



GAUHATI UNIVERSITY
Institute of Distance and Open Learning

B.A./B.Com First Semester
(Core Course)

Paper: ENG-CC-1016

English- I

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UG-ENG-CC-I-01

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Unit 1

ARTHUR MILLER: *ALL MY SONS*

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1.0 Introduction:

Arthur Miller was one of the most important and powerful voices in the 20th century American drama. He started his career as a playwright committed to portraying a realistic picture of the society while he was a student at the University of Michigan. Miller was greatly influenced by classical Greek drama in terms of the structure and the contents of the plays. The inherent truth that emerged at the end of the plays, the idea of individual truth and integrity, calling attention to injustices and discrimination and the essential reforms needed in the society were some of the issues that had gripped Miller and many more playwrights who admired the classical Greek drama. Most of Miller's plays reflect upon the conflict between parents and children.

His plays, *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* are about the confrontations between the son and the father reaching the highest emotional point. *Death of a Salesman* projects the conflict between man's struggle to establish an identity as an individual and the expectations that society has of him. In *All My Sons*, Chris wants his father to acknowledge his moral failure in sending out cracked engine-heads from his industry that led to the death of 21 pilots during the Second World War, among them his other son, Larry. Most of Miller's plays are directed towards revealing basic truths about life and after the revelation the path to social improvement is paved. Miller always believed that the best kind of drama is social drama and he focussed on bringing about changes in the society. He has dealt with many public and private issues that disturb the basic unity, tradition and peace of the family. He also tried to move beyond individual situations and focus on the relationship between individual and society. *All My Sons* was Miller's first successful attempt towards such representation. "In all my plays," he remarked in 1947, "I try to take settings and dramatic situations from life which involves real questions of right and wrong. Then I set out, rather implacably and in the most realistic situations I can find, the moral dilemma and try to point a real, though hard, path out. I don't see how you can write anything decent without using the question of right and wrong." (quoted in Gassner, 1061)

1.1 Objectives:

This Unit is an attempt to familiarize you with Arthur Miller's *All My Son*. After going through this unit you will be able to-

- *understand* the social background and the plot of the play
- *discuss* the notion of the American Dream with relation to the play
- *explain* the condition of women in the play
- *explain* the play as a social drama
- *analyse* the play as a modern tragedy

1.2 All My Sons: The Social Background:

The first half of the twentieth century was a period of immense change for America and the entire world. The period 1940-1950 was crucial for a number of reasons. America was recovering from the devastating impact of the Great Depression, the Second World War and the Cold War. America

had experienced many other developments during this time. Technological advancements led to changes in the lifestyle of the American people. The American economy suffered a setback and experienced inflation after the affluence of the war years receded. The socio-political condition of a country is represented in various forms of art which includes plays that mirrored the social and political milieu of the society of that period. It is important to analyse the social context of the play to see how various issues have been addressed within a certain socio-political environment.

Stop to Consider

The first half of the 20th century saw immense changes in the fields of fashion, industry, commerce, education, culture and so on. The most important invention was the automobile which gave people the freedom and luxury to travel around the world. Henry Ford and Ransom Olds were contributing in the automobile industry and a large number of people had the opportunity of buying automobiles. Another significant invention was the wireless telegraphy that enabled broadcasting with the help of television, radio and phonographs. Lives of the people of America got revolutionised and these got reflected in the plays written during those times.

1.2.1 Introducing the Play:

Joe Keller, a self-made businessman and the patriarch in *All My Sons*, is concerned to secure the financial condition of his family and hand over to his son the business legacy that he had built after spending many years in the business. Joe's wife, Kate, is seen anxiously waiting for the return of their eldest son Larry from the war. Although Larry is dead, Kate firmly believes that he is still alive and will marry Ann, the daughter of Joe's ex-business partner, Steve Deever, who is in jail, serving time for the crime of sending cracked cylinder heads to the Air Force causing the death of 21 pilots in plane crashes. Joe Keller was equally responsible for the crime but he escaped the punishment. In the letter that Larry had written to Ann, it is disclosed that Larry had decided to commit suicide unable to bear the guilt he feels over his father's heinous crime. With the revelation of this letter, Joe ends his life with a gunshot to the head. In *All My Sons*, Arthur Miller portrays the situation of a post-war American family surrounded by the matrix of

lies, truth, greed, love, loss and poses a crucial dramatic question to his audience who could understand their own social responsibilities towards the people of America.

1.2.2 America and the War:

During the 1940s, America had joined the Second World War and it had both positive and negative impact upon the society of that time. Most of the American families had a father or a son recruited in the army. The means through which men communicated with their family back home was through letters. These letters were preserved and kept with utmost care and affection by the family members and often mothers, wives, daughters regarded those letters as treasures of the family. This in fact got reflected in *All My Sons* where Miller constantly keeps on mentioning about the 'American at war'. For instance, Larry is fighting in China and it is seen in the play that the Keller family, mostly Larry's mother, eagerly waits for letters from her son. The family becomes anxious about the whereabouts of Larry since no letters have arrived from him since a long time. However, at the end of the play, Ann, Larry's beloved, shows a letter which she has treasured as the last memory of her man, a suggestion of the value attached by the families of America to the letters sent by soldiers. Such letters are filled with feelings from the person who was away from home and the longing for home is evident in their emotional outpourings. This idea of communication through letters is addressed in the play and the letter also becomes an object of revelation towards the end of the play.

Mother: (as she sees Ann taking a letter from her pocket) What's that?

Ann: Sit down. (Mother moves left to chair, but does not sit) First you've got to understand. When I came, I didn't have any idea that Joe... I had nothing against him or you. I came to get married. I hoped... So I didn't bring this to hurt you. I thought I'd show it to you only if there was no other way to settle Larry in your mind.

Mother: Larry? (snatches letter from Ann's hand)

Ann: He wrote to me just before he... (mother opens and begins to read letter) I'm not trying to

hurt you, Kate. You're making me do this, now remember you're... Remember. I've been so lonely, Kate... I can't leave here alone again. (a long low moan comes from Mother's throat as she reads) You made me show it to you. You wouldn't believe me. I told you a hundred times, why wouldn't you believe me!

Mother: Oh, my God... (III, 66)

Self-Assessment Questions

- *All My Sons* is about a man who prioritises profit over his responsibility to society. Does this raise issues that are still relevant today?
- *How does Joe Keller's understanding of the human race become corrupted by his obsession with the materialistic pursuit of life?*
- Most of the characters in the play are deceiving themselves to some extent. Who are these characters and how are they in a state of self-deception?
- Discuss the importance of the 'absent center', that is, Larry's character in the play.

1.2.3 *All My Sons* and the Effects of the War:

Set against the backdrop of the Second World War, *All My Sons* depicts the negative effect of the war upon the American families. The women of the family were separated from their men and deaths of soldiers completely shattered lives in different ways. The loss was irreparable. Larry is separated from his girlfriend Ann when he joins the Air Force during the Second World War and when the news of his death is received by Ann she is devastated. Although the character of Larry is absent throughout the play his presence is strongly felt through the lives of the other characters. Kate refuses to believe that her son was no more. Such was the state of many American families who had lost their male folk in the war and that period in the history of America was a time of mourning of the loss of the soldiers during the war.

Therefore the loss brought about by the Second World War was not restricted to the Keller family alone.

However, one of the positive effects of the war was the economic prosperity that came along with it. Many industries were set up to supply products to the soldiers in the field. The government made contracts with producers for making equipment and parts for weapons. The Defense department collaborated with private producers who in turn made huge profit from the business. This issue is raised in the play, *All My Sons*, where Joe Keller prospered during the war because he was given the contract for making engine heads for fighter jets. His family became affluent as a consequence of the success of his armaments.

A. Check Your Progress

1. In which month was Larry reported missing?
2. Where is the setting of the play?
3. What was the reason behind the fall of Larry's tree?
4. Who knew about Larry's letter right from the beginning of the play?

1.3 *All My Sons*: The Notion of the American Dream:

Arthur Miller has used the concept of the American Dream to expose various limitations attached to this particular ideal where people desire to be honored in the society for achieving great things in life. They are mostly driven by materialistic pursuits and this brings about their downfall. This craving for economic prosperity has led to utter chaos and conflict between individuals and families and distorted their lives completely. In *All My Sons* Joe Keller is initially seen as a prosperous businessman but eventually his life becomes a tragic story. Miller has posed some basic questions in the play to show that social obligation and personal responsibility of an individual cannot be compromised for the sake of economic success. In this play, we find that there are various people who articulate what the American Dream means to them.

Stop to Consider

In the twentieth century American drama, we find in some of the works 'Reality versus Illusion', which is an outcome of a character's constant struggle to achieve the 'American dream'. The term "American Dream" was first used by the American historian James Truslow Adams in his book "The Epic of America" published in 1931. Adam used the term to describe the complex beliefs, religious promises and political and social expectations. In his book Adams stated that the American dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better, richer, and fuller for everyman with opportunities for each according to his abilities and achievement. Adams also commented, "It is not a dream of motor cars or high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position." (405)

1.3.1 Chris Keller and his pursuit of the American Dream:

In *All My Sons*, Chris wants to make his own choices and realise his American Dream by marrying Ann and making a life with her. Chris wishes to be able to achieve things on his own and not be held back by his parents. Chris says, "Yes. I like it an hour a day. If I have to grub for money all day long at least at evening I want it beautiful. I want a family, I want some kids, I want to build something that I can give myself to." (I, 13) Chris wants to leave his home and build a life on his own terms along with Ann and this upsets Joe because he wants his son to take care of the business he has built. Joe wants his son to establish himself as a successful man but with some help from him. Joe wishes that Chris will run the factory smoothly and take his business to a certain level. But this is Joe's dream and not his son's. Chris wants to be free from the wishes and demands of his father and this is one aspect of the American Dream that is the freedom to think and live. Joe says, "We'll talk about it. I'm going to build you a house, stone, with a drive away from the road. I want you to spread out, Chris, I want you to use what I made for you... I mean, with joy, Chris, without shame... with joy." (II, 41)

1.3.2 Joe Keller and his American Dream:

Through the character of Joe Keller, Arthur Miller has depicted the negative aspects of the American Dream. Miller criticizes the capitalist system of living that may sacrifice human values and happiness. The American Dream idealizes a particular lifestyle of the people of America which is mostly based on the idea of economic progress and growth. One of the glaring examples of the dark aspect of the American Dream is that it cost the lives of twenty one pilots. The family which is a unit within the society is also shattered by an individual's pursuit of that dream. In *All My Sons*, the discord between the Keller and Deever families happens due to Joe's irresponsible action and his reluctance to come to terms with the crime that he had committed. He was completely blinded by the drive to make money that made him supply the cracked engine heads. Miller also shows how self-destruction is inevitable for someone like Joe who ultimately had to commit suicide and became a victim of the American Dream.

Self-Assessment Questions

- What are Fredrick J. Turner's views on the American Dream?
- Can the American dream be based upon character and behavior? Do we risk losing these while trying to climb the ladder of success? What is your understanding from the play?
- Do you believe that the American Dream can be achieved without hard work or do you think that personality and luck can make you realise those dreams?
- What is Miller's criticism of the American Dream in *All My Sons*?

1.4 *All My Sons*: The Condition of Women:

The central male characters in Miller's plays are always in search of an identity and their female counterparts help them in achieving it. The woman in the play supports her man and participates in maintaining the illusionary world of her man and prevents him from encountering the truth that might destroy him. The lives of the women characters in Miller's plays, for example, Kate Keller in *All My Sons* and Linda Loman in *Death of a Salesman* are representations of women who are trapped within the traditional doctrines and strictures of the society. They are not just women who are submissive

and loyal to their husbands but their behavior is suggestive of the conventional American values. The women characters in the plays are mostly viewed as admirable people, self-sacrificing wives and mother.

Stop to Consider

During the first half of the twentieth century, women in America participated in almost all spheres of public life – politics, workforce, popular culture and so on. Women are essentially divided by race, class, place, religion, ethnicity and they do not always identify with one another. Therefore their collective identity or their sense of solidarity as women has not been firm. However certain movements for women’s rights have given them opportunities for exploring their space and freedom. Each wave of feminism has empowered women in varied ways and the stories of these changes are sometimes heard loud and sometimes are quiet.

1.4.1 Kate Keller in *All My Sons*:

Kate Keller is introduced in the play in the following way: “Mother appears on porch. She is in her early fifties, a woman of uncontrolled inspirations and an overwhelming capacity for love.” (I, 13) She is shown as a woman who is troubled by the missing news of Larry, whose return she has been expecting for a very long time. She suffers alone and does not want her husband to get affected by the truth. The truth she has been concealing is that the father is responsible for his son’s death as she instinctively knows her husband’s guilt. Her devotion to her husband is so strong that she believes that Larry is alive because if he is dead it will become obvious that his father killed him. She says to Chris, “Your brother’s alive, darling, because if he’s dead, your father killed him. Do you understand me now? As long as you live, that boy is alive. God does not let a son be killed by his father. Now you see, don’t you? Now you see.” (II, 58)

It is evident that the reason of her anxiety and depression is the guilt of her husband which she is carrying throughout the play. Kate regards Ann as “Larry’s girl” and does not approve of the alliance between Chris and Ann. Joe Keller wants Chris not to shatter his mother’s dream of Larry’s return by marrying Ann. The burden of hiding the truth of her husband’s guilt makes her physically and mentally ill leading to her nervous breakdown.

1.4.2 Ann Deever in *All My Sons*:

When Ann first appears in the play, she is referred to as a 'beautiful thing' and Jim comments on how it is good to have a beautiful woman to look at since in the entire neighbourhood there is no pretty thing to please the eyes. This observation is suggestive of the fact that women were mainly objects of desire. Ann's beauty offers a sharp contrast to Sue's who is 'round and overweight'. Women were also expected to get married and bear children as it was considered to be their first and foremost duty. In the play, *All My Sons*, it is surprising to Lydia that Ann is twenty six and still not married whereas she already has three babies. Through the women characters, Miller constructs an ideal of femininity and people's obsession with such an ideal. The play reflects upon the misogyny of 20th century America where women were confined to domestic roles and were mere objects of the male gaze.

However, Ann Deever is crucial to the plot development of the play as she holds an important piece of information about Larry's death. It is this letter that discloses Joe's guilt and figuratively kills Joe as it is because of the information in the letter that drives Joe to commit suicide. Ann's decision to show the letter to Kate is a major decision that directs the course of the play.

1.4.3 Sue Bayliss in *All My Sons*:

Sue Bayliss, the wife of Dr. Jim Bayliss (Jim), is seen as a woman whose main focus in life is social recognition and material wealth. She does not approve of the idealism that her husband believes in nor the moral values he shares with Chris. Sue is an influential person in the Bayliss family as she wants Jim to continue as a successful doctor and not devote himself to medical research because research would not earn enough for the family. She had actually chosen Jim rather than Jim choosing her which would have been the more traditional way of men choosing women for marriage. She seems to have the obsession for money which men usually have in a materialistic world and believes that it is important to make money rather than following one's dreams and goals. Miller has pointed out the influence of money not only on men but also upon women in a post war America that had corrupted the mindset of people making them ignore basic human values and friendship. She is a practical woman who thinks that making compromises in life is sometimes inevitable in order to adjust to certain

circumstances. She talks about the hypocrisy of Chris who talks of higher values but on the contrary supports Joe who is guilty.

B. Check Your Progress

1. What is Jim Bayliss's profession?
2. What does Jim tell Ann not to do?
3. Do you agree that Sue Bayliss is corrupted by her obsession for money?
4. What does Jim want to do with his life? Who is the hindrance between him and his dreams?

Self-Assessment Questions

- Critically analyse the character of Kate Keller as a sufferer in the drama of success and war.
- Discuss the condition of women in America in the first half of the twentieth century.
- American Dream is typically a masculine dream. Explain with reference to the play *All My Sons*.
- Critically comment on the character of Ann Deever.
- Estimate Sue Bayliss's role in the play as a 20th century woman.
- What are the roles of women characters in the play? How do they contribute to the major shifts of the play's plot lines?
- Comment on the gender roles in the play *All My Sons*.

1.5 *All My Sons*: The Play as a Social Drama:

Arthur Miller was primarily concerned with portraying the social realities of his time and offering his criticism on the attitudes of the contemporary society. He has contributed immensely towards conveying social, political and moral concerns in the 20th century. One of the main issues that found expression in his plays is the relationship between the individual and the society. He also dealt with ideas of love, friendship, loyalty, deception, marriage, motherhood, economic success, capitalism, idealism and so on. Exploring the relationship between father and son also forms a major concern in his plays. Miller can be considered as a social dramatist because his plays examine the nature and attitude of the society. He criticised the corruption that was prevalent by exposing the unscrupulous people with only profiteering

motives and this is found in the play *All My Sons* where people had taken huge advantage of the war. Miller, through the character of Joe Keller, has shown how people tend to ignore their national responsibilities only for the sake of money. By using drama as a medium, Miller has tried to highlight certain corrupt values and bring about a change in the society. Joe Keller suffers mentally because for a very long time he remains indifferent towards his duties for the society and nation and thinks only about his personal relationships and monetary gains. Once he realises his obligation towards the nation that he acknowledges he is responsible for the death of the twenty one pilots whom he now considers as his own sons and part of his family.

1.5.1 Joe Keller in *All My Sons*:

Miller's representation of Joe Keller in the play is quite realistic due to the fact that Joe is portrayed as a common man and not a man with the stature of a hero. He has certain flaws in his character, flaws which are fatal as it cost his own life and his son's life. Miller has examined human as well as materialistic aspects of this character in a way that evokes sympathy for him in the audience. He has lost Larry, his son, and he wants to make sure that Chris gets all the happiness and comfort he deserves. But Joe lacks the ability to confront the truth of the fateful decision he had made and he also neglects some basic human principles of life. It is already too late when he realises his social responsibility and towards the end of the play he loses all hopes and kills himself. In both the plays by Miller, *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* there is a sharp contradiction seen between material success and the success of the relationship between the father and the son. It is death that ultimately resolves this conflict because those two ideas of success are irreconcilable in many ways. Joe Keller represents the old generation. He lacks prudence and moral sense and is only concerned to uphold the paternal authority in his family. Chris, on the other hand, is idealistic; he is unhappy with the present state of affairs where people had become too materialistic and were destroying each other for their selfish gains. He confronts his father and makes him realise his responsibility for the heinous crime and his betrayal of the trust of his friend. He becomes highly disillusioned with the materialistic world where people were obsessed with money making and profiteering.

Self-Assessment Questions

- Miller criticises the system of capitalism in the play *All My Sons*. Explain.
- *All My Sons* portrays an uncomfortable picture of human psychology and nature. Give your comments on this statement.
- Discuss the play as a representation of social realities of the American society.
- Examine the father-son relationship in *All My Sons*
- Critically analyse the character of Joe Keller as a tragic hero.
- Comment on *All My Sons* as a play dealing with the themes of free will and moral choice.

1.5.2 Miller's indictment of Society:

Arthur Miller has shown post-war America as a place of corruption and selfishness where people are mainly concerned about benefits. Money seems to be the most important factor determining the degree of corruption. People tend to forget about others to so much an extent that they do not think about the harm their actions are likely to bring to others. This becomes clear when Joe Keller consciously supplies cracked cylinder heads that would certainly crash an aircraft if used so that his business would not suffer any loss. He even allows Steve Deever, his business partner, to go to jail although he was equally to be blamed for the tragedy. Later, Joe claims that he did it for the sake of his family to give them all the happiness they need. He justifies his act by telling Chris that he took the chance for him (Chris). This act of Joe shows the human tendency of creating a false idea of innocence although being conscious of one's guilty actions. Another example is that of people like Sue Bayliss who would make compromises in life for monetary gain. She was against Jim's wish to undertake research in medicine. Medical research was Jim's dream and something that he really wanted to do but due to the lack of profit involved in pursuing research he ultimately gave up his ambition and decided to remain a professional doctor. Miller depicts the society as corrupt where people would do things mechanically that they do not enjoy doing just for the sake of monetary gain. In *All My Sons*, Miller also exposes how money, betrayal, selfishness, dishonesty comes first ignoring basic human values in a corrupt society. Such lives led by people will lead to devastation as is evident in the life of Joe Keller. This representation of society by Miller suggests that if people do not value

honesty and goodwill, evil will eventually take over this world as also the American society. He calls for change in the society and for a world of honesty and righteousness.

C. Check Your Progress

1. How many P-40s crashed due to the faulty manufacturing of Keller's industry?
2. Who was the first person to see that Larry's tree had fallen?
3. What made the mother think that Larry would not return?
4. Who was Steve Deever?

1.5.3 *All My Sons* as a Modern Tragedy:

The play can be considered as a modern tragedy not only of an individual but also of a society. It is the story of a common man who fails to realise his social responsibilities and ultimately slides into the pathetic condition of committing suicide. A severe limitation in Joe's character is the lack of self-awareness which leads to the tragedy. This limitation contributes to the tragic effect of the play. Tragedy also comprises of the feeling of pity and pathos and *All My Sons* is evocative of such emotions. Kate Keller is portrayed as a desperate mother who believes that her son is still alive and would return one day. Miller depicts people with limitations and contradictions and links personal drama with the outside world. He shows how the capitalist system has an impact upon the characters and their relationships and also influences the choices that they make. In *All My Sons*, Miller has projected characters who are representative of all humanity and some human flaws that give the play a realistic affect. The play also has 20th century idiomatic dialogue, realistic situations and stage setting that makes it a well-constructed realist play. It is a classic example of the tragedy of a man in a modern world who believed that whatever he (Joe) achieved was for the happiness of his family but when reality dawned, he realised that whatever he had gained was hollow. He had multiplied his mistakes by trying to cover up his crime. Unable to face the family, the society and most importantly his own self, Joe ends his life leading to a tragic ending of the play.

1.6 Summing Up:

The play, *All My Sons*, suggests the inescapable influence of the past upon people and Joe Keller's life is a classic example of that. His downfall suggests that every person has the liberty to make choices but at the same time has the responsibility that comes along with those choices. Joe Keller had denied his responsibility and therefore lived in bad faith. Through this play Miller attempts to highlight the 'exclusiveness' of private life at this historical juncture in America where people lived selfishly carrying only for material gain.

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1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress:

- A. 1. Larry was reported missing in November.
2. The setting of the play is Keller's backyard.
3. The reason behind the fall of Larry's tree was lightning.
4. Ann knew about Larry's letter right from the beginning of the play.

- B.**
1. Jim Bayliss practices medicine.
 2. Jim tells Ann not to count her husband's money.
 3. Yes I agree that Sue Bayliss is corrupted by her obsession for money.
 4. Jim wants to pursue medical research. His wife, Sue Bayliss, is the hindrance between him and his dreams.
- C.**
1. The number of P-40s that crashed due to the faulty manufacturing of Keller's industry was 21.
 2. The mother was the first person to see that Larry's tree had fallen.
 3. Ann's visit and the conversation about the letter made the mother think that Larry would not return.
 4. Steve Deever was the business partner of Joe Keller.

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Unit 2
GEORGE ORWELL (1903-1950):
‘SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT’

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2.0 Introduction:

The British Empire has been the focus of many literary texts since the nineteenth century. Orwell’s experience in Burma had already formed the source of his novel *Burmese Days*. In this essay, “Shooting an Elephant”, Orwell uses the same colonial landscape to provide deep insights on the psychological effects of colonialism on both the conqueror and the conquered. The essay involves the narrator’s inner conflict as he is torn between his conscience and his posturing as the representative face of the Empire. The essay, one of the most anthologized pieces of the modern English language, can also be read as a confessional recounting of events stimulated by the author’s subjective guilt. Contemporary commentators haven’t missed the political suggestions of the essay, specially coming from a polemical author like Orwell, and are divided whether Orwell truly condemns imperialism or is, just like many others, a product of his times.

2.1 Objectives:

This unit should help you to read the essay “Shooting an Elephant” and develop your own understanding of the different aspects of the literary piece. The details provided in the unit shall enable you to

- *read* and follow each paragraph for the development and structuring of Orwell’s account.
- *locate* Orwell’s narrative in the historical ethos of its time.
- *study* the history of imperialism and its importance in the context of the essay.
- *analyse* the essay as one written in confessional mode.
- *note* the use of different stylistic devices including the use of symbols.

2.2 About the Author:

Born Eric Arthur Blair in 1903 in India where his father served as a British government official, George Orwell is now acknowledged as one of the most significant literary figures of the twentieth century. After his education in England, Orwell joined the Indian Imperial Police at the age of 19 years and was stationed at Burma. Having faced the first hand experiences of the oppression of British rule he soon became disenchanted with imperial policies and left his job after five years in 1927. His experiences inspired his first novel, *Burmese Days*, which was published in New York in 1934. Orwell began his literary career, however, as a writer of non-fiction through his first book *Down and Out* in Paris and London, published in 1933. His first book was based on his experiences after he left his job and turned his back on a middle class life, living the life of a destitute and eking out his existence through menial jobs. His time spent amongst the poor and homeless in London solidified his convictions of becoming a political writer championing the cause of the underdogs and the downtrodden. The same political positioning informs books such as *The Road to Wigan Pier* – a documentary account of poverty among unemployed miners in northern England. In 1936 he set out for Spain to join the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War out of an obligation to fight fascism. The experiences in the war only strengthened his political beliefs and also provided material for his book *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), where he articulates his commitment to fight for totalitarianism through his writings. In 1945, Orwell published *Animal Farm*,

a satiric political fable, which ensured his literary fame worldwide. The publication of *1984*, a novel set in an imaginary totalitarian future, four years later and one year before his death in 1950, enlightens his enormous contribution to modern literature and at the same time propels his stature as a writer of prose which has continuously become more profound after his death.

2.3 The Background of the Essay:

The essay is set in a town in southern Burma during a period when the country was under colonial rule. Burma, presently known as Myanmar, was a sovereign kingdom prior to British intervention. It was annexed to the British Empire in 1885 following its defeat in the three Anglo-Burmese Wars and included under the administration of British India. Orwell arrived at Burma in 1922 as a young police officer at a time when resentment against the British was slowly brewing among the natives for the sufferings that they endured and the curtailment of their religious and political freedom under the British rule. Orwell would soon quit his service in disgust and disillusionment but his experiences in Burma would form the basis of his early writing, including the novel *Burmese Days*. The essay "Shooting an Elephant", based on an incident during the same period can be considered as an addendum to the novel. First published in 1936 in *New Writing*, the essay has since been anthologised in several other collections of the author.

2.4 The form of the Essay:

In its foregrounding of the personal element, investigation of the psychological processes of the mind, unstructured narrative and distinct prose style, "Shooting an Elephant" can be regarded as one of the best examples of the modern essay. In a reflective style, the author employs a first-person narrative to weave a story that at once appears frank and straightforward. The first-person narrative suits best for the purpose of the writer to present his own perspective of events. As Orwell tries to reminisce an event that still burdens him in an analytical, confessional mode we can notice Orwell's projection of his self. The older author Orwell perceives things from a distance which the younger self could not. In conveying and communicating this inner conflict the contemplative and subjective tone of the essay serves the purpose well.

2.5 The Summary of the Essay:

Paragraph I and II:

The narrative essay “Shooting an Elephant” begins at a time in Moulmein, in colonial Burma, when the narrator served as a sub-divisional police officer for the British Raj. It was a time when anti-European feelings among the natives were quite strong. Though the Burmese never staged an open revolt, they displayed their disgust by harassing Europeans at every opportunity. Orwell recounts how European women were spat at when they passed through the bazaars. As a police officer and belonging to the side of the occupiers, he was made an obvious object of contempt. When he was tripped on the football field the crowd erupts in laughter. Whenever he was walking down the streets, the crowd seems to follow him with insults and abuses and all these, Orwell relates, was getting on his nerves. The situation was more confusing because Orwell realizes that the reaction of the Burmese was a result of the crimes of imperialism. Deep-down, he too considered imperialism an evil thing and hated his job to the core of his heart. Being witness to the brutal oppression of the Empire from close quarters as an officer handling prisoners filled him with an intense sense of guilt. However, though Orwell laments being part of the tyrannical Empire yet he cannot curb his urge to avenge the indignities he suffered at the hands of the Burmese. Orwell says he was undereducated and insufficient to handle this conflict within him. While one part of him condemns the British Raj severely, another part considers driving a bayonet into a Buddhist priest’s guts. Orwell calls this dilemma a typical mindset of officers in the British Raj and a by-product of imperialism.

Stop to Consider

The power hierarchy that Orwell establishes and which he is a part of could not prevent him from being at the receiving end of abuses and slander. Though Orwell’s principles make him to oppose the Empire and its exploitations in the East, it fails to restrain vengeful and violent thoughts in him towards the Burmese. The conflicted position that a conscientious colonial officer occupies pits his moral beliefs against the operational mechanisms of imperialism.

Check Your Progress

1. Which country is “Shooting an Elephant” set in?
2. At the time of the essay, Burma was a colony under which country?
3. How did the Burmese express their resentment towards the British in general and Orwell in particular?

