her poetic work. It is said that her poems had English words, but an Indian soul. Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhale inspired her to compose patriotic songs and thus, to use her poetry and her beautiful words to give new life or energy to the spirit of Independence in the hearts of Indian villagers.

Philosophic Aspect of her Poetry: Sarojini Naidu expresses deep philosophy in her poetry. For example, To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus is a great philosophic poem that refers to a popular idol of Lord Buddha. He is sitting on a lotus in the mood of meditation, with praying eyes and hands. There is a mystic delight on his face. The image inspires eternal peace of mind attained in human life through meditation. Meditation implies the search for truth. Lotus springs from dirt and mire but remains free from the evil effect of surroundings. It inspires all to remain free from evils and ills of worldly life. The poetess wishes to know how common people may attain this sublime state. The simple answer is hidden in Lord Buddha's life. He was a born prince but gave up his royal comforts. He lived like a saint and still today he is called a lord while people have forgotten all the kings of that time. Indian Weavers is a philosophic poem that suggests how life is full of joys and sorrows. Both are inevitable. A wise man ought to do his duty like weavers who make robe for all occasions of joy and sorrow. Sarojini Naidu's famous poem

Guerdon is an inspiring song. All objects and creatures in the world aspire for something or the other. Mostly they wish for worldly rewards but the poetess wishes for spiritual gain. She aspires for the rapture of love and truth. She has no interest in worldly delights. It is her sublime nature that she wishes to see all satisfied.

Patriotic Aspect of her Poetry: Sarojini Naidu was a great patriotic leader. Her poetry is rich in this element. Her famous poem *Awake* is an inspiring patriotic song. Sarojini Naidu composed the poem wishing for India's freedom. In this patriotic song Sarojini Naidu accounts for the glory of the Bharat Mata. She wishes for a bright tomorrow with a call for unity against all the ills of the time. The people of India make a promise to serve her with a true heart. They would give up their narrow differences of caste or religion and come together for this great purpose. She is sure that this dream of freedom would become a reality when all creeds are united. The song has a great importance in the present context when the country is again being divided in the name of caste, religion or region. If such considerations are not forgotten, the country would again fall in the chains of slavery. The Lotus pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi. The poetess accounts for Mahatma Gandhi's greatness. As the lotus springs from dirt and mire but remains free from its evil effect and inspires all with its beauty and quality, Mahatma Gandhi blessed the country by remaining free from the evils of his time. He faced all violent forces quite bravely and brought the country to success. His popular effectiveness among common people is everlasting. He taught the ways of attaining peace of mind. All express respect for his glorious heart.

Psychological Aspect of her Poetry: Sarojini Naidu's poems are rich in the element of psychology. Its best example is *Song of Radha, the Milkmaid*. It is a folk-song based on Radha's love for her lover Govinda. Radha is a milkmaid. She goes to Mathura to sell her milk-products. She fails in selling her products. She remains lost in the thought of Govinda. Her mind is over-filled with the name of Govinda. Govinda is a cowboy and flute player. It brings to a psychological fact that Sub-conscious state of mind overrules the conscious. It dominates human actions. For example, Radha visits the Mathura fair. She carries curds to sell there. She is conscious to her purpose of selling curds. But she takes interest in seeing cows softly lowing in joy. Cows are associated with Govinda. They remind her of Govinda's activities. She has a lot of curds to sell. She hawks to sell the curds. She wants to praise the quality of her curds that it is as white as the clouds in the sky when the breezes blow in the month of Shrawan. But she is so greatly lost in love of Govinda that her mind remembers nothing but her beloved Govinda. She begins to call Govinda in place of curds. Seeing her madness, all the people laugh at her for she remains crying 'Govinda!' 'Govinda!' 'Govinda!' 'Govinda!'; as if she were selling Govinda in place of curds. She is attracted towards the river flowing softly. The cow and the river attract her for these both are beloved to Govinda.

But my heart was so full of your beauty, Beloved, They laughed as I cried without knowing:
'Govinda!' 'Govinda!' 'Govinda!' 'Govinda!' How softy the river was flowing!

Treatment of Love: Sarojini Naidu's treatment of love is excellent. Her concept of love is true and sublime. It is spiritual. For example, Song of Radha, the Milkmaid is a folk-song based on Radha's love for her lover Govinda. Radha is a milkmaid. She remains lost in the thought of Govinda. Her mind is over-filled with the name of Govinda. Govinda is a cowboy and flute player. She visits the Mathura tide to take water from the Yamuna. She carries pots there. She is delighted to see the sailors rowing the boat joyfully. Her friends are dancing and they ask her to join them to dance and sing wearing saffron garments in order to welcome the spring. Friends ask her to come with them and pluck the new buds that were blowing. But, Radha does not take interest in such activities for her heart is filled with the music of Govinda's flute. Her friends laugh at her when she shouts unknowingly 'Govinda!' 'Govinda!' 'Govinda!' 'Govinda!' She takes delight in seeing the river flowing happily. It proves her love for Govinda is true and sublime. It is spiritual.

Use of Poetic Imagery: Sarojini Naidu is excellent in use of poetic imagery. For example, Indian Weavers is a poem of poetic imagery. The poetess uses colour imagery to suggest different moods of human life. The blue coloured robe is for a new-born child. The purple green robe is for a royal wedding of a queen. The white robe is for funeral of a dead body.

Weavers, weaving solemn and still,

What do you weave in the moonlight chill?

The poem is rich in poetic imagery. The imagery of chill moonlight is remarkable. It suggests death for want of action. In The Lotus, she presents the flower imagery. As the lotus springs from dirt and mire but remains free from its evil effect and inspires all with its beauty and quality, Mahatma Gandhi blessed the country by remaining free from the evils of his time. He faced all violent forces quite bravely and brought the country to success. His popular effectiveness among common people is everlasting. He taught the ways of attaining peace of mind. All express respect for his glorious heart.

Sarojini Naidu is also well acclaimed for her contribution in poetry. Her poetry had beautiful words that could also be sung. Her collection of poems was published in 1905 under the title "Golden Threshold". She published two other collections called "The Bird of Time", and "The Broken Wings". Later, "The Magic Tree", "The Wizard Mask", and "A Treasury of Poems" were published.

CRITICAL STUDY OF “INDIAN WEAVERS”

Text Indian Weavers

WEAVERS, weaving at break of day, Why do you weave a garment so gay?. . . Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild,

We weave the robes of a new-born child.

Weavers, weaving at fall of night,

Why do you weave a garment so bright?. . . Like the plumes of a peacock, purple and green, We weave the marriage-veils of a queen.

Weavers, weaving solemn and still,

What do you weave in the moonlight chill?. . . White as a feather and white as a cloud,

We weave a dead man's funeral shroud.

Critical Appreciation of “Indian Weavers”

This is a short lyric poem written by Sarojini Naidu in the early stage of her poetic career. It is a folk song taken from the golden threshold. It has the characteristic of simplicity and melodiousness, written in three stanzas of four lines where the poetess asking three question in the beginning of each stanza.

Sarojini Naidu has given a most interesting philosophical meaning to this poem. According to the poetess, the poem describes man's journey from birth to death. Birth represent creativeness. Youth represents marriage or happiness and death is described through the white cloth of the weaves which the weaver weaves at night. There is a reference to the Greek Mythology where fate works out like a man through birth, marriage and death. It also reminds us of three Indian gods Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. They are the lords of man's destiny. This process of creation managed by God is an endless activity like the weaving of the weavers from morning till night.

This poem consists of three stanzas of four lines each. It is a folk song in which the poetess has used simple languages and melodious phraseology. The rhyming scheme of the poem is also quite musical. It is ‘aa bb’ and the three stanzas we can read in a sing song voice.

Thus, this poem is most important from the viewpoint of subject matter, philosophical thought and symbolism. The poetess has the skill of showing her great quality of economy of words and felicity of language.

Summary of the poem

In the first stanza the poet, Sarojini Naidu describes weavers weaving cloth in the early morning. She asks the weavers why they are weaving a cloth of a particular colour. They say that the cloth that they are weaving is the colour of a halcyon's wings. It is a beautiful, blue because it will be used for making the clothes of a newly born child.

In the second stanza the poet asks the weavers why they are weaving a cloth late in the evening. She asks why it is so bright and colourful. The weavers tell her that the cloth is brightly and richly coloured like the feathers of a peacock because they are weaving it for a queen. The queen will use this cloth to make her marriage veil.

In the third stanza the weavers are weaving cloth in a cold moonlight and the poetess asks the weavers, why they are weaving the white cloth this time of night? The weavers answer that they are so serious and calm at that late hour of night because they are weaving the cloth which is white as a feather and white as a cloud because it is a coffin cloth of a dead person. The white cloth is meant to be a covering cloth of a dead person. The third stanza shows that the life is a mixture of pleasure and sorrow.

CRITICAL STUDY OF "IN THE BAZAARS OF HYDERABAD"

Text In The Bazaars of Hyderabad

What do you sell, O ye merchants? Richly your wares are displayed, Turbans of crimson and silver,
Tunics of purple brocade,

Mirrors with panels of amber, Daggers with handles of jade. What do you weigh, O ye vendors? Saffron,
lentil and rice.

What do you grind, O ye maidens? Sandalwood, henna and spice.

What do you call, O ye pedlars? Chessmen and ivory dice.

What do you make, O ye goldsmiths?

Wristlet and anklet and ring, Bells for the feet of blue pigeons, Frail as a dragon-fly's wing, Girdles of gold for the dancers, Scabbards of gold for the king.

What do you cry, O fruitmen? Citron, pomegranate and plum. What do you play, O ye musicians? Sitar, Sarangi and drum.

What do you chant, O magicians? Spells for the aeons to come.

What do you weave, O ye flower-girls? With tassels of azure and red?

Crowns for the brow of a bridegroom, Chaplets to garland his bed,

Sheets of white blossoms new-gathered To perfume the sleep of the dead.

Critical appreciation of "In The Bazaars of Hyderabad"

In this poem Sarojini Naidu describes the magnificent things of life along with common scenes in the bazaars of Hyderabad; the poem is set in the form of conversation between customers and vendors. Naidu has repeatedly asked questions in every stanza about the different kinds of goods sold in the bazaar. Naidu presents the scene of the music produced by traditional instruments played by the musicians and the chantings of the magicians, the various fruits being sold by the fruit-men, the weighing of saffron, lentils and rice by the vendors, and other depictions of different wares which are sold in the bazaar. The poet has used vibrant rhymes to describe the magnificence of the bazaars and the products sold.

Folklore is one of the central subjects in the poetry of Naidu. In The Bazaars of Hyderabad is associated with one such subject, the charm and enthusiasm of a traditional Indian bazaar in the city of Hyderabad is presented in this poem. Naidu had enthusiastically described the Bazaar with merchants and vendors selling diverse range of wares. The poet stops over at the galleries arranged by the merchants, traders, hawker, goldsmiths, fruit sellers, musicians and flower girls. The poet describes the experience of conversation between the seller and the buyer; here the poet questions the sellers about what they are selling and who in turn politely answer while explaining their products. Emotional moods are stirred by the poet, when Naidu makes the readers feel that the bazaar life also witnesses both sorrows and joys. Wedding and festival occasions brings joy in the Bazaar's life when people buy jewelry, garlands, fruits and children crowding near the magicians. The sorrow and sadness is witnessed when common public kitchens are

arranged when the noble's or soldiers dies and when flower girls are seen weaving masses of white flowers to be used for the dead people's grave.

Another theme in the poem is the Swadeshi movement, though not specifically mentioned in the poem. The poem was written during the Indian independence movement. Through the poem, Naidu encourages the Indians to buy goods from their traditional bazaars and she urges the country men to take part in the Swadeshi movement and boycott all foreign goods

The poet has used vibrant senses of human body to describe the majesty of the Hyderabad traditional bazaar. Visual depiction is described by the use of lively colors such as silver, crimson, purple, amber, blue, azure, red and white. Aural depiction is created through the melody of the sitar, the sarangi, the drums and the chanting of the magical spells by the magicians. Olfactory senses are stimulated through the use of the fragrances describing sandalwood, henna and the smell of flowers. Gustatory depiction is created through the portrayal of the fruits like lemons, pomegranates, plums and principal Hyderabad food such as lentils and rice. In the last, the palpable imagery is produced by the bells made for the pigeons.

Summary of the poem

In the start of the poem the poet questions with the merchants in the bazaar about what they are selling, to which the merchants answered that they are selling silver and crimson colored turbans, purple brocade tunics, mirrors framed in amber and daggers with handles made of jade. The first stanza ends there.

In the second stanza the poet moves to another stall and asked the same question to the vendor about what they are weighing to sell, Saffron, lentils and rice replied the vendors. The poet put her next question to maidens what they are grinding and she gets a reply that they are grinding henna, sandalwood and spices, In the end of the stanza poet questions the hawkers about what they are selling and they reply dice made from ivory for chessmen.

The poet moves to a jewelry shop in the third stanza and asks the goldsmith what ornaments they manufacture. They reply; necklace, wristlets, anklets rings, and continued to say that, they also make bells for blue pigeons that are tied to their feet. The bells are as delicate as a dragonfly's wing. Simultaneously they make gold girdles for dancers and casings for noble's and soldiers to keep their swords.

In the fourth stanza, the poet visits a fruit shop. There she enquires about what they are selling. They reply we sell lemon, pomegranate and plum. Then the musicians are asked what they play and they say sitar, sarangi and drums are played. The poet even comes across magicians and asks them what they are chanting and they say that they are chanting magical spells to charm thousand ages to come.

The final stanza is about the flower girls who are asked what they are weaving with strands of colourful flowers. The flower girls answer that they are making garlands for bride and groom to be decorated during wedding night. Alternately they also weave sheets of white flowers which are placed on graves for fragrance purposes.

Self-Assessment Questions

Describe Sarojini Naidu as a poetess?

Give the critical appreciation of Indian Weavers?

Give the summary of night of Indian Weavers?

Give the critical appreciation In The Bazars of Hyderabad?

Give the summary of In The Bazars of Hyderabad?

CONCLUSION

Sarojini Naidu is a prominent figure in pre-independence Indian English poetry. She is considered to be a dreamer, born in a dreamless age and an ardent, versatile and dynamic genius unsurpassable for her sweet and melodious songs which are unsurpassed in the entire range of Indian English poetry as a magnificent and colourful album of Indian life. Indianness is an interesting aspect of the poetry of Sarojini Naidu.

The India that Sarojini Naidu has presented in her poems is a land of beauty and merriment. The Yorkshire Post reviewer admires her poetry in the following manner:

“Mrs. Naidu has not only enriched our language, but has enabled us to grow into intimate relation with the spirit, the emotions and glamour of the East.”

ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Refer to the discussion given at 2.4

Refer to the discussion given at 2.5.2

Refer to the discussion given at 2.5.3

Refer to the discussion given at 2.6.2

Refer to the discussion given at 2.6.3

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

Discuss Sarojini Naidu as a poet in your own words.
Critically analyze the poem 'In the Bazaars of Hyderabad'.
Discuss the use of Symbolism in the poem 'Indian Weavers'.

UNIT 3 NISSIM EZEKIEL:

“Night of the Scorpion”, “Poet, Lover and Birdwatcher”

Introduction

Objectives

Nissim Ezekiel: Life and Works

Ezekiel as a Poet

Critical Study of “Night of the Scorpion”

Text

Critical appreciation of “Night of the Scorpion”

Summary of the Poem

Critical Study of “Poet, Lover & Bird Watcher”

3.6.1 Text

Critical appreciation of “Poet, Lover & Bird Watcher”

Summary of the Poem

Conclusion

Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

References

Terminal and Model Questions

INTRODUCTION

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the most towering figures in Indian English poetry. His poetry is many faceted, and it has certainly enriched Indian English poetry and given a new dimension to it by extending its scope and its range. Commenting on Nissim Ezekiel's influence on Indian English poetry Bruce King observes:

Of the group of poets attempting to create a modern English poetry in India, Nissim Ezekiel soon emerged as a leader who advised others, set standards and created places of publication. His main significance is not, however, as a promoter of poetry, it is his will to be a poet, his continuing involvement in the poetry scene and the ways in which the developing body of his work express his personal quest for a satisfactory way of living in the modern world.

Ezekiel made poetry "Central to his life". While other wrote poems, he wrote poetry. Bruce King adds: "Ezekiel brought a sense of discipline, self criticism and mastery to Indian English poetry. He was the first Indian poet to have such a professional attitude." In all his works he stresses the centrality of man in the universe and prefers poetry of statement and purpose. He admires the American poetic traditions, "that can be traced back to Whitman. Its peculiar qualities belong to its time and place, a poetry of utmost freedom, informality and freshness which expresses directly its own independent sensibility. No organized theory no moral or social doctrine, no mask of reason or respectability, no imagist, symbolist or other technical imperative shapes." Ezekiel poetry fulfills this qualification of poetic composition and in this respect he is a linear in Indian English poetry.

OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit you will have a clear picture of:

Concept of Ezekiel as a poet

An analysis of some of the major poems

Critical evaluation of "Night of the Scorpion" and "Poet, Lover and Birdwatcher"

NISSIM EZEKIEL LIFE AND WORKS

Ezekiel was born in 1924 in Bombay of Jewish parents (Bene-Israel) both devoted to education. His parents influenced him very much. His father was the principal of

several colleges in the latter part of his life. He was a rational, questioning and had an immaculate taste for proverbs and homespun wisdom. Ezekiel inherited from his father lover for proverbs and homespun wisdom which runs deep in his poetry. His mother was also the principal of a school started and runs by herself for over thirty years.

Teaching passed into his blood. Ezekiel has taught at school, at college and at university. He is primarily a teacher both in life and poetry. Gieve Patel comments:

When he conducts programmes on art appreciation for Bombay television, he teaches. When he sits in his industry office at the Indian P.E.N. as its most active office bearer, reading quantities of other people's poems and giving comments on them- thereby earning lifelong friends and enemies- he is teaching again. When he writes poetry he teaches, this time largely himself. In all these contexts the pedagogic bone is relieved, even subverted by self-directed irony, subdued passion, and simple, direct concern for what's at hand.

When Ezekiel was an undergraduate he came under the influence of M.N. Ray and was an active member of the Radical Democratic party until 1947. He took his Master's degree in English literature in 1947. He went to England in 1948 and studied philosophy at Birbeck College under C.E.M. Joad. Ezekiel has been a man of varied interests. He has been manager of a well-known advertising firm in the fifties, manager of the Chemould a picture frame manufacturing company for a year. In 1952 he even worked as deck scrubber and coal-carrier on an English Cargo Ship to earn his passage home from England.

Ezekiel won lasting renown in literature. His profession as a teacher of English literature for a number of years at Bombay University shaped his literary personality. In 1964 he was visiting Professor at the University of Leeds. He edited Quest, Imprint and six issues of Poetry India. A renowned critic of arts and literature Ezekiel conducted a course in art appreciation of J.J. School of Art and other institutions. He has also remained Director, Theatre Unit, Bombay. One of the front-rank poets in the Indian English tradition he has published six collections of his verse. O.U.P. has brought out in one volume published in 1989, collected poems of Ezekiel from 1952 to 1988. Besides writing poetry, Ezekiel has edited many books, including The Emerson Reader, A Martin Luther King Reader and Writing in India. He has also edited the Indian P.E.N. Ezekiel has visited England and USA. He has won distinguished honours for his poetry.

Ezekiel is passed away on Jan 12, 2004 and is survived by three children, a son and two daughters.

Ezekiel's poetry collection consists of A Time to Change (1952), Sixty Poems (1953), The Third (1959), The Unfinished Man (1960), The Exact Name (1965), Hymns in Darkness (1976) and Latter Day Psalms. In all his poems he leaves the

impression of an urban poet, the poet of the great metropolis-Bombay, where he was born and where he has been living since birth. Bombay haunts his imagination:
Barbaric city sick with slums, Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged, Processions led by frantic drums
A million purgatorial lanes, And child like masses many tongued,
Whose wages are in words and crumbs.

A GENERAL ESTIMATE OF EZEKIEL AS A POET

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the most notable poets in the Indian English tradition, who has published six collection of verse. His poems have appeared in several journals and he is well represented in many anthologies. He is the most versatile poet in the country. He experiments endlessly with form and craft. In his best poetry form and craft are deftly fused together. Versatility is the outstanding characteristic of Ezekiel's poetry. Linda Hesse says: "He is a poet of the city, Bombay, a poet of the body, and an endless explorer of the labyrinths of the mind, the devious delving and twisting of the ego, and the ceaseless attempt of man and poet to define himself and to find through all the myth and maze a way of honesty and love." What distinguishes his poetry is the note of informality and frankness the authenticity of expressions and flawless craftsmanship.

Indian Sensibility:

Ezekiel's entire poetry is suffused with Indianness. His commitment to India and to Bombay which is his chosen home is total. In his famous poem "Background Casually", he clearly reveals his commitment to and attachment with India:

The Indian landscape rears my eyes I have become a part of it
To be observed by foreigners They say that I am singular, Their letters overstate the case.
I have made my commitments now This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves In some remote and backward place My backward place is where I
am

Ezekiel says that the major themes of his poetry are “Love, personal integration, the Indian contemporary scene, modern urban life, spiritual values.”

Ezekiel’s poetry is closely related with his environment. His roots lie deep in India. Ezekiel has graphically painted in vivid picturesque words and phrases a vast gallery of portraits representing various Indian professions and ways of life. How pitiable is Dhanya, a typical Indian beggar:

His old slain

is like the ground on which he sleeps so, also his rags

Ezekiel, Thus, succeeds in creating the authentic atmosphere of the place by the peculiar flavour of language. As you have seen the acceptance of the Indian reality is an important characteristic of Ezekiel’s poetry.

Martial, Family and Human Relationship:

Ezekiel is a poet of ordinary human situations and common human relationships. He has composed some very fine poems out of common and ordinary characters and situations. Ezekiel has centred his attention most on family relationship- the interaction between the poet and his immediate family-wife, children and parents. No Indian English poet has written so nicely on family relationship as Ezekiel. Family life is the source from which one derives warm humanism and compassion for all. His family poems are pervaded with gently humour, wit and irony.

Marriage, the most enduring of all human relationships finds a prominent place in his poetry. In “Marriage” the poet describes how in the first stage the newly married lovers feel ecstasy:

Lovers, when they marry face Eternity with touching race Complacment at being fated Never to be separated

Thus, you can see Ezekiel’s family poems are conspicuous for frankness, humour and irony. He conceals nothing. There is a confessional note in them and they reveal the growth of his outlook and personality.

Alienation and Search for Identity:

Born in a Bene-Israel family which migrated to India generations ago, Ezekiel is alienated from the cultural heritage of India. His famous poem “Background Casually” provides an attempt of cultural heritage of India. His famous poem “Background Casually” provides an example of cultural and social alienation:

My ancestors, among the castes, Were aliens crushing seed for bread
As a schoolboy he felt alienated among his classmates. He went to a Roman Catholic School
A mugging Jew among the wolves They told me I had killed the Christ
He was an alien among both Muslims and Hindus. Ezekiel once said, "My background makes me a natural outsider: circumstances and decisions relate me to India." At the same time the poet's alienation from his own minority religious ethos also appears to have begun quite early, as his confession in the following lines would indicate:

At home on Friday nights the prayers Were said. My morals had declined. I heard of yoga and of Zen.
Could I, perhaps, be rabbi saint? The more I searched the less I found
He went to England where the feeling of alienation haunted him. "How to feel at home, was the point."
The poet could not live with despair for long. He resigned to the existential reality and tried to identify himself with India. "My backward place is where I am."

Thus, you can see that as a poet Ezekiel tries to explore his identity in a rural India, where he finds reality in "the eyes of supple innocence." In some of his finest poems- "In the Country Cottage", "Poverty Poem", "Night of the Scorpion" and "In India"- Ezekiel tries to strike roots in the reality which is the meaningful centre of Indian Life. He also explores his self in contemporary Indian realities.

Symbols and Images:

Ezekiel uses symbols and imagery in strictly functional sense and not for decoration. Through his symbols and images he makes the abstract concrete. In "Enterprise" journey symbolizes journey of life and it also stands for the voyage into one's inner self, the voyage of self-exploration "Home" symbolizes the place where one lives, as also one's inner self. "Night of the Scorpion" is symbolic juxtaposition of the forces of darkness and light. Darkness gives way to evil in the form of scorpion:

Ten hours

of steady rain had driven him to crawl beneath a sack of rice parting with his poison flash
of diabolic tall in the dark room

He risked the rain again.

The continuous rain stands for hope and regeneration. But the evil, having fulfilled its part, departs. Other hurdles come in:

More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours more insects, and the endless rain

My mother twisted through and through groaning on a mat.

The ever recurring images in Ezekiel's poetry are woman, the city and the nature. He weaves a number of associative images around these key images.

Now you can understand that Ezekiel has been a kind of law giver to the young poets writing in the Indian English tradition. He has taught them to avoid sentimentality, looseness of structure and abstract sublimities which all seem to be peculiarly Indian traits.

CRITICAL STUDY OF "NIGHT OF THE SCORPION"

Text

I remember the night my mother was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours of steady rain had driven him to crawl beneath a sack of rice.

Parting with his poison - flash
of diabolic tail in the dark room - he risked the rain again.

The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the name of God a hundred times to paralyse the Evil One.

With candles and with lanterns throwing giant scorpion shadows on the mud-baked walls
they searched for him: he was not found. They clicked their tongues.
With every movement that the scorpion made his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said.
May he sit still, they said

May the sins of your previous birth be burned away tonight, they said.
May your suffering decrease
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.
May the sum of all evil balanced in this unreal world against the sum of good
become diminished by your pain.
May the poison purify your flesh
of desire, and your spirit of ambition, they said, and they sat around
on the floor with my mother in the centre, the peace of understanding on each face.
More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours, more insects, and the endless rain.
My mother twisted through and through, groaning on a mat.
My father, sceptic, rationalist, trying every curse and blessing, powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.
He even poured a little paraffin
upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.
I watched the flame feeding on my mother.
I watched the holy man perform his rites to tame the poison with an incantation.
After twenty hours it lost its sting.
My mother only said
Thank God the scorpion picked on me And spared my children.

Critical Appreciation of “Night of the Scorpion”

‘Night of the Scorpion’, published in *The Exact Name* in 1965 is one of the finest poems of Ezekiel. It has been highly admired as a flawless piece of poetic composition. In it Ezekiel gives to the narrative dramatic intensity, a beauty of imagery and a musical subtlety, and richness such as Indian Poetry in English has rarely known in its recent history. This poem shows that Ezekiel is a typical Indian poet whose interest in the Indian soil and in ordinary human events of day-to-day Indian life is superb.

‘Night of the Scorpion’ is a brilliant narrative poem. The protagonist might be the poet himself or an imagined person who speaks in the first person. The mother is

stung by a scorpion one rainy night. The mother occupies a prominent place in Indian home. All love and respect her. So all members of the family and neighbours are very anxious to bring her quick relief:

The peasants came like swarms of flies

and buzzed the name of God a hundred times to paralyse the Evil one.

They are simple and well-intentioned people who believe in the efficacy of prayer. Prayer can ward off the evil influence.

The poet also throws light on Indian superstitions. They search for the scorpion but all in vain. They are simple and ignorant people who believe that if the scorpion moves, its poison will also move in the mother's blood. The following lines reveal how superstitious they are:

With every movement that the scorpion made his poison moved in mother's blood, they said may he sit still, they said.

May the sins of your previous birth be burned away tonight, they said May your suffering decrease the misfortune of your next birth they said

The rationalist and skeptical father tries "every curse and blessing, powder, mixture, herb and hybrid." Ezekiel ironically juxtaposes the world of magic, superstition, irrationality and blind faith, represented by the simple peasants with the world of science, rationalism and skepticism represented by the father. But the situational irony is that both the traditional, superstitious way and modern scientific way are equally futile and vain. The mother suffers intense agony for full twenty hours when the pain automatically subsides.

The last three lines from an ironic contrast to the whole: My mother only said

Thank God the scorpion picked on me and spared my children

The mother who has suffered intense physical agony for twenty hours is happy that none of her children has been bitten. The poet highlights the self-effacing lore of an Indian mother in the lines quoted above. P.M. Chacko writes: "The poets' objective observation of the scene of agony, which has much affinity with his father's rationalism, puts him to shame and makes him remorseful when he hears his mother's utterance which goes beyond the fragile façade of rationality. While admiring the mother loves concern for her children, he confesses his failure to offer her even a semblance of it." Ezekiel also shows the warmth of human relationship

in this poem. The inter-relationship between the domestic tragedy and the surrounding community is unobtrusively established.

Without distinguishing “Night of the Scorpion” is the juxtaposition of the forces of darkness and light that is intrinsically centripetal in the poem. The title itself “Night of the Scorpion” is suggestive of evil. The word “night” stands as a symbol of darkness along with the ‘scorpion’ which suggests evil. Evil gives suffering. As the scorpion-poison moves in the mother’s blood, her suffering increases. Evil is active in darkness. It is in the darkness of the night that the evil, symbolized in the scorpion, enters the mother’s body through the bite. Evil has always been associated with darkness in human psyche. Suffering is a sort of purgation that helps in removing that darker patch in human mind. The patch that has always been a besetting sin of our existence:

May the sum of evil Balanced in this unreal world Against the sum of good

Become diminished by your pain, they said

The superstitious and unenlightened peasants are aware of the forces of darkness and evil, and they are in search of catharsis through suffering.

The two symbols of darkness and light have been systematically developed in the poem. These two symbols are juxtaposed the very beginning, and as the poem advances, the poet builds upon it the whole structure of his fascinating architecture.

Ten hours

Of steady rain had driven him To crawl beneath a sack of rice Parting with his poison flash

Of the diabolic tail in the dark room

He risked the rain again

Ezekiel uses simple, conversational language in “Night of the Scorpion.” The repetitive vocabulary is employed to highlight the crises, as it is understood by the simple peasants:

With every movement that the scorpion made His poison moved in mother’s blood, they said May he sit still, they said

May the sins of your previous birth Be burned away tonight, they said May our suffering decrease

The misfortunes of your next birth, they said

“They said” has been repeated four times in the lines quoted above. These two worlds form the choric refrain in this poem and have an ironic implication. The poet

has to emphasize the indomitable force of darkness gripping the minds of the superstitious and unenlightened farmers. The repetition of “more” in “more candles, more lanterns, more neighbours/more insects” conveys the idea of indefinite and excessive numbers.

The imagery is vivid, sensitive and suggestive, for example Parting with his poison-flash
Of diabolic tail in the dark room He risked the rain again

An
d

The peasants came like swarms of flies
And buzzed the name of God a hundred times To paralyzes the Evil one

An With candles and with lanterns Throwing giant scorpion shadows On the sun baked walls
d

The poet observes complete objectivity and detachment throughout the poem. He withholds his own emotional outburst throughout the poem. He withholds his own emotional outburst so that we may dispassionately understand the peasant’s world of superstitions juxtaposed against his father’s world of skepticism and rationalism. The two opposite worlds are placed in ironical juxtaposition in the following lines:

My father, skeptic, rationalist, Trying every curse and blessing Powder, mixture, herb and hybrid He even poured a little paraffin
upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.

Christopher Wiseman highly admires ‘Night of the Scorpion’ for technical innovations and excellence: “The poem demonstrates deliberate attempt at formal innovation by using a loose, seemingly free verse narrative structure. IT is much more relaxed and open worked the Ezekiel’s formal poetry, with a new quality of natural colloquialism in diction and tone. We notice in the poem the abandonment of capitals at the start of each line, the dramatic casualness of the recalled crises, the long paragraph set off abruptly from the three-line climax, all of which give the ‘Night of the Scorpion’ a new feel, a sense of unhurried lucid progression through time. It is an interesting and very valid poem, containing a fascinating tension between personal crisis and mocking social observation but the discrepancies of from confuse the tone which swings, between the natural and colloquial reporting

of experience and more removed literacy formality. And yet, for all the problems, a real voice is heard in this poem, with its own rhythms and cadences.

Summary of 'Night of the Scorpion'

The poet of 'Night of the Scorpion' is Nissim Ezekiel who narrates this poem by remembering his childhood when his mother was bitten by a scorpion. He says that the continuous rain for ten hours had driven the scorpion into the house, where it crawled beneath a sack of rice. In the dark room, when his mother entered, the scorpion parted the poison into her toe in fraction of seconds and probably went out again.

The peasants of the village collected in their house in large numbers like the swarms of flies and buzzed God's name about hundred times, praying to stop the movements of the scorpion, as they believed that with every movement of the scorpion, the poison would move in the mother's blood. So, with the candles and lanterns, they even searched their house to paralyze the evil scorpion. But he was not found.

The shadows they formed on the wall, too appeared a scorpion to the poet. The villagers prayed that the scorpion stops and the sins of mother's previous birth gets washed away that night or her sufferings might decrease the misfortunes of her next birth. They said this way the sums of evil might get balanced in this unreal world. They called the world unreal as everything in this world is temporary and births and deaths keep occurring in a cycle.

They even prayed to god that the poison purifies her flesh. They sat around the mother groaning in pain. There was peace o understanding on each face as they felt that she had approached her end. The condition was becoming very messy as more neighbours were entering the house with more candles and lanterns; the insects were also increasing and the rain too continued.

The poet's father being a skeptic and rationalist person tried powders, mixtures and herbs to cure the mother. However, he also tried prayers and blessings as it was a very problematic situation He poured some paraffin upon the bitten toe and burnt it. The priest was also performing his rites to tame the poison. Finally, after twenty hours, the sting was lost. The mother, after getting cured, thanked god that the scorpion picked her and spared her children.

CRITICAL STUDY OF 'POET, LOVER, BIRDWATCHER'

Text Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher

To force the pace and never to be still is not the way of those who study birds
or women. The best poets wait for words. The hunt is not an exercise of will
But patient love relaxing on a hill
To note the movement of a timid wing; Until the one who knows that she is loved No longer waits but
risks surrendering - In this the poet finds his moral proved Who never spoke before his spirit moved.
The slow movement seems, somehow, to say much more. To watch the rarer birds, you have to go
Along deserted lanes and where the rivers flow In silence near the source, or by a shore Remote and
thorny like the heart's dark floor. And there the women slowly turn around,
Not only flesh and bone but myths of light With darkness at the core, and sense is found But poets lost in
crooked, restless flight,
The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight.

Critical appreciation of "Poet, Lover & Bird Watcher"

"Poet, Lover, Bird Watcher" is one of the Ezekiel's finest poems. It is "a wonderfully orchestrated poem, the tone becoming impassioned and exultant as the feelings rise to the crescendo." In this beautiful poem Ezekiel expresses his views on the art of poetry through vivid and beautiful images. I.N. Kher remarks: "The poem reveals the nature of poetic perception through the network of a highly fecund metaphor in which the images merge into each other like lovers in the art of love. The poet or the bird watcher begins by defining the mood in which all those who study birds or women must place themselves birds or women symbolize freedom, imagination, love and creativity. A posture of stillness is recommended, because it is in stillness that one listens to the stirring of the soul, a necessary pre-requisite to the study of freedom and creativity that is why the best poets wait for words from the centre of stillness before they articulate their experiences."

In the first stanza Ezekiel strikes a parallel between the poet, the lover and the birdwatcher. The poet deftly brings together his two pet themes, poetry and love, along with his comparatively new found enthusiasm for bird watching. So, the poem has become a wonderful synthesis of all that Ezekiel has loved best in life. All three- the poet, the lover and the bird-watcher have on thin in common that is, to watch the movement and wait patiently:

To force the pace and never to be still Is not the way those who study birds
Or women. The best poet waits for words The hunt is not an exercise of will
But patient love relaxing on a hill
To note the movement of timid wing

The bird watcher has to wait patiently, the movement of the fluttering wings of the bird, the lover, has to observe patiently the calm and dignified movement of the beloved, and the poet has to wait for the right moment when inspiration dawns on him and right words spontaneously come to him. At the end this patient wait, the poetic word appears in the concrete and sensuous form of a woman, “who knows that she is loved”, and who surrenders to her lover at once.

In this analogy

... the poet finds his moral proved,

Who never spoke before his spirit moved

In this poetry, love and bird watching, word, woman and bird become interrelated.

“Bird-beloved-poem syndrome runs through the Lyric.”

The slow movement in the three cases is rewarding. The bird-watcher is rewarded when the bird is suddenly caught in the net, the lover is rewarded when the beloved gladly surrenders and the patient poet gets inspiration to compose a fine piece of poetry. It is all the more rewarding. In order to watch the rarer birds the bird watcher has to go “along deserted lanes and where the river flow in silence near the sources or by a shore”, the lover has to explore love in a remote place like the heart’s dark floor where “the women slowly turn around, not only flesh and bone but myths of light.” The poet passing through remote, crooked and zigzag paths of his psyche and consciousness, attains enlightenment and inspiration, and words occur to them which take the shape of poetry which has power to activate the senses and make men see and hear much more than he could have otherwise done.

Ezekiel says:

.....and sense is found

By poets lost in crooked, restless flight The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight

The imagery in this poem is vivid and striking. C. Paul Verghese writes: “What is striking about the use of images in this poem is that the transition from one image to the other is so unobtrusive that the poet, lover and bird watcher lose their separate identities for once and merge into one another to carry the poem forward to its end.” In this lyric the literal and the symbolic merge and become undistinguishable. The worlds, “patient love relaxing on a hill/ to note the movement of a timid wing” are

literal when applied to the bird-watcher but become a wonderful symbol for the poets' wait for the right worlds and the right images or the lover's wait for the moment when the beloved will turn to him. Birds turn into worlds, the remote shore to which the birdwatcher goes to "watch the rearer birds "turn into "the heart's dark floor where the poet looks for themes and images.

To watch the rearer birds, you have to go Along deserted lanes and where the rivers flow In silence near the source, or by a shore

Remote and thorny like the heart's dark floor And there the women slowly turn around Not only flesh and bone but myths of light

It is one of the most celebrated poems of Ezekiel. It is based on "iambic pentameter lines in closely rhymed ten-line stanzas." The beautiful and well worked images, which are evocative and suggestive work, as we have seen, on three interpenetrating levels.

Summary of "Poet, Lover & Bird Watcher"

"Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher" is a popular poem, much anthologized and studied. It embodies the poet's search for a poetics, which would help him redeem himself in his eyes and in the eyes of God. The message of the poem is clear, 'The best poets wait for words': the best poets begin to write poetry only when they are truly inspired or when they experience a moment of illumination or enlightenment, only then do the right poetic words come to them. This waiting is not so simple. The poet cannot while away his time, but like the careful birdwatcher, has to remain ever alert. The gift of poetry comes at the cost of eternal vigil. The poets have to remain poised in that state of tension. 'To force the pace' is to compel oneself to make haste. 'Never to be still' is never to remain motionless, but to be always on the move. 'Or women' are of those who study women and those who pursue the women they love.

'The hunt' is the search for birds or the desire to win a woman's heart. 'Patient love relaxing on a hill' is to assume an attitude of patience and relaxation while watching birds or women. 'A timid wing' is a transferred epithet where the idea of a bird being timid is suggested. 'Until the one who knows that she is loved' is for the man to wait for the woman to respond to his love out of her own accord, and should not force himself upon her. 'In this the poet finds his moral proved, Who never spoke before his spirit moved': In the examples of the bird watcher and the lover, the poet would find the right parallels and would be able to draw a moral for his own guidance. The poet's view that waiting patiently ultimately brings its reward is vindicated.

The ‘deserted lanes’ are the untrodden pathways where one can see rare birds. ‘Remote and thorny like the hearts dark floor’ is the simile used obscurely and probably means the unexplored depths of human heart, just as there may be faraway and distant seashores with thorny bushes that are inhabited by rare birds. The idea of labour and hard-work is implied here with regard to a bird watcher in search of rare birds and to a poet in search of the right words. ‘And there the women slowly turn around, Not only flesh and bone but myths of light’: Only after undergoing an arduous journey may the lover get some response from the woman. The woman then becomes for him not just a being of flesh and blood, but appears as a radiant spirit which is not so much real, but mythical and imaginary. She is no longer a mere physical presence. The poet has Thus, glorified love as well as the woman who eventually responds to a man’s love.

‘With darkness at the core’ is the center of the woman’s personality which is shrouded in darkness even after she has been transformed into a radiant spirit; she still continues to be a mystery or an enigma. ‘And sense is found By poets lost in crooked, restless flight’ refers to the poets find meaning and significance in things even when they have been puzzled and perplexed earlier, like a bird which has lost its way; this illumination comes only after patiently waiting for the right moment. A third element which is that of love is also introduced in the poem. Courtship, bird watching and poetry, Thus, become related. In each case, the attitude that is recommended is of passive alertness, not of anxiety, hurry, aggression, or hyper-activity. The more one is agitated, the less one gains. The one who is loved is not pursued like a quarry, but watched with such intensity and patience that she ultimately risks surrendering. There is no action, no exercise of will, in a poet, a lover, or a birdwatcher, but patient waiting itself a strategy in order to achieve the goal.

Self-Assessment Questions

Describe Ezekiel as a poet?

Give the critical appreciation of night of the scorpion?

Give the summary of night of the scorpion?

Give the critical appreciation poet, lover and bird watcher?

Give the summary of poet, lover and bird watcher?

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Ezekiel is not only a good poet in the post-Independence India, but also a cause of good poetry in others. He has opened a new era and trend in Indian English poetry. He is the pioneer and father of modernity in Indian English poetry.

There are many contemporary Indian English poets who voyage along the path Ezekiel has opened.

ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Refer to the discussion given at 3.4.
Refer to the discussion given at 3.5.2.
Refer to the discussion given at 3.5.3
Refer to the discussion given at 3.6.2
Refer to the discussion given at 3.6.

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

Give an estimate of Nissim Ezekiel as a poet in your own words.
What is the central theme of the poem "Night of the Scorpion"?
Critically analyze the poem "Poet, Lover and Birdwatcher".

UNIT 4 KAMALA DAS:

“My Grandmother’s House”, “The Sunshine Cat”

Introduction

Objectives

Kamala Das: Life and Works

Kamala Das as a Poet

Critical Study of “My Grandmother’s House”

Text

Critical appreciation of “My Grandmother’s House”

Summary of the poem

Critical Study of “The Sunshine Cat”

Text

Critical appreciation of “The Sunshine Cat”

Summary of the poem

4.7.Conclusion

4.8.Answers to Self-Assessment-Questions 4.9.References

4.10. Terminal and Model Questions

INTRODUCTION

Kamala Das is the pioneer who gave clear, frank and straight forward expression to feminine sensibility in all its varied manifestations. In this respect she enjoys a high place in Indian English poetry. Her poetic output is very slender and consists of only three volumes- Summer in Calcutta, The Descendants and The Old Playhouse and Other Poems. Kamala Das has shown the way to the women poets in India as far as the candid, unsentimental and uninhibited expression of love, sex, emotional disintegration in marital relationship, disillusionments and frustrations are concerned. Her poetry is confessional and autobiographical. She expresses in her poetry and her famous autobiography, entitled, MY Story, about her own frustrations and failures in a male-dominated world, and show how she tried to maintain her individuality and feminine identity and how from this rebellion issued all her troubles, frustrations and psychological traumas. She herself says: “I must let my mind striptease/I must exude autobiography”. An analysis of her poetry will enable us to understand her poetic art and the main themes of her poetry.

OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit you will have a clear picture of:

Concept of Kamala Das as a poetess.

An analysis of some of the major poems.

Critical evaluation of My Grandmother’s House and The Sunshine Cat

KAMALA DAS: LIFE AND WORKS

Kamala Das, the singer of feminine sensibility in Indian English poetry, was born in Southern Malabar on March 31, 1934. She is the daughter of the famous Malayali poetess, Balamani Almma. Her parents were poets, so poetry is in her blood. Her maiden name was Madhavi kutty. She was educated mainly at home and was denied the privilege of regular school and college education. Her grandmother who is lovingly remembered in “A Hot Noon in Malabar” and “My Grandmother’s House” loved her deeply. At the age of fifteen she was married to K. Madhava Das. She could not find emotional fulfillment in marriage, which according to her is a male dominated institution. Her frustrations, want of love and sufferings are frankly and sincerely

expressed in several of her poems and her autobiography *My Story*. She craves for love which has been conspicuous by its absence in her married life:

..... I see you go away from me

And feel the loss of love I never once received (“The Sea Shore”)

In “An Introduction” Kamala Das writes about her interest in English and also discusses her rebellious nature. She is proud of her Indian heritage.

Despite disillusionment and frustration in married life, Kamala Das resigned to her fate and lived with her husband. She has three children.

Kamala Das is a bilingual poet who writes in her native Malayalam and English with equal ease, mastery and command. Her poetic output consists of three volumes of poetry- *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967) and *The Old Playhouse* (1974). Her poems have appeared in prestigious magazines and journals-*Young Commonwealth Poets 65*, *New Writing in India*, *Commonwealth Poems of Today*. She is represented in many anthologies including *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English* and *Ten Twentieth Century Poets*. Her autobiography, *My Story*, has been translated into fourteen international languages. She has published various books, especially short story collections in Malayalam, under the pseudonym Madhavi Kutty.

Kamala Das stormed into popularity with the publication of *Summer in Calcutta* in 1965. She won the Asian P.E. N. Poetry Prize, 1964 for her poem “The Sirens”. She was awarded the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award for fiction in 1969. She was also awarded The Chimanlal Award for Fearless Journalism. She was the poetry editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* for one year.

Kamala Das’s poetry is characterized by frankness, clarity and openness. Devendra Kohli writes: “Courage and honesty are the strength of Kamala Das character and her poetry, and the courage lies in not able to assert in the face of it that in the final analysis one has no regrets and that one has lived beautifully in this beautiful world”. Her poems and numerous essays- “I studied All Men”, “What Women Expect Out of Marriage and what they Get”, “Why not More Than One Husband”, *I have Lived Beautifully* “ etc. have left the impression about Kamala Das as “feminine but forthright, unconventional but honest, ebullient but sad, impetuous but insecure”.

She has been contributing to various journals and magazines including *Opinion*, *Debonair*, *Poetry East and West*, *Imprint*, *Femina*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Love and Friendship*, *Eve’s Weekly*, *Weekly Round Table*, etc.

At present, Kamala Das, an old poetess, is a disturbed woman. The iconoclast in her is still very strong and still generates anger and rebellion, as she did in her youthful writings, at the growing cult of violence, degeneration of humanity,

devaluation of values, rampant corruption and dirty politics. She angrily remarks. “I am not for saving mankind. Is it worth saving?” I think it is time we make way for another breed on earth. May be a breed of cockroaches that can resist the DDT”.

Recently she has shifted from her palatial bungalow in Thiruvananthapuram to a small flat in Kochi on her son's request. In an interview, she gave to The Times of India, (April 24, 1993) she frankly and freely expressed her views on various aspects. She condemned bitterly the modern day politics which has led the country astray. She says that we cannot say that we are free when we have taken loans that cannot be paid back by generations. Our industry is strangled and indigenous products are being choked in the market.

She says: “As a human creature, I feel I am worthless. We are also devalued like the rupee. Who has got value?” She does not believe that our glorious tradition would help us to lead better lives despite its many plus points. She says: “Tradition, ideology, customs and beliefs that have gone beyond the expiry date should be discarded. She hates communal hatred and tensions. She believes in the unity of mankind. She says: “I had looked after two Muslim children. It was an emotional experiment. I wanted to know whether I could love them. And I could”.

She exults at the thought of being called “Mother” by the new generation: “Firstly I am a mother. I don't want temples and gods. I take my children as their substitutes.” To be born an Indian is the greatest boon to her.

Kamala Das still writes. She thinks that literatures becoming junk but she will not stop writing.

KAMALA DAS AS A POET

Kamala Das, who has published only three slender Volumes of poetry, *Summer in Calcutta*, *The Descendants* and *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*, has stabilized her reputation as the *femme fatale* of Indian English poetry. In her poetry we find the best expression of feminine sensibility. Being a woman and wife, she has a minute and thorough knowledge of feminine sensibility, its exploitation, its hurts, its anguishes and its suppression in a male dominated society. So her poetry is confessional and autobiographical to a great extent but at times she universalizes what is personal. K.N. Daruwalla remarks: “In a manner Kamala Das has shown the way to the women poets in India”. He again says: “A writer of undoubted talent. Kamala Das was an instant success with the publication of *Summer in Calcutta*, her first and the best book so far. The intensity of feeling ably controlled in her better poems, and the uninhibited manner in which she treated sex, immediately won for her a big audience.

