

PONDICHERRY UNIVERSITY

(A Central University)

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

NEW LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

(Paper Code: MAEG2001)



MA (English) – II Year

DDE – WHERE INNOVATION IS A WAY OF LIFE

PONDICHERY UNIVERSITY

(A Central University)

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

MASTER OF ARTS

In

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New Literatures in English

PONDICHERRY UNIVERSITY
(A Central University)
DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

MASTER OF ARTS
in
English
New Literatures in English

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Master of Arts in English

New Literatures in English

Expert

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NEW LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

Course Objective:

The course aims to aim introduce the learner to the growth and development of literatures outside Britain. It also envisages acquainting the learner with the richness and diversity of literary creativity.

- To know a wide range of writing across continents.
- To form a background to further study in English literature
- To identify different theoretical assumptions and practices in literature.

UNIT 1

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Preface:

Hi,

We are happy that you have chosen New Literatures as your optional paper. I know you may all be wondering what new literatures are. Don't worry about the nomenclature and your fear in what this course contains. So I suggest you just sit back with this book and race through various continents learning values, cultures and traditions of different societies. However, don't forget you still have to write an examination. So gear up your mind towards that end also. Moreover, remember to get the novels and poems and read up because what we provide you is only further help to understand the new literatures syllabi. Well, now let me first introduce you to new literatures before we look at any country.

UNIT 1

LESSON 1: INTRODUCTION

OUTLINE:

- **Idea of New Literatures**
- **Definition and Scope**
- **Theoretical Perspectives**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Understand the concept of New Literatures**
- **Know the different genres in New Literatures**
- **Figure out the background and rise of New literatures**

In this section we will introduce to the significance and scope of new literature, and then take you on a short voyage through the background to the rise of New Literatures. This section would enable you to understand the literatures that you deal with in the later units.

What is New Literatures?

If you recall your history you may remember that at one time in the past, Britain had taken control of many regions and ruled many parts of Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, and Caribbean. It had also gained control over countries such as India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific islands, and Sri Lanka. Since New Literatures deal with places that have once

been colonized the literatures of these countries are also called as postcolonial literatures/writings. Well, now that you remember your history we will briefly address issues relating to the term postcolonial. The term postcolonial is however very broad and has been part of different versions. One of the definitions states, that the term 'post-colonial' refers to all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This sort of a statement is made because it is perceived by many that the European conquest in many places had given rise to similar conditions. But such a statement is easy to make but when one studies it carefully one may find that it is not easy to give a clear definition to the term 'post-colonial'. Here I will just introduce you to some of these problems and definitions.

Postcolonial emerged to indicate the period after colonization in simple terms. According to Ania Loomba, the term is a vague concept with no crystallized definition. One other argument that comes up is by Elleke Boehmer, who thinks in such a case of colonization most modern and contemporary literatures could be called colonial or postcolonial as Britain was conquered by the Roman Empire. Therefore she is of the view that literature written in English would be a better choice to indicate the term. Deepika Bahri, another post-colonial critic is of the opinion that “the term 'post-colonial' as applied to the literatures of the former colonized countries has been subject to endless debates due to its “internal complexity”. One of the earliest theorists in post-colonial

criticism is the work, The Empire Writes Back by Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Gareth Griffith which tries to point out the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing. They feel that the complexity and cultural difference of the colonized provinces is so great that an appropriate idea of either new literatures or post-colonial literatures is problematic. In order to understand the concept of post-colonial literature it is necessary to be familiar with colonialism. As you are all aware colonialism means the Imperialism and Expansion. Elleke Boehmer argues that colonial literature is "writing concerned with colonial perceptions and experience, (...) mainly by metropolitans, but also by creoles and indigenes during colonial times [and] therefore includes literature written in Britain as well as in the rest of the Empire". She makes a distinction between colonial and colonialist literature which is written "from the imperialists' point of view". She cites the example of Forster's Passage to India and Conrad's Heart of Darkness. In this case post-colonialism becomes an important reflection because it displays the emergence of indigenous writing from the colonized countries and reveals the cultural complexity of the new writing. One of the important reflections of post-colonial theory is that it addresses issues of power using as its tool, language. Writers seek an individuality and identity by using language that is used innovatively. Therefore, "post-colonial writing abrogates the privileged centrality of 'English' by using language to signify difference while employing a

sameness which allows it to be understood.” Ashcroft et al. add that "in many post-colonial societies, it was not the English language which had the greatest effect, but writing itself." They continue arguing that the seizing of the means of communication and the liberation of post-colonial writing by the appropriation of the written word become crucial features of the process of self-assertion and of the ability to reconstruct the world as an unfolding historical process. In a way new literatures are an important realm to display the reconstruction of identities and to remake new structures of power.

Growth of Post-colonial Literatures:

Now that you have understood the problem associated with the term post-colonial literature let us see how these new literatures shape out over a period of time. When the colonies were established many of the people who colonized the societies wrote fiction, poetry, essays which were mostly their notion of the culture that they encountered. Thus as a critic mentions, “during the imperial period writing in the language of the imperial centre is inevitably, of course, produced by a literate elite whose primary identification is with the colonizing power”. These works were written by settlers, administrators, soldiers, travelers, visitors and memsahibs. As already mentioned they were representatives of the colonizers in some form or the other. Therefore they did not reveal the true nature of the colonized land or people.

The second stage in the literary field is the work written by writers who are natives but who produce documents which are licensed by the rulers. One of the examples is the large body of poetry and prose produced in the nineteenth century by the English educated Indian upper class, or African 'missionary literature'. The writers display their gaining of power by entering into the colonizers space by using their language and education. Even though some of these writings did touch upon social evils they still were written under the sanction of the imperial power and therefore could be considered to be objective and unprejudiced.

The final stage of the evolution of independent literatures came when the colonizers power was subverted and used in newer and innovative ways. One example of this is Raja Rao's Kanthapura. Well, your question is that how can one through fiction/drama/poetry come up with subversions or innovations. The answer is that the writers used the tools of literature namely language to reveal power structures in society. In fact today post-colonial or new literatures as we address it is largely a dialogue about the method by which the language of power, and the writing of authority, has been wrested from the dominant European culture. In order to focus on the complex ways in which the English language has been used in these societies, and to indicate the different cultural patterns that emerge which are deviant from the 'standard' British English inherited from the empire, critics distinguish between the terms, 'English' and

‘English’. If English is indicative of the colonizers standard format, English is response of the post-colonial nations. Another thing you will have to remember at this point is that even though British imperialism resulted in the spread of the English language, the English of Indians is not the English of Jamaicans, Maoris, or Kenyans. As a critic states, “We need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, English, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world”.

Themes in new/post-colonial literatures:

Some of the common topics addressed in post-colonial/new literatures are:

- Hegemony
- Language
- Place and Displacement

Since already hegemony in other words power relations and language are addressed we shall try to understand place and displacement. A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or 'voluntary' removal for indentured labour.

Place and Displacement:

A major feature of the dialectic of place and displacement is always a characteristic trait of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by

a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two. Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity is a feature common to all post-colonial literatures in English. The accounts of Trinidadian-Indian indentured laborers, West Indian slaves, or forcibly colonized Nigerians discuss identities in new environments and places. Many times the creation of these identities may have problems due to the inadequacy of language. Therefore the writers may recreate the Standard English thereby developing a new English. One of the examples for this is once again Raja Rao's Kanthapura. Another example is the Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe. Thus Raja Rao and Achebe have found it necessary to transform the language, to use it in a different way in its new context and so, as Achebe says, quoting James Baldwin, make it 'bear the burden' of their experience (Achebe 1975: 62). In the case of these two writers one can say that these writers may not have faced geographical displacement but on the other hand have undergone linguistic displacement. You must understand that this type of pressure of inventing an appropriate language to express their otherness and alienation. Thus most of new literatures you will find the distinctions made with reference to landscape, flora and fauna, seasons, and climatic conditions.

Post-coloniality and theory:

All of the above discussions you must remember have made the inadequacy of any criticism or theory to deal with this type of literary writing and a new theory called post-colonial theory has emerged to deal with these writings. These theories address many issues such as nationalism, education, language, societal patterns, institutions, genders, value systems and epistemologies. Right now as our topic does not deal with the theoretical issues we will move into a closer study of the different nations and their writings.

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UNIT 1

LESSON 2: AFRICAN LITERATURE

OUTLINE:

- **Idea of Africa and Colonialism**
- **Definition and Scope of African Writing**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Understand the concept of the political condition in the African continent.**
- **Know the different genres in African literatures**
- **Figure out the background and rise of African writing.**

Africa too like other countries underwent extensive colonization from British and French. Due to political power the provinces in various parts of Africa had to subscribe to European values. Similar to the Indian context, one of the first strategies to gain power was through education which was maintenance of the European values.

As mentioned by Rodney, “the main purpose of colonial school system was to train Africans to participate in the domination and exploitation of the continent as a whole.” Thus colonial education was an education meant to subordinate, and exploit the masses. Moreover educated Africans also became isolated from their own people. This is true even in the Indian sub-continent. They became slaves to the white rulers as they were paid more by the British masters and made to take active role in the administrative sections of the rulers.

Walter Rodney's How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Amilcar Cabral's National Liberation and Struggle, and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's "Writing Against Neocolonialism" reveal the political, economic, and social circumstances that formed the sensibility of most African writers. Thus, they illuminate the various types of mentalities or ideologies that inform African literature. In addition, these works help the reader determine if a novelist's portrayal of African society fully reflects its social relations, political arrangements, and economic factors.

These critical writings also help in the debate on the definition of African literature. For they bring out the historical connections that make it possible to analyze African literature dealing with pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial phases of African history.

A second method of indoctrination was through religion. In fact the novel that you will all read will make this picture clearer to you. I do hope that you finish reading Achebe's Things Fall Apart by the time we complete this short introduction. In addition to this, the economic condition of the country was so much exploited that the country became impoverished in the independent stage. Also as Cabral points out there was cultural exploitation and a crisis of identity among the people. Cabral "defines culture as the result of economic and political activities as they appear on the ideological and idealist levels. Culture has its basis in a society's level of productive forces and in the character of the dominant mode of production. Thus, culture is the result, with more or less awakened consciousness, of economic and political activities, the more or less dynamic expression of the type of relations prevailing within that society, on the one hand between man (considered individually and collectively) and nature, on the other hand, among individuals, groups of individuals, social strata or social classes." (1980: 141)

Most African countries won Independence in the 1950s. The writing of this period reflected the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist stance and still a note of hope and optimism was present in the writing. The new African writer countered such claims by producing artistic works that showed that Africa had its own history, culture, and civilization that were equal if not superior to that of the imperialists. The writers saw their societies "put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self abasement imposed on them by colonialism." In 1970s

many of the African countries underwent an up rise of neocolonialism as the nations began to be taken over by dictators who perpetuated the political, economic, and social practices of colonialism.

Due to these dictatorships many African countries also began to show divisions based on class and economics. Many of the writers tried to reflect their disappointment at the new garbs of their countries. The writers thought that the blame has to lie at the feet of the new rulers who had no moral/ ethical values. Many writers thought that they had to discuss through their works the need for changes and social transformations. As stated by Landow,

The writers of this period intended the pathos and emotive power of their works to instigate the oppressors to initiate a political and economic reorganization of society in the interest of the oppressed. However, some critics maintain that the intentions (of the pathos and bitterness of these novels) were to whip the emotions of the people into revolutionary action. The artistic forms reflect the ideological content, for writers used satire and ridicule as "corrective narrative techniques" to enlighten their society morally. The despair that pervades these works, which portray the oppressed as trapped and helpless, arises in the writers' political misunderstanding...The writers delegate the revolutionary vanguard role to the people themselves. The authors were implicitly disgusted with the educated elite who cannot initiate a struggle and bestow their faith in the peasants themselves or suggest ways to solve Africa's contradictions. The writer saw his or her role as that of instigating the people into a revolutionary struggle. There is also the realization that women are the most exploited in an aggressive society.

The modern writers have moved away from notions of nationalism and development to issues of survival and rediscovery of the cultural roots. Ngugi in a remarkable statement wanted writers to go back to their native tongues but he did not think that writers may not be able to find equivalents in their tongues as they have not been able to study it like the colonizers tongue. Also readers may not have access to the dialect. One cannot, however, ignore what Ngugi says about African writers. He states that they “should align themselves with the masses, even if it means risking jail or exile. For the only alternative would be for the writer to become a state functionary via self-censorship”.

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UNIT 1

LESSON 3: CHINUA ACHEBE

OUTLINE:

- **Biography of Achebe**
- **Works of Achebe**
- **Things Fall Apart**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Understand the significance of Achebe as an African writer**
- **Be acquainted with the works of Achebe**
- **Critically perceive and comprehend the key issues in Things Fall Apart.**

BIOCRITICAL READING OF CHINUA ACHEBE:

Chinua Achebe was born on November 16, 1930 in Ogidi, an Igbo-speaking town in eastern Nigeria. His parents, Isaiah Okafo and Janet Achebe, were missionary teachers and so he was brought up as a Christian. Achebe had his early education at the Church Mission Society and later at the Government College in Umuahia. He then received his BA in English literary studies from Ibadan University in 1953. He began his career at the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation where he was director of external broadcasting from 1961-1966. He then launched a publishing company with Christopher Okigbo who later died in the Nigerian Civil war (1967-70).

Achebe married in 1961 and moved to the United States in the early 1970s as a visiting professor at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and then the University of Connecticut. He was also lecturing at the University of California, Los Angeles and other schools across the nation. In 1976, however, he returned to Nigeria to teach at the University of Nigeria-Nsukka and from 1990 he has been the Charles P. Stevenson Jr. Professor of Languages and Literature at Bard College.

Achebe is considered as the man who laid the foundation for African literature. His writing style moulds the English language to the rhythm and lyrical quality of the Nigerian language his characters speak. This style, and the incorporation of the proverbs and idioms of African culture, combines to mark his stories as uniquely African. Achebe sees his role as a writer as one of social responsibility. In his book of essays, Morning yet on Creation Day, Achebe explains his belief that "art is, and always was, at the service of man. Our ancestors created their myths and legends and told their stories for a human purpose." Therefore, Achebe believes that all good stories should have a purpose and that is what he has tried to emulate in his works.

In an essay written in 1972, Charles R. Larson says, "Things Fall Apart has come to be regarded as more than simply a classic; it is now seen as the archetypal African novel. The situation which the novel itself describes - the coming of the white man and the initial disintegration of traditional African society as a consequence of that--is typical of the breakdown all African societies have experienced at one time or another as a result of their exposure to the West". Achebe's first novel, Things Fall Apart, was published in 1958. Besides, Things Fall Apart, Achebe has also written several other novels. They are No Longer at Ease (1960), Arrow of God (1964), A Man of the People

(1966), and Anthills of the Savannah (1987). In 1972 he was the joint winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. Some of his significant contributions in poetry are Beware, Soul-Brother, and other Poems (1972) and Christmas in Biafra, and Other Poems (1973). His collections of essays are Morning Yet on Creation Day (1975), The Trouble with Nigeria (1984), and Hopes and Impediments (1988). Postcolonial critics think his essay, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness' is considered to be a seminal one for postcolonial studies.

THINGS FALL APART:

Things Fall Apart, published in 1958, was a response to Joyce Cary's Mister Johnson, which portrays a comic African who slavishly adores his white colonist boss, to the point of gladly being shot to death by him. Achebe has said that it was his indignation at this latter novel that inspired the writing of Things Fall Apart. Even though, Achebe's contemporary, Amos Tutuola too had written in a similar vein, it was Achebe's novel that was seen as the major inspiration for African literature. The most striking feature of Things Fall Apart is to create a complex and sympathetic portrait of a traditional village culture in Africa. Achebe is trying not only to inform the outside world about Ibo cultural traditions, but to remind his own people of their past and to assert that it had contained much of value. All too many Africans in his time were ready to accept the European judgment that Africa had no history or culture worth considering. Through out the novel he portrayed the richness and diversity of the African culture. The language of the novel is simple but dignified. When the characters speak, they use an elevated diction which is meant to convey the sense of Ibo speech. This choice of language was not only creative but also innovative and invoked the richness of the African language.