Self Asking Questions

What is the dilemma that Orwell considers a typical mindset of officers serving in the British Raj? Why does he call it a consequence of imperialism?

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Paragraph III and IV:

Orwell then proceeds to the description of an incident which helped him to understand why despotic governments behaved the way they did. This was an enlightening event that provided insights into the real nature of imperialism. Orwell received a call one morning from another sub-inspector informing him that an elephant had turned rogue and was ravaging the bazaar. Orwell was called to action to take control of the situation and prevent the animal from doing further damage. Orwell started out towards the troubled area taking his 44 Winchester with him. The rifle was too small to kill an elephant but Orwell hoped he could use it to terrorise the animal with its noise. On his way Orwell learnt that it was not a wild elephant but a domesticated one which had broken its chain and escaped during its ‘must’. Its mahout who could control it had pursued it in the wrong direction and was presently twelve hours’ away. The weaponless Burmese population was exposed to the onslaught of the elephant that had already destroyed public and private property and killed a cow. After being received by the Burmese sub-inspector and some Indian constables, Orwell arrived at the neighbourhood where the elephant had been last seen. It was one of the poorest areas of the district filled with shoddy thatched huts. Orwell heard conflicting reports about the whereabouts of the elephant from the inhabitants and at a time it became so puzzling that he had already made up his mind to conclude the account as a hoax. Just then he was startled by an outcry of a woman trying to shoo away some kids. He moved towards the noise only

to find the dead body of a Dravidian coolie, lying almost naked in the mud. The Indian labourer had come under the foot of the elephant and had been trampled alive. The twisted and disfigured body of the man lay there with an expression of excruciating pain. Orwell then sent back the pony and ordered his subordinate to fetch him a gun from a friend's house nearby, strong enough to kill an elephant.

Check Your Progress

1. What does Orwell carry with him when he sets off in the direction of the elephant?
2. What was the extent of the damage that the elephant had caused?
3. What does Orwell discover when he hears the hue and cry raised by the woman?

Paragraph V and VI:

The subordinate returned with the gun and Orwell is informed by the locals that the elephant was in a paddy field nearby. As Orwell made his way to the place, he is followed by a large crowd. There was excitement in the air as the people had seen the rifle and were shouting that Orwell was going to shoot the elephant. Orwell felt uncomfortable as he had no intentions of killing the elephant and had called for the rifle only for self-defence. He had already started feeling like a fool as the crowd grew in numbers behind him. Orwell located the animal eighty yards from the road in a soggy field calmly stuffing grass without the slightest attention to the crowd's presence. As soon as he saw the elephant Orwell knew that he should not kill it. He compares it to a huge and costly piece of machinery- something that ought not to be destroyed. Orwell understood that once the attack of must had passed, the beast would not be dangerous to anyone. The best thing to do would be to keep a watch on the animal lest he becomes wild again and wait for the mahout to arrive.

Check your Progress

1. Why was the crowd following Orwell very excited?
2. What was the elephant doing when Orwell first spotted it?
3. What does Orwell compare the elephant to?

Paragraph VII and VIII:

Paragraph VII brings us to defining moment of the essay where Orwell realizes the implications of the colonial baggage which would eventually determine the course of his action. As the crowd swelled every passing moment, Orwell felt the pressures of being watched and the expectation to act in a certain way. He could sense the eagerness in the ‘yellow faces’ as they waited anticipating the shooting of the animal. Orwell says he felt like a magician with a task to entertain the crowd with his tricks. It was at that moment he realized that he would have to submit to the demand of the crowd and kill the elephant against his will. Speaking of the futility of the whole colonial enterprise and the predicament of the white officer employed in the East, Orwell notes, “I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys”. Orwell realized that the so-called power of the white man is hollow and deceitful as he is trapped by his own image. In trying to embody the conventional figure of a sahib, he was bound by the need to impress the natives and appear authoritative and resolute all the time. He felt it was impossible now to have the rifle in your hand and not do anything. He feared being made a laughing stock by the crowd, something that he cannot endure as is the case in every colonialist’s life. Still Orwell could not convince himself to kill the huge animal. He considered its value to the owner and that he would lose a lot if the huge animal were to be killed. He turned to some experienced-looking Burmans for some input on the behaviour of the animal. They all said that the animal had kept to itself but might charge only if one approached too close to it.

Stop To Consider

The role of the authoritative and powerful colonizer is the performative persona every employee of the Empire has to undertake. The demand to keep up with this appearance limits their autonomy as the pressure to comply with the position of power is immense. The incident concerning Orwell’s decision to shoot as per the expectations of the crowd articulates the paradox of colonialism in the sense that unwittingly it is the Burmese who controls and dictates Orwell’s actions rather than the other way round.

Self Asking Questions

What makes Orwell observe, “I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys”?

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Paragraph IX and X:

After taking many things into consideration, Orwell specifies what should have been ideally done in that situation. He should have approached the elephant, stayed at a safe distance to check its temperament and kept a watch on the animal until the mahout arrived. At the lack of any aggression from the elephant, it should have been left unharmed. However, Orwell knew he would not choose the proper procedure as that would endanger his life for he knew he was a poor shot. He feared if the elephant charged towards him and he missed he would share the same fate as the Dravidian coolie. More importantly, he was haunted by the dread of being made to look like an idiot in front of the Burmese crowd. In the absence of any other alternative, Orwell loaded the gun and aimed at the elephant. Orwell could decipher a sigh of relief from the waiting crowd as they prepare themselves for the spectacle to unfold. Not being an experienced hunter, Orwell was not sure where to shoot and hence aimed at its forehead where he thought the brain was.

Check Your Progress

1. What should Orwell have ideally done in that situation?
2. What did Orwell fear that finally compelled him to load his gun and aim at the elephant?
3. What was the spectacle the Burmese crowd was eagerly waiting to witness?

Paragraph XI, XII and XIII:

The following sections deal with the shooting of the elephant and how the huge animal meets an agonizing death. As soon as Orwell pulled the trigger the crowd erupts with joy. Orwell recounts the sudden change in the animal after the bullet had penetrated it. The elephant suddenly became impaired and unable to hold its weight slowly sunk to its knees with a drooling mouth.

Orwell fires again at the same spot and the elephant struggles to get back on his feet. The third shot brought it down as it finally fell with a jolt that seemed to shake the ground. But the elephant was not dead yet. As Orwell waited for it to die it continues breathing laboriously with long rattling gasps. Orwell was saddened to watch the agony of the animal as he was dying very slowly. To bring an end to the torture Orwell pounded countless bullets in its heart from his short rifle and left the scene as he could not bear it any longer. Later he learnt that it took the animal another half an hour to die and before long the Burmese equipped with *dahs* and baskets stripped its body to its bones for the meat.

Check Your Progress

1. Describe the shooting of the elephant and how the it met a brutal death
2. Why did Orwell pound so many bullets at the heart of the elephant?
3. What did the Burmese do with the body of the animal?

Paragraph XIV:

The concluding paragraph of the essay highlights the aftermath of Orwell's decision. Orwell's killing of the elephant generated elaborate discussions and opinions were divided. The elephant owner was angry but being an Indian he had no legal recourse. Older Europeans backed Orwell's choice while the younger colonialists thought that it was not worthwhile to kill an elephant just because it had killed a coolie. Orwell felt glad that the coolie had been killed for that gave him legal protection to shoot the elephant. At last he wondered if anyone will ever find out the truth that the elephant was killed merely to avoid looking a fool.

Stop to Consider

Racism lies at the core of colonialism which holds sway over all moral considerations and human compassion. Orwell is able to look back at the incident with regret and a self-deprecating humour only because his existing vantage point and distance enables him to.

Check Your Progress

1. What was the reaction of the younger colonialists to the killing of the elephant?
2. Why did Orwell feel glad that the elephant had killed the coolie?
3. What was the real reason Orwell had killed the elephant?

Self Asking Questions

1. Orwell states that he doesn't want to shoot the elephant. Why then does he go against his inclination?
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2. Does Orwell's attitude embody the perspective of a colonizer? Give reasons for your answer.
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2.6 Themes in the Essay:

Colonialism:

The dictionary definition of the term roughly denotes expansion of a nation's territory beyond its borders where the settler colony generally takes control over the land, labour and resources of the occupied region. And imperialism is the process or ideology that advocates and facilitates such politico-economic domination over the colonized states. Postcolonial studies have also used the term to refer to a certain belief system that promotes or legitimizes the colonial enterprise ranging from widespread racism to a general conviction of one's superiority. Orwell's colonial writings are important for the insights that they provide coming from the pen of an insider who served the Indian imperial police in Burma for about five years. The significance of the essay "Shooting an Elephant" lies in how the incident that is depicted bares the different aspects of imperialism. Orwell says that the particular incident gave him a better idea of the workings of imperialism and repressive governments. Orwell, despite his compassion for the animal was rendered a puppet under the institution of imperialism as he killed the elephant against his will. He felt he needed to act like an authoritative officer to maintain his control and command over the natives. A white officer performing to the

demands of the colonized to fulfil the role that the natives expect him to play creates the necessary irony and reversal of the master-slave relationship.

The essay can be read as an attempt by the author, motivated by a profound sense of guilt, to recollect and reconsider the chain of events that occurred while he was young. Orwell portrays colonial Burma and the conditions that provoke him to commit something he later regrets. Throughout the essay, his inner suffering and the plight of an imperial officer is all pervasive as he strives best to mend his own feelings of guilt. He tries to justify the act of killing the elephant but also admits that he was glad that the elephant had killed the Indian coolie. The last line of the essay where he confesses shooting the elephant primarily for fear of humiliation sheds light on the real nature of his guilt. Though he says he sympathises and roots for the cause of the natives in their fight against the oppression of the British yet he makes a series of racial comments about the Burmese. He doesn't see anything positive in them and refer them as "evil spirited little beasts", "yellow faces" etc. Also his wish to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts shows how Orwell had internalised the imperial project.

The essay also gives us a glimpse of the atrocities committed by the British Raj and the fate of the Burmese under them. Orwell as a police officer witnessed it from close quarters as he mentions the wretched condition of the people taken as prisoners beaten and flogged with bamboos and locked in stinking cages. The natives did not have the privilege of rights or legal recourse as evident from the helplessness of the elephant owner. We can also interpret the horrible prejudice of the young colonialists when they considered it a shame to shoot an elephant merely for killing an Indian coolie-the same mindset of racial and cultural superiority that promotes and facilitates colonialism.

Self Asking Question

How can you say that the British officials internalised the imperial project? Elucidate using instances from the text.

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The Elephant as a Symbol:

A symbol is a literary device that is used by the writer as an object or phenomenon containing several layers of meaning, mostly to represent something more than what appears on the surface. The elephant acts as the central symbol of Orwell's essay. Orwell uses it to symbolise British imperialism and its effects on both the coloniser and the colonised. The figure of the elephant is ambiguous just like Orwell's feelings about imperialism in the essay. Orwell compares the huge animal with a piece of costly machinery thus implying how the elephant stands for the Burmese people. Like the elephant, the natives too were under the restrictions of a strict regime and that it turns violent can be seen as a rebellious response to being chained. Orwell understands that he must use force to contain the animal which is comparable to the unnatural use of force by the British to demonstrate their power over the natives. The elephant's brutal end also bears similarity with the fate of the native Burmese who too were dominated with an iron fist. On the other hand the elephant can also be viewed as a representation of the British to the Burmese. The people described that it had come suddenly upon them and out of nowhere trampled the coolie on to the ground. In this context the hopes and aspirations of the Burmese populace were also crushed by the British. And hence the elephant's death, much anticipated by the Burmese, exemplifies a symbol for the end of this tyrannical rule. The animal can also be viewed as a symbol of the monumental forces of nature as Orwell describes it as a calm and peaceful creature but finally made a powerless victim against the vandalism and violent ego of mankind. Many of Orwell's events can be viewed as having symbolic significance which only adds to newer ways of interpreting the text.

Self Asking Question

How do you think 'the elephant' symbolises the Burmese people?
And what does its death mean in that context?

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2.7 Summing Up:

In this essay, Orwell comments on his experiences of being a colonial policeman in Burma. Orwell describes a real life incident when he is informed

about an aggressive elephant ravaging the streets and is called to action. Reaching the site Orwell faces a rather absurd situation where he is expected to shoot the elephant despite his unwillingness. In the end, against his convictions and wishes, Orwell is compelled to submit under the pressure of the natives and shoot the elephant. This situation vividly explains the accompanying problems of supremacy and power. Orwell was instigated to kill the beast just because being a member of the imperial race he was required to act tough. The essay can be considered as Orwell's satire on British imperial policies based on oppression and subjugation of the natives which also demanded the coloniser to surrender his freedom in his need to "act like a Sahib".

2.8 References and Suggested Readings:

1. Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism. Second Edition.* New York: Routledge, 2005
2. Orwell, George. *Shooting an Elephant, and Other Essays.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950.
3. Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks (1967).* Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press. 2008

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Unit 3
MUNIN BARKOTOKI (1915-1995):
‘KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI’

Contents:

- 3.0 Introduction**
- 3.1 Objectives**
- 3.2 About the Author**
- 3.3 The form of the Essay**
- 3.4 Summary and Explication of the Essay**
- 3.5 Summing Up**
- 3.6 References and Suggested Readings**

3.0 Introduction:

What constitutes scholarship? What are the criteria that elevate one to the status of a scholar of genuine worth? These are the questions that Munin Barkotoki entertains and seeks an answer to in this essay while epitomizing the great Krishna Kanta Handiqui as his vision of a ‘scholar par excellence’. While writing about Handiqui- a world renowned Sanskrit scholar, Indologist, educationist, visionary administrator and philanthropist all at once- cannot be contained within the scope of an essay, Barkotoki compensates it by pinpointing only his scholarly credentials. At the same time the essay is interesting for it unveils the sketcher as well as his subject. Originally written in English by Barkotoki, the essay has been included in both the collections- *A Munin Barkotoki Miscellany* and *Essentially Speaking*.

3.1 Objectives:

This unit should help you to read the essay “K.K Handiqui: Scholar Par Excellence” and develop your own understanding of the different aspects of the literary piece. With the details provided in the unit you should be able—

- *read* and follow each paragraph for the development and structuring of Barkotoki's account
- *locate* Handiqui's works and achievements in the milieu of his times
- *study* Handiqui's worth as a scholar in accordance with the standards set by Barkotoki
- *analyse* the piece as a biographical essay
- *assess* Munin Barkotoki as a composer of biographical sketches.

3.2 About the Author:

On the day of Kati Bihu in the year 1915, Munin Barkotoki was born at Jorhat in a family known to have produced many firsts in different fields of Assam. He was the younger son of Raisaheb Durgadhar Barkotoki, regarded as the first Assamese Director of Education in pre-independent Assam, and Kamalini Devi, daughter of Padmavati Devi Phukanani whose *Sudharmar Upakhyan* (1884) is considered as the one of the earliest attempts at novel writing in Assam. His maternal great grandfather was Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, one of the pioneers of Assamese literature in the Orunodoi era who, who with his passionate zeal and groundbreaking publications, became one of the leading beacons of the Assamese Renaissance. Belonging to a family of such greatness, Munin Barkotoki showed keen interest in books from his early childhood. As a young man he was quite absorbed in his studies and haunted bookshops and libraries, expanding his choice and interest day by day. In the early 1930s when he was still a teenager, his writings were being published in Assamese periodicals like *Ghar-Jeuti*, *Awahon*, *Bahi* etc. Published in *Awahon*, his essay *Confessions* is considered the first and finest attempt in Assamese at the form of literary exercises called *belles-letters*. *Bismrita Byatikram*, the only book Barkotoki published during his life time won him the coveted Assam Publication Board Award in 1983. The book contained fourteen biographical essays on some of the distinguished personalities and legendary figures of the state. While making a list of these personalities two factors seem to play a deciding role in his selections. First, was his closeness with most of them and secondly, all of them commanded deep admiration from him. These intimate character portraits reveal to the readers the different features that encompass the greatness of the fourteen lives and together

make an imposing addition to the history of Assamese biographical literature. His extensive reading and wide ranging interests enabled Barkotoki to measure his life-subjects against a modern worldview or to cite and refer from Western classics whenever need arose. Besides, his critical acumen and penetrative sense of judgement made these portraits stand out. Barkotoki did not publish any other book during his lifetime but kept contributing through correspondence columns of newspapers, review journals, theatre magazines etc which have been compiled and published in form of books posthumously. Even with his limited literary output, Barkotoki still occupies a prominent position in the literary scene in Assam.

3.3 The form for the Essay:

This short and compact literary piece can be taken as an example of biographical essay where the writer explores the life and works of a real-life person. Like a traditional essay of the biographical genre we find an account of selected events in the subject's life as well as description of his key character traits. The essay in study also has a thesis statement that it asserts one specific idea about that person's life and achievements. In Barkotoki's essay that projection is of Handiqui as a scholar of the highest degree. And hence the subtle nuances of Handiqui's life or the intimate details of his personal struggles are intentionally avoided. The use of Psychoanalysis, which has hugely influenced modern biographies, to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the subject and develop it as a real and interesting person is also missing. A writer of biographical portraits is also supposed to adhere to facts and be accurate with his sources. However as the editorial notes at the end of the essay suggest, Barkotoki exaggerates on two accounts. While the real reasons for these discrepancies are not known, it can be attributed to Barkotoki's own stance as a true admirer of Handiqui which may have led to eulogizing his subject, sometimes extravagantly.

3.4 Summary and Explication of the Essay:

Paragraph I and II:

Krishnakanta Handiqui, the essayist claims, is a well-known figure in Assam despite leading a secluded life among books away from public gaze or recognition. Fortunate to have such a reputed scholar from our land, his

name still occasions deep reverence from one and all. Barkotoki includes a personal anecdote saying that whenever he remembers Handiqui he is reminded of Nirad C. Chaudhuri's noteworthy book on the German orientalist Max Mueller. Chaudhuri had called Mueller 'Scholar Extraordinary' and Barkotoki regards that if anyone closer home deserved the same title it would be none other than Handiqui. Barkotoki goes on to discuss the difference between an epithet like 'Scholar Extraordinary' and 'Scholar par Excellence' which, incidentally, is also the title of the essay. He comments that though there is not much to choose between the two, the former hints at something beyond scholarship while the latter appears to confine a versatile genius only to his scholarly achievements. Barkotoki however refuses to divulge further into the matter reasoning that it is not the primary concern.

Stop to Consider

Note the use of the phrase 'scholar par excellence' in the title of the essay. At the same time the author considers 'scholar extraordinary' a better sobriquet in view of Handiqui's personality. However he leaves the matter without further elaboration and the question remains why he didn't choose the latter and better title.

Check Your Progress

1. What is the title that Nirad C. Chaudhuri gave to Max Mueller?
2. What is the slight difference between 'Scholar Extraordinary' and 'scholar par excellence'?

Paragraph III and IV:

Continuing with the same line of thought about judging scholarship, Barkotoki puts forward an important question about the essential requirements of being considered a true scholar. He contends the general notion that it is decided by the number of books that one authors. He argues that Handiqui might have written just three major works in his lifetime but that does not make him unsuitable for the title of 'scholar par excellence' which the essayist had conferred upon him. As a matter of fact Handiqui's reputation as an eminent Indologist and Sanskritist rests on the strength of his three major works. Barkotoki asserts there was nothing accidental about it, the reasons which

he would elaborate as the essay progresses. He agrees he is neither a scholar nor an expert in Sanskrit to assess Handiqui. Yet through this essay he endeavours to write about him on two grounds. Firstly, Handiqui's vast knowledge and philosophy does not make his scholarship exclusive to a particular domain. Secondly, although Sanskrit was his area of expertise Handiqui expressed himself mostly in English. Besides, Handiqui had done his masters in Modern History at Oxford and not in Sanskrit. Hence, Barkotoki sees no reason why he cannot compose an essay on the great man Handiqui, not through the lens of a scholar but from the perspective of a true admirer.

Stop to Consider

It is the quality of works and not its quantity that conditions the true benchmark of scholarship. For books to endure the test of time and be exceptional like Handiqui's, it should not be private to particular specializations only. Also noteworthy is the author's own projection of himself as a biographer where he studies his subject as an admirer rather than a scholar or any literary practitioner.

Paragraph V and VI:

It is also noteworthy, that the essayist says, Handiqui was neither a professor nor an academic in the strict sense of the term. Although he was conferred few honorary D.Litt. degrees during his tenure as the Vice Chancellor of Gauhati University, the humble man that Handiqui was, he never used the prefix 'Doctor'. A man of action rather than words, posterity would be indebted to the vision of Handiqui for ushering in tremendous change in the academic as well as administrative section while functioning as the founding Vice Chancellor of Gauhati University. During his lifetime Handiqui contributed extensively to many esteemed journals and publications, delivered keynote addresses and chaired various prestigious conferences and enriched several anthologies and encyclopedias with invaluable chapters. However, Barkotoki regards Handiqui's prominence as a classical scholar rests primarily on his three main publications, namely the *Naisadhacarita* (1934), *Yasastilaka and Indian Culture* (1949) and the *Setubandha* (1976).

Paragraph VIII and IX:

The essayist devotes the next two sections to a brief review of Handiqui's three masterpieces as mentioned above. He agrees with what one classicist had to say about *Yasastilaka* about it being a cultural commentary of a rare standard. About the other two treatises, he is of the opinion that for a long time they were left untouched and untranslated because of their difficulty. It would require a scholar of the pedigree and talent of Handiqui to do justice to those translations. The deftness that he showed in these two books while grappling with the complex intricacies of philosophy elevated him to the status of a scholar par excellence. Handiqui displayed the same skill in translating these obscure and ancient treatises making them pleasant readings for the modern times as well. His greatness lies in the fact that he was not merely a scholar of Sanskrit. He was a polymath who could express difficult and ancient knowledge in the most lucid of languages.

Check Your Progress

1. What are the three major works of K.K Handiqui?
2. Why had scholars left Handiqui's treatises alone?
3. How were Handiqui's texts made available for the modern audience?

Paragraph X:

What separated Handiqui from other scholars was the extensive variety of his research which extended far beyond the shores of Sanskrit and ancient lore alone. His proficiency in many classical and modern Indian and European languages allowed his scope of study to be broad and profound. His passion for a language like German furnished his horizon and facilitated his interest in art, archaeology, religion, philosophy and many other diverse fields. While his mastery in the Sanskrit and Prakrit language is second to none, he was equally competent as a critic of art and aesthetics.

Stop to Consider

It is the versatility of a scholar and his rich resourcefulness that distinguishes him from the rest. The scholar's proficiency in several languages unfolds newer vistas of knowledge and enriches his range. Handiqui's broad repository of knowledge and languages render his

works inviting and relevant for modern audience as well though apparently he seems to be talking about ancient learning. Due attention should also be given to the importance of translation in opening up a book to a wider audience thus enabling it to achieve its true worth.

Paragraph XI and XII:

The last two paragraphs of the essay ends in a tone of lament. Barkotoki voices the general feeling of disappointment at the recognition that Handiqui received from the rest of the country and the outside world which he opines as insufficient. He reproaches the Government of India as well for offering him merely the ‘Padma Bhushan’ when the ‘Padma Bibhushan’ was the minimum the government could have done to honour a scholar of the stature of Handiqui. Handiqui’s contribution to the field of Indian classical scholarship was so enormous that it had eclipsed his work and identity as an Assamese and hence deserved better accolades and acknowledgement at the national level. Belonging to the hinterlands of Assam and making a mark among renowned scholars like Ananda Coomaraswamy and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan is a proud moment. Quoting the linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterji, he reiterates, “Handiqui was a scholar of whom India could be proud.” However, as the historian A.L Basham wished, Handiqui could not prolong his life like Sankardeva’s as he passed away in 1982, which Barkotoki rightly grieves as an immeasurable loss.

Self Asking Questions

1. Attempt a study of Handiqui’s scholarship after Barkotoki’s account of his work and achievements.
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2. Assess Munin Barkotoki as a composer of biographical sketches after your reading of the text.
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.....
3. What is the true worth of a scholar? Does Handiqui meet Barkotoki’s benchmark of scholarship?
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.....

3.5 Summing Up:

This is a biographical essay on Krishnakanta Handiqui, a world renowned Sanskrit scholar, Indologist and visionary educationist. His reputation as a classical scholar rests on his three main books *Naisadhacarita* (1934), *Yasastilaka and Indian Culture* (1949) and the *Setubandha* (1976). In this essay the author Munin Barkotoki tries to establish Handiqui as a scholar par excellence by bringing forth the literary and scholarly achievements of the great personality. The author, then, goes on to identify the characteristics of a true scholar. Handiqui may not have authored many books but the few that he wrote are sufficient to establish him as a world renowned scholar. Another quality which distinguished Handiqui and his scholarship was that he did not confine his studies to just one domain but expanded it to many diverse fields. However, Barkotoki regrets that such a scholar has not been given the due recognition and appreciation that he actually deserved.

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Unit 4
D.H. LAWRENCE: ‘THE WOMAN
WHO RODE AWAY’

Contents:

- 4.0 Introduction**
- 4.1 Objectives**
- 4.2 D.H. Lawrence – Life and Works**
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- 4.6 Style of the Text**
- 4.7 Importance of the Text**
- 4.8 Summing Up**
- 4.9 References and Suggested Readings**

4.0 Introduction:

D (avid) H (erbert) Lawrence was an English novelist, poet and short story writer and is famously associated with the modernist literary period. He is best known for his portrayal of the then contemporary English life, the life characterized by the dehumanizing effects of industrialization. Due to the rapid advancement of technology and development of the industrial sector in England and America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, people’s approach towards life changed to a great extent. The growing materialistic approach becomes central in most of D.H. Lawrence’s works. Moreover, his works deal with the changes brought about by the impact of modernity in social, individual and emotional scenarios. This text, ‘The Woman Who Rode Away’, included in your syllabus is a testimony to Lawrence’s vivid creative imagination and his treatment of the modern life.

4.1 Objectives:

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

- *discuss* the life and works of D.H. Lawrence
- *analyze* Lawrence's representation of the contemporary social life
- *examine* the themes of the short-story
- *investigate* the effects of modernity
- *assess* Lawrence as one of the greatest modernists in English literature

4.2 D.H. Lawrence – Life and Works:

Before diving deep into the literary world of Lawrence, you should come to terms with his life and experiences as these two factors become central in shaping up the creative imagination of any writer. Born in 1885 with a humble background - his father was a coal-miner and his mother was a homemaker, Lawrence did not enjoy a privileged childhood. His mother was an educated woman, the daughter of an engineer, and had worked as a teacher before marriage. On the contrary his father was not educated and followed a rustic way of living. As a result of their different backgrounds there request conflicts between his parents. This conflict of attitudes between the rustic working class father and the refined middle class values of his mother never ceased, resulting in then unhappy married life. Lawrence did his schooling from the Nottingham High School and was an average student. After leaving the high school he initially worked as a clerk in a surgical appliances manufacturing factory. However, he soon contracted pneumonia and had to leave his job. After his recovery he gained a scholarship in the Nottingham University College to undergo the programme of teacher training. He completed the course and began his career as a teacher. You should note that though Lawrence had written some works prior to his appointment as a teacher, his literary career boomed only after joining the teaching profession.

Life was never easy for Lawrence even after joining a school as a teacher. The death of his mother, to whom he was very closely attached, left an unending void in his life. Since then Lawrence had had acquired quite a few complicated experiences – ranging from his elopement with a German women which lead him to trouble with the British authorities during the first World War, to his becoming infamous as a sexually explicit writer. However, it is among those experiences and happenings in his life that he was able to

produce the best of the English fiction written till date. His works can be seen as the embodiment of his personal experiences and his social concerns. Lawrence was a prolific writer of his period. He wrote extensively in all the major genres of literature- novel, short story, drama, poetry, non-fiction, letter, literary criticism, and travel writing. What is more he was also interested in painting and tried his hand at it towards the last stages of his life. Because of the amount of work he had produced, it will not be just to highlight or mark out a single theme or motif in his works.

Diverse as his literary outputs, the major themes which you shall notice in most of his works range from man-woman relationship, sexual angst, and homoeroticism to spiritual quest, alienation, disillusionment, self-realization, class-consciousness, love, and death. Some of his best known works include the novels *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1920) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928); the short story collections *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories* (1914), *The Horse Dealer's Daughter* (1922), *The Rocking-Horse Winner* (1926), *Love Among The Haystacks and Other Stories* (1930) among others.

Stop to Consider:

You should know that D.H. Lawrence was an avid traveler. Owing to various controversies on the one hand, and his lifelong sufferance from tuberculosis on the other, he moved from place to place and took up his subjects and themes from his experiences in travel. His works are set in various places, like Mexico, America, England, and Australia. A stern critic of the modern way of life, his works explore the deteriorating aspect of human beings in various settings of the world. Moral concerns and religious beliefs find place in his works, so do sensuality and sexual desires. Generally regarded as an obscene writer during his lifetime, his works had to undergo many fierce criticisms and censorship.