Feminine Sensibility and Rebellion:

Kamala Das is a singer of feminine sensibility and rebels against the conventions and restraints of society, which are meant to exploit womankind in a manmade world. K.R. S. Iyengar writes: "Kamala Das is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely manmade world". In her poetry she is intensely conscious of herself as a woman. Her vision is vitally particularized by woman's point of view. Men do not see women as women but as objects or playthings. She says

... these men who call me Beautiful, not seeing
Me with eyes but with hands

Kamala Das's feminine sensibility craves for fulfillment in love. She is deeply hurt when love is denied to her. More sexual union, devoid of love, tries and sickens her:

Who can

Help us who have lived so long And have failed in love?

Kamala Das rebels against the exploitation of women in a male oriented world. She is aware of her femininity and asserts it in poem after poem. She is a social rebel who opposes all conventions, traditions and accepted norms of society. Her failure to realize fulfillment in love and security and her sexual exploitation, imposed on her by the time honored institutions of marriage, disillusionment and frustrations turned her into a social rebel. She has been unconventional both in her life and poetry. In her own life she sees the reflection of the entire suffering womanhood. She, thus, generalizes the particular. She is every woman:

It is I who laugh, it is I who make love And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,

I am saint. I am the beloved and the Betrayed.

Kamala Das's poetry is a frank and straight forward expression of feminine sensibility. She violated "the chiseled, systematic and traditional norms and values and she affirms to a form of life which is characterized by the unconventional and extremely modern point of view."

Disease, Sickness, Decay and Death:

The poetry of Kamala Das also shows concern for disease, sickness, decay and death. There is an all-pervading feeling of loneliness and incompleteness. The

poetess feels that “loneliness is eternal” and what “we are born with great hollows that need to be filled, for us to feel to be complete.”

The burden of convention-ridden life and domesticity, dull routine, loveless sexual bouts, non-fulfillment of love and subsequent frustrations and disillusionments cost a melancholy shadow over her poetry and make her think Indian poets in English.

About decay and death:

The following lines from “The Testing of Sirens” reveal Kamala Das intense feeling of loneliness and disillusionment:

Shut my eyes, but inside eyelids, there was Nor more night, no more love or peace, only The white sun burning, burning, burning... Ah, why does love come to me like pain Again and again and again

In ‘The Sunshine Cat’ the poetess shows how she pined away in secret grief, became lean and thin, merely a shadow of her former self. She became cold and half dead. Her youth and beauty decayed and she was no longer of any use to men. “The invitation” contains death wish. She feels like “lying on a funeral pyre/with a burning head”. In “The Looking Glass” she shows how a women’s body, whose emotional fulfillment is denied prematurely grows old and decrypt.

The Confessional Mode:

Kamala Das poetry is confessional, KRS Iyengar remarks: “Her confessional poetry has been compare with that of Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Judith Wright. Her long “Composition” is a sustained exercise in self exposure....” The poetess herself says:

I also know that by confession By feeling off my layers

I reach closer to the soul... I shall someday see

My world de-fleshed, de-veined, de-blooded....

Like other confessional poets- Nissim Ezekiel and A.K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das makes her own life, her personal emotional experiences, disillusionment and frustrations, the centre of her poetry. A confessional poet usually gives the psychological equivalents of his mental state in poetry. We get such psychological equivalents in the poetry of Kamala Das. As a true confessional poetess she exhibits with remarkable frankness, the wrongs, injustice and humiliations that she suffered in the male oriented world. Sexual humiliation and exploitation as we have already discussed, is one of the main them in her poetry. Her poetry records her experiences

and struggles she had to undergo in order to maintain her identity. People instructed her not to use English but she vehemently asserted her personality and choice by discarding all suggestions put to her:

I am an Indian, very brown, born in Malabar, I speak three languages, write in

Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said English is not your tongue. Why not leave me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins, Everyone of you? Why not let me speak in Any language I like? The language I speak is All mine, mine alone.

Thus, you can see, almost all her poems are confessional. Confessional poetry is autobiographical. Kamala Das poetry reveals her experiences, her anguishes and her frustrations. It is a mirror of her life. Kamala Das always deal with private humiliations and sufferings which are the stock themes of confessional poetry.

Language, Diction and Style:

Kamala Das shows remarkable command and ease over the use of English and has cultivated a style that is characterized by a colloquial simplicity and clarity. Words effortlessly come to her and she spontaneously begins to write when emotions come to her. Since English is most familiar to her, she naturally and skillfully uses it to express her emotions, her feelings, her reminiscences, her love and sexual experiences, her frustrations and disillusionments. In her case "style is the man". English authentically mirrors her life. She writes in "An Introduction":

The language I speak

Becomes my mine, its distortions, its queerness All mine, mine alone. It is half English

Half Indian, funny perhaps, but is honest, It is human as I am human don't you see?

Kamala Das has cultivated a poetic style- conversational, colloquial, fluent and graceful, which fits in the confessional nature of her poetry. Her diction has nothing to do with mystical and philosophical musing or religious chants. She does not compose poems of love or nature. She writes only about herself. So she imparts a personal touch to words. Mark the simplicity and colloquial ease in the diction in the following extracts which express her intense emotions:

When you leave, I drive my blue battered car Along the blue sea. I run up the forty

Noisy steps to knock at another's door, Through peep holes the neighbours watch They watch me come

And go like rain.

Thus, you can understand that Kamala Das poetic style is personal- or style which garbs her emotions. Her diction is commonplace. She does not wait for words.

Imagery and Symbolism

Imagery and symbols in Kamala Das poetry are suggestive and functional. They are not mere decorations. Her images are drawn from the familiar and the commonplace, and they poetically reveal the poetess own life. Her unfulfilled love, lusts and sexual bouts, agony and anguish, sterility and inner vacuity, sadness, disease, sickness and death wish are expressed through the images of human body, sun and heart, burial and cremation, nature, sleep and the myth of Radha and Krishna.

In “An Introduction”, the poetess writes of “the incoherent mutterings of the blazing pyre”. Night, air, water, earth, fire etc. are also used as images and symbols for corruption, sterility and lustfulness. The sea image, standing for retreat from male oriented world and suicide wish recurs in “The Invitation”, “Composition” etc.

Images in Kamala Das poetry reflect sterility, unproductively and fertility of lustfulness. Her famous poem “Jaisurya” is an exception in this respect. The images of rain, darkness womb and blood symbolize creativity, hope, regeneration and fulfillment:

Out of a mire of moonless night was He horn, Jaisurya, my son, and out of

The wrong is born the right and out of night The sun drenched golden day

The deft use of Radha-Krishna and Krishna-Mirabai legends provides a mythical framework to extramarital sex in Kamala Das’ poetry. These mythical personages recur as symbols to sanctify the quest of women in her poems for emotional fulfillment outside marriage.

CRITICAL STUDY OF “MY GRANDMOTHER’S HOUSE”

Text

There is a house now far away where once I received love..... That woman died,
The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved Among books, I was then too young

To read, and my blood turned cold like the moon
How often I think of going
There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or Just listen to the frozen air,
Or in wild despair, pick an armful of Darkness to bring it here to lie
Behind my bedroom door like a brooding Dog...you cannot believe, darling,
Can you, that I lived in such a house and Was proud, and loved.... I who have lost My way and beg now
at strangers' doors to Receive love, at least in small change?

Critical Appreciation of "My Grandmother's House"

'My Grandmother's House', published in 1965 in Calcutta, expresses the poet's nostalgic mood. She remembers passionately her family home in Malabar where she spent some years of her early life in the affectionate and sheltering care of her grandmother. She loved the poetess most. Kamala Das spent some happiest years of her life in her grandmother's company. The old family house and the grandmother are closely identified. She remembers the family house and the grandmother in this admirable lyric.

The poetess has gone to live in a different city, quite far from grandmother's home. But she wishfully remembers the family home where she lived as a girl, and her grandmother who showered love and affection on her. The past cannot be relieved. So, the poetess is sad and melancholy. Her heart is choked with the intensity of emotions. Kamala Das vividly recalls her grandmother and the day she died. When she died, even the great house shared the grief. The house comes to life. It is bestowed with individuality. The house symbolizes collectively all the members of the family. The poetess was very young at that time. There were a large number of books in the house, which seemed to be repulsive and horrible like snakes. The grandmother's death shocked her. She became cold and pale like the moon. Even "the House withdrew", this is a highly poetic and suggestive expression which implies that the house was so stunned by her death that it is no longer wanted to stay there.

The poetess passionately yearns to go to the great house and to look once again through their windows which are "blind". The house is now entirely deserted and no one can look through the windows. She longs to sit there by herself and to listen to the dreary music of blowing cold winter winds, which would revive memories of her dear, dead Grandmother. She wants to articulate her intense grief once again.

The "window" image in this poem is very remarkable and suggestive. It suggests a link between the past and the present. It also underlies the languishing desire of the

poetess for a sentient peep into her past and resurrections of her dreams and desires. At the end of her visit to the old family home she would like to return to her new home in a distant. Far off place, but he sad and painful memories of the bygone days would accompany her. The ellipses (dots) reveal the intensity of her grief.

The poetess got love from her grandmother in her girlhood. Now she yearns for love and begs it even from strangers, but fails to get it. She is hungry of love. Unfortunately nobody fills her heart with the life-nourishing emotion of love.

The Grandmothers' House is a symbolic retreat for the poetess to a world of innocence; purity; love and simplicity form a world of corruption, sterility, exploitation and cunningness. It is a sanctuary of love which is conspicuous by its absence in the harsh world of reality.

Summary

The poem is a reminiscence of the poetess' grandmother and their ancestral home at Malabar in Kerala. Her memory of love she received from her grandmother is associated with the image of her ancestral home, where she had passed some of the happiest days of her life, and where her old grandmother had showered her love and affection. With the death of her grandmother the house withdrew into silence. When her grandmother died, even the house seemed to share her grief, which is poignantly expressed in the phrase "the House withdrew". The house soon became desolate and snakes crawled among books. Her blood became cold like the moon because there was none to love her the way she wanted. The poetess now lives in another city, a long distance away from her grandmother's house. But the memories of her ancestral house make her sad. She is almost heart-broken. The intensity of her emotions is shown by the ellipses in the form of a few dots. Now, in another city, living another life, she longs to go back. She understands that she cannot reclaim the past but she wants to go back home, look once again through its windows and bring back a handful of darkness – sad and painful memories, which she would have made her constant companion, to keep as a reminder of her past happiness.

CRITICAL STUDY OF "THE SUNSHINE CAT"

Text

They did this to her, the men who know her, the man She loved, who loved her not enough, being selfish
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor Used her, but was a ruthless watcher, and the band
Of cynics she turned to, clinging to their chests where

New hair sprouted like great-winged moths, burrowing her Face into their smells and their young lusts to forget

To forget, oh, to forget, and, they said, each of Them, I do not love, I cannot love, it is not

In my nature to love, but I can be kind to you. They let her slide from pegs of sanity into

A bed made soft with tears, and she lay there weeping, For sleep had lost its use. I shall build walls with tears, She said, walls to shut me in. Her husband shut her

In, every morning, locked her in a room of books With a streak of sunshine lying near the door like A yellow cat to keep her company, but soon Winter came, and one day while locking her in, he Noticed that the cat of sunshine was only a

Line, a half-thin line, and in the evening when He returned to take her out, she was a cold and Half dead woman, now of no use at all to men.

Critical Appreciation of “The Sunshine Cat”

‘The Sunshine Cat’ is a poem in the confessional mode. It was published in Summer in Calcutta in 1965. Her poetry is an authentic recordation of her personal humiliations and sufferings. K.N. Daruwalla writes about Kamala Das’ poetry: “Kamala Das is preeminently a poet of love and pain, one stalking the other through a near-neurotic world. There is an all pervasive sense of hurt throughout. Love, the lazy animal hungers of the flesh, hurt and humiliations are the warp and woof of her poetic fabric. She seldom ventures outside this personal world.” This poem is concerned with the theme of sexual humiliation and exploitation the poetess had to suffer.

‘The Sunshine Cat’ narrates the pathetic story of a woman who suffered much sexual humiliation in her life and could never seek emotional fulfillment with any of the men with whom she had physical contact. Her husband as well as other men with whom she had intimate contacts used her sexually but none of them loved her. She loved one of them but he too was only interested in exploiting her sexually and did not respond to her love. Her husband too was mean and callous like others. He too did not love her but indulged in sex with her. He was a “ruthless watcher”. He kept watch on her and cut down her freedom of movement. But he could not prevent her from turning to other men and having intimate physical relations with them. She hungered for love but all of them refused to love her. All of them were equally lustful. Consequently the woman in her suffered much. She was so disgusted with all of them that she wanted to wipe out even their memories- their shameless lusts, their smells and the ugly hair on their chest. The repetition “to forget oh! to forget”

the voices the intensity of her desire to forget all humiliations she had suffered. The remembrance of these humiliations caused her much spiritual sufferings. She seemed to be losing her sanity.

The woman wanted to isolate herself from the piercing eyes of the world. She was confined to the prison of domestic life that her husband had built around her. She remained confined to a room full of books, where her only companion was a streak of light which seemed to her disturbed eyes to be a yellow cat. She was forced to play the conventional role of a wife within the four walls of her house. She thought herself to be “a yellow creature” of her heated imagination.

She gradually pined away. Her beauty and youth prematurely vanished. Such is the life of a woman in a male dominated world. She is a mere nobody, an object of sheer sexual enjoyment. This lyric beautifully reveals the inner vacuity in a woman’s life through apt images.

Summary

In the poem ‘The Sunshine Cat’, the poetess rants over the disillusionment in her yearning for love. The ones who took advantage of her emotional instability are termed as ‘men’ in general this so-called community inevitably included her husband too. He turned out to be a mere objective observer without any emotional attachment. Being selfish he did not exhibit the slightest display of love. And, being cowardly he did not dare to give in sexually to her, for it would mark the relegation of his ego: his perspective of masculinity. He was a relentless onlooker to the extent of being insensitive for he watched her encounters with other men like a carnival affair.

In the case of the poetess in the prescribed poem, the husband jails her in a room full of books. However, Kamala Das does not crave for intellectual company, but emotional companionship. She seeks solace in the streak of sunlight beneath the door. This is her ray of hope: her Sunshine Cat: the sunny impulse in her. Nevertheless, as her life approached its winter, her husband notices her while locking her, one day that this streak had reduced to a thin line. The evening made him realize that she had mellowed down, partly due to age and partly owing to her despondency. The fire in her (evocative of the Sunshine Cat) had died away. Hence, she was of no use to any man; as though the sole purpose of the woman in a man's life is for sexual gratification.

Self-Assessment Questions

Describe Kamala Das as a poet.

Give the critical appreciation of “My Grandmother’s House”.

Give the summary of “My Grandmother’s House”.

Give the critical appreciation of “The Sunshine Cat”.

Give the summary of “The Sunshine Cat”.

CONCLUSION

Kamala Das is a great original poetess who directed the path of women poets in modern Indian English poetry. The charge of obscenity and obsession with sex is baseless because being a confessional poet she articulates her own emotions. In exploring personal relationships, Kamala Das broods and always the eye is focused on pathos of her two predicaments. When she steers clear of self pity and exhibitionism, she is profoundly moving, and the loneliness and despair come through.

ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT-QUESTIONS

Refer to the discussion given at 4.4
Refer to the discussion given at 4.5.2
Refer to the discussion given at 4.5.3
Refer to the discussion given at 4.6.2
Refer to the discussion given at 4.6.3

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

Discuss the poetic achievements of Kamala Das in your own words.
Write a note on symbolism and imagery used in the poems of Kamala Das.
Summarize the poem “My Grandmother’s House” in your own words.

UNIT 5 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: ‘SONNET 65’, ‘SONNET 116’

Introduction

Objectives

William Shakespeare: Life and Career

What is a Sonnet?

Sonnet No. 65: “Since Brass, Nor Stone, Nor Earth, Nor Boundless Sea”

Summary of the Poem

Line-Wise Annotation

Critical Appreciation of the Poem

Paraphrase

Analysis

Sonnet No. 116: “Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds”

: Summary of the Poem

: Line-Wise Annotation

: Critical Appreciation of the Poem

Paraphrase

Analysis

Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

References

Terminal and Model Questions

INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare is considered as one of the best poets in English Literature. No study of English Literature could be termed as complete without reading and understanding Shakespearean sonnets. In this Unit, you will go through two of the total 154 sonnets written by Shakespeare and you will definitely have an idea of the greatness of Shakespeare as a poet. Besides understanding Shakespearean Sonnets, it is equally important to have an idea of Sonnet as a form of English poetry. William Shakespeare is treated as one of the greatest playwrights in the history of world literature. He wrote 37 plays. But as we are mainly concerned with two of the Shakespearean sonnets in this Unit, we will confine our study to these sonnets only. Shakespearean sonnets are thought to be autobiographical; and it is believed that in these sonnets, he has expressed his love and feelings for a youth known as the 'Fair Youth' and a lady known as 'Dark Lady'. This is the reason why William Wordsworth feels that "with this key Shakespeare unlocked his heart".

OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, you will learn about:

The life and career of William Shakespeare.

Sonnet as a form of English Poetry.

Development of Sonnet from Italian Poet Petrarch to the modern age.

Two sonnets, i.e., Sonnet No. 65 and Sonnet No. 116 out of the total 154 sonnets written by William Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's concept of 'True Love'.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: LIFE AND CAREER

William Shakespeare was born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden Shakespeare at Stratford-on-Avon, situated about 94 miles away from London, on 23rd April, 1564. He was the third child among the seven children of his parents. His father was a prominent and rich trader of the town. Not much is known about Shakespeare's youth, but it is presumed that he studied at the Stratford Grammar School where he learnt "small Latin and less Greek". As his father's financial position deteriorated when William Shakespeare was only a fourteen-year-old boy, he had to discontinue his studies. Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway on 27th November, 1582 at a very young age of 18. His wife was 26 at the time of the marriage. The very next year on 26th May, 1583 a girl child, Susanna, was born to them and two years later in 1585, the twins Hamnet and Judith were born.

After the birth of his children and with his father's gradually shrinking income, Shakespeare was forced to leave the town and seek some job in London. London at that time was not only a home for craftsmen, businessmen, and merchants, but it was also a centre of dramatic performances that were held there on regular basis. The renowned theatres at that time were: The Theatre, Curtain, Globe, Rose, Swan, Blackfriars, and a host of others. In London, Shakespeare started his career as an actor, poet, and playwright. He joined one of the most successful acting troupes in London 'The Lord Chamberlain's Men'. The troupe continued performing plays in the theatre called 'The Theatre' until 1599 when the troupe built its own theatre which came to be known as 'The Globe'. After James I was enthroned in 1603, the troupe was designated by him as the 'King's Men' or 'King's Company'.

Shakespeare continued working with the troupe for another ten years. By the time, Shakespeare was recognized as a great Playwright and most of his plays were performed in the major theatres of London. By virtue of his plays, he became prosperous enough to purchase the Great House known as 'New Place' in Stratford. Shakespeare died on 23rd April, 1616 at the age of 52.

Generally, critics do not agree to many facts about Shakespeare's life and career and they differ in views when it comes to deciding as to which of his works was published first, thus, no chronology of his works is considered as correct, but, it is, generally, agreed that he started writing sonnets first. Broadly, Shakespeare's literary life has been divided by the critics into four periods. The first period from 1585 to 1594, the second from 1594 to 1600, the third from 1600 to 1608, and the fourth from 1608 to 1612. In the first period, Shakespeare is supposed to have written as many as 26 sonnets and an Envoy, and perhaps 7 plays, namely, Henry VI (Part I, II, and III), Richard III, Titus Andronicus, Comedy of Errors, and Taming of the Shrew. He also wrote two long poems Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece during this period.

In the second period, he is presumed to have written 15 plays, some of which were comedies, such as Love's Labour's Lost, As You Like It and Twelfth Night. Some of them were tragedies, like, Romeo and Juliet and some histories, like, Richard II, King John, Henry IV (Part I and II), and Julius Caesar. It is also assumed that this was the period when Shakespeare produced most of his sonnets, i.e., from sonnet 28 to sonnet 154. His sonnets are supposed to be dedicated to a youth known as the 'Fair Youth', and a lady known as 'Dark Lady'.

In the third period, Shakespeare produced tragedies and some dark romances as well. The major tragedies produced during this period were: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth. These four tragedies enhanced his reputation as a playwright and he became famous. Some critics regard these tragedies as one of the greatest tragedies that have ever been written in the history of English literature. Some of the dark comedies produced during the period were: All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, and Troilus and Cressida. This was the period when

Shakespeare gained recognition as a great playwright and his plays won him name and fame.

In the fourth period, Shakespeare wrote Antony and Cleopatra, Pericles, Coriolanus, and Henry VIII. His collection of sonnets was also published during this period in 1609. William Wordsworth feels about these sonnets that “with this key Shakespeare unlocked his heart”.

In the last phase of his career, Shakespeare is supposed to return to the theme of love once again. It is believed that he wrote three plays towards the end of his literary career, these were: Cymbeline, The Winter’s Tale, and The Tempest.

WHAT IS A SONNET?

Sonnet is, generally, a 14-line poem or lyric written in iambic pentameter which follows a certain rhyme-scheme. The term ‘sonnet’ is derived from the Italian word sonnetto which means a ‘little song’. Italian poet Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374) is known as the father of Sonnet, as he was the first poet to assign Sonnet a proper form and style. Petrarch developed an eight-line stanza known as ‘Octave’ followed by a six-line stanza known as ‘Sestet’ with rhyme-scheme abba, abba for octave and cde, cde for sestet. His sonnets are supposed to be dedicated to a lady named Laura, he is supposed to have fallen in love with her.

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503 - 1542) in the Sixteenth century during his journey to France, Spain, and Italy as an ambassador read some of the sonnets there and was so impressed with them that he not only adopted sonnet as a form of poetry, but also translated some of the Petrarchan sonnets. It is he, who introduced sonnet-form into English poetry. He along with Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey popularised sonnets in English literature. While Sir Thomas Wyatt followed Petrarchan style of sonnets, Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey (1517-1547), who is also known to have introduced blank verse into English literature in his translation of Virgil’s Aeneid, developed and created a new style, which, later on, came to be known as English Sonnet. He divided sonnets into three quatrains followed by a heroic couplet with a certain rhyme-scheme, i.e., abab, cdcd, efef, and gg. They, initially, circulated their sonnets in manuscripts only, but, later on, their sonnets were published in Richard Tottel’s Songes and Sonnettes also popularly known as Tottel’s Miscellany in 1557. Sir Philip Sidney’s Astrophel and Stella (1591) also gained widespread popularity and it also accelerated the pace of sonnet-writing in English literature. The most significant advancement in the development of sonnet came with the adoption of sonnet-form by William Shakespeare and John Milton. They soon became the chief exponents of Sonnet in English literature. It was their greatness as sonneteers that the Sonnet in England, later on, came to be known as ‘English

Sonnet’ or ‘Shakespearean Sonnet’ and ‘Miltonic Sonnet’. Shakespeare on the one hand, followed the style developed by Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey and, likewise, divided sonnets into three quatrains followed by a rhyming-couplet with rhyme-scheme abab, cdcd, efef, and gg, and on the other hand, John Milton followed the pattern of octave and sestet with rhyme-scheme abba, abba for ‘octave’ and cde, cde for ‘sestet’.

You must have understood, by now, that William Shakespeare and John Milton were the greatest exponents of sonnets in England, so Sonnet in English literature came to be known as ‘English Sonnet’ or ‘Shakespearean Sonnet’ and ‘Miltonic Sonnet’. It must also be kept in mind that the general theme of sonnets written during the Elizabethan Age was ‘Love’.

Edmund Spenser (1552-1599), one of the best poets of the Elizabethan Age (1558-1603) also wrote sonnets, but he invented his own form and rhyme-scheme which was a b a b b c b c c d c d e e.

Sonnet as a form of poetry kept on gaining popularity even after the Elizabethan age and is practiced even today by the modern poets. Poets like George Meredith, Robert Frost, E.E. Cummings, Pablo Neruda, Ernest Hilbert, and many others wrote sonnets in the Modern Age; but as we are, primarily, concerned here with Shakespearean Sonnets, it is better for us to confine our study to Shakespearean Sonnets only.

Self-Assessment Questions I

Briefly trace the development of Sonnet from Petrarch to the Modern Age.

What is the basic difference between ‘Shakespearean Sonnet’ and ‘Miltonic Sonnet’?

SONNET NO. 65

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea, But sad mortality o’ersways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea, Whose action is no stronger than a flower? O! how shall
summer’s honey breath hold out Against the wrackful siege of battering days, When rocks impregnable
are not so stout

Nor gates of steel so strong but Time decays? O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall Time’s best jewel from Time’s chest lie hid? Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back? Or
who his spoil of beauty can forbid?

O! none, unless this miracle have might-

That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

Summary of the Poem

The poem starts with Shakespeare describing the transient nature of the mortal world which is sure to come to an end with the passage of time. He starts the sonnet by asking a question that since even long-lasting objects, like, brass, stone, earth, and boundless sea cannot survive or sustain forever, how can a very delicate and fragile thing like beauty last or survive for long or escape from the rage or power of Time? He further asks as to how the summer's sweet breath shall withstand the damaging grip of time. Even summer season is not everlasting, rather, it also diminishes very shortly and the new season replaces it. When time decays even the invulnerable rocks and iron gates, how can time's best jewel, i.e., poet's love, the Fair Youth, be hidden from the obliteration of time? He is frightened by the very idea of losing his love, so he addresses this thought as a 'frightening thought!' and asks further as to where could time's best jewel, the Fair Youth, be hidden from the devastation of Time? What strong hand can hold Time's swift foot back? Time is so powerful that none in the world can escape from the damaging grip of fearful time. Time destroys everything and nobody can stop it from spoiling and destroying the beauty. The poet feels that none other than his verse can prove to be miraculous enough to save 'Fair Youth' from the devastating grip of time and his love may eternally shine bright only in the black ink of his poetry.

Line -Wise Annotation

Line 1. brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea: Brass and stone are the supposed to be long-lasting objects; similarly, earth and boundless sea are also long-lasting and are supposed to last for the longest duration of time.

boundless: endless; limitless.

Line 2. sad mortality: Mortality is responsible for causing sadness, so it is termed as 'sad mortality'. It is this very 'sad mortality' that 'o'ersways their power' thereby meaning that it possesses more power than brass, stone, earth, and boundless sea.

o'ersways: Rule against; override.

power: Authority; control; supremacy; influence.

Line 3. this rage: 'This rage' connotes the anger, wrath or fury of Time, as it spares none in the world and every object and living being on earth is subject to destruction and death.

beauty hold a plea: How can beauty withstand the fury of time and put forth its plea before the time or can ask to be spared from the devastation of time?

plea: Appeal; petition.

Line 4. Whose: Beauty's.

action is no stronger than a flower: The strength of beauty is compared with that of a flower. Both are supposed to be powerless, as they cannot withstand the ruins of time and are supposed to be easily destroyed.

Line 5. Summer's honey breath: The mild, fragrant summer-breeze which carries the scent of flowers thereby making it honey-like. Summer is personified here.

hold out: Endure; stand firm.

Line 6. wrackful: Ruinous and devastative; wreckful. The word 'siege' is suggestive of the act of seizure during warfare. The days are battering, as they are supposed to tread everything down.

battering days: Pounding or hammering days.

Line 7. rocks impregnable: Rocks are impregnable or invulnerable, but time can overpower them.

impregnable: Something that cannot be penetrated.

stout: Solid; corpulent.

Line 8. Nor gates of steel so strong: Even gates made up of steel are not strong enough to stop time from causing devastation.

but Time decays: Even steel gates are decayed by time.

Line 9. fearful: That causes fear; dreadful; frightful; fearsome.

meditation: Thought; contemplation.

alack: Miserable; sad.

Line 10. Time's best jewel: The most valued thing in the world, i.e., the poet's love.

Time's chest: Time's chest holding everything that it takes away from the world.

Line 11. what strong hand can hold his swift foot back: Who is there in the world who can hold the swiftly-moving foot of Time and stop the destruction caused by it.

his: Of Time. Time is personified here.

swift foot: Swiftly-moving foot.

Line 12. spoil: Ruin.

forbid: Stop.

Line 13. O! none: Nobody can stop Time from moving swiftly and ruining the world and taking it swiftly to the doomsday.

miracle: Marvel; amazing thing.

might: Power; capability.

Line 14. in black ink: Written in black ink.

my love: Poet's love, the Fair Youth. The black ink stands in sharp contrast with the brightness of the poet's love which enhances it.

shine bright: Shine brightly.

CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE POEM

Paraphrase

Quatrain 1

Shakespeare starts the sonnet by asking a question that since even long-lasting objects, like, brass, stone, earth, and boundless sea cannot survive or sustain forever, how can a very delicate and fragile thing like beauty last or survive for long? He feels that it is the 'sad mortality' that 'o'ersways their power' thereby meaning that 'mortality' is more powerful than brass, stone, earth, and boundless sea and these things cannot survive against the devastation of time for a long duration of time and 'Time' will certainly override them. Time's rage spares none in the world and every object and living being on earth is subject to destruction and death. The strength of beauty is not more than that of a flower. Both are supposed to be powerless, as they cannot withstand the ruins of time and are supposed to be easily destroyed.

Quatrain 2

Even the mild, fragrant summer-breeze, which carries the scent of flowers thereby making it honey-like, cannot survive for long against the wreckful grip of the pounding days. So, the beautiful flowers and sweet fragrance of the summer days also cannot survive forever and these are also sure to decay with the passage of time. When impregnable rocks and steel gates are not strong enough to resist the destruction caused by the time, how can a fragile and weak thing like beauty can stop time from causing devastation and destruction? Summer is personified in these lines and the metaphor of the act of capturing of a city is also apparent.

Quatrain 3

The fear or apprehension of the poet becomes evident in these lines and he feels that even his love Fair Youth cannot be spared by time and he will also die someday. This very thought fills him with terrible fear. He feels that even the best jewel of time, the Fair Youth, will have to enter the chest or coffin of time. The poet also knows that none in the world can be strong enough to hold the swiftly-moving foot

of time. He also asks as to who can forbid time from spoiling the beauty and he himself supposes that none in the world can do so.

Couplet

The poem concludes with poet's affirmation that none can stop time from causing devastation and destruction, for he considers 'Time' to be the most powerful in the world. But he believes and says that it is only in his mighty and miraculous verses written in black ink that the Fair Youth can shine brightly forever. He, thus, establishes the supremacy of poetry over all material things in the world. He feels that it is only poetry which can withstand the devastation of time and his love will also shine eternally in his verses.

Analysis

Sonnet no. 65, like most of the Shakespearean sonnets, establishes the supremacy of verses over all other objects of the world. In most of his sonnets, he feels that it is only poetry that is everlasting and his poetry written for the 'Fair Youth' will last forever. He believes that his immortal verses can immortalize his love. He feels that it is only verses or poetry that will last forever and everything save these verses will be destroyed by time. This very idea is expressed in this sonnet also. He feels that his love will also survive and shine brightly in his verses written in black ink. He starts the sonnet by asking a question that since even long-lasting objects, like, brass, stone, earth, and boundless sea cannot survive or sustain forever, how can a very delicate and fragile thing like beauty last or survive for a longer duration of time? He is aware of the sad fact that every object and being on earth is subject to destruction and death, in fact, the world itself is transient in nature, so he says that the 'sad mortality', 'o'ersways their power' thereby meaning that the 'sad mortality' is more powerful than brass, stone, earth, and boundless sea and it will override them. Time's rage spares none in the world. He feels that the strength of beauty is not more than that of a flower; and as both of them are supposed to be powerless and fragile, they cannot withstand the ruins of time and are supposed to be easily destroyed. In the second quatrain, Shakespeare moves on with his earlier statement and reinforces it by adding that even the mild, fragrant summer-breeze, which carries the scent of flowers and makes it honey-like, cannot survive for a longer duration of time against the wreckful grip of the pounding days. So, beautiful flowers and sweet fragrance, which are brought by the summer days, also, cannot survive forever and are sure to decay with the passage of time. He further adds that when even impregnable rocks and steel gates are not strong enough to resist the destruction caused by the time, how can a fragile and weak thing like beauty can stop time from causing devastation and destruction? Summer is personified in these

lines and the metaphor of the seizure or capturing of a city is also aptly described in these lines. In the third quatrain, the poet seems to be somewhat apprehensive and feels that even his love Fair Youth, who is also a part of this mortal world, cannot be spared by time and will also die some day. He addresses his love, the Fair Youth, as the best jewel of time and feels that he will also have to enter the chest or coffin of time. The poet feels that none in the world can be strong enough to hold the swiftly-moving foot of time. He also asks as to who can stop or forbid time from spoiling the beauty and he supposes that none in the world can do so. In the couplet, the poet feels that none can stop time from causing devastation and destruction. But he also thinks strongly that it is only in his mighty and miraculous verses written in black ink that the Fair Youth can shine brightly forever thereby establishing the supremacy of poetry over all material things in the world. The sonnet ends with a strong pronouncement that it is only poetry which can withstand the devastation of time and everything described in poetry will remain eternal.

This sonnet, like all other Shakespearean sonnets, is divided into three quatrains followed by a rhyming-couplet with rhyme-scheme abab, cdcd, efef, and gg. It is written in iambic pentameter, i.e., each line has five pairs of stressed and unstressed syllables thereby making it ten syllables in all.

Self-Assessment Questions II

Write a critical appreciation of the sonnet - 'Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea'.

How does Shakespeare establish the supremacy of verses over the mortal world?

SONNET NO. 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds Admit impediments. Love is not love Which alters when it alteration finds,

Or bends with the remover to remove. O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark

That looks on tempests and is never shaken; It is the star to every wandering bark,

Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken. Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks Within his bending sickle's compass come;

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Summary of the Poem

The poem starts with Shakespeare declaring that he will not allow himself to declare that true love has any impediments or obstacles; and further adds that love cannot be termed as 'true love', if it alters or changes when it finds any alteration or change either in the lovers or in the circumstances. Love is also not love if one of the love-partners wanders away, the other also tends to bend and does the same; or when others want them to be separated, they get separated. So, in the first quatrain, Shakespeare describes 'what is not love'. In the second quatrain, he describes love as an ever-fixed mark that never changes and remains unshaken even when it faces fierce tempests. Love is like the guiding-star to every wandering bark or ship that loses its way, whose worth or value cannot be known though its height can be measured. In the third quatrain, the poet says that love is not the toy of time, although rosy lips and cheeks fall prey to the bending sickle of time and are cut or rotted by the passage of time. Love does not change with the passing of short hours and weeks; rather it bears it out to the doomsday. In the couplet, the poet proclaims that if whatever he has said about love is proved to be wrong, he would feel that he never wrote anything and nobody ever loved in this world.

Line-Wise Annotation

Line 1: Marriage: Union; unification. marriage of true minds: Union of true lovers. true minds: The platonic or spiritual lovers. Line 2: Admit: Proclaim; accept. impediments: Hurdles; obstacles.

Line 3: Which alters: Which changes.

alteration: Change; difficulties.

finds: Faces.

Line 4: bends: Changes; proves disloyal towards his or her love.

remover: Someone, who tries to get the lovers separated.

with the remover to remove: Changes with the circumstances or situations.

Line 5: ever-fixed mark: A beacon that shows path to the wandering ships; a lighthouse.

Line 6: That looks on tempests: That faces the tempests.

is never shaken: Never yields to it; never bows to the tempests.

Line 7: It is the star: The Pole Star; the North Star. every wandering bark: Every ship that loses its way.
bark: Ship.

Line 8: unknown: Cannot be estimated.

although his height be taken: Though its height can be measured.

Line 9: Time's fool: A plaything of time.

though rosy lips and cheeks: Symbolizing physical beauty that is sure to decay with the passage of time.

Line 10: his: Time's. Time is personified here.

compass: Range.

bending sickle's compass come: Comes within the purview of Time's bending sickle which will decay or cut everything which comes within the sickle. The image of a Reaper cutting crops with a bending sickle is apparent.

Line 11: Love alters not: Love does not change.

with his brief hours and weeks: With brief hours and weeks of time.

Line 12: bears it out: Takes it to.

the edge of doom: To the edge of the Doomsday, when, every dead is supposed to come out of his or her grave and be present before the God, who will confer reward or punishment on them according to the merit decided on the basis of the work done by them during the course of their lifetime. The Fair Youth will also be there on the Doomsday.

Line 13: If this be error: If whatever I said about love is wrong.

and upon me proved: And is proved upon me.

Line 14: I never writ: I did never write anything.

Critical Appreciation of the Poem

Paraphrase

Quatrain 1:

The sonnet begins with the poet's declaration that he will not admit that there is any obstacle in the marriage or union of two of 'true minds', i.e., two truly spiritual lovers. Love is not love when it changes with the change in circumstances or when someone else wants it to be changed. If some situations arise when they are forced to change their course of love and they change it, their love cannot be termed as 'true love'.

Quatrain 2:

Shakespeare, in these lines, defines true love as an ever-fixed mark or a beacon that faces many-a-tempest but is never shaken. It faces all the tempests firmly and remains fixed and unmoved. True love is a star that guides every wandering ship that has lost its way. It is the Pole Star, which never changes its position in the sky and, thus, guides the wandering ships. Its worth cannot be known, though its height may be measured. The worth of the guiding Pole Star or North Star could be understood only by the ships that need it at the worst time when they have lost their directions and need some guidance to help them to find their way.

Quatrain 3:

In these lines, Shakespeare says that love is not Time's plaything or toy, although the symbols of physical beauty, i.e., the rosy lips and cheeks, are subject to decay, as they fall under the sway of time's bending sickle. Here, he has personified time as someone having a bending sickle and cutting everything that comes in its range. This very quatrain tells us about the difference between the material and spiritual world. He wants to say that the true or spiritual love is not subject to death; rather, it remains immortal; while physical beauty decays with the passage of time. He further adds that love does not change with the passage of time, but carries it out to the edge of doomsday, the day when all the dead will arise from their graves and appear before the Almighty, who will pronounce his judgment upon them according to the merit of the works done by them during the course of their lives.

Couplet:

The poem ends with Shakespeare proclaiming that if whatever he has said about love is proved wrong, he will assume that neither he has written any poetry ever, nor any of the men ever loved truly and faithfully on the earth. None can deny the fact that Shakespeare was a great poet and also that there remains the existence of 'true love' on earth, as men keep on falling in love ever since the existence of

human beings commenced on earth, thus, he wants to prove that whatever he has written about love is true and it cannot be proved as wrong.

Analysis

The sonnet describes the qualities of 'True Love' and Shakespeare feels that his concept of love defined in the sonnet cannot be proved wrong. In the beginning of the sonnet, Shakespeare defines 'what is not love'. He declares that he will not admit that there is any obstacle in the marriage or union of two 'true minds', i.e., two truly spiritual lovers. He moves further by saying that such love is not love as changes with the change in circumstances or when someone else wants it to be changed. If some situations arise when the lovers are forced to change their course of love and they change it, their love cannot be termed as 'true love'. So, at the very outset he makes it clear as to what are the qualities that should not be there in the 'true love'. In the second quatrain, Shakespeare defines true love as an ever-fixed mark or a beacon that faces many-a-tempest, but is never shaken. This metaphor gives his definition of love a wider meaning. He says that love faces all the tempests firmly and remains fixed and unmoved. True love, here, is compared to the North Star that guides every wandering ship that has lost its way. Love for the poet is the Pole-Star, which never changes its position in the sky and, thus, guides the wandering ships. Love's worth cannot be known, though its height may be measured. The worth of the guiding North Star or the Pole Star could be understood only by the ships that need it at the worst time when they have lost their directions and need some guide to help them find their way. So, he feels that 'True Love' guides the lovers through all the ups and downs of life and it never changes. It is always there to guide the lovers when they are led astray and are in great need of strength and support in their lives. Its worth can only be understood by the lovers, who find it always rescuing them in the most crucial and difficult times of their lives. In the third quatrain, Shakespeare says that love is not time's plaything or toy, although he admits that the symbols of physical beauty, i.e., the rosy lips and cheeks, are subject to decay, as they fall under the sway of Time's bending sickle. Here, the Poet has personified time as a Reaper holding, a bending sickle and cutting everything that comes in its range. This quatrain tells us about the difference between the material and spiritual world. He wants to say that the true or spiritual love is not subject to death; rather, it remains immortal and eternal; while physical beauty decays with the passage of time. He further adds that love does not change with the passage of time, but carries it through to the edge of doomsday, the day when all the dead will arise from their graves and appear before the Almighty, who will pronounce his judgment upon them according to the merit of the works done by them during the course of their lives. The sonnet ends with Shakespeare's declaration and a sort of challenge that whatever he has said about love, if it is proved to be wrong, he will assume that he never wrote anything and nobody ever loved in this world truly and faithfully. The fact remains that Shakespeare was a great poet and also that men on earth keep on falling in love irrespective of age and

era and, thus, there remains the existence of 'true love' on earth, so, he wants to affirm that whatever he has written about love is true and it cannot be proved as wrong.

This sonnet is also divided into three quatrains followed by a rhyming-couplet in the end. It is written in iambic pentameter, i.e., each line has five pairs of stressed and unstressed syllables thereby making it ten syllables in all. The rhyme-scheme of this sonnet is abab, cdcd, efef, and gg.

Self-Assessment Questions III

Write a critical appreciation of the sonnet - 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds'.

Enumerate the qualities of 'True Love' that have been described in the sonnet - 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds' by Shakespeare.

ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I

Refer to Section 5.4.

Refer to Section 5.4. II

Refer to Section 5.6.3.

Refer to Sections 5.6.3 and 5.6.4. III

Refer to Section 5.7.3.

Refer to Sections 5.7.3 and 5.7.4.

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

How has Shakespeare established the superiority of poetry over the material world in his sonnets?
Write a note on autobiographical elements in Shakespearean poetry.

UNIT 6 JOHN DONNE: ‘A VALEDICTION FORBIDDING MOURNING’, ‘THE CANONIZATION’

Introduction

Objectives

John Donne

“A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”

Development of Thought

Analyzing the Characters

The Speaker

His Wife

“The Canonization”

Development of Thought

Analyzing the Characters

The Speaker (Lover)

The Beloved

Style and Technique

Summing Up

Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

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Terminal and Model Questions

INTRODUCTION

John Donne, English poet, prose writer, and clergyman, is considered the greatest of the metaphysical poets and one of the greatest writers of love poetry. Donne is the founder of the Metaphysical school in England at about the beginning of the 17th century. The works of these poets are characterized by mysticism in content and fantasticality in form. In all of his poems there is a mystery. They are uneven, startling and fantastic. He threw style and all literary standards to the winds. His poems are included into two collections, Songs and Sonnets, which consists of his love poems, and Devotion Upon Emergent Occasions, which consists of his sacred verses. Donne's poetry had great influence on the poets of his times and the poets of later times. Donne's poetry involves a certain kind of argument, sometimes in rigid syllogistic form. In his poetry, Donne frequently applies conceits, i.e. extended metaphors involving dramatic contrasts. Donne's poems are characterized by mysticism in content and fantasticality in form. In all of his poems there is a mystery. They are uneven, startling and fantastic. He threw style and all literary standards to the winds. The poetry of Donne is characterized by complex imagery and irregularity of form. He frequently employed the conceit, an elaborate metaphor making striking syntheses of apparently unrelated objects or ideas. His intellectuality, introspection, and use of colloquial diction, seemingly unpoetic but always uniquely precise in meaning and connotation, make his poetry boldly divergent from the smooth, elegant verse of his day. The content of his love poetry, often both cynical and sensuous, represents a reaction against the sentimental Elizabethan sonnet. His literary features are original, witty, erudite, and often obscure, his style is characterized by a brilliant use of paradox, hyperbole, and imagery- all of his verse--his love sonnets and his religious and philosophical poems, the devotional poems and sermons. The present unit will take up two of the best poem of John Donne namely 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' and 'The Canonization'. In this unit an attempt has been made to cover all the areas of John Donne for which he is best 'known and thought' in the world. By the end of the unit you would feel mustering the courage about the concept of 'conceit' for which Donne is recognized. Besides you would also be familiar with the style and way by which Donne persuades his wife for not wailing and weeping and finally proves with examples that their love is not worldly and their physical separation stands nowhere.

OBJECTIVES

While passing through the reading process of the unit you must bear in your mind the following aims and objectives which are worthy to mention to make you able study:

About the 'metaphysical school of poetry'

About the difference between Sensual love and Platonic love

About Donne as a Metaphysical bard

About the real types of love- physical or spiritual

The present unit covers both Donne and his poem 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' and 'The Canonization'. Donne is the greatest among the 'metaphysical' poets and holds a place of honor among the great English poets. He, of course, did not originate the 'metaphysical' school of poetry, whose chief characteristics was 'conceit', but it was he who in England first gave it full expression and who was its first vigorous and effective and devoted spokesman. And this secures him a conspicuous position in the history of English Literature, when we remember how prevalent was the fashion of 'conceit' during the first half of the seventeenth century, and that amongst those who followed it more or less are to be mentioned, to say, nothing of the earlier poems of Milton and Walter and Dryden, Suckling, Denham, Herbert, Crashaw, Cleveland, Cowley. His strongest as well as his weakest point is his wit. It is this which at times gives him a position of humour among the poets of England and at other times, when done to excess, exposes him to ridicule.

JOHN DONNE (1572- 1631)

John Donne was a poet who made revolutionary changes in English poetry after Shakespeare. Donne was a brilliant intellectual who despised easy platitudes, and hackneyed expressions. He changed everything of the Elizabethan courtly love lyrics, its form and content, the style of expression, and most of all, the metaphor. He provoked a new generation with originality. And though that generation / school of poets called Metaphysical poets were forced to obscurity by the neo-classical critics, they have become the spirit of modern poetry since the 1920s. If we regard expression, word game and music as the basic elements of poetry, Donne replaced the meditative expression of Elizabethan lyric poetry with dramatic expression. He displaced the traditional of repeating elegant metaphors by the necessity of inventing original metaphors; and he introduced the use of the speech- like rhythm in place of the artificial, mellifluous music of fixed metrical patterns. He made poetry realistic, striking and concrete. The poet was no longer an imitator of polished expressions, but a real person expressing real emotion. Donne added the colloquial and personal expression, countering the cavalier formality and polish. He combined the 'violence' of personal emotion with the intellectual solemnity, stark realism with cunningly imaginative imagery, the head with the heart. He balanced emotion and intellect.

Donne was the chief among the Metaphysical poets. Referring his life and works, Long has observed in English Literature: 'The briefest outline of Donne's life

shows its intense human interest'. He was born in London, the son of a rich iron merchant. On his father's side he came from an old Welsh family, and on the mother's side from the Heywood and Sir Thomas Moor's family. Both families were Catholic. His poetry falls naturally into three divisions: 1) Amorist, 2) Metaphysical, 3) Satirical. The amorous work includes his earliest work and the mingling at times of sensuality and cynical wit. His metaphysical and satirical work bulks the most largely and towards the end of his life he wrote little verse, devoting his powers entirely to homiletically literature. In his entire works one finds a mystery, a hiding of some deep thing which the world would gladly know and share and which is suggested in his haunting little poem, 'The Undertaking':

I have done one braver thing Than all the worthiest did;

And yet a braver thence doth spring Which is, to keep that hid.

The main influence of Donne on English poetry was in the domain of love-poetry, satire and personal lyrics. In this connection Grierson has observed: 'The poet who challenged and broke the supremacy of the Petrarchan tradition was John Donne.' 'For evil or for good, Donne is the most shaping and determining influence that meets us in passing from the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries.' Beauty with him is never the paramount consideration. If beauty comes to Donne, it comes as to the alchemist, who glorifies his pregnant pot,

If by the way to him befall

Some odoriferous thing or medicinal.

Donne is one of the greatest of English love-poets. In fact among all the English love-poets he is the only complete amorist. His capacity for experience is unique, and his conscious as a writer towards every kind of it allows of no compromise in the duty of doing justice to each. The poetry of lust has never been written with more minute truth but then neither has the poetry of love transcending sex. Donne's poetry was singular, indeed. Though he began to write in 1593, but his poems were published after his death in 1631. Some of his early poems *Of the Progress of the Soul*, *Satires* and *Divine Poems* show the concern with religious studies that later led him to the Church. In his secular poems he completely rejected the various schools of poetry with their shopworn imagery and marked his own course, insisting on the working on the intellect. Donne loved to move from familiar to the obscure, from the material to the philosophical and the spiritual, leading Dryden to be called him 'metaphysical', a little later confirmed by Samuel Johnson. Modern poets have been greatly influenced by Donne's language and rhythms, drawn from common speech, his dramatic treatment of metaphor and image, his anti-climacteric statements, irony and psychological explorations. For like Donne, they cherish the intellect, while feeling the need for a spiritual anchor.