The title of the novel is taken from Yeats' poem, 'The Second Coming', (*Taming and turning in the widening gyre/The falcon cannot hear the falconer;/Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold,/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.*). Through this novel Achebe reveals the clash of the alien and indigenous culture and the violence that arises out of this conflict.

Plot Summary:

Okonkwo, the protagonist of Things Fall Apart is a great man in his home of Umuofia, a group of nine villages in Nigeria, even though his father was a lazy man who earned no titles in the Ibo tribe. Okonkwo disliked his father and did everything he can to be different from him. As a young man, Okonkwo began building his social status by defeating a great wrestler, thus becoming the cynosure of his tribe. He is hard working and shows no weakness - emotional or otherwise - to anyone. Although brusque with his family and his neighbors, he is wealthy, courageous, and powerful among his village. He is a leader of his village, and this place in society is what he has striven for his entire life.

Because of his great esteem in the village, Okonkwo is selected by the elders to be the guardian of Ikemefuna, a boy taken prisoner by the tribe as a peace settlement between two villages. Ikemefuna is to stay with Okonkwo until the Oracle instructs the elders on what to do with the boy. For three years the boy lives with Okonkwo's family and they grow fond of him, he even considers Okonkwo his father. Then the elders decide that the boy must be killed, and the oldest man in the village warns Okonkwo to have nothing to do with the murder because it would be like killing his own child. Ignoring the warning and trying to reveal his bravery, Okonkwo assists in the killing. Shortly after Ikemefuna's death, things begin to go wrong for Okonkwo and when he accidentally kills someone at a funeral ceremony, he and his family are sent into exile for seven

years to appease the gods he has offended with the murder. While Okonkwo is away in exile, white men begin coming to Umuofia and begun to initiate the village into their religion. Gradually many of the villagers get converted and the whites begun to consolidate their power and dominate. At this point, Okonkwo returns to his village after his exile to find it a changed place because of the presence of white men. He and other tribal leaders try to reclaim their hold on their native land by destroying a local Christian church that has insulted their gods and religion. In return, the leader of the white government takes them prisoner and holds them for ransom for a short while, further humiliating and insulting the native leaders. The people of Umuofia finally gather for what could be a great uprising, and when some messengers of the white government try to stop their meeting, Okonkwo kills one of them. He realizes with despair that the people of Umuofia are not going to fight to protect themselves because they let the other messengers escape and so all is lost for the Ibo tribe. Finally when Okonkwo faces charges and is about to be taken for trial he kills himself thereby sullyng his reputation of a noble and courageous man.

List of Major & Minor Characters in the Novel:

Okonkwo: Courageous and wealthy; violent, dislikes father, considered a great warrior in the tribal conflicts of Umuofia and the surrounding villages.

Unoka: Okonkwo's father; lazy and a debtor.

Ikemefuna: A boy of a neighboring village who was chosen as a sacrifice to avoid warfare with Umuofia and later killed by Okonkwo who was very fond of the boy, in spite of warnings from elders.

Nwoye: Okonkwo's oldest son, child of Okonkwo's eldest wife, he was growing into a lazy boy despite his father's constant nagging and beating.

Nwoye later converts to Christianity when the missionaries came to Mbanta. His conversion was the final separation from his father.

Obierika: Okonkwo's friend who takes care of his home for him while he's in exile and brings word of the first violent encounters of the Ibo with the white men who came to colonize the area.

Mr. Kiaga: An Ibo convert to Christianity who acts as a missionary and translator for the first six missionaries who come to Mbanta. He builds a church in the Evil Forest, the land that the village elders gave him, and his church prospers despite the skepticism of the prominent men of Mbanta.

Mr. Brown: A respected missionary in Okonkwo's native village who tries to induce the villagers to educate themselves and who attempts to establish a stable relationship between the Christians and the villagers.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Smith replaces Mr. Brown as the leader of the Umuofia church and encourages the fanatics to act out against the pagan tribal customs.

District Commissioner: A white man sent to rule over Umuofia, he and his court messengers are corrupt officials who abuse the natives. He judges cases although he knows nothing of the people, their culture, or their customs. He is another form of colonization.

Amalike the Cat: A wrestler from a village near Okonkwo's home of Umuofia who was undefeated for seven years till Okonkwo defeated him.

Nwakibie: A prosperous villager with three barns, nine wives, thirty children, and all but the greatest title in the clan who helped Okonkwo when he was young.

Ekwefi: Okonkwo's second wife, she was the village beauty in her younger days.

Ezinma: The daughter of Okonkwo and Ekwefi, Ezinma understands her father better than her other siblings. She seems to be his favorite, and he often wishes to himself that she had been born a boy because he believes that she would have been prosperous. Ezinma is the only living child of his wife, Ekwefi although she had given birth to ten children.

Chielo: The priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. She and Ekwefi are friends.

Ogbuefi Ezeudu: One of the oldest men in Umuofia, he came to warn Okonkwo to have no part in Ikemefuna's death because the boy considered him a father.

Uchende: Okonkwo's uncle on his mother's side who is an elder of Mbanta where Okonkwo and his family stay in exile for seven years.

Enoch: A religious zealot hungry for conflict who unmasked a sacred egwugwu at a public ceremony and enraged Okonkwo's village.

Now I would be happy after you finish this background to begin to read the novel if you haven't done so already. As you read the novel, stop after every chapter and see if you can answer the questions set. This will help you to comprehend the novel better.

Comprehension:

Chapter One

- What are Okonkwo's main characteristics as he is depicted in this chapter?
- What were the characteristics of his father which affect him so powerfully?

- Describe the ritual associated with kola.
- Explain some of the proverbs used.

Chapter Two

- What effect does night have on the people?
- What do they fear?
- How do they deal with their fear of snakes at night?
- What is the purpose of the taking of Ikemefuna?
- What do you think the advantages and disadvantages of the polygamous set-up as displayed in this chapter.

Chapter Three

- What effect does 'The priestess of Agbala' have on your judgment of the roles played by women in the culture?
- Explain the notion of the *chi* or personal spirit?
- How is awareness of rank observed in the drinking of the palm wine?

Chapter Four

- What are Okonkwo's virtues?
- What are his faults?
- What does this proverb mean, "When a man says yes his chi says yes also"?
- What is Okonkwo's relationship with Ikemefuna like?
- What is the crime that causes Okonkwo's to be reprimanded?

Chapter Five

- What is Okonkwo's attitude toward feasts?
- Briefly summarize the story of Ikwefi.
- What kind of a woman is she?

Chapter Six

- What roles does Chielo play in the village?

Chapter Seven

- How has Nwoye begun to "act like a man"?

- What values does Okonkwo associate with manliness?
- How does Nwoye relate to these values?
- Why is Okonkwo asked not to take part in the killing of Ikemefuna?
- Why do you suppose they have decided to kill the boy?

Chapter Eight

- What is Okonkwo's attitude toward his daughter Ezinma?

Chapter Nine

- Why does Ekwefi prize her daughter Ezinma so highly?

Chapter Ten

- What do you think their attitude toward the egwugwu is?
- What seem to be the main functions of the ceremony?
- How does Evil Forest refute the argument of Uzowulu that he beat his wife because she was unfaithful to him?

Chapter Eleven

- What is the moral of the fable of the tortoise?
- What values does it reflect?
- What does the incident involving the priestess of Agbala reflect about the values of the culture?

Chapter Twelve

- How is the importance of family emphasized in the *uri* ceremony?

Chapter Thirteen

How does the one-handed egwugwu praise the dead man?

Chapter Fourteen

- What is the significance of comparing Okonkwo to a fish out of water?

- How does Okonkwo's lack of understanding of the importance of women reflect on him?

Chapter Fifteen

- How does the story of the destruction of Abame summarize the experience of colonization?
- What sorts of stories had Okonkwo heard about white men before?

Chapter Sixteen

- Why do you think Nwoye has become a Christian?
- What is the first act of the missionaries which evokes a positive response in some of the Ibo?

Chapter Seventeen

- What mutual misunderstandings are evident in this chapter between the missionaries and the people of the village?
- How does the granting to the missionaries of a plot in the Evil Forest backfire?
- What does the metaphor in the next to the last sentence of the chapter mean?

Chapter Eighteen

- What is the purpose of introducing the outcaste *osu* in this chapter.

Chapter Nineteen

- What does the final speaker say is the main threat posed by Christianity?

Chapter Twenty

- What clashes in values are created by the functioning of the British courts?
- Note the final phrase of Obierika's last speech, alluding to the title of the novel.

Chapter Twenty-One

- Why do some of the villagers--even those who are not converts to Christianity--welcome the British?
- Note the recurrence of the phrase "falling apart" in the last sentence of the chapter."

Chapter Twenty-Two

- How is Rev. Smith different from Brown?
- What is the result of his black and white thinking?

Chapter Twenty-Three

- What does the District Commissioner say is the motive of the British in colonizing the Africans?

Chapter Twenty-Four

- What do you think of his act?

Chapter Twenty-Five

- Why do you think Okonkwo kills himself?
- What is your reaction to the final paragraph of the book? Analyze it.

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UNIT 1

LESSON 4: AFRICAN POETRY:

WOLE SOYINKA & AMA ATA AIDOO

OUTLINE:

- **Wole Soyinka & his works**
- **Study of ‘The Telephone Conversation’**
- **Ama Ata Aidoo and her works**
- **Study of ‘Motherhood**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Understand the concept of African Poetry.**
- **Comprehend the racial connotations in Soyinka’s ‘Telephone Conversation’.**
- **Realize the concerns of women through the study of ‘Motherhood and its games’.**

In this section we will introduce to the significance and scope of two poets.

BIOCRITICAL READING OF WOLE SOYINKA:



Wole Soyinka was born on 13 July 1934 at Abeokuta, near Ibadan in western Nigeria and studied at the University College of Ibadan. He then continued his education at Leeds University in England, where he received his Ph.D. in 1973. Soyinka began his writing career as a dramaturgist for England's Royal Court Theatre in London in 1958-1959. In 1960 he received a Rockefeller award and returned to Nigeria to study theatre and at that juncture he was commissioned by the Nigerian government to write a play celebrating Nigerian independence. The play that he wrote was A Dance of the Forests which has been called by Paul Brians, a professor at Washington State University as "a lyrical blend of Western experimentalism and African folk tradition, reflecting a highly original approach to drama" brought him recognition. At the same time, he taught drama and literature at various universities in Ibadan, Lagos, and Ife. In 1960, he founded the theatre group, "The 1960 Masks" and in 1964, the "Orisun Theatre Company", in which he produced and also acted in his own plays. He has periodically been visiting professor at the universities of Cambridge, Sheffield, and Yale. During the civil war in Nigeria, Soyinka appealed in an article for cease-fire. For this he was arrested in 1967, accused of conspiring with the Biafra rebels, and was held as a political prisoner for 22 months. Soyinka outspokenness and his critique of the Nigerian dictator General Sani Abacha, also led to his exile. He therefore now lives in exile in the United States. His two years in solitary confinement (1967 - 1969), the punishment

meted out to him for supporting Biafran secession, were described in his 1972 memoir, The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka.

Soyinka's literary career is enriched by the plurality of his writings. He is well-known as a playwright but he is also a critic and a poet. He has been influenced greatly in his playwriting by the Irish writer, J.M. Synge. His plays have a blend of the western tradition and the traditional popular African theatre with its combination of dance, music, and action. He reworks into his plays the mythology of his Yoruba tribe and centres the plays around Ogun, the god of iron and war. His first plays The Swamp Dwellers and The Lion and the Jewel, were performed at Ibadan in 1958 and 1959 and were then published in 1963. Later, mentionable comedies of his are The Trial of Brother Jero (performed in 1960, publ. 1963) with its sequel, Jero's Metamorphosis (performed 1974, publ. 1973), A Dance of the Forests (performed 1960, publ.1963), Kongi's Harvest (performed 1965, publ. 1967) and Madmen and Specialists (performed 1970, publ. 1971). Some of his plays such as The Strong Breed , The Road (1965) and Death and the King's Horseman (1976). Soyinka's latest dramatic works are A Play of Giants (1984) and Requiem for a Futurologits (1985). He has written two novels, The Interpreters (1965) and Season of Anomy (1973). Season of Anomy deals with the writer's thoughts during his imprisonment and confronts the Orpheus and Euridice myth with the mythology of the Yoruba. His literary essays are collected in, and published as Myth, Literature and the African World (1975) and The Open Sores of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Continent (1996). Soyinka's poetry collections are Idanre, and Other Poems (1967), Poems from Prison (1969), A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972). Long poems of his are Ogun Abibiman (1976) and Mandela's Earth and Other Poems (1988).

One has to remember that for Soyinka, writing and politics are interwoven. He traces his political awakening to 1958 when he met the first generation of Nigerian legislators in London. At this meeting he painfully realized that they meant to take up where the departing white colonialists had left off, in terms of continuing a corrupt political regime. It was after this meeting that Soyinka implored African writers to become the “conscience” of their nations; otherwise, they would be forced to withdraw “to the position of chronicler and post-mortem surgeon.” The Guerilla Theatre Unit, a Nigerian production company, performed many of Soyinka’s plays, not only in auditoriums, but also, provocatively, in front of government buildings and in public squares and marketplaces. While these community performances drew criticism from the government, they allowed the company to reach audiences traditionally excluded from theatrical performances. He also founded the culture and criticism magazine *Transition*, in Ghana. Since then Soyinka has been in and out of exile in accordance with the ever-changing political environment of Nigeria. When asked where home is, he replied, “In my head,” and when asked what he misses about Nigeria, he said, “The smell . . . especially the smell of the bush when I go hunting.”

Soyinka is currently the Woodruff Professor of the Arts at Emory University in Atlanta and a Fellow of the W.E.B. DuBois Institute at Harvard. He won the Nobel prize in 1986.

The Nobel committee characterized his work as follows:

He has his roots in the Yoruba people's myths, rites, and cultural patterns, which in turn have historical links to the Mediterranean region. Through his education in his native land and in Europe he has also acquired deep familiarity with Western culture. His collection of essays,

"Myth, Literature, and the African World" make for clarifying and enriching reading.

Selected Works:

The Lion and the Jewel (1963)

A Dance for the Forests (1963)

Idanre and Other Poems (1967)

Madmen And Specialists: A Play (1971)

The Jero Plays: The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis (1971)

Interpreters (1972)

The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka (1972)

Death and the King's Horseman (1975)

Aké: The Years of Childhood (1981)

Forest of a Thousand Daemons: A Hunter's Saga (1982)

Mandela's Earth and Other Poems (1988)

Art, Dialogue, and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture (1994)

Ibadan - the Penkelemes years - a memoir 1946 - 1965 (1994)

The Open Sore of a Continent : A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis
(1996)

The Burden of Memory, The Muse of Forgiveness (1999)

THE TELEPHONE CONVERSATION:

Paraphrase:

The price seemed reasonable, even though the location

was indifferent. The landlady swore that she lived
away from the premises. At this point nothing remained
But self-confession and so I warned her, "Madam, I am African."
At this there was
Silence that was a transmission of pressurized good-breeding.
Finally when the Voice, spoke it sounded
Lipstick coated and long gold-rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped.
I was caught unawares as I was asked,
"HOW DARK?" . . .
Then the question was repeated "ARE YOU LIGHT
OR VERY DARK?"
I smelled the stench
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.
Then I dreamed of the
Red booth. Red pillar box. Red double-tiered
Omnibus squelching tar. And realized that This was reality!
Embarassed by ill-mannered silence, I sought simplification.
She was considerate, and varied the emphasis--
"ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?"
Then revelation came to me and I understood.
I questioned "do you mean--like plain or milk chocolate?"
Her agreement was clinical, crushing in its light impersonality.
Now rapidly, my wave-length got adjusted,
And I answered "West African sepia"--and as afterthought,
added that's what is in my passport."
There was silence for a spectroscopic
Flight of fancy, till truthfulness clanged her accent

Then she asked, "WHAT'S THAT?" conceding that she had no idea.

She again enquired if it is like a brunette.

"THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?"

Then I stated "Not altogether.

Facially, I am brunette, but, madam, you should see

The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet

Are a peroxide blond.

I added further, Friction, caused-- foolishly, madam--by sitting down, has turned

My bottom raven black. Sensing that

Her receiver was going to be placed I asked in desperation,

"wouldn't you rather see for yourself?"