4.3 The Form:

The text included in your syllabus is the titular short-story from the collection *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories*. In the simplest of terms, you may say that a short-story basically deals with a single scene or an episode. This form of literature employs the minimum settings, and generally

revolves around lesser number of characters as compared to a novel. Further, this shorter form of fiction enables the author to express or represent his/her idea of a single subject/theme in a self-contained manner. The narrative revolves round a simple plot where the events and happenings carry forward the action. A powerful mode of expression, the short-story requires the reader to contemplate upon the subject/theme within a shorter period of time. Generally, a short-story is meant to be finished in a single sitting. However, there are exceptions as no clearly defined limit for the number of words for a short story exists, thereby making it one of the most elusive forms of literature. Short story such as D.H. Lawrence's 'The Fox' consists of around 30000 words; while there are other writers who had used only about 1000-1200 words for their stories. Somerset Maugham opines in the preface to *Complete Short Stories* that the word count in the short-stories should generally range between 1600 to 20000 words. In this respect the text with which you shall be dealing falls under the ambit of Maugham's standard classification as it consists of approximately 15000 words. The subject of the short-story has been varied since its existence as a literary form. Talking about its unprecedented popularity it can be said that this shorter literary form enables itself to be included in popular reading materials like the newspapers or the magazines, which adds to its easy access and large number of readers.

Stop to Consider:

Short-story as a form has been present since ages. It has been an integral part of oral literature. Though it is now an important genre of modern literary world, its existence as a form gained critical and serious attention only after the nineteenth century. With the modern man having less time to engage in leisure, the form of the short-story gained wider audience. Further, it served as the vehicle to express the modern sensibilities within a limited length. Its distinctive traits are the economy of setting, lesser number of characters and a generally simple plot. This form eludes broader description of the characters or the settings and generally opens up as well as closes abruptly. Due to its shorter length the development of character is not seen distinctly as in a novel. A brief fictional narrative, it takes up a certain event/issue and is able to engage the minds of the readers because of its compact form. The subject may be drawn from any aspect of life and used accordingly to express the thoughts and feelings of the character concerned.

4.4 Reading the Text:

Reading this would be more fruitful if you have already read the short-story on your own. That way you would be able to easily relate to the things mentioned in this unit. And if you have not yet read the story, then I would advise you to go back to the text so that everything which shall be discussed hereafter would enable you to gain a better understanding of the text. Those of you who have read the story shall find that D.H. Lawrence has aptly used the form of the short-story to represent the human thought process as well as the effects of modernity. He takes up a single setting and deals primarily with the main character's awakening towards spiritual fulfillment. The quest for spirituality occupies the central theme in the story. Based on the mining setting of Sierra Madne, Mexico, it dwells upon an unnamed female character, who is apparently fed up with her existing domestic lifestyle. The wife of a rich silver mine-owner, she appears to be confined within the rooms and garden of their house which whatsoever has no charm for her. The riches of her husband do not seem to relieve her, for what she experiences in her life is a perennial void. Age difference coupled with the husband's scant attention towards his wife, begin to hamper their relationship. Lawrence lets us know that the husband is a workaholic who sees marriage and children as mere by products of his work.

Contrary to the wife's initial belief that her marriage would be a happy one, she realizes after a period of a few years that maintaining a family or indulging in domestic activities were not the primary aspects of her husband's way of life. Indulging himself in a ranch and breeding dogs after the closure of the mines due to the war, Lederman, the husband is not able to see the growing gap in his marital relationship. Though his marriage seemed to be the most intimate of his things, his basic purpose in life was taken over by business and work. As Lawrence puts it, "he was a squeamish waif of an idealist, and really hated the physical side of life." (59) You shall find out that at a certain point of time the wife pleads her husband to take her somewhere in order to break away from the monotonous routine of her daily life. The husband too abides and they spend about three months in the town of El Paso. She happily enjoys her stay only to discover after her return that nothing had changed. For her, everything seemed to follow the same pattern of life again. With her jealous husband dictating her spatial movements, her life seemed nothing less than a life lived in slavery. Bored by the daily routines and the conditions of enslaved living, she becomes restless and resorts to

finding a meaning in life. The spark of self-fulfillment ignites when she overhears a discussion between her husband and one of his guests about the tribal Indians who dwelt across the hills. The faint enthusiasm of the guest's description of the unknown Indians touches the woman's heart: "She felt it was her destiny to wander into the secret haunts of these timeless, mysterious, marvelous Indians of the mountains." (61) She discovers more about the whereabouts of those tribes by asking her husband and comes to know about the Chilchuis tribe, who Lawrence says, are the most sacred tribe of all the Indians.

Her husband had to leave town for business purposes and would be away for three days. Seizing the opportunity she decides to break away from the shackles which had been binding her since her marriage by riding solo upon horseback towards the Indians' settlement. You have been told that she was never allowed to walk out of the house alone as the place was lawless and cruel. Add to that her husband's jealousy and possessiveness regarding her. Nevertheless she embarks upon her journey leaving her son in the care of the servant. Arming herself with the requisite supplies she ventures out into the woods. Never had she experienced such freedom in her life. The journey elates her and she continues to ride in spite of her tiredness. On the way she comes across three Indian men, and after ascertaining her purpose of visit they guide her towards the Chilchui settlement. It should be noted that the same Indians who were termed as barbaric and ruthless in the guest's conversation do not seem to invoke any kind of fear in her. In spite of being a woman, alone and helpless in the woods, she talks with the Indians with a newly discovered confidence. She was feeling proud "of her adventure and the assurance of her own womanhood, and the spell of the madness that was on her." (68) A realization dawns upon her, she becomes confident that she would be able to find satisfaction in the knowledge of their God. It is from this point that the story takes up the route of the spiritual dimension. With all these in mind she rides along with the three males and reaches the valley of the Chilchuis.

Check Your Progress:

1. Discuss Lawrence's representation of modern society with reference to the text. (200 words)

After the verification by the elders that she is not a missionary, her process of initiation into the new religion begins. She was sure that indulging herself in the ancient forms of beliefs and worship would enable her to attain divine happiness. You should not forget that she is in a quest for her soul, which otherwise had been buried deep under the unrelenting weight of mechanical and modern existence. Here, Lawrence contrasts the modern approach towards nudity by referring to the traditions of the Indians. Unlike most of Lawrence's fiction which dealt with the idea of sexual desire and sexuality; this short-story, through the portrayal of the ancient traditions and ways of the Indians, gives more importance to spirituality than sensuality. The scenes or episodes that follow in the Indians' territory stand in stark contrast with the modern way of living prevalent at that time. After her initiation she is gradually imparted the knowledge of the ancient god whom the Indians worshipped. Throughout the process she is given potions to drink which keeps her in a state of hallucination: "More and more her ordinary personal consciousness had left her, she had gone into that other state of passional cosmic consciousness, like one who is drugged. The Indians, with their heavily religious natures, had made her succumb to their vision" (93). With these "refined and heightened senses" she becomes aware of what is coming to her. It is evident from the text that the indigenous Indians believed in the prophecy where a Christian woman would appear before them and whose sacrifice would strengthen the native gods, which in turn will then be powerful enough to defeat the Christian god. Here the word 'god' can be seen as an umbrella term for all indigenous religious beliefs, customs and traditions. The intervention of the Christian missionaries into the indigenous tribal societies of America had given rise to hatred against them. The imposition of the cultural and religious values of the western world was becoming a matter of concern for the existence and beliefs of native tribes. It is because of these issues that the Indian characters in the short-story participate in the custom of sacrificing the white woman.

Stop to Consider:

The treatment of the Indians in the story serves to mark out the growing dissimilarities in opinions and worldviews among the people living in that period. The use of mystery in this story is of paramount importance because it is that element which fires up the imagination of the white woman and adds fuel to her desire of leaving her monotonous life.

Though she was bored and unhappy, she had not been able to find out a source of inspiration prior to her knowledge about the indigenous tribes. A simple conversation about the Indians would lead her to leave everything and strive towards mysticism. The form of the short-story has always encouraged Lawrence to view nature as a cure to the ailments of the modern world. You have been already told that Lawrence was well accustomed to the mining industry as his father also worked as a miner. Hence, he uses the form and setting to give an episodic view of the quest for spirituality and the price the lead character had to pay for it.

4.5 Major Themes:

Now we shall discuss some of the underlying themes in order to facilitate a better understanding of the text.

4.5.1 The Primitive versus the Modern:

While reading the text you have already found out that the society of the unnamed woman and her husband denotes the modern Euro-American or the Western civilization. By placing the Indian's way of life in the context of the story Lawrence is able to highlight some of the growing concerns of his period. Lawrence explores the impact of the clashes of these two cultures. In the earlier part of the story the woman is living an unhappy married life. All the riches and pleasures cannot quench her boredom. Her marriage appears to be a kind of slavery, where she could enjoy no freedom. Now, if you have noticed, her life in the Indian's territory is no different. She is drugged and kept in isolation. Here she does not object to the enslavement, rather she willingly submits herself in her quest of spirituality. Her sacrifice is the result of the intervention by the western culture. The Indians are ready to sacrifice a white woman since they believe that it would make their god more powerful; and the woman readily accepts it because she wants to come out of the chains of modernity itself. On a deeper level, the sacrifice is a testament to the quest of power. The Indians feel subjugated before the growing Western values of life; the sacrifice becomes necessary in their beliefs to come out of that dominion.

On another plane, business and commerce play an important role. Mining had become a major source of income for the people in the late 20th and

early 21st century. People were striking gold and silver and becoming rich within a fortnight. In this case, the habitats of the indigenous peoples of America, generally labeled as the Indians, were becoming the victims of mining exploration. The white supremacy as symbolized by the modern people was affecting the culture of the native people. As more and more mining fields were discovered and white settlements grew in numbers, the Indians' fear of fading into oblivion increased. The sacrificial act carried out on the white woman can be seen as an act of resistance in this respect, in which the woman too willingly participated. While the native Indians tend to live a normal life devoid of the mechanical and materialistic pleasures brought about by the advancement of science and technology; the modern people are so engaged in their materialistic striving that they tend to lose the very meaning of life itself. Artificiality was taking over the place of the natural. However, it would be inadvisable on our part to judge which culture is superior. Neither does Lawrence clearly demarcate between superiority and inferiority in the story. The most important thing which he seems to suggest is how one is affecting the other. And in this story the whole idea of human sacrifice and barbarism stems out of the forceful implementation of religious faiths upon the Indians. Their hatred for the Christian missionaries testifies to this. They do not want Christian beliefs to be imposed upon them.

4.5.2 Emancipation:

In the human world which had been following the norms of patriarchy since time immemorial, the plight of women gains no interest in the eyes of men. The modern society was no exception. The treatment of the female character is worth noticing because Lawrence makes her the central point around which the plot of the story develops. At the very outset Lawrence takes the readers into the inner consciousness of the character exposing her thought that "this marriage, of all marriages, would be an adventure" (57). Lawrence does not clearly imply that the woman is unhappy in the marriage because of physical inefficacies between her husband and herself. Nor does he give a hint about any type of physical abuse or conflict of interests. Her boredom primarily stemmed from the restlessness which she felt by being confined to the domestic atmosphere. Her outings were limited; she never had a chance to venture out into the world alone. She was constantly living under the husband's so-called protection which was the outcome of his jealousy! "he

was jealous of her as he was of his silver-mine” (59). This is the implication that his wife was no dearer to him than his material or earthly possessions. Hence, there was never a scope open for her to assert her individuality or personal passions. Moreover, the husband seemed more interested in his work as the story suggests. Hence the desire to seek out the life which she had envisioned prior to marriage was building inside her.

The title itself is suggestive of the fact that the utmost priority for the female protagonist of the story is freedom. The limited access to the outer world was tormenting her, and as soon as she found the opportunity, she did not for once hesitate to come out of it. She decided to escape the domestic sphere she was confined to, casting away the relationships with her husband and children only because she felt constrained with the mechanical and (defined) existence she was living. Had the husband given her the time and necessary freedom, her story might have had a different ending. Also, the effects of modernity come into play here. The modern people had become so engaged in the betterment of material life, of which her husband is the prime example, that they had failed to realize the importance of life itself. The idea of being in the wife’s shoes and thinking about her existence never really occurred in the husband’s mind. She was so fed up with her life that she had begun to search for freedom among the mysteries and traditions of a primitive religion. She convinces herself of the fact that spiritual enlightenment is the only way through which she could gain eternal bliss and freedom. Though this freedom comes to her at the cost of her life, what appears to matter most is the journey towards freedom. She embarks upon her journey without once looking back at her children or her home; she gives up all the riches and comforts of the home without giving a second thought. Such was the necessity to be free. And Lawrence gives a vivid and elaborate description of her journey towards the Chilchui territory to emphasize the fact that she had never felt freer in her life before.

4.5.3 Atonement:

By now you have been well acquainted with the woman’s willing sacrificial act in the story. Though it is her only way to be free and to attain spiritual fulfillment, we may talk about another dimension here. Scholars have mostly agreed upon the woman’s sacrifice as an act of atonement for whatever damages the modern society had imposed upon the native Indians in the continent of North America. They had their own tradition to follow and

cultural baggage to carry. The spatial exploration of their territories as well as the imposition of Christian values on them had instilled a fear on the minds of the natives. By reading the story you shall find out that the Indians were well aware of their present predicaments. They knew their god had become powerless and that the modern society was taking over. Hence, the white woman's willing submission may be seen as her decision to redeem herself as well as her society from all the disturbances it had brought to the Indians. Her choice to ride away reflects her desire to abandon the white consciousness which had been tormenting her since her marriage.

Self Asking Questions:

1. How does Lawrence associate the plight of the white woman with that of the position of women in the modern society?

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2. Can the lead woman character be seen as a victim of the male-dominated framework of social norms?

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4.5.4 White Supremacy:

D.H. Lawrence, through his treatment of spirituality and freedom in the story, is also able to highlight the superiority which the white people tried to impose upon the non-white population. You should know that Lawrence in his critique of the modern society hints at the white people's notion that they are the supreme creatures in the planet. The conversation between Lederman and one of his guests points to the white man's perception of other people:

Savages are savages, and all savages behave more or less alike: rather low-down and dirty, unsanitary, with a few cunning tricks, and struggling to get enough to eat. . . I don't know about mysteries – howling and heathen practices, more or less indecent. No, I see nothing wonderful in that kind of stuff. And I wonder that you should, when you have lived in London or Paris or New York. . . (61)

The differences in the Indians' ways of living and cultural practices do not find appreciation in the eyes of the white men. Their natural and somewhat wild or unpolish living style (in the eyes of the whites) is contrasted with the so-called refined manners of the white people. Since the Indians followed their traditional ways and means, they are deemed as savages and inferior. Lawrence makes use of two contrasting cultures in order to drive home his ironical observations on the modern Euro-American society.

Check Your Progress:

2. Discuss Lawrence's use of the mystic elements in the story. (150 words)

4.6 Style of the Text:

As a writer Lawrence always found himself in controversial situations, primarily owing to his explicit representation of sex and sensualities. His style of language clearly associates with the theme he deals with in his works. This story however follows a slightly different angle. Nothing much is highlighted about sexuality or sexual desires in the story; the emphasis is on the emancipation of the lead woman character, and on the natives' resistance to the impending materialism of the colonial white population. Hence, sexually explicit words and phrases are null, and the style is in keeping with the subjects. He never uses sensual terms in his description of the Indians and their traditions. Though we are told in the concluding part of the story that the eldest man in the village is about to strike the knife and complete the act of human sacrifice, Lawrence leaves the story open-ended.

A distinctive trait of modern writing, Lawrence does not provide the picture after the sacrifice; rather he leaves it to the imagination of his readers. What is remarkable is the intensity with which Lawrence deals the characters in the story. Limiting authorial interference despite using the third person omniscient narrative technique, Lawrence opens up the narrative to multiple points of view. The text is written in a lucid and fast moving style where the plight of the woman trying to come out of the modern and industrial society has been discussed. Lawrence makes use of primitivism and the description of the natives is in keeping with the themes and motifs he explores in his story.

Self Asking Questions:

3. Comment on Lawrence’s narrative technique from your reading of the text.

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4. Does the setting of the text justify Lawrence’s treatment of the themes in the story? If yes, how?

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4.7 Importance of the Text:

You should be aware that D.H. Lawrence’s ‘The Woman Who Rode Away’ first appeared in 1925 when modernism in literature was at its peak. With the publication of seminal texts like *The Wasteland* (1922) by T.S. Eliot and the experimentation with the narrative technique by Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Joseph Conrad to name a few, English literature was moving towards a new dimension. These writers seemed to break away from the traditional modes of expression and deviated from established norms and conventions. Forms of literature like novel, poetry and short-story did not follow the traditional linear movement. The First World War was also paramount in de-stabilizing dominant styles writing. The experiences and thought processes after the War could not be assimilated within the existing norms of literature. A newer technique and style was needed to express the changes that occurred during this period. Hence, the techniques like stream of consciousness, non-linear narration and other similar modes of expression gained prominence.

The consciousness of the modern society was moving in rapid flux and modernist literature deals with those kinds of changes. Though the text under consideration does not follow the non-linear technique, you cannot dismiss the fact that it is modern. Lawrence uses the traditional mode of narration to deal with the same intricacies of life which the modern society experienced. The influence of materialism in the lives of the people, the spiritual alienation experienced after the Great War, the conflicts between humans and the environment, the decline of consciousness, the rapidly changing consciousness of an individual have all been dealt with in the story. The themes and motifs in the text are distinctively modern, and so is the setting of the story. This text enables the readers to realize the confusion and alienation brought about by modernity and its effects upon the individuals. When read

in utmost detail, you shall find out that Lawrence's work is a pioneering effort in highlighting the traits of modernity.

4.8 Summing Up:

Written against the backdrop of the modern period, this text exposes the ground realities which the modern civilization experienced. You should read the text keeping in mind the basic tenets of modern English literature. Written while D.H. Lawrence was in Mexico, he intricately carves out the two opposing forces of primitivism and modernism in order to drive home his dislike of the capitalist society. From your reading you must have developed an idea that Lawrence is one of the major writers of the modern period. In his literary career, he has been able to touch many issues and realities pertaining to the advancement of modern civilization. His language in this story is lucid and the descriptions are very realistic in nature. To sum up, you should note the importance this text plays in representing the chaos and disorders of the society.

Check Your Progress:

3. Examine D.H. Lawrence's text as a reaction to modernity. (200 words)

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Unit 5

MANOJ DAS (1934-): ‘THE MISTY HOUR’

Contents:

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- 5.3 The Form and the Text**
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- 5.6 Importance of the Text**
- 5.7 Summing Up**
- 5.8 References and Suggested Readings**
- 5.9 Answers to Check Your Progress**

5.0 Introduction:

Post-Independence Indian English Literature has witnessed the emergence of many important writers. These writers were instrumental in making Indian English literature flourish in almost all the major forms – novel, short-story, drama, essay and poetry. The literature, especially the short-stories, coming out in this period is deeply Indian in tone and sensibility. You should note that all the world renowned literary personalities like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Keki N. Daruwalla, Manohar Malgaonkar, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Nayantara Sehgal to name a few, belong to this period. They have their own variety of themes and settings. However one common thing which you shall notice in their literary outputs is that they share distinctive Indian ethos and sentiments. These works reflect their richness in expression and encompass their views on contemporary Indian society. Among such writers, Manoj Das has established himself as one of the greatest living bilingual authors in India. He has produced a wide volume of literature in

the two languages – Odia and English. A radical writer, he has been a part of various literary conferences and associations in India. In this unit we shall deal with one of his famous short-stories named ‘The Misty Hour’.

5.1 Objectives:

After the discussion of this unit you shall be able to

- *discuss* the life and works of Manoj Das
- *analyze* the themes and motifs of the story
- *investigate* the elements of Indianness in his work
- *formulate* an idea about the political atmosphere of the period
- *assess* the then Indian contemporary society

5.2 Manoj Das – Life and Works:

Born in 1934 at a remote coastal village named Balasore in the state of Odisha, India, Manoj Das had to undergo many hardships throughout the process of his growing up. He grew up amidst nature’s variety as well as with the devastating varieties of nature. He had experienced the fury of a cyclone, the calamity brought about by famine, and the deaths and horrors of an epidemic. Furthermore, his house was also plundered by bandits on two occasions. All these experiences were instrumental in shaping the creative imagination of the writer. His father was in the land-owning profession under the British government, and owing to it he was able to come to terms with many important and influential personalities since his childhood. He showed his artistic qualities at a very young age as he published a book in his native language when he was just fourteen years old. At fifteen, he launched a journal named *Diganta* which eventually gained a significant place in the Odia literary tradition. As a student he seemed to follow a revolutionary Marxist attitude as he became as a youth leader and participated in many agitations. He became the President of the University Law College Union, the Secretary of the federation of student and also was also an active member of the Afro-Asian Students Conference held at Indonesia in 1956.

He worked as a lecturer in English at a college in Cuttack for four years before leaving it to get himself involved with mysticism. He settled himself along with his wife in the ashram of Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry, India and has been living there since 1963. He has been a regular columnist in the

major newspapers of India like *The Times of India*, *The Hindu* and *The Hindustan Times*. Apart from this he is also associated with many regional newspapers of Odisha. You should note that he is one of the most loved bilingual authors whose works in both the languages have gained significant literary attention. Apart from all this he also works as an author-consultant to the Education Ministry, Government of Singapore teaching hundreds of teachers per year. Another landmark with which he is associated is his research in the London and Edinburgh archives which has brought into light into some of the important events of the Indian freedom struggle led by Sri Aurobindo of the many awards and recognition he has received during his lifetime, the Sahitya Academy Award, the Odisha Sahitya Academy Award, the Sahitya Bharati Award, and the Sarala Award, are a few notable ones.

Manoj Das has been highly influential in using folk elements and a rural environment in his works. His treatment of mystical elements also highlights his adherence to cultural and social norms of the Indian society. He has been rightly termed as a devout interpreter of folklore. His works provide an original image of India, be it in rural settings or suburban. Human consciousness remains the constant investigation in his works. If you take a look at his works you shall hardly find violence, sex or anxiety regarding human loss; instead he focuses deeply on human psyche and is always optimistic about the betterment of the human society in general. Some of his major works in English include the stories titled 'A Trip into the Jungle', 'The Submerged Valley', 'Farewell to A Ghost', 'Statue-Breakers Are Coming', 'Creatures of Cricket', 'The Misty Hour', 'Mystery of the Missing Cap' among others. Apart from short-stories he has also written a few novels and travelogues.

5.3 The Form and the Text:

One of the master story-tellers living in India at the present moment, Manoj Das has very succinctly used this newer form of literature in conveying his observations on the society of India. I have used the term 'newer' because though the short-story had been present since the beginning of literature, or you can say since human beings learnt to communicate, it is only in the nineteenth century that it was established as a distinct literary form. Prior to this period it was not critically looked upon compared to other forms. Because of modernization beginning in the later part of the nineteenth century the lives of the people were changing. For the writers, there was always

something new to observe and comment upon. Due to the rapid development of science and technology people were becoming busier day by day. Hence a shorter form was easily appreciated as it demanded economy of time. The effects of modernity were dawning upon humanity and hence concerns about the futility of human civilization were growing in the minds of the intellectuals and thinkers of that period. Since the form of the short-story demanded economy of setting, writers were able to take up a single issue and express their concern using its form. A short-story is generally compact, based upon a single scene or episode and could be read in a single sitting. Further, it gave the facility to deal with all the aspects of society – political, economical, emotional and familial in a concise manner. This made the short-story increasingly popular for the writers as well as for the readers.

The effects of modernity were felt all over the world and India was no exception. Moreover, India as a country was young as it had gained Independence only in 1947. The environment of India in the early twentieth century was highly political as the struggle for freedom from the British rule was at its peak. Since literature is considered to be the mirror of the society, the societal conditions of that period were bound to be reflected in literary works. Many Indian writers took up the English language to express their views and opinions, primarily because it was the only language through which they could reach out to a wider audience. You should consider all these things while reading this short-story. I hope you have already acquainted yourself with the text, and if you have not then I suggest you go back and read the text first. And those of you who had read the text, this unit aims to help you to gain a comprehensive understanding of the text by facilitating deeper insights into the themes, motifs and style which Manoj Das have used in this short-story.

Self Asking Questions:

1. Comment briefly upon the growth and development of the English short-story in India.

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2. What are the characteristic features of a short-story?

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In this particular short-story Manoj Das provides us with the social atmosphere of India in the third decade of the twentieth century. The opening lines of the story allow us to imagine the then society, which was so new to modernity. His descriptions of the provincial town show us that automobiles were new since the dogs were not used to the roar and humming of the engines and hence they barked whenever cars passed by them in the streets. He also expresses the innocent way of expressing love at that period by saying that “a young lady blushing violently at a fluttering look from a young man in the college corridors was evidence enough of her responding to his love.” He also goes on to say how love marriages worked at that period. Caste consciousness can be felt here as the story says that nine out of ten couples belonged to the same caste. Moreover, the prevalence of superstitions and blind belief in horoscope can be discerned. Within a single line Manoj Das gives us the nature of the existing social systems, he mentions a single word about dowry and we become conscious of the pathetic dowry system that was prevalent at that period. You can take that as an example of Manoj Das’s art of story-telling.

The author gives us a further description of what modernity meant at that period; it meant “a newlywed lady, almost half her face revealed to the public, sharing a hand-pulled rickshaw with her husband, and when a monthly magazine highlighted the phenomenon of progress on its cover showing a young lady cycling by...” Manoj Das always looked at the brighter side of life as evident from his works; here too he gives us a satirical overview of the modern Indian society. However, the satire here is mild and humorous rather than a scathing attack. The character of Roopwati is introduced to let us know about the importance that a beautiful female face carried in that period. Suggestive of her name, she must have been so beautiful that even at the old age of seventy her cheeks blushed. Reminiscing about her younger days and all the modern elements that she had experienced in youth make her cheeks bloom. An epitome of a perfect lady based on the standards of that time, she was a learned woman too as the narrator tells us that she was a graduate. And you might be well aware that in those days graduation was not everyone’s cup of tea. Furthermore, she could even sing melodiously. Her pride also comes to the surface when she asserts that some of the best poetry was written by great poets of that time so that it could be sung by her. Through all these Das paints us a picture of Roopwati with his great technique of word play. Now, you should note that, generally, the Indian freedom struggle was dominated by the participation of men, even though

there were exceptions like Rani Lakshmi Bai, Sarojini Naidu and others. The participation of women increased only when Gandhi made people aware the necessity of women in the struggle for freedom. It was against that background that the female character Roopwati also joined the freedom struggle. It came like a storm for the common public, because they were not able to digest the fact that such a beautiful lady with brains can join the movement. You can easily perceive the common worldview of Indian society at that period.

Stop to Consider:

Most of the short-stories by Manoj Das are humorous. He uses witty language and remarks which reflect the originality of the situation. The description of the wedding night in this story is humorous in the fact that it instantly makes us laugh when we imagine a situation like that. The remarks made by Roopwati and the title of the treatises narrated by Jagdishji, especially the third one, appear humorous because of the context in which these are placed. If you go through the conversation between the two you shall find that Das has used the colloquial language to serve his purpose of showing us the disagreement between the partners. Roopwati is the character in this story through which Das employs his humour. Hence, in this story you can find many humorous descriptions and events associated with her.

Roopwati was confident of her success in the political sphere owing to her extraordinary oratory skills. However, the narrator says that there was one flaw in her – her habit of self-praise. This was the reason why her colleagues disliked her. It becomes evident in the story that she was not able to climb up the political ladder as people thought she would. She was not clever enough to make her praise come out of another's mouth like the other successful politicians of her time did. Nor did her marriage yield a happier result. She had married a person named Jagdishji, the one who stood out in her eyes because of the combination of virtues his personality carried – an idealist, a patriot, and a strong integrity of character. It was only on their wedding night she realized that the marriage would not work out. The marital dissatisfaction does not last long for her as her husband dies at the age of thirty-five. The narrative now moves to the post-Independence period and the narrator lets us know about the impact which Roopwati's oratory skills had when she spoke against the British Raj demanding independence. This

had made her famous among the leaders and now that same thing was used by the budding politicians to speak ill of their colleagues. Instead of becoming a leader she was now a mere tool to be used for the political benefits of others.

In the meantime the story introduces another major character named Chinmoy Babu. Keeping the mayoral election in the background, Das gives us a view of the politics of the day. An intelligent and culturally oriented politician, and also one of the greatest freedom fighters of his generation, Chinmoy Babu lived a humble life and never went after any sort of recognition. It was when the party workers were fed up with their incompetent leaders that they felt the necessity to make Chinmoy Babu the mayor. It was Roopwati's assertion that Chinmoy Babu had once been her lover. And when Chinmoy Babu refused to make Roopwati the manager of his Chief Ministerial campaign, she became furious and turned against him. She made a scandalous revelation that forty years back he had tried to become physically intimate with her. In order to save the reputation of Chinmoy Babu, a man named Dhani Choudhury, who was out of politics for almost twenty years, comes out of the blue and confesses that it was he who had advanced his amorous hands towards her in the darkness. He was even ready to distribute written and printed leaflets mentioning his confession. Before any decision was taken Roopwati contracted pneumonia and died soon thereafter. Now in the final part of the story, the scene moves to the day before the polls. In the midst of a tour to his constituency, Chinmoy Babu asks the narrator to stop by the place where Roopwati was cremated. Placing a bouquet of flowers he weeps and weeps. After sometime he gets into the car and they move towards their destination. The story ends with the narrator speculation about Dhani Choudhury's confession: was it true or just an effort to save the reputation of Chinmoy Babu?