John Donne was an English poet, satirist, lawyer and priest. He is considered the pre-eminent representative of the metaphysical poets. His works are noted for their strong, sensual style and include sonnets, love poetry, religious poems, Latin translations, epigrams, elegies, songs, satires and sermons. His poetry is noted for its vibrancy of language and inventiveness of metaphor, especially compared to that of his contemporaries. Donne's style is characterised by abrupt openings and various paradoxes, ironies and dislocations. These features, along with his frequent dramatic or everyday speech rhythms, his tense syntax and his tough eloquence, were both a reaction against the smoothness of conventional Elizabethan poetry and an adaptation into English of European baroque and mannerist techniques. His early career was marked by poetry that bore immense knowledge of British society and he gained that knowledge with sharp criticism. Another important theme in Donne's poetry is the idea of true religion, something that he spent much time considering and theorising about. He wrote secular poems as well as erotic and love poems. He is particularly famous for his mastery of metaphysical conceits. Despite his great education and poetic talents, Donne lived in poverty for several years, relying heavily on wealthy friends. He spent much of the money which he inherited during and after his education on womanising, literature, pastimes, and travel. In 1601, Donne secretly married Anne Moore, with whom he had twelve children. In 1615, he became an Anglican priest, although he did not want to take Anglican orders. He did so because King James I persistently ordered it. In 1621, he was appointed the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London. He also served as a member of parliament in 1601 and in 1614.

“A VALEDICTION: FORBIDDING MOURNING”

As virtuous men pass mildly away, And whisper to their souls, to go, Whilst some of their sad friends do say,

'The breath goes now,' and some say, 'No:'

So let us melt, and make no noise,
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move; 'Twere profanation of our joys
To tell the laity our love.

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears; Men reckon what it did, and meant;
But trepidation of the spheres, Though greater far, is innocent.
Dull sublunary lovers' love

(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit Absence, because it doth remove Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refin'd, That ourselves know not what it is, Inter-assured of the mind,
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one, Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion, Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show To move, but doth, if the' other do.

And though it in the centre sit, Yet when the other far doth roam, It leans, and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.
Such wilt thou be to me, who must Like th' other foot, obliquely run; Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begun.

“A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” is a metaphysical poem written by John Donne. The poem was written in 1611 or 1612 for his wife Anne before he left on a trip to Continental Europe with Sir Robert Drury. A Valediction is a 36-line love poem that was first published in the 1633 collection *Songs and Sonnets*, two years after Donne's death. Based around the idea of two parting lovers, the poem is notable for its use of conceits and heavy allegory to describe the couple's relationship; critics have thematically linked it to several of his other works, including *A Valediction: of My Name, in the Window*, *Meditation III* from the *Holy Sonnets* and *A Valediction: of Weeping*.

The speaker explains that he is forced to spend time apart from his lover, but before he leaves, he tells her that their farewell should not be the occasion for mourning and sorrow. In the same way that virtuous men die mildly and without complaint, he says, so they should leave without “tear-floods” and “sigh-tempests,” for to

publicly announce their feelings in such a way would profane their love. The speaker says that when the earth moves, it brings “harms and fears,” but when the spheres experience “trepidation,” though the impact is greater, it is also innocent. The love of “dull sublunary lovers” cannot survive separation, but it removes that which constitutes the love itself; but the love he shares with his beloved is so refined and “Inter-assured of the mind” that they need not worry about missing “eyes, lips, and hands.” Though he must go, their souls are still one, and, therefore, they are not enduring a breach, they are experiencing an “expansion”; in the same way that gold can be stretched by beating it “to aery thinness,” the soul they share will simply stretch to take in all the space between them. If their souls are separate, he says, they are like the feet of a compass: His lover’s soul is the fixed foot in the center, and he is the foot that moves around it. The firmness of the center foot makes the circle that the outer foot draws perfect: “Thy firmness makes my circle just, / And makes me end, where I begin.” The nine stanzas of this Valediction are quite simple compared to many of Donne’s poems, which utilize strange metrical patterns overlaid jarringly on regular rhyme schemes. Here, each four-line stanza is quite unadorned, with an ABAB rhyme scheme and an iambic tetrameter.

This is probably Donne’s most famous love poem. It deals with every aspect of love, whether spiritual, emotional or physical. The occasion is the parting of the poet from his beloved wife and the situation is dealt within a very moving and elevating manner. The lover forbids his beloved from weeping and urges her to show restraint so that the depth of their feeling may not be displayed before onlookers. He tells her that their parting should be as peaceful as the passing of virtuous men. He feels that sighs and tears would be a desecration of their love. He compares their love to the ‘trepidation’ of the spheres which, though great, is unnoticeable, for it is fine and subtle beyond expression. He assures her that their love will suffer no parting- it will expand like gold beaten into thin leaf and there will be no division or separation, for their hearts are one. In his most famous conceit, Donne compares their two souls to the two legs of a compass. One point remains fixed in the center and the other revolves around it. However, the two legs are joined inseparably at one point. The moving leg may trace at very wide circle, in which case the fixed one leans towards it. But when its circle is completed, it returns to the fixed leg. In fact, the circle traced by the moving leg is perfect only because the other leg remains constant and stationery. At first glance, this comparison seems to be startling and forced. But through the use of a rigid, metallic object to serve as an example of sublime, spiritual love is strange and unfamiliar; it is a most apt symbol of constancy, unity and firmness. The lover will return after his wandering to the beloved, who remains steadfast through distance and separation.

Development of Thought

A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning is one of Donne's most famous and simplest poems and also probably his most direct statement of his ideal of spiritual love. For all his erotic carnality in poems, such as "The Flea," Donne professed a devotion to a kind of spiritual love that transcended the merely physical. Here, anticipating a physical separation from his beloved, he invokes the nature of that spiritual love to ward off the "tear-floods" and "sigh-tempests" that might otherwise attend on their farewell. The poem is essentially a sequence of metaphors and comparisons, each describing a way of looking at their separation that will help them to avoid the mourning forbidden by the poem's title.

First, the speaker says that their farewell should be as mild as the uncomplaining deaths of virtuous men, for to weep would be "profanation of our joys." Next, the speaker compares harmful "Moving of th' earth" to innocent "trepidation of the spheres," equating the first with "dull sublunary lovers' love" and the second with their love, "Inter-assured of the mind." Like the rumbling earth, the dull sublunary (sublunary meaning literally beneath the moon and also subject to the moon) lovers are all physical, unable to experience separation without losing the sensation that comprises and sustains their love. But the spiritual lovers "care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss," because, like the trepidation (vibration) of the spheres (the concentric globes that surrounded the earth in ancient astronomy), their love is not wholly physical. Also, like the trepidation of the spheres, their movement will not have the harmful consequences of an earthquake.

The speaker then declares that, since the lovers' two souls are one, his departure will simply expand the area of their unified soul, rather than cause a rift between them. If, however, their souls are "two" instead of "one", they are as the feet of a drafter's compass, connected, with the center foot fixing the orbit of the outer foot and helping it to describe a perfect circle. The compass (the instrument used for drawing circles) is one of Donne's most famous metaphors, and it is the perfect image to encapsulate the values of Donne's spiritual love, which is balanced, symmetrical, intellectual, serious, and beautiful in its polished simplicity. Like many of Donne's love poems (including 'The Sun Rising' and 'The Canonization'), A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning creates a dichotomy between the common love of the everyday world and the uncommon love of the speaker. Here, the speaker claims that to tell "the laity," or the common people, of his love would be to profane its sacred nature, and he is clearly contemptuous of the dull sublunary love of other lovers. The effect of this dichotomy is to create a kind of emotional aristocracy that is similar in form to the political aristocracy with which Donne has had painfully bad luck throughout his life and which he commented upon in poems, such as 'The Canonization.' This emotional aristocracy is similar in form to the political one but utterly opposed to it in spirit. Few in number are the emotional aristocrats who have access to the spiritual love of the spheres and the compass; throughout all of Donne's writing, the membership of this elite never includes more

than the speaker and his lover—or at the most, the speaker, his lover, and the reader of the poem, who is called upon to sympathize with Donne's romantic plight.

'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' is one of the best and the most well-known poems of Donne. It is a love lyric. It is a very fine poem of conjugal love. The poem was written by the poet when he was going on a trip of the continent. It is in the form of a valediction or a farewell song addressed to his wife Anne More. In the valediction Donne asks his wife not to weep at his separation from him for there can be no real separation from him. At the time of separation, the true love does not weep and cry. True love is something sacred and private. If the lovers weep and cry this public exhibition of their love will destroy sanctity and vulgarize it. Moreover, true love does not depend upon the senses. So physical absence of the object of love does not matter in it. On the contrary, physical love depends on the senses; it cannot tolerate separation because separation removes the body and the senses of which it is made. In true love even if one lover goes away, there can be no real separation. Donne makes this point clear by using an analogy of a lump of gold. If the lump of gold is beaten, it expands. On being beaten, the lump of gold does not undergo any breach but only expansion. The same is true about true love. The two lovers which are really one like a lump of gold. Separation does not bring about any breach in them but only an extension of their being, 'like gold to airy thinness beat'. In the last three stanzas of the poem a very famous conceit of the two legs of a compass is used to prove the point that in true love there is union in separation. If the two lovers are two, 'they are two so as the two legs of the compass are two. The wife who remains at home is like the first leg or the fixed leg of the compass. The husband who goes away is like the second leg or the moving leg of the compass. When the circle is drawn the first leg remains in the central and it seems that it is moving but the reality is that when the second leg starts moving to draw the circle, the first leg or the fixed foot also inclines towards the moving leg and starts moving after it. The same is true with the wife and the husband. It seems that the husband goes away and the wife remains at the center, 'thy soul the first foot, makes no show/ to move but doth if the other do.' The poem reflects all the chief characteristics of Donne as a poet. It is a good example of the use of conceits for which Donne is justly famous. As in all the poems so also in this poem we find a union of thought and feelings. There is a great intellectual element in the poem. Donne argues like a lawyer. The poem is also dramatic in nature. It is in the form of address to his wife who is present as a silent listener. Like all other poems of Donne this poem is also written not in the literary language but also in the language of common speech. There are no classical references. Donne has made a good use of his knowledge of astronomy and science. The versification of the poem does not possess the sweetness and delicacy of an Elizabethan lyric. It is a bit rugged but it is marked by force and vitality.

Considered to be Donne's most famous valedictory poem, Theodore Redpath praises "A Valediction" for its "lofty and compelling restraint, and the even tenor

of its movement". Targoff distinguishes *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning* from Donne's other Valedictions in what Donne leaves for his lover: "Donne does not leave his beloved either a physical or spiritual piece of himself. Instead, he leaves her the power of his poetic making. What is meant to prevent her "mourning" is not her possession of his name or book or heart or sole. It is the possession of his metaphors, metaphors of their union that seem invulnerable to division". The analogy of beaten gold was heavily criticized by T. S. Eliot as not being based on a statement of philosophical theory; Targoff argues that this is incorrect—that Donne had a consistent philosophy, and that the analogy of beaten gold can be traced to the writings of Tertullian, one of Donne's greatest religious influences. Another critic of Donne, Samuel Johnson, highlighted *A Valediction's* compass analogy to highlight the "violence" used by metaphysical poets to "[force] the most heterogeneous ideas together".

Analysing the Characters

There are two main characters around whom the whole poem revolves; ie Donne and his wife. One is the active speaker and the other is the passive listener. It may not be called soliloquy but may be called monologue because in the soliloquy there is no listener but in the dramatic monologue there is silent listener. Hence in this love poem of John Donne, his wife is the silent listener.

The Speaker

The main speaker or the hero of the poem is the writer himself who wants to convey some message to the world through his best love poem. Firstly, he quotes the example of the virtuous people of the world who are our real guru called saints, sages, prophets, seers, torch bearers like lord star or pole star to 'every wandering bark'. So he convinces his wife that we should also not weep and wail as no one wails on the death of great souls. If we do so it would be an insult of our love. Then he gives the example of the movement of the earth and the trepidation of the spheres. For the worldly people the earth is counted greatest in importance but in real sense the sphere's movement is of high importance but unknown to the worldly people. Thought proceeds and idea conceives in the form of comparison and contrast of worldly people's 'dull sublunary' love whose love is based on the senses. Then he goes on the wings of fancy and fact taking the flight in the poetic asylum of poetic constellation. He uses the conceit for which he is just famous. First he quotes the example of gold 'to airy thinness beat'. Similarly their love also expands but 'no breach but an expansion.' Then Donne uses long conceit to prove his point soundly and strongly. With the help of the two legs of the compass he unveils that 'they are two so/ As stiff twin compasses are two'. The first leg is the soul of Donne's wife who remains at the center firmly but ready to move as the second leg moves which is the soul of Donne himself. 'Thy firmness makes my circle just,/ And makes me end, where I begun.' Indubitably if the first leg or the soul of his wife remains firm only then the second leg or Donne can complete the

circle of his journey. Ergo, their separation is only physical on whose senses it is not made. They are two in one and true to each other. In this manner Donne not only convinces his wife but to all the people of the world. The most striking feature of Donne's love poetry is his originality. He rejected all the prevailing love traditions: Platonic, Petrarchan, Medieval etc. According to Medieval tradition the mistress was a married woman. In Petrarchan tradition the lover sighed in vain for her. In Platonic tradition love was only an affair of the souls. Donne rejected all these traditions. As a love poet he did not follow any convention but treated love in an original way. In love Donne does not make difference between marriage and adultery. For him the real difference is between love and lust. All love outside marriage is not lust just as all love within marriage is not love. What makes love holy or otherwise is not marriage but its sincerity. If love is sincere, though outside marriage, it is true love and something holy. If it is not sincere though within marriage, it is only lust and something unholy.

His Wife

The role of his wife is mute and silent listener. She makes no comments but to obey as our antique, pious and religious books proclaim that 'Man to command and woman to obey/ Man for the field, for the hearth she'. At last, her inner soul gives this green signal that she is a unique kind of woman whose soul is one though they are two in body. As a result of that she stops mourning and gives see off to her husband with smile face and makes her journey a complete one.

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS I

Summarize the poem in your own words.

From your reading of the poem 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning', discuss the character of the speaker in your own words.

'CANONIZATION'

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love ; Or chide my palsy, or my gout ;
My five gray hairs, or ruin'd fortune flout ;
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve ; Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his Honour, or his Grace ; Or the king's real, or his stamp'd face
Contemplate; what you will, approve, So you will let me love.
Alas ! alas ! who's injured by my love?

What merchant's ships have my sighs drown'd? Who says my tears have overflow'd his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove? When did the heats which my veins fill Add one more to the plaguy bill?
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still Litigious men, which quarrels move, Though she and I do love.
Call's what you will, we are made such by love ; Call her one, me another fly,
We're tapers too, and at our own cost die, And we in us find th' eagle and the dove.
The phoenix riddle hath more wit By us ; we two being one, are it ;
So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit. We die and rise the same, and prove Mysterious by this love.
We can die by it, if not live by love, And if unfit for tomb or hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse ; And if no piece of chronicle we prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms ; As well a well-wrought urn becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs, And by these hymns, all shall approve Us canonized for love ;
And Thus, invoke us, "You, whom reverend love Made one another's hermitage ;
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage ; Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes ;
So made such mirrors, and such spies, That they did all to you epitomize—
Countries, towns, courts beg from above A pattern of your love.
The word Canonization means the act or process of changing an ordinary religious person into a saint in Catholic Christian religion. This title suggests that the poet and his beloved will become 'saints of love' in the future: and they will be regarded as saints of true love by the whole world in the future. The speaker of the poem is an old man who has just got the good luck of having a young beloved! But, unluckily, he is being disturbed by a man who comes to a place where he is making love. This intruder (one who disturbs) seems to have told him not to do like this. The old lover gives an energy reply to him. Donne's Canonization is an example of

metaphysical poetry. It uses conceits, allusions from the medieval philosophy of metaphysics, a dramatic situation and an impassioned monologue, a speech-like rhythm, and colloquial language, all of which make it a typical "metaphysical" poem.

The person in the poem speaks about the transformation of worldly lovers into holy saints as in the Catholic Christian custom of 'canonization'. The speaker in the poem claims that he and his beloved will be canonized when poet immortalizes their love, and that lovers of the future will invoke to them to give them the strength of spiritual love. The speaker argues with the intruding stranger so as to justify his metaphysical logic of love. As the argument develops, the comparison for the relation between lovers develops with other metaphors of myth, religion and so on. The speaker equates worldly human love with the ascetic life of unworldly saints. The whole poem can be seen as an extension of the central unusual comparison of canonization of lover. The poem makes an impressive beginning with an abrupt jump into the situation: 'Hold your tongue and let me love.' The lines are highly dramatic. They illustrate the shock tactic used in most of Donne's metaphysical poems. Donne also uses many new vocabularies. 'Palsy' and 'gout' for instance belong to the register of medicine while 'merchant' and 'ship' signify the realm of trade and commerce. While 'Phoenix' relates to myth, 'hymns' concerns religion and 'chronicles' means 'history'.

The argument in the poem is forceful, suggestive and witty. The speaker uses colloquial words, rough idioms and broken rhythm, all of which characterize metaphysical poems. The very beginning "For God's sake " is a good example. The whole poem is in such shockingly new language and rhythm. Though the rhythm is rough and conversational, the poem is written mainly in iambic pentameter. Each of five stanzas is of nine lines, and a rhyming scheme such as: a b b a c c a a. But the word loves is, for some reason, always used in slant rhyming as in love/ approve, love/ improve, etc 'Canonization' links together disharmonious images. In other words, there is 'a yoking together of heterogeneous images by violence'. As the speaker faces an intruder and argues with him, he links 'lover's sigh' with 'merchant's ships', 'colds' with 'spring', 'heat' with 'plague' and 'love songs' with divine hymns. As the argument proceeds, the comparison for the relation between lovers moves from the register of trade and myth to a climax where true lovers are equated with canonized saints. Fusion of emotion and intellect is another important feature of the poem. The fusion is observed in the comparison of the lovers to the mysterious phoenix and the divine saints. The speaker assumes that like the phoenix, the lovers would 'die and rise at the same time' and prove 'mysterious by their love'.

Development of Thought

John Donne starts his argument abruptly in phrasal manner 'For God's sake hold your tongue' and let me explain you my vein and strain of true love. We are made

but for each other, we 'meet' but only to 'depart' and in this world we are 'broken halves' and in that world a 'perfect one'. With our pious love no one is going to be injured or wounded, no one is to be 'drowned' with our sighs, and our love is not too cold to remove 'spring' and too heat to bring 'plague'. Although worldly people fight for trifles and trivial but we are one in soul yet two in body who do not fight for menial things as the worldly people do. The speaker goes on to pursue the beloved that we are made for each other, as night follows the day, so are we for each other. Our love is immortal and the love of the worldly people is mortal. We shall die but only to rebirth and like 'phoenix' who arises from her ashes. Similarly we are such flies who have to die only for to arise and it is a thing of 'beauty' for us but a thing of 'mystery' for others. Our close relationship is as sure as death as pure as air to go anywhere. If the worldly people do not accept or pay due regards to our bodies in tomb we shall be fit for 'bard's verse'. The poet will eulogize our saga in his sonnets which would be the true tribute of our true love to console our dying but immortal souls. He will inscribe on the urn our love story like Laila-Maznu, Hira-Ranza, Antony and Cleopatra, etc. and we shall get a new name and fame and canonization our love-story. Our tomb shall become the place of tribute and homage and pious place of visit and hermitage. The speaker further adds that the worldly people would epitomize our love and find the truth after peeping through into the eyes of each other and would be able to see our figure in the mirror for their solace. It would be a new kind of love in the world for the world and generation may come and generation may go but our love would the same as mentioned above.

The last stanza of the Canonization admirably sums up Donne's sexual metaphysics that the really valid and complete relationship is between man and woman and their souls into a complete whole and that they became a microcosm of the living world. This very attitude is expressed in a number of other poems. For true lovers the entire world is contracted into the eyes of each other and this world is better because it is not subject to decay and dissolution. Grierson rightly points out, 'neither sensual passion nor gay and cynical wit nor scorn and anger is the dominant note in Donne's love-poetry.' Had he kept his wit and fancy a little more under control, Donne would have been one of the greatest love poets, 'the greatest poet of love as a real untransmuted, overwhelming experience.' This complicated poem, spoken ostensibly to someone who disapproves of the speaker's love affair, is written in the voice of a world-wise, sardonic courtier who is nevertheless utterly caught up in his love. The poem simultaneously parodies old notions of love and coins elaborate new ones, eventually concluding that even if the love affair is impossible in the real world, it can become legendary through poetry, and the speaker and his lover will be like saints to later generations of lovers. (Hence the title: The Canonization refers to the process by which people are inducted into the canon of saints).

The speaker asks his addressee to be quiet, and let him love. If the addressee cannot hold his tongue, the speaker tells him to criticize him for other shortcomings (other than his tendency to love): his palsy, his gout, his “five grey hairs,” or his ruined fortune. He admonishes the addressee to look to his own mind and his own wealth and to think of his position and copy the other nobles (“Observe his Honour, or his Grace, / Or the King’s real, or his stamped face / Contemplate.”) The speaker does not care what the addressee says or does, as long as he lets him love. The speaker asks rhetorically, “Who’s injured by my love?” He says that his sighs have not drowned ships, his tears have not flooded land, his colds have not chilled spring, and the heat of his veins has not added to the list of those killed by the plague. Soldiers still find wars and lawyers still find litigious men, regardless of the emotions of the speaker and his lover. The speaker tells his addressee to “Call us what you will,” for it is love that makes them so. He says that the addressee can “Call her one, me another fly,” and that they are also like candles (“tapers”), which burn by feeding upon their own selves (“and at our own cost die”). In each other, the lovers find the eagle and the dove, and together (“we two being one”) they illuminate the riddle of the phoenix, for they “die and rise the same,” just as the phoenix does—though unlike the phoenix, it is love that slays and resurrects them. He says that they can die by love if they are not able to live by it, and if their legend is not fit “for tombs and hearse,” it will be fit for poetry, and “We’ll build in sonnets pretty rooms.” A well-wrought urn does as much justice to a dead man’s ashes as does a gigantic tomb; and by the same token, the poem about the speaker and his lover will cause them to be “canonized,” admitted to the sainthood of love. All those who hear their story will invoke the lovers, saying that countries, towns, and courts “beg from above / A pattern of your love!”

In the first stanza, the speaker obliquely details his relationship to the world of politics, wealth, and nobility; by assuming that these are the concerns of his addressee, he indicates his own background amid such concerns, and he also indicates the extent to which he has moved beyond that background. He hopes that the listener will leave him alone and pursue a career in the court, toadying to aristocrats, preoccupied with favor (the King’s real face) and money (the King’s stamped face, as on a coin). In the second stanza, he parodies contemporary Petrarchan notions of love and continues to mock his addressee, making the point that his sighs have not drowned ships and his tears have not caused floods. (Petrarchan love-poems were full of claims like “My tears are rain, and my sighs storms.”) He also mocks the operations of the everyday world, saying that his love will not keep soldiers from fighting wars or lawyers from finding court cases—as though war and legal wrangling were the sole concerns of world outside the confines of his love affair.

In the third stanza, the speaker begins spinning off metaphors that will help explain the intensity and uniqueness of his love. First, he says that he and his lover are like moths drawn to a candle (“her one, me another fly”), then that they are like the

candle itself. They embody the elements of the eagle (strong and masculine) and the dove (peaceful and feminine) bound up in the image of the phoenix, dying and rising by love. In the fourth stanza, the speaker explores the possibility of canonization in verse, and in the final stanza, he explores his and his lover's roles as the saints of love, to whom generations of future lovers will appeal for help. Throughout, the tone of the poem is balanced between a kind of arch, sophisticated sensibility ("half-acre tombs") and passionate amorous abandon ("We die and rise the same, and prove / Mysterious by this love"). The five stanzas of *The Canonization* are metered in iambic lines ranging from trimeter to pentameter; in each of the nine-line stanzas, the first, third, fourth, and seventh lines are in pentameter, the second, fifth, sixth, and eighth in tetrameter, and the ninth in trimeter. The rhyme scheme in each stanza is A B B A C C C D D.

The Canonization is one of Donne's most famous and most written-about poems. Its criticism at the hands of Cleanth Brooks and others has made it a central topic in the argument between formalist critics and historicist critics; the former argue that the poem is what it seems to be, an anti-political love poem, while the latter argue, based on events in Donne's life at the time of the poem's composition, that it is actually a kind of coded, ironic rumination on the "ruined fortune" and dashed political hopes of the first stanza. The choice of which argument to follow is largely a matter of personal temperament. But unless one seeks a purely biographical understanding of Donne, it is probably best to understand the poem as the sort of droll, passionate speech-act it is, a highly sophisticated defense of love against the corrupting values of politics and privilege.

Analysing the Characters

There are three characters around whom the whole story revolves but basically the main speaker (lover) is at the front of the tale, the beloved and so-called intruder are at the back of the curtain.

The Speaker (Lover)

The speaker uses all types of styles to prove or disprove his arguments like use of conceits, allusions from the medieval philosophy of metaphysics, a dramatic situation and an impassioned monologue, a speech-like rhythm, and colloquial language, all of which make it a typical "metaphysical" poem. The romantic affair and the moral status of the worldly lovers are compared to the ascetic life of unworldly saints. In the beginning the speaker expresses his commitment to love. He addresses an intruding stranger and warns him to keep out of the lover's way. Next, he discusses love in terms of 'sighs', 'cold' and 'heat'. In the lines that follow, the poet uses more and more of disharmonious associations. He equates lovers to 'flies' and 'tapers', 'Eagle' and 'Dove', 'Phoenix' and 'saints'. Thus, *Canonization* is in many ways a typical metaphysical poem where complexity of substance is expressed with simplicity of expression. The general argument and its development

are clear like its dramatic situations. The allusions are sometimes too forced, but that is a part of such poetry

The Beloved

As per the practice of John Donne, the beloved is the true Indian woman who suffers a lot silently and enjoys a lot smilingly. Whatever the arguments put by her lover are given green signal with heart and soul. The physical passion is to unite them into one soul and transform them into saints of love. The poem takes the form of a drama where the speaker is speaking back with angry arguments against a third person who seems to have told him not to indulge in such love affair in old age. Finally they reach to the top of sages, saints and seers.

Self-Assessment Questions II

What do you mean by the word canonization?

What arguments does John Donne put forward in the poem while stating that the beloved and the lover should be canonized as saints of love?

STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

John Donne uses the example cum preaching style and technique, afar from the commanding and dictatorship or of the boss's style. The conceit is a strange type of comparison which tries to find out likeness in the things completely unlike. First he uses a sort conceit to prove his fact followed by long conceit to proclaim his sound argument. Donne is famous for his wit and his conceit is pregnant with ample examples of wit. He has been called the 'monarch of wit'. Gransden has summed up the achievements of Donne thus: 'Inheriting from his contemporaries and immediate predecessors the immense yet formal Elizabethan world-picture and true son of the Renaissance (means rebirth, reawakening after a long sleep), Donne came to maturity in the age of disenchantment that followed the Golden Age.' His own decade of anxiety 1601-10, mirrored that of the age and rendered him peculiarly sensitive to the dark side of human condition.

Study me then, you who shall lovers be

At the next world, that is, at the next spring; For I am every dead thing

In whom love brought new Alchimie.

In this way he could set his own personal reactions within the framework of the age which he studied and to which he responded so accurately. Thus, his poems often seem curiously alive and up-to-date for they are the secret writings of an introspective intellectual with no position in the society which he suffered and

learned, making articulate the private rebellions and difficulties which underlay his restless and dissatisfied generation. By his death the 'universal monarch of wit' had been left, not without its courtiers, but without a king.

Donne's earliest poems showed a developed knowledge of English society coupled with sharp criticism of its problems. His satires dealt with common Elizabethan topics, such as corruption in the legal system, mediocre poets, and pompous courtiers. His images of sickness, vomit, manure, and plague reflected his strongly satiric view of a world populated by all the fools and knaves of England. His third satire, however, deals with the problem of true religion, a matter of great importance to Donne. He argued that it was better to examine carefully one's religious convictions than blindly to follow any established tradition, for none would be saved at the Final Judgment, by claiming "A Harry, or a Martin taught [them] this." Donne's early career was also notable for his erotic poetry, especially his elegies, in which he employed unconventional metaphors, such as a flea biting two lovers being compared to sex. In Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed, he poetically undressed his mistress and compared the act of fondling to the exploration of America. In Elegy XVIII, he compared the gap between his lover's breasts to the Hellespont. Donne did not publish these poems, although did allow them to circulate widely in manuscript form.

"... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

Some have speculated that Donne's numerous illnesses, financial strain, and the deaths of his friends all contributed to the development of a more somber and pious tone in his later poems. The change can be clearly seen in "An Anatomy of the World" (1611), a poem that Donne wrote in memory of Elizabeth Drury, daughter of his patron, Sir Robert Drury of Hawstead, Suffolk. This poem treats Elizabeth's demise with extreme gloominess, using it as a symbol for the Fall of Man and the destruction of the universe.

The increasing gloominess of Donne's tone may also be observed in the religious works that he began writing during the same period. His early belief in the value of skepticism now gave way to a firm faith in the traditional teachings of the Bible. Having converted to the Anglican Church, Donne focused his literary career on religious literature. He quickly became noted for his sermons and religious poems. The lines of these sermons would come to influence future works of English literature, such as Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, which took its title from a passage in *Meditation XVII of Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, and Thomas Merton's *No Man is an Island*, which took its title from the same source. Towards the end of his life Donne wrote works that challenged death, and the fear that it inspired in many men, on the grounds of his belief that those who die are sent to Heaven to live eternally. One example of this challenge is his Holy Sonnet X, *Death Be Not Proud*, from which come the famous lines "Death, be not

proud, though some have called thee / Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so.” Even as he lay dying during Lent in 1631, he rose from his sickbed and delivered the Death's Duel sermon, which was later described as his own funeral sermon. Death's Duel portrays life as a steady descent to suffering and death, yet sees hope in salvation and immortality through an embrace of God, Christ and the Resurrection.

SUMMING UP

In this unit you learned about Donne as a metaphysical poet. You further examined two of his poems namely 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' and 'The Canonization'. In both of the poems John Donne makes use of conceits intelligently in order to convey his feelings and point of view. In the first poem, 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' you saw how John Donne taking examples of virtuous men conveys the message of endurance and true love to his wife. In the second poem, 'The Canonization' John Donne again focuses on the topic of true love and discusses how the lover and the beloved will be canonized as the saints of love.

ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I

Refer to the discussion at 6.4

Refer to the discussion at 6.4.2.1

II

Refer to the discussion at 6.5

Refer to the discussion at 6.5.1

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

Write a note on Metaphysical poetry.

Give a brief account of the 'metaphysical school' of poetry with special reference to Donne.

What reason can you give for the greatest attractions which the English poets of the present day have felt for Donne's poetry?

Write a note on Donne as a love poet. Critically examine the development of thought in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning".

What is conceit? Illustrate with the help of examples from the poem "The Canonization".

UNIT 7 JOHN MILTON: “How Soon Hath Time”, “When I Consider How My Light Is Spent”

Introduction

Objectives

~~John Milton: Life and Career~~

Sonnet: “How Soon Hath Time”

Summary of the Poem

Line-Wise Annotation

Critical Appreciation of the Poem

Paraphrase

Analysis

Sonnet: “When I Consider How My Light is Spent”

Summary of the Poem

Line-Wise Annotation

Critical Appreciation of the Poem

Paraphrase

Analysis

Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

References

Terminal and Model Questions

INTRODUCTION

John Milton is considered as one of the finest poets in English Literature. There was a time in the history of English literature when he was considered to be a superior poet to all his contemporary English poets, even to Shakespeare. Sonnets in English Literature could not be understood properly without reading and understanding Miltonic sonnets. In this Unit, you will go through two of the total twenty-three sonnets written by Milton which will enable you to have an estimate of the greatness of Milton as a poet. Besides understanding Miltonic Sonnets, it is equally important to have an idea of Sonnet as a form of English poetry. John Milton is chiefly known for his epoch-making epic *Paradise Lost*; but as we are mainly concerned with two of the Miltonic sonnets in this Unit, we will confine our study to these sonnets only. Like Shakespearean sonnets, Miltonic sonnets are also autobiographical; and in these sonnets Milton has expressed his political, social, religious, and moral views. Milton's sonnets also express his philosophy of life.

OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, you will learn about:

The life and career of John Milton.

Sonnet as a form of English Poetry.

Development of Sonnet from Italian Poet Petrarch to the modern age.

Two sonnets, i.e., 'How Soon Hath Time' and 'When I Consider How My Light is Spent' written by Milton.

Milton's philosophy of life.

JOHN MILTON: LIFE AND CAREER

John Milton was born in Bread Street, Cheapside, London, on 9th December, 1608. His father was a Puritan as well as a noted music composer and his mother Sarah Jeffrey was a social activist. Milton studied at St. Paul's School in London where he studied Latin and Greek. Later on, Milton studied at Christ's College, Cambridge and obtained his B.A. degree in 1629. Milton wanted to become an Anglican priest, so he continued his studies in the University and obtained his Master of Arts degree in 1632. It was at Cambridge that Milton met Edward King, for whom he later wrote 'Lycidas'. Milton had long hair and also a peculiar kind of mannerism, so he was known as the "Lady of Christ's" at Cambridge. While studying in the University, Milton focused his attention, primarily, on developing his poetic skills.

Milton, after completing his studies, shifted to Hammersmith and later on to Horton, Berkshire, where he devoted his time to wide and extensive reading of both ancient and modern works of theology, philosophy, history, linguistics, politics, literature, scriptures, and science as well as learnt many languages, namely, Hebrew, French, Italian, Spanish, etc. His extensive learning won him the status of one of the most learned English poets and he came to be recognized as a great scholar. He continued his studies on a variety of subjects in order to develop his skill and talent as a poet. He also kept on writing poetry during this very period of time and started getting recognition as a good poet. Milton later on, travelled to many countries of Europe and met many noted poets, writers, and scholars of the time; there also, he established and cemented his reputation as a poet.

After he returned to England, he devoted his time for the cause of Puritanism and started writing pamphlets in favour of the Parliamentarians and wrote some very important pamphlets, namely, *Tractate on Education*, urging the universities to allow some important and necessary reforms and *Aeropagitica*, in which he attacked pre-printing censorship. After Commonwealth was established under Oliver Cromwell, John Milton was appointed Latin Secretary to the Committee for Foreign Affairs.

In June 1643, Milton married 16-year-old Mary Powell. But this marriage could not sustain for long and Mary left Milton. Milton married thrice in his life and his first wife, Mary Powell died on 5th May, 1652. On 12th November, 1656, Milton married Katherine Woodcock, who died on 3rd February, 1658. Milton married for the third time on 24th February, 1662 to Elizabeth Mynshull, who was 31 year younger to him, but this marriage proved to be successful.

Milton continued his work as pamphleteer and it is believed that overburdened by his work as a pamphleteer, Milton lost his eyesight in 1652 at the age of 44. It was after he turned blind that his one of the best sonnets "On His Blindness" or "When I Consider How My Light is Spent" emanated which expressed his disappointment on having lost his eye-sight very early in his life. He is supposed to have dictated this sonnet to his three daughters.

Upon the Restoration of monarchy in 1660, arrest-warrant against Milton was issued and his writings were burnt, for his works were supposed to support the cause of the Parliamentarians. Milton was, later on, arrested for a short duration of time, but on his release from the prison, he published some minor prose-works.

In 1667, *Paradise Lost* was published which earned Milton great name and fame as a Poet and he came to be considered as the best poet of the time. *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, which were published in 1671, also cemented his reputation as a poet further.

After publication of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's greatness as a poet was recognized worldwide. He, at that very point of time, was considered to be superior to all other English poets, even to Shakespeare.

Milton's stature increased in such a way that he continued inspiring and influencing the future generation poets. His influence on the 18th century poets and writers, namely, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Thomas Newton, Samuel Johnson, and many others sustained for a long time and Milton continued influencing even the Romantic poets, like, William Wordsworth, John Keats, and other poets of the era. Influence of Milton was also apparent in the Victorian age. His influence can also be traced even on the poets of the modern age.

Milton's major works include: *On Shakespeare* (1632), *Comus* (1637), *Lycidas* (1638), *Paradise Lost* (1667), *Paradise Regained* (1671), *Samson Agonistes* (1671), *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643), *Of Education* (1644), *Poems* (1645), and *The Ready and Easy Way to establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660).

Milton died of kidney failure on 8th November, 1674.

SONNET-7: HOW SOON HATH TIME

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
Stolen on his wing my three and twentieth year! My
hasting days fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom show'th. Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth,
That I to manhood am arrived so near,
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
That some more timely-happy spirits endueth. Yet be it less
or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure even
To that same lot, However, mean or high,
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven;
All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.

Summary of the Poem

It is, generally, believed that the Sonnet – “How Soon Hath Time” was composed on 9th December, 1631, on the occasion of Poet John Milton's twenty third birth anniversary. In this sonnet, John Milton expresses his dissatisfaction that Time is passing very swiftly and he has not been able to make any significant achievement in his life and career so far. He feels that although he has been endowed with the

gift of writing poetry by the God, yet he has, so far, not been able to make use of the gift or talent conferred upon him by the Almighty and admits that Time is moving so speedily that he is unable to keep in pace with it. So, he expresses his discontent on the present status of his life and feels disgusted. He thinks that his youth is slipping away very swiftly without adding any significant achievement to his credit. He personifies Time as a winged-thief and says that the Time has stolen his youth away and carried it on his wings before he could accomplish greatness as a poet. He seems much concerned about his career and future, but he also has a strong belief that although he has not been able to achieve greatness and recognition as a poet so far, yet he will definitely accomplish the greatness with the help of the talent conferred upon him by the God and feels that in due course of time everything will take place as per the will of the God and he will be able to mold his career accordingly, for he strongly believes that he is destined to be a great poet. He also feels annoyed by the fact that despite completing twenty-three years of his life, his physical or outward appearance does not show any sign of maturity and he looks much younger than his actual age. Here, it is worth-noting that while studying at Cambridge, owing to his long hair and distinct mannerism, Milton was known as the “Lady of the Christ’s”. Milton has this very fact in his mind when he feels that his appearance does not show any signs of maturity though he has reached very near to manhood. Milton is confident that he will definitely attain greatness, as he feels that it is the will of the God and he will certainly become a great poet sooner or later. Milton’s unflinching faith in God is apparent in the Sonnet.

In the last line, reference to a parable from the Bible (Matthew: 20, 1-16) is apparent, according to which, some labourers come to labour in the field. Some of them come early, and some come late, but they all are paid the same wages. The labourers coming early complain about this practice, the taskmaster explains that “the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen”.

John Milton is confident that despite the fact that he has spent twenty-three years of his life without making any significant growth in his career, he will certainly attain greatness as per the will of the God, for according to the Parable mentioned above, those who start working late are also paid the same wages the early-starters get.

Line-Wise Annotation

Line 1. How soon: How quickly; how swiftly.

the subtle: Delicate.

thief of youth: The thief that steals youth or young age away and pushes a person towards old age.

Note: ‘Personification’ of Time as ‘the subtle thief of youth’ is apparent here.

Line 2. Stolen on his wing: Stolen and carried on his wings.

my three and twentieth year: Twenty third year. The sonnet is supposed to have been composed on the 23rd birth anniversary of John Milton, i.e., on 9th December, 1631.

Note: 'Time' here appears as a 'winged thief'.

Line 3. My hasting days: The days of my life, which are passing very hastily or swiftly.

fly on: Flying or passing very speedily.

with full career: With full speed; profession or occupation.

Note: The word 'career' has a 'Pun' here, which means 'with full speed' as well as the 'profession or occupation' one desires to choose or has chosen in one's life.

Line 4. my late spring: The days of my life that have passed so far; my inner spirits.

no bud or blossom: Do not show any budding or blossoming, i.e., my recent days do not show any signs of growth or progress, as I do not have any significant achievement to my credit so far.

Note: The poet uses 'Metaphor' in 'my late spring no bud or blossom show'th.'

Line 5. my semblance: My physical appearance. It is worth-noting that while studying at Cambridge, owing to his long hair and distinct mannerism, Milton was known as the "Lady of the Christ's"; Milton has this very fact in his mind and feels that his appearance does not show any signs of maturity, although he has reached very near to manhood.

deceive the truth: Does not show the truth; misleads the truth.

Line 6. to manhood: Adulthood; maturity.

arrived so near: Come very close to.

Line 7. inward ripeness: Internal maturity; maturity from inside.

much less appear: Appears very less.

Line 8. some more timely-happy spirits: The poet feels that although it does not appear from outside or his physical appearance, yet he has more maturity inside than other young people who are keeping in pace with time.

endueth: Endows; bestows; gives; awards.

Line 9. be it less or more: It may be less or more.

soon or slow: Very soon or very late; sooner or later.

Line 10. Strictest: Strict or deliberate. Here, Milton's deliberate intentions or attempts to be a great poet are clear.

measure: Lines of poetry or verse.

Line 11. lot: Fate; Destiny.

mean or high: It may be very low or very high. Milton feels that whatever is destined, it may be a very low or a very high place or status in his life, he is sure to achieve in his future.

Line 12. Toward which: Towards the future.

the will of Heaven: The will of the God. Whatever the God has decided for me, is sure to take place.

Line 13. All is: All that is important is; all that matters is.

if I have grace to use it: If I have the grace of the God to use my lot or fate; if I am fortunate enough to act as destined.

so: As is destined.

Line 14. As ever: Always.

my great Taskmaster's eye.: Under the observance or supervision of the God, the Taskmaster. Here, we find a reference to a parable from the Bible (Matthew: 20, 1-16), according to which, some labourers come to labour in the field. Some of them come early, and some come late, but they all are paid the same wages. The labourers coming early complain about this practice, the taskmaster explains that "the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen".

The Poet, here, means to say that his 'Taskmaster' or the God has designated some special role to him and has also assigned him a particular task. It is the Taskmaster, who only knows the appropriate time when it is going to complete and it is he, who always has an eye on all his activities.

Critical Appreciation of the Poem

Paraphrase

Octave (Lines 1-8)

The sonnet starts with the poet complaining and expressing surprise over the fact that Time, a soft winged-thief of youth, has stolen away the twenty-three years of his life very quickly. He further says that the days of his life are passing very swiftly, but his life and inner spirits, so far, have not shown any signs of growth. He does not find any budding or blossoming which may denote or decide the future course of his life. He feels that his appearance might be deceiving the truth. It is a well-known fact that while studying at Cambridge, owing to his long hair and peculiar mannerism, Milton was known as the “Lady of the Christ’s”. Milton has this very fact in his mind and feels that his appearance does not show any signs of maturity, although he has reached very near to attaining manhood. He feels that although his outward appearance seems to be misleading and his inward ripeness or maturity does not appear at forefront at this very moment of time, yet at a very appropriate time everything will take place as per the will of the God.

Sestet (Lines 9-14)

Milton, after expressing unhappiness and discontent over the progress and growth he has made in his career so far, moves on to say that sooner or later, the will of the God will manifest itself and his career will definitely move in the pre-destined direction, and some day, he will definitely become a great poet. He believes that he is destined to become a poet, his fate, be it very low or high, will definitely turn the direction of his career and he is sure to become a great poet and write something great that would be in the form of great poetry. He feels that Time will definitely lead him to the direction he is destined to go, sooner or later, because it is the will of the God; whatever he has decided for him, is sure to take place in due course of time. The sonnet ends with the Poet’s strong belief that the will of the God is sure to be realized and he will definitely attain greatness as a poet. He feels that he is bound to become and do what the God or his Taskmaster, who observes all his activities and has an eye over them, wants him to become and do.

Analysis

It is clear, by now, that the sonnet ‘How soon hath Time’ was composed on the twenty-third birth anniversary of the poet John Milton. The sonnet has autobiographical elements, as Milton was unable to decide at that very point of time as to what would be the right occupation or career for him. He had two options; either to become an Anglican Priest or to become a Poet. So, in this sonnet, he is found to be on crossroad – a little hesitant to decide as to which way to go, but soon he realizes that he will become a poet, as he feels that it is the will of the God.

This sonnet is divided into an ‘octave’ followed by a ‘sestet’. It is written in iambic pentameter, i.e., each line has five pairs of stressed and unstressed syllables thereby making it ten syllables in all. The sonnet has a distinct rhyme-scheme. Generally, Miltonic Sonnet has the following rhyme-scheme: abba, abba for the ‘octave’ and

cde, cde for the 'sestet', but in this sonnet, he has changed the rhyme-scheme and it is: abba, abba for the 'octave' and cde, dce for the 'sestet'.

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONSII

Write a critical appreciation of the sonnet 'How Soon Hath Time'.

Trace out the autobiographical elements in "How Soon Hath Time".

SONNET 19: "WHEN I CONSIDER HOW MY LIGHT IS SPENT"

When I consider how my light is spent

Ere half my days in this dark world and wide And that one talent which is death to hide

Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent To serve therewith my Maker, and present

My true account, lest he returning chide; "Doth God exact day labor, light denied?" I fondly ask. But
Patience, to prevent

That murmur, soon replies: "God doth not need Either man's work or his own gifts; who best Bear his
mild yoke, they serve him best. His state Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest; They also serve who only stand and wait.

Summary of the Poem

This is one of the finest sonnets written by John Milton which has been eulogized worldwide, and which expresses Milton's philosophy of life. Overburdened by pamphleteering and other kinds of writings, Milton turned completely blind in 1652 at the age of 44. He felt utterly disgusted that, in future, he would not be able to write poetry, something his life was meant for. Milton starts the sonnet by saying that when he thinks how he has lost his eye-sight even before he reached the half stage of his life-time, in this dark and vast world, he feels aggrieved and disappointed that, now, he will not be able to use his talent of writing poetry conferred upon him by the God. He feels that it is like death in life to hide this talent. Milton refers to a foolish servant mentioned in Biblical Parable of Talents (Matthew: 25, 14-30). Talent was a kind of coin used in ancient Greece. According to the Parable, an employer who was going on a long journey gave his three servants five, three, and one Talent respectively. When he returned, he came to know that the first two servants had used their Talents sensibly and doubled those, but the third servant, instead of using his Talent, hid it. The employer rewarded the first two servants and punished the third servant for his foolishness. Milton, here,

compares himself to the third servant, because, he feels, he also is not making any use of his talent or skill, i.e., of writing poetry, conferred upon him by the God. But, his situation is different, for he is willing to use his talent and has not hidden his talent like the third foolish servant; in fact, his blindness has forbidden him to use it. He feels that his talent is lying useless with him, for he is unable to use it, but his soul wants to use it more eagerly than ever and serve his maker – the God – therewith, so that when the God returns to him like the master mentioned in the ‘Parable of Talents’ above, he will have to present the true account of his activities on earth, in other words, he will have to present the true account of poems he has written during his lifetime. He feels that he will be scolded and rebuked by the God for not making use of his Talent given to him like the master mentioned in the ‘Parable of Talents’, who rebuked and punished his servant after returning from the journey. Then he foolishly asks himself as to whether God would ask about the labour of writing poetry, despite the fact that he became blind and eye-sight was denied to him. Soon, his Patience answers him to avert his dissatisfaction that the God never wants anything from anyone, nor does he want anything in lieu of the gifts he has given to men. Milton, then, consoles himself by saying that those who bear the mild yoke of despondency or adversity, placed on their shoulders, with fortitude and forbearance, and submit to the will of the God very patiently, serve him in the best manner. The status of the God is like a king and thousands of angels carry out his commandments very speedily and fly all over the land and ocean to follow his orders without any rest. Milton, at the end of the sonnet, arrives at the conclusion that they also serve the God who only stand patiently and wait for their turn, so that they may also serve the God, thereby implying that they also serve him who only stand and wait for his orders.

Line -Wise Annotation

Line 1: When I consider: When I think; when I reflect on.
my light is spent: I have lost my eye-sight or vision.

Line 2: Ere: Before.

half my days: I have spent half of my life.

in this dark world and wide: In this dark and wide world. Being blind, the world seems very dark and wide to the poet.

Note: ‘Alliteration’ in ‘days in this dark world and wide’ is apparent.