Read the poem and answer the questions below before

- Who is the speaker?
- With whom is the speaker speaking?
- What does the speaker want/
- What are the references to light and dark in the poem.
- What do the phrases, 'lipstick coated', and 'long gold-rolled cigarette-holder pipped' indicate.

If you have being able to answer these questions successfully then you may have understood the theme of the poem. Well, in case you haven't here is the central idea of the poem.

Central Idea:

Soyinka's poem, 'Telephone Conversation' is a reflection on racial perceptions and it uses a satirical tone to depict the meaninglessness of racism. The speaker

of the poem is a dark West African man who is searching for a new apartment. The speaker has made a telephone call to a potential landlady to find out about the house particulars. But the discussion instead of being focused on the price, location, comforts, and other significant information discussed the speaker's skin color. One should also note that instead of the apartment's location being neither good nor bad, we read that the apartment's location is unbiased and impartial. The landlady from the poem we understand is a polite, refined woman, even though she is portrayed as being racist. The speaker in the poem seems to be sorry for his dark color, although this is something on which he has no control over.

After this introduction, the speaker begins his "self-confession" about his skin color. He warns the landlady that he is African, instead of just informing her. "Caught I was, foully" he says after listening to the silence of the landlady. The use of the word 'caught' indicates that some wrong had been done, that the speaker was a criminal caught committing his crime. By making the speaker actually seem sorry for his skin color, Soyinka shows how ridiculous it really is for someone to apologize for his race. A reader also comprehends that the dark colored speaker is an educated, intelligent and sensitive person. This is indicated by the use of the lines:

Not altogether.

Facially, I am brunette, but, madam, you should see

The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet

Are a peroxide blond.

As a critic mentions, the run-on-line "crushing in its light / Impersonality" puns on several possible meanings of the word "light", both as noun and as adjective. At first the speaker fails to understand the question "Are you dark?" Only later

he realises what she is seeking. He then puts together the meaning and understands her concerns and goes on to explain the dark imagery.

Further Reading:

"Nobel e-Museum: Wole Soyinka - Biography." 2004. The Nobel Foundation. 14 Mar. 2004.

Here are some points made by Robert Reese about the use of irony in the poem which I think you will find useful. In case you need to brush up on irony go back to your British Poetry lessons.

The Irony of Racism:

'Telephone Conversation' is a poem that displays racism through the ironical mood.

The first sentence of the poem includes a pun that introduces the theme of the following poem and also informs us that things are not going to be as straightforward as they appear. "The price seemed reasonable, location / Indifferent" (lines 1-2). If we read over these lines quickly, we would assume that the speaker meant "Being neither good nor bad" by the use of the word indifferent (American Heritage 706). But, indifferent is also defined as "Characterized by a lack of partiality; unbiased" (706). This second definition gives the sentence an entirely different meaning. Instead of the apartment's location being neither good nor bad, we read that the apartment's location is unbiased and impartial. However, we quickly learn in the following lines of the poem that the location of the apartment is the exact opposite of unbiased and impartial. The speaker is rudely denied the ability to rent the property because of bias towards his

skin color. This opening pun quickly grabs our attention and suggests that we as readers be on the lookout for more subtle uses of language that will alter the meaning of the poem.

After this introduction, the speaker begins his "self-confession" about his skin color (line 4). It is ironic that this is called a self-confession since the speaker has nothing that he should have to confess since he has done nothing wrong. He warns the landlady that he is African, instead of just informing her. "Caught I was, foully" he says after listening to the silence the landlady had responded with (line 9). Again, the word caught connotes that some wrong had been done, that the speaker was a criminal caught committing his crime. By making the speaker actually seem sorry for his skin color, Soyinka shows how ridiculous it really is for someone to apologize for his race.

The landlady, on the other hand, is described with nothing but positive terms. The speaker mentions her "good-breeding," "lipstick coated" voice, "long gold-rolled/Cigarette holder," all possessions that should make her a respectable lady (lines 7-9). These words describing her wealth are neutral in regard to her personal character, but allow that she could be a good person. Her goodness is seemingly confirmed later on when the speaker says that she was "considerate" in rephrasing her question (line 17). Her response to the caller's question included only "light / Impersonality" (lines 20-21). Although she was described as being a wealthy woman, she was seemingly considerate and only slightly impersonal. The speaker seems almost grateful for her demeanor. Of course, these kind descriptions of the woman are teeming with verbal

irony. We know that she is being very judgmental even while she is seeming to be so pleasant.

After recording the all-important question, "How dark?," the poem pauses for a moment and describes the surroundings to give a sense of reality that shows that the ridiculous question had really been asked (line 10). The speaker describes the buttons in the phone booth, the foul smell that seems to always coexist with public spaces, and a bus driving by outside. His description gives us an image of where the speaker is located: a public phone booth, probably somewhere in the United Kingdom. The "Red booth," "Red pillar-box," and "Red double-tiered / Omnibus" are all things that one might find in Leeds, the British city in which Soyinka had been studying prior to writing this poem (lines 13-14; "Nobel"1). In addition to the literal images that this description creates, a sense of the anger running through the speaker's mind is portrayed by the repeated use of the word red. This anaphora is the closest that the speaker ever comes to openly showing anger in the poem. Although it is hidden with seemingly polite language, a glimpse of the speaker's anger appears in this quick pause in the conversation.

In the end, the landlady repeats her question and the speaker is forced to reveal how dark he is. "West African sepia," he says, citing his passport (line 23). She claims not to know what that means. She wants a quantifiable expression of his darkness. His response, feigning simplicity is that his face is "brunette," his hands and feet "peroxide blonde" and his bottom "raven black" (lines 28, 30, 32). He knows that she just wants a measure of his overall skin-color so that she can categorize him, but he refuses to give it to her. Instead he details the different colors of different

parts of his body. As it was meant to, this greatly annoys the landlady and she hangs up on him. In closing, he asks the then empty telephone line, "wouldn't you rather / See for yourself?" (lines 34-35). The speaker, still playing his ignorance of what the lady was truly asking, sounds as though he is asking whether the landlady would like to meet him in person to judge his skin color for herself. The irony in this question, though, lies in the fact that we know the speaker is actually referring to his black bottom when he asks the woman if she wants to see it for herself. Still feigning politeness, the speaker offers to show his backside to the racist landlady.

Throughout the poem, yet another form of irony is created by the speaker's use of high diction, which reveals his education. ... Although he pretends politeness the entire time, he includes subtle meanings in his speech. The fact that a black man could outwit and make a white woman seem foolish shows the irony in judging people based on their skin color.

Comprehension:

- ❖ Explain the central theme of the poem.
- ❖ Explain the use of irony and sarcasm in the poem.
- ❖ Explain the context of the following lines:
 - i) The price seemed reasonable, location Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived Off premises.
 - ii) "ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?" Revelation came. "You mean--like plain or milk chocolate?"
 - iii) "Not altogether.

Facially, I am brunette, but, madam, you should see
The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
Are a peroxide blond.

BIOCRITICAL READING OF AMA ATA AIDOO:

Ama Ata Aidoo was born in Abeadzi Kyiakor, Gold Coast, the present Ghana. Her father served as the chief of Abeadzi Kyakor, a political chief. Aidoo grew up in a royal household, due to her father's position. She had from the beginning Aidoo had a clear idea of not only African traditions but also western culture due to her Western education. She graduated from the University of Ghana in 1964, and started to publish poetry while studying. Later in the early 1960s she worked with Efua Sutherland, founder of the Ghana Drama Studio. Aidoo's has experimented in different genres such as fiction, drama, and poetry. Most of her stories deal with the role of the women in the process of change. Aidoo became popular when she wrote the play The Dilemma Of A Ghost (1965). The Dilemma Of A Ghost was a play that dealt with the problem of conflict between traditional culture and Western education and values. The play portrayed Ato Yaweson, a young man from Ghana, who returns home after getting educated in the United States and brings with him seeds of conflict. The tension is increased by his wife's unawareness and irresponsibility. In the end Ato's mother helps to relieve the tension in the family. Her next work was a collection of short stories, No Sweetness Here (1970), written from the mid-1960s, was a. Aidoo's semi-autobiographical novel, Our Sister Killjoy; Or, Reflections From A Black-Eyed Squint was published in 1977 and this book delineated the interaction between African and European cultures. In a way the book also dealt with the psychological impact of postcolonialism on women by depicting Sissie, the disillusioned young woman who has become alienated by her experience in England and in Bavaria, Germany. She feels distressed to use language that

'enslaved' her, and she undergoes racist persecutions throughout her journeys. Sissie finally returns to Ghana. Aidoo's narrative technique is unique in this novel using alternately prose and poetry. Her second play Anowa (1970) was the story of a girl who disregarded her parents' choice of a husband for her. This was produced in Britain in 1991 followed by the publication of the novel, Changes. She won the 1993 Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Africa region for this novel. Changes is about Esi, a modern African woman who earns more than her schoolmaster husband Oku. After a 'marital rape' Esi seeks a divorce and begins an affair with a Muslim businessman, Ali Kondey. Although Ali is married, he can due to his religious background have more than one wife. Therefore, Esi and Ali marry, but Esi realizes that her husband is not attentive to her and they move apart. Esi in the novel questions her notions of love and tries to understand her selfhood.

Aidoo has taught for many years in the United States and Kenya and has been a professor of English at the University of Ghana and a fellow at the Institute for African Studies, where she wrote and researched Fanti drama. She also served as a consulting professor to the Washington bureau of the Phelps-Stokes Fund's Ethnic Studies Program. She has attended an advanced creative writing course at Stanford University and she has been at the Harvard International Seminar. In 1983-84 Aidoo was Minister of Education under the government of Jerry Rawlings. Due to her political career her writing had lessened during the years, 1970 to 1985. In 1986 and 1987, Someone Talking To Sometime, (poetry collection) and The Eagle And The Chickens (a children's book) were published respectively. Besides Ghana, Aidoo has lived in Harare, Zimbabwe from 1983, where she has worked for the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry of Education and has also been active in the Zimbabwe Women Writers Group.

FURTHER READING:

- Women Writers in Black Africa by Lloyd Brown (1981)
- Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature, ed. by Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves (1986)
- In their Own Voices, ed. by Adeola James (1990)
- Diverse Voices, ed. by Harriet Devine Jump (1991)
- Black Women's Writing, ed. by Gina Wisker (1993)
- The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo by Vincent Odamtten (1994)
- Postcolonial African Writers by Pushpa Naidu Parekh and Siga Fatima Jagne (1998)
- Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo, ed. by Ada Uzoamaka Azodo and Gay Wilentz (1999)

Works By Ama Ata Aidoo:

- The Dilemma Of A Ghost, 1965
- Anowa, 1970
- No Sweetness Here, 1970
- Our Sister Killjoy; Or, Reflections From A Black-Eyed Squint, 1977
- Someone Talking To Sometime, 1985
- The Eagle And The Chicken, 1986
- Birds And Other Poems, 1987
- Changes: A Love Story, 1991 - Muutoksia
- The Girl Who Can And Other Stories, 1999

MOTHERHOOD AND THE NUMBERS GAME:

Paraphrase :

Egyeifi said to the other screaming woman

Now that I am suffering so much
I know I am truly a mother
Two painfully hoarse voices were still
Bellowing like
Cows in an abattoir
While four veins were swollen to sizes larger
Than the two necks they stood on.
Meda w'ase...osiande, ama meehu de, saana moso maawo
I always wondered at the non-logic of it all and even
Managed the educated lady's grin on the day
They told me that in all the twenty years I was away
My mother never slept a wink
The woman who spoke (my mother's friend)
Stared straight into my eyes.
So at two in the morning I lie here in the dark
More sharp eyed than the cat in my totem—anxious, angry and sleepless
I am also blissfully anxious, happily angry and nervously fulfilled
That I too am a mother.

Read the poem and answer the questions below before

- Who is the speaker?
- What event taken place when the poem begins.
- Why does the poem have the title. Motherhood and the Numbers Game.
- At the end of the poem what is the feeling of the speaker.
- What do you think is the meaning of this line: *Meda w'ase...osiande, ama meehu de, saana moso maawo.*

If you have being able to answer these questions successfully then you may have understood the theme of the poem. Well, in case you haven't here is the central idea of the poem.

Central Idea:

The poem is about motherhood and is trying to explain the pain and agony of being a mother. The indication in the poem is that the speaker has just given birth and there is also the implied meaning that she has another woman who also has given birth to a baby. The lines that state: “they told me that in all the/20 years I was away,/my mother never slept a wink!” may mean that the speaker is twenty years old and also the lines depict the anxiety and anguish that fills a woman’s -- more importantly -- a mother’s heart. The poem at the same time seems to make a remark at not just the state of motherhood but more so about the number of times one becomes a mother. It seems to indicate that in the process of being the mother one loses the preciousness attached to being a mother. The use of the African dialect in the poem brings in a realm of the African culture. The words, *Meda w’ase* means *Thank You and osiande, ama meehu de, saana moso maawo* emphasizes the title, ‘Motherhood and the Numbrers Game’.

Comprehension:

- ❖ Explain the main idea in the poem, Motherhood and the Numbers Game.
- ❖ Write a short note on the writing of Ama Ata Aidoo.
- ❖ Explain the lines:

i) I
too
am
a mother!

ii) 'meda w'ase
meda w'ase
meda w'ase
osiande
ama meehu de,
saana moso
maawo!'

UNIT 1

LESSON 5: NADINE GORDIMER

OUTLINE:

- **Nadine Gordimer & her works**
- **Study of ‘Six Feet of the Country’**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Understand the significance of South African writing.**
- **Know the central concerns of Gordimer’s work.**

In this section we will introduce to the significance and scope of South African writing by viewing a short story of Nadine Gordimer.

BIOCRITICAL READING OF NADINE GORDIMER:



Nadine Gordimer grew up in South Africa. She was born in Springs, Transvaal, South Africa in 1923 and has been living in Johannesburg since 1948. She studied at Witwaterstrand University and has made writing her career. She has not only travelled extensively, but is also a writer of non-fiction and producer of TV documentaries. The Gordimer Stories 1981-82 was a series that was screened on the television. Gordimere has more than thirteen novels and ten short story collections and her work is published, in about forty languages. Many of her earlier works deal with the issue of racism and depict the moral and psychological tensions of life experienced by the oppressed and coloured characters. She was very much opposed to apartheid and refused to accept the system, although she grew up in a community in which it was accepted as normal. Her work has therefore been a type of propaganda projecting the illness of the apartheid movements.

She has been awarded fifteen honorary degrees from universities in USA, Belgium, South Africa, and from York, Oxford and Cambridge Universities in the UK. She was made a Commandeur de l' Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (France), and is Vice President of International PEN and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. She was also a founder of the Congress of South African Writers. She was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991.

The Lying Days (1953), was her first novel, and this is a semi-autobiographical novel. She depicts the master-servant relationship in her next three works, A World of Strangers (1958), Occasion for Loving (1963), and The Late Bourgeois World (1966). Occasion for Loving also deals with an illicit love affair between a black man and a white woman. She was the joint winner of the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1974, for her novel The Conservationist. Just after the Soweto uprising in South Africa she wrote Burger's Daughter (1979) and this was banned, along with other books she had written. The House Gun (1998), investigates, through a murder trial, the complexities of violence-ridden post-apartheid South Africa. The theme of forced emigration is delineated in her novel, The Pickup (2001). The novel is set in South Africa and Saudi Arabia. Her latest novel is Get a Life (2005).

Gordimer has been an avid crusader against racism in South Africa. She firmly believes in tolerance, free speech and understanding. Though the South African authorities banned three of her works she refused to go into exile. As a critic states, "In Gordimer's work there is an affection for her homeland and its people, a love of its epic haunting landscapes and potent past. This is juxtaposed with an examination of the devastating psychological effects of political persecution on the lives of ordinary South Africans and it is this which gives her work its moral force and imaginative richness". Most of her character depictions are faced with issues such as exile and compromise, exploitation and alienation. She questions the white supremacy and exposes the weakness of their arguments. She also reveals how white self-justification and benevolence hide a latent egotism.