Stop to Consider:

Irony and satire are the tools which any writer makes use of whenever he/she wants to provide some sort of criticism. In this story you shall see that Roopwati stands in stark contrast with the rest of the society. She is everything what other women are not. Her manners, her powerful language and her personality as a whole are quite different from the women of her times. She seems to be the lady who would achieve newer heights wherever she goes. What happens is exactly the

opposite. Though she finds herself in a position where no one could subdue her, she incurs losses throughout her life. Her marriage fails her, she does not get any prominent political leadership and her attachment to Chinmoy Babu brings no success. To sum up, she lives a tragic life and dies lonely. Here Manoj Das uses her tragedy as an irony to make us investigate the apparent perfections in life.

5.4 Major Themes:

Some of the major areas which you should look upon in ‘The Misty Hour’ are:—

5.4.1 Politics:

By now you should be well aware that politics is the dominant theme of this text. The characters who occupy the central position in the story are Roopwati, Chinmoy Babu and Dhani Choudhuri; and all the three are involved with the politics of their time. Be it the struggle for Indian independence or the betterment of personal careers in politics after the Independence, they are testimonies to the various happenings in Indian politics. Manoj Das uses these three characters to present us with a scenario that was common and prevalent at that time. You all know that politics is a complex thing characterized by truth, lies, half-truth, deception, honesty, optimism, personal gains, selfishness and selflessness all acting in a parallel plane. Against these background Das places three different characters and exposes the political games played in order to serve each other’s purpose. Very aptly and suggestively Das initially describes the advent of modernity in Indian society in the 1930s. In order to make his observations more vivid Das begins his story in the 1930s. This was the time when India as a nation was experiencing massive political uprising. It was the period when Gandhi with his ideals had changed the face of India’s freedom struggle. The period between 1920 and 1950 witnessed major freedom movements like the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the Quit India Movement. Political consciousness was looping around the minds of the Indian population, both young and old. Participation of women also tremendously increased during this period.

Initially this consciousness seemed to carry one objective – freedom from the British Raj. However, through this story Das seems to suggest that the political scenario changed after Independence. Personal motives and career advancement took over and people got caught up in the tidal wave of politics.

This is reflected through the brief sketch of the three characters which Das provides. Roopwati was a woman who had against all odds joined the struggle. Chinmoy Babu was also actively associated with the movement and so was Dhani Choudhury. They had made significant contributions towards the freedom movement. When India emerged as a nation after Independence, it was during that period that politics took a sharp turn. When Roopwati was denied the position of manager in Chinmoy Babu's electoral campaign for the post of Chief Minister, she joined the opposing party and campaigned against him by using her oratory skills as the tool. The reputation of Chinmoy Babu received a blow when she mentioned a particular incident of the past where Chinmoy Babu had made sexual advances towards her. Long time colleagues became fierce opponents; such was the nature of Indian politics.

The narrator implies that playing games was very popular. In order to save the reputation of Chinmoy Babu, Dhani Choudhuri comes out of his political hiding and accepts that it was he who had made sexual advances towards her. The truth is blurred as we are left on our own to decide. We just know that Aunt Roopwati had reduced herself to meanness for her personal benefits. When you look at the character of Chinmoy Babu, you shall find that he is the example of a perfect politician. Loved and respected by all, he never hankered after political success or personal gains. People adored him and thereby wanted him to be the leader of the state. However, the ending of the story leaves us with the question: If Dhani Choudhuri's claim was just to save Chinmoy Babu, then what was the truth? Why did Chinmoy Babu not say anything about that? And if Chinmoy Babu was really guilty of advancing sexual offers, it is clear that he was also getting himself in the dirty game of saving one's reputation. Though nothing has been made clear about the culprit, Manoj Das raises the question and leaves it open for the readers to contemplate. The open question hints at the possibility of twisting truths and selling lies which was not uncommon in political practices.

Self Asking Questions:

1. Give your observations on the effect of politics on human relationships.
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2. Comment on the nature of Indian politics from your reading of the text.
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5.4.2 Human Relationships:

After your reading of the short-story you must be aware that it is not a total love-story; nor is it a mystical or spiritual quest for a deeper understanding of things. However, you should note the way Manoj Das is able to ironically point out the fact that when it comes to personal gains, human relationships are nothing more than futile exercises. The deep bond which was shared by Chinmoy Babu and Roopwati since their younger days could not weather the political storm. The narrator even contemplates that she had a soft corner for him. However, it did not take even a moment for Roopwati to cast away cordial relations and speak ill of her competitor. She did not once care about the effects her assertion would have on her colleague's political career and social reputation. The emotional ties which held people together were now replaced by practical and functional ties. Modernity had its effects and this appears to be one of them. People had become oriented towards materialism and practicality so much so that the emotional attachments did not seem to have any lasting impact.

Roopwati's wedding night is another example which exposes the marital relationships of modern India. When Jagdishji deviates from the usual customs and coerces Roopwati into listening to the three things he had written, she becomes furious and at the very moment realizes that their marriage would not work. You should not forget that she had chosen Jagdishji as her husband among many competitive suitors primarily because she thought he possessed an integrity of character and was different from others in that respect. But their scuffle in the wedding night was strong enough to tear apart the sacred vows of marriage. It has been said that after that incident they hardly spoke with each other. It ended only when Jasdishji died. Their relationship gives us the scope to speculate about the complexity of perceptions which modernism brought.

Now the final part of the story reinstates the value of human relationships. In the story the narrator says that the death of Roopwati gave relief to all the well-wishers, but such was not the case with Chinmoy Babu. Though we do not know what impact Roopwati's revelation had on Chinmoy Babu's Chief Ministerial candidature as the story ends just before the polling day, the tears of Chinmoy Babu suggests that he had forgiven her for all she had done and was mourning her death. We cannot be sure whether he had romantic feelings for her or was just grieving the death of his colleague. It can only be said that casting away all the political rivalries, he was able to

connect emotionally. In the midst of all things plotted and done for the cause of political success, the final scene appears to be the only one suggesting the value of life and human relationship.

5.4.3 Female Voice:

In an otherwise male dominated society, Roopwati successfully breaks away from all the perceived opinions and becomes an influential figure in the political sphere. Armed with great oratory skills coupled with her intelligence and beauty she appears to hold power even with the topmost political leaders of the region. She had such a hold that even the top leaders could not exert their power and positions against her. This is because “she could strip layer after layer of their reputation with incredible ease, like peeling an onion, leaving nothing at the end.” Breaking down all the barriers and conventions she is able to assert her individuality. And you should note that she was highly ambitious. In a society where, generally, women did not dare or get the chance to express themselves or hold a position, Roopwati had other things on her mind. This kind of portrayal becomes Das’s ironical tool in commenting upon the nature of Indian society.

There are other examples too: he also mentions the picture of a young lady riding a bicycle. Such things were new and women were gradually realizing that they were not meant to be chained only to domestic chores. Indian society was on the brink of change and what evidence is truly convincing than the hold which Roopwati had in the political sphere. However, the quest for power did not go well in the later part of Roopwati’s life. Unable to accept rejection she decided to go against one of her most admired colleagues. You should note that never did she stoop down or bend her head. Even at the age of seventy she possessed the power to bring differences in the public opinion. Her charges against Chinmoy Babu are a testimony, to that. She can be seen as an example of a true fighter who never gives up and who tries to retain his/her position by any means possible. Blind glorification of her character is not advisable, but you should not forget that she was fighting at a time when female participation in areas like politics was not deemed important. It is the setting in which Manoj Das places her that makes her stand out in the story. Chinmoy Babu’s visit to the remains of her funeral pyre shows that he had deep respect for her. No matter what their political conflicts were, he seems to accept her as the one who had the extraordinary capabilities to overcome any barriers that came in her way.

Self Asking Questions:

1. Compare and contrast the society depicted in the story with the society in which you live.

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2. Attempt a feminist reading of the text.

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Check Your Progress:

1. Manoj Das’s ‘The Misty Hour’ deals with the issues of politics, womanhood, and modernism in general. Do you agree? Illustrate your answer. (300 words)

5.5 Style of the Text:

Manoj Das is quite famous for using a style which suits his treatment of the themes. In ‘The Misty Hour’ he aptly employs idiomatic expressions such as “Jagdishji clad in spotless white” or “all the city fathers made a beeline for the mayoral chair”. His use of such phrases heightens the effect which he aims to convey. His use of a language which is simple and very vividly brings out the Indian ethos and sentiments is highly commendable. His subtle use of irony and humour adds flavour to his treatment of themes. He uses an economy of words which is a distinctive trait of the short-story form and his words are quite dramatic in expression. This technique ignites the reader’s imagination about a particular event and makes him/her think about it. Another important style of Manoj Das in his story is the generation of suspense. Though this is not in abundance in the text under consideration, most of his other stories employ the element of surprise and suspense. His narration is simple and flows in a linear motion.

You should note that the narrator in this story is initially a journalist. Later on he goes on to become a close confidante of the chief ministerial candidate Chinmoy Babu. By making the narrator present in the scene, Manoj Das is able to portray a realistic image of the setting he has chosen. Without any authorial interventions the narrative moves forward through the eyes of the narrator. Also, his presence allows the readers to read the story as his first-

hand experiences of the political environment of that period. This adds to the element of reality which Manoj Das wants his readers to realize.

5.6 Importance of the Text:

This short-story of Manoj Das is a criticism of modern life. Being a realist, he uses the characters to expose an array of events and happenings in the political atmosphere and its effects on their lives. This story gains prominence because of Das's handling of the themes. Using the scope of the short-story he presents us with a comprehensive view of the nature of Indian politics of that period. The context on which the story is based, i.e. a provincial town allows him to dive into the realities experienced by the common people. You should not forget that Das frequently deals with the rural aspect – villages and provincial towns are his settings. Generally it is the common people who suffer the most when any decision taken by the leaders go wayward; their lives are the most affected. He takes up the freedom struggle and moves towards the politics of a new nation by exposing the ongoing in a small provincial town. He uses the mist as his symbol for blurred truths. Like being in a mist, a person cannot see the inner games and schemes employed by the politicians. It is always in a blurred state just like the scandal which appears in the later part of the story. The text allows the readers to relate to the Indian ethos and sensibilities. It is an important social and political documentation of the life of Indian people in general.

Check Your Progress:

2. Discuss 'The Misty Hour' as a satire on post-Independence Indian society. (300 words)

5.7 Summing Up:

You have now got a fair idea of Indian society in general and of the style and technique of Manoj Das's short-story in particular. It is because of the form that Das has been able to take up a distinct setting and portray what he experienced during that period. The feelings, emotions, and the characters carry distinctive Indian traits. The ending is left open, thereby creating a sense of mystery about the things that happened thereafter. It justifies the title because mysteries obscure truth just as a mist or dusk obscures clear vision.

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5.9 Answers to Check Your Progress:

Ans 1. Politics, womanhood and contemporary issues have been integral parts of literature for long. 'The Misty Hour', being a modern text, also deals with the events and happenings of its contemporary period. After 1947, India emerged as a new country. Having been freed from the colonial masters, the people of India celebrated freedom with great enthusiasm. However, in the field of internal social and political aspects, nothing much had changed. Corruption prevailed, and so did patriarchy and other social evils. A new government was on the making and people tried to better their lives through active participation in it. An important thing which Manoj Das makes clear is the reason for people's involvement in politics. Pre-independent India saw numerous people taking stand, joining the fight for freedom and ultimately giving up their lives in the process. However, Post-independent Indian society saw the emergence of personal gains through politics. The characters in the story provide testimonies to the fact that people were interested in politics mainly because they could exercise power and money according to their whims.

By taking up a female character in the lead role, Manoj Das also exposes the plight of the Indian women and their social positions. In her efforts to escape social discrimination and gender-specific roles, Roopwati makes use of her beauty and charm to seek public admiration as well as to climb up the social ladder. Moreover, with the advent of modernism she finds a scope to cast away gender roles and achieve what she sought. The changes brought about by modernism in the Indian society can be discerned from the earlier part of the story where Das talks about dowry, romantic relationships and marriage customs. This story is indeed a social documentation of India; an India which was on the brink of changes brought about by modernism, as well as on the initial stages of political development.

Ans 2. A reading of 'The Misty Hour' makes it quite clear that the effects of modernity and the emergence of a new national identity were felt in every part of India. It was the period when numerous changes in all the aspects of life were occurring, and people were yet to be accustomed to this newness. Things were misty and people were not immune to the ill effects of those changes. This story takes into account such happenings in a provincial setting and provides a satirical overview of the post-Independent Indian society. Social evils and political gains were prevalent, and Manoj Das draws his characters imbibing them with all the personal prejudices and experiences which people encountered during that period. Because of political gains and competitions the essence of human relationships was minimized. What is more, comrades who had shared the freedom struggle had now become arch rivals in politics. Their course of lives change and they resort to unethical means to achieve their purpose. Roopwati is a modern Indian lady, educated and intelligent. Though she was able to cast off all the gender assumed roles and create her unique identity in the midst of a male dominated society, she however fails to keep pace with ethics and friendships. On being denied a political position, she resorts to making personal claims with the view of tainting the political reputation of the opposition leader. A strong character like hers also falls prey to the complexities of the modern political life. Other characters like Jagdishji and Chinmoy Babu are also placed in a similar political situation where they had to look beyond friendship and love. The story, in general, can be seen as a social satire on humans, modernism and post-Independent India.

Unit 6

ROHINTON MISTRY (1952-): ‘RUNNING WATER’

Contents:

- 6.0 Introduction**
 - 6.0.1 About the Author**
 - 6.0.2 Summary**
- 6.1 Objectives**
- 6.2 Travel Writing**
- 6.3 Pop Culture**
- 6.4 Tibetan Refugees**
- 6.5 Summing Up**
- 6.6 References and Suggested Readings**
- 6.7 Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’**

6.0 Introduction:

“Running Water” by Rohinton Mistry is a popular travel account, marked for its humorous, comic qualities and stark, documentary style that throws light on various aspects of the place he is visiting, about the hardships of travelling, about pop culture, etc.

6.0.1 About the Author:

Rohinton Mistry was born in Bombay (now Mumbai), India in 1952 to a Parsi family.

He graduated with a degree in Mathematics and Economics from the University of Bombay in 1974. Thereafter, he left for Canada in the following year and married his fiancée. He settled down in Toronto and worked as a bank clerk for some time and then studied English and Philosophy at the University of Toronto, getting his second second degree in 1982. His first short story titled “One Sunday”, published in 1983, won the First Prize in

the Canadian Hart House Literary Contest. He won another Hart House prize for “Auspicious Occasion” in 1984. After sometime he chose to become a full-time writer with the grants that he received. He then published his *Tales from Firozsha Baag* in 1987 (published as *Swimming Lessons* in the US), which is a collection of eleven short stories that present the lives of a Parsi community residing in the apartment complex known as Firozsha Baag in Bombay. His next book, a novel titled *Such a Long Journey* (1991), is the story of a Bombay bank clerk who unwittingly becomes involved in a fraud committed by the government. The novel which is set in 1971 during a time of domestic turbulence and war with Pakistan, also alludes to the political instability of India under Indira Gandhi in the mid ’70s. It won many prestigious awards including the Governor General’s Award, the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book, and was even shortlisted for the Booker Prize. His third book, *A Fine Balance* (1995), again a novel, is set in the years of Emergency rule in India in the 1970s. It is one of Mistry’s most well-known and successful books. Mistry who is critical of Indira Gandhi’s Emergency, details downsides of the same, looking at its effects upon the Parsi community and the poor in Bombay. It won the Giller Prize, the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. His 2002 novel *Family Matters* is set in Bombay during the 1990’s. It tells the story of an old and retired Parsi widow suffering from Parkinson’s disease and living with his step-children. His illness strains his relationship with the family members who feel burdened by it. The book thus exposes the pitiable state of senior-citizens. The novel was shortlisted for the 2002 Man Booker Prize for Fiction.

Mistry’s latest book *The Scream*, published in 2008, returns to the issue of ageing and the difficulties and discrimination that come with it (as he did in his previous work). In 2011, the book was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize and in 2012, it won the Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

Marked for his realist and documentary style, Mistry’s works present the diverse customs and traditions of the Parsi community living in India and are considered as rich sources of ethnographic information regarding the community. His works are also read as historical fictions that deal with important historical moments of post-Independence India, especially the instance of Emergency rule, to which he returns time after time.

6.0.2 Summary:

The travelogue by Mistry begins with a description of his arrival in Dharmsala, Himachal Pradesh during the monsoon season with a purpose to visit his relatives living there. He reaches the rundown hotel—‘Hotel Bhagsu’ with some difficulty. It had been raining continuously and Mistry’s luggage was completely drenched, and he stepped inside the hotel all soggy, wet and dripping. He was informed by the desk clerk that he will be provided with candles as there was no supply of electricity for quite some time due to a local problem—the electric workers were on strike for some reason and there was no electricity in the whole region. He reported another problem to the weary tourist—the lack of tap water. The heavy rains had uprooted huge rocks which fell on water pipes and broke them. Mistry was already aware of this situation as he had seen the “pipe-breaking avalanches” from his taxi on his way. As an alternative, he would be given two buckets of water per day and he immediately asks for some for a bath. The irony of this scarcity is that the name of the hotel—‘Bhagsu’—meant ‘running water’, the title of the piece, but there was no running water to enjoy. Mistry wonders about where the water he is provided with has been obtained and guesses that there must be a well nearby. He sets out to make the best of his circumstances and spreads out his wet clothes all over his room to dry. He remembers the warnings to avoid visiting Dharmsala during the monsoon season and regrets not heeding them.

When Mistry pulled the curtains open, he was greeted with “a spectacular view of the Kangra Valley” and he falls into a reflective mood. He reminisces about the Dalai Lama living there since the 1950’s. The Dalai Lama, a respected religious figure of Buddhism, was forced to flee his home in Tibet due to the Chinese invasion of the place. He sought refuge in India which was granted and he was followed by other Tibetans who wanted to be with their spiritual leader. Groups of Tibetan refugees thus arrived after a series of difficulties and hardships, bringing stories and news of horrific Chinese torture which involved killing of Buddhist monks, destruction of monasteries, wiping out the history of Tibetan culture, etc. The exiled Dalai Lama and his persecuted followers, who could not return to the Chinese-occupied Tibet made Dharmsala their temporary home and abode. Mistry thinks that the Dalai Lama (who had other titles like “Precious Protector”, “Gentle Glory”, “Ocean of Wisdom”) chose Dharmsala because its landscape of ice and snow and its atmosphere resembled Tibet in many ways, being a “quiet

mountain hamlet in the Himalayas”. Visitors and tourists worldwide began to flock to Dharmsala to see its Tibetan colony, the Children’s village, and other landmarks like the Namgyal Monastery, the new temple, the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, etc. At this point Mistry turns nostalgic, recalling his childhood fantasies about the place. He says that when he was young, he always found it fascinating that he had an uncle living in Dharmsala, running a family business of the Nowrojees, far away from their native state of Bombay. The uncle would send photographs of the place to relatives in Bombay (Mumbai) periodically—photos of snow-covered mountains and trails, of uncle and aunty dressed in the traditional costumes of the hill people, of uncle posing with his wife and children with a snow-clad background, clothed in winter-wear, etc. Living in Bombay, a hot coastal city, Mistry would find it amazing that such a place existed in India—a country known for its oppressive heat, dust and grime. And he always desired to visit this “foreign”, “magical” place ever since. But for some reasons and problems, his dream to visit Dharmsala always kept getting postponed. But the adult Mistry took a different and longer journey to Canada where he settled down. He found this ironical and decided that the next time he came to Bombay, nothing would stop him from visiting Dharmsala—”not monsoon rain nor ticket queues nor diarrhoea nor avalanches”. With this determination, he undertook the harrowing trip to Dharmsala. He describes the journey to the readers in detail. From Bombay, he took a first-class train which after twenty-eight hours, brought him to Punjab. Here he gives us a funny anecdote. It was raining hard when he arrived and he was approached by a rickshaw-puller inside the station. He thought there might be a scarcity of transportation due to the rain and he gives his agreement to the rickshaw-puller to be taken to the Pathankot bus station. With great dismay he realised a little too late that there were three-wheelers parked outside—autos which gave better protection against the rain when compared to the “pitiful cycle rickshaw”. And sure enough, he was drenched despite having his raincoat on, and all his belongings were soaked with water as well. Later, despite his disappointment with the rickshaw-wallah, he listened to the latter’s advice that a taxi was better than a bus in this weather. And he was glad he did so because he noticed on his way that buses had been pulled over to the side of the road because of avalanches that rendered the road too narrow for big vehicles.

Mistry then describes the geographical features of Dharmsala; it is a colony of settlements spread out in the lower ridges of the Dhauladur range. The

range is a southern projection of the Himalayas and encircles the Kangra district. He mentions the famous McLeod Gunj which he notices on his way. He also mentions other places like the Kotwali Bazaar—the main commercial centre with its shops, restaurants and lodgings, Forsyth Gunj, the military cantonment, etc. He talks a little about the British history regarding this region. When the British were ruling India, they thought of making Dharmsala their “summer capital” as it was too hot to be in the plains during this season. But official records say that their plans were foiled by the earthquake in 1905 which damaged the place and they had to choose another hill-station—Simla. However, according to Mistry’s uncle, making Dharmsala the “summer capital” failed not because of the earthquake, but because the official in charge of selecting Dharmsala suffered from dysentery on his way and died when he reached the place, which led to dropping the idea of Dharmsala as the “summer capital”.

The day after his arrival, Mistry finally went to meet his uncle and aunt who lived nearby. They were sorry to see his deplorable state and offered him access to use their bathroom whenever he wants since it had running water from their private pipeline that was still intact. Mistry reveals the history behind this saying that the Nowrojee store which belongs to his uncle’s family was the only structure that survived the 1905 earthquake. It served as a relief centre during the devastation with the uncle’s grandfather giving out food, clothing and other necessities from his own store to the public, until proper relief measures came from the British. When normalcy returned, the then District Commissioner showed his gratitude for the family’s generosity by gifting them a mountain spring. A private pipeline was thus established, bringing water from the spring directly to their home. It was still in operation, surviving the avalanches which broke other water-pipelines. He notices that like the locals, the foreign tourists, also hit by the water-crisis, were stocking up on bottled mineral water bought from the store.

Thereafter, Mistry goes out with his uncle who takes him around Dharmsala. He sees smiling Tibetan monks on the way, amazed and impressed by their cheerful and happy countenances—something not expected from a people who had suffered so much. They radiated an “inner well-being”, Mistry says, just like the Dalai Lama, their spiritual leader. He notices that exchanging namaskars with people met along the way is common here, and he arrives with his uncle at a ‘chorten’. It is a tall gold-crowned structure in the middle of buildings, made in the memory of those suffering under the Chinese rule

in Tibet. He sees monks circling this structure while muttering prayers. They roam around the square selling Tibetan handicrafts, with restaurants and lodgings for the visitor. He could see the Tibetan colony with their faded prayer flags farther down. During this walk, Mistry could sense that although his uncle loved, respected and admired the Tibetan people, he harboured a little grudge against them. This was because the arrival of the Tibetan refugees had drastically changed the landscape and image of Dharmasala as he knew it. He had indeed helped the Tibetans to find and build houses and settle into place comfortably. But a longing and nostalgia of the place as it had been before the arrival of the refugees, seems to haunt him. Mistry also notices big changes to the place; it did not completely resemble the place in his photographs. He especially marks the changes caused by environmental degradation. The mountain slopes were being deforested by people for firewood. This was followed by soil erosion, landslides and rockfalls. The uncle adds that the amount of snowfall has been lessening every passing year.

They continue to climb uphill and reach the ‘Thekchen Choeling’—the new residence of the Dalai Lama from where he imparts teaching on Mahayana Buddhism. Removing their shoes, they go inside the temple. They did not see the Dalai Lama as he was in Ladakh at the moment to “deliver the Kalachakra-Wheel of Time-Initiation”. There was the high throne of the Dalai Lama on one side of the main hall from where he preached. Behind the throne was a larger-than-life statue of the Buddha in the lotus position which symbolised enlightenment, meditation and relaxation. On the right side of the throne were a few more statues. Mistry comments on the statue of Chenrezi with its multiple heads and arms. It symbolised compassion because according to the Buddhist legend, Chenrezi always thought about and wanted the happiness of all living beings. His head then burst into a thousand heads—representing the all-seeing nature of compassion, and his arms split into a thousand arms—representing the omnipresence of help to be given to anyone in need. They see monks with their prayer beads doing the ‘Holy Walk’ or the ‘Lingchor’ on their way out. Back at home in the store, they discover that there was no water supply as the private water pipeline had been cut open by the desperate people seeking water. Late that night, Mistry is accompanied by his uncle to Hotel Bhagsu. He notices a little earthen lamp in the middle of two forking roads. His uncle tells him not to mess with it as it has something to do with Tibetan exorcism rites. The locals believe in it strongly and he should leave it alone to avoid danger.

The next morning, Mistry realised with relief that electricity was back. In spite of the bad stomach that he got here, he ordered a breakfast of tea and toast. But the desk clerk who also doubled as houseboy, waiter, etc., and had taken his order was nowhere to be seen. Irritated, Mistry went out to look for the boy, complaining about the poor management. He is then informed by the hotel watchman that because it was a Sunday, everybody in the town is watching Ramayana, and they will get back to their work only when the show is over. He seems to understand and goes on to talk about the epic series. He informs that when the *Ramayana*, one of the greatest Sanskrit epics of ancient India was made into a Hindi TV show, “sixty million homes began tuning in every Sunday morning”. People who did not have TV sets of their own went over to their neighbours who did. Villagers would gather and garland the TV and burn incense before the show started. Various ads in newspapers would ask people to contact only after the broadcast of Ramayana was over. Even oath-taking ceremonies of elected ministers were postponed when it clashed with the airtime of the show. The series originally had seventy-eight episodes. But it could not cover the epic within these limited episodes and protests erupted in parts of the nation—sweepers went on strike, there were rallies and demonstrations in several cities—all demanding addition of episodes. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting then sanctioned twenty-six more episodes to the show which pacified the public.

More distressingly though, people would stalk and mob the actor who played Rama in the series, treating him as the real god, bowing to him, touching his feet and asking his blessings. Seeing this, the Congress party enlisted the actor-god to campaign for their candidate in the upcoming election with hopes of sure victory—something frowned upon by the intellectuals of the country. The actor-god would campaign for the candidate by telling people that Rama’s kingdom of Ayodhya would return if he is elected and they will be blessed if they vote for him. But surprisingly, the Congress Party met with a harsh defeat in the election.

Mistry wonders about the mass appeal of this show. It intrigues him that this serial with poor production and poor acting-skills, could make viewers tune into it for such a long time. Not only that, it had a wide range of viewers comprising not only Hindus, but also Sikhs, Muslims, Parsis and Christians. He thus concludes that the ancient Sanskrit epic of *Ramayana* is a “national heritage” belonging to all Indians as it helps them overcome the barriers of caste, class, race and religion; and the TV show based on the epic brought

diverse communities together, even if for a short period of time. He had not expected to witness the “power of the serial” in remote Dharmsala. Funnily enough, even the electricity workers who were on strike, co-operated with the show and the public and supplied electricity while the show was airing, after which they cut off the supply again.

Check Your Progress

- Q1. What is the name of the hotel where Mistry stays? State its meaning.
- Q2. Why was there no electricity and water supply?
- Q3. What are the other titles of the Dalai Lama as mentioned by Mistry?
- Q4. What was the purpose of Mistry’s visit?
- Q5. What were the side effects of deforestation?
- Q6. In which year did the Dalai Lama flee from Tibet?
- Q7. What was the original number of episodes of the serial Ramayana? How many episodes were added later?