Line 3: one talent: Skill; ability. Talent was a kind of coin used in ancient Greece. Here, Milton refers to the Biblical Parable of Talents (Matthew: 25, 14-30). According to the Parable, an employer who was going on a long journey gave his three servants five, three, and one Talent respectively. When he returned, he came to know that the first two servants had used their Talents wisely and doubled those,

but the third servant, instead of using his Talent, hid it. The employer rewarded the first two servants and punished the third servant for his foolishness. Milton, here, compares himself to the third servant, because, he feels, he also is not making any use of his talent, i.e., of writing poetry, conferred upon him by the God. But, his situation is different, for he is willing to use his talent and has not hidden his talent like the foolish servant mentioned in the Parable; in fact, his blindness has forbidden him to use it.

Note: Use of 'Pun' is apparent here, as 'Talent' means skill or ability as well as a kind of coin used in ancient Greece.

which is death to hide: Hiding the talent, for the poet, is just like death.

Line 4: Lodged with me: Is lying with me

useless: Unused; without any use.

more bent: Is inclined. The more I'm unable to use my talent, the more I'm inclined to use it.

Note: Here the Poet uses a 'Metaphor' and uses the word 'soul' for his mind.

Line 5: To serve therewith: To serve by making use of my talent.

my Maker: The God, who has made me.

present: To show or put up before the God.

Line 6: My true account: The record of my activities on the earth.

Lest: Otherwise; for fear that.

returning chide: Scold or reproach me when the God returns to me like the master mentioned in the 'Parable of Talents' above.

Line 7: exact: Demand; require; ask for.

day labour: Hard physical work done during the day. Here, labour or work done during the life-time.

light denied: Eye-sight taken back or denied.

Line 8: fondly: Foolishly.

ask: Ask myself.

But Patience: But my patience or endurance.

to prevent: To stop or avoid.

Note: 'Personification' of Patience is noticeable.

Line 9: murmur: Grumble; discontent.

God doth not need: God does not need.

Line 10: Either man's work: Work done by any of the men on earth. or his own gifts: The gifts or talent conferred upon men by the God. who best: Who in the best possible way.

Line 11: Bear: Tolerate or put up with.

mild yoke: Soft or light burden or responsibility; workload.

they serve him best: They serve him in the best way.

His state: God's status, rank or position.

Line 12: Is kingly: Is like a king. at his bidding: At his command. speed: Move speedily or swiftly.

Line 13: post: Fly; travel or move swiftly.

o'er land and ocean: Over land and ocean.

Line 14: who only stand and wait: Who are content with any situation they have been placed in and who face every situation with fortitude and patience. Those who submit to the will of the God happily and stand and wait patiently for their turn or chance to serve Him.

Note: 'Paradox' in the line - 'They also serve who only stand and wait' is evident.

Critical Appreciation of the Poem

Paraphrase

Octave (Lines 1-8)

Overburdened by pamphleteering and other kinds of works, Milton turned completely blind in 1652 at the age of 44. He felt utterly disappointed and aggrieved that he would not be able to write poetry any more. Writing poetry was something, he thought, his life was meant for. He starts the sonnet by mentioning that when he

thinks how he has lost his eye-sight even before he reached the half stage of his life in the dark and vast world, he feels utterly dismayed that, now, he will not be able to use his talent of writing poetry conferred upon him by the God. He further feels that it is like death in life for him to hide this talent. He refers to a foolish servant mentioned in Biblical Parable of Talents (Matthew: 25, 14-30). Talent was a kind of coin used in ancient Greece. According to the Parable, an employer who was going on a long journey gave his three servants five, three, and one Talent respectively. When he returned, he came to know that the first two servants used their Talents wisely and doubled those, but the third servant hid his Talent and did not use it. The employer rewarded the first two servants and punished the third servant for his foolishness. Milton, here, compares himself to the third servant, because, he feels, he also is not making any use of his Talent, i.e., of writing poetry, conferred upon him by the God. But, his situation is different altogether, for he is willing to use his talent and has not hidden his talent like the foolish servant mentioned in the Parable; in fact, his blindness has forbidden him to use it. He feels that his talent is lying useless with him, for he is unable to use it, but his soul wants to use it more eagerly than ever and serve his maker – the God – therewith, so that when God will return to him like the master mentioned in the ‘Parable of Talents’ and ask about the Talent given to him, he will have to present the true account of his activities on earth; in other words, he will have to present the true account of poems he has written during his lifetime. He feels that he will be scolded and reproached by the God for not making use of his talent conferred upon him. Then he foolishly asks himself as to whether God will ask about the labour of writing poetry, despite the fact that he became blind and eye-sight was denied to him.

Sestet (Lines 9-14)

He continues with his idea expressed in the octave, but, soon, his Patience answers him to avert his dissatisfaction that the God never wants anything from anyone, nor does he want anything in lieu of the gifts he has given to men. Milton, then, consoles himself by saying that those who bear the mild yoke of despondency or adversity, placed on their shoulders, with fortitude and forbearance, and submit to the will of the God very patiently serve him in the best manner. The status of the God is like a king and thousands of angels are always ready to carry out his commandments very speedily and fly all over the land and ocean to follow his orders without rest. Milton towards the end of the sonnet arrives at the conclusion that they also serve who submit to the will of the God happily and stand and wait patiently for their turn or chance to serve him, thereby implying that they also serve him who only stand and wait for his orders.

Analysis

Like all other ‘Miltonic Sonnets’, this sonnet is also divided into an ‘octave’ followed by a ‘sestet’. It is written in iambic pentameter, i.e., each line has five pairs of stressed and unstressed syllables thereby making it ten syllables in all. The

rhyme-scheme in the sonnet is: abba, abba for ‘octave’ and cde, cde for ‘sestet’. The sonnet is a fine example of Miltonic sonnet.

The sonnet is autobiographical, as Milton has expressed disappointment after he lost his eye-sight at the age of 44. He is supposed to have dictated this sonnet to his three daughters.

He is aggrieved and annoyed that he is not able to use his poetic talent, but soon, he consoles himself by saying – “They also serve who only stand and wait.” We also get a hint of Milton’s philosophy of life in this sonnet.

SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS III

Write a critical appreciation of “When I Consider How My Light is Spent”.

Who, according to Milton, serve the God best?

ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I

Refer to Section 7.4.

Refer to Section 7.4.

II

Refer to Section 7.5.3.

Refer to Sections 7.5.3.1. and 7.5.3.2.

III

Refer to Section 7.6.1.

Refer to Sections 7.6.1. and 7.6.2.

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

Write a note on Milton’s philosophy of life in the light of the sonnets – “How Soon Hath Time” and “When I Consider How My Light is Spent”.

Write a note on autobiographical elements in Milton’s poetry.

UNIT 8 ALEXANDER POPE:
From An Essay of Man Epistle II

Introduction

Objectives

Alexander Pope: A Biographical Account

Epistle II: The Proper Study of Mankind is Man

Summary

Development of Thought

Analyzing the Character

The Speaker

Style and Technique

Summing Up

Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

References

Terminal and Model Questions

INTRODUCTION

Alexander Pope was the leader of the Neo-classical school. This school was a reaction against the late Elizabethan and the Metaphysical poetry. Neo-classicism emphasized on the virtues of clarity, smoothness, restraint, and proportion. The poets of this school is believed in following the rules, wrote about the town life, and wrote didactic and satiric poetry. Pope's poetry has both the merits and demerits of neo- classicism. Pope does not believe in giving free expression to one's passions and inspiration. Inspiration must be kept under the control of rules. These rules are based on the practice of the ancient writers. If a poet follows these rules, he can describe Nature or life in a better way. 'These rules of old, discovered, not devised; / Are Nature still, but Nature methodized.' Pope mainly wrote satiric poetry. He laughs at the weaknesses of the human beings and the human institutions. This type of poetry is always didactic. His aims both at pleasing and teaching the readers. His poetry is mainly intellectual. It is lacking in emotions and imagination. The result is that the lyrical quality is not there in his poetry. Somerset Maugham once said, 'I have a notion that there is a kind of poetry which appeals to the mind rather than to the heart. Pope's poetry is the best example of this type of poetry'. Like all the neo-classical poets Pope uses many tricks like personifications to elevate his low subject matter. The result is that his poetic diction becomes artificial. As far as versification is concerned, he has used only one meter that is the heroic couplet. However, he has achieved almost perfection in this one meter. His poetry also suffers from the limitations of neo-classicism. Afterwards when there was a romantic reaction against neo-classicism, Pope became unpopular. Some critics even went to the extent of saying that he was not a poet at all. However, this romantic prejudice against Pope was now died away. It is true that he is lacking in passions and imagination and there is too much of uniformity in his poetry. But we should remember that poetry is not only inspiration. It is a craft also. It is useless to compare Pope with Shakespeare or Milton or Shelley. He has his own field and in that field his mastery is supreme.

OBJECTIVES

While studying this unit you must bear in your mind the following aims and objectives which are worthy to mention here to make you able:

To study about neo-classical school.

To understand neo-classical poetry.

To understand and appreciate Heroic Couplet.

Through a study of the poem develop an understanding of man.

ALEXANDER POPE: A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

The present unit deals with the best poem of the best Neo-Classical poet Alexander Pope who laid the foundation of the Neo-Classical or Pseudo- Classical Age in the 18th century which is also known as Augustan Age. Pope is the poet who represents best the early 18th century. ‘Pope,’ says Lowell, ‘is the poet of society, the delineator of manners.’ He represents his own age as Chaucer represents 14th century and Tennyson the Victorian Age. But whereas Chaucer represents completely, Pope represents his age only in fragments. He represents only the life of the aristocratic classes of the town. Nevertheless, he is the child of his age and reflects the main literary and social trends. His poetry is the product of the age of prose and reason, of neo-classicism. That is why it is without sentiment and emotion. It is intellectual and dominated by rationalism. He is the high priest of neo-classicism. It is correct, he lays emphasis on accuracy and exactness, on reason and intellect, on judgment and elegance, on polish and reform. That is why his themes are prosaic-criticism, morals and satire.

Alexander Pope was born in London of middle-class Roman Catholic parents. He remained faithful to the Catholic Church, which entailed, along with heavy taxes, his exclusion from public schools and universities. Pope was taught to read by his aunt, and went to Twofold in about 1698/99. He then went to two Catholic schools in London. Such schools, while illegal, were tolerated in some areas. In 1700, his family moved to a small estate at Popeswood in Binfield, Berkshire, close to the royal Windsor Forest. This was due to strong anti-Catholic sentiment and a statute preventing Catholics from living within 10 miles of either London or Westminster. Pope would later describe the countryside around the house in his poem Windsor Forest. Pope's formal education ended at this time, and from then he mostly educated himself by reading the works of classical writers such as the satirists Horace and Juvenal, the epic poets Homer and Virgil, as well as English authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare and John Dryden. He also studied many languages and read works by English, French, Italian, Latin, and Greek poets. After five years of study, Pope came into contact with figures from the London literary society such as William Wycherley, William Congreve, Samuel Garth, William Trumbull, and William Walsh. Chronic ill-health made him irritable and peevish, but by the age of twenty-four, he was honored as ‘the best poet of England and at present, of the entire world’ (Voltaire). Financial success enabled him to remain happily independent of wealthy patrons of all his life. Pope was the most important figure on the literary scene of the Neo-Classical or Augustan Age of the 18th century. The age laid emphasis on good sense, reason, restraint and a formal style rather than on inspiration or freedom of expression, on intellect rather than on the imagination, on eloquence of form rather than on content. Emotion and enthusiasm were suppressed and elaborate

methods of expression were given more importance than idea being expressed. This gave rise to artificial poetic diction and the mock-heroic element in the 18th century poetry- that is, the use of the heroic couplet to treat a trivial and petty subject matter. Pope was the undisputed master in the field of satiric and didactic verse. He reflected with remarkable clarity every belief, superstition, fashion and whim of his times. His poetry is typical of the age-polished, sophisticated and witty, but artificial. It lacks the passion and fire of Elizabethan poetry. It is a study of life, not a delightful, imaginative vision of life. Thus, the movement towards the Classicism of the Roman literature of the age of Emperor Augustus became in reality pseudo-classical, lacking as it did the substance, content and depth of ancient literature. The money made from his translation of Homer allowed Pope to move to a villa at Twickenham in 1719, where he created his now famous grotto and gardens. Pope decorated the grotto with alabaster, marbles, and ores. He also used Cornish diamonds, stalactites, spars, snakestones and sponge stone. Here and there in the grotto, he placed mirrors, expensive embellishments for the time. A camera obscurer was installed to delight his visitors, of whom there were many. The serendipitous discovery of a spring during the subterranean retreat's excavations enabled it to be filled with the relaxing sound of trickling water, which would quietly echo around the chambers. Pope was said to have remarked that: "Were it to have nymphs as well – it would be complete in everything." Although the house and gardens have long since been demolished, much of this grotto still survives. The grotto now lies beneath Radnor House Independent Co-ed School, and is occasionally opened to the public.

Self-Assessment Questions I

Pope's poetry is the product... (Complete it)
When was Pope honored as 'the best poet of England'?
What is the use of Heroic Couplet in the 18th century?
For which style does Pope famous?

EPISTLE II: "THE PROPER STUDY OF MANKIND IS MAN"

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan; The proper study of Mankind is Man.
Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state, A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side, With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride, He hangs
between; in doubt to act, or rest,

In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast; In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer, Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err; Alike in ignorance, his reason such, Whether he thinks too little, or too much: Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confus'd; Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd; Created half to rise, and half to fall; Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all; Sole judge of Truth, in endless error hurl'd: The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

Go, wond'rous creature! mount where Science guides Go, measure earth, weigh air, and state the tides; Instruct the planets in what orbs to run, Correct old Time, and regulate the Sun; Go, soar with Plato to th'empyreal sphere, To the first good, first perfect, and first fair; Or tread the mazy round his follow'rs trod, And quitting sense call imitating God; As Eastern priests in giddy circles run, And turn their heads to imitate the Sun. Go, teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule - Then drop into thyself, and be a fool!

SUMMARY

The present couplets full of rhyme schemes are an example of high style of the 18th century specially writing about the upper-class society of London. Here Pope draws the similarity and dissimilarity of the man with God. Though man is a bundle of mixture, yet sometimes he is the riddle in himself to be solved by another man. He is unable to judge his power and weakness. That is why he is hanging like Trishanku in this world. Neither he can go up side in the sky nor he can come downward on the earth. In this biting and pungent satire Pope exhorts man to try to know himself and not to be presumptuous enough to think he can know God. A creature of contradictions, man is knowledgeable and ignorant, master and slave, judge and wrong-doer. Placed between God and beasts in the cosmic scheme of things, he is not sure about his own nature, which is a chaos of oppositions, doubts, riddles and confusions. Master of all yet prey to his own instincts, he rises towards the light of knowledge, but falls into the darkness of ignorance. On the one hand, he can penetrate the mysteries of the planets or be a Plato and assert Prime Causes, and on the other, his greatness is only a macabre jest, an 'endless error'. Man regards himself as favored, created in God's own image and, therefore, superior to all

creatures. The poem ends with an anti-climax when Pope says that man may achieve the pinnacle of glory, but in some ways he will always remain a fool, a giddy, shallow creature, lost in his superstitions and hollow pride. Written in the mock-epic style, for which Pope is justly famous, the extract presents the old Socratic adage, 'Man, know thyself.' Man presumes to study and know the heart of God's mystery but remains ignorant about himself.

DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

An Essay on Man is a poem published by Alexander Pope in 1734. It is a rationalistic effort to use philosophy in order to "vindicate the ways of God to man", a variation of John Milton's claim in the opening lines of *Paradise Lost*, that he will "justify the ways of God to man". It is concerned with the natural order God has decreed for man. Because man cannot know God's purposes, he cannot complain about his position in the Great Chain of Being and must accept that "Whatever is right, a theme that was satirized by Voltaire in *Candide*. More than any other work, it popularized optimistic philosophy throughout England and the rest of Europe. His *Essay on Man* and *Moral Epistles* were designed to be the parts of a system of ethics which he wanted to express in poetry. *Moral Epistles* have been known under various other names including *Ethic Epistles* and *Moral Essays*. On its publication, *An Essay on Man* met with great admiration throughout Europe. Voltaire called it "the most beautiful, the most useful, the most sublime didactic poem ever written in any language". In 1756 Rousseau wrote to Voltaire admiring the poem and saying that it "softens my ills and brings me patience". Kant was fond of the poem and would recite long passages of the poem to his students. Later however, Voltaire renounced his admiration for Pope and Leibniz's optimism and even wrote a novel, *Candide*, as a satire on Pope and Leibniz's philosophy of ethics.

The essay, written in heroic couplets, comprises four epistles. Pope began work on it in 1729, and had finished the first three by 1731. They appeared in early 1733, with the fourth epistle published the following year. The poem was originally published anonymously; Pope did not admit authorship until 1735. Pope reveals in his introductory statement, "The Design", that *An Essay on Man* was originally conceived as part of a longer philosophical poem, with four separate books. What we have today would comprise the first book. The second was to be a set of epistles on human reason, arts and sciences, human talent, as well as the use of learning, science, and wit "together with a satire against the misapplications of them." The third book would discuss politics, and the fourth book "private ethics" or "practical morality." Often quoted is the following passage, the first verse paragraph of the second book, which neatly summarizes some of the religious and humanistic tenets of the poem. Pope says that man has learnt about Nature and God's creation by using science; science has given man power but man intoxicated by this power thinks that he is "imitating God". Pope uses the word "fool" to show how little he (man) knows in spite of the progress made by science.

ANALYZING THE CHARACTER

There is solely one character who is none other than writer or speaker himself. He himself asks question and puts the solutions in front of the reader.

The Speaker

The Essay on Man is a philosophical poem, written in heroic couplets and published between 1732 and 1734. Pope intended this poem to be the centerpiece of a proposed system of ethics that was to be put forth in poetic form. It was a piece of work that Pope intended to make into a larger work; however, he did not live to complete it. It challenges as prideful an anthropocentric world-view. The poem is not solely Christian; however, it makes an assumption that man has fallen and must seek his own salvation. It consists of four epistles that are addressed to Lord Bolingbroke. Pope presents an idea on his view on the Universe; he says that no matter how imperfect, complex, inscrutable and disturbing the Universe appears to be, it functions in a rational fashion according to the natural laws. The natural laws consider the Universe as a whole a perfect work of God. To humans it appears to be evil and imperfect in many ways; however, Pope points out that this is due to our limited mindset and limited intellectual capacity. Pope gets the message across that humans must accept their position in the "Great Chain of Being" which is at a middle stage between the angels and the beasts of the world. If we are able to accomplish this then we potentially could lead happy and virtuous lives.

The poem is an affirmative poem of faith: life seems to be chaotic and confusing to man when he is in the center of it, but according to Pope it is really divinely ordered. In Pope's world, God exists and is what he centers the Universe around in order to have an ordered structure. The limited intelligence of man can only take in tiny portions of this order and can experience only partial truths; hence man must rely on hope which then leads into faith. Man must be aware of his existence in the Universe and what he brings to it, in terms of riches, power and fame. It is man's duty to strive to be good regardless of other situations: this is the message Pope is trying to get across to the reader.

STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Alexander Pope rejected all the traditions of the Elizabethan Age and the Metaphysical Age. He followed his own tradition and wrote in Heroic Couplet for which he was known and thought in the 18th century, of prose and reason. His much-acclaimed Pastorals were published in 1709, followed by the Essay on Criticism in 1711. His other well-known work is the philosophical Essay on Man (1733-34), the most-quoted of all his writings. He was an 18th-century English poet, best known

for his satirical verse and for his translation of Homer. Famous for his use of the heroic couplet, he is the third-most frequently quoted writer in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, after Shakespeare and Tennyson. The word 'classic' is applied to the best literature of a nation. Thus, Goethe said, 'Everything that is good in literature is classical'. It is used for the works of the masters of ancient Greece and Rome, Horace, Homer, Virgil etc., for their works is undisputed excellence. It is used for Dante of Italy, for Rapsin and Boileau of France, for their works occupy the highest place in the literature of their particular countries. Pope's works may also be called classical, for they stand in a class by themselves and have undoubted excellence. He had a power of satire almost unrivalled and a skill in using words so consumed that there is no poet, excepting Shakespeare, who has left his mark upon the language so strongly. 'The loss to us,' says John Dennis, 'of Pope's verse, were to become extinct, cannot easily be measured.' He may not be a Shakespeare or Milton, but in his own province says Lowell 'he still stands unapproachably alone.' As has been well said, 'Pope of a thousand years was Pope.' Critics may differ as to whether he is a classic of prose or poetry, but such are his merits, that none has dared deny greatness to him.

Before we consider whether Pope was a classic or not it would be worthwhile to understand the real significance of the word 'classic'. The term has been interpreted in a number of ways: (i) it has been used for a literature which stands in a class by itself, a literature which is of the highest order, (ii) the word is also used for a literature which follows the rules of literary composition, as laid down by the ancient classics of Greece and Rome, (iii) it has also been used as 'antithetical' or opposition of, the word 'Romantic' and finally (iv) the term also indicates which have qualities similar to those of the classic work of antiquity. Pope was a classic also in the second sense of the word. He advocated and claimed to follow, the rules of literary criticism as laid down by the classical writers of antiquity. The critical canons which Pope advocated have been embodied by him in his *Essay on Criticism*, and have been admirably summed up by Court hope in his *History of English Poetry*. In a nutshell, Pope's doctrine is: (a) a writer must 'follow nature', for nature is the source of all wit, 'good sense', and sound judgment. (b) the true standard for determining what is natural and the works of the ancients. One who wants to be really great, must follow the rules of literary composition as laid down by the classics as interpreted by the French Masters whose influence was predominant in the age. (c) the disregard for these natural rules results in all sorts of excesses, faults and errors as are to be observed in the works of the Elizabethans or the Metaphysical poets of the previous century. Thus, when Pope advocated 'follow nature', he did not use the word 'nature' in the same sense in which it was used by Wordsworth or Shelley. By nature, he did not mean the world of leaves and flowers, but he meant the rules of the ancients, which were 'natural' as they were based on actual observation of life. Pope himself claimed to follow these rules.

Anything which savours of wit excesses of the romantics is carefully excluded. The form must be perfect, the rules of composition must be followed, event at the

expense of passion and imagination. Everything must be judged by the standard of good sense, anything which does not appeal to reason and wit must be viewed as a serious fault. The great Elizabethans were barbarians for they did not follow the classical rules of composition. Literature is judged by intellect rather than by its appeal to the imagination. Rationality, intellectuality, and not inspiration or intuition, are therefore, the motif of the poetry of Pope. As Edmund Gosse puts it, 'Pope may not have romance, spirituality but in the lower provinces there is perhaps no single writer who showers fine things about him with such a prodigality of wit or dazzle us so much with the mere exercise of his intelligence.' It is in all these senses that Pope is called a classic. But he is not a true classic, only a false or pseudo-classic, for he exalted form at the cost of matter, while in the classical writers, matter is not so sacrificed. In the works of ancients, there is a balance between form and matter, reason and imagination. Now in the works of Pope this balance between reason and imagination, good sense and sentiment, formal beauty and worth of matter, is lacking. He exalts 'correctness', perfection of forms, nationality and good sense, at the expense of imagination, passion and poetic rapture. His intellectuality suffocates his imaginative sensibility; hence he was not true classic but a pseudo-classic.

Some limitations of Pope as a representative poet may be noted. First, he described only the life of the upper classes of the city of London. The life of the lower sections is ignored. Secondly, even the life of the upper classes is dealt with superficiality. He does not probe into the depths, does not portray the boredom from which the upper-class people suffered. Thirdly, the life of the underworld has not been dealt with. There was much coarseness and brutality in the age, much vice and crime but all this has not been rendered by the poet. He deals only with the surface glitter and ignores the reality behind it.

Self-Assessment Questions II

With what purpose in mind did Pope write this poem?

What was Voltaire's view about this poem?

When was this poem published?

What is the message of Pope to the world?

What is the real significance of the word 'classic'?

What is the reason of calling Pope as a Pseudo- Classic?

SUMMING UP

In this unit you learned in detail about the Neo-Classical school of poetry. You also read about the Augustan age and its chief exponents. The chief characteristics of the Augustan Age were also highlighted. The unit also focused on the most representative of Augustan poets, Alexander Pope and an excerpt from his very popular *An Essay on Man* in which Pope suggested that human beings must accept their position in the "Great Chain of Being" which is at a middle stage between the

angels and the beasts of the world. If we are able to accomplish this then we potentially could lead happy and virtuous lives. Alexander Pope was a consummate artist who polished, chiseled and refined his expression with care and labour. An inapt word never escapes his pen and his mastery over the heroic couplet remains unmatched unto this day. He used it correctly in the most skilful manner. He was a profound craftsman, the supreme craftsman of his age. His style has precision, clarity and aptness. Reason, wit, and good sense are hallmarks of Pope's genius and the present heroic couplet remains a unique contribution to the 18th century literature.

ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I
of the age of prose and reason, of neo-classicism.
Refer to our discussion at 8.3.
Refer to our discussion at 8.3.
Refer to our discussion at 8.3. II
Refer to our discussion at 8.4.2.
Refer to our discussion at 8.4.2.
Refer to our discussion at 8.5.1.
Refer to our discussion at 8.5.1.
Refer to our discussion at 8.6.
Refer to our discussion at 8.6.

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

'The proper study of mankind is man.' Elaborate your arguments with reference to the lines prescribed in your course.
Bring out the salient features of Pope's poetry.

Pope's poetry is the product of the age of prose and reason, of neo-classicism. Elaborate.
What are the limitations of Pope as a poet?
Explain the reasons of the downfall of the Neo-Classical Movement.

UNIT 9: WILLIAM WORDSWORTH:
“The World Is Too Much With Us”, “The Solitary Reaper”

Introduction

~~Objectives~~

An Introduction to Wordsworth

“The World Is Too Much With Us”

Summary

Development of Thought

Analysis

Analyzing the Character

The Speaker

Style and Technique

“The Solitary Reaper”

Summary

Development of Thought

Analyzing the Character

Laity Girl

Style and Technique

Summing Up

Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

References

Terminal and Model Questions

INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth is variously called the harbinger of Nature, the high priest of Nature, and the worshipper of Nature, for he was the poet of Nature par excellence and his chief originality is to be found in his poetry. He has been placed among the greatest of English poets. He is the greatest poet of Nature in English. Critics like Arnold have given him a place in the English Language next only to that of Shakespeare and Milton and in European poetry it is next only to Goethe and Moliere. No doubt he has written a lot of dull poems, and he is at his best only in some poems on Nature where he is really great. The poets before him used to describe Nature either as an ornament or as a background for the human drama. Wordsworth made Nature an independent subject matter of poetry and gave to her a personality of her own. According to De Quincy, 'Wordsworth had his passion for Nature fixed in his blood. It was a necessity of his being, like that of a mulberry leaf to the silk-worm and through his commerce with Nature did he live and breathe.' According to Matthew Arnold, 'Wordsworth's poetry, at its best, is as inevitable as Nature herself. Often Nature seems to take pen out of his hand and write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power.' He reacted against the neo-classical poetry of the 18th century.

Wordsworth, along with Coleridge, published the Lyrical Ballads in 1798. This was a landmark in English poetry. It began the age of the Romantic Revival in England. He was the pioneer of the Romantic Revival of the early 19th century. He gave a new turn to English poetry. He made a great contribution to English poetry by bringing about a revolution both in the subject matter and style of poetry. The World Is Too Much with Us is a sonnet in which Wordsworth criticizes the world of the First Industrial Revolution for being absorbed in materialism and distancing itself from Nature. Composed circa 1802, the poem was first published in Poems, In Two Volumes (1807). Like most Italian sonnets, its 14 lines are written in iambic pentameter. It is written between 1802 and 1804, lamenting the loss of Nature to modern society. It is a Petrarchan sonnet because it has fourteen lines; is written in iambic pentameter that is five feet; written in iambs; an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable. It begins with two quatrains in the octave, first eight lines, rhyming ABBA ABBA; the sestet, final six lines, rhymes CDC DCD; it has a Volta in line eight; and the theme is about Nature.

OBJECTIVES

While taking the high leap and soar of the unit you must bear in your mind the following aims and objectives which are worthy to mention here to make you able:
To know about romanticism and its chief characteristics.

To understand Wordsworth primarily as a poet of nature and man.

To understand and appreciate Wordsworth poetic style.

To develop a better understanding of Wordsworth as a poet through a careful study of his poems.

AN INTRODUCTION TO WORDSWORTH

The present unit deals with one of the best poems of the best Nature bard William Wordsworth who laid the stone of Romanticism in 1798, with the publication of the Lyrical Ballads along with Coleridge. The French Revolution of 1789 was an epoch-making event in the history of the continent of Europe and had deep impact on its literature. It strengthened the process of transition from neo-classicism to romanticism. Basically, the Romantic Movement and the French Revolution were the products of the same impulse. The French Revolution provided the philosophical background to the English Romantic movement. The imagination of the Elizabethans was set on a fire by the Renaissance. The imagination of the Romantics was set ablaze by the French Revolution. They felt as if a new Golden age had dawned in human history. There are three main ideas which inspired this revolution- liberty, equality and fraternity. Wordsworth was in the first flush of his youth when the French Revolution took place. His heart was bubbling with zeal and thrilled with enthusiasm and he welcomed it; 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, /But to be young was very heaven.' But as the reign of terror was let loose in France and the Revolution failed in its purpose, Wordsworth lost faith in it. However, the philosophy of the Revolution continued to inspire him. He remained up to the end of his life the interpreter of the Revolutionary ideas of the dignity of the common man and the love of Nature. The romanticism of the 19th century was both a revival and revolt. It was revival of the qualities which were already present in the literature of Elizabethan period. It was a revolt as well against the artificial and intellectual poetry of the late 17th century and the 18th century. Wordsworth along with Coleridge belonged to the first generation of the Romantics. Shelley, Keats, and Byron belonged to the second generation who started writing when Romanticism had already given its best to the world. Romanticism found its most splendid expression in poetry, but invaded other branches also.

William Wordsworth was born on April 7th, 1770 in Cockermouth, Cumberland, England. Young William's parents, John and Ann, died during his boyhood. Raised amid the mountains of Cumberland alongside the River Derwent, Wordsworth grew up in a rustic society, and spent a great deal of his time playing outdoors, in what he would later remember as a pure communion with Nature. In the early 1790s William lived for a time in France, then in the grip of the violent Revolution; Wordsworth's philosophical sympathies lay with the revolutionaries, but his loyalties lay with England, whose monarchy he was not prepared to see overthrown. While in France, Wordsworth had a long affair with Annette Vallon, with whom he

had a daughter, Caroline. A later journey to France to meet Caroline, now a young girl, would inspire the great sonnet "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free." Freed from financial worries by a legacy left to him in 1795, Wordsworth moved with his sister Dorothy to Racedown, and then to Alfoxden in Grasmere, where Wordsworth could be closer to his friend and fellow poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Together, Wordsworth and Coleridge began work on a book called *Lyrical Ballads*, first published in 1798 and reissued with Wordsworth's monumental preface in 1802.

An outstanding contribution and quality of his poetry is his treatment of Nature. He takes up only the bright side of Nature. His love of Nature passed through four stages. In the first stage his love for Nature was only a healthy boy's delight in open nature. In the second stage his love for Nature becomes sensuous. In the next stage he spiritualized Nature. He believes that all the objects of Nature are the expression of one Universal Spirit. In this stage he became a pantheist and a mystic. In the last stage he combines Nature with man. There is harmony between man and Nature. Therefore, there can be a communion between man and Nature. As a poet of man Wordsworth is equally great. He does not describe the life of the lords and ladies of London. He takes up the rustics as the subject of his poetry. He is a poet of simple humanity. He describes the patience and dignity of the common man. The democratic note is very strong in his poetry. He is also a great poet of childhood. According to Wordsworth every great poet is a teacher. He combines pleasure with instruction. He says, 'I want to be considered a teacher or nothing else.' His poetry has got a great soothing and healing power. But we should remember that he is not a didactic in a narrow sense. He teaches by appealing to the heart and not to the intellect. He reacted against the artificial poetic-diction of the neo-classical poets of the 18th century. He believes that poetry should be written in the language of the common people. He himself says, 'The selection of the language of all the rustics is the real language of poetry.' Of course, many times he could not himself follow his theory about the language of poetry. He is the most egotist of all the poets. He writes about himself, his impression and his reactions. His poetry reflects his personality fully. He believes that Nature is the best teacher. The full development of human personality is possible only in the lap of Nature with a 'heart that watches and receives.' If we go to Nature with such a heart: 'One impulse from a vernal wood/ May teach you more of man;/ Of moral evil and of good/ Than all the sages can.' ('The Tables Turned'). In Lucy poem he describes how Nature combines all her forces to educate Lucy and develop her into an ideal maiden. Lucy will learn something or the other from every object of Nature: 'The floating clouds their state shall lend/ To her! For her the willow bends.' ('The Education of Nature'). He writes in Tintern Abbey, 'Nature did never betray the heart that loved her.'

Wordsworth believes that there is harmony between Nature and man. As long as man is in contact with Nature, he is happy and pure. The more he goes away from Nature, the more corrupt and miserable he becomes. William Wordsworth gave a new turn to Nature poetry in English. All the coming poets were influenced by him

directly or indirectly. He was not only a poet but also a prophet of Nature. He has given Nature a life and a soul of her own. No other poet is more truthful in the representation of Nature than Wordsworth. He is the greatest Nature poet of England because he is the poet of more than external nature; he is in a higher degree, the poet of man. According to Wordsworth, 'Nature's healing power is a panacea for all the ills of human life.' 'Byron, being Byron,' says Hudson, 'saw Nature in the tumult of revolt. Wordsworth, being Wordsworth, found in Nature what he sought-the peace which was in his own soul.' It was for this reason that he could find: 'The silence that is in the starry sky/The sleep that is among the lovely hills.' This spirit took his last sleep in 1850.

Self-Assessment Questions I

What is the date of the publication of the Lyrical Ballads?

What is the date of the French Revolution?

What are the three principles of the French Revolution?

To which generation of Romantic poets did Wordsworth belong?

Who are the bards of the second generation of Romanticism?

To which mythology do Proteus and Triton belong?

THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH US

The world is too much with us; late and soon, Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon, The winds that will be howling at all hours, And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers, For this, for everything, we are out of tune;

It moves us not. – Great God! I'd rather be A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,

Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn; Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;

Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

Summary

The poem is basically explaining the conflict between humanity and nature. 'The world is too much with us; late and soon.' The sentence describes how we have affected the world; the way the past and the future are going to be consumed by the way we are treating Nature. 'Getting and spending we lay waste our powers.' Wordsworth shows his fatalistic view on mankind, 'getting and spending' relates to our greed as a nation that we are using up all of Nature and its resources. As the

industrial revolution was just starting at this time, it gives us a great insight to what many of the poets thought about the way the revolution was spreading consuming Nature. Using the word 'power', he makes man seem very all powerful and mighty, in comparison to Nature. We are not using our powers for the good, instead greed has clouded our judgment. 'little we see in nature that is ours.' Even though we do not own the Nature, we still use it for our benefit, and instead of contributing to it we are taking it away. 'We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!' Allusion is used here to relate to the Bible. As man, we are made out of dust, as described in Genesis. This sentence is saying that we have given away the part of us that is the earth, and by doing this and destroying this part of us, it is 'a sordid boon', which basically means this spreading consuming is terrible. 'The sea that bares her bosom to the moon.' 'This could have many meanings. As a woman baring herself in these days was very unnatural, it could be referring to the fact that this is unnatural for us to destroy the earth. It could also mean that in the way the woman is bearing herself, our actions have been exposed for everything to see, we have given ourselves away for money and greed and material possessions. We as humans are always caught up with worldly things not remembering where the true reason for living lies. This poem is confusing and makes you wonder if we are consuming the world and Nature. But yet this makes you think get a better understanding.

The writer arises a question in our minds in the octave (first eight lines); what did we do to our bounds to the nature and nature itself? We became consumers and lost our emotions. "The world is too much with us" that we are consuming it. There is no more balance, harmony; 'The regret of mankind.' In the sestet (last six lines) he finds an impossible solution or criticizes being a Christian who behaves as enemy of Nature. He tells he would prefer a pagan who admires to worship Nature. His poem examines the persona's thoughts and feelings towards the industrialization of modern society particularly England and comments on the loss of innocence and moral integrity this has brought upon society. The first line 'The world is too much with us' first addresses the idea of man's separation from Nature which is repeatedly references throughout the poem; 'Little we see in nature', 'we are out of tune'. Wordsworth comments on the segregation of man and planet and blames this upon societies materialism and squalor, 'Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers'. The powers Wordsworth make reference to may be one's ability to imagine and to see ourselves as part of Nature and God's creation. These things appear to have been given up for the means of production, of gathering and mining and spending and working. The contrast of 'sordid boon' conveys the bitter- sweet victory of man over his environment. The comment that Wordsworth appears to make is that even though man may have advances tremendously and has created civilized he lost his connection and value with Nature.

In the fourth line imagery of Nature is used to appeal to the readers' senses and to help them imagine the beauty of the scenes described by the persona 'This sea that bares her bosom to the moon'. Furthermore, personification is used which shows

the naked beauty and vulnerability of Nature 'bares her bosom'. The next line However, contrasts this peaceful yet passionate scene as the persona describes the 'howling' winds giving Nature a fierce and brutal mentality. However, it is also possible to see the sea and the wind as our own human natures and feelings which are like 'sleeping flowers' during this period when men neglected their natural origins and emotions and were 'out of tune' with themselves. The next line is the beginning of the sestet which brings with it a change in rhyming pattern. This sestet contrasts the octave where Wordsworth ridicules society's abandonment of Nature as he represents a society which praises Nature 'pagan' and is one with their earth. The reference to Proteus and Triton who are aquatic deities from Greek mythology and who have the ability to command the sea seems to say that society only holds the illusion of power over Nature. However, it is real Gods such as these who are in control. Also, the imagery used to describe 'Proteus rising from the sea' and Triton blowing 'his wreathed horn' gives the feeling of retribution from Nature.

Development of Thought

"The World is Too Much with Us" is a miniature manifesto of the Romantic Revival. A Petrarchan sonnet, the poem was first published in *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807) when the Industrial Revolution was in full swing. It exemplifies how man in his materialistic march has relegated the rejuvenating powers of Nature and lost communion with the same. Wordsworth adjudges that it is Nature that is a panacea for all the trials and tribulations of life. It is instrumental in spiritually enlightening ourselves. The words "late and soon" bridge the gap between the past and present. Our energies are expended in "getting and spending". Life has evolved into a business proposition where it is appraised in terms of profit and loss. "Little do we comprehend that Nature is ours": Here the poet may refer to 'Nature' as both external and inner nature. In the rat race for commercialization, Human Nature is commoditized and marginalized. The line: "This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon" bears testimony to this fact; that in the process of commoditization we have ruled ourselves out and have sold our hearts and principles away. It is a dishonorable gift that we have to offer.

The wind is an emblem of revitalization and rejuvenation. However, here the howling wind is up-gathered like sleeping flowers. Human civilization is stagnant, characterized by dormancy and morbidity everywhere. Note that the poet does say that the flowers are sleeping, and not dead. Therefore, there is room for hope. The poet further declares that 'we are out of tune'. The harmony of life is nowhere to be found. Rather than live in a manipulative, competitive and calculating era, the poet aspires to transcend into primitivism where instinct reigns supreme over reason. He envisages himself on a green meadow "less forlorn" and he apprehends how the heathens imparted more significance to Nature and kinship. "Forlorn" has been commented by critics as a remarkable word in terms of its etymology. It is the past participle of the word 'forlorn' which means to lose completely. The literal meaning

of 'forlorn' therefore, amounts to the state of being completely lost. The poet refers to the modern condition of human beings that find themselves in a state of existential amnesia. Towards the end, the poet captures images of the sea-Gods. Wordsworth begins with wind, then earth (lea) and then progresses to the sea. In the process, he traverses the three basic elements of Nature. He longs to regress into paganism to "see" Proteus and "hear" Triton. That is, he wishes to utilize all his channels of sensory perception to revert to irrationalism and hold spiritual union with Nature.

Proteus was a sea God, who according to Greek legends was the son of Poseidon (the God of the sea) whose flocks he tended. He had prophetic powers and the ability to change shapes. The poet wants to revisit this vision, so that it can come across as a prophetic revelation before the people. Triton, a powerful sea-god was the son of Poseidon and Amphitrite. Triton was half-man and half-dolphin. This brings to us the picture of a mermaid. In the first symbolism of Proteus, he wants to be entirely pagan adapting himself to the surrounding. In the second, he aspires for the intellect of a man in the form of a mermaid, but yet be restricted to Nature in the form of water. Being a perfect product of post-enlightenment Christianity, Wordsworth's pagan views are therefore, more emblematic and universal than spiritually and personally inclined. These lines been explained by Mr. Webb as follows: "To us, spoiled by civilization, Nature is dead: in her presence we find ourselves solitary, unfriended. The heathens were better off: for them every tree had its wood nymph, every stream Naiad; every form of Nature might give chance "glimpse" of some indwelling spirit."

Wordsworth intended to highlight the fact that we receive Nature in its abundance but see very little, and have given our hearts away. We need to get up and pay attention because we are out of tune with Nature. "Great God," how could we do such a thing. Wordsworth highlights that information be subtly varying the meter. As well, the poet symbolizes Nature in the past by suggesting he would rather be "A Pagan," which is pre-Christian. Nature itself is symbolized in Proteus and Triton. Proteus is the shape-changing herdsman of the sea; Triton, usually depicted blowing a conch shell, is a sea deity. As with much of Wordsworth's work, he sees deity in Nature. Although this sonnet is written in iambic pentameter, it does have eight variations. The variations are purposeful; to obtain the attention of the reader. In this case, the variations are in line two, the word "Getting" is a trochee; a stressed and unstressed syllable; line three, the word "Little" is a trochee; a stressed and unstressed syllable; line four, the word "given" is a trochee; a stressed and unstressed syllable; line seven, the phrase "And are up" is an anapest; an unstressed, unstressed and stressed syllable; line eight, the words "we are" and "out of" represent two trochees; a stressed and unstressed syllable, and "tune" is a single spondee; a single stressed syllable; line nine "Great God" is a spondee; a stressed and stressed syllable. There are a lot of references to Nature in "The World is too Much with Us"; the speaker refers to the sea twice, he describes a lea at another

point, and he also talks about the winds. But the poem isn't so much a celebration of Nature as it is a lament about the state of man's relationship to it. While the poem doesn't critique mankind's destruction of Nature per se, the fact that people are no longer moved by the natural world makes it figuratively dead.

Analysis

Lines 1-2

The poem opens with a complaint, saying that the world is out of whack and that people are destroying themselves with consumerism ("getting and spending"). The world is too much with us" sounds odd, and could mean several things. It could mean that the world – life in the city, contemporary society – is just too much, as in "This is too much for me, and I can't take it anymore." The "world" might refer to the natural world instead of the city, in which case it would mean that humanity is so busy that they don't have time for the natural world because "it's too much." It could also mean mankind or society is a burden on the world, as in "there's not enough space for both man and the earth" or "mankind has upset a delicate balance." "Late and soon" is a strange phrase. It could mean "sooner or later," or it could mean we've done this recently or in the past ("late") and will do it in the future as well ("soon").

Lines 3-4

The poem's tone of complaint continues as the speaker describes a rift between Nature and humanity. We get a potential clue as to the identity of at least one of those "powers" described in line 2: the ability to feel, which we've lost because we've given our hearts away. The phrase "little we see in Nature that is ours" is tricky, and can mean several, related things. We've become so absorbed in consumerism – in another world – that we no longer seem a part of Nature. Alternatively, "Nature" can't be "got" or "spent" – because it is, isn't a commodity that is manufactured – so it doesn't seem like it has anything to offer us. A "boon" is a reward, a benefit, or something for which to be thankful. "Sordid" means base or vile. The speaker is being sarcastic here, almost as if he were saying, 'wow it's so great that we've handed over our hearts...not!'

Lines 5-8

The poet elaborates on man's alienation from Nature, claiming that humanity is no longer susceptible to the influence of the "Sea," the "winds," and basically everything else in Nature. "Tune" is interesting. It can mean "out of tune," in the sense that we're out of touch with Nature, but it also suggests something like "attuned." The sea isn't literally taking her shirt off here; the speaker is elegantly describing the ways in which ocean-tides are affected by the moon, or just how the sea appears to him in its relationship with the moon. The speaker describes the

winds at rest; they are "sleeping flowers" that will howl when they wake up. Wait minute, flowers? Howling? Weird. "For" is more complicated than it looks. It can mean both that we're not in the right tune "for" the natural world, in the right frame of mind to "get it." It could also mean "because," as in "because of these things we're out of tune."

Lines 9-10

In some sonnets, including this one, important things happen in the ninth line; there is a shift, called "volta" or "turn" that moves the poem in another direction. While the speaker reiterates the claim, he's been making all along – humanity and Nature are alienated from one another – he also tells us how he wishes things were, at least for him, personally. He appeals to the Christian God (the capitalization means he has a specific, monotheistic deity in mind) and says he'd rather be a pagan who was raised believing in some antiquated ("outworn"), primitive religion ("creed"). To wish to be a pagan in 1807 – when the poem was published – would be like saying, "I wish I could wear clothes or do things that were in fashion a thousand years ago." It can be considered that he believed less in the religion he was told to believe, and more in pagan gods and religion. "Suckled" just means "nursed at a breast" or "nourished."

Lines 11-12

The speaker explains why he would rather be a pagan. If he were, then he could look at the land in front of him and see something that wouldn't make him feel so lonely and sad ("forlorn"). A "lea" is a meadow or open-grassland. Earlier, the poet was telling us about the sea and suddenly the thought shifts to a meadow. Maybe he's standing in a meadow overlooking the sea. The speaker wants "glimpses" of something, but we don't know what; he suggests that if he were a pagan he would only see things in snatches, for a brief moment, in the blink of an eye. And this isn't even guaranteed; he says he "might" have "glimpses."

Lines 13-14

The speaker elaborates on those potential "glimpses." He says he might see Proteus coming out of the ocean or Triton blowing his horn. Proteus is a sea god in Greek mythology. He had the ability to prophesy the future, but didn't like doing it. If someone grabbed a hold of him and tried to make him predict the future, he would change his shape and try to get away. The modern word "protean" – meaning variable or changing a lot – comes from his name. Triton was a son of Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea. He had a conch shell that he blew into in order to excite or calm the waves. "Wreathed" means something like twisted, sinewy, having coils; the "wreathed horn" is a reference to Triton's conch shell.

ANALYSING THE CHARACTER

There is only and solely one character who is none other than writer or speaker himself. He himself asks question and puts the solution to it.

The Speaker

The speaker complains that "the world" is too overwhelming for us to appreciate it. We're so concerned about time and money that we use up all our energy. People want to accumulate stuff, so they see nothing in Nature that they can "own." According to the speaker, we've sold our souls. We should be able to appreciate beautiful events like the moon shining over the ocean and the blowing of strong winds, but it's like we're on a different wavelength from Nature. The speaker would rather be a pagan who worships an outdated religion so that when he gazes out on the ocean (as he's doing now), he might feel less sad. If he were a pagan, he'd see wild mythological gods like Proteus, who can take many shapes, and Triton, who looks like a merman. To me the poem pivots on the dichotomy of 'world' as opposed to 'the earth'. It is our 'boon' to have altered the earth to our own devices, our own collective betterment. But a boon made 'sordid' by what we have lost, (and suggesting as well the uncleanness of the industrial age in the early 19th century, the means of production, the mining and gathering of materials, the necessities of city life, concentrations of humanity in drab filthy tenements blocks, the abuses of the labor force, men, women and children reduced to factory tools, their concentration in industry-owned houses, etc). 'Our powers' we have lost; the kind the Poet in his sensitivity did claim to apprehend... even if he was often wont to fully name. 'Little we see in Nature that is ours' suggests not reality, but a mere illusion of separation, brought on by our imbalance, our shift of focus towards the rational and materialistic, and away from the Divine and inspirational.

'The sea', 'the wind' is as 'sleeping flowers'... not in their presences within the world, but within US. It is our own powers and awareness we have lost, forsaken in our pursuit of material gain. 'We are out of tune,'? It moves us not.' And Thus, the last lines speak of what, for Wordsworth, represents something nearer to what he sees as a vital human being in a human-shaped, human-sized reality, a reality worthy of us; something capable of igniting 'our powers', of suggesting our place in the Nature of things. '... a creed outworn'? He'd prefer that to a creed of 'progress' heedless to our connection to Nature and to our inner-selves. The poet laments the fact that we have become immersed in the affairs of the world. We think 'getting and spending' is what life is about. We consider ourselves to be 'apart' from Nature. We no longer think that we are part of Nature and that we that we are connected to the trees, grass and the animals around. We have also forgotten the fact that it is when we realize our oneness with Nature that we become truly happy. We do not realize that the pleasures of the world inevitably leave us dissatisfied but that the pleasures of Nature do not. We think that Nature is for us only and also for us to use as we wish.