Gordimer has a detached concise style, not a word is wasted; she moves the narrative on with a subtlety of detail. Gordimer's work is itself proof of her

belief in the transforming power of art: ‘art defies defeat by its very existence, representing the celebration of life, in spite of all attempts to degrade and destroy it.’ Many scholars and critics have criticized her for being a part of the white supremacy and for writing from a position of privilege but her work itself is filled with feelings of sympathy and empathy. This form of criticism negates Gordimer’s position as a steadfast guardian of a free South Africa and of her right to be a literary witness to her country’s tragedies. With Mandela’s election one wondered about the crusades of Gordimer. Yet her novel The Pickup revealed that she is able to raise other pertinent issues. This particular novel had the theme of migration and narrated the story of Julie Summers, the daughter of an investment banker, and Abdu, a mechanic who has come from an unnamed Arab African state to South Africa. Julie finds her uprooting and settling down in Abdu’s homeland as more meaningful and enriching experience. Similarly her earlier novel The House Gun (1998) depicts the emotional and legal consequences of a murder committed by the son of privileged white parents. It explores the bonds of familial love and the power that such bonds have. Novels such as these explain to us that Gordimer’s work is an unflinching voice probing and investigating power politics and explaining the misery of the oppressed.

Gordimer’s Works:

Face to Face: Short Stories Silver Leaf Books (South Africa), 1949

The Lying Days Gollancz, 1953

The Soft Voice of the Serpent and Other Stories Gollancz, 1953

Six Feet of the Country: Short Stories Gollancz, 1956

A World of Strangers Gollancz, 1958

Friday's Footprint Gollancz, 1960

Occasion for Loving Gollancz, 1963

Not for Publication Gollancz, 1965

The Late Bourgeois World Gollancz, 1966

South African Writing Today (co-editor with L. Abrahams) Penguin, 1967

Penguin Modern Stories (contributor) Penguin, 1970

A Guest of Honour Cape, 1971

African Literature: The Lectures Given on This Theme at the University of Cape Town's Public Summer School, February 1972 University of Cape Town (South Africa), 1972

Livingstone's Companions: Stories Cape, 1972

On the Mines (with David Goldblatt) C. Struik (South Africa), 1973

The Black Interpreters: Notes on African Writing Spro-Cas/Ravan (South Africa), 1973

The Conservationist Cape, 1974

Selected Stories (reissued as "No Place Like: Selected Stories", Penguin, 1975) Cape, 1975

Some Monday for Sure Cape, 1975

Burger's Daughter Cape, 1979

A Soldier's Embrace Cape, 1980

Town and Country Lovers (Collectors Edition) Sylvester and Orphanos (USA), 1980

What Happened to Burger's Daughter Or How South African Censorship Works Taurus (South Africa), 1980

July's People Cape, 1981

Something Out There Cape, 1984

The Tanner Lectures on Human Values Cambridge University Press, 1985

A Correspondence Course and Other Stories Eurographica (Iceland), 1986

Lifetimes: Under Apartheid (with David Goldblatt) Cape, 1986

Reflections of South Africa: Short Stories Systime (USA), 1986

A Sport of Nature Cape, 1987
The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places Cape, 1988
My Son's Story Bloomsbury, 1990
Crimes of Conscience: Selected Short Stories Heinemann, 1991
Jump and Other Stories Bloomsbury, 1991
Three in a Bed: Fiction, Morals and Politics Bennington College (USA),
1991
Why Haven't You Written?: Selected Stories 1950-1972 Penguin, 1992
None to Accompany Me Bloomsbury, 1994
Writing and Being Harvard University Press, 1994
Harald, Claudia and Their Son Duncan (Bloomsbury Birthday Quid)
Bloomsbury, 1996
The House Gun Bloomsbury, 1998
Living in Hope and History: Notes On Our Century Bloomsbury, 1999
The Pickup Bloomsbury, 2001
Loot Bloomsbury, 2003
Telling Tales (editor) Bloomsbury, 2004
Get A Life Bloomsbury, 2005

Prizes and awards won by Gordimer:

- 1961 WH Smith Literary Award *Friday's Footprint*
- 1971 James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction) *A Guest of Honour*
- 1974 Booker Prize for Fiction (joint winner) *The Conservationist*
- Scottish Arts Council Neil M. Gunn Fellowship
- Premio Malaparte (Italy)
- Nelly Sachs Prize (Germany)

- Nobel Prize for Literature
- International Primo Levi Literary Award
- Mary McCarthy Award (USA)

‘Six Feet of the Country’ (1956)

Synopsis:

This story discusses the life of a couple, who are managing a farm in the countryside. The story is narrated to us by the husband who works in Johannesburg and maintains the farm some kilometers away from Johannesburg. His wife, Lerice is quite happy running the farm and belies his expectation that she may get tired of it.

On the farm a number of colored people work and Lerice, the wife treats the sufferings and problems of the farmhands who are natives with compassion and sympathy. One night, Albert the farmhand disturbs the narrator at night and informs him of the sick state of another farmhand. When the narrator is taken there he finds the man dead and also realizes that he is not their regular farm hand. He also gets to know from the other farmhands that the man is the brother of one of the farm hands, Petrus. At the same time he also learns that the dead man was an illegal immigrant because he was a Rhodesian and Rhodesians needed a permit to enter that region. Since the matter has to be reported to the police and other government authorities, the narrator goes to the authorities. The concerned officials take away the body and later after postmortem bury it. Now, Petrus wants the body of his brother back for burial. To complicate matters Petrus’ father takes a regular permit and turns up from Rhodesia for the burial. The master goes and convinces the authorities and also pays twenty dollars collected from the farmhands to have the body exhumed and sent back. The next day the body arrives and with solemn and grave rituals the body is carried for

burial. On the way to the burial, the old man, the father breaks down that the body is too heavy and his son was not that heavy. When they open the coffin they find to their horror that it is indeed not the body of the son and someone else who is in it. The master runs to the authorities but it is of no use. In the process the farmhands lose not only their money but also the rights to retrieve their beloved. However the story ends on a happy note because Lerice gives a coat of her father for the old man, the father of the deceased who goes off better equipped from when he had come down from Rhodesia.

Glossary: Piccanins" is somewhat condescending slang for small black children. Zoot suits were wide-lapelled, high-waisted outfits worn by "hip" urban blacks in the forties

Now read the story and answer the following questions:

Comprehension:

Characterize the wife's and husband's relationship in the story.

Examine the husband's feelings towards his wife at different points in the story.

What does "tension" mean to the Johannesburg people?

Who is the narrator?

What does the narrator mean when he says that his relationship with the black people is "almost feudal."

Why does the worker, Petrus think that white men can do anything?

What is the attitude to death as revealed by the whites and the coloured people?

What do you think the blacks felt like at the end of this story?

What are the feelings of the narrator at the end of the story?

What does the title, 'Six Feet of the Country' mean?

UNIT 2

Australia & New Zealand:

A.D. Hope: Australia (P)

Christina Stead: The Schoolboy's Tale: Day of Wrath (SF)

Judith Wright: Train Journey (P)

Peter Carey: Do You Love Me? (SF)

Sally Morgan: A Black Grandmother (SF)

A.R. D. Fairburn: Imperial (P)

Allen Curnow: House and Land (P)

UNIT 2

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UNIT 2

LESSON 1: INTRODUCTION

OUTLINE:

- **Idea of Australian Writing**
- **Definition and Scope**
- **Theoretical Perspectives**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

Understand the concept of Australian Creative Writing

Know the different genres in Australian Literatures

Figure out the background and rise of Australian Writing.

In this section we will introduce you to the significance and scope of Australian literature, and then take you on a short trip through the background and then to the rise of different genres in Australian writing. This section would enable you

to understand the inter-relatedness between the land, society and the growth of literatures.

Did you know that the internationally famous Australian novelist Nevil Shute was an immigrant and was not a native? Shute moved to Australia and settled there after World War II. He then began to write about world events such as the war and nuclear warfare from an Australian point of view. In many English novels Australia is depicted as a penal colony. Illustrations are Charles Dicken's Great Expectations and D. H. Lawrence's Kangaroo.

Other writers have felt that the remoteness of Australia needed to be escaped. Germaine Greer, author of *The Female Eunuch*, has spent much of her career in England and has in the past been a fierce critic of her native land but she now regularly lives some of the year in New South Wales. The other pioneering feminist writers are Louisa Lawson, Nettie Palmer and Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson. Louisa Lawson was the mother of the poet Henry Lawson and she was a suffragist and editor of The Dawn Journal a campaigning publication.

Modern period:

Australian literature can be thought of as being recognized with the award of the Nobel prize to Patrick White in 1973. Other notable writers to have emerged since the 1970s include the dual Booker Prize winner Peter Carey and David Malouf.

Did you know that Australia also had several hypocritical writers. One such literary hoax was created in 1944 by Ern Malley which led to an obscenity trial. Once again in the 1990s, a writer called Helen Darville masqueraded as Helen "Demidenko", winning major literary prizes for her Hand that Signed the Paper before being discovered, sparking a controversy over the content of her novel, which dealt with Nazis in the Ukraine.

Well, the question that you may all be asking is what are the genres in Australian writing.

James Clavell in his collection of works called The Asian Saga discusses an important feature of Australian literature, namely, the depiction of the far eastern culture like in the works of Nevil Shute. Clavell was also a successful screenwriter and along with writers as Thomas Keneally, who won the Booker Prize for Schindler's Ark (the book Schindler's List is based on), has expanded the topics of Australian literature far beyond that one country. Other Australian

novelists who use international themes are Gerald Murnane and Brenda Walker. Writers in other genre such as Science fiction or fantasy writing and crime fiction are Greg Egan, Joel Shepherd and Traci Harding and Kerry Greenwood, Shane Maloney and Peter Temple. The crime genre is currently thriving in Australia, most notably through books written by Australian born business man Rupert Murdoch is one of the most powerful men in media worldwide. His influence on Australian literature includes the ownership of numerous newspapers and the publishing firm Harper Collins.

The voice of aboriginal Australians has begun to be noticed and includes the playwright Jack Davis although he is still little known. Writer Sally Morgan's My Place was considered a breakthrough novel in terms of bringing indigenous stories to wider notice.

Another important milestone is the History of Australia written by Manning Clark which is usually regarded as the definitive account of the nation. Major Australian literary journals include Meanjin, Overland, Island, Heat and Southerly magazines, and the annual publications Verandah, Sleepers Almanac and Going Down Swinging.

This should have given you a fairly general picture of Australian writing.

Comprehension:

Write an essay in about 200- 250 words generally about Australian literature.

UNIT 2: LESSON 2: INTRODUCTION

OUTLINE:

Australian Poetry

A.D. Hope and ‘Australia’

Judith Wright and ‘Train Journey’

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

Appreciate some of the finer aspects of Australian poetry

Be acquainted with the poetry of A.D. Hope

Comprehend Judith Wright’s Creative Skill and position in Australian Writing.

In this section we will introduce to the poetry of two great Australian poets. Besides introducing these two writers we will also take a quick look at two of their poems. Prior to that it would be good if you had a general idea of the

background and developments in Australian poetry. Poetry in Australia can be divided into following sections:

- ❖ **Poetry**
- ❖ **Performance Poetry**
- ❖ **Modern Poetry**

Poetry:

Despite perhaps seeming out of the typical Australian character, poetry played an important part in the founding of Australian literature. Two poets who vie for the position of greatest Australian poet are Christopher Brennan and Adam Lindsay Gordon. Gordon was not born in Australia but the Azores, to Scottish parents. Despite this he is often called the "national poet of Australia" and is the only Australian with a monument in the poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey in England.

Both Gordon's and Brennan's works are made up of traditional styles of poetry with many classical allusions, which can be thought of as high culture, but there was also a competing, vibrant tradition of folk songs and ballads. Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson were two of the chief exponents of these popular ballads and 'Banjo' himself was responsible for creating what is probably the most famous Australian verse *Waltzing Matilda*.

Performance Poetry:

The sounding of poetry in Australia has always been present but in most historical accounts it has not been emphasized as an activity, always assumed to be a supplementary activity to the industry of print publishing. Even when the oral transmission and aural appreciation of poetry dominated the aesthetics and poetics of Australian poetry and in the absence of sound recording devices, our record of these works remain as printed texts. The texts contained the 'sound' of the poems in their metre and rhyming patterns. Australia lacks any real academic discourse in the field of performance poetry or poets; there are no prizes, no courses of study at universities, no peer-reviewed journals, no histories, no national anthologies, nothing that could be considered a body of information for the study and analysis of performance poetry. All there is are reports that have appeared in the daily presses and on radio and television, and the memories of readings attended. Since the 1960s, when regular rhyme and rhythm in poetry became replaced by a more freestyle expression, and the public soundings of these works relied less on familiar rhythms and more on the political, social and psychological interpretation of the words, sounded poetry, has been appreciated for many other qualities. The sound of words and word combinations, fragments of sentences, repetitions, mirrorings within the text, alliteration and assonance and even internal rhyming became devices in the

writing, and the line the basic unit of the poem, the breath determining the rhythm. The performance poets in 1978 drew attention to themselves as a new cultural formation and to the fact that there were poets dedicated to the sounding of poetry as their primary poetic activity and that poetry could be written not only for print, but exclusively for the sake of sound.

As a critic mentions, "Indeed, the value of the poetry reading (sounding) as a social and cultural form can be partly measured by its resistance, up to this point, to reification or commodification. It is a measure of its significance that it is ignored. That is, the (cultural) invisibility of the poetry reading is what makes its audibility so audacious. Its relative absence as an institution makes the poetry reading the ideal site for the presence of language for listening and being heard, for hearing and for being listened to." (Bernstein, 1998)

PiO claims in his anthology of performance poetry (PiO, 1985) that the term 'performance poetry' was coined at a seminar where David Malouf was speaking. This event definitely marked the beginning of the use of the term 'performance poets' as Ruth Starke notes in *Writers, readers and rebels*, 1998. However, it was not the first instance of the call for performance of poetry. "If poets are going to perform in front of large audiences, then they ought to learn how to project their voices, or how to use a microphone; otherwise they

should introduce the poem and let someone else read it,' wrote Geoffrey Dutton(ABR, April, 1970), after the 1970 Writers' Week."

Performance poetry is not a recent phenomenon in English-speaking Australia. It would not be beyond credibility to identify Henry Lawson as Australia's first professional performance poet, but there had been many performance poets in Australia prior to Lawson (real name Larsen, Norwegian father) from the First Fleet onwards. In fact prior to 1890 most poetry in Australia was received aurally. It is generally acknowledged in most of the histories of Australian literature that the Bulletin Bush poetry, in its nationalist mission to be Australian, sort of overtly mythologized the nature of the Australian identity. The most performed Australian poem ever, that has become somewhat of an unofficial anthem of Australia (in sports particularly) is A B Paterson's 'Waltzing Matilda'. Another popular performance poem is Dorothea Mackellar's My Country, 1908. The lines that are probably present in the minds of every Australian, even if they have never seen it written down.

I love a sunburnt country,
a land of sweeping plains,
of rugged mountain ranges,
of floods and droughts and rains.

The sound of that early Australian bush poetry is firmly embedded in the national psyche. The largest selling poetry volume in Australia, C J Dennis's *Sentimental Bloke* in 1915 was poetry to be performed, and was performed. But the voices in that poem and others by CJ Dennis are character voices, often over exaggerated, of stereotyped Australian voices comically represented.