6.1 Objectives:

The student should read up the piece by the writer before undertaking a study of this unit for better understanding of the context. After reading this unit, the student will be able to:

- understand the contents and features of travel writing
- see the pleasures and the challenges of travelling
- understand pop culture
- recognize political refugees
- grasp the historical context of the place the writer is visiting

6.2 Travel Writing:

With his acclaimed piece “Running Water”, Rohinton Mistry takes readers along on a journey to the hard-to-access Dharmsala. It falls under the category of travel-writing which are a form of creative non-fiction called travelogues, and has been praised for its attention to detail and history. Travel-writing generally comprise writings about the place visited, its characteristics, landmarks or monuments, the local inhabitants, their customs and traditions, beliefs and superstitions, the local food, and the relaying of

the overall travel experience. It generally has exotic locations as travel destinations—places that are hard to reach, or places which are virtually unknown or even places which are misunderstood by the world at large. They therefore shed light on many aspects of the place visited that had remained undiscovered or unknown. Travel writing is thus prized for its revelatory nature—recording and giving important information about a particular place to the unaware reader. Mistry’s travel account also has an exotic location as its destination—Dharmsala, a place known to be reached with some difficulty even during good circumstances. Mistry’s bad fortune was in visiting it at the wrong time of the year during the monsoon season when travelling to it becomes harder with the high frequency of landslides and avalanches caused by heavy showers. More importantly therefore, travel writing is also about the hardships faced during the journey, the disappointments and the dangers, as much as it is about the pleasure and adventure. It serves as advice or warning to people wanting to visit a particular place in the future. In the very beginning of his account, Mistry describes to the readers the difficulties he had to endure in order to reach Dharmsala. He arrived in the hotel all soggy and wet with his luggage dripping water. At the unimpressive hotel he had to make do with two candles for there was no electricity and two buckets of water per day as there was no running water due to damaged water pipelines. He describes his harrowing journey to the hotel from the station, which shows the way the tourists or travellers who are unfamiliar with the place they are visiting, are taken advantage of. Approached by a rickshaw-puller, he rides on a rickshaw that barely protected him from the rain, instead of the three-wheelers that were parked outside, which would have given him better shelter against the rain.

He found Dharmsala different from his childhood imaginations of picturesque snow-clad mountain ranges and peaceful township—boosted by the pictures of the place his uncle had sent to the relatives in Bombay. He arrived during a time of local disturbance and agitation with electricity workers going on strikes, people sabotaging power lines and existing water pipelines. He was warned about visiting the place during the monsoons, and sure enough, he was sorely disappointed in his expectations of it being a summer retreat or escape. He gives a historical account of the way the British officials were also similarly disappointed like him in their hopes of making Dharmsala their “summer capital” due to an earthquake. However, all the hardships and discomforts he had to withstand, do not extinguish the traveller’s spirit

in him and he continues to explore the place—exploration of the unknown being a motto of travellers.

Typical of travel accounts, the piece gives a thorough description of the geographical aspects and characteristics of the place. He describes the Dhauladur range, the McLeod Gunj and the Forsyth Gunj, the Lower Dharmsala, etc. He also describes the local bazaars, villages, military cantonments, settlements, squares, buildings, shops, restaurants, etc., which show that he has a keen eye for detail—which is expected of travellers and travel writing. He also shows the observational powers of a conscious traveller when he talks about the environmental degradation of the place. Dharmsala with its rapidly deforested mountain slopes, was a different place from the photos he had seen of it in childhood. The increased demand for firewood has resulted in more felling of trees which has led to soil erosion and its effects of frequent mudslides and avalanches. He notes the gashed and scarred hills pointed out to him by his uncle.

Many people travel to gain spiritual experiences. Mistry notes the presence of many tourists and foreign nationals who have come to Dharmsala to have spiritual experiences in its Buddhist temples and monasteries set up by the Tibetan refugees in exile. He also visits one of these temples and describes the interior. He not only describes it, but also gives the background information or history of the artefacts inside, such as of the statue of Chenrezi, or the ‘chorten’ in the compound, as explained in the summary. He notices the local custom of greeting every person one comes across, even strangers with a Namaste. He gives a history of how the Tibetan colony in Dharmsala came into existence. The place was chosen by the Dalai Lama as a temporary refuge for Tibetan Buddhists oppressed by the Chinese because it resembled their own homeland to a large degree. Mistry therefore does a good job of filling the gaps by giving the writers a context of the current circumstances of the place—a feature of most travel writings. He also mentions the local superstitious belief in Tibetan exorcism rites and though a skeptic, he respects the belief and follows his uncle’s instruction to walk carefully on the right side of the lit earthen lamp in the middle of two roads. The registering of local quirks and customs like this is another highlight of travel writings. Mistry does not glorify the place but gives an honest account which shifts between tones of humour and seriousness.

Self-Assessment Questions

Q1. Describe the difficulties that Mistry faced during his journey to Dharmsala.

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Q2. Describe Dharmsala in detail as Mistry depicts it.

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6.3 Pop Culture:

Towards the end of his account, Mistry gives the readers an amusing account of the appeal and power of pop culture in his travel piece. In general terms, pop culture (short for ‘popular culture’ and the opposite of ‘high culture’) comprises ideas, beliefs, customs, attitudes, perspectives, images, stories or narratives, etc., liked, practised or consumed by the majority of the masses. Media, which includes television as a medium of entertainment, is an indispensable aspect of modern pop culture. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines pop culture as “music, TV, cinema, books, etc., that are popular and enjoyed by ordinary people, rather than experts or very educated people”. In Mistry’s travel account we witness the popularity of the TV show Ramayana. Nobody in Dharmsala wanted to miss a single minute of the show and Mistry suffers due to this craze as his waiter leaves his order of breakfast unsupplied to go catch the broadcast of the Sunday show. Even the electricity workers of the region who were on strike, conceded to the strong public demand and supplied electricity for the duration of the show. Mistry then goes on to give some background information of this phenomenally successful TV serial. Around sixty million homes in India tuned into watch the show every Sunday morning. People without TV sets of their own would go over to their neighbour’s or friend’s places to watch it. In villages, the entire population would gather to watch the show every Sunday morning. It was reported that people would treat the TV set reverentially and before the show started, they would garland it with fresh flowers and burn incense before it as well. Even the classified ads in newspapers would request to be contacted after the show was over, not

while it was airing. Swearing-in ceremonies of elected ministers would be delayed if it conflicted with the time of the show's broadcast. When the series ended with seventy-eight episodes, the masses were enraged and there were nationwide protests; particularly remarkable was the sweeper's strike and the public rallies and demonstrations in cities demanding addition of more episodes to the show in order to give justice to the lengthy epic of *Ramayana*. The Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting fulfilled the public demand by sanctioning twenty-six more episodes to the show. One negative aspect of the show was that people began to treat the actor who played Rama as the real thing and would bow to him, touch his feet and ask his blessings. The Congress Party tried to make the best of this situation by recruiting the actor to campaign for their candidate in the next elections, hoping to win a smooth victory from the star-struck masses. He campaigned for the Party pronouncing that the candidate would bring back the golden age of Ayodhya or Ram Rajya upon election and people who had voted for him would be blessed. But they underestimated the public's capacities of judgement and had a "resounding defeat".

Mistry then muses about the power of pop culture in bringing masses together, transgressing all divides in the social spectrum. What he finds fascinating is that a serial with poor production and incompetent actors could hold the interest of the masses for so long. It was a show that had "captive audiences" that consisted not only of the Hindus, but also Sikhs, Parsis, Muslims and Christians. Even in Dharmsala, a remote township, he witnesses the mass obsession for the show which he did not expect. He acknowledges at the end, the strength and appeal of pop culture. *Ramayana* was a show that brought people from all walks and ranks of life—people from diverse communities and different religious, linguistic and racial background together every Sunday morning. He therefore declares the ancient Sanskrit epic on which the show is based as a "national heritage" with its legacy of overcoming communal and other differences.

Self-Assessment Questions

- Q1. Describe the immense popularity of the TV serial *Ramayana*.
- Q2. Why does the Congress Party enlist the actor who played Rama?
- Q3. Explain why Mistry thinks that the epic *Ramayana* is a "national heritage".

Stop to Consider

The popular TV serial Ramayana mentioned in the travel account was aired during 1987-88 in the Doordarshan network. It had a high viewership rating of 82 percent. Mirroring Mistry's account, a BBC correspondent reported that during the period of the telecast of the show every Sunday morning, "streets would be deserted, shops would be closed and people would bathe and garland their TV sets before the serial began". The historical novelist William Dalrymple also notes of the same that "In villages across south Asia, hundreds of people would gather around a single set to watch the gods and demons play out their destinies. In the noisiest and most bustling cities, trains, buses and cars came to a sudden halt, and a strange hush fell over the bazaars. In Delhi, government meetings had to be rescheduled after the entire cabinet failed to turn up for an urgent briefing".

6.4 Tibetan Refugees:

Mistry gives a moving and sensitive account of the Tibetan refugees and colony in Dharamsala—a distinguishing feature of the place—in his travel account. He begins by giving a brief outline of the history of these refugees, mentioning the harsh and pathetic circumstances under which they arrived in Dharamsala, India. In 1959, the Dalai Lama fled Tibet and was granted asylum in India—"just hours before" as Mistry dramatically states, "the Chinese conducted a murderous raid on his palace in Lhasa and occupied the country". He was followed by other Tibetans who were also fleeing from the political persecution and wished to join their spiritual leader. Groups of Tibetan refugees kept coming to Dharamsala for months afterwards, barely escaping the cold, the dangerous mountain passes and the Chinese soldiers. They brought horrific news of the brutal Chinese regime in Tibet—the genocide of the remaining Buddhist monks, rape of nuns, the plunder and vandalization of Buddhist monasteries, destruction of Tibetan culture, etc. The Dalai Lama who saw no hope of immediate return, made Dharamsala his refuge, establishing his "government-in-exile" in the place. Mistry thinks that the spiritual leader might have chosen Dharamsala as it reminded him of his homeland since it resembled the Tibetan landscape of "ice and snow" and of a "quiet mountain hamlet" to a large degree. Thus a Tibetan colony gradually developed in Dharamsala, which attracted visitors/tourists from all

over the world coming to see the Namgyal Monastery, the Children’s Village, the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives which stored important historical documents, the new temple of Dalai Lama, and more. Mistry visits this temple with his uncle and notes its structure and artefacts and also the praying monks and a nun in the premises. During his walk, he came across Tibetan monks whose happy, smiling faces and peaceful looks amazed him. He finds it impressive and admirable that they were radiating an “inner well-being”, despite being a group of people who were severely harassed and tortured, and forced to live in a strange land away from their homes with very little hope of return. Mistry’s uncle had helped these monks when they first arrived in acquiring houses and properties. They transformed the original aspect and panorama of Dharmsala to a great extent with their establishments and structures made in the image of the place they left behind. Dharmsala abounded with Tibetan constructs and symbols. And it could be seen that the local inhabitants of the place gladly accepted their presence and influence. Mistry’s travel account thus imparts to the reader a glimpse of an important moment of history.

Self-Assessment Questions

- Q1. How did the Chinese treat the Tibetans? Describe the precarious circumstances under which the Dalai Lama and other Tibetans arrived in India.
- Q2. Why did the Dalai Lama choose Dharmsala to establish a “government-in-exile”? Describe the Buddhist temple Mistry visits with his uncle in detail.

Stop to Consider

The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) defines a refugee as someone who has been “forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so”. The definition reflects the situation of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan diaspora in India—a displaced people who have fled the Chinese oppression back home. This why they have the accepted status of refugees and are addressed by the world at large by this term.

6.5 Summing Up:

Travel writing is a very significant and influential genre of literature. The piece by Mistry which is essentially a travel account, serves to familiarise the readers with the remote “mountain hamlet” of Dharmsala that is not easily accessible—as his strenuous and four hours-long taxi ride proves. The piece also reads like a celebration of encounter with other cultures and the differences in customs and traditions in a different place—a trait of travel writing. It gives vital information to the reader regarding the place he is visiting and recounts his experiences honestly; readers willing to visit Dharmsala will at least not repeat his mistake by visiting it during the monsoons. He also gives his thoughts on the prevalence of pop culture as he witnesses the popularity of a TV show even in a remote place like Dharmsala which is very different from mainland India in various ways. Readers also get to know and understand the lesser-known history of the Tibetan settlement in Dharmsala.

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6.7 Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’:

1. ‘ Hotel Bhagsu’; it means “running water”
2. There was no electricity supply in the hotel as the local electricity workers were on strike, and there was no water supply in the hotel

because the heavy rains had uprooted huge rocks which fell on water pipes and broke them

3. “Precious Protector”, “Gentle Glory”, “Ocean of Wisdom”
4. Mistry’s purpose was to visit his uncle and aunt who lived in Dharamsala
5. Soil erosion, landslides, avalanches, rockfalls and lessening snowfall every passing year
6. 1959
7. The Ramayana series originally had seventy-eight episodes. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting then sanctioned the addition of twenty-six more episodes to the show to meet the public demand.

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Unit 7

MICHAEL ONDAATJE (1943-): ‘ANGULIMALA’

Contents:

- 7.0 Introduction**
 - 7.0.1 About the author**
 - 7.0.2 Summary**
- 7.1 Objectives**
- 7.2 Background**
- 7.3 Themes**
 - 7.3.1 Transformation**
 - 7.3.2 Non-violence**
- 7.4 Summing Up**
- 7.5 References and Suggested Readings**
- 7.6 Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’**

7.0 Introduction:

The story by Ondaatje is a retelling of the original legend of Angulimala of which different versions exist with slight variations. The author who is from Sri Lanka must have written this story recognising and keeping in mind the majority religion in the island-nation—Buddhism and all the popular folk narratives therein. Ondaatje’s version reads like an abridgement of the original story, seeking to familiarise readers worldwide with this Buddhist tale.

7.0.1 About the Author:

Michael Ondaatje is a Canadian writer who was born in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) on September 12, 1943 (in the Second World War years from 1939 to 1945). He is of Sinhalese, Dutch and Tamil descent—people of such multiracial origins are known as ‘Burghers’ in Sri Lanka. Ondaatje grew up in Colombo and later moved to England to pursue higher studies. He then relocated to Canada for further studies, majoring in English and settled there permanently.

A writer in multiple forms—poetry, fiction, autobiography, screenplays—Ondaatje's first published literary work is a collection of poetry titled, *The Dainty Monsters* (1967); it is a series of poems showing the connection of myth and daily life. His other poetry collections include *Rat Jelly* (1980), *Secular Love* (1984), *The Cinnamon Peeler* (1989), *Handwriting: Poems* (1998), and *The Story* (2005). In 1970 he published an experimental book that played with different forms for which he gained appreciation and recognition—*The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. This book which received positive reviews from the public and critics alike and is presented as a collage or combination of poems, prose, interviews, comics, photographs, songs—deals with the idea of an artist as an outlaw. The book won him the Governor General's Award. He also won the same award for another poetry collection titled, *There's a Trick With a Knife I'm Learning to Do* (1979).

Ondaatje however, is better known for his highly acclaimed novels. His first novel, *Coming through the Slaughter* (1976) is about a fictional New Orleans jazz musician named Buddy Bolden, who gradually becomes insane. He published the memoir *Running in the Family* in 1982. This semi-autobiographical work focuses on his roots and depicts his life in Sri Lanka and his family history. His novel *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) is based on the life of minority groups and migrants living in Toronto, Canada in the early 20th century and shows their problems with identity and the class struggle between the rich and the poor. His most famous novel is *The English Patient*, and was published next in 1992. It won the prestigious Booker Prize and also the Governor General's Award. It is based on the events of the Second World War and set in Florence, Italy. The novel takes readers on a memory trail of the nameless and paralysed English patient who lives in an upstairs bedroom of a villa in Florence, recovering from severe injuries he received from a plane crash. *Anil's Ghost*, the next novel by the writer published in 2000, also received many awards including the Giller Prize, the Prix Medicis, the Kiriyama Pacific Rim Book Prize, the Irish Times International Fiction Prize and the Governor General's Award. It is based on the Civil War and political violence in Sri Lanka during the 1980's and 90's. It follows the life of Anil Tissera, a forensic anthropologist who investigates the political murders and other war crimes in Sri Lanka. Ondaatje's next novel *Divisadero* (2007) won the Governor General's Award again. It is a story about divisions and is based in California, USA and France. The next novel by the writer—*The Cat's Table* (2011), tells

the story of an 11-year old boy who voyages aboard a cruise ship from Sri Lanka to England during the 1950's. Ondaatje's most recent novel, *Warlight* (2018), is about a teenage boy and his sister after the Second World War when their parents go to Singapore, leaving them with two strangers.

Due to his impressive and thought-provoking literary output, Ondaatje was honoured as an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1988. Earlier he had also received the President's Medal in 1967. And in 2005, he received the prestigious Sri Lanka Ratna.

7.0.2 Summary:

As mentioned earlier, the story is adapted from the legend of Angulimala, popular in the Buddhist tradition. There are many folk versions of the story. The story by Ondaatje is a retelling of the Pali version of the ancient story, known as the *Angulimala Sutta*. Ondaatje is faithful to this version of the story and follows its style, plot, incidents and dialogues closely. The story opens with a song sung by Angulimala that is reflective and autobiographical and looks back on his life and the moral lessons he was taught as a young person. But the complete song is only revealed at the end. The readers are introduced to the Buddha who was teaching at Savatthi—the birthplace of Angulimala and the capital city of the kingdom of Kosala. It is known to be one of the six largest cities during the Buddha's lifetime. In the story, it is described as a great city with “a hundred gates” and “a hundred guards”. Angulimala's reputation in the beginning of the story is already set as the fearful brigand and he is the very incarnation of violence. The public fear and dread of this person was such that people went around saying that there were two rulers in the region—the King and Angulimala. Angulimala earned his name which means a “garland of fingers” by robbing and mercilessly murdering people, cutting off their fingers and wearing them as a garland around his neck; he does not have any remorse or feel any guilt for his actions. There was an infamous refrain about this serial killer which declared that he transformed “villages into non-villages, families into non-families”. This refrain which is repeated a few times in the story seems to serve as a warning to people to avoid running into him. The Buddha who taught and lived in the town decided one day to travel through the countryside—the place where Angulimala roamed. The local people—cowherds, goatherds, publishers, guards, potters, retired politicians, etc.—who saw the Buddha making his way towards the countryside warned him

not to go that way, repeating the infamous refrain about the murderer. They said to him that Angulimala had even overpowered and killed people travelling in large groups. But the Buddha ignored their warnings and continued to walk in the direction of the countryside—alone and unafraid, with only his begging bowl and robe. When he reached the forest, a few of the ancient hermits and recluses who lived in the caves nearby, came out to warn him about the dangers of going ahead, repeating the same refrain about Angulimala’s horrific crimes. There was a mournful tone in their voices—sad at the memory of their families mercilessly slaughtered by Angulimala. But the Buddha was steady and unshaken by these fearful tales, and continued to move ahead. When he reached the top of the hill, he was seen by Angulimala. The murderer found the sight of a lone man near his place quite unusual and confusing as it was rare for anyone to approach him unaccompanied by a good number of people and arms. Angulimala thought that the monk who was coming towards him must be very foolish since he was all alone. He decided to kill him, just as he killed other people who crossed his path, and started to follow the monk with his sword, bow and arrow. But no matter how fast he walked or ran, he could not catch up with the strange monk who seemed to be walking at a normal pace but was always out of his reach. He found the fact that he was unable to overtake the monk very “remarkable” as he was a fast runner habituated to catching animals like deer and horses that were very quick on their feet. He became curious and giving up the pursuit, he called out to the monk, asking the Buddha to stop and stand still as he wanted to have a talk with him. The Buddha turned and replied that he was in fact standing still; it was rather Angulimala who was restless and moving. Angulimala who did not understand what the monk meant, asked him to explain his statement. The Buddha then explained that he was standing still because he had given up using violence and force against people or other living beings, unlike Angulimala who always chased people and animals in order to kill them. And further, he explained that because he was moving at such a fast pace in life looking to kill without restraint, he would die far sooner than everyone else. These words enlightened Angulimala and he immediately repented and gave up his evil ways. He buried all his weapons of violence and went to the Buddha, bowing to him and touching his feet. He asked the Buddha how he could serve him and become a disciple. In reply, he was addressed as “monk” by the Buddha who told him to follow him. The fearsome bandit and murderer thus became a monk with Buddha’s teaching. The two of them journeyed to the edge of

the town of Savatthi where Angulimala said farewell to the Buddha and parted company from him to return to the forest. Having taken the path of Dhamma (The Truth), Angulimala lived alone in the forest with a monk's begging bowl and old robes. He would occasionally come to the city to beg where he was not recognised and he began to become aware of the sufferings, sorrows and miseries of the people around. He saw for the first time the poor and homeless, people in pain and fear, people injured in wars and by other atrocities, and found himself feeling sympathy for them. However, once when he entered the city, he was recognised by a few people. The town people gathered around him and set out to punish the former brigand by hurling rocks, sharp metal and broken pottery at him. They beat him and smashed his begging bowl, tore his robes and even broke his fingers—for it was fingers that he used to collect as a murderer. Angulimala fainted and the people threw the dead bodies of birds and animals upon him in an attempt to bury him under them and finally left him lying there. But Angulimala regained consciousness after a few hours in the dead of the night when no one was about and around. He walked away unnoticed and went towards the forest where he saw the Buddha standing. He walked towards the Buddha in spite of the pain of his bleeding wounds and deep embarrassment. But the Buddha or the Master who seemed to know all about what had happened to him, did not shock at his condition and gave him a joyful smile. And instead of reassuring him with comforting words, he asked Angulimala to endure the insults and the hatred he had just received. He said to him that he had received the punishment of centuries in hell for all the sins he had committed on earth in the form of the mob attack. This was atonement for all his crimes of looting and reckless killing of countless innocent people, and was necessary for him to experience hell on earth for the sake of his ultimate freedom or Nirvana. The Buddha then took him to a river nearby where he bathed him and cleaned his wounds and gave him his own robes and begging bowl. With this second meeting and lesson, Angulimala finally came to understand the true meaning of freedom and its joys. After the Buddha left, he sang a song of spiritual enlightenment and gratitude. The end of the story thus presents the complete version of the song introduced in the beginning. The verses of the song basically say that Angulimala was never able to control his violent temper until his meeting with the Buddha. He was known as the "thief", "the Violent One", "The Great Flood", etc., and people continually lived in terror of him. But the Buddha "tamed" him by enlightening him and prevented "a thousand evil rebirths" for the former murderer, launching him into "the freedom of spiritual carefulness".

Check Your Progress

- Q1. Name the birthplace of Angulimala.
- Q2. What is the meaning of the name 'Angulimala'? How does he come to have the name?
- Q3. What is the infamous refrain about Angulimala repeated by the people?
- Q4. What puzzles Angulimala about the Buddha on their first encounter?
- Q5. How do the people respond to Angulimala's reappearance in the town as a monk and why?
- Q6. What were the titles by which Angulimala was known as he says in his song?
- Q7. What does the Buddha say regarding the townspeople's treatment of the reformed Angulimala?

Stop to Consider

In the song that is in the story, Angulimala says that the Buddha, by taming his ferocity and cruelty, has saved him from a future of "a thousand evil rebirths". This brings us into a consideration of the concept of karma and reincarnation/rebirth. Buddhism is known to strongly believe in the idea of multiple rebirths and karma, which is basically 'action' or the 'law of action and consequence'. One incurs karmic debt when one does not do one's proper duty to someone, or harms others in the present birth or lifetime. As evident, Angulimala incurs big karmic debt as he kills innocent people not just for purposes of revenge but simply for his personal goal or target of having a thousand fingers for the garland to be given to his teacher. As long as one has karmic debt, he or she keeps getting reborn on this earth because the universe requires any remaining karmic debt to be paid off in the different/multiple births of a soul. Moksha or Nirvana (according to the Buddhists) which means spiritual liberation from the endless cycle of rebirths in this sad and painful world is the ultimate goal of Buddhism. This can be achieved only if one has completely paid off all the karmic debts one has. A record of accumulated bad karma or bad deeds can be lessened or negated by doing good karma or good deeds. Buddhism strongly insists on non-violence so that one can avoid having bad karma; non-violence towards all beings is itself a good karma, cutting off the effects of bad karma. When the reformed Angulimala is beaten up by the townspeople and barely escaped death, the Buddha

says to him that his suffering was a just and necessary one because it is something that he deserves and his karmic debt is decreased in the process. Temporary moments of pain and embarrassment like this can indeed help him achieve the desired Nirvana. Different sources of the story say that the monk Angulimala has indeed gained Nirvana by living a non-violent, helpful and penitent life throughout the rest of his years, paying off all his karmic debts.

7.1 Objectives:

The student must read the short story thoroughly before studying this unit. After reading this unit, the student will be able to:

- understand the philosophical dimensions and moral aspects of the story
- recognise the importance of the story in the Buddhist tradition
- grasp fundamental Buddhist concepts regarding the idea of spiritual enlightenment
- appreciate the ongoing relevance of this popular redemption story

7.2 Background:

Ondaatje's story which begins with the introduction of Angulimala as a violent bandit and murderer, does not tell the readers how he came to be so. Later additions to the original story say that Angulimala was born in the city of Savatthi in the kingdom of Kosala. He was named Ahimsaka at birth which meant 'the harmless one'. The child grew up intelligent and well-mannered and because he was born into a Brahmin family, he was sent by his parents for education to a gurukul in Taxila—a well-known centre of learning which housed one of the earliest universities in the world (the University of Ancient Taxila). Ahimsaka became the student of a respected teacher there and excelled in his studies doing everything with great diligence. He quickly became the favourite student of his guru. The guru favoured the brilliant and quick-learner Ahimsaka making the other students under him envious of the boy. These students schemed and plotted to sour and strain his relationship with the guru. They poisoned the teacher's mind by falsely reporting to the guru that Ahimsaka had been discovered seducing his wife. The angry teacher then commanded Ahimsaka to give him a 'guru-dakshina' or the

traditional gift or fees due to a teacher in the form of a thousand fingers—each cut off from a different person. He demanded this thinking that Ahimsaka himself would be killed in the process of obtaining so many fingers. He thus set Ahimsaka on the path to becoming Angulimala—a vicious and ruthless brigand, who killed people for their fingers because no one was willing to give their fingers away voluntarily without a struggle. Thus, in order to fulfil his responsibility as a student by obeying his teacher’s unreasonable request, Ahimsaka began to commit horrible crimes and became a thoroughly despicable character.

Some sources of the story say that Angulimala, who was on 999 fingers, looking for the final victim for the 1000th finger—as per the wicked demand of the teacher—saw a woman approaching him. It was his own mother who came out to look for her son, in spite of the threat and danger of death at his hands, to warn him of the official announcement by the King to capture him. Angulimala, who recognised that the figure was his mother indeed thought of killing her to obtain the final finger. But the Buddha who knew of what was happening during his meditation in the town, immediately set off to prevent Angulimala from committing the most horrible crime which is matricide (killing one’s own mother). He reached just in time, saving the mother from being harmed by the son. Angulimala who saw the appearance of the Buddha on the scene was distracted and thought to himself that it would be better to kill the man instead of his mother (as he now has an option to choose the victim). But, as we have already seen, that is far from being the case as his last victim (the Buddha) is the one to tame him and change his life forever.

Ondaatje’s story does not cover the instance where the King of the place, King Pasenadi, who was unaware of Angulimala’s transformation, had been on the lookout for the wanted criminal. He came across the Buddha and warned him to stay away from the murderer for his own safety. The Buddha then asked him how he would react if he saw that Angulimala had transformed completely—from a violent serial killer to a humble monk. The King replied that he would be pleased indeed and much relieved if such was the case. The Buddha then presented before him the new monk Angulimala and the happily shocked King praised the Buddha saying that where they failed many times in taming someone so ferocious even with the use of force and weapons, the Buddha tamed him without the use of any force or violence.

7.3 Themes:

7.3.1 Transformation

The story of Angulimala has been traditionally read as a story of transformation as the central and the most important event of the story is the transformation of the ruthless bandit and bloodthirsty murderer. A fateful encounter with the Buddha causes Angulimala to undergo a drastic change of heart and he vows to cease from all his violent activities at once. His repentance is true and accepted by the Buddha and he is pronounced a monk by the Master. Angulimala has therefore become the symbol of complete transformation. He is regarded as an icon of change or reform and is an inspiration to the greatest and the worst of sinners for giving up evil ways and finding true freedom by returning to the right path or Dharma. Persuaded and transformed by the Buddha's teaching, the story of Angulimala shows that attaining Enlightenment is possible for anyone in this world. It is a story of redemption of depraved, barbaric and cruel criminals like Angulimala. The Buddha's teaching restores him to the path of peace, balance and self-control. The story thus demonstrates the transformative effects of Buddha's teaching as well. He attracts the attention of Angulimala by supernaturally maintaining distance from the speeding murderer, even while walking at a slow, steady pace. Tired, puzzled and out of breath, Angulimala is forced to call out to the Master, seeking an explanation of this impossibility. But a simple, meaningful and truthful conversation with the Buddha wins the cold-blooded criminal over to a life of piety. Buddha's revelation that his chasing after people and his violent and merciless killing spree will in the end harm him and cut his life short before its time, makes a big impact on the murderer. He sees the error of his ways and immediately gives up his horrifying quest for fingers. He thus transforms with the Buddha's teaching; he accepts the Master's instructions on the way to living a pious and humble life and becomes a monk. Leaving behind his evil and violent life of bad karma, Angulimala returns to a life of good karma or good deeds. The story therefore, is as much about virtues of teaching as it is about transformation which is caused by it. The Buddha, as seen does not avoid meeting the fearful bandit and in fact goes out to meet him and have a talk with him. Satish Kumar writes in this context that, "The real challenge is to talk to those who are violent, those who disagree, those who oppose and

who intend to harm. External violence is only a symptom, a manifestation of some deeper cause. Only in dialogue can the perpetrators of violence and the victims of violence discover its root cause. And find ways to heal the discord” [2005:10,11].