I would say that some verses in the Bible encourage us in this belief. 'The earth and its fullness thereof are thine'. Genesis says God created the earth for man's use. Older religions of Greece, Rome and also the religions of the East like Hinduism and Buddhism, the religions of ancient tribes like the Indians (of America), the aboriginals of all nations, on the other hand, stress man's essential oneness with Nature. Christ unlike modern day Christians warned us against the wiles of the world. He said, 'I am not of this world', meaning that he had conquered all worldly desires. But we are enmeshed in the affairs of the world and think this is life. Wordsworth prophetically speaks about materialism and consumerism taking hold of mankind two hundred years ago, when factories and machines were just coming into existence. He asks us to find our true selves.

STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Nature: Symbol Analysis

"The World is too Much With Us" is obsessed with Nature; in fact, the central complaint of the poem is that people are so consumed by consumerism that they are no longer moved by Nature. But there's more in the poem than just a gripe about humanity's inability to say, "Oh my god, that is the most beautiful ocean I've ever seen." According to this poem, mankind's alienation from Nature is also the sign of a much deeper problem, the loss or destruction of something as important as our hearts. Line 3: The speaker notes that, because humanity has become so immersed in consumerism, it no longer feels any connection to the natural world. Lines 5: The speaker describes "this sea" as something that should move us but doesn't. He compares the sea to someone taking off their shirt ("bares her bosom"), but because he doesn't use "like" or "as" this is a metaphor. "Bares her bosom" is an example of alliteration, a phenomenon in which several words begin with the same letter. Line 6: The speaker compares the winds to a wolf or any other animal that "howls." The "howling" animal is a metaphor for the winds. Line 7: The winds aren't "howling" at this moment, and the speaker compares them to "sleeping flowers" that are "up-gathered." Because the speaker uses the word "like" to make the comparison, this is a simile. Line 8: The speaker here refers to "everything," by which he means the entire natural world. The way in which the speaker says "for this, for everything" suggests that the sea and the wind were just standing in as representatives for "everything" else; parts (the sea and wind) standing in for the whole (the natural world), that's called synecdoche. The speaker uses a musical instrument as a metaphor for humanity; for humanity to be "out of tune" means they are tuned to a pitch that isn't in harmony or unison with Nature. Line 11: The speaker tells us he's standing on a lea, which is an open pasture or meadow. Line 13: The speaker describes the sea, only this isn't the same sea of line 5; the sea has gone back in time in a sense because it is now full of deities like Proteus.

The Senses: Symbol Analysis

In a poem concerned with our inability to be moved by Nature, it is no surprise that the senses are invoked on several occasions. The speaker suggests that our obsession with "getting and spending" has altered, or even destroyed, our ability to see anything of value in Nature. As if to compensate for this sad state of affairs, this figurative blindness, the speaker says he would rather be a pagan, because then he would at least see and hear something a little more inspiring. Line 3: The speaker describes humanity's alienation from Nature as a kind of blindness; people no longer see any similarities between Nature and humankind, nor do they see anything in Nature that is worth their time. Line 12: The speaker says that if he were a pagan he might have "glimpses" of something that would make him less depressed. Line 13: The speaker elaborates on those "glimpses," telling us that if he were a pagan he might "have sight" of Proteus rising out of the sea. Line 14: Alongside a vision of Proteus, the speaker tells us that he might also "hear" Triton blowing his horn.

Feelings: Symbol Analysis

Wordsworth was one of the prominent Romantic poets, and they were always talking about their feelings. This poem is no exception, only the rhetoric is more subtle than usual. It is not only humanity's inability to "see" anything in Nature that so depresses the speaker, it is also our inability to be moved by it. Such insensibility is, for the speaker of the poem, a sad sight. Lines 1-2: The speaker implies that we don't have time for Nature because we're too busy "getting and spending" all the time; the phrase "we lay waste our powers" is cryptic, but the fact that it occurs so close to the word "heart" suggests that it has some connection to our ability to feel. Line 4: The speaker says that we have given away our hearts, the organ most often associated with feelings, sentiment, etc. Of course, the heart doesn't literally do anything but pump blood, which means it is a symbol of our feelings. Line 8: The speaker says we are "out of tune" for the sea and wind. Here, a musical instrument is a metaphor for humanity; for people to be "out of tune" means that they are tuned to a different pitch, one that isn't in harmony with Nature. There is also the suggestion that people are out of touch with Nature. Line 9: The speaker says bluntly what he's been suggesting all along: nature doesn't move us anymore or cause us to have an emotional response. Nature never literally "moves" us, so "move" is here a metaphor for a change in one's emotions. Line 12: The speaker suggests that the current state of affairs has caused him to feel "forlorn" (i.e., sad, depressed, etc.). He implies that if he were a pagan he would see things that would make him feel differently.

Death: Symbol Analysis

There aren't any overt references to death in the poem, but the speaker imagines humanity's alienation from Nature as a kind of death. In addition, Nature has

become so alien to mankind that it is virtually unrecognizable as Nature, as something that is moving. It is figuratively dead, in the same way that people are emotionally dead. Line 2: The poet claims people are killing their "powers" (probably something like our ability to feel), because they're so obsessed with "getting and spending." Line 4: The act of giving away our hearts is a metaphor for our alienation from Nature. "Sordid boon" is a paradox because a boon is a reward or gift, which we usually think of as good, but the poet calls it "sordid," which is bad. Lines 9-10: Paganism is a thing of the past, which is why it is a "creed outworn." It's used up, out of style, dead, kind of like those jeans you wore in third grade.

Paganism and Mythology: Symbol Analysis

The speaker complains that people are no longer moved by the sea and the winds, and he tells us that he'd rather be a pagan. At least that way he would be able to see something in Nature less depressing than the gross consumerism that is at the root of humanity's alienation from Nature. More importantly, he includes himself in the category of people who aren't moved by Nature, and his preference for paganism also reflects a desire for a Nature from which mythical creatures might spring. Line 10: The speaker expresses his desire to be a pagan "suckled in a creed outworn." Here, nursing (suckling on a breast) is a metaphor for one's relationship to religion. Line 13-14: The speaker says that if he were a pagan he might see Proteus coming out of the ocean or Triton blowing his shell.

Metaphor -The metaphor "we have given our hearts away, a sordid boon" is also a paradox. Sordid suggests the worst aspects of human nature such as immorality, selfishness and greed, while a boon is something that functions as a blessing or benefit. The contradiction between the meanings of the words suggests that materialism is a destructive and corrupt blessing which the industrial revolution has produced. It emphasizes the tension between the good exterior and the sordid truth behind materialism. On an exterior level, material goods bring pleasure and are a symbol of man's progress; however, in truth, they feed the worst aspects of humanity: Thus, a "sordid boon."

Sonnet Form -Wordsworth employs a strictly structured form, the Italian sonnet, which conforms to a set of strict conventions. As in many sonnets by the Romantic poets, he creates a tension between the emotional, natural, and fluid themes explored in the poem and the structured form of the sonnet. This tension reflects what was occurring during the Romantic Era, in which artists and poets were rebelling in the structured world of the neoclassical period. Employing the familiar with the new and revolutionary- Wordsworth uses the familiar structure of the sonnet as well as referencing to familiar ancient Gods (in the authors context they would have been familiar) to persuade the reader to engage in a positive way to the concepts addressed. The unfamiliar or unknown is always feared and suppressed

Thus, by incorporating the familiar with the revolutionary the reader in the 19th century is more likely to engage positively with Wordsworth's message.

Repetition and Rhyming Scheme -The repetitive rhyme scheme ABBAABBA, and the use of word pairs such as "getting and spending" and "late and soon" emphasizes the monotonous nature of modern life and materialism. Getting and spending is a cluster of longer emphasized words with many consonants, also possibly emphasizing this view. In essence, materialism is just that getting and spending: it is devoid of emotion or a true fulfilling purpose. In many ways the stereotypes of man and woman mirror the difference between the neoclassical and romantic period between civilized and nature. Men in this context are associated with rationality, strength, order and power, whereas women are associated with emotion and the imagination.

Music and Harmony -The line, "For this, for everything we are out of tune" implies that man is out of tune with nature, unable to live in harmony with the world around him. By describing the harmonious relationship of man and Nature as a tune, Wordsworth evokes a sensuous experience of Nature.

Collective Pronoun --Wordsworth uses the words "we" and "us." This includes the reader, once again positioning the reader to engage with the poem. **Imagery** --In the simile "and are up gathered now like sleeping flowers," sleeping flowers suggest that man is numb and unaware of the beauty and power of the natural world. At the same time, however, there is also a certain optimism: the image of sleeping flowers implies that humans are only dormant, and that there is some hope we will wake up and realize the power of nature. **Punctuation** --The poem's many commas and semicolons create pauses that instill reflection in the reader. In each pause the reader is given space to contemplate and engage with the message.

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS II

What is the pattern of this sonnet?

What are the 'sleeping flowers'?

Who was the son of Poseidon, the Greek God of Sea.

"Bares her bosom" is an example of?

What is alliteration?

"Sordid boon" is an example of?

What is the rhyme scheme followed in this sonnet?

THE SOLITARY REAPER

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

Alone she cuts and binds the grain, And sings a melancholy strain;

O listen! for the Vale profound Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chant

More welcome notes to weary bands Of travelers in some shady haunt, Among Arabian sands:

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird, Breaking the silence of the seas Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?--Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow For old, unhappy, far-off things, And battles long ago:

Or is it some more humble lay, Familiar matter of to-day?

Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain, That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang As if her song could have no ending; I saw her singing at her work, And o'er the sickle bending;--I listened, motionless and still; And, as I mounted up the hill, The music in my heart I bore,

Long after it was heard no more.

Summary

The Solitary Reaper is a ballad by English Romantic poet William Wordsworth, and is considered one of his best-known works. The Solitary Reaper presents a familiar but striking picture of a peasant girl working in her field. The poet sees the young, beautiful Scottish girl reaping the corn all alone in the field. The scene is so

enchanting that he stops to watch the girl who is reaping and singing a song simultaneously. She sings a melodious sad song. The whole valley seems to be overflowing with the sweet sound of her song. The sweetness of the girl's song reminds the poet of sweet-singing nightingales and cuckoos. The poet thinks that the girl's song is sweeter than that of the nightingale, singing to some group of tired travelers in some shady oasis in the Arabian Desert. It is sweeter than that of the song of the cuckoo that disturbs the silence of the seas in the spring season on distant Hebrides islands. The poet fails to know the theme of the girl's song as he is not familiar with the dialect in which the solitary reaper is singing. He makes certain guesses. Possibly, her song is about some tragic events of the past or about the battles fought long ago. It may be about some common, familiar events of life. It may be about some universal human pain, loss, or suffering. The poet says that it hardly matters what she sings. What is important here is that her song seems to be never-ending. The poet listens to her song as she reaps and binds the grain bending over her sickle. He stands still and silent, and carries in his heart the echoes of the song which will haunt him for long.

Composed of thirty-two lines and divided into four stanzas, the poem is dominated by one central figure, a highland girl standing alone in a field harvesting grain. The poem is written in the first-person narrative and can be classified as pastoral, describing a scene from the country life. In the first stanza, the poet indicates how the solitary highland lass (the girl from the mountains) is reaping and singing a song which is incomprehensible to the poet. The poet urges not to disturb her in her work and her singing. He suggests others to either watch her or gently pass from the scene. The poet highlights how the solitary reaper sings a melancholic tune while doing her work. The poet emphasizes how the entire valley is flowing with the sound of the song. In the second stanza, the poet is all praises for the tune of the song. The poet is unable to understand the language of the song but the tune is quite expressive. In this stanza, the poet employs the literary device of metaphor and hyperbole to emphasize the enchanting quality of the song. The poet categorically says that no nightingale did ever chant in such a mellifluous voice, the quality of voice of the reaper surpassing that of the cuckoo-bird in spring. In the third stanza, the poet tries to conjecture about the themes of the song. Given its melancholy tune, the poet feels that the theme of the song might be of some natural sorrow, loss or pain or of battles fought long ago. Finally, the poet concludes that even if he cannot grasp the meaning of the song, he finds the tune touching his heart and lingering in his mind for ever giving him joy despite its melancholy nature.

Self-Assessment Questions III

What is ballad?

What is the theme of the song?

Does Wordsworth believe in harmony between Nature and Man? Give illustrations from the poem.

What is the setting of the poem?

Why does the poet have to make guesses about the theme of the song of the girl?

Development of Thought

Along with “I wandered lonely as a cloud,” “The Solitary Reaper” is one of Wordsworth’s most famous post-Lyrical Ballads lyrics. In ‘Tintern Abbey’ Wordsworth said that he was able to look on Nature and hear “human music”; in this poem, he writes specifically about real human music encountered in a beloved, rustic setting. The song of the young girl reaping in the fields is incomprehensible to him (a “Highland lass,” she is likely singing in Scots, a dialect), and what he appreciates is its tone, its expressive beauty, and the mood it creates within him, rather than its explicit content, at which he can only guess. To an extent, then, this poem ponders the limitations of language, as it does in the third stanza (“Will no one tell me what she sings?”). But what it really does is praise the beauty of music and its fluid expressive beauty, the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling” that Wordsworth identified at the heart of poetry. By placing this praise and this beauty in a rustic, natural setting, and by and by establishing as its source a simple rustic girl, Wordsworth acts on the values of Lyrical Ballads. The poem’s structure is simple—the first stanza sets the scene, the second offers two bird comparisons for the music, the third wonders about the content of the songs, and the fourth describes the effect of the songs on the speaker—and its language is natural and unforced. Additionally, the final two lines of the poem (“Its music in my heart I bore / Long after it was heard no more”) return its focus to the familiar theme of memory, and the soothing effect of beautiful memories on human thoughts and feelings.

The poet orders his listeners to behold a “solitary Highland lass” reaping and singing by herself in a field. He says that anyone passing by should either stop here, or “gently pass” so as not to disturb her. As she “cuts and binds the grain” she “sings a melancholy strain,” and the valley overflows with the beautiful, sad sound. The speaker says that the sound is more welcome than any chant of the nightingale to weary travelers in the desert, and that the cuckoo-bird in spring never sang with a voice so thrilling. Impatient, the poet asks, “Will no one tell me what she sings?” He speculates that her song might be about “old, unhappy, far-off things, / And battles long ago,” or that it might be humbler, a simple song about “matter of today.” Whatever she sings about, he says, he listened “motionless and still,” and as he traveled up the hill, he carried her song with him in his heart long after he could no longer hear it. The four eight-line stanzas of this poem are written in a tight iambic tetrameter. Each follows a rhyme scheme of ABABCCDD, though in the first and last stanzas the “A” rhyme is off (field/self and sang/work).

The Solitary Reaper anticipates Keats’s two great meditations on art, the “Ode to a Nightingale,” in which the speaker steepes himself in the music of a bird in the forest—Wordsworth even compares the reaper to a nightingale—and “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” in which the speaker is unable to ascertain the stories behind the

shapes on an urn. It also anticipates Keats' "Ode to Autumn" with the figure of an emblematic girl reaping in the fields. Memory is crucial to Wordsworth throughout these poems, because it is memory that enables the individual to regain access to the pure communion with Nature enjoyed during childhood. As Wordsworth explains in 'Tintern Abbey', memory works upon the individual psyche even when the individual is unaware of it, and pleasant, beautiful memories of nature work to preserve and restore the connection between the individual and the purity of the natural world. Wordsworth puts this idea most concisely in *The Solitary Reaper* when he writes of the girl's song, "The music in my heart I bore, / Long after it was heard no more."

Wordsworth employs a kind of identity-switching technique, whereby Nature is personified and humanity is, so to speak, naturalized. Wordsworth describes himself as wandering "like a cloud," and describes the field of daffodils as a dancing crowd of people. This kind of interchangeable terminology implies a unity—metaphors from either realm can be applied to the other, because the mind and the natural world are one. A subtler version of this technique appears in "Intimations of Immortality," in which the poet describes the natural world in the final stanza with a sequence of ascribed actions and characteristics previously performed and possessed in the poem by human beings. Wordsworth expresses anger with a sweeping, dramatic rhetorical skill, often taking risks with language that create spectacular imagery in the reader's mind, as when the wind and the raging sea are swept up like a bouquet of flowers in "The world is too much with us." The principle moral ideal Wordsworth upholds in the poem is simply the quality of happiness gleaned from the unity of the inner self with the natural world. In both sonnets, Wordsworth declares that humanity is out of touch with these realms— "out of tune" with them in the first, having "forfeited" them in the second. England has violated that ideal by becoming materialistic, and by failing its traditional institutions such as church, home, and literature.

Recovering "the naked and native dignity of man" makes up a significant part of Wordsworth's poetic project, and he follows his own advice from the 1802 preface. Wordsworth's style remains plain-spoken and easy to understand even today, though the rhythms and idioms of common English have changed from those of the early nineteenth century. Many of Wordsworth's poems (including masterpieces such as 'Tintern Abbey' and the 'Intimations of Immortality Ode') deal with the subjects of childhood and the memory of childhood in the mind of the adult in particular, childhood's lost connection with Nature, which can be preserved only in memory. Wordsworth's images and metaphors mix natural scenery, religious symbolism (as in the sonnet "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free," in which the evening is described as being "quiet as a nun"), and the relics of the poet's rustic childhood—cottages, hedgerows, orchards, and other places where humanity intersects gently and easily with Nature. Wordsworth's poems initiated the Romantic era by emphasizing feeling, instinct, and pleasure above formality and

mannerism. More than any poet before him, Wordsworth gave expression to inchoate human emotion; his lyric “Strange fits of passion have I known,” in which the speaker describes an inexplicable fantasy he once had that his lover was dead, could not have been written by any previous poet. Curiously for a poet whose work points so directly toward the future, many of Wordsworth’s important works are preoccupied with the lost glory of the past—not only of the lost dreams of childhood but also of the historical past, as in the powerful sonnet “London, 1802,” in which the speaker exhorts the spirit of the centuries-dead poet John Milton to teach the modern world a better way to live.

Analysing the Character

There is only one character who is none other than the laity girl or the singer herself who is singing a sweet but melancholic song coming from her heart as she reaps and binds the grain.

Laity Girl

Wordsworth’s Scottish tour in the autumn of 1803 produced some beautiful poems. This poem is one of them. It is one of Wordsworth’s most famous lyric. He records in this poem his reaction to an ordinary incident. What others might have passed by producing a strong emotional response in him, his response, rather than the image causing it is his subject here. After expressing the fact that he is deeply moved, he allows the emotion its own life and delights in new access of thought and feeling. A highland girl is all alone in the field. She is reaping and singing by herself. The poet asks the passersby to stop or gently pass without disturbing her. She is reaping the harvest and binding the sheaves alone. And the notes of her melancholy song are resounding in the deep valley. The song of the girl is sweeter to the poet than that of the nightingale to the tired travelers who take rest in the oasis of the Arabian Desert. To the poet, the girl’s song seems more thrilling than the cuckoo’s song heard in spring time in the silent seas of the remotest Hebrides. The poet asks someone to tell him the theme of the girl’s song because the language in which she is singing is incomprehensible to him. As there is no one to interpret the song to the poet, he guesses that the melancholy song of the girl might be connected with unhappy incidents or battles of the past. He further guesses that the song might be about some misfortunes of everyday life of sorrows which come out of the natural course of the things. Whatever might have been the subject matter of the girl’s song, it appeared to the poet that she would go on singing forever. The girl was singing at her work. The poet remained motionless and still while the song was going on. The melody of the song remained enshrined in the heart of the poet long after it had stopped. The poem is based on Wordsworth’s personal experience, he did not see the Solitary Reaper, did not hear her song. It is imaginative in the ordinary trivial sense. He had the idea from a friend’s record and re-created the reality for himself. With its simplicity, suggestiveness, pathos, and verbal music, the Solitary Reaper

remains a very delightful lyric. It is not only one of the best of Wordsworth's best poems, but one of the most wonderful lyrics in the whole of literature.

The speakers of Wordsworth's poems are inveterate wanderers: they roam solitarily, they travel over the moors, and they take private walks through the highlands of Scotland. Active wandering allows the characters to experience and participate in the vastness and beauty of the natural world. Moving from place to place also allows the wanderer to make discoveries about himself. In "I travelled among unknown men" (1807), the speaker discovers his patriotism only after he has traveled far from England. While wandering, speaker uncovers the visionary powers of the mind and understand the influence of nature, as in "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (1807). The speaker of this poem takes comfort in a walk he once took after he has returned to the grit and desolation of city life. Recollecting his wanderings allows him to transcend his present circumstances. Wordsworth's poetry itself often wanders, roaming from one subject or experience to another, as in *The Prelude*. In this long poem, the speaker moves from idea to idea through digressions and distractions that mimic the natural progression of thought within the mind. In the present poem too, the laity little girl could do nothing but to do her work and sing the melancholy but sweet song which was heard no more after the depart of Wordsworth. The poem has a clear narrator who instruct the reader to 'behold her, single in the field, / yon solitary Highland Lass! These first two lines both indicating that the woman is alone. Next the third line reinforces this detail by saying that she is 'reaping and singing by herself.' The lines have a very lyrical quality to them, but the poet also mentions that the woman is singing. This adds the readers mind a gentle hum from the woman as she works. Music is also mentioned towards the end of this stanza as the area she is working in is said to be 'overflowing with the sound.' The poet has painted a picture of a woman at peace with her surroundings as she works. The reader is also told at the start of the first stanza, 'stop here or gently pass!' Not only has the poet depicted tranquil setting, but he also warns the reader that it should be maintained as if any sudden sound will shatter the calmness around the woman. The theme of the relation of man with the natural world is again emphasized when the narrator asks, 'tell me what she sings?' Wordsworth compares her singing to a Nightingale, but he never tells the reader the words the woman sings, leaving the question if there is any lyric unanswered. This makes the woman's song even more a part of Nature. The poem also points out, in a slightly ironic way, how little words truly matter in the end. Language is what sets man apart from animals in the world. By taking emphasis off speech, the bond between the solitary reaper and Nature can more easily be seen. Wordsworth re minds his readers to take a moment and appreciate the natural world. To do so, like with the woman in the poem, might be solitude but if such a relationship is found, people are truly not alone.

STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Wordsworth's monumental poetic legacy rests on a large number of important poems, varying in length and weight from the short, simple lyrics of the 1790s to the vast expanses of *The Prelude*, thirteen books long in its 1808 edition. But the themes that run through Wordsworth's poetry, and the language and imagery he uses to embody those themes, remain remarkably consistent throughout the Wordsworth canon, adhering largely to the tenets Wordsworth set out for himself in the 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Here, Wordsworth argues that poetry should be written in the natural language of common people, rather than in the lofty and elaborate dictions that were then considered "poetic." He argues that poetry should offer access to the emotions contained in memory. And he argues that the first principle of poetry should be pleasure, that the chief duty of poetry is to provide pleasure through a rhythmic and beautiful expression of feeling—for all human sympathy, he claims, is based on a subtle pleasure principle that is "the naked and native dignity of man."

Throughout Wordsworth's work, Nature provides the ultimate good influence on the human mind. All manifestations of the natural world—from the highest mountain to the simplest flower—elicit noble, elevated thoughts and passionate emotions in the people who observe these manifestations. Wordsworth repeatedly emphasizes the importance of Nature to an individual's intellectual and spiritual development. A good relationship with Nature helps individuals connect to both the spiritual and the social worlds. As Wordsworth explains in *The Prelude*, a love of Nature can lead to a love of humankind. In such poems as "The World Is Too Much with Us" (1807) and "London 1802" (1807) people become selfish and immoral when they distance themselves from Nature by living in cities. Humanity's innate empathy and nobility of spirit becomes corrupted by artificial social conventions as well as by the squalor of city life. In contrast, people who spend a lot of time in Nature, such as laborers and farmers, retain the purity and nobility of their souls.

Memory allows Wordsworth's speakers to overcome the harshness of the contemporary world. Recollecting their childhoods gives adults a chance to reconnect with the visionary power and intense relationship they had with Nature as children. In turn, these memories encourage adults to re-cultivate as close a relationship with Nature as possible as an antidote to sadness, loneliness, and despair. The act of remembering also allows the poet to write: Wordsworth argued in the 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that poetry sprang from the calm remembrance of passionate emotional experiences. Poems cannot be composed at the moment when emotion is first experienced. Instead, the initial emotion must be combined with other thoughts and feelings from the poet's past experiences using memory and imagination. The poem produced by this time-consuming process will allow the poet to convey the essence of his emotional memory to his readers and

will permit the readers to remember similar emotional experiences of their own. The same experience could be felt in the Solitary Reaper where she alone sings and works at the lonely island from where the speaker was passing.

Throughout his poems, Wordsworth fixates on vision and sight as the vehicles through which individuals are transformed. As speakers move through the world, they see visions of great natural loveliness, which they capture in their memories. Later, in moments of darkness, the speakers recollect these visions, as in “I wandered lonely as a cloud.” Here, the speaker daydreams of former jaunts through nature, which “flash upon that inward eye / which is the bliss of solitude” (21–22). The power of sight captured by our mind’s eye enables us to find comfort even in our darkest, loneliest moments. Elsewhere, Wordsworth describes the connection between seeing and experiencing emotion, as in “My heart leaps up” (1807), in which the speaker feels joy as a result of spying a rainbow across the sky. Detailed images of natural beauty abound in Wordsworth’s poems, including descriptions of daffodils and clouds, which focus on what can be seen, rather than touched, heard, or felt. In Book Fourteenth of *The Prelude*, climbing to the top of a mountain in Wales allows the speaker to have a prophetic vision of the workings of the mind as it thinks, reasons, and feels. In this poem, we have the same experience of

I listened, motionless and still; And, as I mounted up the hill, The music in my heart I bore, Long after it was heard no more.

Wordsworth praised the power of the human mind. Using memory and imagination, individuals could overcome difficulty and pain. For instance, the speaker in ‘Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey’ (1798) relieves his loneliness with memories of Nature, while the leech gatherer in “Resolution and Independence” (1807) perseveres cheerfully in the face of poverty by the exertion of his own will. The transformative powers of the mind are available to all, regardless of an individual’s class or background. This democratic view emphasizes individuality and uniqueness. Throughout his work, Wordsworth showed strong support for the political, religious, and artistic rights of the individual, including the power of his or her mind. In the 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth explained the relationship between the mind and poetry. Poetry is “emotion recollected in tranquility”—that is, the mind transforms the raw emotion of experience into poetry capable of giving pleasure. Later poems, such as “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (1807), imagine Nature as the source of the inspiring material that nourishes the active, creative mind. In Wordsworth’s poetry, childhood is a magical, magnificent time of innocence. Children form an intense bond with Nature, so much so that they appear to be a part of the natural world, rather than a part of the human, social world. Their relationship to Nature is passionate and extreme: children feel joy at seeing a rainbow but great terror at seeing desolation or decay. In 1799, Wordsworth wrote several poems about a girl named Lucy who died at a young

age. These poems, including “She dwelt among the untrodden ways” (1800) and “Strange fits of passion have I known” (1800), praise her beauty and lament her untimely death. In death, Lucy retains the innocence and splendor of childhood, unlike the children who grow up, lose their connection to Nature, and lead unfulfilling lives. The speaker in “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” believes that children delight in Nature because they have access to a divine, immortal world. As children age and reach maturity, they lose this connection but gain an ability to feel emotions, both good and bad. Through the power of the human mind, particularly memory, adults can recollect the devoted connection to nature of their youth. In this poem the bard recollects his past memory and coins this poem long after it was heard no more, following his own principle of poetic diction ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, recollected in tranquility’.

Self-Assessment Questions IV

Do you agree that the song of the girl is sweeter to the poet than that of the nightingale and seems more thrilling than the cuckoo’s song?

What type of bond between the solitary reaper and Nature can be seen?

According to Wordsworth what is the first principle of poetry?

Do you agree that Wordsworth followed his own principle of poetic diction in the poem? Give reasons for your answer.

SUMMING UP

In this unit, you read about Romanticism and traced its roots in the French Revolution. You saw how in contrast to Pope, who represented Neo Classicism, Wordsworth stood for liberty and freedom both in subject matter as well as style. The sonnet ‘The World is too much with us’ gives us a glimpse of Wordsworth’s philosophy of life. Similarly, the poem ‘The Solitary Reaper’ exemplifies Wordsworth’s love for nature and laity.

ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I

1. 1789

From 1789 to 1799

liberty, equality and fraternity

first

Shelley, Keats and Lord Byron

Greek

II

Refer to our discussion at 9.4.1

Refer to our discussion at 9.4.1 and 9.4.2.

Refer to our discussion at 9.4.1. and 9.4.2.

Personification

Refer to our discussion at 9.6

Oxymoron

abba abba

III

Refer to our discussion at 9.7.1.

Refer to our discussion at 9.7.1.

Yes

Refer to our discussion at 9.7.1.

Refer to our discussion at 9.7.1.

IV

Yes

Refer to our discussions at 9.7.2 and 9.7.3.1.

Refer to our discussion at 9.8.

Yes, also refer to our discussion at 9.8.

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

‘The world is too much with us.’ Elaborate your arguments in reference to the line of the sonnet prescribed in your course.

Wordsworth has variously been called the ‘harbinger of Nature, the high priest of Nature, and the worshipper of Nature.’ Elaborate.

‘Little we see in Nature that is ours’. Elaborate this line with special reference to the sonnet prescribed in the syllabus.

The Solitary Reaper presents a striking picture of a peasant girl. Discuss.

Unit 10 PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY**“Ode to the West Wind”, “The Cloud”****Introduction**

Objectives**Percy Bysshe Shelley****“Ode to the West Wind”****Substance of the Poem****Critical Appreciation of the poem****“The Cloud”****Substance of the poem****Critical Appreciation of the poem****Summing Up****Answers to Self-Assessment Questions****References****Terminal and Model Questions**

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Romanticism' means a tendency, feeling, principle or spirit in search of a romance beyond the limits of ordinary life. The word 'Romanticism' has been derived from 'romance' which means something imaginary, adventurous, thrilling and wonderful. In literature the term came to mean a tendency, a principle, OR an attitude which insists upon something imaginary exciting emotional and wonderful.

The dates of the Romantic period of literature are not precise and the term 'romantic' was itself not widely used until after the period came in practice. Conventionally speaking, the Romantic period began in 1798 with the publication of Lyrical Ballads by Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge and ended in 1832 a year which saw the death of Sir Walter Scott and the enactment of Parliament of first 'Reform Bill'. The period underwent a rapid social and intellectual change as the nation was transformed from an agricultural country to an industrial one. The Industrial Revolution created change, unrest and eventually turbulence in society. The Industrial Revolution led to an increasing regimentation of the individual. Rousseau's philosophy of "Back to Nature" was the major force behind the Romantic Movement.

The ideals of French Revolution—liberty, equality and fraternity provide another platform for the Romantic Movement.

Percy Bysshe Shelley occupies a prominent place in Romantic period's works of art. Shelley explored political and social questions explicitly. He was the individualist and idealist who rebelled against the institutions of family, Church, marriage and the Christian faith and against all forms of tyranny. Shelley's first major poem 'Queen Mab' came into being in 1813 which attacks institutional religion and codified morality, sketching a utopian vision of man's need for simple virtue and straightforward happiness. Shelley's poetry like his life presents two distinct moods. In the first mood, he is the violent reformer, seeking to overthrow the present institutions. Poems like 'Queen Mab' (1813), 'Revolt of Islam' (1817-18), 'Hellas' (1821-21) and 'The Witch of Atlas' (1820) etc. can be cited as the example of first mood. In the second mood, Shelley has presented himself like a wanderer following a vague, beautiful vision, forever sad and unsatisfied. 'Ode to the West Wind' is the greatest lyrical poems of Shelley written in 1819 and published in 1820 along with musical drama, Prometheus Unbound. 'The Cloud' is one of his famous poems in which Shelley personifies the cloud and gives it life and personality.

OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit carefully you will be able to —

Find out the treatment Nature in P.B. Shelley's poetry.

Explain the use of personal symbols in Shelley's poems.

Point out the thematic concerns of Shelley's poems.

Discuss Shelley as a Romantic poet.

Examine Shelly as a lyrical Poet.

P.B. SHELLEY

Percy Bysshe Shelley holds an unforgettable position and is one of the prominent figures in the Romantic School of Poetry. Romanticism which is said to begin with the publication of Thomson's poem *Seasons* in 1730, but reached its culmination with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798.

As a lyric poet, Shelley is among the greatest. His song is pure inspiration, a thing of lightness, melody and grace. It can be said undoubtedly that Shelley's lyrics represent the highest achievement of romantic poetry. Some of his most outstanding lyrics are— 'Ode to the West Wind', 'To a Skylark', 'The Cloud', 'To Night', 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'.

The striking quality of Shelley's lyricism is its spontaneity. His lyrics are pure effusions and they originate from his heart, loaded with intense feeling and deep passion. Some of Shelley's lyrics are highly embellished composition. They possess glittering quality because of having ornamental imagery.

Appreciation and love of Nature can be considered as the perceptible and important issue of Shelley's poetry. Shelley believes in the healing influence of Nature of the human heart. In the poem "The Euganean Hills", we find the description, how he draws comfort from his contemplation of natural scene around him and also from his fanciful description of an imaginary island where he and his company might lead a happy and careful life. In the 'Ode to the West Wind', we find Shelley's love for the indefinite and changeful aspects of Nature. According to Shelley, as he tells us in a note, 'Ode to the West Wind' was written in 1820 in a wood round the Arno, near Florence (Italy) when the strong wind was collecting the vapours. It concerns itself with Shelley's dreams for a better society and expresses his helplessness that he cannot make them come true. In his utter despair Shelley turns to the West Wind which is for him an embodiment of absolute will and power.

In the first three stanzas of the poem, we find the description of the complete sway of the wind on the earth, the sky and the oceans. The dead leaves are the symbolic of the decadent and unjust institutions which the West Wind destroys. The wind is an agent of the regeneration on the earth. It creates the atmosphere of terror in the oceans and in the sky. He prays to the West Wind to instill destructive power into his body so that he can bring his desired change in the society. The poem 'The Cloud' is considered to be the most famous lyric of Shelley. In this lyric, he has personified the cloud. The poem has become the autobiography of the cloud.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born on August 4, 1792 at Field Place near Horsham Sussex and was the eldest son of Timothy Shelley who subsequently succeeded to a baronetcy. On both of his father's and mother's side, he was descended from noble, old families, famous in the political and literary field, history of England. After some schooling at Isleworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley went to Eton in 1804, where in the style of Mrs. Ann Radcliffe, he wrote two lurid romances *Zastrozz* (1808) and *St. Irvyne* (1810).

In 1810, Shelley was sent to University College, Oxford where he met Thomas Jefferson Hogg and developed a warm and intimate relationship with him. At Oxford, he developed his passion for reforming the world. He had written some verses at Eton and this creativity did not stop at Oxford, rather he continued his versifying exercises and published a small collection entitled *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson* (1810). The religious skepticism of both Hogg and Shelley led them to publish a pamphlet named *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811). Consequently, both of them were expelled from the University. After the expulsion from the University, Shelley migrated to London where he experienced a considerable monetary problem because his father had detached himself from Shelley. In London, he developed intimacy with a 16-year old girl named Miss Westbrook who was the daughter of a retired hotel keeper. Shelley had courted his cousin Harriet Grove, but when she came to know about his atheistic beliefs, she broke off with him. After a few years, Shelley returned to his family in Sussex and reconciled to his father. Again, we find Shelley in London with his girlfriend. After a long discussion and interaction, they agreed to elope. On August 28, 1811 Shelley married Miss Westbrook according to the rites of Scottish Church.

Mrs. Shelley was amiable, accommodating, highly educated and well-bred. Shelley and Mrs. Harriet Shelley lived with Hogg for a short period of time. There occurred a quarrel between Shelley and Hogg on the complaint of Shelley's wife that latter had tried to seduce her during a temporary absence of Shelley.

Now the marriage of Shelley and Harriet proved to be ill-matched and by the spring of 1814, Harriet left Shelley for a prolonged visit to Bath. Shelley met another girl named Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin who was the daughter of William Godwin and fell in love reciprocally. Shelley again with Mary eloped to Switzerland on July 28, 1814. Shelley and Mary now settled at Bishopgate, near Windsor Forest, where the

excellent poem 'Alaster' or the Spirit of Solitude came into being and published in 1816. In Switzerland Shelley met Byron.

Shelley with his wife Mary, two infants William and Clara went to Italy for convalescent. After a short period of time, his both infants William and Clara died. In Pisa, Shelley developed intimacy with Emilia Viviani and fell passionately in love with her. "Epipsychidion" (1821), a transcendental love-poem is the result of this love affair.

As a lyric poet, Shelley ranks with our very greatest and no praise would be excessive for the ecstasy of feeling the lightness and grace, the felicity of phrase and the verbal music of such poems as 'The Skylark', 'The Cloud', 'The Sensitive Plant,' 'The Ode to the West Wind' and 'A Lament'. Shelley was a prolific writer. He authored Queen Mab, Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, Alastor, The Revolt of Islam, Prometheus Unbound, The Cenci, Hellas The Masque of Anarchy, Ode to Liberty and Adonais and so on.

Shelley's first published poem was Queen Mab (1813). In 'The Necessity of Atheism', Shelley argued that the existence of God could not be proved. The Mask of Anarchy was a direct response to the Peterloo Massacre occurred in 1819. Julian Maddalo can be dealt as a central text of Romanticism. The character Julian and the Count Maddalo represent Shelley and Byron.

Shelley was a great writer of Romantic period. He has been described in different ways by various writers. Carlyle described him as "windy phenomenon". Other descriptions are— "sun treader" (Browning), "a beautiful and intellectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain" (Matthew Arnold), "elfin spirit in a man's form" (Hervegh), "a Titani spirit in a girl's form" (Carducci) and "at times almost a blackguard" (T.S. Eliot).

The last residence of Shelley was the Casa Magni, a bare and exposed dwelling on the Gulf of Spezia. On July 18, 1822, Shelley and William went on a boating excursion where they were caught in a storm, and were both drowned. Both bodies were subsequently washed ashore and cremated on August 15 and 16, 1822, respectively. Shelley's ashes were buried in the new Protestant Cemetery in Rome.

ODE TO THE WEST WIND

1

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being, Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red, Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou, Who chariotest to
their dark wintry bed

The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low, Each like a corpse within its grave, until

Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill (Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air) With living
hues and odours plain and hill:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere; Destroyer and Preserver; hear, O hear!

2

Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion, Loose clouds like Earth's decaying leaves are
shed, Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou Dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre

Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: O hear!

3
Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,
Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay, And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear The
sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear, And tremble and despoil themselves: O hear!

4
If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear; If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free Than thou, O Uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven, As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven

As Thus, with thee in prayer in my sore need. Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

5

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own! The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone, Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce, My spirit! Be
thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth! And, by the
incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind! Be through my
lips to unawakened Earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Substance of the Poem

Shelley wrote this great ode in October 1819, and got it published in 1820 along with his musical drama, Prometheus Unbound. This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood round the Arno near Florence. This poem was written on a day when the stormy wind was collecting the vapours that send the autumnal rains. The poem consists of five stanzas of fourteen lines each and is highly lyrical and musical. It begins with an invocation and end with a forceful prophecy.

‘Ode to the West Wind’ is the greatest lyrical poem of P.B. Shelley. It was written in 1819 and was published in 1820 along with musical drama ‘Prometheus Unbound’. The ode is a type of lyric but longer and more serious than that. An ode is a long lyric poem that is serious in subject and treatment, elevated in style and elaborate in its stanzaic structure. It is always in rhyme and often is in the form of an address. Shelley begins the poem with an invocation to the West Wind. Just as the ghosts flee on the approach of a magician, similarly the West Wind drives away the dead leaves with it. The West Wind carries the seed far and near where they lie buried in the earth like the dead bodies, and with the approach of Spring, they sprout into new plants and trees. The poet, in the second stanza of the poem, describes the activities of the West Wind in the sky. The West Wind carried the loose-clouds on its surface. The loose clouds seem to have fallen from the sky just as withered leaves

fall from the branches of trees. The clouds are the messenger of rain and lightning. The West Wind sings the funeral song for the dying year.

In the third stanza of the poem, Shelley describes the effects of the West Wind on water. The Mediterranean Sea gets awakened from its long slumber by the West Wind. When the West Wind blows on the Atlantic Ocean, the plants growing at the bottom of the Ocean tremble with fear and shed their leaves.

From the fourth stanza onwards, the poet becomes personal and establishes a relationship between his own personality and that of the West Wind. He remembers his boyhood days when he was uncontrollable and swift as the West Wind. He thought that he could even excel the speed of the West Wind. But now he is surrounded by the sorrows of the world and has been rendered helpless. He prays to West Wind to lift him away from the sorrows of the world like a leaf, a wave and a cloud. Shelley wants the West Wind to make him as its lyre and spread his thoughts all over the world so that his thoughts may bring about a change in human history.

In conclusion, it can be said that the autobiographical touch adds a peculiar charm to the ode. The poem begins with a sad mood but ends with an optimistic note—"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind".

Self-Assessment Questions I

What are the different phases of the West Wind as discussed in the poem?

Why does poet want to become the lyre of the West Wind?

Write a short note on the 'symbolic use' in the poem "Ode to the West Wind".

Write a short note on the effect of the West Wind on Mediterranean Sea.

Discuss in brief about the personal element in the poem "Ode to the west Wind".

Track down the preserving quality of the West Wind.

After going through the poem "Ode to the West Wind" the idea that we get is—

The opening stanza describes the activities of the West Wind in the sky.

The poem ends with optimistic approach.

The poet does not want to become the lyre of the West Wind.

The poet condemns the West Wind.

Critical Appreciation of the Poem

The poem deals with Shelley's dream for a better society. P.B. Shelley seeks the help of the West Wind to establish an ideal society. In his utter emotional turmoil

and despair, and considering his inability to change the society, Shelley turns to the West Wind which is for him an embodiment of absolute will and power.

The West Wind as a Symbol: The West Wind has been used as a symbol in the poem for the artistic expression of the poet. Shelley sees the west Wind as a symbol of destruction and preservation. It destroys the dried leaves and preserves the living seeds. It is the destroyer of the old order, taboos, customs and systems of the society; and preserves the new. It has become the symbol of change, it destroys as well as recreates. The treatment of West Wind in the poem also acts as the symbol of Shelley's own personality. As an adolescent boy, the poet possesses the same qualities which the West Wind keeps.

He is tameless, swift, proud, wild uncontrollable and free. We find a close affinity between the poet and the West Wind, and this affinity encourages the poet to seek help from the West Wind. Shelley was of the view that such a difficult work as to change the society and establish the ideal society cannot be done by the ordinary man, rather it can be materialized with the help of the West Wind.

West Wind as a Medium of Shelley's Expression of Idealism: The poem presents Shelley as an idealist dreamer, visionary and revolutionary. The West Wind acts as a tool for the poet to express his sense of idealism. In this poem, he utters a prophecy about the radiant future of the mankind. He was extremely upset with the existing orders of the society. He hates political tyranny and orthodox of Christianity. The wickedness, the evil and the wars which have made the life of mankind so unhappy and miserable, are extremely criticized by the poet. He wanted to have the abolition of these vices. The poet wanted to liberate the mankind from the chains of political, religious and intellectual slavery. The poem ends with an optimistic sense making us sure that bad days did not last for a long period of time. They are followed by good ones.

Personal Element in the Poem: "Ode to the West Wind" as a whole can be divided into two parts. The first part of the poem deals with the activities of the uncontrollable West Wind over the earth, sky and the ocean, while the second part establishes a relationship with the personality of the poet and the West Wind. It has a strong autobiographical touch in the fourth stanza, where the poet discovers a similarity between his own personality and that of the West Wind. As a boy he is swift, proud free, and uncontrollable like the West Wind. But he is not able to act like the West Wind does because of the oppressed attitude of the society. He appeals to the West Wind to come forward to his help and to lift him like a wave, a leaf, and a cloud. He implores—

Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed.

A Heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed On too like thee: tameless, and swift and proud.

The poet appeals to the West Wind to treat him as a lyre and to blow on him as it blows on the forest.

Style and Meter: The ode is composed in terza rima, an Italian verse form. Each stanza is executed in fourteen lines like a sonnet. The last two lines of every stanza are a couplet. So far as the form of the poem is concerned, it has been written in a regular ode with the same rhyme-scheme in each stanza.

The poem is perfect from its construction view point. We find a logical development of ideas in a coherent order. The first stanza deals with the activities of the West Wind on the earth. In the second stanza, we find the description of the activities of the West Wind in the sky, while the third one tells us how the West Wind awakens the blue Mediterranean Sea from its long slumber. The fourth stanza is profoundly personal, expressing the poet's deep sense of sorrow and frustration.

The language is noble and chaste, which reminds us of Keats's practices in 'Ode to Autumn' and Wordsworth's in 'Ode to Duty'. The poem begins with an address to the West Wind in the form of a sustained invocation and proceeds to deal with the theme of death and rebirth. The poem is full of autobiographical tone and adds peculiar charm to the ode.

THE COULD

I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers, From the seas and the streams;
I bear light shade for the leaves when laid In their noonday dreams.
From my wings are shaken the dews that waken The sweet buds every one,
When rocked to rest on their mother's breast, As she dances about the sun.
I wield the flail of the lashing hail,
And whiten the green plains under, And then again I dissolve it in rain,
And laugh as I pass in thunder.

I sift the snow on the mountains below, And their great pines groan aghast;
And all the night 'tis my pillow white, While I sleep in the arms of the blast.
Sublime on the towers of my skiey bowers, Lightning my pilot sits;
In a cavern under is fettered the thunder,

It struggles and howls at fits;
Over earth and ocean, with gentle motion, This pilot is guiding me,
Lured by the love of the genii that move In the depths of the purple sea;
Over the rills, and the crags, and the hills, Over the lakes and the plains,
Wherever he dream, under mountain or stream, The Spirit he loves remains;
And I all the while bask in Heaven's blue smile, Whilst he is dissolving in rains.

The sanguine Sunrise, with his meteor eyes, And his burning plumes outspread,
Leaps on the back of my sailing rack, When the morning star shines dead;
As on the jag of a mountain crag,
Which an earthquake rocks and swings, An eagle alit one moment may sit
In the light of its golden wings.
And when Sunset may breathe, from the lit sea beneath, Its ardours of rest and of love,
And the crimson pall of eve may fall From the depth of Heaven above,
With wings folded I rest, on mine aëry nest, As still as a brooding dove.
That orbèd maiden with white fire laden, Whom mortals call the Moon,
Glides glimmering o'er my fleece-like floor, By the midnight breezes strewn;
And wherever the beat of her unseen feet, Which only the angels hear,
May have broken the woof of my tent's thin roof, The stars peep behind her and peer;
And I laugh to see them whirl and flee, Like a swarm of golden bees,
When I widen the rent in my wind-built tent, Till calm the rivers, lakes, and seas,
Like strips of the sky fallen through me on high, Are each paved with the moon and these.

I bind the Sun's throne with a burning zone,

And the Moon's with a girdle of pearl;
The volcanoes are dim, and the stars reel and swim, When the whirlwinds my banner unfurl.
From cape to cape, with a bridge-like shape, Over a torrent sea,
Sunbeam-proof, I hang like a roof, The mountains its columns be.
The triumphal arch through which I march With hurricane, fire, and snow,
When the Powers of the air are chained to my chair, Is the million-coloured bow;
The sphere-fire above its soft colours wove, While the moist Earth was laughing below.

I am the daughter of Earth and Water, And the nursling of the Sky;
I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores; I change, but I cannot die.
For after the rain when with never a stain The pavilion of Heaven is bare,
And the winds and sunbeams with their convex gleams Build up the blue dome of air,
I silently laugh at my own cenotaph, And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb, I arise and unbuild it again.

Substance of the Poem

'The Cloud', one of the famous poems of Shelly under lyric genre was written during late 1819 or early 1820. In this poem the cloud has been personified and given a life and personality. The poem is written in anapestic meter, a foot with two unaccented syllables followed by an accented syllable. In the poem "The Cloud" Shelley presents the concrete description of the idea of the cloud treating it as a living entity. The poet allows the cloud to narrate its existence and activities in various aspects. P.B. Shelley presents the poem in the form of monologue, speaking only the cloud about itself, Thus, the poem has become the autobiography of the cloud.