Kenneth Slessor in the 1940s, and Bruce Dawe and Thomas Shapcott, in the 1950s, introduced the sound of everyday Australian voices, incorporating the vernacular and the colloquial language of Australia as part of their poetry. The Commonwealth Literary Fund, which in the 1950s toured Australian poets on reading tours of their works, eg Roland Robinson, provided another way in which sounded poetry was promoted by that organization. Cath Walker (Oodgeroo Nunuccal) also emerged as an Aboriginal-Australian voice in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

In the 1960s poetry readings were associated with the great poetry explosion that was happening globally but also particularly in Australia due partly to the challenging of the self proclaimed establishment of university poet-professors led by A D Hope. A D Hope strangely enough, due to strict censorship laws and due to sexually explicit nature of his poetry, was more likely to have been heard than read as he didn't publish his poetry until the early 1960s. Very early in the

1970s University of Queensland Press released a series of twelve poets on vinyl records, featuring older and newer Australian poets reading their work. This was a milestone publication in Australian poetic culture, the first commercially available sound recording of twelve of Australia's most prominent poets of the time

By the 1970s there was a great desire in Australia for the voices to be heard that were other than the Anglo-centric male dominated majority, Thus, women, migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, indigenous Australians, differently abled and gendered persons began to read their poetry. . For many the poetry reading was the place to be heard. There were many poetry groups and much performance activity in the 1970s. Ania Walwicz, Vicki Viidikas, Sylvia Kantazaris, Anna Couanni, and PiO emerged as strong non-anglo voices in performance poetry, and Kate Jennings's anthology of women writers Mother i'm rooted, 1975, highlighted the lack of women in Australian poetry anthologies. Most of the new women writers had engaged with poetry through the activity of poetry readings and not the formal anglo-centric male dominated academic poetry of the universities. In 1976 the Poets Union was formed, identifying that poetry was indeed work and workers needed to be represented by a union to negotiate their demands. New readings, often centred around performance were held in Sydney by the 'militant' Poets Union there and were

the genesis of the later pub poetry in that city. The significant poets behind this movement were Chris Mansell and Les Wicks, who organized readings. The Poets Union pushed for better conditions for performance poets at the Sydney Festival, which then included writers, and successfully gained recognition and payment.

The performance poets, in 1978, were recognized as a group, or movement, or new cultural formation, separate from published poets for the first time. There were many other semi-professionals, like Ken Smeaton, Geoffrey Eggleston and Shelton Lea in Victoria, but the majority held full-time jobs and did their performing as a secondary activity. The 1980s saw a greater development in performance poetry, with more professional poets earning their living by poetry writing. Some of the mentionable ones are Geoff Goodfellow, and Jenny Boulton in South Australia, komninos, Myron Lysenko, Liz Hall, Lauren Williams, Kerry Scuffins, Kerry Loughrey, Carmel Bird in Melbourne, Grant Caldwell, Chris Mansell and Steven Herrick in Sydney and others in other states. The mid 1980s also saw major literary events enter the public sphere. Literary readings were usually restricted to academics, publishers, writers and readers and Writers' Week programs. The place, New Partz became the centre of Sydney performance poetry and attracted performance and so-called page poets. The performance poets had been having small readings in public places, hotels and

coffee lounges, since the early 1970s. By the mid 1980s Les Murray and the performance poets were sharing large public stages in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

Modern Poetry:

In sharp contrast to these early frontier writers most of the white inhabitants of Australia were city dwellers. Even Banjo Paterson, who wrote of the archetypal swagman, was a city lawyer. Nevertheless their romanticized views of the outback and the rugged characters that inhabited it played an important part in shaping the Australian nation's psyche. Henry Handel Richardson (Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson) was, aside from being one of the first female Australian authors, one of the first to write about urban, middle-class life. The 1920s brought two of the most important proponents of Australian literature, Vance and Nettie Palmer, to the forefront. The husband and wife team, Vance working on novels and Nettie on non-fiction, did much to promote their own writings but also to chronicle earlier authors.

Prominent Australian poets of the twentieth century included A. D. Hope, Judith Wright, Kenneth Slessor, Gwen Harwood, David Rowbotham, Les Murray, Jennifer Maiden, Will Ogilvie and Kevin Hart.

Comprehension:

Write an essay on the growth and development of Australian poetry.

Explain Performance poetry and mention some of its salient features.

A.D. Hope and Australia: (1907 - 2000)

Have you ever heard of A.D. Hope or the poem Australia. Well if you haven't then you can know about him now.

Alec Derwent Hope (July 21,) was an Australian poet and essayist, known for his satirical slant, who was also a critic, teacher and academic. He was born in Cooma, New South Wales, and educated partly at home and in Tasmania. He attended Sydney University, and then the University of Oxford on a scholarship. Returning to Australia in 1931 he then trained as a teacher, and spent some time drifting. He worked as a psychologist with the New South Wales Department of Labor and Industry, and as a lecturer in Education and English at Sydney Teachers College (1937-44). He was a lecturer at the University of Melbourne from 1945 to 1950, and then took the post as the first professor of English at the newly-founded Canberra University, later the Australian National University, a chair he held until retiring in 1967.

Although he was published as a poet while still young, The Wandering Islands (1955) was his first collection, what remained of his early work after it was mostly destroyed in manuscript in a fire. His influences were Auden, and Swinburne; he was omnivorous, very largely self-taught, and with a talent to offend his countrymen. He was awarded an OBE in 1972, and many other honors. He died in Canberra. Some of the significant works of A.D. Hope that you may want to know are:

The Wandering Islands (1955)

Poems (1960),

The Cave and the Spring (1965) (essays)

Collected Poems (1966)

New Poems (1965-1969)

Dunciad Minor (1970) (satire)

A Midsummer Eve's Dream (1970)

Native Companions (1974)

The Pack of Autolycus (1978) (essays)

The New Cratylus (1979) (poetics)

A Book of Answers (1978)

The Drifting Continent (1979) (poems)

Antechinus (1981)

The Tragical History of Dr Faustus (1982)

The Age of Reason (1985) (poems)

Ladies from the Sea (1987) (drama)

Orpheus (1991) (poems)

Chance Encounters (memoirs)

PARAPHRASE OF A.D.HOPE'S 'AUSTRALIA'

This is a nation of drab green, desolate grey
trees standing in a stretch.

The field is uniform of wars
and darkens her hills, the endless, outstretched
paws of sphinx demolished or store his ---
away.

They call her a young country and yet lie
because she is the last of lands and the
emptiest. She is a woman beyond her
change of life, a woman whose womb
is dry though the breast is tender.

Her body has no songs or history
she is filled with the emotions and
feelings of the younger lands.

Her rivers drown in inland sands
while the river of her immense stupidly
floods her monotonous tribes.

In them the ultimate men
arrive who burst 'we survive'.

They are the type who will inhabit
the dying earth.

Her five cities are like five sores
each will drain her.

Into this jungle some like me
will turn back from the jungle of modern thought
to find the Arabian desert
thinking that the prophets in this desert will come
such savage and scarlet
springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
the learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
which is called civilization in this place.

Comprehension:

- How is the nation discussed in the first two lines?
- What is the sphinx and what is the significance of it in the fourth time?
- Why cannot she be called as a young country?
- Why is the country conceived of as a woman?
- Why the nation is also referred to as a 'river of immense stupidity that floods her monotonous tribes'.
- What does the phrase 'from cairns to Perth' indirectly?
- What is the pride of the men who com to this land?
- What are the five cities that the poet refers?
- Why does he call them as five sores?
- Why is he glad to turn home?
- What does he find in this land?
- How does this land affect the poet?

Judith Wright and 'Train Journey'

Judith Wright was a prolific Australian poet, critic, and short-story writer, who published more than 50 books. Wright was also an uncompromising environmentalist and social activist campaigning for Aboriginal land rights. She believed that the poet should be concerned with national and social problems. Judith Arundell Wright was born near Armidale, New South Wales, into an old and wealthy pastoral family. She was raised on her family's sheep station. After her mother died in 1927, she was educated under her grandmother's supervision. At the age of 14 she was sent to New England Girls' School, where she found consolation in poetry and decided to become a poet. In 1934 she entered Sydney University, and studied philosophy, history, psychology and English, without taking a degree. When Wright was in her 20s, she became progressively deaf. Between the years 1937 and 1938 she travelled in Britain and Europe. She then worked as a secretary-stenographer and clerk until 1944. From 1944 to 1948 she was a university statistician at the University of Queensland, St. Lucia. At the age of 30 Wright met her lifelong partner, the unorthodox philosopher J.P. McKinney, 23 years her senior; they later married.

Most of Wright's poetry was written in the mountains of southern Queensland. Wright left her home state in the mid-1970s protesting the policy of Joh Bjelke-

Petersen, Premier of Queensland, and settled in a remote property near the heritage town of Braidwood, south of Canberra, where she wrote many of her later nature poems. She lectured part-time at various Australian universities. In 1975 she published a collection of her addresses and speeches in Because I was Invited. Wright was appointed a foundation fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and an emeritus professor of the Literature Board of the Arts Council of Australia. Wright's memoir, *Half a Lifetime*, covered her life until the 1960s, and appeared in 2000. Wright died of a heart attack in Canberra on June 26 at the age of 85. Her ashes were scattered around the mountain Cemetery of Tamborine Mountain. Wright had owned a strip of rainforest nearby, which she donated to the state so it could be preserved as a national park.

Wright started to publish poems in the late 1930s in literary journals. Her first collection was The Moving Image (1946), in which she showed her technical excellence. Most of the poems were written in wartime. In The Trains Wright took the threat of the war in the Pacific as her subject. The main theme in the volume was the poet's awareness of time, death, and evil on a universal scale. With the following collections Wright gained a reputation as a wholly new voice in literature with a distinctly female perspective. The title poem from 'Woman to Man' (1949) dealt with the sexual act from a woman's point of

view. 'The Maker' paralleled the creation of a poem and the creation of a child. Several of her early poems such as 'Bullocky' and 'Woman to Man' became standard anthology pieces. Wright also wrote love poems to her husband. His death in 1966 and her increasing anxiety over the destruction of the natural environment introduced more pessimistic undercurrents in her work.

Wright's poetry was inspired by the various regions in which she lived: New England, New South Wales, the subtropical rainforests of Tamborine Mountain, Queensland, and the plains of the southern highlands near Braidwood. Wright in the mid-1950s commented: "The two threads of my life, the love of the land itself and the deep unease over the fate of its original people, were beginning to twine together, and the rest of my life would be influenced by that connection." In The Two Faces (1955) she took Hiroshima as an example of man's power to destroy even the cycles of nature. Wright's activism on conservation issues led her to focus on the interaction between land and the language. According to Wright, "the true function of art and culture is to interpret us to ourselves, and to relate us to the country and the society in which we live." She started to see that her mission was to find words and poetic forms to bridge the human experience and the natural world, man and earth. "Poetry needs a background in which emotional, as well as material values are given their due weight; and the effect of this shallowness of roots is easily traceable in Australian writing, with its

uneasy attempts to solve or to ignore the problem of its attitude to the country." Alienation from the land meant for Wright crisis of the language. She criticized the education system for failing to teach students the pleasures of poetry, and promoted the reading and writing of poetry in schools. Realistically she also expressed doubts about the power of poetry to change the scheme of things.

The middle period of her writing saw essays on Australian poetry (*Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* and *because I was Invited*) and the books *The Gateway, Two Fires* (with the haunting *At Cooloolah*), *Birds, Five Senses and The Other Half* (where she looked at the unconscious, the "self that night undrowns when I'm asleep"). In *Shadow*, the last of these, she begins to tackle some of the issues of the day, mainly the Vietnam War. She had moved from the "isolated sensibility, the lone poet ... exploring inwards towards an impossible peace" to "a rage against destructiveness and blind obedience." But once again, limitations to her understanding of the core issues meant she could only scratch at the surface of things. In the early 1970s her next book, *Alive*, saw her move from issues like the Vietnam War to questions of society and the forces that are exerted on people. In *Tableau* is a story of a man staggering in panic and despair, being ignored by the passing crowd. Wright examines her reactions and how she fights against the dehumanizing conditioning of society to go to his aid.

Holding him up as he asked till the ambulance came,
among the sudden curious crowd, I knew
his plunging animal heart,
against my flesh the shapes of his too-young bone,
the heaving pattern of his ribs. As still I do.

In the early 1960s Wright helped to found the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland. She fought to conserve the Great Barrier Reef, when its ecology was threatened by oil drilling, and campaigned against sand mining on Fraser Island. In her passionate poem 'Australia 1970' Wright expressed her feelings of disappointment and anger, seeing her wild country die, "like the eagle hawk, / dangerous till the last breath's gone, clawing and / striking." The Coral Battleground (1977) was her account of the campaign to protect the "great water-gardens, lovely indeed as cherry boughs and flowers under the once clear sea." In *The Cry for the Dead* (1981) Wright examined the treatment of Aborigines and destruction of the environment by settlers in Central Queensland from the 1840s to the 1920s.

As a literary critic Wright enjoyed a high reputation, and edited several collections of Australian verse. She was a friend of the Aboriginal poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal, whose work Wright helped to get published. Her work,

Preoccupations in Australian Poetry (1965) was Wright's pioneering effort to reread such early Australian poets as Charles Harpur, Adam Lindsay Gordon, and Henry Kendall. Wright received several awards, including the Grace Leven Prize (1950), Australia-Britannica Award (1964), Robert Frost Memorial Award (1977), Australian World Prize (1984), Queen's Medal for Poetry (1992). She had honorary degrees from several universities. In 1973-74 she was a member of the Australia Council.

If any of you want to know more about this writer then you can utilize this reading list:

South of My Days: a biography of Judith Wright by Veronica Brady (1998)

Bridgings by R. Lucas and L. McCredden (1996)

Judith Wright by Jennifer Strauss (1995)

Flame and Shadow by Shirley Walker (1991)

The Poetry of Judith Wright by S. Walker (1980)

Critical Essays on Judith Wright, ed. by A.K. Thomson (1968)

Some of her significant works are as follows:

Australian Bird Poems, 1940

The Moving Image, 1946

Australian Poetry, 1948, (edited volume)

Woman to Man, 1949

The Gateway, 1955

Kings of the Dingoes, 1958

The Generations of Men, 1959

The Day the Mountains Played, 1960

Australian Bird Poems, 1961

Birds, 1962

City Sunrise, 1964

Preoccupations in Australian Poetry, 1965

The Other Half, 1966

The Nature of Love, 1966

The River and the Road, 1966

Collected Poems, 1971

Alive, 1973

Because I Was Invited, 1975

Half Dream, 1975

Fourth Quarter, and Other Poems, 1976

Boundaries, 1976

The Coral Battleground, 1977

The Double Tree, 1978

Reef, Rainforest, Mangroves, Man, 1980

The Cry for the Dead, 1981

Judith Wright: Collected Poems 1942-1985, 1994

The Flame Tree, 1994

Going on Talking: Tales of a Great Aunt, 1998

Half a Lifetime, 2000

PARAPHRASE OF JUDITH WRIGHT'S 'TRAIN JOURNEY'

As I was glassed with cold sleep
and was dazzled by the moon
I woked and sun under the moons
cold sheet your delicate dry breasts
as the country that built my heart-

While the small trees on their
Uncolored slope moved like poetry
purposeful under the great dry flight
of air and under the currents
of wing and air.

Hold down your strength, box tree
and ironbark; break with your
brute strength the virgin rock
draw from the flying dark
the breath of dew till the unloving
comes to life in you.

Be over the blind rock a skin of sense
under the barren height of a slender dance
I woke up and saw the trees that
burst into flowers more lovely than
the white moon.

This poem is about a train journey. The speaker of the poem is the poet herself. She is traveling on the train she wakes up during the night. In her half-awakened state, she sees the countryside in the moonlight. She sees the countryside in the moonlight. She sees the slyness of the country that had burst her heart. She is indicating here the loss of creativity and the state of nationalism that the present Australia has degenerated into.

The second stanza is a continuation of the first. She sees the trees that moved her inner spirit and nurtured her creativity. She motivates the muse of creativity to burst forth out of the virgin rock and makes its presence felt. She wants the unloving to come to life again and regain its senses. She wants the kindling of emotion, sensuousness and wishes that the landscape should once again to be rejuvenated. The last two lines of the poem indicate the poet's wakefulness and her witnessing the 'dark small tree's hushing forth into flowers. The poem uses the state of sleep and wakefulness metaphorically to indicate the notion of loss of creative urges and the rekindling of it. At another level it can also be a reference to the bustling end the beauty of it.

Comprehension:

- Is the poem a dream or a reality?
- Why is the poem titled as train journey?
- What does the speaker see on the train journey?
- What does the poet want her countrymen to do?

UNIT 2: LESSON 3: Australian Fiction

OUTLINE:

- **Idea of Australian Fiction**
- **Definition and Scope; Themes and Issues**
- **Christina Stead**
- **Peter Carey**
- **Sally Morgan**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

Understand the background to Australian Fiction.

Know the different writers in Australian Fiction.

Be Acquainted with Christina Stead and Peter Carey and their fictions.