Stop to Consider

In other faith systems also, say Christianity, transformation of a character, of a spiritual new birth, is given utmost importance. In the epistles or letters of Paul in the *Bible*, we can see mentions of phrases like “new creation” which highlight the importance of transformation in one’s life in order to become a new person. Instances like the last-minute transformation of the dying thief on the cross who is crucified alongside Jesus Christ, point to the fact that no person, even the worst sinner, is beyond redemption. The moment the sinner meets the Saviour, as Angulimala meets the Buddha and the thief on the cross meets Jesus, he or she is saved through a complete, inner spiritual transformation.

Self-Assessment Questions

- Q1. Explain in detail the meaning of Angulimala’s song in the story.
(Hint: Examine the process of Angulimala’s transformation as outlined in the song of his life at the end of the story)
- Q2. How does Angulimala gain spiritual enlightenment? Describe his conversion experience.
(Hint: Importance of an encounter with a sage or a saintly person [like the Buddha] who has already achieved spiritual enlightenment and can help others achieve the same by showing the way to it)

7.3.2 Non-violence:

One of the most important teachings of Buddhism is the idea of non-violence. In this story, violence is equated with instability and unrest of soul and personality—as seen in the character of Angulimala. This is what the Buddha meant when he said that Angulimala was not standing still, which was the root of all his problems. He habitually used force or violence against people

and other living beings and could not control his bloodthirsty impulse—always looking for the next kill. But he was finally rescued from his own evil ways, “tamed” from his violence by the still one—the Master, the Buddha. Buddha says to Angulimala that he had ceased from using force or violence against people or animals long ago. This attitude of non-violence had given him spiritual enlightenment, true joy, peace and freedom. He says that if the latter continued his use of force or violence against people, he would die a horrible and terrifying death himself, far sooner than the rest of the world. In harming and destroying other beings, he was harming and destroying himself. The Buddha thus points out to the penitent murderer about the importance and necessity of sticking to the path of peace.

Ironically, Angulimala, whose real name is Ahimsaka which means ‘the harmless one’ or ‘the non-violent one’, becomes a person who harms several lives with his brute violence and force. But his fateful encounter with the Buddha transforms him completely and he abandons his former ways. The teaching and revelation of the Master in the forest enables him to recover his true and original identity as a harmless, righteous and non-violent person. His spiritual enlightenment thus returns him to the path of peace.

Another important aspect of non-violence is the element of compassion. It is compassion for the murderer that moves the Buddha to leave the town and go in search of him. He aims to give the man spiritual enlightenment and stop him from further violence against other beings, because this would ultimately hurt his own self. And the teaching that the former criminal receives about non-violence from the Master, is really all about compassion—compassion for other people or living beings that prevents one from the use of force or violence against them. Instead of violating the other, compassion is about protecting the other. The path of non-violence is therefore the way of compassion, the attitude of kindness.

Self-Assessment Questions

- Q1. What does the Buddha mean he talks about “standing still”? Explain.
(Hint: Equation of non-violence with “standing still” in the story)
- Q2. Describe the importance of non-violence as shown in the story.
(Hint: Besides kindness and concern for other beings/people, non-violence is also essential for self-preservation—for the accumulation of good deeds which will bring upon a better fortune in the future)

Stop to Consider

Non-violence, which in the Sanskrit original of ‘Ahimsa’ basically means “non-harm” or “non-injury”, is the central tenet of Buddhism. Non-violent thought and action is the first of the five Buddhist precepts; it says to “avoid killing, or harming any living thing “. With the basic element of compassion or consideration for others, it is fundamentally opposite to the violence habitually practiced by Angulimala. Violence generally involves jealousy, greed, covetousness, ambition, consciously imposing suffering upon others in small or big ways, etc. And being a murderer who had killed hundreds of people, Angulimala was basically practising the most extreme form of violence. The Buddhist non-violence is famous for being extended and applied even to other living beings besides humans. The Buddha is known to have said in *The Dhammapada*, “That one I call a brahmin who has put aside weapons and renounced violence towards all creatures. Such a one neither kills nor helps others to kill. . . That one I call a brahmin who is never hostile to those who are hostile toward him, who is attached among those who are selfish and at peace among those at war” [2008: 250]. In another place he is known to have said to Buddhist monks to avoid violent actions even in the form of self-defence. The statement reads like this—”Monks, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handle saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching” [2016:60]. The transformed Angulimala follows this instruction of Buddha as he does not retaliate when the townspeople beat him up bloodily and bury him under dead bodies of animals. The modern world which is always seeing wars in one place or the other, is moving in a destructive direction opposite to the Buddhist principles of non-violence. The Dalai Lama, the head monk of Tibetan Buddhism, says regarding our times—”*Of course, war and the large military establishments are the greatest sources of violence in the world. Whether their purpose is defensive or offensive, these vast powerful organizations exist solely to kill human beings. We should think carefully about the reality of war. Most of us have been conditioned to regard military combat as exciting and glamorous — an opportunity for men to prove their competence and courage. Since armies are legal, we feel that war is acceptable; in general, nobody feels that war is criminal or that accepting it is criminal attitude. In fact, we have been*

brainwashed. War is neither glamorous nor attractive. It is monstrous. Its very nature is one of tragedy and suffering.”

The issue of non-violence is therefore at the heart of Buddhism and the story of Angulimala demonstrates its importance very well.

7.4 Summing Up:

The story of Angulimala is one of the most popular and well-known narratives in Buddhism. And Angulimala himself holds a prominent position in Buddhism and is a very important and symbolic figure for Buddhists. As already discussed, Angulimala’s spiritual awakening and enlightenment and the subsequent radical transformation, are the key events of the story. The story gives hope of change to immoral humanity trapped in a cycle of bad deeds. It also sheds light on the virtues of a true and noble teacher as exemplified by the Buddha. The story or this particular account has thus become an example for people seeking spiritual liberation. From a fierce mass murderer to a humble monk, the story of Angulimala’s change and evolution has been inspiring people into believing that spiritual enlightenment and freedom are indeed attainable for anyone. When Angulimala is declared a monk by the Buddha, he gives up all he has and is left with only a begging bowl and old robes. This symbolises his giving up of all earthly ambition and greed that kept him bound in a circle of crimes and misdeeds. And he begins to understand that true joy, freedom and spiritual development are to be found in selflessness. And from a life of restless chasing and violence, he makes a successful transition to a life of inner peace and serenity, finally learning how to be still like the Buddha.

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7.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress':

1. Savatthi, Kosala
2. "Garland of fingers"; Angulimala earned his name by robbing and mercilessly murdering people to cut off their fingers and wear them as a garland around his neck
3. The refrain goes: Angulimala had turned "villages into non-villages, families into non-families"
4. No matter how fast Angulimala chased the Buddha, he could not catch up with him, even though the teacher seemed to be walking at a normal pace
5. The townspeople were hostile to the reappearance of Angulimala as a 'monk' among them as they were suspicious of his overnight transformation and met him with violence which sprang from their pent-up rage and frustration that they had harboured against the former murderer
6. 'Thief', 'The Violent One', 'The Great Flood', 'Garland of Fingers'
7. Angulimala was giving due payment for his past misdeeds

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Unit 8
SALMAN RUSHDIE: ‘GOOD ADVICE
IS RARER THAN RUBIES’

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8.0 Introduction:

“Good Advice Is Rarer Than Rubies” is a short-story penned by the award-winning and controversial author Salman Rushdie. It was first published in 1987 and then later included in his short-story collection titled *East, West* that came out in 1994. The collection is divided into three sections in a geographical order—‘East’, ‘West’ and ‘East-West’—in order to classify the stories related to any of these regions respectively. The story “Good Advice Is Rarer Than Rubies” which takes place in Pakistan, is accordingly placed in the section ‘East’ which presents stories particularly from the South-Asian region.

8.0.1 About the Author:

Salman Rushdie is one of the most formidable, radical and controversial contemporary writers. He was born on June 19, 1947, in Bombay (now Mumbai) to a family of liberal Kashmiri-Muslims. Rushdie's published works—both fiction and non-fiction—range from examinations and explorations of history, philosophy, politics, society, religion, the state, nationalism, fundamentalism, pop-culture, etc. His style of writing is considered satirical, blunt, allegorical, humorous, and full of local speech or vernacular effects that are recognisably from regions in India and Pakistan—all of which have been skilfully transliterated into English in his works.

Rushdie's first published work was a novel titled *Grimus* which came out in 1975. A fusion of science-fiction and fantasy, the novel had a lukewarm reception. But his next work, *Midnight's Children*, published in 1981, was a major success and brought him worldwide recognition and praise. In this novel, we see Rushdie's adept use of 'magic-realism'—a recurring style in his creative works. The novel which won the Booker Prize in 1981 and subsequently, the Booker of Bookers in 1993 and Best of the Booker in 2008, tells the story of a boy named Saleem Sinai who is born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947 when India gains its official independence from British rule. Saleem and other children like him who were born near the hour of Independence are blessed with special and extraordinary powers. Saleem's growth from a child to an adult mirrors to a large extent, the development of the nation of India after Independence. Rushdie's next novel *Shame* which was published in 1983 is focussed on the political disturbances and instability of Pakistan post-Independence. Rushdie subsequently published his first non-fiction work, a travelogue, in 1987, titled *The Jaguar Smile*, which is based on his visit to Nicaragua. In the book he writes about his experiences as a traveller and also comments on the political state of the country he is visiting. The next work by Rushdie—his fourth novel *The Satanic Verses*—published in 1988, sparked a huge controversy. The novel drew severe criticism and backlash from the Muslim community for what seemed to be an impious representation or portrayal of the prophet Muhammad and his process of writing the *Quran*. The book was condemned as "blasphemous against Islam" and banned in several countries with large Muslim populations including India. There were mass protests, demonstrations and rallies held against the book and the writer. On February 14, 1989, a 'fatwa'— which is basically a legal decree

according to Islamic law—ordering the immediate execution of Rushdie was issued. The spiritual leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini gave out this order as a penalty for what he considered to be the writer's blasphemy. And a reward was promised to whoever would fulfil the 'fatwa'. Rushdie was thus forced to go into hiding as there were multiple attempts at assassinating him. But being a prolific writer, he continued to write defiantly in spite of the death-sentence hanging on him. Jack Livings, who had once interviewed the writer, says of him that, "For a man who occasioned such furor, who has been lauded and blamed, threatened and feted, burnt in effigy and upheld as an icon of free expression, Rushdie is surprisingly easygoing and candid". Rushdie's first children's book, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, dedicated to his son, was published in 1990. It is an allegorical work that is critical of the issues of censorship encouraged by powerful leaders like the Ayatollah who curb the freedom of speech and expression. His next work, *East, West*, which is a collection of short stories that he wrote at different times, was published in 1994. After this he published his fifth novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh* in 1995—a family saga of four generations which won prestigious awards like the Whitbread Prize in 1995 and the Aristeion Prize in 1996. The next novel by Rushdie titled *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* was published in 1999. The book depicts a parallel universe where many of the crucial and real historical moments and events are altered or modified and transformed. The novel is basically an imagination of the alternative history of the development of modern rock music. His novel *Fury* published in 2001 is a psychological thriller. His *Imaginary Homelands* (1991)—a collection of essays—gives a new argument about place and belonging. *Step Across This Line*, another nonfiction by the writer published in 2002, has mentions of events like the September 11, 2001 attacks on the 'Twin Towers' in New York as well as his literary influences like James Joyce, Lewis Carroll, Jorge Luis Borges, etc. Rushdie's novel *Shalimar the Clown* published in 2005 is based on Kashmir and its political turmoil. It won the prestigious Hutch Crossword Book Award. In 2010, Rushdie published another children's book titled *Luka and the Fire of Life*, which is considered to be a sequel to *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. In 2012, Rushdie published his memoir titled *Joseph Anton*, which is narrated in the third-person and which documents his life under the death-threat. The name Joseph Anton in the title is the fake identity Rushdie went by while he was in hiding due to the 'fatwa' in order to protect himself. In 2015, Rushdie published another novel titled *Two Years Eight Months*

and Twenty-Eight Nights which is an allusion to *The Thousand and One Nights*. His latest novel *The Golden House*, published in 2017, is about the experience of an Indian family that has migrated from Mumbai and settled in New York.

Always a bold writer, Rushdie was knighted by the British monarch in 2007 in recognition of his contribution to literature.

8.0.2 Summary:

The story begins with the arrival of the dawn bus to the British Consulate or Embassy on the last Tuesday of the month. We are introduced to Miss Rehana—one of the central characters of the story—who comes to the Consulate in the dawn bus in the hopes of what seems like obtaining a passport and visa to move to England.

Rushdie describes Miss Rehana as a young woman of extraordinary beauty and magnetism. Her eyes are “large and black and bright” and she is someone who does not need the help of make-up to beautify herself. Muhammad Ali, the older character who is also pivotal to the story and who is the self-proclaimed advice expert on matters of emigration, finds himself immediately and helplessly attracted to this beauty.

Upon arrival, Miss Rehana boldly asks the scary-looking guard with his fearsome beard when the Consulate gates would open for the applicants to enter. The guard who is usually ill-tempered and dismissive of the “Tuesday women” who come to the Consulate, answers her with an unusual courtesy. He says to her that the gates may open in an hour or two as the Sahibs are currently busy having their breakfast.

We find the Consulate compound already full of the “Tuesday women” in the wee hours. Most of these women were veiled as the tradition demanded with very few exceptions like Miss Rehana. The other women who were waiting for the gates to open alongside Rehana, looked timid and frightened. They leaned on the arms of the male relatives who had accompanied them and who were also secretly afraid of being at the Embassy. At this point, the narrator informs the reader that unlike the majority of the women, Miss Rehana who had come alone without anyone accompanying her, did not seem frightened or alarmed in the least bit.

Muhammad Ali, the dishonest old crook who made a living by posing as an ‘advice-expert’ to the vulnerable women, approaches Miss Rehana in spite of himself as he finds her very fascinating and alluring. He asks her if she has come to get a permit to England—which is the case for majority of the women who come to the Embassy. Rehana affirms that she has indeed come for this reason to the Consulate which encourages the old man. He asks her if he can offer her his professional advice regarding her situation, advice that can be bought for a small fee. To this Rehana replies saying that she cannot afford to pay for the consultation as she is poor—an orphan in fact—unlike the other ladies who are dependents of wealthy relatives. As Ali keeps on insisting and trying to convince her that she will find his advice truly useful, she backs away saying that he must not waste his time on her as “good advice is rarer than rubies” and should be properly compensated with “good money” which she does not have. She tells him to go to the other women waiting by and make profit by giving his valuable advice to them as their male relatives who earn good wages can pay him for it. Then, in spite of himself, Ali proceeds to offer Miss Rehana free advice—something which he has never done before. A grateful Miss Rehana then happily obliges and listens to the old man’s advice. Ali asks Miss Rehana to sit down and starts with a show of various official procedures involved in verifying the identity of the applicants who have applied for the passport. He firstly asks Miss Rehana her name and her legal status. She replies for the same wherein it is revealed that she is the fiancée of one Mustafa Dar residing in Bradford, London. Ali who presumes to be a know-all, corrects her saying that it is not “Bradford, London” but “Bradford, England” as London is just one of the many towns of the great nation of England. He checks if she has filled up her application form properly and finds that she has. Rehana thanks the old fraud for his help and for what she thinks is his advice and says that she is going to wait by the Consulate gates for further proceedings. But Ali snaps at her loudly—irritated by what seemed to be her simplicity and ignorance pertaining to these matters. He says to her that things are not as simple, easy and fast as she supposes them to be. He grudgingly explains that the mere submission of an application form does not guarantee the issuance of permit to the applicant and that the Consulate is a place which is worse than even a regular, brutal police-station. Miss Rehana is convinced by his oratory and believes that it is indeed so. Ali goes on to say to the oblivious Rehana that the higher officials, the Sahibs, had a very low opinion of the “Tuesday women”. According to the Sahibs, all these women coming

to the Consulate every last Tuesday of the month, trying to obtain a passport or a visa claiming that they had relatives living in the cities of England as bus drivers or chartered-accountants—were all “crooks and liars and cheats”. There had been a trend of people providing false information just to get a permit in order to migrate to another country where they might have better chances, riches and access to more opportunities and a better lifestyle. This is why the screening process of the applicants at the Embassy has been made more strict, lengthy and exhaustive. Miss Rehana who is irked and provoked by this information says to the fraudster that she will simply tell the officials that she is not one of those “crooks and liars and cheats”. Upon this, Ali genuinely begins to worry for the young lady; she appeared an innocent simpleton to him, one who was most likely to fail in obtaining the required passport. He therefore informs her about the actual procedures at the Consulate and how to face them so that she is not shocked, embarrassed or mortified later. He warns her beforehand that the Sahibs would interview her (as they interview all applicants) and will ask her a lot of personal and intimate details about her and her relationship with her fiancée. He says that there will be questions about her virginity, her would-be spouse’s lovemaking habits, the nick-names they have given each other; she will also be interrogated about mundane stuff such as the number of rooms in the family home, the particular shade of walls, the particular days in a week when they empty the trashcan, and other details like the middle name of her fiancée’s “mother’s third cousin’s aunt’s step-daughter”. Even a single mistake or mismatch in her answer would disqualify her for the permit. Miss Rehana who is visibly shaken by this information asks Ali for his advice to avoid this embarrassing and difficult situation. So the latter mentions about his acquaintance working at the Consulate who, for a fee can secure all the necessary papers and with the required authenticating seals and Miss Rehana can then easily get the desired permit without having to undergo the disgraceful interrogation that awaited the applicants at the Consulate. Ali, who sincerely wants to do a favour to Miss Rehana by getting her a passport, does not tell her that this is the very scheme he uses to cheat most of the Tuesday women by giving them fake papers and who would happily pay him a big sum of money or jewellery for his services. Before actually tricking them he made sure to identify as his targets only those people who came from “hundreds of miles away” so that when they realise upon returning home that they had been cheated and swindled, it is too late. Ali, who finds himself strangely moved by the young lady, even offers to get her the hard-to-get

British passport for free, even if it causes him great inconvenience later on. But Miss Rehana is horrified by this and opposes the old man's proposal saying that this action amounts to a crime as the illegal gain of a permit is criminal and punishable by law. She tells Ali pointedly that this is a bad advice from him and that she is not going to confirm the image the Sahibs have of her countrymen by going to England illegally. Ali, who very generously offered her the passport so that she will not lose her dignity in the mortifying session of interrogation at the Consulate building, is stunned and offended by her angry response. Miss Rehana, who is also offended and slighted by the old crook's suggestion, stomps off to the Consulate gates after turning his offer down. But Ali continues to be anxious for the young girl throughout the day and is not able to carry on his business of swindling people by giving them wrong advice and issuing fake permits. He lingers near the Consulate gates waiting for Miss Rehana to emerge. Coming out of the Consulate building, Miss Rehana who finds Ali waiting, greets the old man politely and makes peace with him again. She appeared strangely calm, composed and serene to the old man who wonders if she has successfully passed the evaluations and gained the passport by charming the British Sahibs as well. He begins to congratulate her for her success but is cut short and promptly whisked off by the young lady as she wants to buy him a pakora as a way of thanking him for his advice and apologising for her rudeness. Amidst busy coolies and shouting hawkers and atop a bus-bumper, the two munch on the pakoras and start a conversation. It is here that Miss Rehana reveals about her life to the old man. She says that her engagement to Mustafa Dar who is twenty-one years older to her, had been arranged by her parents when she was just nine years old. She understands that her parents did this out of concern for her and with her best interest at heart—as most other parents do—so that she will have someone older, honest, reliable and experienced to take care of her and provide for her. She has never actually met the man; she has only one photo of his from years ago. She had talked with him over phone but even his voice is unrecognisable to her since they never conversed in person. It therefore seemed absurd to her to go and marry this man who is practically a stranger in a faraway place. She discloses to the shocked Ali that she deliberately gave wrong answers to all the questions asked at the Consulate. The surprised and dismayed Ali who still thinks that Miss Rehana wants to go to England to join her fiancée living there, asks her what she is going to do now to leave for England as there are no other options left for her to gain

a permit. Her identity and her answers at the Consulate had been recorded and there is no going back to change that. Miss Rehana happily declares that she will go back to living her independent and satisfactory life as an ayah or governess to three boys in a good household at Lahore. Ali who is distressed on her behalf feels that this is a “tragedy” and that she should have accepted the passport he had offered her earlier. But she corrects him and says that he does not need to be sad about her decision to stay back. She leaves with a big, happy smile which confounds and baffles the old crook who has never seen anything or anyone like this before. Miss Rehana had intentionally sabotaged her interview so that she will fail after listening to what Ali had to say regarding the same and what one needed to do to pass.

A. Check Your Progress

- Q1. Who are the “Tuesday women”?
- Q2. Why does Muhammad Ali correct Miss Rehana about the address she gave of her fiancée as “Bradford, London”?
- Q3. What do the Sahibs think about the “Tuesday women” and why?
- Q4. How are the passport applicants cheated by Muhammad Ali?
- Q5. Why does Rehana reject Ali’s passport that he offered to her for free?

Self-Assessment Questions

- Q1. Why does Miss Rehana come to the Consulate? What are her real intentions?
- Q2. Describe and explain the ways in which Miss Rehana is different from the rest of the “Tuesday women”.
- Q3. Why is Muhammad Ali unable to take advantage of Miss Rehana?
- Q4. Describe in detail, the bureaucratic process involved in issuing permits?
- Q5. Why does Ali think Rehana’s failure to gain a permit to be a tragedy?

8.1 Objectives:

The student should read the story carefully before proceeding to study this unit for a better understanding. After reading this unit, the student will be able to:

- understand the workings of an Embassy/Consulate
- see the patriarchal codes and expectations regarding women; understand gender stereotypes
- comprehend the aspect of migration and its desirability among Third-World nationals
- distinguish plot structures in a narrative

8.2 Plot:

The short-story “Good Advice Is Rarer Than Rubies” by Rushdie is developed along the lines of what is known as the twisted-plot or simply, plot-twist. According to Gustav Freytag, a German writer, a usual narrative has a plot that proceeds serially as follows:

Exposition—Rising action—Climax—Falling action
—*Denouement/Resolution*

Stories start with *exposition* which introduces the setting, the characters, the protagonist (hero) and the antagonist (villain), the relationship of the characters, their history and aims.

Rising action begins with the arrival of unforeseen conflicts or complications. Most of the parts of this phase of story see the protagonist trying to solve the problems that come his or her way.

Climax is generally the turning-point of the story. The protagonist’s actions and decisions in this part of the story play a big role in how it will end. It begins with the hero overcoming his obstacles by winning over the opponent. In the case of tragedy, the hero loses the struggle at this point.

Falling action is the part of the story after the protagonist’s crucial victory or defeat. Although the turning-point of the story is over, there are still important goals to achieve.

Denouement or Resolution comprises of events that lead to the ending of the story. At this point, all conflicts and problems are resolved or over with either the hero or the villain having the final victory or advantage. Sometimes, the future course of the protagonist or any other character is also revealed and added in this phase of the story.

In “Good Advice Is Rarer Than Rubies”, we can identify all the five phases of the plot as explained above. Exposition introduces to us the central characters of the story—Miss Rehana and Muhammad Ali—their thoughts and actions, as well as the setting of the story which is Pakistan. In the form of rising action, we see the difficulties that women like Miss Rehana face when it comes to obtaining a permit. At this point of the story, we see Miss Rehana trying to overcome the obstacles ahead of her due to the tough bureaucratic procedures, especially the prying interview, by patiently listening to an old man named Muhammad Ali who claims to be an advice-expert on immigration. In the climax we see Rehana rejecting Ali’s free illegal passport and boldly going to the Consulate building to sit for the interview with a mind to give her interviewers wrong answers. In falling action we have the moments when Rehana who has completed her interview sits with the old man and treats him to a pakora, and tells him that she purposefully gave wrong answers to all the questions. She thanks him for his advice which prepared her beforehand for the direction she is going to take so that she can avoid going to England to join her fiancée and become a dependent housewife. With her problems thus resolved, we come to the denouement or the resolution of the story where we see a happy, relaxed and carefree Miss Rehana saying to the shocked old man that he should stop being sad about her situation as it is what she really wants. The readers are given a glimpse of the direction she is going to take in the future; she tells the old man that she is going to continue being an independent woman with her job as an ayah to little boys of a family.

The important and interesting aspect to be noted in this short-story is the plot-twist. Plot twist is basically a literary device or technique that reveals an unexpected or unforeseen outcome or result. In this story, we misread Miss Rehana’s actual aims and intentions; like Muhammad Ali, the readers are made to believe from the beginning of the story that Rehana wants to go to England to join her fiancée there. It is only towards the end that readers along with Ali come to know that Miss Rehana never wanted to go to England in the first place. We see her using the old man’s advice to her own purpose at the Consulate by giving wrong answers and thereby avoiding the scenario of having to marry and live with a stranger for the rest of her life in a faraway place. Plot twists are also known as surprise endings for that is the effect it has on readers and the other characters of the story.

B. Check Your Progress

- Q1. What is a plot? State the sequence of a common plot in the correct order.
- Q2. What is a plot twist? In what way do we see a plot twist in the given story?

8.3 Characters:

The story “Good Advice Is Rarer Than Rubies” has two central characters around whom the plot revolves. Besides them are some other characters who are mentioned only in passing and not developed and depicted in detail—even though a few of them have important functions in the story. These include the courteous bus-driver in the beginning who brings women like Rehana and their companions to the British Embassy on early Tuesday mornings. Then we have the gruff, scary-looking lala, the bearded guard posted at the Consulate gates whose job is to maintain discipline and regulate the entry of applicants. There are other women who have come to obtain passports and who wait for long hours under the shadow of their male relatives—waiting to be granted entry into the Consulate building. And there are, most importantly, the British Sahibs—the legal officials in the Consulate building who had the power to either grant or refuse permits to the desperate applicants after a lengthy process of careful, meticulous examination and personal interview. We find in the story that these Sahibs often had a very low opinion of the “Tuesday women” who come to get permits. They assume most of the applicants to be imposters who lie about having relatives in England just so they can get a permit and move to England for a better life.

8.3.1 Miss Rehana:

From the beginning of the story, Miss Rehana is described as a woman of extraordinary beauty and charm with her large, bright eyes. She is a person who is sure of herself and exudes great confidence. She is marked out by the narrator as the “strange, big-eyed, independent girl” who comes alone to the Embassy—an unusual occurrence as women who come to the Consulate are always accompanied by their male relatives or other friends. And unlike the other “Tuesday women”, Miss Rehana, as readers find out later, does not really want a passport to go to Bradford, England, in order to join her fiancée. She may be poor, but she is an intelligent woman and does not fall into the trap of the old fraudster Ali who claims to be the

advice-expert on the easy way to obtain a passport upon payment of money. She is patient and not gullible like the other women who are tricked by the old man into buying fake papers. She is an upright character who has strong opinions on what is good and bad and refuses Ali's illegally obtained passport, even though he offers it to her free of cost. And because she actually wants to avoid marrying a stranger and live as a dependent housewife in a distant country, she uses Ali's advice to give only correct answers and the overly bureaucratic immigration system to free herself. Instead of giving accurate answers as Ali had advised, she deliberately gives wrong answers to disqualify herself. No one can really scold her for her mistakes and she happily goes back to her independent life earning her own money as an ayah to three good boys in a good family in Lahore.

Self-Assessment Questions

- Q1. Why does Miss Rehana give wrong answers in the interview?
What is she really after?
- Q2. What are the ways in which Miss Rehana can be marked as a rare, independent and intelligent character?

8.3.2 Muhammad Ali

The self-proclaimed advice-expert, Muhammad Ali is a dishonest old crook in the story. He makes a living by issuing fake permits to the unsuspecting and gullible "Tuesday women" who come to the Consulate. He is an unscrupulous old man who targeted only those people as victims who came from afar, so that by the time they return home and realise they had been cheated, it was too late and troublesome to take any action against him. But upon the entry of the young, beautiful and confident Miss Rehana, something inside him changes and he finds himself helplessly attracted to the lady. He does not act like his usual self and becomes genuinely concerned and worried for Rehana. At his own cost, he even offers Rehana a free passport which he got illegally to facilitate her move to England and so that she does not have lose her dignity with the round of intimate questions the Sahibs were likely to ask her at the Consulate. He is hurt and confused when Rehana rejects his offer and is surprised by her confession that she gave wrong answers to her interviewers because she never really wanted to go to England to join her fiancée. He therefore finds the young woman very enigmatic and her cheerful countenance leaves him shaken and wondering.

Stop to Consider

The issuance of fake or counterfeit passports is a real global problem. Copies of passports illegally gained by unauthorised agencies (like Muhammad Ali and his helpers) are sold to ignorant or desperate people or people seeking to flee their countries for whatever reason, at profit. In most instances, this allows illegal immigration, which is always a burning issue and point of contention for the host nation.