The poem as a whole is written in six stanzas. Each stanza presents different activities of the cloud. In the first stanza, we come to know the importance of the cloud for plant kingdom. The plant cannot survive without the help of the cloud as it brings water to nourish them. The cloud provides shades to these plants and

vegetation, also acts as shelter for the same from the scorching heat of the sun during the hottest hours. The drops of water from the cloud awakes the sleeping buds which had slept on their mother's breast to absorb the sun rays for their food.

In the second stanza, we are informed about the cloud's counterpart—lightning and thunder. Lightning plays the role of a guide and torches the cloud in the course of its journey. It sits on the high towers of the aerial dwelling of the cloud. During its journey the cloud enjoys itself in the smile of the blue sky, while lightning dissolves itself in tears of rain. The third stanza describes a type of game between the cloud and the sun. In the morning, we find the sun climbing up of sky, riding on the back of the cloud. It presents an imagery of a bright winged eagle sitting on the edge of a rock. In the evening, when the crimson colours of the sky due to sun setting spread all over things, the cloud stops its journey and becomes motionless. Now the cloud rests like a dove sitting in its nest with folded wings. In the fourth stanza we find the description of the cloud about the moon. The beautiful, white moon glides over the surface of the cloud. During this journey of the cloud at some places, where the moon places its feet, the clouds thin roof is vent open, through which the stars peep and stare.

In the fifth stanza, we find the restricted power of the cloud. The cloud weaves a bright circle round the sun as well as round the moon. The cloud says that when it covers the entire sky, the huge quantity of it appears like a bridge across the ocean. The cloud hangs like a roof over a torrential sea, and protects it from the heat of the sun. In the last stanza, there is a description of the origin of the cloud. The cloud says that it is the daughter of earth and water and its infancy is nursed by the sky. There is a sense of transmigration of the cloud in various forms. It changes its form but maintains the essence of its life.

Thus, in a nutshell, it can be said that the cloud is the agent of the cycle of life, for it brings water and sustains all living being.

Self-Assessment Questions II

Write a short note on the poem "The Cloud".

Discuss in brief the thematic concern of the poem "The Cloud".

'The Cloud' exhibits Shelley's—

Love of Nature

Art of Making Myth

Both

None of these.

Which one is considered to be the first published poem of P.B. Shelley?

The Revolt of Islam

Alastor

Queen Mab

Prometheus Unbound

Critical Appreciation of the Poem

‘The Cloud’ is considered to be one of the famous lyric poems of Romantic period written by P.B. Shelley. In this poem the poet has personified the cloud. The cloud has been presented telling its own life story assuming various forms. The poem talks of the cloud as the source of all activities that are being staged whether by human beings or plant kingdom.

Imaginative and Fanciful Treatment of a Scientific Fact: In the poem “The Cloud” we find a highly imaginative and fanciful treatment of scientific fact. The description of the way the cloud brings fresh showers for the thirsty flowers and light shade for the leaves is of much significance. The formation of clouds through evaporation is much scientific. The cloud adopts various phases/forms in the scientific manner but the life-force does not come to end.

‘The Cloud’ Exemplifies the Myth-Making Power of Shelley: Shelley’s quality of myth-making power is not only reflected in ‘The cloud’, but it is also to be found in the ‘Ode to the West Wind’. Shelley possessed the capacity to present the object of Nature as having a distinct individuality of its own. In the poem ‘The Cloud’, the flowers, the leaves, the buds, the pines, the lightning, the sunrise, the sun set, the moon, the earth and the sky all have been given separate and independent lives.

Treatment of Nature in the Poem: One of the most important themes in Shelley’s poetry is his love of nature. The cloud is imbued with the sense of appreciation and love. Shelley lived the indefinite and changeable mood of nature. In the poem, we see the cloud in all its moods i.e. gentle, bringing fresh showers for the thirsty flowers. Shelley sees the natural phenomenon with a scientific eye.

Style and Meter: The poem consists of six stanzas. It is written in an anapestic meter. It is a foot in which two unaccented syllables are found. There is an abundant use of the liquid consonants in the poem. An example can be cited as follows—

I bear light shade for the leaves when laid In their noon-day dreams...

...I wield the flail of the lashing hail, And whiten the green plain under...

Whenever he dreams under mountain or stream. The spirit he loves remains

The poem possesses a number of beautiful figures of speech i.e. similes and metaphors. The sunrise was depicted as having “meteor eyes” and “burning plumes”. The stationary cloud is compared to a “brooding dove”. In some lines of the poem, the use of iamb is perceptible.

SUMMING UP

In this unit you read about the life of P.B. Shelley who was a radical Non-Conformist all throughout his life. You also examined the salient features of his writing with special reference to two of his poems namely, “Ode to the West Wind” and “The Cloud”. While “Ode to the West Wind” reflects Shelley’s idealism, “The Cloud” depicts him as a myth-maker. You also examined Shelley’s technique, diction and major themes used in the two poems namely, “Ode to the West Wind” and “The Cloud”. You also saw how Shelly emerged as a revolutionary poet who craved a future for mankind where he dreamed of replacing the rule of tyranny and evil with the ideals of love, beauty and freedom.

ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I

Refer to discussion at 10.4.1.

Refer to discussion at 10.4.1.

Refer to discussion at 10.4.1.

Refer to discussion at 10.4.1.

Refer to discussion at 10.4.1.

Refer to discussion at 10.4.1.

a, b

II

Refer to discussion at 10.5.1.

Refer to discussion at 10.5.1.

c

c

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

Write a note on Shelley as a Nature Poet.
Write a short note on Shelley as a poet of Odes.
Discuss in brief Shelley as a lyric poet.
Comment on Shelley's use of imagery and symbols.
Throw light in brief about the personal element handled by the poet in "Ode to the West Wind".

UNIT 11 JOHN KEATS: “La Belle Dame Sans Merci: A Ballad”, “Ode to a Nightingale”

Introduction

Objectives

John Keats

“La Belle Dame Sans Merci”

Substance of the poem

Critical appreciation of the poem

“Ode to a Nightingale”

Substance of the poem

Critical appreciation of the poem

Summing Up

Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

References

Terminal and Model Questions

INTRODUCTION

Romanticism began in reaction against the 18th century new classical canons of poetry and reached its climax in the hand of John Keats in the 19th century. It was a period of extraordinary development of imaginative sensibility which described a number of features that are associated with romanticism. One of them was love of beauty expressed in different ways by different poets. The beauty of nature both in wild and domesticated aspects finds noble expression in all romantic poetry. With Keats, however, beauty became a religion and was identified by him with Truth.

John Keats was one of the greatest romantic poets in the history of British poetry. Like Shelley, Keats belongs to the second generation of romantic poets after Wordsworth and Coleridge who showed early promise and great maturity in his poetic creativity in a quite young age. His work in poetry is not slender and some of his poems have become the classics of English poetry. In this unit we will know about his two poems. 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' is the most unique poem of John Keats, written in the form of ballad. The second one "Ode to Nightingale" is the best lyrical poem which is also considered as one of the representative poems of the romantic period.

OBJECTIVES

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

Find out the salient features of Keats's poetry.

Explain the main merits of Keats's poetry.

Discuss the magical element in the poem.

Analyze the romantic nature of the story in the poem.

Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem.

Identify the difference between Ode and Ballad.

JOHN KEATS

Keats is a unique poet who innovated Keatsian 'aestheticism' in English poetry. As a poet of beauty and master artist of sense-perceptions, Keats 'is par excellence', 'Beauty is truth, and Truth Beauty' and 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.' As nature rolls through all things in the poetry of Wordsworth, similarly in the poetic vision, Keats perceived the reflection of beauty in all things. Beauty originates from the holiness of the heart's affections and truth of imagination and the poet realizes 'what the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth'. He finds a deep association between eternal beauty and eternal poetry' which are in the form of naturalness and spontaneity and believes that if 'poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to tree it had better not come'. The greatness of Keats's poetry lies in his 'sense of beauty'

which overcomes every other consideration or rather obliterates all conditions.’ According to Keats ‘the excellence of every art depends upon making it capable of all disagreeable elements evaporate from their being in close relationship with beauty and truth’. Beauty and truth were embodied in his poetry as theme and style, form and context, texture and structure. His “house of poetry has many mansions”, according to Douglas Bush.

Keats like Shelley was a great lyric poet and, in his poetry, there are many short pieces of supreme beauty. His bulk of poetry consists of some fine sonnets, odes, Ballads and long narrative poems. But among all his odes, “Ode to Nightingale”, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and “Ode to Autumn” are the finest creations in English language. “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” is very popular as a short lyrical ballad, perfect in form and expression and is, in Sir Sidney Calvin’s words “the masterpiece, not only among the shorter poems of Keats, but even (if any single masterpiece must be chosen) among them all.”

As a younger poet of the romantic group, Keats was the son of Thomas Keats, a prosperous livery-stable keeper. Born in London on 31 October 1795, he was the first one and was deeply attached to his brothers George and Tom and to his sister Fanny. When Keats was only eight, his father was killed in a riding accident in 1804. About two months his father’s death, his mother married again. But her second marriage was an unhappy one, and in 1806, she left her second husband William Rawlings, and went with her children to her mother’s house at Edmonton.

Keats was educated at a private school at Enfield and then apprenticed to an apothecary. He passed his examinations in surgery but soon abandoned surgery in favour of literature. At the age of fifteen, he was orphaned due to his mother’s death and taken out of school. His teacher Charles Cowden Clarke generated in him a passion for reading and introduced him to the great contemporary celebrities like Spenser, Haydon, Shelley and Leigh Hunt. He also cultivated a sense of music and theatre in the growing mind of Keats.

His poetic career began in 1817 when he published his first volume of verse titled *Sleep and Poetry*. The poems in this volume are obviously immature, betraying much confusion of ideas as well as of expression. He met Fanny Brawne in 1818 and fell deeply in love with her but the circumstances made their marriage impossible and love came as a great shock and torment for the poet. In the same year ‘*Endymion*’ was published which was severely attacked by the critics. Meanwhile Keats’s domestic worries reached their climax when his younger brother Tom died of tuberculosis. However, Keats achieved consummation of his poetic powers in 1819 apart from his mental turmoil. This year is often regarded as the great year of his poetic achievements because he wrote most of his significant works between 1819 to 1820. He composed poems rapidly like the “Hyperion: A Fragment”, “The Eve of St. Agnes”, “Ode to Psyche”, “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”, “Ode to Nightingale”, “Ode on Grecian Urn”, “Ode on Melancholy,” “Ode

to Autumn”, “Lamia, Isabella or the Pot of Basil and Other Poems”. Before his tuberculosis worsened, his great works had been completed. He was invited by Shelley to come to Italy to escape the coldness of London. But he felt victim to consumption and went to Rome with his friend Severn for medical treatment and died on 23 Feb., 1821. He was buried at the Protestant cemetery and as per his wish; it was carved on his tomb: ‘Here lies one whose name was writ in water’.

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI: A BALLAD

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms, Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has wither'd from the lake, And no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms! So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full, And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever dew, And on thy cheeks a fading rose Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a fairy's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light, And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone; She look'd at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long, For sidelong would she bend, and sing A fairy's song.

She found me roots of relish sweet, And honey wild, and manna dew,
And sure in language strange she said—

“I love thee true.”

She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she wept, and sigh’d fill sore, And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

And there she lulled me asleep,
And there I dream’d—Ah! woe betide! The latest dream I ever dream’d
On the cold hill’s side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all; They cried—“La Belle Dame sans Merci Hath thee in thrall!”

I saw their starv’d lips in the gloam, With horrid warning gap’d wide, And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill’s side.

And this is why I sojourn here, Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither’d from the lake, And no birds sing.

Substance of the Poem

The poem “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” was written in the spring of 1819 and sent in a letter to George and Georgina Keats dated 28th April, 1819. The poem was first published in *Indicator* on 20th May 1820. The title of the poem is in French and in English it means “The beautiful lady without Mercy”. The title is taken from a poem by Alain Chartier, a fifteenth century French court poet. It is said that Keats might have been struck by the title of the French poem due to his own disappointed and unreciprocated love for Fanny Browne. For him she becomes the beautiful lady without mercy.

‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’ is a short lyrical ballad perfect in form and expression and is in Sir Sidney Calvin’s words “the masterpiece, not only among the shorter poems of Keats, but even among them all.” A ballad is an important form of poetry. It is a short tragic poem traditionally belonging to folk literature. It is characterized

by a strong lyrical element and expresses intense astonishment, horror or pity and supernatural aspect woven into the narrative and voiced by a character.

In this charming ballad, Keats describes the haunting story of a Knight's disappointment in love with a fairy. It is steeped in an atmosphere of mystery and music. The poet as the narrator himself met a Knight wandering here and there aimlessly in a dejected and perplexed mood in the chilly and cold atmosphere. He asked him what was the reason of this wretched condition and the Knight replied that he saw a dream in which he had a strange experience of meeting with a enchantress. She had long flowing hair, nimble feet and wild charming eyes. The Knight was greatly enraptured by her beauty, and fell in love with her. She took him to a strange cave where he fell asleep and had a nightmare. He kissed her wild eyes four times and made her shut them. He did this to show the sincerity of his love and to comfort her. When he woke up in the morning he found no lady and was left lonely on the cold hillside. The beautiful and charming lady had disappeared. The Knight told the poet that this was the reason why he was wandering here and there aimlessly. The Knight was too confused, shocked and disappointed to understand the reality of that whole incident.

The poem with its interest in Knight-errantry is suffused with the spirit of chivalry, mystery and the supernatural. The love-lorn Knight-at-arms who is smitten by the sight of the 'a fairy's child', the 'elf' in grot', are all abundantly suggestive of Keats's interest in medievalism. The lady is bound by the rules of fairy land and she weeps and sighs that she can not live with her human lover. These images are perhaps the most primitive elements of human psyche which hold an uncanny appeal. The lady in the poem may symbolize the poetic imagination which is both divine and demonic and has a magical quality about it which enslaves the poet with its beauty and charm.

The poem has a human touch and is full of pathos and tragic note. It is marked by a subtle music, narrative charm, delightful simplicity and economy of expression. It is in the form of a dialogue between two speakers, a stranger who asks questions to the Knight and the Knight who replies to the queries. The narrative tale of adventure is highly dramatic and creates a dream-like atmosphere. Other ballad devices used are the quaint and archaic words and spellings, direct speech, repetitions, simple monosyllabic words and the utmost economy in the use of language. Ultimately we can say that the poem is one of few most haunting and beautiful ballad-like poems in English literature.

Self-Assessment Questions I

What are the salient features of Keats's poetry?

Trace the development of thought in Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci".

Analyze the medieval element in Keats's poem.

Write a note on Keats's concept of love and romance.

Discuss the magical element in the poem.

Keats borrowed the title of the poem from:

Homer

Alein Chartier

Milton

Shakespeare

In the ballad the most attractive feature in the maiden's body is her:

Head

Feet

Eyes

Hair

The word "kisses four" in the VIII stanza suggests:

Romance

Sensuousness

Perfection in love

False love

Critical Appreciation

"La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is a beautiful poem in the form of ballad. The poem reveals the story of a Knight who was deceived by a beautiful but cruel lady. Its title is taken from a French poem, written by Alein Chartier, a 15th century court poet of France. It seems that this title had haunted Keats's mind for quite some time earlier in the poem "The Eve of St. Agnes" where he had mentioned Porphyro woke up Madeleine by playing by the side of her bed "an ancient deity, long since more,/ In Province called "La belle dame Sans Merci." It is obvious that Keats borrowed only the title from the French poem and the context is widely different from that.

Personal Touch in the poem: Romantic poetry has been characterized by subjective theme. Keats sent this poem in a letter to George and Georgiana. Though it is steeped in an atmosphere of magic, it has a dim personal touch. The Knight's unreciprocated love for the fairy becomes symbolic of the poet's own disappointed love for Fanny Brawne. His personal experience in love affairs made him realize the devastating power of love. Keats had a very ardent and real passion for Fanny Brawne but she always played with his feelings and disregarded his love. It is the reason that the poet treats Fanny Brawne a beautiful lady without mercy.

Medieval Atmosphere in the poem: Love for the Middle Ages and the past was one of the most important features of romantic poetry. Most of the romantic poets were dissatisfied with the present and hence looked back to the past by means of their imagination to recreate the atmosphere of the middle ages with magic and chivalry. Keats wrote this poem in the form of ballad very popular in the middle ages to recapture successfully the very spirit of medievalism. The theme of magical love, loving a man to his doom is found in folk legend of medieval period. Keats

like Coleridge in “Chistabel” creates an atmosphere of medieval romance full of magic, terror and supernatural.

This ballad takes us back to those times when fairies came down to earth to love and deceive human beings. The people of the Middle ages believed in the existence of such fairies and supernatural agencies working for the misery of human beings. Similarly Keats in “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” describes the sad story of an unfortunate Knight who was falsely loved by a mischievous fairy in the form of a beautiful woman. Ultimately she displayed her passionate love for him, took him to her fairy cave and made a fool of him by leaving him alone in a miserable condition.

Romantic Elements in the poem: “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” is a typical poem which has a truly romantic atmosphere. It is steeped in romanticism and recreates the chivalric atmosphere in a profoundly suggestive manner. It conjures up a vision of the past—the medieval world of Knight Errantry and peculiar enchantment. The atmosphere created by the poet’s imagination is highly romantic and supernatural. The description of a fairy along with the Knight, Kings and princes is very magical and awe-inspiring. As Walter Peter describes if romanticism is strangeness added to beauty, this poem is romantic in its very essence.

Love, Romance and Sensuousness: The poem deals with the idea of love and romance and has a sensuous appeal. The love of the Knight for the lady and his erotic desires has been described with all the details of sensuousness. To please his beloved, the Knight makes garlands of flowers for her and while sitting on the horse wanders here and there all day long. The lady sits on the horse with him, looks at him lovingly and utters a sweet moaning sound. She sings a fairy song of love and in a strange manner passionately loves the Knight. She takes him to her “elfin grot” shows her passionate love for him by weeping bitterly. The Knight shut her tearful eyes by kissing them four times which symbolize the perfection in love. This demonstrates the fact that the Knight truly falls in love with her and the lady’s love makes him believe the sincerity of her affections for him. The Knight could not understand her false love and ultimately finds himself in utter frustration deserted by the lady.

Style and Metre: Keats is a true romantic in respect of his poetic style. His style is characterized by directness and sensuousness of expression, concreteness of imagery, rich suggestiveness and perfection of workmanship. This poem is a fusion of romantic impulse with classical severity. Apart from romantic suggestions, the structure of the poem has the symmetry of a Greek Urn. The beautiful fusion of romantic and classical qualities makes this poem the finest and unique specimens of romantic poetry.

This ballad has terseness and an economy of language which contrasts sharply with the opulence of language and imagery which characterizes most of Keats’s poems.

This ballad also shows the reticence of Chistabel. The loneliness of the Knight is matched by the desolation of the wintry landscape which is conveyed in that masterpiece of verbal condensation, "And no birds sing". These four very simple monosyllables recreate the utter desolation of winter clearly and vividly before our eyes.

The poem has a magical simplicity of diction and plaintive haunting rhythm, and represents the very quintessence of romance. Its slow, tilting music, recreation of all the weird, romantic and enchanted atmosphere of the middle ages, vivid description of Knight's love for a fairy and his subsequent disappointment and desolation and its wistful elf in cadence make it one of the most charming poems in English poetry.

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains

My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk, Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains

One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk: 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,

But being too happy in thine happiness,—That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees

In some melodious plot

Of beechen green, and shadows numberless, Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,

Tasting of Flora and the country green,

Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!

O for a beaker full of the warm South,

Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene, With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,

And purple-stained mouth;

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen, And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget

What thou among the leaves hast never known, The weariness, the fever, and the fret

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan; Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,

Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies; Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.
Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards, But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards: Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne, Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.
I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs, But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine; Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.
Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death, Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die, To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird! No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard In ancient days by emperor and clown:

Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home, She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.
Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf. Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream, Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades: Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

Substance of the Poem

“The Ode to a Nightingale” was written in May 1819, while Keats was staying at the house of his friend, Charles Armitage Brown, in Hampstead. The ode was inspired by the song of a Nightingale that had built its nest close to the house of Brown. The song of the bird often threw the poet into a trance of tranquil pleasure. One morning he took his chair from the breakfast table and placed it on the grass under a plum tree and wrote the poem. It was written on some scraps of paper and later on its stanzas were re-arranged by Brown with the help of Keats to give a final shape. As Robert Bridges has pointed out, the poet’s mood is more intense in this ode than in other odes and the poetry vies in richness and variety with its subject.

The poem was written just two years earlier before the death of Keats. It is one of the most admired poems of John Keats. In the opening lines, the poet listens to the sweet song of a Nightingale. It creates a hypnotic effect on him. He feels that the Nightingale is a wood nymph who in some beech trees, sings of the beauty of summer in so joyful and melodious manner. He wants to escape from this world of suffering to the happy world of the bird. In the beginning, he longs to do so with the help of a cup of wine that has been cooled in the deep delved earth from a long time. This wine will bring to his mind all the folk-songs and dances associated with the place of its origin. If the poet can fly in imagination to happy regions of the bird, he will leave behind him all the woes of this life—the weariness, the fever, and the fret of this world, where beauty and love are both transient.

The poet points out that wine is not potent enough and he wants to be transported in imagination to the ideal regions of the bird “the viewless wings of poesy”, though his dull brain temporarily checks his flight. Simultaneously he finds himself in the

dim forest of beauty and romance where the Nightingale is singing her melodious song. He imagines and describes the forest scene in all the beauty of early summer. It is the time of night and perhaps the full moon surrounded by the stars is shining in the sky. In the darkness, the poet cannot see the flowers but can guess each in one of them by its particular smell. He describes the various kinds of flowers blossoming there are the hawthorn, the eglantine, the violet and the musk rose.

According to the poet, he is so much fascinated by the sweet song of the Nightingale that he wants to die at the same moment. But he thinks that even after his death, the bird would continue to sing her song though he would not be able to listen. The idea of death contrasts the mortal life of man with the permanence of the Nightingale's song. There is a continuity in the Nightingale's song and it is heard from times immemorial by emperor as well as peasant and delighted the people of all ranks and classes. It is perhaps the same song that had given consolation in the past to the sad heart of Ruth, when she stood in the fields of Boaz longing to return to her Moabite home. It has also cheered up the captive princes sitting at the window of the enchanted castle, looked out over the dangerous seas for the ship of her rescuing knight.

Finally, the poet realizes that the word 'forlorn' rings like a bell and his imagination breaks to reality. The illusion is suddenly broken and the poet felt that fancy cannot cheat a man for a long time. The song of the bird fades into distance and the poet wonders whether he has been dreaming or awake.

Self-Assessment Questions II

How does Keats respond on hearing the Nightingale's song?

Why does the poet call the bird immortal?

The season in which the poet heard the Nightingale's song is:

Autumn

Winter

Summer

Spring

In which line Keats recalls his brother Tom:

'Where Poesy shakes a few, sad, lost gray hairs'

'Here where men sit and hear each other groan'

'Where youth grows pale, and specter-thin and dies'

'Or new love pine at them beyond tomorrow'.

How does Keats create a romantic feeling through imagery?

How does poet describe the miseries of human life on earth?

Critical Appreciation

“Ode to a Nightingale” has been praised highly as a unique poem perfect in artistic expression apart from its mood of pessimism. The poem is really about aesthetic bliss and the contrasting condition of human existence which is full of misery. As an Ode, it has a powerful subjective element with special references to Keats’s own life. But the poet has created a new kind of ode by characterizing it with the sonnet in both tone and form.

Subjective Element in the poem: This poem was written when Keats was passing through the most critical period of his life. His brother Tom had recently died of consumption and his life was completely shaken. Keats makes an indirect reference to Tom’s death in the line “where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin and dies.” On the other hand, his poetry was bitterly attacked by the reviewers who asked him to leave the profession of poetry and return to his earlier career of a hospital assistant. The shock of failure in love told heavily on his weak health and sensitive soul and he was completely in hopelessness and despondency. It is the reason that the lonely spirit of the poet longs to be united with the perfectly happy spirit of the bird.

Note of Escapism: The bird’s song becomes for the poet a symbol of the happiness which he despaired of attaining in his life. He wants to escape from the anguish of human life where thought itself is a disease, to the ideal world of the Nightingale, first through the potent agency of wine but on the “viewless wings” of poetic imagination. It is for this reason that some critics denounce Keats as an escapist because he had no courage to face the stark realities of life. But really Keats is not an escapist and faced the bitter realities of life without any hesitation. He was trying to understand the meaning and significance of human life particularly the beauty and truth and the eternal truth.

Description of Nature: Keats was a great lover of nature. He loved nature for its own sake. In the poem his deep love for nature finds a beautiful expression. The picture of the moon shining in the sky, surrounded by the stars like a queen in the company of fairies, is very apt and appealing. Though on account of darkness, the poet cannot see what flowers are at his feet but can recognize them by their sweet smell. He gives a vivid description of these flowers in the following lines:

White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast-fading violets covered up in leaves;
And Mid-May’s eldest child,

The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine.

The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Sensuousness in the poem: Keats is eminently a sensuous poet and the pleasures of the senses are always a luxury to him. In the very opening stanza of this poem he describes the feelings of fatigue and intoxication produced by the soul-enchanting song of the Nightingale. He wishes to prolong this sweet sensation by drinking the wine of the best quality which has been “cooled a long ago in the deep-

delved earth”. Then he longs for a beaker “full of the warm south”. All the senses of sight touch, taste, hearing and smelling are at work in the poem. The poet finds himself in a dark region and cannot see anything around him. But his sense of smell is so sharp that he can guess each flower and plant by its sweet smell.

Note of Romance: The poem is thoroughly imbued with the spirit of romance. The sweet song of the Nightingale arouses a feeling of drowsiness in the poet and he begins feeling sleepy. The excess of happiness and joy induces in him a state of numbness and he longs to go to the happy regions of the Nightingale by his imagination. The poet is in the negative capability because the objective and the subjective melt into each other and the music of the bird becomes one with his poignant longings. But the fancy cannot cheat so well and the word ‘forlorn’ brings him back to the world of reality. As usual the poet is haunted by the contrast between the brevity of human life and the permanence of art, as represented by the Nightingale’s song. He wants to escape the reality to the Nightingale’s ideal and happy land of romance. Like a true romantic, he enjoys the very ‘luxury of sorrow’ and longs for death because it alone can give peace to his mental agony.

Fusion of the Classical balance and Romantic Inspiration: The poem reveals a perfect blending of classical balance and romantic inspiration. Every word is in its place, and there is a restraint of expression from the beginning to the end. There is also a perfect structural unity in the poem and the development of thought naturally develops from one stanza to another. Though deeply romantic the poem contains several myths and images of classical period. The Nightingale is the “light-winged Dryad of the trees”, the beaker should be full of the “true, the blushful Hippocrene”, though there is darkness all around, perhaps “the Queen-Moon is on her throne”. Finally the poet longs to move to the happy regions of the nightingale not “charioted by Bacchus and his Pards”, but “on the viewless wings of poesy”. These classical allusions lend an enchanting beauty and sensuousness to the poem.

Note of Melancholy: The poet vividly describes the painful experiences of his life which the bird in its idealized space has never known. The miseries of human life are characterized by “weariness, the fever and the fret”. The last note of sadness brings the poet back to the painful reality of this world. He says goodbye to the Nightingale bird and realizes the fact that imagination can not cheat him from the pain of living.

Style and Metre: The poet has introduced in the poem a new kind of stanza composed of the elements of ode and sonnet. It is a ten line stanza in iambic pentameter with eighth line having only three iambs—that is trimeter. This poetic device was used by the poet to highlight the last two lines. The rhyme scheme is ab ab cde cde in the poem. The first four lines in this arrangement form one sub-section which is followed by illustration and addition in the other six lines which have their own pattern of unity in the Petrarchan sonnet. In addition to this these six lines are

also sub-divided into two units where necessary. The same stanza pattern has been followed by the poet throughout the poem.

Keats's rounded felicity of expression—his magic of verbal perfection is fully displayed in this poem. It abounds in beautiful phrases, compound words, and pictorial words that catch the eye by its vividness and aptness. The following phrases and images like "Lethe Words", "light winged Drayed of the trees", "full throated ease", "deep delved earth", "the blushful Hippocrene", "purple stained mouth", "leaden eyed despairs" and "mid-May's eldest child" are suggestive and add the beauty of the poem.

The musical quality of the poem is remarkable. There are ten iambic lines in each stanza. The charm of the verse depends partly on the inevitable yet unmonotonous recurrence of the rhyme, partly on the effect of the shortened eighth line in producing a momentary pause that heightens the force of the full music of the last two lines.

In fact this poem is the high water-mark of romantic achievement and a memorable expression of the poetic personality of Keats. The high imaginative conception and of noble and perfect execution make the poem unique in its form and style.

SUMMING UP

In this unit you got information on the life and important events in the life of John Keats. You examined two of his poems namely 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' and 'Ode to a Nightingale'. You saw how Keats employed various poetic devices like figures of speech, symbols and imagery in his poems. You were also given a glimpse of the various forms of poetry like ode, ballad and lyric. Among all the romantic poets, Keats is one of the best poets who used with equal eagerness for intensely personal outpourings and for meditations on social and political questions.

You saw how Keats was gifted with an exquisite and powerful poetic faculty. He proclaimed, "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all." His poems explore the bliss of imagination and beauty of their ability to transmute life and reality for perfection."

ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I

Refer to our discussion at 11.3.

Refer to discussion at 11.4.1.

Refer to discussion at 11.4.1.

Refer to discussion at 11.4.1.

Refer to discussion at 11.4.1.

b

c

c

II

Refer to discussion at 11.5.1

Refer to a discussion at 11.5.1

a

c

Refer to a discussion at 11.4.2

Refer to a discussion at 11.4.2

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

Examine John Keats as a romantic poet.

Discuss John Keats as a sensuous poet.

Write a short essay on Keats as a writer of odes.

Comment on Keats's use of imagery in the poem.

Discuss the symbolic implications of the Nightingale and its song.

Analyse Keats as a lyrical poet with reference to the poems you have read.

**UNIT 12 ALFRED LORD TENNYSON:
“ULYSSES”, “BREAK, BREAK, BREAK”**

Introduction: The Victorian Age

Objectives

Tennyson - his life and works

Ulysses

A Summary

Analysis of the Poem

Form

Autobiographical Element

Modern Interpretation

Break, Break. Break

A Summary

Analysis of the Poem

12.5.3. Form

Tennyson : An Estimate

Tennyson as a Representative of the Victorian Age.

Tennyson as a Poet

Tennyson as a Poetic Artist/Craftsman

Political and Social Outlook

Influence of Science and his Religious Outlook

Summing up

Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

References

Terminal and Model Questions

INTRODUCTION - THE VICTORIAN AGE (1830-1890)

What do we mean by the nineteenth century? The nineteenth century means the period between 1800 and 1899 and it can be divided into two distinct parts. The first half of the 19th century is known as the Romantic Age roughly 1730-1830. The second half is commonly known as the Victorian Age (1830—1890] It was so named because Queen Victoria was on the throne of England then. After her, it came to be known as the Victorian Age. It was a period of transition or change. Change was coming over the life and times of England. Society was slowly changing itself and there was new life being breathed into the thought process of the times. This was Tennyson's age.

Two great revolutions that influenced the age came at the turn of the century—the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. The French Revolution of 1788 raised the cry of Liberty, equality and fraternity. The working, lower and middle classes raised their voice against the nobles and the aristocrats. It was fought for equality and brotherhood. There are no high and low classes. It inspired many poets and writers. Wordsworth was deeply inspired by it though the later bloodshed, when many nobles were hanged in full public view deeply disturbed him and he lost faith in humanity and human values. The French Revolution saw the beginnings of democracy in the sense that the common man came into his own. Till then he had been overlooked. Now the focus was on him and he was beginning to have a say in what was happening around him, in society and in politics. This changed the very fabric of society.

The Industrial Revolution was the other great influence on the age. England was slowly changing from an agricultural society to an industrial one. With the coming of machines, industry changed. More factories were opened and as a result more people left the countryside looking for jobs in the city. But this was not to be; with one machine doing the work of ten men, machines were replacing men. It led to unemployment. The men who came from the country were without jobs leading to a number of related problems – overcrowding, squalor, slums, poverty and dirtiness. These were the main problems of nineteenth century Victorian England

– Unemployment and as a result slums, poverty, dirtiness and frustration. Democratic principles too came into being. Place, Bentham and others demanded universal suffrage, vote by ballot and women's right to vote. They were demanding equality – equal opportunity in education and jobs.

The other change was in prison reforms. Till now old, young, hardened and new criminals were all dumped together. But the tireless work of reformers like Mrs. Fry and others changed the scene. The place was transformed and separating criminals tamed them. Humanitarian reforms were urged by the reformers – hanging in chains was abolished and so was the death sentence for minor crimes. Capital punishment was reserved for murder only. Much had been done and much

remained to be done. But the first steps had been taken to humanize and reform society.

Another very important influence was that of science. In 1859 a new influence came into the literary and social life of the day – Natural Science. Charles Darwin published his 'Origin of the Species' and it started a new era. Poetry and fiction were influenced with the new spirit of scientific observation and philosophic analysis which can be seen in the works of – George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, Clough, Huxley and Browning. Darwin claimed, through proof, that man's first parents were not Adam and Eve but the Ape. That man had evolved slowly, over the centuries from the Ape. This led to a lot of bitterness and confusion. In fact, confusion is one of the marked characteristics of the Victorian Age. Loss of faith, confusion and melancholy can be seen in the works of Tennyson, Clough and Arnold. Religion and faith said that Adam and Eve were the first parents of man. The Bible said that in the Garden of Paradise, God had placed Adam and Eve and asked them not to touch the fruit of the tree of knowledge, the apple. However, Satan disguised as a serpent entered Paradise and tempted them to eat the fruit. As a result they invited the anger of God who threw them down to Earth and from there started their life on earth, full of pain and suffering, as a result of their Original Sin (eating of the apple against the wishes of God.) Darwin's scientific proof left the people with no choice--- was the story of Bible false? And if it was not true then should they follow the lesson taught by the Bible – that the good are rewarded and the evil punished. If you do wrong, you will be punished as Adam and Eve were when they went against God. As a result people lost faith in religion and God and did not know what to believe in. It led to frustration and melancholy; for belief in God gives strength and humility to man. And with that gone, Man had no one to turn to in times of trouble. Science could not be a substitute for God and religion, for it was cold and could offer no comfort to troubled man; hence the sadness of the age and the bitterness and melancholy. Victorian England then was a society in the throes of change and all this is reflected in the literature of the age – the rise of democratic ideals and the progress of scientific thought. Democratic ideals led to equal educational opportunities for all and this led to the development of journalism and periodical literature. Many new journals came up and many more people took it up as a livelihood. The progress of science changed man's outlook on life. It aroused in him restlessness and also a questioning spirit. He started questioning things he had accepted till now. Society had become more materialistic and so life too had become more commercialized. Wordsworth laments it in "The world is too much with us" – man does not have time to enjoy himself. He is too busy making money. The restlessness and questioning note can be seen in the literature of the times and all this was the result of loss of faith. It did not kill poetry but for some time the impulse was subdued. The positive side of science can be seen in the works of Tennyson. With scientific

accuracy he gave detailed pictures of nature in all her beauty. Victorian literature Thus, was a faithful representation of the age.

OBJECTIVES

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

Understand and appreciate Tennyson's genius as a poet.

Understand how his background – the Victorian Age influenced and moulded his genius.

To appreciate the two poems -- Ulysses and Break, Break, Break

To have a very balanced and unbiased estimate of Tennyson as based on modern criticism

TENNYSON-HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Tennyson was born on 6th August 1809 into an old Lincolnshire family. He was the fourth of twelve children and he and his two brothers were sent to Louth grammar school where he was very unhappy. He left in 1820 but despite the fact that they were passing through difficult days, financially, his father saw to it that he had a wide literary education. For some years he was educated at home and life in the country side was lonely. However, these years spent in the Lincolnshire countryside had a great influence on his poetry. He loved the country side and the quiet life there. It was a life of quiet observation rather than that of a young man. The meadows, the hills and open sea held a great charm for him and to understand his poetry we have to understand his love for his countryside and for nature, which is later revealed in the exact and accurate details of his description of nature.

In 1828 he went to Trinity College, Cambridge with his brother, Charles. Frederick had gone to Cambridge before him. It was here that he met Arthur Hallam and it was the beginning of a true friendship between them. His appearance impressed many and his charm won many friends. He was a member of the debating society 'The Apostle's' but did not take a very active part in it. In 1829 he won the Chancellor's English medal for his poem 'Timbaktu' and in 1831 he left Cambridge without taking a degree and returned to Lincolnshire to continue his quiet country life. By now his father had passed away. He published his first volume of poetry and was content to live the life of a country gentleman. His friendship with Hallam had deepened and Hallam had become engaged to his sister Emily, much against the wishes of the family. His friendship with Hallam was the most precious thing in his life. He was leading a quiet, not very active life and combined with wrong eating habits and drinking, Tennyson was in a sorry state when he received news of Hallam's death. It came as a shock to him. It came at the wrong time. Three of his brothers were suffering from mental illness and, to add to that, his volume of poetry had been severely criticized. And yet his very best work is the product of this period. He poured out his grief into his work. In Memoriam – which began as

an elegy, mourning the death of Hallam, later on took a more philosophical turn, dealing with questions of life, death and the hereafter. Tennyson had always been interested in these topics but till now it was only academically. Now, having passed through grief he wrote with intensity. During this period, he also got friendly with other great writers of the age – Edward Fitzgerald and Thomas Carlyle. Fitzgerald greatly admired his earlier work but Carlyle liked the man and not his poetry.

In 1836, his brother Charles married Louisa Sellwood Horncastle and at their wedding Tennyson fell in love with her sister, Emily. For some years they went around together but her father did not approve of Tennyson and his addiction to smoking and drinking. He did not like his style of living or his religious views either and forbade their marriage. As a result, Tennyson left the place and lived a wandering life. He lost money because of bad investment but 1850 proved to be a turning point for him. He finally married Emily and settled into peaceful family life. Emily brought peace and calm into his life and it ran smoothly to the very end. He wrote a lot and whatever he wrote won him a growing audience. Worldly honours were given to him ending with the title of ‘Baron’ in 1883. On Wordsworth’s death, he also accepted the Laureateship. He continued to live a simple life, cut off from the outside world. This put him out of touch with the problems of the day and his later work suffered because of this. He took to writing plays. But it did not suit his nature. A more active frame of mind was needed and Tennyson, with his meditative nature and the quiet country life he lived was most unsuited for playwriting. His old age was quite peaceful and he remained alert and alive to the very end. He died in 1892 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

His work: - Some of his greatest works were –

Poems Chiefly Lyrical (1830), Poems (1833), Poems (1842), The Princess (1847), In Memoriam (1850), Maud (1855), Idylls of the king (1859-1885), Enoch Arden(1864), Queen Mary (1875), Harold (1876), The Cup and the Falcon (1884), Becket (1884), Tiresias and other poems (1885), Locksley hall 60 years After [1886) and others.

When you study a poet and try to understand what made him the poet or writer he is, you have to turn to his surrounding, the age in which he lived; for environment influences a man and moulds his genius. What is striking about Tennyson’s work is the influence of science. Everyone was struck by his scientific outlook rather than his poetic imagination. He wrote like a scientist with a gift for poetry. Whatever he wrote had great accuracy of detail, the hallmark of a man of science. He would revise and re-revise a stanza till he got it just right. This scientific perception is the source of his strength as well as weakness. It gave accuracy to his picture of nature, form and balance to his craftsmanship and clarity to what he said. But it also clashed with the poet in him.

Tennyson was not greatly influenced by the Romantic poets. He liked Keats and admired him but that was all. The chief defect of his earlier work was lack of inspiration. There is visual beauty and melody but very little thought. The lady of Shalott and the Lotus Eaters in the volume of 1833 were not as brilliant as they were after this final revision in 1842. These volumes were frankly criticized which hurt him and for the next 10 years he published nothing, just revised what he had written earlier. In 1842 he published two slim volumes which were largely made up of revisions of his earlier work and showed how positively he had taken the earlier criticism. Some of the poems in this volume were– ‘The Lotus Eaters’, ‘The Lady of Shalott’, ‘Ulysses’, ‘Morte D’ Arthur’, ‘Break, Break, Break’, ‘Come not when I am Dead’ etc.

In some respects he never bettered the 1842 volume though he did write as well later –In Memoriam. Till now his poetry was all visual beauty and lyrical. There is little of the thought of the day. But now in Locksley Hall we have a hint of the social problems which had begun to move him. In 1847 he published his longer poem The Princess – which dealt with the woman’s question – the problem of the day. Women were beginning to be heard and demanding equality. It may not have been perfect but it gave an indication of Tennyson’s new interest in the problems of his times.

At the same time he was also working on the Memorial Poems, revising them. In 1850 he published ‘In Memoriam’ which was the result of nearly 20 years of thought and poetic craftsmanship. It is too long for an elegy but is much more than just that. It is Tennyson’s statement on his religious philosophy and presents those questions on religion and science that were to confuse his age. At this time he also wrote the great ‘Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington’. As a writer of patriotic poems, he is the best and this poem is one of the best of its kind. In 1855 came ‘Maud’ – less satisfactory and inferior to ‘The Princess’. But as a love poem it is great. In 1859 he wrote Idylls of a king – a great achievement. His blank verse here is finer than that written by the Romantic poets. It has grace, flexibility and tenderness. It does not get monotonous.

Towards his later years he turned to drama. Till now his work had no dramatic tendency, it was descriptive and he had the power of observing things. He had a poetic style which was not suited to drama. Yet he started writing poetic drama and was not very successful. He was too set and fixed in his ways and too old to try out a new field. He was a failure. In his later work, Death of Oenoni or Demeter, you can see the decline of power due to age. His later work does not do him justice.

Looking over his life and work, we cannot help feeling that Tennyson is at his best when painting pictures of nature in his poetry. Clarity, Melody, dignity and lucidity are the hallmarks of his style and no one can beat him on that.

Self-Assessment Questions I

Give a brief account of the nineteenth century background and how it influenced the literature of the times.

What was the effect of Darwin's 'Origin of the Species' on the age?

ULYSSES

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags, Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole Unequal laws
unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me. I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those That loved me,
and alone, on shore, and when Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name; For always roaming with a hungry heart Much have I seen and
known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments, Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers, Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades For ever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end, To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved From that eternal silence, something more, A bringer of new
things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself, And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star, Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
This is my son, mine own Telemachus, To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—Well-loved of me,
discerning to fulfil

This labour, by slow prudence to make mild A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail: There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old; Old age hath
yet his honour and his toil; Death closes all: but something ere the end, Some work of noble note, may
yet be done, Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles, And see the great Achilles, whom we knew. Tho' much is
taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are; One
equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Summary

Ulysses is a dramatic monologue written by Tennyson. It was first written in 1833 and later on revised for publication in 1842. It is based on Greek mythology. The hero, Ulysses is taken from the hero of Homer's *Odyssey* and Dante's *Inferno*. Ulysses which is the Roman form of Greek Odysseus was the king of Ithaca. After

the end of the ten years Trojan War, Ulysses returned to Ithaca, to once again rule over his people. He took up his administrative duties and looked to the welfare of his people. For three years he ruled over them but then grew restless and yearned to go looking for adventure.

The poem is much more than just the story of the Greek hero. It is also an elegy for his friend, Arthur Hallam, who died in 1833. His death came as a shock to Tennyson and he was deeply moved and grief-stricken. He plunged into grief and gave expression to his feelings in a number of poems, finally culminating in 'In Memoriam'. Ulysses symbolizes the grieving poet and his resolution to push onward in spite of his awareness that death closes all, stands for Tennyson's own need to go forward and brave the struggles of life after the loss of his friend, Hallam.

In the poem, Ulysses speaks out his thoughts. He is unhappy, stuck in one place, looking after the day to day problems of his people. After returning from Ithaca he realizes that his people are wild and savage and do not know him in spite of the fact that he has made a name for himself. They are materialists and do not recognize the greatness of their king. There is nothing for him to do over here except look after the welfare of his state. He has lived life to the full and has enjoyed himself. He has gone far and wide looking for adventure, so much so that he is known for being a man always roaming with a hungry heart. He has seen much and gone to distant places and been honoured by one and all. He has fought many battles, the latest being the battle of Troy. In fact he has become a legend and people speak of his greatness and his conquests and he is known the world over. But his own people do not seem to have heard of him or his exploits.

All this is part of his experience. He has gained knowledge and experience but he believes there is much more to be done. Life does not come to an end here. There is so much more knowledge and experience to be gained. In fact the experience he has up to now is like a gateway through which he can see the world and he realizes that much remains to be seen ---the more he sees the world the more there is for him to see. The knowledge he has already gathered makes him realize how little he actually knows and how much there is for him to learn. Therefore, this is not the time for him to stop and bring to an end his travelling. He does not want to rust unused and become old and tired. It is not in his nature to sit quietly and pause. Merely surviving is not living. He has lived life to the full and has enjoyed all his experiences and they have made him the man he is. Therefore, it is difficult for him to pretend that all there is to life is to eat and drink and breathe. That is not how he wants to spend his days. Life has more excitement and he yearns for new experience, and life, for him is too short for all the experiences he wants to gain.

He is aware of the fact that he is growing old and not much is left of his life here. He is nearing his final phase when death draws close; therefore, he would not like to waste his time—the three years he has spent in Ithaca—and instead do what he yearns to do. He wishes to broaden his horizon and to follow knowledge like a

sinking star. He wishes to grow in wisdom and learning and wants to go beyond all bounds of human thought. He then speaks to an unidentified audience and points out his son, Telemachus. He is dearly loved by the father and he will look after the country while Ulysses is travelling and looking for adventure. He is hardworking and sincere and has the patience to civilize the rugged people. His son will be his substitute in his absence and will keep the people happy. As he says, 'he works his work, I mine'. The last part of the poem is addressed to his mariners. His mariners are his companions who have been with him through thick and thin, down the years. They have travelled together and worked together and faced dangers together. Their spirit is the same; they yearn for new horizons to conquer. They have faced the good and the bad together and so are also growing old together. Their youth has been spent looking for adventure and now that they are all old, Ulysses says, it does not mean they are useless and cannot work as they used to in the past. Before death claims them, some noble work can still be done. They are old but not too old to undertake some work becoming of men who strove with the Gods. Thus, he gives words to his indomitable spirit. He has grown old but the yearning for adventure still burns within him and he has confidence in him self and his mariners, that they can still do some noble work of note. As the day comes to a close and darkness falls, Ulysses and his mates strike out to seek a newer world. They will sail beyond the sunset and maybe they will reach the Happy Isles where all noble souls go after death. He speaks of breaking all boundaries and going beyond them. Death places limits on man but they have the courage to cross all limits and sail beyond the sunset. They do not have the strength of youth but still have in them enough courage and strength to fight as one against all odds. Fate and Time have weakened them but they will not yield to time or age. They still have it in them to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.

Analysis of the Poem

Ulysses is an inspiring poem written by Tennyson. It was written after the death of his close friend, Arthur Hallam in 1833 and was published in 1842 in the second volume of Poems. It is a dramatic monologue spoken by one person whose identity is revealed by his own words. Ulysses speaks to an unspecified audience and tells them about himself. He tells them how he spent ten years of his life fighting the Trojan War and looking for adventure. Now that he has returned home to Ithaca to rule over his kingdom, he is discontented. He is restless and bored, dealing with the day to day problems of his subjects. This is something his son, Telemachus, can do. He is compassionate and patient and can look after his country, as he has been doing, in his absence. Ulysses is growing old, and as such, he wants to explore new horizons now and not give in to age. He may not be as strong as he was, in his youth, but as he tells his mariners in the last part of the poem, they still have

something in them to be able to do some work of note. The second half of the poem is addressed to his mariners. He wants them to accompany him in his voyages where they may once again recreate the magic of the past.

Tennyson's treatment of Ulysses is influenced by Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and also by Dante's *Inferno*. Ulysses is the Roman form of the Greek Odysseus. Ulysses, in Greek mythology, was a hero who took part in many battles and was known for his strength and courage. Homer's *Odyssey* gives the narrative background when Tiresias, foretells that Ulysses will return to Ithaca and then begin a new voyage and later die. At the end of Tennyson's poem Ulysses is thinking of taking his new voyage. Tennyson is also influenced by Dante's Ulysses who is shown as being selfish and longs for adventure at the expense of his people and family. He leaves on his voyage leaving behind his subjects and his wife and son. Tennyson's Ulysses is a blend of both. Ulysses has this desire for knowledge and also wishes to sail beyond the sunset. Tennyson holds him up as a great heroic warrior, resolute and determined and whose thirst for knowledge and adventure has not died down, even in his old age. He believes they can still go on another quest and reinvent their heroic past. He longs for more knowledge and experience and believes his son can do the mundane task of governing the country which Ulysses finds burdensome.