**Comprehend the life of the aborigines through an autobiographical
extract of Sally Morgan.**

As already stated in the introduction, Australia in recent years has been seen as a political-economic force in South Asian region. Most modern

Australian literature has been reflecting the peculiarities of the Australian culture. The writing has undergone a change from being the output of British Empire to a strong, liberal, independent country. The country now has a larger number of immigrants and moreover the country also has increase in population due to the fact colonization in many parts of Asia had culminated. The present notion of Australian Literature is a reflection of particular socio-historical influences that the country is undergoing.

The first documents of literature had been just reflecting the reality of time. For example Russel Wand's The Australian Legend was depicting the Australian ethos as it had developed from first settlement to the account of the European invasion of the Australian continent in 1789. This book portrayed the effects of frontier life, the development of an agrarian society, the difficulty experienced by attempting to assimilate and giving artistic expression to what they felt. The early colonial writers saw the land as savage and as a land with no culture, history, tradition, etc. gradually the newness and strangeness of the land itself become a take off for the literary writings. Many of the writers in the country were influenced with the literary influence of Britain. As such some of the writers who utilized a romantic background were Rolfe, Boldrewood and Marcus Clarke. Marcus Clarke's fictional account of convict life in His Natural Life is graphic and romantic. Australian writer of this period is Joseph Furphy

(Tom Collins) who deals with the strength between statesman, bullock-driver and station owner. He adopts rather uses a note of philosophy in his works. Keer points out, "Furphy's purpose is the comic exploration of concepts of truth and justice in Australian society of Literature 1810 and to achieve his purpose he frequently interrupts his story to point a whimsical moral. Most of his writings in the early literature were mostly concerned with land, "Practically every host in the comeback contrasts very favorably the 'independence', the 'freedom' and closeness to 'nature' of the bushman's life with the drabness and meanness of life in the Bush. It is period theme of Furphy, Lawson and Paterson epitomized in the latter enormously popular 'Clancy of the Overflow". If Furphy to some extent romanticizes then Lawson is merciless about the account of particular miserable existence in the Bush, Furphy, is through his writing records the class pretensions, the story of particular educated men, and the value of bush life. On the other hand a writer like Henry Lawson (1867-1922) gives a more realistic portrayal of particular working men and the struggles as he does in his novel, Such is Life.

His idea of life in the bushes is bleak. He depicted the harshness of the bush land and the harsh wretchedness of climate and particularly unproductive soil. Most of Lawson's fiction reveals a sympathetic view of the women who suffer. In addition to that, it depicts the rift between civilized/urban atmosphere

or the uncivilized/rural at now. If the urban is a metaphorical reference to modernization, cleanliness and culture, the mind is a reference to savagery, brutality and chaos. The other writer who is close to the imagery is Barbara Buynton. She sees “the land as malevolent, with beauty transformed to terror and man metamorphosed to animal cunning in his efforts to survive.”

Women’s writing in Australia had begun in the form of letters and diaries. However recent writer have given expression to the problems confronting marriages and particular conflicts that arise with regard to particular position of women in particular country. The leader of Australian feminism is Germaine Greer who in The Female Eunuch discusses the small nuclear family as a disaster. Other reflections of women’s writing are to be found in the Penguin Anthology of Women’s Writing Ed by Dale Spender. In recent years number of women’s presses have cropped up in Australia and in Sydney and Rebbnon a number of women’s publishing group have sprang up.

Thus Australian writing became a recognized one due to particular arrival of Patrick White. The award of particular Nobel Prize in 1973 foregrounds Australian Literature as a literary writing of consideration. The recent writers that one can matter are Glenda Adams, Tom Linton, Hal Porter, David Melong, Kene Walim, Rovels Bundit and Robert Dawe.

CHRISTINA STEAD : (1902-1983)

Christina Stead has generally been considered as a major 20th-century Australian novelist. She was never considered as a big name in Australian writing till recently. She has been called Australia's 'lost' novelist, as she lived abroad, and her works were originally published in England and the US. One of her works, Letty Fox (1946) was banned for a long time in Australia because its heroine was considered degenerate. The Man Who Loved Children (1940; rev. ed. 1965) is considered to be her best work till date. As mentioned in one of her bio notes:

Christina Stead was born in Rockdale, New South Wales. Her father, David Stead, was a Fabian Socialist, and eminent naturalist; later he formed and managed the New South Wales Government State Trawling Industry. When Christina was two her mother died, and she grew up as the responsible eldest child of a large family. Davis Stead married Ada Gibbins, who according to Christina did not like her. She attended New South Wales Teachers College, graduating in 1922. Stead then worked as both a teacher and a psychological tester, but did not enjoy teaching. She took a business course at night and from 1925 she worked as a secretary. By 1928 she had saved enough money to move to London

after Keith Duncan, a young lecturer, with whom she had fallen in love. However, Duncan rejected her, but Stead found work as an office clerk at a grain exchange business. Later Stead returned to this period in *For Love Alone* (1944), in which an idealistic girl follows a detestable man to England.

Later in life Stead met the American broker Wilhelm Blech, whom she married in 1952. Stead began to follow the political thoughts of the communists as Blech himself was a communist. The couple moved to Paris to work at the Travelers' Bank but the closure of the bank made them to go to Spain. At the outbreak of Civil War in Spain, they moved to United States where Blech changed his name to William Blake and began to be a writer in his own right writing romantic and historical novels. In the early 1940s Stead worked in Hollywood as a screenwriter for some of the film studios. Stead also taught at a course on the novel at New York University. Stead and Blake returned to Europe when America began an anti-communist campaign. Blake died of a stomach cancer in 1968. Stead remained unpublished in her own country until 1965, but gradually started to gain recognition. She settled permanently in Australia in the year 1974 and received the Patrick White award in the same year. Stead died in Sydney on March 31, 1983. Her last novel, *I'm Dying*

Laughing (1986), published posthumously, gave an account of communists in Hollywood in the 1940s. R.G. Geering, wrote her biography many years later.

Stead's first novel was Seven Poor Men of Sydney (1934), which was set in Sydney's waterfront, and portrayed a band of young revolutionaries. Her novel, House of All Nations (1938) was a loosely constructed story about the collapse of a Swiss banking house. In this novel she juxtaposed corrupt capitalists with an ideal socialist hero. Her semi autobiographical novel, Miss Herbert (1976) was not published until some twenty years after it was written. The protagonist of Cotter's England (1966) is Nellie Cook, née Cotter, a Socialist, journalist, manipulator. And is a comic novel about politics, poverty, and sexual life. The novel, The Man Who Loved Children portrays the egoistic and tyrannical Sam Pollit who is built on the figure of her own father. The novel also delineates a love-hate relationship which scholars think is a reflection of Stead's own relationship with her father. Stead in this novel views the family as a symbol for the world, ruled by power politics. As in her other novels, Stead also dealt with the theme of a woman facing the conflict between her own artistic freedom and family ties. The Man Who Loved Children was poorly received when it was published, and went unrecognized for 25 years. It was reissued in 1965 with an influential preface by the American poet Randall Jarrell which finally influenced the marketing of the book. Jarrell mentions that the novel "has one

quality that, ordinarily, only a great book has: it makes you part of one family's immediate existence as no other book quite does. One reads the book, with an almost ecstatic pulse of recognition". Stead preferred third-person narration, allowing her characters to express their own clashing views and versions of reality.

If any of you are interested in knowing more about this author then you could refer to the following critical surveys:

Christina Stead, Selected Fiction and Nonfiction, ed. by R.G. Geering and A.

Seegerberg (1994)

Christina Stead by Jennifer Gribble (1994)

Christina Stead by Hazel Rowley (1993)

Christina Stead: A Life of Letters by Chris Williams (1989)

Christina Stead by Susan Sheridan (1988)

Christina Stead by Diana Brydon (1987)

Christina Stead by R.G. Geering (1969)

Some of her significant works are:

Seven Poor Men of Sydney, 1934

The Salzburg Tales, 1934

The Beauties and Furies, 1936

House of All Nations, 1938

The Man Who Loved Children, 1940 (rev. ed. 1965)

For Love Alone, 1944

Letty Fox: Her Luck, 1946

A Little Tea, a Little Chat, 1948

The People with the Dogs, 1952

Dark Places of the Heart, 1966 (U.K. title *Cotters' England*)

The Little Hotel, 1973

Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife), 1976

I'm Dying Laughing, 1987

Talking into the Typewriter: Selected Letters, 1992

A Web of Friedship: Selected Letters, 1992

**CHRISTINA STEAD'S "THE SCHOOL BOY'S TALE: DAY OF
WRATH"**

SUMMARY:

This story is a pathetic one that discusses the death of a young girl. The story takes place in Arallon, a waterside village in a seaport. The narrator is a schoolboy who recounts the incident of a ferry accident on the ocean and the death of 30 children. The story centres around the death of Viola, a girl of fourteen the daughter of cabinet minister. The story begins to tell us the background of Viola's family. Viola's mother has thrown the English propriety to the winds and even though she is a married woman, has an affair with a poor man. Her husband, a cabinet minister was not only rich but coarse, luxurious and tyrannical. In the court case the children had to give evidence of their mother's mighty activities. The town was decidedly against the woman because she had left her husband's home to live with a poor lover. During the divorce proceedings the "father renounced the children who he declared were not of his blood and he left all three in great poverty". The town did not condemn this act "for a woman who forsakes wealth for poverty is obviously poor-spirited and beneath commiseration, even the poor despise her". The divorced woman had two children – a boy aged ten years old and the daughter Viola who was fourteen years old. As the story proceeds the narrator tells us of the ferry

accident and the dead children. During the search for the dead children, no one found the body of Viola. The narrator comments on the fantasy of the village.

After a few days, when the last rumours and hopes had dried out, and the whole village was in mourning, in the lovely weather, only one piece of fantasy remained. Viola alone had not been found... it seemed to my mother and aunt that this was the “judgement of God” though for what moral sins the other bereaved women had been punished, no one thought to conjecture. (196).

Finally the body was found on the wreck, “standing upright, uninjured, her right foot simply entangled in a rope”. The story highlights the fact that Viola could not escape due to her injured leg and the heartlessness of the villagers who had not taken enough pains to search for the girls. The story ends on a sarcastic note, one could say.

In fact, it turned out that way, or at least, if the church and festive were not moved, for they should be above the frailties of flesh and blood, the women began to lament on her mother’s account, to say she was well punished and one could not pity her. The beast was appeased, as in ancient days by the sacrifice of a virgin (196).

After you have read the summary please read the story in detail from the Commonwealth Anthology edited by Arnold. Then you can answer these questions.

COMPREHENSION:

Where is the story set?

Who is the narrator?

Why is Viola's mother divorced?

What is the attitude of the village towards Viola's mother?

What does the story tell us about the civilised people's attitude?

Why does the accident take place?

How does Viola die?

What is the comment of the narrator at the end of the story?

How does the story indicate the gendered attitude of the society?

Have you had any such incidents in your own life? If you have then you could recount it.

Peter Carey: A Bio-note (1943-)

Peter Carey was born in Bacchus Marsh in Victoria in 1943, and was later educated at Monash University, where he studied science. He was influenced into writing and advertising by his early contact with the writers Barry Oakley and Morris Lurie. During the early part of his literary career he supported himself by writing advertising copy. Carey later in life moved from Melbourne to London and then to Sydney. He has in 1980s taken up residence in New York where he teaches creative writing at New York University. His first three novels were all received with much acclaim though his fourth, The Tax Inspector, received more than its fair share of criticism in my view. Earlier in 1985, the novel Illywhacker was short listed for the Booker Prize and then later his novel, Oscar and Lucinda won the award in 1988. Many critics felt that his novel, The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith, was a much better novel and should have been shortlisted for the award. Three of his novels, Bliss, Oscar and Lucinda and Jack Maggs won the Miles Franklin Award while his History of the Kelly Gang was shortlisted for the 2001 Miles Franklin Award. The Age Book of the Year Award was given to his works, Illywhacker, The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith and Jack Maggs. Even though Peter Carey is not a science fiction writer his novel, Illywhacker won the Ditmar Award for Best Australian Science Fiction Novel in 1986 and it was also nominated for the World Fantasy Award for Best Novel in the same year. In May 1998, the Commonwealth Writers Prize was

awarded for his novel, Jack Maggs. Thus one notices that Peter Carey is one of the most reputed novelists in Australia.

Some of his selected works are:

Bliss, 1981

Illywhacker, 1985

Oscar and Lucinda, 1988

The Tax Inspector, 1991

The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith, 1994

Jack Maggs 1997

True History of the Kelly Gang 2000

My Life as a Fake 2003

Theft: A Love Story, 2006

Critical works that you may find useful are:

Peter Carey: The Genesis of Fame Karen Lamb 1992

Dancing on Hot Macadam: Peter Carey's Fiction Anthony J Hassell 1994

Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey edited by Andreas Gaile 2005

A very useful website that you could visit is: ehlt.flinders.edu.au/english/

Do You Love Me?

Read the story in the anthology after you finish reading the summary. You can answer the comprehension questions after you have completed the story.

Peter's Carey's story, 'Do You Love Me' is a story that describes the relationship of a father and a son. The father in the story is a cartographer. Do you know who a cartographer is? Well the cartographer is a man who checks on measurements of the land and makes the maps of any land. In a way, the sky conveys the work of the father as a cartographer in the literal sense and yet at another level it also dismisses the nature of the mapping of Australia in a symbolic way. Australia, as we all know is a young, virgin land and here the work of the cartographer becomes important. The story is divided into fourteen sections and discusses the feelings and emotions of the cartographer. The plot also unravels the issue of love that is lost within humanity and the need to resurrect the Read the story once again and try to answer the following questions.

COMPREHENSION:

What does census in Australia mean?

What is the festival of corn?

When is it held?

Why is the work of the cartographer important?

Why are the cartographers called as 'footloose'?

What is the Fischerscope?

How old was the father?

How is his physical appearance?

Who is the narrator of the story?

How old is the son?

Who is his girlfriend?

Where are the family when the 'family of fire' is referred to as 'fools'?

What is the father's opinion regarding God?

Why does the father become sad later in the story?

Why does the father laugh uncontrollably when the narrator tells him
that he love him?

What is your understanding of the ending of the story?

SALLY MORGAN: A BIO-NOTE (1951 -)

Sally Morgan was born as Sally Milroy in Perth and she was the eldest of five children. The family was very poor and sometimes didn't even have money for food. Her father was often sick so Sally's mother worked as a cleaner to try and make ends meet. Sally's grandmother, Nan also lived with the family and she

played a large part in Sally's life. As Sally mentions, "Most of my positive influences have come from my mum and my grandma...some of the things they taught me was to respect the environment and to respect wild creatures." When Sally started school, she had a difficult time. She mentions in her autobiography, that she didn't like school: "I was hopeless, absolutely hopeless. I was one of the worst truants at school and I was always getting into trouble." However the saving grace was that she loved drawing-- "The only thing I felt I was good at was English and Art - I used to fail maths consistently and I wasn't interested in anything else and then I think I was fourteen or fifteen and the art teacher ridiculed my art in class one day and then I thought I'm not even good at that." School was also hard for Sally because her classmates used to say she looked different and they asked to her what country she was from. Her mother told her she and her family were from India. But when Sally was fifteen years of age she learnt the truth, her sister told her they were Aboriginal.

When Sally was aged seventeen she was desperate to finish school and get a job but she disliked it and then she decided to go to university to study to get a better job. In 1972, Sally married Paul Morgan, a fellow student and over the next decade she finished her studies and had three children. Sally continued to question her mother about their family and heritage. Finally her persistence paid

off, and her mother agreed to tell her the truth about their lives--"my granny was taken away and she was a servant or virtually a slave for a lot of her life, so they had very hard, difficult lives... Aboriginal people had had such a terrible time ...like my grandma and my mum were very frightened that when dad died that us five kids would be taken away and that was based in reality because my grandma had been taken away and then my mum had been taken away and they just couldn't handle the idea that a third generation of our family would be torn apart."

This is why Sally's mother and Nan told had been afraid to admit their Aboriginality.