8.4 Themes:

8.4.1 Challenge to Gender Stereotypes:

One can easily argue that Rushdie's story, "Good Advice Is Rarer Than Rubies" is feminist to a great extent. The central character Miss Rehana—her traits and talk, the behaviour she exhibits and her independent spirit in general—brings to mind the image of the 'New Woman', a feminist ideal. Unlike the other "Tuesday women" at the Consulate who are timid and passive, Miss Rehana is bold and active, in charge of her own affairs and in control of her own life. She is presented as a contrast to the other women at the Embassy who conform to patriarchal norms of passivity and submissiveness. They are dependent on their male relatives who accompany them to carry out the business of getting permits on their behalf; they do not seem confident enough to do soon their own. This again propagates the patriarchal tenet whereby women are supposed to be confined to the household and domestic affairs without the need for exposure or proper education. And they are also prone to getting easily cheated and deceived by crooks like Muhammad Ali. Miss Rehana however, breaks many of the gender stereotypes that patriarchy has set out about women. She comes alone to the Embassy, not with the intention of getting permit to England to join a husband and become a housewife, but to free herself from this bond in order to carry on living an independent life and earning her own money—which she does as an ayah to three little boys. She escapes the patriarchal set-up of arranged marriages. She is not fearful of the authorities and has enough knowledge and sense to negotiate the arduous processes at the Embassy without much help from anyone else. Ali therefore finds her very fascinating, intelligent and unique.

Self-Assessment Question

Q. What are the ways in which Miss Rehana breaks gender stereotypes regarding women in a patriarchal society?

Stop to Consider

Abdulrazak Gurnah's explanation might be pertinent here. He says that the story is "is one of few works to openly broach the question of gender" (2007:142). He explains further writing that "The story draws attention to the plight of Third World women in the East, complete with the horrors of child marriage and/or abandonment by partners who have left for the supposedly more desirable West, but Rehana's gentle refusal requires us to pause at the question of gender and ask if a movement West will set her free? Rehana who now roams barefaced, big-eyed and independent might well find herself veiled and in service of an ageing master in Bradford, in a stridently Muslim immigrant enclave" (2007:142). This explanation thus shows the importance of Rushdie's story which deals with the aspect of gender, highlighting its confining strictures and expectations upon the Middle-East/Eastern women.

8.4.2 Irony:

Irony, which basically involves unexpected outcomes or situations, is another major element of the story and its plot twist. Ironical situations abound in the story. The biggest irony lies in the fact that Miss Rehana uses the old man's advice on how to get a passport by giving correct answers at the Embassy, to make sure that she does not get any permit by purposefully disqualifying herself through wrong answers.

8.5 Summing Up:

The short story by Rushdie sheds light on many aspects of society and culture. With the portrayal of Miss Rehana, we find a new kind of woman who is not silent or dominated, but a woman who speaks her own mind and is confident. She is someone who challenges many of the patriarchal values regarding women. We also see the presence of scammers in society through the character Ali who take advantage of people's ignorance, especially uneducated women and thrive on it. Migrating to richer nations is shown to

be quite popular and we also find that the British officials do not have a good opinion of the Pakistanis migrating—to their homeland to settle in permanently. Readers also learn about the lengthy and taxing bureaucratic process of issuing passports at Embassies.

8.6 References and Suggested Readings:

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Rushdie, Salman. “Good Advice Is Rarer Than Rubies”. *East, West*. New York: Vintage, 1998

8.7 Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’:

A1. The women who come to the Consulate/Embassy every Tuesday in order to obtain passports or visa permits

A2. Muhammad Ali corrects Rehana regarding the address she gave of her fiancée as “Bradford, London”, saying that the proper address should be written as “Bradford, England” instead since London is just one of the many towns of the great nation of England

A3. The Sahibs or the Consulate officials think of the ‘Tuesday women’ as “crooks and liars and cheats” because many of these women falsify information just in order to get passports or permits that will get them to England

A4. Muhammad Ali cheats the naive and gullible passport applicants by pretending to be the middle-man or ‘advice-expert’ and issuing them fake, unauthorised permits upon the payment of a fee

A5. Miss Rehana rejects the genuine passport that Ali offered to her free of cost as she did not want to be counted among the ‘Tuesday women’ who were considered as “crooks and liars and thieves” for gaining passports illegally. Also, it was never really her desire to get one just so she can go

and join her fiancée and live a dependent life. Hence she rejects the passport outright.

B1. Taken in a literary sense, plot is simply the constitution of events in a given story or narrative.

The general sequence of a plot is as follows:

Exposition—Rising action—Climax—
Falling action—Denouement/Resolution

B2. Plot twist in a story is simply an unexpected development or outcome. It points to a change in the original direction of the story.

In the given story, the plot twist is seen in Miss Rehana's actual intentions in that she does not really want a passport to England to join her fiancée (when in the beginning it is made to look as if she is desperate for a permit like the other women) . She purposefully gives wrong answers at the Consulate so that she is denied a permit.

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Unit 9

GRAMMAR

Contents:

- 9.0 Introduction**
- 9.1 Objectives**
- 9.2 Make sentences using common phrases and idioms**
- 9.3 Common errors: To be answered as directed**
- 9.4 Correct use of verbs, tenses, prepositions etc.**
- 9.5 Comprehension**
- 9.6 Summing Up**
- 9.7 Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’**
- 9.8 References and Suggested Readings**

9.0 Introduction:

This unit focuses on the grammar part of the paper “English-1”. There are four topics that are covered. The first topic is “make sentences using phrases and idioms”. Here, common English phrases and idioms are listed alphabetically along with their meanings and sample sentences. The second topic is “common errors”. Here, some of the most common errors in English are discussed and guidelines regarding how to avoid them are provided. The third topic is “correct use of verbs, tenses and prepositions”. Here, various forms of verbs, tenses and prepositions and their specific uses are explained. The fourth topic is “comprehension”. Here, different kinds of reading comprehension questions are discussed with reference to a sample passage. All the topics are presented with the help of representative sentences and practice questions for each are provided for you to test yourselves.

9.1 Objectives:

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

- Grasp the meanings of some common phrases and idioms in English.
- Use phrases and idioms in your spoken and written communication.

- Identify common errors in English.
- Avoid common errors in English.
- Understand the usage of verbs, tenses and prepositions.
- Develop ways of comprehending reading materials.
- Answer reading comprehension questions of different kinds.

9.2 Make Sentences using common phrases and idioms:

► **Introduction:**

To understand “phrases and idioms”, we have to understand the difference between literal and non-literal meaning. Literal meaning refers to the standard meanings of words whereas non- literal meaning involves a departure from standard meaning in order to achieve a special meaning or effect. For example, we are all familiar with the standard meanings of “cat” and “dog”. But the phrase “raining cats and dogs” has nothing to do with these standard meanings. Instead, it means that it’s raining heavily. Therefore, we can say that the phrase “raining cats and dogs” has a non-literal meaning or an idiomatic meaning. In other words, it is an idiom.

Another important thing to note is the difference between the terms “phrase” and “idiom”. A phrase refers to a small group of words standing together as a conceptual unit, viz., “a flock of sheep”. However, the phrase “black sheep” refers to an odd or disreputable member of a group or family. The meaning of the phrase is completely different from the words contained in it. Hence “black sheep” is an idiom. Thus, it can be concluded that all idioms are phrases but all phrases are not idioms. Also note that there are many phrasal verbs (compound verbs that result from combining a verb with a preposition or an adverb) which have idiomatic meanings. For example, the phrasal verb “take back” means to retract a statement.

Self Assessment Questions

Can you think of phrases and idioms peculiar to your mother tongue?
Write down ten such phrases and idioms along with their meanings.

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9.2.2 Common phrases and idioms:

The following section alphabetically lists some important English phrases and idioms along with their meanings. Sample sentences are provided for better understanding.

A

A blessing in disguise

Meaning: An apparent misfortune but eventually has good results.

As my entrance test is on the day of the match, not getting selected in the football team is a blessing in disguise for me.

A taste of your own medicine

Meaning: Bad treatment deservedly received for treating other people badly.

Don't be mean to others because you won't like it when you get a taste of your own medicine.

B

Beat around/about the bush

Meaning: Avoid talking about the main subject.

Stop beating around the bush and tell me what you think.

Butterflies in your stomach

Meaning: Have a queasy feeling because you are nervous.

It is my first day at college and I have butterflies in my stomach.

C

Call it a day

Meaning: Decide or agree to stop doing something, either temporarily or permanently.

After teaching for 40 years, the professor decided to call it a day.

Cry wolf

Meaning: To keep asking for help even when you don't need it.

Our neighbors cried wolf so many times that when they were really in trouble no one believed them.

D

Devil's advocate

Meaning: One who presents a counter-argument.

The plan is good, but I'll play the devil's advocate so that we know what the other group can say.

Don't count your chickens before they hatch

Meaning: Do not count on something that has not yet happened.

Although your interview went well and you got a positive response from the committee, wait till you get the offer letter. Don't count your chickens before they hatch.

E

Easier said than done

Meaning: Something seems like a good idea, but it would be difficult to do.

Everybody agreed to go to Ladakh during the autumn break but it is easier said than done.

Eat your words

Meaning: Retract or take back what you have said, especially when forced to do so.

I told my sister that my friends never come on time. I will have to eat my words (because they arrived before time at our place).

F

Fair-weather friend

Meaning: Someone who cannot be relied on in a crisis.

It is better to have a few loyal friends than many fair-weather friends.

Figure out

Meaning: To solve something by using reasoning.

I can't figure out how this machine works.

G

Get something off your chest

Meaning: Say something that you have wanted to say for a long time, resulting in a sense of relief.

I have to get this off my chest – I drove your car when you were away.

Go the extra mile

Meaning: To make an extra effort to achieve something.

She is a nice person who always goes the extra mile to help others.

H

Hit the sack

Meaning: Go to bed.

They have already hit the sack as they have to leave at six in the morning tomorrow.

Hold one's tongue

Meaning: To stay quiet despite wanting to say something.

I don't like his ideas, but I will hold my tongue.

I

In a nutshell

Meaning: In the fewest possible words.

Please tell us your plan in a nutshell.

In the nick of time

Meaning: Just at the critical moment.

He arrived at the wedding in the nick of time.

J

Jack of all trades (and master of none)

Meaning: A person who can do many different types of work (but has special skill in none).

As Neha's elder brother is a jack of all trades, their family had no difficulty while shifting from Barpeta to Guwahati.

Joined at the hip

Meaning: Two people who are inseparable.

Sangeeta and Priyanka have been joined at the hip since their college days

K

Keep someone or something at arm's length

Meaning: Avoid intimacy or close contact with someone or something.

Though they are business partners, they keep each other at arm's length.

Kill two birds with one stone

Meaning: Achieve two aims at once.

Watching the news while cooking dinner kills two birds at the same time.

L

Let the cat out of the bag

Meaning: To let a secret out in the open.

We are throwing a birthday party for him but please don't let the cat out of the bag.

Light years away

Meaning: Very far away in time.

A cure for that disease is probably light years away.

M

Make (cut) a long story short

Meaning: Abbreviate a long explanation into a short one.

To make a long story short, I got all the lost items and the thief is in police custody.

Make a mountain out of a molehill

Meaning: Foolishly or pointlessly exaggerate the importance of something trivial.

Stop crying! You are making a mountain out of a molehill.

N

Next to kin

Meaning: Closest relative or relatives.

Free medical facilities were provided to the next of kin of all the soldiers.

No love lost

Meaning: Mutual dislike between two people.

After the property conflict, there is no love lost between the two brothers.

O

Oil and water

Meaning: Two elements, factors or people that do not agree or blend together.

The two new members of the committee are like oil and water.

Once in a blue moon

Meaning: Rarely

I visit my aunt once in a blue moon.

P

Pull someone's leg

Meaning: Deceive someone playfully; tease someone.

Stop pulling my leg – I know you didn't forget to bring the present.

Pull yourself together

Meaning: Recover control of your emotions.

You have to pull yourself together and talk to the detective.

Q

Quick as a flash

Meaning: Happening or made very quickly.

Quick as a flash, the new boy ate his food and left the dining room.

Quiet as a mouse (or lamb)

Meaning: Extremely quite or docile.

The teachers do not have any problem with her as she is as quiet as a mouse.

R

Rule something out

Meaning: To stop considering something as a possibility.

The police said that the use of suicide bombers cannot be ruled out.

Run out

Meaning: To not have enough of something

I ran out of sugar and borrowed some from my neighbor.

S

Stick your nose into something

Meaning: To show too much interest in things that are someone's private business.

You should not stick your nose into their disagreement.

Straight from the horse's mouth

Meaning: From the person directly concerned or another authoritative source.

I heard about the fight straight from the horse's mouth.

T

Take a rain check (on something)

Meaning: Said when politely refusing an offer, with the implication that you may take it up at a later date.

Can I take a rain check on the outing? I have an assignment to finish.

Tip of the iceberg

Meaning: The small perceptible part of a much larger situation or problem which remains hidden.

The recent strike is just the tip of the iceberg.

U

Under the weather

Meaning: Slightly unwell.

I did not go to college as I am under the weather.

Up to the mark

Meaning: Of the required standard

The school's performance in sports was not up to the mark this year.

V

Vent your spleen

Meaning: Give free expression to your anger or displeasure.

The press conference provided an opportunity to many social workers to vent their spleen.

Vim and vigour

Meaning: Energy and enthusiasm.

Her grandmother is full of vim and vigour.

W

Walk on air

Meaning: Feel elated.

I have been walking on air since I received the good news.

Wash your hands of

Meaning: Disclaim responsibility for (something).

Although he worked on the project for nine years, he washed his hands of it after the case against the company.

X

X marks the spot

Meaning: Said to show the exact spot

Please move the table here – X marks the spot.

Y

Yesterday's man

Meaning: A man, especially a politician, whose career is finished or past its peak.

The famous leader is now a yesterday's man.

Yoke around someone's neck

Meaning: Trouble or burden for someone

The huge loan is a yoke around the couple's neck.

Z

Zero in on something or somebody

Meaning: To direct all your attention towards a particular person or thing

We have to finalise a topic soon and zero in on it.

Zip your lip

Meaning: To say nothing or stop talking.

One should know when to zip one's lip

Check Your Progress

1. Choose the correct meanings of the underlined idioms:
 - i. I am working body and soul in this project.
 - (a) Involving every aspect of a person; completely.
 - (b) Half-heartedly.
 - (c) Without a fixed plan.
 - (d) Randomly.
 - ii. The front desk officials always have to bear the brunt of public anger.
 - (a) Understand people's problems.
 - (b) Be the person to suffer the most (as the result of an attack, misfortune, etc.).
 - (c) Be unavailable.
 - (d) Offer the address issues.
 - iii. Even after repeated warnings, she was like a bull in a china shop during the meeting.

- (a) Asking irrelevant questions.
 - (b) Responding to all queries.
 - (c) Offering suggestions.
 - (d) Behaving recklessly and clumsily in a place or situation where you are likely to cause damage or injury.
- iv. This controversy can't be swept under the carpet.
- (a) Clean the area properly.
 - (b) Seek suggestions in order to solve a difficult problem.
 - (c) Hide or ignore something damaging, unpleasant or difficult in the hope that it will be forgotten
 - (d) Ask for help from those with direct knowledge about the controversy.
- v. As it was very cold, the children sat cheek by jowl and listened to stories.
- (a) Very close together.
 - (b) Far apart.
 - (c) In a line.
 - (d) In a circle.
2. Make sentences using the following:
- i. Give someone an earful
 - ii. By hook or by crook
 - iii. By/In leaps and bounds
 - iv. Stab someone in the back
 - v. A bone of contention

9.3 Common Errors: To be answered as directed:

The following are some of the areas in which the most common errors in English occur. Each area is discussed with the help of sample sentences.

1. "An"

Consider the following sentences:

- i. I ate an apple.*
- ii. My sister is doing an M.A. in English.*
- iii. The new doctor is an honest man.*

We are aware that “an” is used before a word beginning with a vowel sound, as seen in sentence (i). One thing to keep in mind is the distinction between letter and sound. There are words in English which may not begin with letters that constitute the English vowels (a, e, i, o, u) but still begin with vowel sounds. For example, the word “M.A.” begins with the vowel sound “em” and in “honest”, the letter “h” is silent. Hence we use the article “an” before them. Alternatively, there are certain words that begin with vowels but are preceded by the article “a” reserved for consonants. For example, the word “university” and “one” begin with the vowels (letters) “u” and “o” respectively, but take the article “a” as they begin with consonant sounds.

2. Among/Between

Consider the following sentences:

i. I sat between Rahul and Gayatri.

ii. It is necessary to develop friendship among students.

“Between” is used when there are people or things on either side of someone or something. “Between” is used when one is talking about two people or things. For three or more people or things considered as a group or mass, “among” or “amongst” is used.

Consider the following sentences:

iii. What are the differences between the various courses?

iv. It's so difficult to choose between the three candidates.

Please note that “between” and not “among” is used to talk about differences and choosing one person or thing from others, even though there may be more than two people or things.

3. Any/Some

Consider the following sentences:

i. She doesn't have any friends.

ii. I saw some people outside.

“Any” and “some” are used with uncountable nouns and plural countable nouns. Note that usually, “any” is used in negative sentences whereas “some” is used in positive sentences.

Consider the following sentences:

iii. Could you give me some help, please?

iv. Aren't there some letters to be posted?

v. Have you seen any good films recently?

“Some” is used in offers, requests and questions that expect or hope for a yes answer. In other questions, “any” is used.

Consider the following sentence:

vi. I'm not sure if there are any seats left.

“Any” instead of “some” is used to talk about something unknown or uncertain.

4. Beside/Besides

Consider the following sentences:

i. We need to discover another venue for the event, besides the town hall.

ii. We brought candies from the store beside our house.

The meaning of “beside” is “next to” whereas the meaning of “besides” is “in addition to” or “also”.

5. Comprise/Consist

Consider the following sentences:

The committee comprises twelve members.

The family consists of three individuals.

It is a common mistake to say “comprise of”. Keep in mind that “comprise” is never followed by “of”. However, the phrases “composed of” and “consists of” are correct.

6. Each/Every/All

Consider the following sentences:

- i. We had to answer each question on a new page.*
- ii. Every morning, I serve my grandfather breakfast.*
- iii. Nearly every person received a prize.*

“Each” and “every” are both used in front of a singular countable noun. But the difference is that “each” refers to an individual object or person whereas “every” refers to these objects or persons as part of a collective group. Note that if preceded by “nearly” or “not”, we use “every”.

Consider the following sentences:

- iv. All students were present yesterday.*
- v. All donations will be sent to the relief fund.*

“All” is used in front of plural countable nouns and uncountable nouns.

7. Either...or/Neither...nor

Consider the following sentences:

- i. We can either go by bus or by train.*
- ii. Neither Italy nor France has the required score.*

“Either...or” and “neither...nor” are conjunctions, used to introduce alternatives. Remember that the position of “either” should be the same as the position of “or”, i.e., immediately before a subject, immediately before a main verb, immediately after a verb, etc. In everyday conversation, “either” is often placed immediately before the main verb, as in sentence (i). Similarly, “neither” should be placed immediately before the first of the connected items and “nor” immediately before the second.

Consider the following sentences:

- iii. Neither Priya nor her sister likes mangoes.*
- iv. Either the bears or the lions have escaped the zoo.*
- v. Neither the teacher nor the students were informed.*
- vi. Either you or Gita has to clean the room.*

In sentences where “either...or” and “neither...nor” are used, pay special attention to subject-verb agreement. If both the subjects are singular, the verb is singular, as seen in sentence (iii). If both the subjects are plural, a plural verb is used, as seen in sentence (iv). If one of the subjects is plural/ requires a plural verb and the other subject is singular/ requires a singular verb, the verb form of the subject that is nearest the main verb is used, as seen in sentences (v) and (vi).

8. Elder/Older

Consider the following sentences:

i. The restaurant seems to be more popular with older people.

ii. She is my elder sister

“Elder” is used when one is talking about the members of a family. In all other situations, “older” is used.

9. Few/A few/Little/A little

Consider the following sentences

i. I have few friends in this town.

ii. There are a few oranges in the fridge.

iii. I have little money left.

iv. I gave the homeless man a little money.

“Few/a few” is used with plural countable nouns and “little/a little” with uncountable nouns. Also, “few” and “little” mean “hardly any” and “little” and “a little” mean “not many or much”.

10. Many/Much

Consider the following sentences:

i. How many pens do we need?

ii. My mother didn't serve me much rice.

“Many” and “much” are used mainly in interrogative and negative sentences. “Many” is used in front of plural countable nouns, and “much” in front of uncountable nouns.

Consider the following sentences:

iii. *We are given a lot of tests (or, we are given lots of tests).*

iv. *My husband and I met each other many years ago.*

It is to be noted that as seen in sentence (iii), in affirmative sentences, phrases such as “a lot of” and “plenty of” are used instead of “many” and “much”. However, use “many” before weeks, months and years in affirmative sentences, as seen in sentence (iv).

Self Assessment Questions

Discuss with a partner and make a list of common errors in English that you make. Why do you think you make these errors and how can they be avoided?

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Check Your Progress

Answer the following as directed:

3. Write the article appropriate for the following sentences:
 - i. My sister has _____ L.L.B. from this university.
 - ii. The security guard is _____ honorable man.
4. Choose the right option:
 - i. The purpose of the talk was to spread awareness about cancer _____ the students (between/among).
 - ii. His parents asked him to choose _____ a guitar, a pair of shoes, a watch and a bag for his birthday present (between/among).
5. Choose the right option:
 - i. I'm not sure if there are _____ packets left (any/some).
 - ii. Don't you have _____ work to be completed (any/some)?
6. Fill in the blanks with “beside” or “besides”.
 - i. Who came to meet you, _____ John?
 - ii. I always sit _____ her in the classroom.
7. Rewrite the following sentences correctly:
 - i. In 1992, the climate control board comprised of 24 members.
 - ii. The interview panel is consists of two internal and three external experts.

8. Identify the error in the following sentences:
 - i. Not each student can excel in academics.
 - ii. Every newcomers were given welcome kits.
9. Rewrite the following sentences correctly:
 - i. I will either go to Nalbari or my parents will come to Guwahati.
 - ii. Neither the books nor the pencil box were found.
10. Choose the correct option:
 - i. Puja has two _____ sisters (elder/older).
 - ii. _____ people are given preference in this hospital.
11. Identify the error in the following sentences:
 - i. I have few milk left in the fridge.
 - ii. We will join you after half an hour – we have few tasks to finish.
12. Fill in the blanks with “many” or “much”.
 - i. The delegates did not pay _____ attention to the announcement.
 - ii. I received the call letter after _____ weeks.

9.4 Correct use of verbs, tenses and prepositions etc:

➤ Verbs:

❖ Introduction:

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *Chayan clicks pictures.*
- ii. *Chayan can click pictures.*

In any sentence, subject, verb, object and complement are the nuclear elements, i.e., they are essential to the structure of the sentence. The verbal element of a sentence consists of one word or more than one word. In the first sentence, the verbal element consists of the main verb “clicks”. In the second sentence, the verbal element consists of the modal auxiliary verb “can” and the main verb “click”. Verbs can thus be largely classified into two categories – main verbs and auxiliary verbs (also known as helping verbs). It is mandatory that auxiliaries are followed by main verbs.

❖ Subject-Verb agreement:

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *I like mangoes; I have a pen.*
- ii. *We like mangoes; We have a pen.*
- iii. *You like mangoes; You have a pen.*
- iv. *He/she/it likes mangoes; He/she/it has a pen.*
- v. *They like mangoes; They have a pen.*

If the sentence is in the simple present tense, the form of the verb depends on the subject of the sentence. If the subject is first person singular (I), the verb is used in the original form, as seen in sentence (i) – “like”, “have”. If the subject is first person plural (we), the verb is used in the original form, as seen in sentence (ii) – “like”, “have”. If the subject is second person singular or plural (you), the verb is used in the original form, as seen in sentence (iii) – “like”, “have”. If the subject is third person singular, the suffix “-s”, “-es” or “-ies” is added to the verb, as seen in sentence (iv) – “likes”, “has”. If the subject is third person plural, the verb is used in the original form, as seen in sentence (v) – “like”, “have”. This phenomenon is known as subject-verb agreement.

❖ **Types of main verbs:**

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *I cleaned my desk yesterday (simple past).*
- ii. *I have cleaned my desk / She has cleaned her desk (past participle).*
- iii. *My friends went to the planetarium yesterday (simple past)*
- iv. *My friends have gone to the planetarium (past participle).*

Main verbs can be sub-divided into two types – regular and irregular verbs. The past simple and past participle of regular verbs is “-ed”, as seen in sentences (i) – “cleaned” and (ii) – “have cleaned”. The past simple and past participle of irregular verbs is not “-ed”, as seen in sentences (iii) – “went” and (iv) – “have gone”.

❖ **Types of auxiliary verbs:**

Auxiliary verbs can be sub-divided into the following types:

I. Modals

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *Wait, I will open the windows.*
- ii. *The teacher used to give us a lot of assignments.*

Modals occur before the base form of the main verb and other auxiliary verbs. “Can”, “could”, “may”, “might”, “shall”, “should”, “will”, “would” and “must” are categorized as modals. Verbs such as “dare”, “need”, “ought to”, “used to” are considered to be modal-like auxiliaries.

II. Have

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *The guests have eaten dinner.*
- ii. *Have the guests eaten dinner?*
- iii. *The guests haven't eaten dinner.*

The perfective verb “have” also functions as an auxiliary. In sentence (i), “have” precedes the main verb “eat”. In sentence (ii), it moves to the sentence initial position to form a question. In the third sentence, “have + not” negates the sentence. It is to be noted that when the perfective “have” functions as an auxiliary, the verb following it is to be used in the participle form.

III. Be

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *The children are playing games.*
- ii. *Are the children playing games?*
- iii. *The children aren't playing games.*

In the above sentences, the progressive aspect represented by “be + -ing” (are + playing) functions as an auxiliary. It is to be noted that the “be” verb can be realised as “am”, “are”, “is”, “was” and “were”.

IV. Passive

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *The thieves were caught by the police.*
- ii. *Were the thieves caught by the police?*
- iii. *The thieves weren't caught by the police.*

Here, the passive “be + participle” (were + caught) functions as an auxiliary.

As discussed above, auxiliaries can be of four types, viz. the modal, the perfective, the progressive and the passive. It is to be noted that it is possible that more than one type of auxiliary can occur in one verbal element, viz. “The parcel will be arriving tomorrow”. In this sentence, there are two auxiliaries: the modal auxiliary “will” and the progressive “be arriving”.

❖ Uses of the modal auxiliaries:

The following are some of the ways in which the various modal auxiliaries are used:

I. Will and Shall

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *I will probably watch a movie this evening.*
- ii. *My parents won't be here tomorrow (won't = will + not).*
- iii. *The door is open – I will go and shut it.*
- iv. *The carton looks heavy. I'll help you with it.*
- v. *Sure, I'll give the book to your sister.*
- vi. *I'll pay you back next week.*
- vii. *Will you please keep quiet?*

“Will” is used to talk about the future, as seen in sentence (i). However, we do not use “will” for things we have arranged or planned to do in the future; instead, the present continuous tense is used (this point is discussed in 5.5.6 –I). “Will” is used when we decide to do something at the time of speaking, as seen in sentence (iii); when we offer to do something, as seen in sentence (iv); when we agree to do something, as seen in sentence (v); when we promise to do something, as seen in sentence (vi); and when we ask somebody to do something, as seen in sentence (vii).

Consider the following sentences:

- viii. *Shall I call the doctor?*
- ix. *We are in deep trouble. What shall we do?*

“Shall” can be used in place of “will” if the subject is “I” or “we”. However, in spoken English, “will” is generally used. The negative of shall is shan't (shall +not). “Shall” is used in questions to ask somebody's opinion, as seen in sentence (viii) or suggestion, as seen in sentence (ix).

II. Can and Could

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *We can see the hills from the kitchen.*
- ii. *She can use my laptop during the vacation.*
- iii. *Can the performers compete in extremely harsh conditions?*

We use “can” to say that something is possible, as seen in sentence (i), that something is allowed, as seen in sentence (ii) or that somebody has the ability to do something, as seen in sentence (iii). The negative is “can't” (can + not = cannot).

Consider the following sentences:

- iv. *We could see the hills from the kitchen.*
- v. *We could go to the cinema in the evening.*
- vi. *I'm so tired, I could sleep for a week.*
- vii. *I couldn't live in a small town.*

Sometimes, “could” is the past tense of “can”, as seen in sentence (iv). However, “could” is also used for the following purposes: to talk about possible actions now or in the future, especially to make suggestions, as seen in sentence (v); and to talk about actions which are not realistic, as seen in sentence (vi). “Couldn’t” is used to say that something would not be possible now, as seen in sentence (vii).

III. May and Might

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *He may come.*
- ii. *He might come.*

“May” or “might” is used to say that something is a possibility. The negative forms are “may not” and “might not” or “mightn’t”. Keep in mind that we can use either “may” or “might” most of the times. However, we use only “might” when the situation is not real, viz. “*If I were in her position, I might change the title of the paper*”.