Form

It is a dramatic monologue and is written in blank verse. It is not very clear to whom Ulysses is speaking. The audience is not specified and nor is the location. Some critics believe it starts out as a soliloquy and then turns into a public address. In the beginning he speaks of himself and his restlessness and then introduces his son to an audience. Finally he speaks to his mariners. The language in the beginning is direct and honest as he gives a frank account of himself and his feelings. The modern view is that he comes across as being arrogant and looking down on his people as savage. He is full of himself too and speaks of what he has done. He gives an account of the wars he has fought and how he has become a legend. People know him and honour him. The speeches after this about his son and to his mariners are more politically correct. He tells them what they want to hear and not what he thinks. Thus, the 'savage race' becomes 'a rugged people' He dresses his words to please his audience though still, his opinion of his son comes through. He looks down on his son and thinks he is not as great as his father. Critics see four distinct sections or stages in the poem:

The first deals with his restlessness. The life he has returned to in Ithaca seems pointless and barren to him.

The second refers to his heroic past. He recalls the voyages he had taken and the adventures experienced. In the third he realizes the value of his son, Telemachus who has governed the country in his absence. In the last he plans his journey with his mariners.

The poem is in blank verse which means it is in unrhymed iambic pentameter. The language is simple, forceful and unadorned and it expresses Ulysses' conflicting moods. He is first restless, and then he thinks of his past, then of his son and finally his decision to go looking for adventure. Many of the lines are enjambed which means the thought does not end with the line but goes on to the next line; the pause comes anywhere, in between a line—all of which emphasizes his restlessness and dissatisfaction. Ulysses is one poem which he did not revise as he did his earlier ones; there was no change and it remained the same.

Autobiographical Element

There is an autobiographical element in the poem. He wrote it after the death of Hallam with whom Tennyson had a strong, emotional bond. The two had spent much time discussing politics and philosophy and travelling to Southern France and Germany. When he heard of Hallam's death, Tennyson was living in Somersby, Lincolnshire. His father was dead and he had returned to look after his mother and nine brothers and sisters in a small house in Somersby. His friends were worried about his mental and physical health. Three of his brothers were in the asylum when he received news of Hallam's death. He was deeply disturbed and poured his heart out into his poetry. Ulysses is informed with this grief. His discontent and restlessness mirrors Tennyson's own. When Ulysses decides to defy circumstances and his age and travel again it expresses Tennyson's own need to go forward and brave the struggle of life. As he himself says there is a lot of him in the poem, especially his sense of loss. Tennyson identified with Ulysses and therefore, sees Ulysses as a heroic figure. His determination to seek some work of note is courageous in the face of old age. Tennyson admired courage and persistence and to him Ulysses with his refusal to face life passively is an admirable figure.

Modern Interpretation

In the nineteenth century people reacted sympathetically to the character of Ulysses. He was brave, strong, courageous and heroic. The Victorians admired all these qualities and looked at Ulysses as a symbol of courage against all odds and the desire to do something worthwhile in life. Modern interpretation of the character

of Ulysses is somewhat different. He is seen to be selfish and arrogant and full of pride. Critics point out that he is one of the flawed heroes who show conflicting emotions, self critical introspection and a rejection of social responsibilities –he speaks frankly of what he has done. He looks down on everyone around him; the people are a savage race and his wife, an aged wife. He is weary of governing the savage race and even looks down in contempt at some very admirable qualities of his son. He finds his son, Telemachus, slow and boring. He comments on his own weaknesses too----he is discontented and cannot adjust to peaceful life after his exciting adventures. He is arrogant when he says he has become a legend and people know of him. Therefore,he finds his son slow and has a condescending attitude towards him because he has not achieved as much as the father has. Finally he decides to go on the final voyage with his mariners, again showing his lack of social responsibility. He does not mind giving up his duty to towards his country to go off in a selfish pursuit of personal glory. He does not mind leaving his wife and son as also his subjects after returning home after ten long years.

All in all, the modern interpretation of Ulysses is ironic and negative. However, some do reserve admiration for the poem and find it flawless in tone from beginning to end and also free from over decoration and full of firm and controlled feelings. Readers have found the poem inspirational and the last lines are oft quoted.

Self-Assessment Questions II

Give a critical appreciation of Ulysses.

Discuss the autobiographical element in the poem

Write a note on the character of Ulysses in the poem?

BREAK BREAK BREAK

Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter The thoughts that arise in me.

O, well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O, well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill; But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,

And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break

At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!

But the tender grace of a day that is dead Will never come back to me.

Summary

This poem was written by Tennyson at the death of his dear friend, Arthur Hallam. They had met and become friends during their college days and their friendship remained lifelong. He was to marry Tennyson's sister, Emily. When Tennyson heard the news of his death in 1833, he was shocked and plunged into deep grief. This inspired many of his poems---In Memoriam, Ulysses, Break Break Break and others. It is an elegy, a poem of mourning and is a beautiful moving expression of his feelings.

It is a poem full of grief. It was written at the death of Hallam. The poet sits on the shore and sees the waves dashing against the rocks, breaking against them and he is restless and full of grief. The sea, to him, is able to express itself, its fury or its sorrow by dashing against the rocks on the sea shore. But not so the poet, whose heart is full of grief but he is unable to express himself. He wishes his grief, dashing against his cold and hardened heart [hardened due to grief which has put him in a state of shock] would burst out into words Thus, giving an outlet to the sorrow bottled up inside him.

But then, looking around him he realizes that life goes on as usual. Man may die but Nature and life goes on. And so the fisherman's boy plays with his sister on the shore and the sailor's lad in his boat, sings as he looks out. The ships too sail and go wherever they have to. They do not come to a standstill because Hallam has died. Nature goes on and the poet is left acutely conscious of his grief and his yearning to hear the sound of his friend's voice and also feel his touch. He misses him and longs to see him.

In the last stanza the realization comes to the poet that his friend has gone and will never come back again. Just as a day, once gone, can never come back again. The next day is a new day; so also, the days spent with his friend are gone and the poet is left lonely and all by himself, longing for the old days to come back. It is a beautiful lyric in which sound and sense come together in music. It describes in plain and simple words the grief felt by the poet at the death of his close friend and we are deeply moved by it

Analysis of the Poem

The poem was written as an elegy, mourning the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam. It was written in 1834, in the early hours of the morning during Tennyson's walk in a lane near Somersby in Lincolnshire. He was staying there with his mother and brothers and sisters. His father had died and Tennyson had come home to look after his family. At this point of time he was depressed and a little disturbed as three of his brothers were in a mental asylum and on hearing of Hallam's death he was even more mentally fragile. The death disturbed him deeply and he poured out his heartfelt grief in his poems. 'Break Break Break' was published in the 1842 collection of his poems.

The background of the poem is Clevedon Church, built on an elevated spot facing the English Channel. Hallam was buried there. Tennyson was probably there near the church grave and seeing the waves splashing and dashing against the rocks on the shore, the idea of the poem must have come to him. He speaks of the waves breaking against the rocks and wishes he too could give expression to the grief within him. The storm of grief within him is similar to the storm at sea. He is inarticulate and cannot express the sense of loss within him but wants his grief to burst out of him like the waves break against the cliff. His heart is hardened by the grief but it should break out and give expression to his grief. But even as he is plunged in sorrow he looks around him and sees life go by normally. Nature is unaffected. The fisherman's boy plays with his sister and the sailor lad sings in his boat. Life is going on as usual. It does not come to a stop because a dear one dies and vanishes from the earth. Life goes on and the yearning and longing within him for his friend grows more and more painful as he realizes this parting is forever and he will never return.

That is the gist of the poem-the realization that though men may die and we may mourn their death, Nature and life are not affected. The seasons come and go and the sun and moon rise and set as usual. Life too goes on. It does not come to a standstill because we are sad. It is a deeply moving, sad and melancholy thought but one that we have to get used to, if we are to survive. Life goes on and we have to accept it

It is a remarkable poem. It is a lament for a friend and combines a breaking heart with a suggestion that the waves that are breaking continuously against the cliffs carry the poet away from the past when he realizes that what has happened cannot be changed. The past has gone and he remains in the present. Hallam is dead and Tennyson will have to come to terms with his grief.

Form

The poem has four stanzas of four lines each. The first four lines and the last four lines are about grief. Through the description of the external landscape [the storm at sea] the poet presents the storm within his mind. The storm at sea, when the waves dash against the rocks, represents the storm of grief within his mind, at the death of his friend. Just as the waves are breaking against the cold grey stones of the sea, in the same way, the waves of his grief have to break against his hard cold heart which is in shock over the news. He wants his grief to break through so that it gets an outlet. The second and third stanzas are about life going on as usual and not stopping for anyone --the children play and the sailor lad sings as the ships go on their way under the hill. But the realization comes to him that he will never again feel the touch of his friend's hand or hear his voice evermore.

The rhyme scheme here is abcb. There is a combination of sound and sense. It is as beautiful to hear as it is to understand. It is a beautiful lyric in which sound and sense come together in music. He uses alliteration to create this effect—

‘Boat on the bay’

He uses paradox too

‘But O’ for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still’

The hand has vanished and so cannot be touched and the voice is still so cannot be heard. He emphasizes youth. Hallam was young when he died, so he speaks of the fisherman's son and the sailor lad. All are young. Youth is precious but Nature does not see it as so. Nature is indifferent and continues on its course even as man is plunged in grief. It is touching and sad and a simple musical expression of his grief. The sound of the words, the metre and the flow of the verse go well with the emotion expressed. The last two lines hint at the fact, that what has happened cannot be reversed. The past is irrevocable and he can never again hope for the company of his friend.

The poem then is a simple lyric, melodious in tone and sincere in its expression of the poet's grief. It describes, in plain and simple words, the sense of loss the poet feels at the death of his friend. Death is a part of life and man has to accept it for. However, sad he may be, life goes on and does not come to a standstill, just because a close one has passed away

TENNYSON: AN ESTIMATE

Tennyson as a Representative of the Victorian Age

Tennyson is regarded as being the representative poet of the Victorian Age. That is he reflected in his work the main happenings of the Victorian Age. He was the voice of the whole people- and expressed their feelings, emotions, problems, and doubts in sweet melody-- his poetry. He stood for their ideals, what they aspired for, the social attitudes and the moral problems of Victorian England and most of all for their spirit of compromise. He is best regarded as being the representative of the people in three main areas where there was confusion and people opted for compromise:

Politics- Democracy v/s Monarchy.

Science- Religion v/s Science.

Love

Politics: The 19th century was a period of change. Change was coming about in every aspect of life. The French Revolution in 1788 had inspired people and encouraged them to feel that all men are brothers. Liberty, equality and fraternity was the battle cry of the revolution and many poets, especially Wordsworth and Shelley, were carried away by it. This led to the demand for a greater representation of the common man, in the day to day governance of the country. Democratic ideals came up and also the question of universal suffrage and voting rights for women. There was change in the air but the common man was confused. He felt he owed his loyalty to the king but at the same time wanted a say in governing the country. And so he approached the problem from the point of view of compromise.

Tennyson is the best example of the spirit of compromise which was to be seen in the 19th century. He too was fired up by talk of democracy and believed in change. Change has to come about but it does not have to be sudden. He did not believe in bloody revolutions, and sudden change, like Shelley, who wanted things to change with the sweep of the hand. Tennyson wanted change, but at a slower pace. Gradual orderly development was what he believed in. You cannot do away with class divisions at one go and he was not so sure about giving power to the working class. Through his poetry he tried to bring all ranks of people together under the common band of humanity. He tried to fire them with a love for their country.

Thus, here too, through his poetry he helped to express the doubts and fears of the people-- Their confusion between monarchy and democracy and like them he opted for the middle course--Change but at a slower pace. Monarchy has to go and democracy will take its place but this will take time.

Science: Here too he was a true representative of his age. His poetry dealt with the doubts and difficulties of his age, especially with regard to Christianity and the traditional ideas people had about man's nature and destiny which were now being questioned by science and progress. Yet through the mastery of his poetic genius,

his noble verse and his melodious poetry he managed to give his readers a feeling of calmness and serenity in those troubled times. He himself was beset by doubts. He was aware of new man's place in the universe as revealed by science – it did fill him with fear but he also did give the Victorians a feeling of all being well.

Darwin in his 'Origin of Species' declared that man has evolved from the ape and this put science in direct confrontation with religion. The Bible said Adam and Eve are man's first parents and if you do good you will be rewarded. The Victorians were confused as science and its discoveries were calling in question their very faith. They did not know who to turn to, in difficult times. If the story of the Bible is not true then what of the moral?

Tennyson did not take sides. Like a typical Victorian, he approached the problem from the angle of compromise. He did not deny either religion or science. He just said that there is something in the world that watches over man. It may not be God, for science has proved otherwise, but still man could have faith that something was watching over him, preventing him from doing wrong – you could perhaps call it intuition, today. It was more a philosophy of hope rather than a clear cut viewpoint. The scientist was pleased because he did not completely reject what science said - that man is evolved from the apes. The belief that there could be something looking over man pleased the religious. In the Princess, he gave expression to this philosophy of his when he said

“Somehow good will be the final goal of ill”

This was very popular in the Victorian Age. He did not fight for either science or religion, just declared the compromise between the two- which was exactly what most people were doing in the Victorian Age.

Love: In the Victorian period, love was quite gentle and domesticated. The same is true of Tennyson's depiction of the emotion. Whenever he talks of young people in love, he quickly mentions that they are married or to be married. Love was a domestic sentiment and Tennyson is true to his age. Sex and sexual passion have no place in his work. He was in favour of women's movement. He seems to be for women and their rights. He goes to the root of the problem when he says—

“The women's cause is Man's They rise and sink together”

He sees marriage and domesticated home life as the best outlet for women's energies but he does not restrict them to these alone. In all this he was echoing the thoughts and sentiments of his age

Tennyson then dominated the Victorian scene for half a century. He had the typical Victorian attitude of compromise. With all the changes taking place in politics and science – he holds a middle ground. He is not melancholic like Arnold or too

optimistic like Browning in tone and mood of his poems. He tries to give a real clear picture of the problems of Victorian society and then tries to show a positive way out. His path is that of the middle ground and therefore, he is called a compromising artist. He does not give in to the coming changes nor is he careless of it. He just finds a way between the old and the new.

His poetry marks a departure from romantic poetry which is subjective. The Romantic poets speak of their own emotions & feelings. Tennyson's poetry is objective in that he speaks for his age. The spirit of his age is mirrored in his poetry. We have the conflict between science and religion, monarchy and democracy, romanticism and classicism. He believes that change is due and will happen. He deals with the topic of the day and hence his poetry is interesting because it shows us the political, intellectual and spiritual life of the age. He is qualified to be the mouthpiece, the spokesman of the age and his poetry represents the true spirit of the Victorian age.

Tennyson as a Poet

When we study Tennyson as a poet, we have to look into the different aspects of his craft. Here we will study him as a poet of nature, his attitude and treatment of love, his characters, his political and social outlook, his religious outlook and most of all his lyricism.

Poet of Nature: Tennyson gives us some very close and accurate descriptions of nature. In fact the influence of science on his work can best be seen in his nature descriptions. He wrote like a scientist with a gift for poetry. His work had great accuracy of detail, as if he had spent a lot of time examining nature very closely. He was sensitive to the varied aspects of nature. He observes closely and with accuracy the smallest detail and expresses it with delicate poetic feeling. The two are blended together-- accurate observation and the poetic gift. Thus, he says of dawn,

“And shake the darkness from their loosened manes And beat the twilight into flakes of fire”

He speaks of how autumn lays – “a fiery finger on the leaves “ Of the autumn storm he says –

“The last red leaf is whirled away
the rooks are blown about the sky.”

Everywhere the observation of the scientist is given the poetic touch – The basic, actual fact is dressed in poetry. Besides, his picture of nature is always the background for some human emotion. It reflects what is going on in the mind of

man. If man is happy, nature appears in a happy mood and if sad, he focuses on the gloomy aspects of nature. Nature always is a reflection of man's moods. Wordsworth and Byron look upon Nature as being something outside of man. For Tennyson it is always background for some human emotion. It has no message of its own, just blends in with the mood of man. Thus, in *Lotus Eaters*, he concentrates on showing a dreamy, lazy & languid atmosphere which goes with the lazy feeling of the lotus eaters. In *Tithonus* he gives us the melancholy, autumnal touch –

“The woods decay the woods decay and fall “

In ‘*In Memoriam*’ sorrow is the inspiration which leads to some very lovely poetry

---a calm resignation in the mood of man and also in nature.

“Calm is the morn without a sound Calm as to suit a calmer grief”

Treatment of Love: Tennyson's treatment of love is very different from that of Byron, Shelley or Browning. Byron looked upon love as some kind of elemental force that takes on man and his emotions. For Shelley and Browning it was more of a transcendental passion. But for Tennyson love was always a domestic passion. Whenever he talks of love, of girls and boys going out together, he follows it up quickly with the idea of marriage. This love poetry, at times, may seem cold and may not reach any height or depths. No one goes into extreme happiness over love and no one sinks into despair when love is lost. In fact his love poetry has a certain tenderness, graciousness and homeliness about it. It has a charm all its own -tender, warm and glowing with innocence There is nothing sensuous about it.

Lyricism: Tennyson is a great lyric poet. In his hands, the music of language was changed into melody and harmony. He loved poetry and knew very early that he was destined to be a poet. His poetry is remarkable for its descriptive imagery and sweet melody. Some of his famous lyrics are- *Tears idle Tears*, *Break, Break, Break*, *Come not when I am dead* etc.

Sweetness,, clarity, melody and decency are the hallmarks of his style. They are the dominant characteristics of his typical style. He is happiest when bringing to his readers the beauty of the visible world.

As we had mentioned earlier, Tennyson observed things closely and then placed them in front of his readers in poetic form. He gave expression to bare facts in poetry, with music and clarity. In fact one criticism against him was that there is a lot of beauty and music in his verse but very little thought. This applies specially to his earlier works. The volume of 1833 was severely attacked because of this. Tennyson did not despair and spent the next 10 years revising his work so that when next he published his poetry, it was widely accepted. In some ways he never bettered the 1842 volume which had gems like – *Lotus Eaters*, *Lady of Shalott*,

Come not when I am dead etc. Till now his work was all beauty and music, now a change was coming. Thought was slowly entering his poetry.

W.H. Auden has described him as an essentially lyrical poet and his short lyrics-Break, Break, Break and Tears idle Tears- are some of his greatest lyrics. They are spontaneous and full of melody. Later critics have felt that his work was shallow and lacked thought but there can be no denying that as lyrics-melodious, sweet and spontaneous, they have very few equals. He did turn to the problem of the day in his later work. But even there, critics felt that he was shallow and confused. However, confused and shallow or not, his poetry is superb.

Tennyson as a Poetic Artist / Craftsman

Some critics are of the opinion that he was a great technician and little else. In fact his 1833 volume of poems was severely criticized. But Tennyson took the criticism positively and spent the next 10 years polishing up his art. In 1842 when he published his poems, they were hailed by all. This volume included his old work-‘Lady of Shalott’, ‘Lotus Eaters’, ‘Come not when I am dead’ etc. The earlier versions of these poems were not so polished and finished. But the final version was very well received.

He had the eye of a scientist and revised and re revised his poems till they sparkled. He was a great poetic artist and his poetry had metrical variety. The influence of science gave form and balance to his craftsmanship and also clarity and lucidity to whatever he said.

Many of his poems are written in blank verse- which is unrhymed iambic pentameter. However, he tried other meters too. In the Idylls, for the first time he tried blank verse on such a big scale. His blank verse may not be as grand as that of Milton’s but it has its own peculiar qualities- it has grace, tenderness, nobility and flexibility. It is not monotonous or boring.

Tennyson’s Political and Social Outlook

Even though critics have felt that his poetry is all beauty and melody and no serious thought, this is not so. It was true of his earlier works but later on he turned to the problems of the day- in Locksley Hall and the Princess. His interest in the happenings of his age grew with what was happening around him— democratic ideals were coming up and science was slowly gaining importance. These factors influenced his work and we can see the thought behind his later work.

He wanted change and believed in the democratic ideals coming up but he did not have the revolutionary passion of Shelley who wanted a sudden change- away with the rich and the monarchy - and the establishment of a government of the people. Tennyson believed in an orderly change. Monarchy has to go and democracy should come but gradually without bloodshed. In "Locksley Hall" he gave expression to the social problems of the day. In the Princess he dealt with the woman's question-should they have the right to vote? There was a healthy progressive note in this poem, The Victorian age did not give importance to women and wanted to limit them to the home, He gives a balanced idea of woman's place in society – emphasizes that

"Woman's cause is Man's

They rise and sink together"

Like his age he too believes that marriage and home life is the best outlet for a woman's energies but that does not mean she cannot go out and find her way in the outside world.

Towards the end of his career, he lived a more reclusive life, cut off from the outside world. Hence he was not in touch with the realities of the world. Besides the quiet country life and his temperament made his later utterances on social subjects practically nil. He had nothing to say on the current problem then.

Influence of Science and Tennyson's Religious Outlook

The scientific advances of the day influenced Tennyson greatly. Science influenced him as a poet—he gave accurate descriptions of nature. However, his accuracy did not extend to his general outlook in life. He did not take up anyone position- either that of science or faith and fight his cause with the logic of science. Science said man's first parents were the apes. Faith and religion said Adam and Eve were man's first parents. But Tennyson did not choose sides. Here he was a typical Victorian and approached the problem from the angle of compromise. He was aware of the religious confusion and also sensitive to scientific thought. He did not deny either. He just said that there is something that watches over man. It may not be God, for science has proved otherwise,, but still man could have faith in something, in the universe watching out for him, a kind of intuition which tells you what to do or not.

In his poem In Memoriam, he gives speech to his religious philosophy and gives his position on religion and science. It is not so much a philosophy of faith as of hope. Because as he says

"Somehow good will be the final goal of ill. "

This feeling of certainty many felt showed how weak Tennyson was and this disgusted many critics. Instead of fighting for what science had to say or what religion and the Bible believed in – he just said that good would come out of evil too. In those days of doubts, this compromise was very popular for when man did not know what to believe in - Religion or science. The middle path of compromise was best.

Conclusion: Tennyson was a poet of discipline He believed in law and order and a quiet dignified life. And these are the qualities that mark his work too. His poetry is not great in that sense; not inspiring for he does not thrill us or inspire us. It is quiet and peaceful, dignified and serene and graceful. He is the poet of everyday emotions, a great painter of the English country side and the creator of melodious poetry. However, much the modern critic may criticize him for shallow thought, no one can take away from him the delicacy and charm of his verse.

Self-Assessment Questions III

Critically appreciate “Break, Break, Break”.

Discuss Tennyson as a poet.

Write a note on Tennyson and the Victorian Compromise.

Discuss Tennyson as a lyric poet.

Discuss the treatment of Nature in Tennyson’s poetry.

Answer the following-

Whom is Tennyson mourning in Break Break Break?

Who wrote the Origin of Species?

When was Ulysses published?

In which year was Break Break Break written?

Tennyson was born in _ .

SUMMING UP

In this unit we have studied the following:

Appreciated Tennyson’s genius as a poet

How his background influenced the literature of his age and also Tennyson’s ownwork.

Analyzed the two poems ‘Ulysses’ and ‘Break Break Break’

Got a view of the modern outlook on Tennyson

ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I

Refer to 12.1.

Refer to 12.1. –5th and 6th paragraph

Refer to 12.4.2

Refer to 12.4.2—autobiographical elemental

Refer to 12.4.2 -1st 2nd and 3rd paragraphs and Modern Interpretations

Refer to 12.5.2

Refer to 12.7

Refer to 12.6

Refer to 12.6.3

Refer to 12.7.

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- a. Hallam
- b. Charles Darwin
- c. 1842
1834
1809

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

Discuss Tennyson as a Victorian poet with especial reference to the Victorian Compromise.
Analyze the poem 'Break Break Break'
Give a critical appreciation of 'Ulysses'.

Give an estimate of Tennyson as a poet.

UNIT 13 ROBERT BROWNING:
“Porphyria’s Lover”, “My Last Duchess”**Introduction**

Objectives**Robert Browning—His Life and Works****“Porphyria’s Lover”****A Summary****Analysis****Form****“My Last Duchess”****A Summary****Analysis****Form****Robert Browning: An Assessment****Browning as a Poet****Browning’s Philosophy****As a Love Poet****Summing Up****Answers to Self-Assessment Questions****References****Terminal and Model Questions**

INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will be taking up Robert Browning, an important literary figure of Victorian English Literature. He was a poet in the Victorian Age who was very important in his time. After his death came a period when critics questioned his poetry and in the twentieth century his popularity declined. However, now a more balanced critical judgment has been arrived at and Browning is again regarded as being one of the great English poets of all times.

Browning speaks for the Victorian age though not as much as Tennyson does. Mid-nineteenth century England had become industrialized and so city based. The focus had changed from the country to the city; from rural to urban. And the literary artists of the time too highlighted this aspect of life. Everyday life had changed and with new factories and mills opening, there was a movement from the country to the city. With so many people living in such close quarters, poverty, violence and sex became a part of everyday life. There were fewer restrictions on their behaviour. In smaller communities like villages from where they came, bad behaviour was not accepted. So people felt the need to conform to the rules of society. Now in the anonymity of city life, where you did not know your neighbour, there was no such compulsion to conform to societal behaviour. It did not matter what you did and how you behaved. Big city life Thus, led to violence and as a result, insecurity. You never knew where violence was lurking. Also since it was a growing city there were bigger crowds and bigger markets and shops that catered to the crowds. There were so many new things happening all around that man became numb. Writers too felt the need to compete with all these temptations. They had to shock their readers into reading; otherwise they had no time to read. They were busy looking at the goods available. Browning is a nineteenth century poet in that sense. At times he does try to shock his readers with violence and sex, which had become a symbol of modern urban dwelling conditions. Some of Browning's poems are disturbing in that sense. In 'My Last Duchess' the Duke's man is negotiating a marriage deal for the Duke and he does not hesitate to point out that the Duke's first wife had been murdered by him, for crossing the limits of what, the Duke considered, to be correct behaviour. She was friendly to all, which he interpreted as flirting. Hence, he got her killed. In 'Porphyria's Lover', the lover is jealous of his beloved and so murders her one night so that she remains his forever more.

This moral decay of Victorian society was coupled with a lack of interest in religion which was because of the developments in the field of science. It led to a morally conservative backlash i.e. people reacted to the violence and bad behaviour by going to the other extreme. They encouraged prudery. It was actually an attempt to bring things and society back to normal, to what it had been earlier. Things had been out of control and now society was trying to get things under control. Thus, everything was scrutinized for moral propriety—the way men and women behaved.

It had to be morally correct, prim and proper. This also extended to art and literature and can be seen in Browning's poetry.

Science and the discoveries in science created more problems for religion and tradition. Everything seemed to be in doubt--- questions were being raised about religion and the Bible. It was a period of doubt and confusion. All this is reflected in Browning's work as, through his dramatic monologues, he discusses art and morality and how social powers could be misused. In 'My Last Duchess' he is, in one sense criticizing the Duke for taking upon himself the role of guardian of society. He thinks he is right in sitting in judgment on his wife's behaviour. He could be wrong. The Duchess may have simply been a friendly girl.

Browning was then a major poet of his time and an important influence on modern poetry though that was acknowledged much later. In his later years he came to be looked upon as a wise old man and was highly regarded for his knowledge. Modern critics like T.S Eliot did not hold him in high esteem but Ezra Pound paid him a tribute by calling him one of his literary fathers. After the Second World War something of his damaged reputation was salvaged when the new generation of critics acknowledged that he had influenced the modern poetic form. He regained his lost position and today he is recognized as a major poet.

OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you to-

Understand the poetic genius of Browning.

Analyze Browning's poems.

Understand how Browning looks at life.

Appreciate his philosophy and his optimism

ROBERT BROWNING HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Browning was born on 7 May 1812 at Camberwell. His father was a clerk in the Bank of England and his mother was of mixed German and Scotch descent---a musician and an artist. Browning inherited his music and artistic taste from her. He was familiar with the classics from a very young age and was a sharp and highly imaginative child. Early schooling was in private schools but the experience, being not very satisfactory, he continued his education at home. He was undecided what he wanted to be—a doctor or an actor—but finally decided on becoming a poet. He had written a small volume of poetry in his childhood and Thus, showed a keen interest in poetry very early in life. Byron, Shelley and Keats influenced his early poetry but the effect soon wore off. At 20 he had published 'Pauline' and in 1834

he left for Russia. He made many new friends over there. Macready, the actor was one of them and for his son he wrote 'The Pied Piper'. In 1838 he went to Italy and its influence remained with him throughout his life. Much of his best work was done in this period. When he returned from Italy he became interested in the poems of Elizabeth Barrett and met her on 21st May 1845 in what was to be the beginnings of the most romantic literary love story. Her unreasonable and selfish father refused to give his permission for their marriage. Elizabeth was an invalid and he refused to also let her go abroad for treatment. Browning was then 34 years old and Elizabeth 6 years older. They decided to elope and on 12th September 1846 they were secretly married at Marylebone Church and left for Italy thereafter. They led a happy married life there; Elizabeth grew happy and fit. In 1849 a son was born to them but their joy was cut short by the sad news of his mother's death. They made several trips to England after that but Italy was their home. Sometime later Elizabeth Browning's health started failing and she passed away in 1860. Browning then returned to London and devoted himself to his son's education. His sister had come to live with him and he also continued writing though his poems were not very popular. It grieved him a lot but he continued writing and slowly his popularity grew. As he grew older, his reputation as a poet too grew and he was looked upon as a wise sage. His opinions and his wide knowledge were greatly regarded. His son by now was married and settled in Italy. Browning who had not visited Italy since his wife's death, now made annual visits to the country and on one such visit, he caught a cold and developed bronchitis. He passed away on 12th December 1889 and was buried at Westminster Abbey. Thus, ended the life of a great poet and a great literary figure of the nineteenth century.

Major Works: Browning's development as a poet and a writer can be divided into three periods:

The period of immaturity [1832-1840]

Maturity [1841-1869]

Decline of the artist [1870-1889]

The Period of Immaturity [1832-1840]: The period from 1832-1840 is when Browning had not yet decided how he should write his verse. He was trying out various forms and finally decided on the dramatic lyric. He had a dramatic genius and it found wonderful expression in his poems. He had tried out the monologue, narrative drama and the pure lyric. In the dramatic lyric he combines characteristics of the other forms too.

'Pauline' was written in 1833, when he was twenty. It shows the influence of others and reveals those qualities which were to come later in Browning's poetry – the thinker and the artist. In 1835 he wrote 'Paracelsus' which showed the influence of Keats but Browning was coming into his own. 'Sordello' was his next work-1840. It was a learned poem, full of his knowledge and difficult to understand. All three

works up to now did not show Browning at his best. We can just get a glimpse of what he can do.

The 'Dramatic Lyrics', his next work covered the period -1836-1846. Here Browning, the poetic genius, the artist is revealed. Till now the moralist and thinker had taken centrestage. Now it is the turn of the artist-Evelyn Hope, In a Gondola, Porphyria's lover, My Last Duchess, The Pied Piper- these are some of the best works of Browning. We have satire, humour, keen observation, and joy in life, passion and thought.

Maturity [1841-1869]: The 'Dramatic Lyrics' (1836-1846) of which we spoke in the earlier section can be included in this too. Here we have Browning at his best. The Dramatic Romances 1848 are even better than the lyrics. The works are like the earlier one but here the scope is wider he is more at ease. In 1855 he wrote 'Men and Women' which included 'Andrea Del Sarto' and 'Fra Lippo Lippi'.

This is his best period when he wrote his most varied work. The dramatic note is there with both the intellectual and emotional touch. At times the intellectual, the thinker dominates and at other times, the emotional. But he is at his best when he blends the two together-thought with passion and emotion, the thinker with the poet.

Some of his works of this period are 'Pippa Passes'[1841], 'A Soul's Tragedy'[1846], 'In a Balcony'[1853]. He also wrote 'The Ring and The Book' 1868-1869. Later he wrote *Dramatis Personae* 1864 which was next in line after Dramatic Lyrics, Dramatic Romances and Men and Women. Here he still takes love as his main theme but the thinker too can be seen. The lyrics here are not so sweet and lacking the beauty and tenderness of his earlier work. But still there is much to attract us. And then came 'Rabbi Ben Ezra' and 'Abt Vogler'. Rabbi Ben Ezra is full of wise and tender sayings and gives us Browning's outlook on life.

In *The Ring and The Book* [1869], Browning is both the observer and the critic of life. Till now he was either the thinker or the poet. Here, both come together. It is long but here we see the various sides to him-the dramatic, tragic, and psychological and analytical. However, it is not lyrical.

Decline of the Artist [1870-1889]: After this, the decline sets in. The intellectual side of Browning gets the upper hand. The poetic artist is barely there. He might as well have written in prose. His works include- *The Inn Album* [1875], *Pacchiarotto* [1876], *Dramatic Idylls* [1879-80] *Asolando* [1889] etc. Towards the end of his career, once again, the artist in him awakened. The force and beauty of his earlier work was not there, but something of the old magic and charm remained. The intellectual side was in the background and the poet of hopes, loves fears and sorrows was uppermost. It is the old Browning but slightly weak. It was the last

work of his life as he passed away soon after'. Asolando' is the old Browning coming back to life, though weaker for the last time.

Self-Assessment Questions I

How did the nineteenth century background influence Browning's poetry?

Discuss Browning's work in the light of the three periods of his development:

PORPHYRIA'S LOVER

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake, It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake: I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm, And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm; Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl, And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall, And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me. When no voice replied, She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare, And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there, And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me — she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour, To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever, And give herself to me forever.
But passion sometimes would prevail, Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale For love of her, and all in vain:
So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise

Made my heart swell, and still it grew While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair, Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she; I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before, Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still: The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled, And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how Her darling one wish would be heard.
And Thus, we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred, And yet God has not said a word!

Summary

Browning's poem Porphyria's Lover is his earliest dramatic monologue. It is a study in jealousy. The possessive lover is jealous of his beloved. He wants her to belong to him and him alone to the exclusion of everyone else. And therefore, at the very moment when she declares her love for him, he kills her so that their love could be perfect and remain so for all time to come. He is jealous and possessive and does not want her to go back to her family and therefore, thinks of strangling her. He feels that now she belongs to him and can never again leave him.

The poem opens on a stormy night. It is wet and windy, cold and dark. The storm seeks to destroy everything in sight and puts the speaker in a melancholy mood as he sits in a remote cabin and waits for his beloved. On such a night, Porphyria leaves the party at her place and quietly enters the cabin where her lover was waiting for her. She is completely wet and coming into the room she first of all

shuts the storm out and makes straight for the fire place and lights a fire to make the room cozy and warm. Then she removes her dripping cloak and shawl. She unties her hair and lets them fall on her shoulders. Then she turns to the speaker and calls out to him. She sits by his side and draws his head on her shoulders and quietly tells him of her love for him. She assures him that her love was stronger than the storm outside and it could not stop her from coming to him.

She tells him she longs to belong to him forever but she was too weak and at times her pride and vanity tried to stop her from doing so. Perhaps she belonged to a wealthy and notable family while the lover was ordinary and poor. Her social ties were strong. Her family and her place and status in society prevented her from setting her passion free so that she could come to him. But at times her emotions and her passion got the better of her and then she listened to her love for him. This was such a moment when her passion had the upper hand and Thus, nothing could stop her from coming to him. Thinking of him pale and waiting for her, she left the party midway and through the cold and wet rain she came to the cabin to be with him.

Hearing this lover is surprised and happy. The moment was perfect and he wanted her to belong to him completely. Their love would be perfect and immortal. But he knew this could not last and reality would intrude sometime or the other. Thoughts of her family and social standing would come to her and she would leave him. To make the moment eternal and to prevent her from leaving him, he slowly winds her long golden hair around her neck and strangles her. She dies quietly. He opens her eyelids and sees the laughing blue eyes again and she does not look dead. He unwinds her hair and leans her head against his shoulder. And Thus, they sit throughout the night. At this point of time her passion was uppermost and disregarding her lies and false notions of pride and vanity she had come to him. By killing her, she belonged to him completely and nothing could separate them. Finally he says that he had made true her dearest wish that she belong to him forever, though not quite as she meant.

Analysis

Porphyria's Lover first appeared in 1836. It is one of Browning's earliest dramatic monologues. In it he explores the mind of an insane and possessive lover, who kills his beloved so that she could belong, exclusively to him. He shows us clearly how such a mind works. He believes that by killing her he was preventing her from leaving and was also making eternal, a moment of joy. It gave Browning the opportunity to explore an aspect of human psychology, the dark mind. The fact was that Browning was interested in the workings of the human mind and through his poems he made a study of men and women. He was a passionate observer of men and women and he goes deep into their psyche to reveal the workings of their mind.

If you study his poems closely you will realize that Browning very often takes up such interesting characters—he deals with jealousy, pride, lack of courage to take decisive action and many other things. He has great insight into character which is the result of patient, critical and thoughtful observation. He observes man closely and uses that to give us his pictures of human nature.

Form

It is a dramatic monologue. It is in the form of a speech or the musings of a speaker who is not the poet. The speech comes after the action. Porphyria is already dead and the lover is thinking as he sits by her dead body. The style here is clear and lucid and not obscure. It is easy to understand though there are traces of his obscurity in a couple of lines. It is the same in *My Last Duchess*—

This grew, I gave commands
Then all smiles stopped altogether

Also, nothing is stated clearly. Something is troubling the lover but we do not know what it exactly is. Browning merely hints at it and we have to draw our own conclusions. The lover is pale but we do not know why that is so. Is he sick or something? Obscurity due to language is not seen here. There is a certain compression and concentration which makes things a little vague but otherwise it is fairly clear.

The monologue also throws light on the character of the lover. When he speaks and tells us of what has happened we realize that he is a jealous and possessive lover. He loves the girl but he wants that she should belong to him only and so he kills her. Society would not have allowed them to come together as she belongs to a noble and rich family while he is ordinary and poor. Browning draws the character brilliantly. He goes deep into his mind and studies the workings of his abnormal psychology. The lover is afraid that her worldly ties will draw her away from him. She belongs to a higher class than him and pride and vanity are sure to take her away from him. In a moment of passion, she has come to him but once the moment is over she is sure to return to her place in society. This, the lover wants to prevent and wishes she would be his forever. Thus, on the spur of the moment he strangles her and then is at peace for now she can never leave him.

The poem is spoken by the lover who gives us his point of view. He gives us the report of what has happened. Browning's comment comes from the contrast between what the speaker justifies as right [has killed her so that their love can be immortal] and what the reader actually sees [that he is jealous and has murdered his beloved] The lover speaks of the murder as an act of nobility, whereas it is far from being so. It is a jealous and insane act by a possessive lover. The irony lies in the contrast between the pictures as the lover sees it and as it actually is.

Thus, Browning here is the artist with a deep interest in character. His genius is largely dramatic and this is seen in the interest he shows in men and women as individuals. Man not men interests him and he focuses on any abnormality that he sees in his characters. Here it is an insanely jealous and possessive man who is not happy though his beloved feels the same. He is worried that in the future, a time may come when she leaves him for her family. And to make this moment perfect and eternal he murders her. It is a perfect study in jealousy and reveals Browning's genius for psychoanalysis.

MY LAST DUCHESS

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall, Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said "Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read Strangers like you
that pictured countenance, The depth and passion of its earnest glance, But to myself they turned (since
none puts by The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst, How such a glance came there; so, not the first Are you
to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint Must never hope
to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough For calling
up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad, Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere. Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West, The bough of cherries some officious fool Broke in the orchard
for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked

My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will Quite clear to such an one, and say, “Just this Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss, Or there exceed the mark”—and if she let Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed; Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed At starting, is my
object. Nay, we'll go Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though, Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Summary

My Last Duchess was published in 1842. It is believed to be Browning's best and most effective dramatic monologue. Again, it is a study in jealousy. Here we have the cruel hard-hearted duke who wants to control his wife and also impose his will and standards on his young, beautiful and full of life duchess. It is loosely based on historical events. The duke here is Alfonso, the Duke of Ferrara who lived in the sixteenth century.

It is a dramatic monologue and the speaker is the duke who is speaking to someone else---the count's envoy. He is negotiating his marriage to the count's daughter and is pointing out the portrait of his first wife to the messenger. He tells him what he expects of his wife, how her behaviour should suit his status and what he expects by way of dowry. We do not hear the messenger speak. His presence is guessed at by what the duke says.

The first duchess was beautiful, spontaneous and full of life. She enjoyed life and greeted one and all with the same warmth and courtesy she showed her husband,

the duke. This hurt the duke who was very proud of his family and name which went back 900 years. He wanted that his wife should be more conscious of her status and name and not be friendly with all. She should have been cold and proud in her bearing. But being young and friendly she did not understand this and the duke was too proud and arrogant to stoop so low as to explain to her where exactly she went wrong in her behaviour. Her free and easy behaviour hurt him and being jealous and possessive he suspected she was flirting with others. The fact that she gave as much importance to a servant as she gave her husband did not make him happy. He was jealous and hurt and deeply disturbed as it seemed to him that she was insulting his name and status. Till things went too far and he was forced to take steps to put an end to all such things. He had her killed

This is what he is pointing out to the envoy. The second wife will have to behave properly according to his rank or else she too will have to suffer the same fate as the first. She cannot be too friendly or familiar with others. He also indirectly asks for a substantial dowry. It is a brilliant portrait of a Renaissance duke, a man belonging to the aristocracy of the time wealthy, proud, cold-blooded, cruel and egoistic, suspicious and jealous.

Analysis

My Last Duchess is perhaps one of Browning's best dramatic monologues. It was published as a dramatic romance in 1842 and is one of his studies of the Renaissance. Having lived in Italy for a long time, he had vast knowledge of the social, artistic and cultural life of the Renaissance period and this resulted in his portraits of artists of the period eg. Andrea Del Sarto, Fra Lippo Lippi etc.

The poem is a subtle study in jealousy. It shows a typical duke of the period, selfish, cruel, wealthy, proud, arrogant, and cold and without any compassion, whatsoever. He is also a genuine devotee of art. The fact that he has plenty of wealth does not stop him from haggling and bargaining with the count's envoy for a handsome dowry, when negotiating his second marriage with the count's daughter. As he points out the portrait of his first duchess, he comments on her nature and in the process reveals his own greedy, jealous and dominating nature.

Form

It is a dramatic monologue and can be regarded as one of his very best and most representative of his monologues. His monologues are remarkable for their insight into human nature. 'My Last Duchess' shows Browning's knowledge of human nature and his analysis of human motives. The duke talks of his wife and in the process throws light on not just her nature, but his own too. He reveals himself as

narrow and prejudiced an aristocrat proud of his 900 years old name. He has a superior attitude towards his wife and is a jealous husband, unable to tolerate the friendly nature of his wife. Also, as all monologues, it starts in the middle of a conversation. The conversation has already begun and will go on long after the poem is finished. The speaker here is the duke and he is speaking to someone who does not speak himself. We only guess at his presence by what the duke says. The listener is the count's envoy who has come to negotiate the marriage of the count's daughter with the duke. Every monologue opens at a critical moment and it shows the character's reaction to it. Browning does not begin slowly and then work up to the crisis. Rather he plunges straight into the crisis. So it has an abrupt opening. It opens with the duke showing the painting of his first duchess to someone and talking about her. The speaker then goes on to reflect and think about what has happened even as he tells the envoy what his expectations are. His words reflect his character as even that of the duchess. The language is simple and informal. Of course, it is terse and not too friendly but then that is Browning's style.

The poem is loosely based on an actual event in Renaissance Italy. The duke reveals himself as a model of culture and also as a monster. He is unable to see the cruelty of his actions perhaps because of the fact that he gives undue importance to his 900 years old name. For him everything else is unimportant. When he is upset by his wife's overfriendly behaviour, he thinks it is below his dignity to tell her where she went wrong. He is so full of himself and his family that he believed it was below his dignity to have to tell her how to behave. She should have known. The story is told to the count's envoy as a warning. After all the duke is too proud to stoop to explain things. If the second wife does not behave as he thinks right she will meet the same fate as the first. He is controlled by his social expectations, his rank and his status. He wants to control his wife but is himself controlled by society, rank and status. He also comes across as being greedy. He wants a good dowry. His ego and pride, his arrogance and his vanity, his jealousy and his dominating nature all go to make a picture that is far from attractive. The duchess, on the other hand appears to be an innocent, pleasant, good-natured, amiable, simple and lovable young woman. She is unsophisticated and friendly to all. She treats everyone alike and that is what hurts the duke the most for he feels she does not give his 900 years old name the respect it deserves. She is not a flirt and the duke's jealousy is not justified.

The poem shows us Browning the pictorial artist. We can almost see the Duchess before our eyes. The poem does not suffer from his usual faults. It is not obscure or difficult to understand. It is only 56 lines but there is so much packed into these 56 lines that as a critic says a whole novel could be written on the basis of the poem. It is one of the greatest monologues to be written in the English language and that too by so young a poet.

Self-Assessment Questions II

Give a critical appreciation of “My Last Duchess”.
Analyze the poem “Porphyria’s Lover”.
Discuss “Porphyria’s Lover” as a study in jealousy.
Give a character sketch of the Duke in “My Last Duchess”.

ROBERT BROWNING: AN ASSESSMENT

Browning as a Poet

Browning has now come to be regarded as one of the greatest literary figures of the Victorian period. During the early part of his career, he was comparatively unknown but as time passed he came to be appreciated by all. His dramatic monologue and his novel in verse *The Ring and The Book* have given him his place in literary history. He is a great poet and a great thinker. In fact critics have argued about whether he is first a great poet or a thinker. He is a poet with an intellectual bent of mind and a thinker with a definite philosophy of life. He is also an optimist and a great love poet.

His Obscurity: A charge very often leveled against Browning is that of obscurity. He is difficult to read and understand and it was thought that he was being deliberately obscure. This is not so. If he is difficult it is because of his learning, his style and his technique. He is not always difficult. His short poems are easy. It is not that he cannot write sweetly and smoothly. It is just that a rugged style to express his views and this make him hard to understand. He does not bother about grammar and compresses what he has to say in as few lines as possible. Then his subjects too are hard. We have to be familiar with them before being able to understand them. Browning had read a lot and had vast knowledge. He dips into his vast learning for remote subjects, not realizing that we may not be familiar with them. He was not purposely obscure. He just did not realize he was being so because to him everything was clear. Then his view point too is unexpected and unfamiliar. It takes time getting used to it.

Browning then is obscure because he likes to express himself in a particular way. The manner is natural to him. It is abrupt, sketchy, allusive and full of gaps. He alludes to things we know nothing about. It needs time and patience to read and understand him. In the modern age, critics have once again begun to admire him for his many qualities. They see in his use of the dramatic monologue something which has inspired and influenced many modern poets. Modern poetry now acknowledges its debt to him and regards him as one of the all time greats.

As a Writer of Dramatic Monologues: The first point to remember is that Browning’s genius was essentially dramatic. He was able to bring together the best of drama and poetry into his verse. However, he was not successful as a dramatist and his plays were failures because they did not have proper action or plots. What

makes a play interesting is a proper story line and conflict. In Browning's plays the action is internal, in the study of the soul and in psycho-analysis. However, in the dramatic monologue, he found his form and it established him as a major poet of his times. He did not create the form, just perfected it. He compressed and concentrated intense emotion in a few lines. Hence the shorter it is, the more effective. Some of his most popular dramatic monologues are—My Last Duchess, Porphyria's lover, Andréa Del Sarto, Bishop Blougram's Apology and others.

Before taking up Browning as a writer of the dramatic monologue, we should first of all understand what a dramatic monologue is.

It is actually a narrative or a speech spoken by a single character. 'Mono' means one and 'logue' means speech. So it is a speech made by one man. It is often compared to a soliloquy. But soliloquy is a kind of speech made to oneself. It is as if you are thinking aloud. A dramatic monologue is a kind of conversation made to someone else

A dramatic monologue implies the presence of some other person who is the listener. He does not speak himself. It can be one person or more people listening to what the speaker has to say. Thus, in My Last Duchess, the speaker is the Duke and the listener is the Count's man or messenger who has come to negotiate with the Duke, a second marriage on behalf of the Count's daughter.