Sally began writing about her family and their history. In 1983, Sally and her family travelled north to the Pilbara area of Western Australia where Nan was born to find out more about themselves: "we went up and we met our relatives, our extended family, we met grandpas and grandmas and uncles and aunties and cousins and that was fantastic for us because all of a sudden we had a context, we had a big family, we weren't just this small isolated family in the non-Aboriginal community, we were part of this huge family and that really gave us a sense of belonging, that was very important." In 1987, Sally's story was published and it became a best seller. It

told a story that many people didn't know; of children taken from their mothers, slavery, abuse and fear because their skin was a different colour. But it also told of their determination to keep their culture and families together. Sally then began painting again. She realised her art was Aboriginal art and she held exhibitions, won prizes and sold paintings worldwide. Today Sally continues to write many are stories for children, illustrated with her paintings. She states:

What I really believe in, especially for kids these days is, follow your dreams, even if other people think that your dream is silly or they think that you haven't got the ability to achieve it, just don't listen to the negative stuff , you know you've got to follow your dreams because if you have enough determination you will get there, you will get there eventually - just don't let other people put you off.

A Black Grandmother:

Summary:

Read the story on your own after you have read the summary.

This is a part of the narration of Sally Morgan's autobiography, My Place. The narrative recounts the childhood of Sally Morgan and her identity crisis. Sally herself is the narrator and she reveals about the changing times in

Australia when the country's currency changed from pounds, Shilling's and pence to dollars and cents. Sally's mother and her grandmother, Nan are not very happy with the change and think that their old money will become important one day. As a result Nan keeps hoarding all the old money in one place. Nan is also of the opinion that the government will one day take away all the money. So she tells Sally not to reveal if the government comes to find out of their money has been given to the bank. At this point Sally reveals the identity crisis that her mother and grandmother have: "I was often puzzled by the way Mum and Nan approached anyone in authority, it was as if they were frightened. If knew that couldn't be the reason, why on earth would anyone be frightened of the government". (289)

The narrator goes on to reveal to us that she fails in school in all subjects excepting art and English. She also has decided to be an artist. But she slowly realises that her mother, her mother's friend think that her being an artist is of no use in the present world. They dissuade her and want her to take the junior exam seriously. Even at school, her art teacher displays in class that her art is all wrong and in a state of disappointment Sally tears up all her paintings and burns them: "It wasn't only Mum and Aunty Judy, it was my Art teacher at school, as well. He held up one of my drawings in front of the class one day and pointed out everything wrong with it. There was no perspective; I was the only one with

no horizon line. My people were flat and floating... By the end of ten minutes, the whole class was laughing and I felt very small. I always believed that drawing was my only talent, now I know I was no good at that, either". (290)

The narrative then reveals about grandmother Nan's outburst one day when Sally comes home from school. She is crying and when Sally questions her she states, "You bloody kids don't want me, you want a bloody white grandmother, I'm black. Do you hear, black, black, black". This statement affects Sally very much and she starts wondering about their colours. During her talk with Jill her sister she understand that they are 'aboriginals' but does not understand what it means. She has no idea of how aboriginals are different from others. "Well I don't know much about them". I answered. "They like animals, don't they? We like animals." (291)

However, Sally is more practical and should accept the fact if they are aboriginals. It is Jill who has problems because she was according to sally, "more attuned to social environment". Moreover, "it was important for her to be accepted at school, because she enjoyed being there" (291). Sally in a bid to find out pesters her mother and grandmother who somehow are uneasy about it and do not answer her question about their past. Later Sally is bothered about her junior examinations and starts preparing for it. "Much to the surprise of the

whole family, I passed every subject, even scoring close to the distinction mark in English and Art". The story ends in the note that Sally was keener on failing so that she did not have to go to school any longer but she passed because of her pride.

COMPREHENSION:

How old is Sally in the story?

Who are the other characters in the narrative?

Why does not Sally want to do well in school?

What does she later learn about her colour from her grandmother?

What does her art teacher do in school?

Why is the junior examination an important one?

Who are the aboriginals?

What is the colloquial term used to describe the aboriginals?

Why is Jill bothered about their status?

Why doesn't Sally's mother or grandmother reveal the truth to her?

Why does Sally's mother state, "Mr Buddee was right about grown"?

What is the major theme of the narrative?

What does the narrative tell you about the status of the aboriginals?

In your own words, write synopsis of the story.

New Zealand Writing

Themes in New Zealand Writing

New Zealand Fiction

UNIT 2: LESSON 4: INTRODUCTION

OUTLINE:

- **Idea of New Zealand Writing**
- **Definition and Scope**
- **Theoretical Perspectives**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

Understand the concept of New Zealand Creative Writing

Know the different genres in New Zealand Literatures

Figure out the background and rise of New Zealand Writing.

In this section we will introduce you to the significance and scope of New Zealand literature, and then take you on a short trip through the background and then to the rise of different genres in New Zealand writing. This section would enable you to understand the inter-relatedness between the land, society and the growth of literatures.

INTRODUCTION:

Growth of New Zealand:

New Zealand was first settled by Polynesians who possibly came from the region that is now French Polynesia. They maintained an isolated existence until the first Dutch explorers arrived in 1642. In order to distinguish themselves from the Europeans, whom they called Pakeha, they adopted the common name of Maori, which means normal. A more Europeans settled in New Zealand following the voyages of Captain James Cook (1769-77), they brought with them alien diseases that raised the death rate among the Maori. The Maori population also suffered a decline as a result of tribal warfare as well as that against the Europeans. However, by early twentieth-century, the Maori acquired resistance to some of these diseases, such as measles and influenza, and their birthrate began to recover. The European settlement of New Zealand picked up pace in 1820 and accelerated when Great Britain annexed it in 1840. By 1850, settlers outnumbered the Maori. Although the majority of these settlers came from Great Britain, there were also Scandinavians, Germans, Greeks, Italians, and Yugoslavs. The period between World War I and World War II witnessed an influx of central Europeans, whereas the period after World War II brought a large number of the Dutch into New Zealand as well as Asian immigrants from China and India. More recently, there has been a growing community of Pacific

Islanders from Western Samoa, the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau. Although this diverse society has some racial tensions, they seem relatively sedate compared to the experiences of other multi-cultural societies. Today, the population of New Zealand is predominantly English-speaking. All Maori speak English, whereas only a small minority still speaks Maori, which is taught at a number of schools. Samoan has also become a prominent language in New Zealand.

Before the arrival of Europeans, Maori narrative expression was entirely oral, being without a written version until Christian missionaries devised one. The main literary forms were waiata (song), tangi (lamentation), and other forms of chanted or sung poetry; prose myths and legends; genealogical recitals; and spontaneous oratory. Much of this material has been preserved, notably in the collection made by Sir George Grey and first published in 1854. Little has been added to the tradition, however, for most Maori writers now write in English, using European forms, though expressing Maori themes. Literature in English was slow to develop. Poetry began to come of age in the 1920s through the distinctive voice of R.A.K. Mason, joined in the next decade by A.R.D. Fairburn, Denis Glover, Allen Curnow, Charles Brasch, and Ursula Bethal. They—and later poets such as James K. Baxter, Alistair Campbell, Kendrick

Smithyman, and Hone Tuwhare—contributed lively and varied poetry to the national literature.

A distinctive prose literature began in the late 1930s with the stories of Frank Sargeson. The tradition of critical realism established by Sargeson was continued in the work of writers such as John Mulgan, Dan Davin, Maurice Shadbolt, Ian Cross, Maurice Duggan, and Maurice Gee, while Janet Frame and Keri Hulme have done significant work in a more impressionistic mode. The stories of Katherine Mansfield were written in England, though many of them dealt with New Zealand themes. Other internationally known writers born in New Zealand were Hugh Walpole, Ngaio Marsh, and Sylvia Ashton-Warner.

Literary Trends:

The name, Maoriland has been greatly received with cynicism and irony. Many have tried to distance themselves from the colonial legacy. J.C. describes the modern period as “a synthetic culture without a core”. Another literary historian, Keith Sinclair expresses what he assumes to be a position too obvious to be questioned when he states: “It has been suggested that no major writer appeared until the 1920s, and no modern student of nineteenth and early twentieth century New Zealand literature has disagreed with this judgment”. Poets such as Allen Curnow, castigating the settlers for their

homesickness and yet recognized the nationalist and modernist issues in the New Zealand writing. One must remember that at all stages of New Zealand's history, from the "colonial to the postcolonial, there has been a continual interaction between the imported and the immediate, the remembered and the noticed. The modernists effected an unbridgeable distance between themselves and the colonials by over-emphasizing the dependency, belatedness and weakness of their precursors; they downplayed the continuities by positing a fatal link between colonial nostalgia and the production of bad art". (Slessor, 23). The earlier writing was quite clichéd and artificial but the need of the hour is to see the writing as part of a continuum of cultural activity in New Zealand. Contemporary writing has shifted towards addressing themes such as modernity, nostalgia, self-assertion and dependency.

The story of New Zealand writing from late nineteenth century to the present is that of a continuous dialectic between colonial, indigenous and modernizing forces, which has thrown up successive nationalisms, each enlisting elements of the world elsewhere and of the world to hand. As Suzanne Clark observes in another situation, "the modernist exclusion of everything but the forms of high art acted like a machine for cultural loss of memory". Two important Maryland writers are Jessie Mackay and Blanche Baughan.

At the time of her death in 1938, Jessie Mackay was considered New Zealand's pre-eminent poet, the first truly local writer. Alan Mulgan wrote, "Everyone who knew anything worth knowing about New Zealand poetry knew something of Jessie Mackay's. She became an institution, was revered as a queen, venerated and loved." Jessie Mackay as a poet and critic, she continually interrogates the relationship between place and origin, sets the modernity of settler culture against the inherited or invented "traditions" of home, plays considerations of empire against the local, and works towards a poetic rhetoric that will accommodate all of this. Mackay's poetry accurately reflects the ambivalent attitude towards history and modernity characteristic of settler societies, but in more complex terms than has been allowed.

Forgetting, acclimatisation, and discovery — these were central to the task of the writers of the Maoriland period. A generation after first settlement, their writing provided a means by which the achievements and conflicts of the emerging colony could be presented. Curnow saw Maoriland's efforts to indigenise itself as a false dawn, but Blanche Baughan, more modern in her poetic sources regarded it as a necessary dynamism. Most writers have seen the landscape as a major plus point for their poetry. As Baughan states, the New Zealand landscape is quite unlike any other by virtue of superiority, "one of the purest places of old Earth; with a life of its own, no doubt, but one quite free

from the accompaniments of life as we know it”, free from “the stain and the strain” of the old world; but also a memorializing recreation of it: “something like the Lauterbrunnen Thal [...]the tropic light, jungle luxuriance, the snows of Switzerland, the safety of England — here they all are at once.

UNIT 2: LESSON 5: NEW ZEALAND POETRY

OUTLINE:

- **Idea of poetry of A.R.D. Fairburn**
- **Idea of poetry of Allen Curnow**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

Understand the life and works of A.R. D. Fairburn

Understand the life and works of Allen Curnow.

In this section we will introduce you to the significant poets, A.R. D. Fairburn and Allen Curnow and make you understand the themes in their poems, ‘Imperial’ and ‘House and Land’ respectively.

A.R.D FAIRBURN. (Arthur Rex Dugard) (1904–57): Bio-Note

A.R. D. Fairburn was a fourth-generation New Zealander, his great-grandfather having arrived as a missionary in 1819 and settled permanently in 1823. His

grandfather, Edwin Fairburn, the eleventh Pākehā child born in New Zealand (in 1827), became a surveyor and a novelist while the poet's father became a conservative businessman. The poet, eldest of three sons, was born in Auckland and attended Auckland GS 1918–20, leaving without academic qualifications. There he began his close friendship with the poet R.A.K. Mason. After leaving school, he worked as a clerk for New Zealand Insurance for six frustrating years, resigning in 1926 to take a trip to Norfolk Island. He was formally unemployed from his return in late 1926 until 1930, but did some freelance writing, publishing poems and articles in two of the Auckland papers, the *Star* and the *Sun*, 1927–29, and winning the poetry prize in the *Sun* Christmas Supplement in 1929. Several of these early poems were collected in Quentin Pope's *Kowhai Gold* in 1930. In August of that year he went to England to join the expatriate New Zealand poet Geoffrey de Montalk, and with de Montalk's help published at his own expense his first volume of poetry, *He Shall Not Rise*, in late 1930. He married in England in 1931. Fairburn wrote poems and articles during this time both for the Auckland papers and for English periodicals. It was a time of intellectual searching, as he formulated the rather disparate set of beliefs that remained his personal philosophy. In political and economic matters, he rejected the communist ideals of his friends Mason and Clifton Firth and adopted the philosophy of vitalism related to that of D.H. Lawrence and finally moved into the belief of back-to-nature organic farming. In October

1932 Fairburn returned to New Zealand with his wife and child. From late 1932 to 1934 he was unable to find paid employment, and experienced at first hand the relief gang work. This experience has been part of his narrative, 'Dominion'.

He published poems in the 1933 issues of the magazine, Phoenix, edited by Mason, and in the one issue of the Caxton Club magazine Sirocco, edited by Denis Glover, and began to establish himself with the new generation of writers coming together around the printers Robert Lowry in Auckland and Glover in Christchurch. From its beginnings in 1934 he was one of the primary contributors to the radical Christchurch magazine Tomorrow and he contributed poetry to the Caxton Press collections of the 1930s: New Poems (1934), Another Argo (1935), Verse Alive (1936, drawn from Tomorrow), A Caxton Miscellany (1937) and Verse Alive Number Two (1937). In 1938 Caxton published his major long poem of the Great Depression, Dominion, and in 1941 he contributed to the Caxton anthology Recent Poems with Mason, Glover and Allen *Curnow. In 1943 Caxton brought out his collected Poems 1929–1941 and in 1946 the slighter The Rakehelly Man. We New Zealanders: An Informal Essay was brought out by the Progressive Publishing Society in 1944. During these years of intense literary activity Fairburn was also working at jobs related to his political and social interests. From 1934 to 1942 he held various administrative posts with the Farmers' Union, a Social Credit organisation, and

helped to edit its journal, *Farming First*. He served in the army 1942–43, and then was manpowered into work with radio station 1ZB as a scriptwriter. He remained there until 1947, when he resigned to set up a business as a fabric designer and printer. At the same time he served as the editor of Compost Magazine 1944–49. In 1948 he became a tutor in the Department of English at Auckland University College, and in 1950 lecturer in the history and theory of fine arts at the university's Elam School of Art. He was also active as an editor in these years, doing much writing and editing for the Auckland monthly Here and Now 1949–52 and serving as poetry editor for the Yearbook of the Arts 1945–51.

Fairburn's writing of poetry continued until 1952, when his work was collected in several volumes. Posthumous publications included two volumes of light verse in 1958, *The Disadvantages of Being Dead* and *Poetry Harbinger* (with Glover); the *Collected Poems*, edited by Glover (1966); a selection of his prose, *The Woman Problem ∓mp; Other Prose*, selected by Glover and Geoffrey Fairburn (1967); and *The Letters of A.R.D. Fairburn*, selected and edited by Lauris *Edmond (1981). As his varied career shows, Fairburn was a remarkably diverse man. His literary activity included poetry, essays, reviews and criticism, and editing; he painted, designed and printed fabrics, wrote art criticism and lectured on art; he was a political activist at times and an organizer, with

strongly held beliefs and prejudices concerning the economic system, state patronage of the arts, sexuality and homosexuality, the role of women and organic farming. The death of this multifaceted personality did leave a large vacuum in New Zealand .

A.R.D. FAIRBURN'S "IMPERIAL"

PARAPHRASE:

In the early days, in the past
came the seeds of race, the
forerunners, namely the offshoots,
Outcasts, entrepreneurs; architects
of Empire, romantic adventures
who crossed tropics of hope and fear
who sailed under Capricorn to see for ever
the arc of the sun to northward.

They shouted at the floating leaf
and laughed at the promise of life

at hope that became belief
As they came towards land
it became the landfall of hope
and the goal of ambition.

They walked in tangled forest under the gloom
of leaves in the green twilight
among the abodes of Older Gods.

They walked with Christ beside them
and an old enemy at hand, one
whose creed flourished in virgin earth.

They divided the land some for need
and come for greed

On every hillside fought
God's love against eh old enemy
They change the sky but not their hearts.

These islands which are the remains
of a lost continent
are grown old
resisting the sea's corrosion for an age.

We the latest race, have blood on our hands
we are scions of men who scaled
ambitions tollering slopes, whose desires
encompassed earth and heaven.

We are prospered greatly.

We the desired race, rulers of conquered
Isles sprouting like bulbs in darkness
putting out white shoots under the
wet sack of Empire.