IV. Must

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *There is no time left – we must hurry.*
- ii. *We mustn’t make any noise here.*

We use “must” to say that it is necessary that you do it. We use “mustn’t” to say that it is necessary that you do not do it (so don’t do it).

V. Should

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *You look exhausted. You should rest for a while.*
- ii. *The man on the bike should be wearing a helmet.*
- iii. *It should be easy to find paying guest accommodation in this city.*

“Should” is generally used to say that it is a good thing to do or the right thing to do, as seen in sentence (i). It is, however, less strong than “must”. You can also use “should” when something is not right, as seen in sentence (ii) and to say what you expect something to happen, as seen in sentence (iii). The past tense of “should” is “shouldn’t” (should + not).

VI. Would

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *She said she'd come on Monday when I met her (she + would = she'd).*
- ii. *I would love to open a restaurant.*
- iii. *When we were children, we would sit beside our grandmother and listen to her stories.*
- iv. *She wouldn't give me the phone number.*

Sometimes, “would” is the past tense of “will”, as seen in sentence (i). Additionally, we use “would” and the negative “wouldn’t” (would + not) when we imagine a situation or action, as seen in sentence (ii). You can also use “would” when you talk about things that happened regularly in the past, as seen in sentence (iii). Also, “wouldn’t” can be used to say that somebody refused to do something, as seen in sentence (iv).

Check Your Progress

13. Identify the main verbs and the auxiliary verbs in the following passage:
Dolphins are regarded as the friendliest creatures in the sea. The more we learn about dolphins, the more we realize that their society is more complex than people previously imagined. They look after other dolphins when they are ill, care for pregnant mothers and protect the weakest in the community, as we do. Some scientists have suggested that dolphins have a language but it is much more probable that they communicate with each other without needing words. Could any of these mammals be more intelligent than man? Certainly the most common argument in favor of man's superiority over them that we can kill them more easily than they can kill us is the least satisfactory. On the contrary, the more we discover about these remarkable creatures, the less we appear superior when we destroy them.
14. Fill in the blanks with the correct form of the verbs given in brackets:
 - i. In India, the banks usually _____ at 9.30 in the morning (open).
 - ii. Watches are expensive. They _____ a lot of money (cost).
 - iii. Water _____ at 100 degree Celsius (boil).

iv. Gita and I are good friends. I _____ her and she _____ me (like).

v. Ashok _____ his bicycle every day (wash).

15. Choose the right option:

i. I can't meet you tomorrow. I'm playing/ I'll play cricket.

ii. It's so windy – I'm going to/I will shut the windows.

iii. Don't worry, I may/will not reveal your secret.

iv. They will/can swim very well.

v. I'm so hungry, I can/could eat all the food in the restaurant.

vi. If I were in the security guard's position, I may/might inform the police immediately.

vii. We won't/mustn't throw garbage in this area.

viii. The children look emaciated. They should/can eat something quickly.

ix. I will/would love to meet the singers backstage.

x. When we were in college, we must/would sit in the canteen and talk for hours.

Tense:

❖ Tense Forms

The following are some of the tense forms commonly used in the English language:

I. Simple Present and Present Continuous

Consider the following examples:

i. *He usually writes his letters in English, but today he is writing in Assamese.*

ii. *She always eats oats for breakfast but today she is eating parathas.*

The simple present tense (“writes”, “eats”) usually shows that an action is habitual or happens regularly. On the other hand, the present continuous tense (“is writing”, “is eating”) usually shows that the action is going on at the actual moment of speaking or writing.

Consider the following sentences:

iii. *If it rains, the party will be cancelled.*

iv. *I see a bus coming.*

v. *Mr. Gogoi works in an office.*

vi. *The train leaves at 3 p.m., so I need to be at the station by 1.*

- vii. *I start my new internship in August.*
- viii. *Now the tiger targets the lone deer.*

The simple present tense is also used in clauses of time and condition, as seen in sentence (iii); with verbs which cannot be used in the continuous form (verbs like “see”, “agree”, “contain”, “deserve”, “love”, “like”, “know”), as seen in sentence (iv); for description of people and places, as seen in sentence (v); for timetables, programmes and planned future action, as seen in sentences (vi and vii); and for dramatic narrative and TV/radio commentary, as seen in sentence (viii).

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *I am learning swimming during the summer vacation.*
- ii. *My parents are going to Shimla tomorrow.*
- iii. *My sister is always skipping meals.*

We use the present continuous tense to denote repeated action that occurs over a specified period of time, as seen in sentence (i); for a planned action in the near future, as seen in sentence (ii); and for a repeated action which is not approved of by the speaker, as seen in sentence (iii).

Self Assessment Questions

We cannot always find a one-to-one correspondence between tense and time in English. “Tense” refers to the form of the verb whereas “time” refers to the meaning of the verb. Therefore, sometimes the present tense can be used to refer to future time, viz., “*I am meeting my friends tomorrow*”.

Can you think of a similar phenomenon in any other language you are familiar with? Discuss with your friends.

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II. Simple past and present perfect

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *I came home in the evening.*
- ii. *I have read the book.*

Both simple past (came) and present perfect (have read) are used for an activity which happened in the past. Simple past is used to indicate that the action (single or repeated) occurred in the past, as seen in sentence (i). The focus of attention is on the action and the time of action may be indicated. On the other hand, present perfect is used to express the completion of an action “now”, as seen in sentence (ii). In sentence (ii), the implied meaning is that the speaker now knows about the contents of the book. Thus, the present perfect focuses our attention on the present relevance of a past activity more than the activity or the time of the activity.

Consider the following sentences:

iii. I finished the homework yesterday.

iv. I have recently completed my graduation.

v. I have attended two classes today.

It is to be noted that it is mandatory to use the simple past tense if an adverbial of fixed past time (“yesterday”) is used, as seen in sentence (iii). The present perfect tense is not usually used with such adverbials of fixed past time. However, it can be used with adverbs of indefinite past time, viz. “already”, “never”, “recently” etc., as seen in sentence (iv). Additionally, the present perfect tense can be used with adverbs of present time which is not yet over at the time of speaking or writing, as seen in sentence (v).

III. Past perfect

Consider the following sentence:

i. The train had left before we reached the station.

As seen in the above example, when two actions are completed in the past (“the train left” and “we reached the station”), the action which happens first is indicated by the past perfect tense (“had left”) and the other action is indicated by the simple past tense (“we reached”). Therefore, we can say that the past perfect tense is a past before past.

Consider the following sentences:

ii. The students had completed their assignments by lunchtime.

iii. If I had reached on time, I would have met the chief guest.

- iv. *I wish I had studied harder.*
- v. *The judge said, “The lawyers presented all the documents”/ “The judge said that the lawyers had presented all the documents”.*

There are some other uses of the past perfect tense. We use the past perfect to talk about an action completed by a certain time in the past, as seen in sentence (ii); in a conditional clause, as seen in sentence (iii); to express an unfulfilled wish, as seen in sentence (iv); and to change the simple past or the present perfect tense when converting direct speech into indirect, as seen in sentence (v).

IV. Present perfect continuous

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *I have been writing this novel since last year.*
- ii. *I have been writing this book for 4 years.*

The present perfect continuous tense (“have been writing”) is used to indicate that the action began at a certain time in the past and that it is still going on at the present moment.

V. Past continuous

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *When we arrived, she was cooking breakfast for us.*

The past continuous tense (“was cooking”) is used to express an action taking place in the past while another action was going on.

VI. Past perfect continuous

Consider the following sentence:

- i. *I was tired when I reached home. I’d been working hard all day.*

The past perfect continuous tense (“had been working”) is used to indicate that something had been happening for a period of time before something else happened.

Check Your Progress

16. Fill in the blanks with the simple present or the present continuous forms of the verbs given in brackets:

- i. She usually _____ her answers in English but today she _____ in Assamese (write).
- ii. The bus _____ at 9 a.m, but it is late today and _____ at 10 a.m (leave).
- iii. The moon _____ in the sky at night (shine).
- iv. At the moment, the student union _____ its annual meeting (hold).
- v. They _____ ten students from the college for this offence (expel).

17. Fill in the blanks with the simple past, the present perfect or the past perfect forms of the verbs given in brackets:

- i. I _____ (buy) the book 2 years ago but I _____ it yet (not read).
- ii. I _____ him last month (see).
- iii. I _____ the museum recently (visit).
- iv. She immediately _____ (recognize) the man because she _____ (see) him before.
- v. I wish I _____ (met) the film star.

18. Choose the right option:

- i. We (are/have been) training candidates for four years.
- ii. When I called her, she _____ (was/have been) writing.
- iii. I _____ (did not finish/have not finished) the assignments yet.
- iv. There was a lot of food when we reached. My mother _____ (was cooking/had been cooking) all day.
- v. My family _____ (live) in Australia since 2001.

➤ Prepositions

❖ Common English prepositions

A preposition relates a noun phrase to another element in the clause, especially the verb phrase. Prepositions generally occur before nouns, noun phrases or pronouns. However, some prepositions may also occur at the end of a sentence. The following are some of the most frequently used prepositions in English:

I. At/On/In

At/On/In as prepositions of time:

Consider the following sentences:

- i. They reached at 10 o'clock.*
- ii. They reached on Monday.*
- iii. They reached in January/in 1995.*

“At” is used for the time of day, as seen in sentence (i) (at 7 o'clock, at 12.20, at dinnertime). “On” is used for days and dates, as seen in sentence (ii) (on Wednesday, on 22 May 1985, on *Gandhi Jayanti*, on her anniversary). “In” is used for longer periods like months, years, seasons etc., as seen in sentence (iii) (in December, in 1975, in the twentieth century, in the past, in summer).

We always say “at the weekend”, “at night”, “at Christmas”, “at the end of”, “at the moment”; we say “on Monday afternoon”, “on Wednesday night”; and we say “in the morning”, “in the evening”, “in five years (five years from now).

At/On/In as prepositions of place:

Consider the following sentences:

- i. I am in the building.*
- ii. The car is at the traffic point.*
- iii. There is a mosquito on his nose.*

“In” is used to refer to a position in an enclosed space, as seen in sentence (i) (in the mall, in Guwahati, in the box). “At” is used to refer to a position at a specific point, as seen in sentence (ii) (At the crossroads, at the bus stop, at the help desk). “On” is used to refer to a position on the surface, as seen in sentence (iii) (on the table, on the wall, on the beach).

We say “in bed”, “in the sky”, “in a car”, “in the newspaper”, “in a photograph”, “in the middle of”; we say “at home”, “at the airport”, “at the game”, at the party, “at the top/bottom”; we say “on the cycle/bus/plane/train/ship”, “on the second floor”, “on the way home”. (Note that both “by” and “on” can precede bus/car/train etc. For example, “*Did you go to the party on a bike?*” (question about a specific party) and “*Do you go to work by bike?*” (question about daily activity).

Other uses of on/at:

Consider the following sentences:

- i. Many students of the college are on holiday.*
- ii. The show comes every week on television.*
- iii. I spoke to my mother on the phone.*

- iv. *She always goes to college on foot.*
- v. *My brother got a job at 22.*
- vi. *Water boils at 100 degree Celsius.*
- vii. *It is compulsory for the driver to drive at 40 kilometers per hour*

II. From...to/ Until/Since/For

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *We watched television from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m.*
- ii. *Wait here until the car comes.*
- iii. *It has been raining since morning.*
- iv. *They played cricket for 3 hours.*

“From...to” is used to indicate the beginning and end of an action, as seen in sentence (i) (“from 1995 to 1998”, “from January to March”); “until” occurs before the end of a period, as seen in sentence (ii) (until Friday, until the break); “since” occurs before a time in the past and indicates the time from that point to now, as seen in sentence (iii) (“since Monday”, “since the wedding”, “since the phone rang”); “for” occurs before a period of time to indicate how long something goes on, as seen in sentence (iv) (“for a few days”, “for many years”, “for a week”).

III. Before/After/During/While

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *Everybody is nervous before exams.*
- ii. *I ate breakfast before leaving home.*
- iii. *Call me after the class.*
- iv. *We were hungry after cleaning the house.*
- v. *The cricketer suffered from a number of injuries during his career.*
- vi. *I fell asleep while I was watching television.*

“Before” is followed both by both noun and the “-ing” form of verb, as seen in sentences (i) and (ii). “After” can be followed both by noun and the “-ing” form of verb, as seen in sentences (iii) and (iv). “During” and “while” are used to talk about a period of time within which an event or activity

occurs. “During” occurs when followed by a noun, as seen in sentence (v).
“While occurs when followed by subject + verb, as seen in sentence (vi)

IV. Next to or Beside/Between/In front of/Behind/Opposite/By/Under/Above/Below

Consider the following sentences:

- i. A kind woman sat next to/beside me.*
- ii. Kushal’s house is between two empty plots.*
- iii. The new student stood in front of me.*
- iv. I stood behind the new student.*
- v. The expert sat opposite the candidate.*
- vi. The resort has rooms by the sea.*
- vii. The cat is under the table.*
- viii. The photograph is above the principal’s table.*
- ix. The principal’s table is below the photograph.*

V. To

Consider the following sentences:

- i. We are going to Dhubri next week.*
- ii. What time do you go to bed?*
- iii. I want to go to Kolkata in July.*
- iv. You must come to our house. (But, not “to” home)*
- v. They did not go to the party.*

VI. From/Off/Into/Up/Down/Over/Through/Round/Along/Across/Past

Consider the following sentences:

- i. A lot of students in this college come from other states.*
- ii. Careful! Don’t fall off the bike.*
- iii. The young boys jumped into the water.*
- iv. The trekkers walked up the hill.*
- v. The suitcase fell down the stairs.*
- vi. The birds flew over the trees.*

- vii. *The bird flew into the house through the open door.*
- viii. *The tourists walked round/around the city.*
- ix. *I love walking along the village river.*
- x. *The Olympics winner swam 5 times across the pool.*
- xi. *Never walk past your teachers without greeting them.*

VII. By/With/About

Consider the following sentences:

- i. *A Tale of Two Cities is a famous novel by Charles Dickens.*
- ii. *10 thieves were caught by the police.*
- iii. *Do you like your tea with or without milk?*
- iv. *Please don't go to the theatre without me.*
- v. *I will stay with my cousin in Delhi.*
- vi. *There is no news about the missing aircraft.*
- vii. *The sales executive has great knowledge about cars.*

Check Your Progress

19. Fill in the blanks with appropriate prepositions (at, on, in):

- i. I last saw Rahul _____ Monday.
- ii. I don't like driving _____ night.
- iii. I am going to New Zealand _____ 12 August.
- iv. Cars were not common _____ the eighteenth century.
- v. What are you doing _____ the weekend?
- vi. Many people are swimming _____ the river.
- vii. There was a huge crowd _____ the bus stop.
- viii. I will put up the new pictures _____ the wall.
- ix. I can see many stars _____ the sky.
- x. The office is _____ the ground floor.

20. Fill in the blanks with appropriate prepositions (From...to/ Until/Since/For/before/after/during/while):

- i. I'm going to sleep _____ a few hours.
- ii. I've lived in this house _____ I was two years old.
- iii. Don't open the windows _____ it stops raining.
- iv. We lived in Bongaigaon _____ 1992 _____ 1996.
- v. We've known each other _____ twelve years.
- vi. I felt sick _____ too much coffee.
- vii. I learnt a lot _____ the summer internship.

- viii. We saw them _____ returning from college.
- ix. The film was so boring that we left _____ the end.
- x. I sent postcards to all my friends _____ I was on holiday.
21. Choose the right option:
- i. An old man sat _____ (beside/between) me on the bus.
 - ii. I stood _____ (behind/opposite) my friend in the queue.
 - iii. What time do you go (to/at) work?
 - iv. In my class, there are many students __ (of/from) Lakhimpur.
 - v. The swimmers jumped _____ (into/through) the water.
 - vi. *Jane Eyre* is a novel _____ (by/from) Charlotte Bronte.
 - vii. My brother has great knowledge ____ (about/with) gadgets.
 - viii. Don't watch this movie _____ (with/without) me.
 - ix. His car drove _____ (past/across) on the highway.
 - x. The packet fell _____ (down/through) the stairs.

9.5 Comprehension:

❖ What is reading?

Reading is an essential skill for acquiring proficiency in English. Reading is an active process during which a reader interacts with a text, decodes it and constructs meaning in the process. What the reader constructs depends on not only what the writer writes but also what the reader brings to the text.

❖ Types of reading comprehension questions

The following are some of the different types of reading comprehension questions that can be asked:

i. General comprehension questions

General comprehension questions test your ability to capture the big picture or the main idea. The main idea is a brief but all-encompassing summary that covers everything the paragraph talks about in a general way but does not include the specific details. To answer these questions, you should be able to identify the thesis of the passage and those ideas that support the thesis. Read the passage and try to summarize it in one sentence. Note that authors often put the main idea in the first or last lines of the passage. Isolate those sentences to see if they make sense as the main idea and match them with your summary sentence.

Example of a general comprehension question:

Explain in your own words the main idea of the passage.

ii. Lexical comprehension questions

Lexical comprehension question test your understanding of key vocabulary in the text, in the form of words or phrases. There are two possibilities. If the word is familiar to you, read the sentence in the passage in which the word occurs to confirm that the meaning you know makes sense. If you do not know the meaning, read a few lines that precede as well as follow the word (these lines form the context or surrounding of the word) and use context clues to figure out the meaning.

Example of a lexical comprehension question:

Write down a synonym for the word ____.

iii. Literal comprehension

Questions under this kind of comprehension are based on information provided by the text. Such questions focus on specific ideas or pieces of information presented in the passage. Some of them are reference questions that seek to know what is being referred to by, for example, a particular pronoun. To answer literal comprehension questions, use a lead word to find the part of the passage that answers the question. Next, identify the most specific thing the question asks about and then scan the relevant part of the passage for the answer.

Example of a literal comprehension question:

Why are people with chemical sensitivities advised to avoid contact with the California pepper tree?

In the passage below, the answer to this question can be found clearly written in the fifth line of the third paragraph. The answer is as follows:

The seeds of the California pepper tree contain a chemical that can cause irritation to the mucous membranes. Hence, people with chemical sensitivities are advised to avoid contact with them.

iv. Interpretive comprehension questions

Interpretive comprehension questions test your understanding of facts and ideas not explicitly stated in the passage. These are inference questions that will prompt you to make a logical jump from the statements expressed in the passage to a conclusion. To answer such questions, read the section of the passage that the question asks about and draw a logical conclusion. Be careful not to make unwarranted assumptions and do not use your own knowledge of the topic. Answers to these questions can be in a few lines or more detailed. Keep in mind that some interpretive comprehension questions are more direct than others.

Example of an interpretive comprehension question:

What does the author compare automobiles to and why?

The answer to this question is in the last lines of the fourth paragraph. As the answer is not stated directly, you have to draw a logical conclusion from your reading of those lines. The answer is as follows:

The author compares automobiles to cowboy's horses. In the past, cowboys' horses rested under California pepper trees. In the modern times, people park their automobiles under these trees to keep them cool. Therefore, the author compares automobiles to cowboy's horses.

v. Applied comprehension

These questions, like the earlier ones, deal with topics that are not mentioned explicitly in the passage. This type of questions wants the reader to take the information given in the passage and apply it logically to a context outside of the passage. To answer applied comprehension questions, you have to be able to relate the text to existing knowledge or opinion.

Example of an applied comprehension question:

In your opinion, was the mass planting of the California pepper tree ethical?

The answer to this question is to be written in your own words, expressing your opinion about the consequences of the mass planting of tree for the environment.

Self Assessment Questions

Think about a typical day of your life and note the various reading activities you carry out on such a day. Some common activities are reading the college time-table, reading the newspaper, reading text messages, reading magazines, reading text books, reading recipes etc. In the next part of this task, write down the types of reading required for each of these activities.

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❖ **Reading Passage**

• **The California Pepper Tree:**

The mild climate found in much of California has made the state hospitable to immigrants for centuries. But it isn't just Spanish explorers and hopeful Americans who have adopted California as their home. Plants have been introduced into the state as well. Some species do not take to new surroundings and seldom develop enough of a population to be well represented. Though the palm is the introduced tree that is best known to tourists, the California pepper tree (*Schinus molle*) has thrived equally well and has put down roots like an immigrant.

How this tree native to Peru, Bolivia and Chile came all the way to California is the subject of debate. Most accounts involve the Spanish missions, now famed for their architecture. In gratitude for the hospitality of his hosts, a passing visitor to a mission is said, in one of the traditional stories, to have given them a packet of seeds he had gathered in South America. Another account says that Father Peyri of San Luis Rey de Francia first brought the seeds to California in an attempt to diversify the economy of his mission, which up to that time had been based primarily on grain and livestock. Regardless of the pepper tree's origin, its introduction to California was a welcome one, since the southern part of the state is mostly desert and has few native trees.

The pepper tree flourished in the California sun, providing inhabitants with shade, building materials, and firewood, as well as providing food for birds. It typically grows from five to fifteen meters high, with slender, pendulous branches. Like many plants, the California pepper tree is misnamed. The tree is not actually related to the true pepper, though its seeds look like white peppercorns and do give off a strong pepper-like scent. The seeds

also contain a chemical that can cause irritation to the mucous membranes, so people with chemical sensitivities are advised to avoid contact with them. Its berries are edible, and its cream colored flowers are attractive. The flowers peek out from a broad canopy of lacy, fine-textured foliage. The leaves of the California pepper tree are pinnate, or feather-like, like those of the mesquite trees familiar from images of the dry regions in the American Southwest. They grow densely enough along the branches to provide welcome shade from the sun despite their long, narrow shape. The California pepper tree also has simple climatic requirements. It likes warm, arid, frost-free areas similar to native Andes Mountains.

The California pepper is so adaptable that one of the first trees planted in 1830, originally in a row often beside the Mission San Luis Rey, still stands today. The second-oldest surviving tree is at another mission and is much larger than the first, probably because it has sustained less impact from human use over the years. The nature of that use has changed little since these venerable trees were planted. In the past, the shade of the California pepper gave cowboys' horses a place to rest. Today, people take advantage of the tree to keep their parked automobiles cool.

Unfortunately, the usefulness of the tree led to its mass planting, and some streets were lined exclusively with California pepper trees because of the shade they provided. In nature, it is very unusual for a single species of plant or tree to dominate an area, and the resulting diversity helps fend off predators. Mass plantings of one tree, on the other hand, create ideal conditions for the evolution of species-specific pests and diseases. In the early 1980's, for example, small insects called psyllids began to infest the California pepper trees. The psyllid had been in the United States for some time, but the over-planting of large quantities of these trees near the coast guaranteed the psyllid an almost boundless supply of food, which led to a sudden surge in its numbers and great damage to the pepper trees.

From The Princeton Review TOEFL IBT Manual and Practice

*** Sample questions in the box below are based on the above paragraph*

Check Your Progress

22. Read the passage above and answer the following questions:

- I. General comprehension questions
 - i. Write down a statement that best summarizes the central idea of the passage.

- ii. What, according to you, is the author's purpose behind writing this passage?

II. Lexical comprehension questions

- i. Choose the correct meaning of "canopy" from the following options:
 - (a) Texture
 - (b) Field
 - (c) Neighborhood
 - (d) Cover
- ii. The phrase "fend off" in the passage means:
 - (a) Show off
 - (b) Encourage
 - (c) Push or send away
 - (d) Deceive

III. Literal comprehension questions:

Short answers:

- i. What is the scientific name of the California pepper tree?
- ii. In the second line of the paragraph, who those "their" refer to?
 - (a) Spanish explorers
 - (b) Americans
 - (c) Spanish explorers and hopeful Americans
 - (d) None of the above

Detailed answers:

- iii. Why does the writer say that the California pepper tree is misnamed?
- iv. What are the benefits of the California pepper tree

IV. Interpretive comprehension questions

- i. Why does the author call the California pepper tree an immigrant?
- ii. According to the author, how did the mass planting of the California pepper tree affect the environment?

9.6 Summing Up:

The unit discusses some important areas of English grammar with examples and practice questions. In the first section, we learnt the meanings of a number of English idioms and phrases as well as their usage. It is important to incorporate phrases and idioms in our communication because they help in conveying our thoughts accurately as well as make the language rich. In

fact, to a large extent, idioms encapsulate the culture of a linguistic community. In the second section, we looked at some areas in which errors in English are commonly made. To clear doubts, these areas have been elaborated with examples and explanations. You must understand the different uses of similar or confusing items to avoid errors. In the third section, we studied verbs, tenses and prepositions, three important components of meaningful sentences. There has been a focus on main verbs as well as auxiliary verbs, various tense forms, different kinds of prepositions, and their uses. In the final section, we discussed various types of reading comprehension questions with the help of an interesting passage. Keep in mind that there are specific guidelines for answering different types of comprehension questions, based on which your reading style will vary.

9.7 Answers to “Check Your Progress”:

1. i (a); ii (b); iii(d); iv (c); v (a)

2. i. Meaning: Tell someone how angry you are with them.

“The father gave the young boy an earful for staying out late”.

ii. Meaning: Using whatever methods are necessary.

“The players are determined to win the match, by hook or by crook”.

iii. Meaning: “Very quickly”.

“The tomatoes in my garden are growing by leaps and bounds”.

iv. Meaning: Do something harmful to a person who trusted you.

“After 12 years of friendship, Kunal stabbed Ramen in the back”.

v. Meaning: A subject or issue over which there is continuing disagreement.

“The selection of the general manager has become a bone of contention between the president and the vice president of the company”.

3. i. an; ii. an

4. i. among; ii. between

5. i. any; ii. some

6. i. besides; ii. beside

7. i. In 1992, the climate control board comprised 24 members.

ii. The interview panel consists of two internal and three external members.

8. i. Not every student; ii. All newcomers were
9. i. Either I will go to Nalbari or my parents will come to Guwahati.
ii. Neither the books nor the pencil box was found.
10. i. elder; ii. older
11. i. "little", not "few"; ii. "a few", not "few".
12. i. much; ii. many

13. Dolphins are(M) regarded as the friendliest creatures in the sea. The more we learn(M) about dolphins, the more we realize(M) that their society is(M) very complex. They look(M) after other dolphins when they are(M) ill, care(M) for pregnant mothers and protect(M) the weakest in the community. Some scientists have(A) suggested(M) that dolphins have(M) a language but it is(M) much more probable that they communicate(M) with each other without words. Could(A) any of these mammals be(M) more intelligent than man? Certainly the most common argument in favor of man's superiority over them that we can kill(M) them more easily than they can kill(M) us is(M) the least satisfactory. On the contrary, the more we discover(M) about these remarkable creatures, the less we appear(M) superior when we destroy(M) them.

M=Main verbs; A=Auxiliary verbs

14. i. open; ii. cost; iii. boils; iv. like/likes v. washes
15. i. I'm playing; ii. I will; iii. will; iv. can; v. could; vi. might; vii. mustn't;
viii. should; ix. would; x. would
16. i. writes/writing; ii. leaves/is leaving; iii. shines; iv. is holding; v. are expelling
17. i. bought/have not read; ii. saw; iii. visited iv. recognised/had seen;
v. had met
18. i. have been; ii. was; iii. have not finished; iv. had been cooking;
v. has been living
19. i. on; ii. at; iii. on; iv. in; v. at (on is also acceptable); vi. in; vii. at;
viii. on; ix. in; x. on
20. i. for; ii. since; iii. until; iv. from...to; v. for; vi. after; vii. during; viii.
while; ix. before; x. while

21. i. beside; ii. behind; iii. to; iv. from; v. into; vi. by; vii. about; viii. without; ix. past; x. down
22. (I) i. The California pepper tree has been a very successful introduced species in California.
- ii. The author wants to make readers familiar with the success of the introduction of a particular species of pepper tree in California and the ways in which it has been adapted to new uses over the years.
- (II) i. (d); ii. (c)
- (III) i. Schinus molle; ii. (c)
- iii. The California pepper tree is not related to the true pepper, though its seeds look like white peppercorns and give off a strong pepper-like scent. Therefore, the author says that the tree is misnamed.
- iv. Some of the benefits of the California pepper tree are: It has edible berries; it has attractive flowers; it grows densely and provides shade; it has simple climatic requirements; it is very adaptable
- (IV) i. The mild climate of California has always attracted immigrants, for example, the Spanish explorers and hopeful Americans. Similarly, plants have been introduced into the state as well and one of them is the California pepper tree. This tree has adapted well in California. Hence, the author calls it an immigrant.
- ii. Mass planting of any tree is harmful for the environment because it leads to the evolution of species-specific pests and diseases. In the early 1980's, after the mass plantings of the California pepper tree due to its usefulness, small insects called psyllids began to infest it. The psyllids invaded the trees because they received a boundless supply of food from them. Mass planting is an unnatural phenomenon because in nature, a single species of plant or tree does not dominate an area. Thus, mass plantings of the California pepper tree affected the diversity of the environment resulting in great damage to the California pepper tree.

9.8 References and Suggested Readings:

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