We come to know the remarks of the listener by the speaker's answers. Thus, it throws light on the character of the speaker as well as the listener

It has an abrupt opening. It opens in the middle of a conversation. The conversation has started earlier and will continue after the poem ends.

It is dramatic in that the excitement and action is internal. We come to know the thoughts and feelings of the characters involved. Through the clash of motives in the soul of the speaker, Browning develops character. And therefore, a moment of crisis is chosen. In other words, a critical moment is taken and the speaker's reaction is analyzed. Thus, in 'The Last Ride Together', the critical situation is the lady's rejection of his love and the lover's noble acceptance of it is the substance of the poem. In My Last Duchess the poem opens with the duke showing the envoy the portrait of his first wife and indirectly also warning him that if the count's daughter does not behave he will have her killed too. The duke comes across as being cruel and jealous. We come to know of his character thus.

From what is being said, we also come to know of what has happened in the past.—Thus, we come to know that the lady has rejected him in the past in The Last Ride Together. In 'Porphyria's Lover' we come to know that he has strangled his beloved because he wants her to belong to him forever. In 'My Last Duchess' we come to know about his first marriage from what he has to say about his wife. The

speaker's thoughts go forwards and backwards, past and present and we come to our own conclusion.

Again and again, Browning expresses the fact that the views given here are not his own. They are not self-portraits; just a catalogue of human motives.

A dramatic monologue has to be short to be effective. The longer it is, the less the effect because the tension and pressure is lost. His best monologues are short—'My Last Duchess', 'Porphyria's Lover', 'The Last Ride Together'.

The Dramatic Monologue then suited his genius though he did not meet with success at once. They were not accepted in the beginning and it was only after he polished and worked on them that they were appreciated in the 1842 volume. It was in the 1855 volume *Men and Women* that the form reached perfection. *Dramatis Personae* in 1864 also had a number of monologues though there is a change now—the monologues have become longer and more difficult to follow. The language is informal, grammar is ignored and the manner is either emotional and lyrical or narrative and descriptive. It is much more difficult to follow.

The monologues are supposed to be objective. He just gives us a catalogue of human motives and the men and women he paints are not self portraits. He uses the form to study character and he gives us a variety of characters taken from all walks of life.—artists, scholars, dukes, beggars, saints, murderers, cheats and cowards. They belong to all ages and he shows us the way their mind works. However, his own personal point of view slips in at times and we get his views on God, the universe, man, immortality etc. Browning Thus, was one of the greats and he made the dramatic monologue his very own and excelled in it.

Browning's Philosophy

When we speak of Browning's philosophy what we mean is his outlook on life. He does not have any deep ideas of God and the Universe. All that we mean is his definite and firm views on life nature and man's relation to God. He was not a very profound thinker but his view of life was formed very early in his career and remained the same. He does not go against the conventional idea of God and Christianity. But his attitude towards all this was cheerful and optimistic. He was not depressed by what he saw of life. Even Darwin's Theory of Evolution [that man has evolved from the ape gradually] did not cause him to lose faith in God and man. His approach was that of an optimist. He saw good in everything and had an explanation for the evil in the world.

Optimism: He is an optimist but not blindly so. He does not ignore the pain, suffering and evil that is present in life. He just has a very good explanation for the presence of evil in man's life. His optimism is based on the realities of life. He is

aware of evil and realizes that there is much to feel hopeless about but still maintains a cheerful attitude, for he gets hope from the very imperfections of life. He sees the hand of God behind the imperfections of this world. God has a plan and evil and imperfection are a part of it

Attitude towards Failure: This world and man are both imperfect but he sees God's hand behind this. He has an explanation for all that is wrong in this world. Failure and imperfection are there so that man works harder to achieve his goal. Success makes man complacent for once you have what you want in life, you no longer feel the need to work hard. But when you fail the need to work hard is there. Therefore, failure and perfection are part of God's scheme to make man perfect. Through pain and suffering man's character is being formed.

Presence of Evil: The same is true of evil. He regards evil as something which gives man strength and makes his character firm. When man fights against evil, it is through a realization that this is not right and must be crushed. Thus, it strengthens character and is all part of the experience man has to go through in his youth. Evil is there for the simple reason that man can set it right and in doing so acquire moral strength.

Aspiration and Struggle: For Browning, aspiration is what matters. What man actually achieves is not important. What counts are the hopes, desires and aspirations that he has. The struggle is all that matters. Life is constantly progressing to higher levels---first there was the ape, and then from him evolved man. In the future, higher and better things can come. Man has therefore, to aspire to become better. Perfection is the ideal but this perfection can never be wholly attained. Therefore, achievements do not matter. Aspirations do. And therefore, failure is welcome because it means he has tried to get better. Browning gives importance to the struggle and effort man makes to achieve his goal.

Browning as a Love Poet

There are two different sides to Browning as a poet- one is the love poet and the other is the intellectual the thinker and philosopher. Critics have always been of the opinion that when his poetic side was dominant, he was the greatest poet. But when the intellectual side took over, the philosopher in him was pre- dominant, and then there was much to criticize in his poetry. Of course, at times there was a happy blend of the poet and philosopher e.g. 'Rabbi Ben Ezra'.

We shall take up here, Browning the love poet. When the poetic strain in him was predominant, he wrote the greatest and finest love poetry in the world. The Dramatic Lyrics of 1842 is a wonderful collection of some of the most characteristic love poems.

In Browning's love poetry we find a blend of intensity, beauty, grace, passion and a certain mystic quality too e.g. Evelyn Hope. He deals with both the physical and spiritual aspect of love. For him, physical passion is essential for a happy married life and it can only lead to the spiritual union of the two lovers. He is concerned with the development of the human personality as a whole which includes both the physical and spiritual side. His treatment of the lady too is different from other poets. For him the beloved is not attractive because she is perfect and beautiful. He finds her desirable in spite of or because of her imperfections. Her very imperfections are attractive to him. They make her dearer to him. He loves her because of them.

Power of Love: In his best love poems he sings of the power of love which has it in it to lift the lover to a higher, nobler level and can also make him sink to a lower level. In *By The Fire side*, love gives him new strength; '*The Last Ride Together*'—the lover reaches heights of nobility with his quiet, graceful acceptance of her rejection. Love makes man perfect and without it his life is incomplete and imperfect.

Personal Love Poetry: Some of Browning's poems are deeply personal and express his feelings for his wife—Elizabeth Barrett Browning. *By The Fireside* is one of the finest poems of married love in the English language. He describes how he and his wife sit by the fireside and he reflects on their life. It is a warm picture of happy, peaceful and satisfied married life. *One Word More* is another poem celebrating married love, while '*Prospice*' is a poem written after his wife's death and ends on an optimistic note with the poet declaring that he is sure of meeting her in life after death. It is wistful and tender and very touching.

Impersonal Love Poetry: In his impersonal love poetry, he deals with love situations and gives the reactions of men and women. He deals with love in all its variety and shows the many moods of love. In *The Last Ride together*, the lover accepts her rejection of his love without a murmur. He is dignified and noble. *Porphyria's Lover* shows the jealous lover. In *Evelyn Hope* we have the middle-aged lover and a young girl. But the man does not say anything as long as she is alive. When she dies young, he goes to see her and places a flower in her hands, hoping for her forgiveness when she wakes up. [After death] In *Statue and the Bust*, the lovers do nothing till they are too old. They do not have the courage to elope and keep postponing it. In Browning's eyes any action is better than no action In *The Flight of the Duchess*; the lady runs away with her lover and Thus, attains freedom and happiness. In *My Last Duchess* he gives the Duke, who, out of jealousy, murders his first wife. The fact was that having known happy love he had a keen insight into the emotion and Thus, knew what man is losing when he is rejected or when love is not perfect

In conclusion we can only say that his picture of love is love as seen through the eyes of a man for whom love was all important. He always put it ahead of

everything else in life and recognized it as something which could help in strengthening the soul. He knew the power of love.

Browning's Realism: There is a vein of realism in his love poetry. He does not use ideal imagery as love poets generally do. Instead he uses the commonplace and since he is an urban poet, his imagery is drawn from the city and the streets. Thus, he talks about gardens, medicine bottles, streets, pianos, fashionable fur coats etc. What he talks about are those common things which we come across in our daily life and which, for him, may be associated with his beloved. Because of their connection with the beloved, common day-to-day ordinary things acquire a new meaning.

Self-Assessment Questions III

Do you think Browning is difficult to understand?

What is a dramatic monologue?

Give a summary of 'My Last Duchess'.

Fill in the blanks—

My Last Duchess is a [dramatic monologue/lyric]

Porphyria's Lover is a study in [jealousy/hate]

Porphyria's Lover first appeared in [1836/1837]

Whom is the duke talking to in My Last Duchess?

SUMMING UP

In this unit we read about the poetic genius of Browning, critically appreciated Browning's two poems, understood his philosophy of life; his optimism and attitude towards life. We examined Browning's Realism and also studied him as a love poet.

ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Refer to 13.1

Refer to 13.3 –immaturity, maturity, decline

Refer to 13.6.1. and 13.6.2.

Refer to 13.4, 13.4.1. and 13.4.2.

Refer to 13.4., 13.4.1. and 13.4.2.

Refer to 13.6.1, 13.6.2. and 13.7.FORM (2nd paragraph)

Refer to 13.8. (Section on Obscurity)

Refer to 13.8. (Section on Dramatic Monologue)

Refer to 13.6.1.

- a. Dramatic Monologue
 - b. Jealousy
 - c. 1836
 - d. The Count's Messenger
-

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

How far would you support the view that Browning is more of a philosopher than a poet?

Browning has been called a poet who is not very easy to understand. Discuss the element of obscurity in Browning's poetry.

Give a critical appreciation of "Porphyria's Lover".

Discuss Browning as a love poet.

Discuss "My Last Duchess" as a dramatic monologue.

UNIT 14 MATTHEW ARNOLD:
“DOVER BEACH”, “THE FORSAKEN MERMAN”

14.1 Introduction

Objectives

Matthew Arnold - Life and Works

Dover Beach

Summary

Analysis

The Forsaken Merman

Summary

Analysis

Matthew Arnold as a poet

His Classicism or Hellenism

The Melancholy Note

As a Poet of Nature

His Poetry as a Criticism of Life

Diction and Style

Summing up

Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

References

Terminal and Model Questions

INTRODUCTION

The third great poet of the Victorian age, after Tennyson and Browning, which you have in your course, is Matthew Arnold. He was a typical Victorian poet. As we had said in the earlier introduction to Tennyson, the background of the age had a great effect on the literature of the period. The changes taking place moulded the poetry of the times. Tennyson was known as the representative poet of the Victorian age; Browning too showed the influence of his age though not in a negative way. He was an optimist and felt that whatever evil or bad or wrong there was in the world, was there so that man could set it right and in doing so, could also strengthen his moral character. Matthew Arnold, like Tennyson, showed traces of his age in his poetry. He was a British poet and critic who worked as an inspector of schools and is known today for his poetry and criticism. As he, himself said, 'Tennyson may have had greater poetic sentiment and Browning more intellectual vigour but Arnold had a fusion of the two.' In other words he combined in himself the poetic sentiment of Tennyson with the intellectual vigour of Browning. As such his place in Victorian literature is assured.

Today, he is remembered chiefly for his critical essays but he began his career as a poet, winning early recognition. He was a thoughtful and intellectual poet who often dealt with the problem of isolation which was common in nineteenth century England. The loss of faith and belief led to a lot of frustration and pessimism. This is his subject matter in many of his poems. In 'Dover Beach' he links these two--- the problem of isolation, the feeling that man is alone and has no one to turn to in his time of need, with the loss of faith in the nineteenth century. It is because he has lost faith in religion as a result of the developments in science that man feels he is alone in the universe. He needs to have faith in something or else he will end up frustrated. Thus, in Dover Beach, he says that man's faith in Christianity needs to be renewed and then things will get better in the world. He had his own doubts but he tried to establish the truth of Christianity. Religious faith has to be renewed and the literature of the times should not ignore the moral needs of the age. His approach was gentlemanly and courteous and his style was subtle.

He was a great influence on modern poets and critics too. His Essays in Criticism are appreciated even today. His criticism influenced every major English critic--T.S.Eliot and Lionel Trilling included. His poetry too influenced the modern poets. He spoke of his deepest innermost feelings with complete frankness. The feeling of loneliness and melancholy which was so common in Victorian England found wonderful expression in his poetry. Poets like W.B.Yeats, Sylvia Plath, Sharon Olds and James Wright paid tribute to his influence and they too reflected the atmosphere of their age. Arnold was indeed a remarkable figure of the nineteenth century and like Tennyson and Browning holds an important place in the literature of the times. His poetry vividly reflects the changing social, literary, economic and religious conditions of his age.

OBJECTIVES

After going through the unit you will be able to
Appreciate Matthew Arnold as a poet.
Understand the effect of the age on him
Analyze Dover Beach and Forsaken Merman

MATTHEW ARNOLD –HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Matthew Arnold was born on 24th December 1822. He was the eldest son of Dr Thomas Arnold and Mary Penrose. They had ten children and Matthew was the second child. He had poetic aspirations right from the beginning and shared his hopes with his eldest sister, Jane. His father later on became the Headmaster of Rugby, the famous public school. He was one of the most important Victorians who was always at the centre of religious and political discussions and he greatly influenced his son, both morally and intellectually. Arnold went to school in Winchester and Rugby in 1837 where he won prizes for essay writing and later for English poetry. In 1841 he went to Baliol College Oxford and won the Newdigate Prize. He also graduated in the same year but disappointed his family by getting a second class honours degree.

After graduating, he took up a teaching job at Rugby school for some time, taking a break from his studies for a short period. In 1845 he was given the Fellowship at Oriel College, Oxford and he continued his studies there with John Keble and Henry Newman and enjoyed himself reading and travelling to Ireland, Wales and France. In 1847 he was made private secretary to Lord Lansdowne. In 1851, at the age of 28 years, Arnold married Francis Lucy Wightman who was the daughter of the Justice of the Queen's Bench. He now took up the position of Inspector of schools, a position he held for thirty five years. He led a happily married life and had six children of whom three survived.

In 1849 he published his first volume- 'The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems'. 'Empedocles on Etna' was published in 1852 and the second volume of poetry in 1855; 'Merope' in 1859 and 'The New Poems' in 1867. In 1853 he started writing prose. His critical prose was collected in 1865 and published under the title Essays in Criticism; followed by Lectures on the Study of Celtic Literature(1867), Culture and Anarchy(1869) Last Essays on Church and Religion (1877) Mixed Essays(1879) Irish Essays(1882). In 1857 he was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford and received a pension of 250 pounds a year in 1883. He died very suddenly in 1888 when running to take a train that would have taken him to Liverpool to

see his daughter who was coming from America. He was a man of the world entirely' free of worldliness and a man of letters without a trace of pedantry.' In other words he was deeply read but presented an image of lightness. He did not seem serious but wrote very seriously on heavy topics. His writing clashed with the image he presented to the world. His critical views which had a high seriousness and the melancholic note in his poetry clashed with the urbane and frivolous manner he put on. He is considered to be the link between Romanticism and Modernism. His use of symbolism in *Dover Beach* gives us a nightmarish world from which all faith has been withdrawn. It was typically romantic while his pessimistic outlook was modern. His writings are marked with sincerity and purpose and have a distinctive style. His prose has beauty, is thoughtful, reflective and restrained. He felt that poetry should be a criticism of life and express a philosophy. He believed that true happiness comes from within and we should seek within ourselves for good while outwardly accepting the turmoil and disturbances of the world. We should not believe in eternal happiness and should have more realistic and moderate hopes and desires rather than live in a dream of something that may never be achieved. He found peace in nature as against the change and disturbance of the outside world.

Matthew Arnold, then was a quiet and gracious man. He was refined, educated and a scholar but never made a show of his learning. He started as a poet but later switched to prose and is, today known for it. However, his poetry too is beautiful and has a wistful and melancholic air about it. It reflects the frustration and pain felt by the nineteenth century people.

DOVER BEACH

The sea is calm to-night.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair

Upon the straits; on the French coast the light Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand;
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.

Come to the window, sweet is the night-air! Only, from the long line of spray

Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land, Listen! you hear the grating roar

Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling, At their return, up the high strand,

Begin, and cease, and then again begin, With tremulous cadence slow, and bring The eternal note of
sadness in.

Sophocles long ago

Heard it on the A gaeon, and it brought Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought, Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true

To one another! for the world, which seems To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain; And we are here as
on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, Where ignorant armies clash by night.

The poem was published in 1867 in *New Poems*. It is typical of Matthew Arnold and his outlook on life. It gives expression to Arnold's melancholic view of life. You can see very clearly the effects of the developments of the age on Arnold. It shows the loss of faith that was caused by the growth of commerce and science in the nineteenth century. This was one of the main problems of Victorian England. Charles Darwin had published his 'Origin of the Species' which said, with proof, that man was descended from the ape. Thus, the Biblical story of Adam and Eve was proved wrong. This led to a lot of frustration and loss of faith because man did not know what to believe in. And if the story of the Bible was wrong then what of its teachings. Man no longer believed in God or religion and this led to melancholy, depression and frustration because you have to have something to believe in especially in your time of trouble. Arnold was influenced by this and was just giving voice to the feelings of the age. He also try to give the lessons of to faith and belief in God to the people of his times. He tried to suppress his own doubts to assure his age that with faith and belief, things would be easier.

A Summary

This poem is typical of Arnold's melancholy and sounds the note of sadness, loneliness, religious loss and spiritual isolation. Standing on the beach at Dover, the poet thinks about contemporary life and all its evils. The sea is calm, the tide is full and the moonlight shines on the waters of the strait. In the distance you can see the French coast and the cliffs of England. It is peaceful and calm as the poet asks his beloved to come to the window to see the beauty of the night. On the beach you can hear the sound made by the pebbles as they are thrown on the sand and then washed away again by the waves. The poet is sad and gloomy as he hears the grating sound of the pebbles again and again. It reminds him that Sophocles, the Greek dramatist, too must have heard the same sound centuries back, on the banks of the Aegean Sea near where he lived. It must have brought to his mind the ebb and flow of human misery.

Pain and suffering keep coming and going in man's life. He is happy one moment only to suffer pain the next moment. That too does not last long and he is back to being happy again. So nothing is permanent in life, neither pain nor joy

He is brought back to the present with the thought that just as Sophocles, in the past must have thought of human misery so also now the poet thinks of what is happening in his own time. Once upon a time people had faith in God and religion. They believed and were happy but now that faith has gone and instead he can only hear the long withdrawing roar of faith as it leaves the world. There is no faith left in the world and with that, man is left lonely and with no one to turn to. This melancholy thought is the result of the age he lived in.

He then turns to the beloved and says that, they at least can be true to each other. Their love can be true for otherwise there is not much left in the world. It has neither joy nor love. It is shallow, beautiful on the outside but nothing inside. Human beings are like soldiers fighting in the dark without knowing a thing about who their enemy is. What he means is that it is a dark and frightening world from which all religion and faith has vanished and there is nothing to show man the light or the right way. In love alone, can we perhaps, find the values missing from the world. Therefore, the lovers should have faith and belief. There are no values left in the world and love alone can be a kind of consolation to them. They can find in love, the values missing in the world. Thus, there is a chance of happiness through self discovery in love.

Analysis

Dover Beach is a short poem by Matthew Arnold and published in 1867 in the volume *New Poems*. It is one of his most well-known works and truly represents his melancholy style. The theme of the poem is the loss of faith in the nineteenth century.

Developments in science and commerce led to this loss of faith and the poet laments it and tries to seek consolation in the constancy of true love.

It is believed to have been written in June 1851 during a brief voyage across the English Channel. As the poet watched the ebb and flow of the sea on Dover Beach, he became aware of the fluctuating fortunes of man. Man was not always happy or sad; or successful or a failure. Things kept changing in his life. Nothing were permanent. And the idea of the poem then came to his mind.

Standing on the beach at Dover, the poet observes the quiet and calm sea. The sky is clear and the moon is shining in all its beauty. The rays of the moon fall on the beach, the sea and the distant hills. At a distance the French coast can be seen as also the white cliffs of England. He asks his beloved to come to the window and hear the sound made by the pebbles, as they are thrown on the beach by the waves. The grating sound is melancholy and gloomy and brings to his mind, the thought that Nature being permanent, the same sound must have been heard by Sophocles, the Greek dramatist, on the shores of the Aegean Sea, so many centuries back. He too must have been sad and melancholy on hearing the sound and it must have brought to his mind the ebb and flow of human destiny. Pain and misery come and go in man's life. It brings to Arnold's mind the thought of faith, which like the sea, at one time encircled the world but now it was slowly withdrawing. People no longer believed, or had faith in God or religion. Nothing was left and with no faith there was only fear and doubt. He calls out to his beloved to stay loyal and true to each other for with no joy or happiness in this world, it was love alone which could offer some sort of consolation. In love, man could find some of the values missing in the world.

The poem is a beautiful expression of Arnold's melancholic view of life but there is nothing sentimental or unmanly about it. It throws light on the way he thinks. It also shows his faith in God and religion. He is aware of the changing fortunes of humanity and the ebb and flow of human misery but he is also conscious of the fact that once people had faith and if they somehow retain that faith, things will be better. They will be able to deal with the frustrations of life. Arnold does not lose heart and asks his fellow men to turn to love, for there, they will find rest and peace and constancy. In the midst of doubt and fear, love alone can offer some consolation.

Dover Beach is remarkable for its psychological touch. It is closest to a modern sensibility. It is a modern poem in that it depicts a frightening world from which faith and the old religious truths have fled. In other words it is a world with no faith or belief in God or religion and the effect that has on man. It is a spiritually barren world. We see the emotional and psychological conflicts and also the uncertainty within the mind of man; the feeling also of being different and separate from society, the feeling that man is alone and has no one to turn to, in his time of need-

--- what is called alienation in modern terms. This is held up as an early example

of the modern sensibility--what T.S.Eliot and Auden depicted in their poems. Arnold was a blend of the romantic and the modern here. The symbolic landscape was typical of the romantic age and his pessimistic view point typical of the modern age. He felt that the world has no happiness or peace or love. The landscape that he describes is one where there is no faith. The sea symbolizes this—faith has withdrawn from the world—

‘The melancholy long withdrawing roar’

In fact the poem employs sound imagery which is the poem’s greatest technical virtue. And so we have lines like

‘The grating roar of pebbles which the waves draw back’

and Arnold hears human sadness in it. And also the above quoted line to describe the withdrawal of faith from the world. He hears human sadness in all this. It has the eternal note of sadness. He also compares all feverish activity, strife, struggle and exertions of human beings to an aimless and purposeless battle. That is why he says that man is busy fighting but he does not know who the enemy is. Man is not clear who or what he is fighting against. What is the use of all this pointless activity and struggle in life without spiritual faith and belief in God?

It also reveals Arnold’s attitude to Nature. Nature forms the background of his philosophical reflections in the poem. He loved Nature in her quieter, more subdued moods. The sea to him reflected his own melancholy and sense of isolation. Here the sea is calm, the night quiet and the moon throwing its light over the landscape. It is Nature, at its tranquil best. The quiet moonlit night suggests the serenity, balance and stability he wanted for himself. The sea symbolizes the faith which has withdrawn from the world. Once it encircled the world; now it is slowly shrinking. And the sound of the pebbles must have reminded Sophocles that misery is not permanent in man’s life. It keeps coming and going. Just as it reminds Arnold that faith has withdrawn from the world and now what is needed is for man, to seek in love, those values which cannot be found elsewhere. As he says in the end, it is a dark night because there is no faith and ignorant armies are clashing by night. It is his most powerful image of modern life, that man does not know what he is doing and where he is going. He is going ahead in ignorance. With no faith in life there are no values to guide him. He should therefore, look to love where he will find some of the values missing in the world.

The poem then, is a great one. It is his best lyric. Half of it is written in iambic pentameter and it is free in the sense that lines and stanzas are of uneven length---3ft,.4ft.and even more. It has rhyme and inner tension and is a coming together of strong feeling and a particular atmosphere. It makes for great poetry and is the very best of Arnold. It is at once religious and also skeptical [full of doubts], philosophical and also emotional. After all he is reflecting on the state of affairs in

his world but also at the same time giving importance to love which alone has some of the values missing from the world.

Self-Assessment Questions I

Discuss the three great poets of the Victorian Age with special reference to Matthew Arnold.

Give a summary of 'Dover Beach'.

Give a critical appreciation of 'Dover Beach'.

THE FORSAKEN MERMAN

Come, dear children, let us away; Down and away below!

Now my brothers call from the bay, Now the great winds shoreward blow, Now the salt tides seaward flow; Now the wild white horses play,

Champ and chafe and toss in the spray. Children dear, let us away!

This way, this way!

Call her once before you go—Call once yet!

In a voice that she will know: "Margaret! Margaret!"

Children's voices should be dear (Call once more) to a mother's ear;

Children's voices, wild with pain—Surely she will come again!

Call her once and come away; This way, this way!

"Mother dear, we cannot stay!

The wild white horses foam and fret." Margaret! Margaret!

Come, dear children, come away down; Call no more!

One last look at the white-wall'd town

And the little grey church on the windy shore, Then come down!

She will not come though you call all day; Come away, come away!

Children dear, was it yesterday
We heard the sweet bells over the bay? In the caverns where we lay,
Through the surf and through the swell, The far-off sound of a silver bell?
Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep, Where the winds are all asleep;
Where the spent lights quiver and gleam, Where the salt weed sways in the stream, Where the sea-beasts,
ranged all round, Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground; Where the sea-snakes coil and twine, Dry
their mail and bask in the brine; Where great whales come sailing by, Sail and sail, with unshut eye,
Round the world for ever and aye? When did music come this way?
Children dear, was it yesterday?

Children dear, was it yesterday (Call yet once) that she went away? Once she sate with you and me,
On a red gold throne in the heart of the sea, And the youngest sate on her knee.
She comb'd its bright hair, and she tended it well, When down swung the sound of a far-off bell.
She sigh'd, she look'd up through the clear green sea; She said: "I must go, to my kinsfolk pray
In the little grey church on the shore to-day. 'T will be Easter-time in the world—ah me!
And I lose my poor soul, Merman! here with thee." I said: "Go up, dear heart, through the waves;
Say thy prayer, and come back to the kind sea-caves!" She smiled, she went up through the surf in the
bay.
Children dear, was it yesterday?
Children dear, were we long alone? "The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan; Long prayers," I said,
"in the world they say;
Come!" I said; and we rose through the surf in the bay. We went up the beach, by the sandy down
Where the sea-stocks bloom, to the white-wall'd town; Through the narrow paved streets, where all was
still,

To the little grey church on the windy hill.
From the church came a murmur of folk at their prayers, But we stood without in the cold blowing airs.
We climb'd on the graves, on the stones worn with rains, And we gazed up the aisle through the small
leaded panes. She sate by the pillar; we saw her clear:
"Margaret, hist! come quick, we are here! Dear heart," I said, "we are long alone;
The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan." But, ah, she gave me never a look,
For her eyes were seal'd to the holy book! Loud prays the priest; shut stands the door. Come away,
children, call no more!
Come away, come down, call no more!

Down, down, down!
Down to the depths of the sea!
She sits at her wheel in the humming town, Singing most joyfully.
Hark what she sings: "O joy, O joy,
For the humming street, and the child with its toy! For the priest, and the bell, and the holy well;
For the wheel where I spun,
And the blessed light of the sun!" And so she sings her fill,
Singing most joyfully,
Till the spindle drops from her hand, And the whizzing wheel stands still.
She steals to the window, and looks at the sand, And over the sand at the sea;
And her eyes are set in a stare; And anon there breaks a sigh, And anon there drops a tear, From a
sorrow-clouded eye, And a heart sorrow-laden,
A long, long sigh;
For the cold strange eyes of a little Mermaiden And the gleam of her golden hair.

Come away, away children Come children, come down! The hoarse wind blows coldly; Lights shine in
the town.

She will start from her slumber When gusts shake the door;
She will hear the winds howling, Will hear the waves roar.
We shall see, while above us The waves roar and whirl,
A ceiling of amber, A pavement of pearl.
Singing: "Here came a mortal, But faithless was she!
And alone dwell for ever The kings of the sea."
But, children, at midnight, When soft the winds blow, When clear falls the moonlight, When spring-tides
are low; When sweet airs come seaward From heaths starr'd with broom, And high rocks throw mildly
On the blanch'd sands a gloom; Up the still, glistening beaches, Up the creeks we will hie,
Over banks of bright seaweed The ebb-tide leaves dry.
We will gaze, from the sand-hills, At the white, sleeping town;
At the church on the hill-side—And then come back down.
Singing: "There dwells a loved one, But cruel is she!
She left lonely for ever The kings of the sea."

A Summary

The poem opens with the merman telling his children it is time for them to return to their home below the sea. The wind has started blowing and the waves are coming right up to the shore. He had come up to wait and watch for his wife to return home with them but she refused to come, so he tells his children they should return to their world. Before leaving they should call out to their mother in the voice she knows so well. He too calls out to her -Margaret. But she refuses to hear. The children call out that they cannot stay long so she should come out soon but there

is no reply. The father then tells his children to take one last look at the grey church for she will not come.

They were deep down in the cavern below the sea and from there they heard the church bells ring. Surrounded by the world of the deep—the sea-weeds and the sea snakes, the whales and the sand—it was surprising the sound of the bells should reach their ears when they were so deep down under the sea. It was the day before that the whole family was together. She sat on the red gold throne, in the heart of the sea with her youngest child on her knee, combing her bright hair, till the sound of the bell fell on her ears. Hearing the bell, she said that she had to go to her relatives on shore. It was Easter and she could lose her soul if she remained out at sea with the merman. At which the merman asked her to go for the prayers but then return home soon to them. After she left, it turned stormy and it seemed as if they were alone for a very long time. The prayers seemed prolonged and at last the merman with his children rose up through the surf and went up to the beach to the white walled town. They reached the church, where they could hear the low murmuring sound of prayers being said. They climbed onto the grave stone and looked into the church to see her sitting against a pillar. They whisper to her to come back home. The storm was brewing and the little ones were moaning but still she refuses to look at them. She was saying her prayers and the door was shut. The merman then returns home to the sea with his children. but seems to imagine his wife on earth, soaking in the sun; she sits outside and sings a happy song but then stops and looks at the sea and sighs and a tear falls down her cheek. She remembers her children and misses them.

With the storm blowing strong outside, he asks his children to come away and not expect their mother to come to them. She was a faithless being and they will have to learn to live without her. But at midnight, when the moonlight is clear and the tide low, when the wind is soft and clear, then they could gaze towards the land and at the church on the hill-side and sing the song about the loved one who was cruel to leave them alone. She left the king of the sea lonely for ever more. In the closing lines he speaks of the grief of the girl child [the daughter] who is left out and abandoned by her mother. The grief is unspeakable and the pain in the cold, strange eyes of the girl looking at her mother through the church windows is too disturbing for words. With that the poem finishes, the last image being of the merman standing alone with his children, waiting for his wife, the cruel one, who is heartless to have left her loved ones and spend time away from them.

Analysis

The Forsaken Merman is Arnold's poem, hauntingly beautiful and dreamy. It has a dream like air about it and a clear rhythm that is charming and musical. Arnold was disturbed by the loss of faith in his time and this poem is one expression of that melancholy and sadness with which his poetry is imbued. The poem has a deep sense of sadness and a lingering charm because of its thought and music. It is a

great poem and important because it shows Arnold as a poet of beautiful verse and not just of reflective and thoughtful poetry.

The story is about a merman who is forsaken by the woman who married him. He is a merman [half man half fish] while she is all woman, belonging to the human world. They stay together beneath the sea with their children leading a happy family life. One day, as she sat with her daughter on her knee, the sound of the Easter bell ringing fell on her ears and she left to say her prayers and join her kinsfolk or else she would lose her soul. Her merman husband asked her to say her prayers and then return home for her loving family was waiting for her. But the prayers were prolonged and the wait for her endless, till at last the merman with his waiting children, who missed their mother, rose through the surf and made his way to the church and peeped through the window to see her by the pillar with her eyes on her prayer book. The father and his children called her but she paid no heed to them, till at last, they had to leave. In the end he calls her cruel and heartless to have left her loving family and thinks of her happy in her land, till a thought of her family comes to her mind and she is sad. The merman takes his children on a quiet peaceful night to the church to gaze at her and long for her return. But she refuses to return and he thinks of her as being cruel.

The story is not completely possible—the union between the merman and a human lady but Arnold's inspiration can be traced to a sea side village named Zennor in the county of Cornwall in England. There is a mermaid chair in the church there which has a legend associated to it. The hero was a human being named Matthew and a mermaid who lived deep down in the sea by the shore, was fascinated by his singing in the church and came there regularly in disguise to hear him sing. When Matthew came to know about her, he fell in love with her and followed her into the sea. After that they were never seen again but legend had it that on a quiet, calm silent night the sound of Matthew's singing could be heard, making its way up from the deep. This legend influenced Arnold and he built his story around it.

The poem shows the power of love. It was love which brought the merman and his love together and it made the girl give up her life on earth to follow her lover deep down in the sea. They have children and live a happy contented life surrounded by their little ones. Even after she leaves, it is love which makes the merman and his little ones rise up through the surf to gaze at the woman-wife and mother—who now spends her days praying. He thinks of her leading her life in happiness but now and then remembering her children and sighing because she misses them.

The conflict here is between religion and emotion, specifically love. The lady has given up her whole life for love but then, on Easter day, the sound of the church bell, recalls for her, the world and God she has left to be with her family. Religion calls her back and she returns to her human world. Love has carried her till now but finally it is faith and belief in God and religion that is necessary for man to survive in these dark days. Arnold asks his fellow men not to neglect religion. Faith and

belief in God is important and gives purpose to life. Hence, we cannot ignore it. This conflict between religion and emotion, this uncertainty is seen in many poems and represents, for him, the main problem of the age

Moreover, the town that he shows us is an unruly one. It is a lonely place and not a soul is to be seen. The church is the only well-defined structure here and it is quiet and calm inside the church even as the storm rages outside. The people spend their time praying as also the lady, once she leaves her home under the sea. Under the sea too it is quiet and peaceful but here time is spent enjoying life as a family. The parents are together with their children and are happy. The church then represents religion and the house under the sea represents family and love. The conflict is between the two and religion wins here. She gives up her love and her family life and opts for God and religion. The mood of the poem is dreamy, magical, sweet and sad. There is grief but all in all it is a beautiful and touching poem. Many poets have acknowledged its power. Sylvia Plath said it gave her the first thrill of poetry. It charmed her and cast its spell on her. It spoke of the conflict between heart and soul—her love for her family and her equally strong belief and faith in God. What will she choose? Will it be her family or will she opt for the church? It reflects the reality of life where there are moments of betrayal and love. Whatever you choose—to remain true to that love or betray that love and opt for the soul which says faith is everything the poem is sad, melancholy, and wistful. It gives us the grief and sorrow of love.

She leaves the merman and he is forsaken. He is deep in sorrow and grief and consoles his children as best he can. He calls her cruel and heartless but still yearns for her. In the conflict between the heart and the soul, between love and religion, between emotion and religion, she has made her choice and lives with it as best she can, for now and then; she does remember her children and sighs for them. Arnold then emphasizes the importance of faith and belief in God. In the troubled Victorian age, when so much was happening around them, man should not give up his faith in God. That alone is going to see him through all his problems and hence man should believe in God and religion.

Self-Assessment Questions II

Give a summary of 'The Forsaken Merman'.

Analyze the poem 'The Forsaken Merman'.

Answer the following –

The grating sound of the pebbles in Dover Beach reminds Arnold of which Greek dramatist?

What does the long withdrawing roar represent in Dover Beach?

What did the ebb and flow of the sea remind Arnold of?

What is the conflict shown in The Forsaken Merman?

ARNOLD AS A POET

Arnold is a reflective and thoughtful intellectual poet of the Victorian age. His literary output may not be as much as that of Tennyson or Browning yet he was much more faithful in expressing the intellectual and spiritual distress of the late nineteenth century. He gives expression to the changing social, literary, economic and religious conditions of the day. He belongs to the age of doubt and despair. His simple and lucid highly polished style makes him a praiseworthy poet. Critics, however, accuse him of being too cold and lacking in emotion which is not true. He feels strongly on matters of life, love and death but he expresses his feelings with restraint. He is counted among the greats of the Victorian period and we will study here the various sides to his genius as a poet.

His Classicism and Romanticism

Arnold is a classicist. He believed in the rules of classicism—classical restraint, proportion, harmony, clarity, lucidity and simplicity. A poet should say whatever he wants to say as clearly and simply as possible without any exaggeration and showing great restraint. The Greek writers followed this in their works and Arnold does the same. The Greeks also did not believe in exuberance, richness and mere decorative poetry. Arnold is the same. The hallmarks of his poetry are restraint, simplicity and lucidity. There is gravity and dignity of thought, a grip on his subject and austerity in his treatment in his works. All this gives his poetry an intellectual feel. He is actually a thinker and a philosopher and in his meditative poems he gives us his criticism of life. The Hellenic [Greek] influence is there and the traits most prominently Greek are restraint, not excessive joy, very few words to describe things, formality, clarity and no spontaneity. Whatever he has to say, he says in as few words as possible and to the point. His language is as simple and clear as is needed. Words are not used for mere decoration. They are used to put across his thought. He treats his subject with seriousness and it was this that led to the charge being brought against him, of his poetry being cold and lacking in emotion.

But still he could not do away completely with the romantic influence on him. He was greatly influenced by Keats and we can see this in his descriptions of nature. Many of his poems have the romantic spirit—The Strayed Reveller, Empedocles on Etna etc. There was an inner romanticism in his poetry which he tried to suppress but could not do so. His pensiveness, thoughtfulness and his wistfulness all have a touch of romanticism.

14.6.2 The Melancholy Note

Arnold is regarded as an elegiac poet. The elegy was a poem of mourning and by calling him an elegiac poet we are drawing attention to the fact that the melancholy strain was predominant in his poetry. In other words there is a note of sadness in his poems. It was partly due to the age in which he lived. The loss of faith around

him disturbed him deeply and awakened in him a deep sense of melancholy. He reflects over the pain and misery in life and can see no way out except for a belief in something. Faith alone can see man through these difficult days. And hence in *Dover Beach* and *Scholar Gypsy* he speaks of the sea of faith which has receded but needs to come back again. He has a sense of the powerlessness of man and his despair arises from that. He hears an eternal note of sadness in the melancholy long drawn out roar of the waves near *Dover Beach*; and in 'The Scholar Gypsy' and 'Thyrsis', he mourns not only individuals, but also a whole way of life which has passed away and the modern life with its sick hurry and divided aims which has come in its place. Both poems are pastoral elegies and there is a note of wistful melancholy in them. Even *The Forsaken Merman* has a note of sadness running through it.

Arnold then is the greatest elegiac poet of the Victorian age and his genius too is elegiac. In the elegy he found an outlet for his native melancholy. It is not as if no other poet wrote elegies but Arnold had a note of sadness or melancholy running through him and it was his ruling passion. Milton, Gray, Shelley and Tennyson—all of them wrote elegies but not as often as Arnold did. His elegies are many and they are his best works. His elegies are like those of Gray and are marked with a general grief. Even the personal elegies are marked with a general grief. 'Thyrsis' mourns the death of his friend, Clough; *Rugby Chapel* is written at the death of his father, Dr. Arnold, Headmaster of Rugby; *A Southern Night* is for his brother and *Westminster Abbey* on the death of Dean Stanley. They start off mourning personal sorrow but then he widens his view and deals with human destiny as Gray did in expressing his mournful mood. 'Thyrsis' and 'The Scholar Gypsy' are his two true elegies for the others are more reflective. Here, though he does reflect over the problems facing his age, he is essentially mourning what has passed away---the calm and peaceful way of life and also what has taken its place, the hurry, pressure and tension of modern life. His melancholy mood and temper best suited his poetry which grieved over the life he could not accept---the modern way of life --and the life he liked but could not make his own---the old way of life. Arnold presented a very outwardly worldly exterior but his poetry is far away from this world. It is serious and sensitive and has the melancholy note about it. It actually expresses what he felt deep down in his soul and it is this that is dominant in his poetry. His melancholy sprang from the thought that man is stuck in a hopeless place in his age—to believe or not to believe—and the resultant frustration is due to this loss of faith.

As a Poet of Nature

Wordsworth's influence on Matthew Arnold can be seen in his attitude to Nature. He taught him to love nature and he had a deep love for her but it was very different from that of Wordsworth. Both were different in their attitude to nature. Wordsworth found company in Nature and it more than made up for man's society.

When he was disillusioned by the French Revolution it was to Nature that he turned and found in her solace and calm. She taught him to once again love his fellow human beings. He believed that nature exercised great influence over man and it could be good or evil. Arnold did not think so. For him Nature had no influence or hold over man. Nor did he find in her a spirit of joy or cheerfulness. He found peace rather than joy in her. It also intensified his feelings of melancholy by its lonely spectacles— the mountains, the sea and the vast open places which only served to remind him how little and insignificant man was in front of Nature. He found in her the same loneliness that he found in human society but he also found peace and calm in her. He contrasted the permanence of Nature with the impermanence of man. Human life is temporary and man will be gone tomorrow for he has a limited time on earth but Nature is here for all time to come. He dwells on this theme in *Dover Beach*, when he says the same sounds of shells and pebbles on the beach must have been heard in days long gone.

His descriptions of nature are more accurate and precise than those of Wordsworth or Tennyson. He had the eye of a scientist when describing nature. He Thus, gives beautiful pictures of flowers and meadows, hills and mountains, lakes and rivers—all located and portrayed with great precision. At times his landscapes have a symbolic importance. In ‘*Thyrsis*’, a single elm is a symbol of changeless truth; in ‘*Sohrab and Rustam*’, Oxus stands for endless life and the landscape, in *Scholar Gypsy*, stands for the calmness of nature in contrast to the hustle and bustle of city life. Arnold loved nature, but in her quieter and more subdued moods; he preferred her silence. He liked her softer and gentler pictures, but above everything else he worshipped in nature her steadfastness and calm, teaching man the lesson of self-dependence.

His Poetry as a Criticism of Life

Another important factor about Arnold is that his poetry is a criticism of life. His mood is always reflective and critical, in verse as well as in prose. By which, we mean that he looks at life and comments on it. In his poetry, he criticizes the poets, the people and the conditions of his times. In ‘*Scholar Gypsy*’ and ‘*Thyrsis*’, he passes judgment on the life of his age, the life of his country and on the lives of individual men. He examines the great literary figures like Goethe, Byron, Wordsworth and Shelley. Byron is ‘the fount of fiery life’, Shelley is “the beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings” and Wordsworth’s healing power is much appreciated.

Apart from criticizing individual poets, his poetry also focuses attention on the growing craze for materialism in his age. He battles against worldliness and materialism within us and in the world. The sick hurry, ambition, tension, pressure and restlessness of modern life is such that Arnold only wishes to retire from all this and find peace elsewhere. Arnold finds that everything is there in life—money, business, acceptance by society, name and fame but still man is not happy. Health

and happiness have fled because there is so much tension in getting ahead in life that man cannot enjoy his success. It is a mad race for wealth, name and fame and he does not have the time to enjoy what he has won. He wants peace and quiet and a restful life. London, with its noise and wealth and poverty stands for the ugly life of Victorian England.

And this is what he criticized and reflected in his poetry. He called it the strange disease namely modern life. Man was so busy running after money and success that he does not realize the emptiness within him. With no God to turn to and no faith to believe in, he was in a sorry state. This was the state of affairs in Victorian England and he gives voice to this. As he says in his letter to his mother---his poems represent the main movement of mind of the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Diction and Style

Arnold's style is unique in English Literature. It is simple, lucid, precise, elegant and restrained. He was considered more of a critic than a poet and as such his poetry cannot be expected to be from the heart. Since it is critical, it appeals more to the head than the heart. He was not a born poet, like Shelley, whom he called an 'ineffectual angel'. He wrote poetry because it was a good medium for expressing his views on life and its problems. As such his poetry lacks spontaneity, passion music and rapture, all of which go to make great poetry. His poetry instead is reflective, stoic, serious and austere which does not entitle him to be placed among the greats like Keats, Shelley and Byron.

Many critics dismissed Arnold as colourless and a mere academic because he was a poet without the lyrical touch and rapture so necessary for great poetry. He is to be counted as an intellectual and reflective poet. The fact was that Arnold was a quiet, reserved, calm man and as such his poetry too is calm, restrained, serene, stoic and reflective. It mirrors the man he actually was not the face he presented to the world.

The main characteristics of his poetic style are lucidity, clarity, suavity, serenity, wistful melancholy and stoic wisdom. He is not passionate or emotional in his manner. He is clear about what he has to say and says it as clearly and in as few words as possible. He has a persuasive charm and is courteous. Whatever he has to say, is said with gentleness and straight forwardly. He does not give us exaggerated descriptions and there is balance and wisdom in what he has to say. He is melancholy or sad because a whole way of life has passed away and this makes him wistful---makes him long for the old days. He wishes the old way of life would come back but at the same time he is aware that the past is long gone and will never come back. But still he misses the old days and yearns for them. In spite of this longing, there is no sentimental pessimism, no complaining and no excessive grief. He is serene but troubled, wistful and suave. He is stoic---suffers pain and suffering without openly showing his pain. Stoicism and melancholy, wistfulness and suavity

then are the main features of his poetic style. His simple, lucid and highly polished style makes him a poet worthy of our praise.

However, this gentle and suave style hid a strong and virile hand. He had great intellectual courage and calm self-confidence. He had strong opinions on politics, religion and art and was not afraid of stating them. And he was never disturbed by the attack of those criticizing him. You should know that in his work, Arnold was very different from the picture he presented to the world. He appeared light, frivolous and a man of the world but it was in his work that he revealed his real self. He was analytical, introspective, not swayed by emotion and deeply disturbed by his times and also influenced by the changes. He lived in an atmosphere of doubt and fear and this passed into his work. That is why he is wistful and melancholy. He makes less his pain by writing elegies and sonnets. He believes faith alone can heal man and this leads to his wistful and melancholy note---a dreamy sadness which is typical of him. But he is not really pessimistic. Arnold has serenity. He sees the disturbing atmosphere, the lack of faith—it makes him melancholy and sad but it also gives him the strength to quietly suffer all this. He has the serenity of a brave spirit. There is a gentle wistfulness and a pathetic resignation in his work – the feeling that since this has to happen, man has to bear it. He is restful but not really at rest and serene but not tranquil like Wordsworth. Matthew Arnold then is a figure of importance in nineteenth century England. He was considered more a critic than a poet and even in verse he is always a critic of life. He is a poet who appeals to the head rather than the heart. His poetry does not have spontaneity, passion or music but it is reflective, stoic and full of wistful melancholy.

Self-Assessment Questions III

Give a general estimate of Arnold as a poet.

Write short notes on the following—

The Hellenic influence on Arnold

Melancholy note in Arnold's poetry

Arnold as a critic of life

Discuss Arnold's diction and style.

Discuss Arnold as a poet of Nature with special reference to the poems in your syllabus.

SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learnt the following:

To appreciate the fact that Arnold is a reflective and thoughtful poet.

You saw how his age had a direct influence on his works and made him the kind of poet he was.

To critically appreciate his two poems – ‘Dover Beach’ and ‘The Forsaken Merman’

ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I

Refer to 14.1.

Refer to 14.4. and 14.4.1.

Refer to 14.4.2.

II

Refer to 14.5.1.

Refer to 14.5.2.

Sophocles

It represents faith withdrawing from the world. Loss of faith was the main problem of nineteenth century England

It reminded him of man's fluctuating fortunes. Nothing is permanent in man's life - Pain joy, sorrow, success, failure—everything comes and goes in his life.

It shows the conflict between love and religion, heart and soul

EXERCISE 3

Refer to 14.6.

Refer to 14.6.1.

Refer to 14.6.2.

Refer to 14.6.4.

Refer to 14.6.5.

Refer to 14.6.3.

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TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

Analyze Arnold as a poet with special reference to the poems in your course.

Give a critical appreciation of Dover Beach.

Discuss Arnold as a poet of Nature.

Is Arnold an elegiac poet?

Write short notes on—

Note of melancholy in Arnold's poetry.

The Hellenic influence on Arnold

His diction and style

'The writings of Matthew Arnold are characterized by three persisting qualities—suavity, wistfulness and serenity'. How far is this true of Arnold's style?

Can we call Arnold a critic of life in his verse as well as in his prose?