Comprehension:

- What is the central idea of the poem, Imperial?
- How can is the poem stand as a statement of Imperialism.

Allen Curnow: (1911– 2001) BIO NOTE

Curnow was born in Timaru, where his father—a fourth-generation New Zealander—was an Anglican clergyman; his mother was English-born. During his childhood Curnow lived in a succession of Anglican vicarages in Canterbury, at Belfast, Malvern, Lyttelton and New Brighton. He was educated at Christchurch BHS and the universities of Canterbury and Auckland. He worked for the Christchurch Sun in 1929–30, before moving to Auckland to prepare for the Anglican ministry at St John’s Theological College, 1931–33. His earliest poems appeared in the university periodicals Kiwi in 1931 and Phoenix in 1932–33. His first collection of poems Valley of Decision (1933)—printed, like Kiwi and Phoenix, by R.W. Lowry—reflected a crisis of religious vocation pointing towards his decision not to be ordained, taken the following year. Biblical imagery and language remained an important element in all his writing.

In 1934 Curnow returned to the South Island. And took up a job in Christchurch Press. In Christchurch he quickly established a lifelong friendship and collaboration with Denis Glover and began contributing to Caxton Press publications, such as New Poems (1934) and Another Argo (1935). In 1935, Three Poems and a brief prose manifesto, Poetry and Language, were published

by Caxton. He also contributed verse and prose to the radical periodical Tomorrow (1934–40). He used the pseudonyms ‘Amen’ and ‘Julian’.

An influence of contemporary English poets such as Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Auden, Day Lewis, Spender, MacNeice, Dylan Thomas and William Empson and a sharper consciousness of the New Zealand scene, both social and physical came up in his writing such as Not in Narrow Seas (Caxton, 1939), Island Time (Caxton, 1941) and Sailing or Drowning (Progressive Publishing Society, 1943), which demonstrates growing technical mastery and a progressive widening of thematic scope. These works display a tight focus on details of New Zealand’s landscape and history and on its situation as a small island nation in the wider world.

From the mid-1930s Curnow contributed frequent reviews and articles to the literary pages of the Press, and, after 1941, to the Caxton miscellany Book. His satirical verses, A Present for Hitler, appeared in 1940. During the war years, Curnow spent his nights sub-editing foreign news at the Press and his days working on The Axe, a verse play with a Pacific setting and an anthology, eventually published as 1923–45 (Caxton, 1945). The selection in the anthology together with Curnow’s forty-page introduction, provided the first coherent and substantial representation and analysis of New Zealand poetry and has remained

a landmark publication. The introduction was most noteworthy for his identification of recurring elements among the themes and images of the poets, in which he saw evidence of 'some common problem of the imagination' particular to the New Zealander's situation.

The notion that there are circumstances reflected in the poetry which are 'peculiarly New Zealand's' ('Attitudes for a New Zealand Poet' iii) was perhaps the most influential and controversial of his critical ideas in that it engages with the complex and much debated question of 'nationalism', a keyword of the Curnow era though one he seldom used himself. An expanded edition of the anthology, including several poets who had emerged in the post-war period up to 1950 was published in 1951.

During and after the war Curnow's own poetry gradually became less preoccupied with issues of history and national identity and moved towards more personal and universal themes. In 1949 Curnow was awarded a grant from the newly established Literary Fund to travel abroad for the first time. He spent much of that year in the UK, supplementing the grant by employment on the News Chronicle, and with occasional work for the BBC. After a brief return to Christchurch and the Press in 1950, he and his family moved to Auckland; he took up a position in the English department at the University of Auckland

where he worked from 1951 to 1976, retiring as associate professor. He received the university's LittD degree, and an honorary doctorate from the University of Canterbury.

Throughout the 1950s, Curnow—by this time recognized as one of the country's leading writers—continued to write verse (*Poems 1949–57*, 1957). Allen Curnow's statement in the penguin anthology figured prominently in literary discussion in the 1960s.

Reality must be local and special at the point where we pick up the traces: as manifold as the signs we follow and the routes we take. Whatever is true vision belongs, here, uniquely to the islands of New Zealand. The best of our verse is marked or moulded everywhere by peculiar pressures—pressures arising from the isolation of the country, its physical character, and its history...

There were clarifications and elaborations of Curnow's views in the lectures 'New Zealand Literature: The Case for a Working Definition' (1963) and 'Distraction and Definition: Centripetal Directions in New Zealand Poetry' (1968). These lectures, the anthology introductions and other miscellaneous pieces were eventually collected in *Look Back Harder: Critical Writings 1935–*

1984, edited by Peter Simpson (Auckland University Press, 1987). After A Small Room with Large Windows (OUP, 1962)—a selected poems published in the UK which contained only two previously uncollected poems—Curnow published no further verse collection until Trees, Effigies, Moving Objects appeared in 1972. From the perspective of the end of the 1990s it is apparent that this brilliant sequence of eighteen poems initiated a new phase of his poetic career. The poems had an openly textured verse, often vividly colloquial, imagistic, and idiomatic in expression.. Also with this book a new landscape made a forceful entry into the poetry—that of the bush-clad hills and wild beaches of Auckland’s west coast, in particular Lone Kauri Road and Karekare Beach; as Curnow explained in a note in *Selected Poems 1940–1989* (1990): ‘I have spent most of my summers and weekends there since 1961. (<http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/curnowa.html>)

House and Land:

Paraphrase:

Wasn’t this the site?

Asked the historian of the original homestead?

The cowman replied couldn’t tell you.

I just live here working for old
Miss Wilson since the old man's death.

The dog moping in the blue gums trailed his chain.
He roamed from the privy to the fowl house and back again
Feeling the stagnant afternoon and the smell of rain.

Over there sat old Miss Wilson
With her pictures on the wall
The baronet uncle
Taking tea from a silver pot.

She said, People in the *colonies*
Cannot understand
Why from Waiiau to the mountains it was father's land.

She's all of eighty
and I am leaving here
as it is too quiet said the cowman
in the milking shed.

The spirit of exile, wrote the historian
Is strong in the people still
He reminds me rather said Miss Wilson
Of Harriet's youngest, Will

The cowman went home drinking
With the rabbit home from the hill.

The sensitive nor 'west afternoon
Collapsed and the rain came
The dog crept into his barrel
Looking lame and lost.

But you can't attribute to either
Awareness of what great gloom
Stands in a land of settlers
With never a soul at home.

Read the paraphrase and the original poem before you answer the
comprehension questions:

Comprehension:

Who is the speaker in the poem?

Whose house is it.

Why does the milk man want to leave?

Explain the actions of the dog.

What is the setting in the poem?

How does the poem reflect the New Zealand landscape?

Explain the gender notation in the poem.

What does the title of the poem suggest?

Write a critical appreciation of the poem.

UNIT 3

Canada:

Al Purdy: *Elegy for a Grandfather* (P)
F.R. Scott: *Laurentian Shield* (P)
Margaret Laurence: *Stone Angel* (N)
Margaret Atwood: *Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer* (P)
Joy Kogawa: *Obasan* (N)
Jeanette Armstrong: *This is a story.* (SF)

UNIT 3

Contents:

LESSON 1

Introduction
Canadian Literature: Themes and Issues

LESSON 2

- Canadian Poetry
- Al Purdy and his works
- F.R. Scott and his works

LESSON 3

- Women Writers
- Margaret Laurence: Life and Works

LESSON 4

- Margaret Atwood
- *Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer*

UNIT 3

LESSON 1: INTRODUCTION

OUTLINE:

- **Definition and Scope of Canadian Literature**

➤ **Theoretical Perspectives**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Understand the concept of Canadian Literatures**
- **Know the different genres in Canadian Literatures**
- **Figure out the background and rise of Canadian Literatures.**

In this section we will introduce to the significance and scope of Canadian writing, and then take you on a short voyage through the background to the rise of Canadian Literatures. This section would enable you to understand the literatures that you deal with in the later units.

Background and the making of the Canadian Nation:

Canada did you know was for a long time part of the region called as North America. It emerged as a nation because of various settlers entering into the land. In this short tracing of the Canadian history we will just run through some of the important developments that happened in this land. In 1534 Jacques Cartier claimed the St. Lawrence basin for France, and gradually settlements were established at Quebec and Montreal. The area was called New France. Later in 1670 Charles II of England established the significantly important Hudson's Bay Company. Subsequently, in the battle of Quebec in 1759, British troops defeated the French forces at Quebec City by getting into Quebec from

the St. Lawrence River. This victory enabled Great Britain to take over France's empire in Canada at the end of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763).

The battle of Quebec was as already mentioned fought in 1759 and in 1867 Canada became a confederation of former colonies by the implementation of The British North America Act. In 1867 the British North America Act united the Province of Canada (divided into Ontario and Quebec) with Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to form "One Dominion under the name of Canada.

During both the World wars Canada too had sent its troops thus gaining recognition of a new nation. Canada's population between the world wars rose from 8 to 11 million; the urban population increased at a more rapid rate from 4 to 6 million. WWI created expectations for a brave new Canada, but peace brought disillusionment and social unrest. Enlistment in the armed forces and the expansion of the munitions industry had created a manpower shortage during the war, which in turn had facilitated collective bargaining by industrial workers. There had been no dearth of grievances about wages or working conditions, but the demands of patriotism had usually restrained the militant. Trade-union membership grew from a low of 143 000 in 1915 to a high of 379 000 in 1919, and with the end of the war the demands for social justice were no longer held in check. Even unorganized workers expected peace to bring them

substantial economic benefits. Later the creation of the status of Canadian citizen was legalized in 1947. In 1957 the appointment of Vincent Massey as the first Canadian governor took place.

By the year 1959 several new social welfare programmes such as the Unemployment Insurance in 1940 and Family Allowance in 1945 were in position. Also in the 1960's a distinctive Medicare system was established. In 1969 the Official Languages Act was passed and the new national flag was designed in 1965. Then in 1982 the Constitution Act ended British control over amendments to Canada's Constitution. This meant that The Constitution Act, signed by Queen Elizabeth II on April 17, 1982, gave Canada the sole power to amend its Constitution. It is thought that the name Canada is derived from the Huron-Iroquois *kanata*, meaning a village or settlement.

UNIT 3

LESSON 2: CANADIAN POETRY

OUTLINE:

Canadian Poetry

Al Purdy and his works

F.R. Scott and his works

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Understand the concept of Canadian Poetry**
- **Know the different themes and issues in Canadian poetry.**
- **Understand the background and works rise of poets such as Al Purdy and F.R. Scott.**

In this section we will introduce to the significance and scope of Canadian poetry, and then take you on a short voyage through the background to the rise of modern poetry. This section would enable you to understand the poetic techniques that arose in Canada.

CANADIAN POETRY:

In the beginning of the 70s “Canadian poetry” became a writing that tried to question the issues of Canadian identity and nationalism. Along with the emergence of the poetry of Margaret Atwood, Dennis Lee, Leonard Cohen, and others there was also an explosion of poetry publishing in this period due to the establishment and development of Canada Council for the Arts. During this period the poetry that was both oppositional to and celebratory of the traditions of Canadian poetry. A good example of this kind of poetry is the works of Earle

Birney, whose poems such as “David” were classics of Canadian modernism and yet maintained a traditional attitude.

You should remember that despite the differences between individual poetic voices in any country one can also speak of the nationalness in poetry. A similar thing came up in Canadian poetry too. The poets of this period established a central set of poetic and cultural concerns. A period of Canadian modernity set into the poetic forms. Thus poets such as A.J.M. Smith and F.R. Scott worked to re-envision Canada’s unique landscape as a way of expressing a greater independence for a Canadian nation that was still imagining itself as a Victorian British colony. On the other hand you must understand that the poetry of this period was not a homogenous mass and the pattern of poetry was a mass of variations of poetic and cultural ideas. As a critic puts it “It is as if Canadian poets are not so much anxious about the “question” of Canadian identity as they are desirous of exploding the very notion of a Canadian poetry, of seeking to imagine all possible worlds, of attempting to think through every imaginable way of conceiving what Canada might be”. Along with this type of growth poetry was also influenced by Canada’s changing demographics and increasing racial and sexual identities.

One of the most influential documents in setting attitudes toward the history of modern poetry in Canada was A.J. M. Smith's introduction to the first edition of The Book of Canadian Poetry (1943). In it, Smith delineated two schools of Canadian poetry—the nationalist and the cosmopolitan—and praised the cosmopolitan school as the better of the two and as the true source of modernism in Canada. However, in truth it was the nationalist First Statement/Northern Review group which started modern poetry in Canada. Out of this Montreal group in the forties there arose poets such as Irving Layton, Raymond Souster, Louis Dudek, P.K. Page, and Miriam Waddington. They went on to found other little magazines and presses, to write reams of poetry, and to influence younger Canadian poets for four more decades. Smith and Scott themselves profited from the explosion of the forties, Smith publishing his first book, News of the Phoenix, in 1943, and Scott, Overture, in 1945.

The growth of Quebec poetry too was simultaneous. Not only is Quebecois poetry transcultural in nature but also has retained its autonomy as well as its sense of evolution over the past few decades. Perhaps unsurprisingly in this francophone context of poetry writing and criticism, the foremost subject appears to be the poetic genre itself — its innovations, the overt break from all constraints of versification, yet also the servility to a French European tradition, at least on the part of nineteenth-century poets who, perhaps for that very

reason, have failed to leave their mark on the literary history of French Canada. As varied and wide-ranging as those of their Anglophone counterparts, their critical and literary discussions about poetic form and genre take place, without exception, in the context of *modernité*. For obvious historical and linguistic reasons, Quebec and French Canada have always been to some extent under the influence of French theories and practices, but they have also made *modernité* their own and even, in the case of such contemporary Québécois women poets as Nicole Brossard and France Théoret, actually transformed it. Thus the poetry today in Canada has a cultural complexity as well as a traditional, conventional aspect to it. There has always been a tension between nationalism and internationalism in the Canadian psyche. A.J.M. Smith introduced the terms "cosmopolitan" and "nationalist" in *The Book of Canadian Poetry* to describe this tension.

Al Purdy and his works: (1918-2000)

Al Purdy along with Milton Acorn, Alden Nowlan and Patrick Lane formed a group of important Canadian poets. These poets had little formal education and hailed from Canada's working-class culture. Al Purdy was brought up in Trenton, Ontario and was educated at Albert Coll, Belleville, but did not attend university. During the Depression, he rode the rods to Vancouver and worked there for several years at a number of manual occupations. In World War II he

served in the RCAF, and after the war - until the late 1950s - he worked as a casual laborer in Ontario. Later on he settled in Ameliasburgh, which became a celebrated Loyalist community in many of his poems. By the early 1960s Purdy was able to support himself by free-lance writing, poetry reading and periods as writer-in-residence at various colleges. He was a restless traveler throughout Canada (including the High Arctic) and around the world, and all these journeying have been reflected in his writing. Just like many other writers Purdy worked in a variety of genres: radio and TV plays, book reviewing, travel writing, magazine features. He edited anthologies, particularly of younger poets, and also a collection of essays entitled The New Romans (1968), which revealed his deep Canadian nationalism. But it is poetry, written and read, that was Purdy's essential mode. By 1982 he had published 25 volumes of poetry. The evolution of his verse shows an interesting progression from the conservatively traditional lyrics of his first collection, The Enchanted Echo (1944), to the open, colloquial and contemporary style of his later years, which began to emerge in his fourth collection, The Crafte So Longe to Lerne (1959).

Earlier works of Purdy had been imitative drawing on the romantic tradition. But his later works began to display humor and the anger and a style and form that had relaxed, long lines and an engaging poeticness. Purdy was at the heart of the 1960s movements that set Canadian poets wandering the country, reading

their poems to large audiences. There is no doubt that this experience helped him to develop a poetry more closely related to oral speech patterns than his 1940s apprentice poems. The influence of readings on his work is one aspect of the close contact between experience and writing in Purdy's work. Some of his poetry was based on his trips and were accounts of journeys, namely, *North of Summer* (1967), based on a trip to the Arctic, and *Hiroshima Poems* (1972), on a visit to Japan.

Purdy is a poet who had a great passion for reading and he tried to get into his poetry a sense of Canada's past and the changes that were part of the Canadian atmosphere. Some examples of this type of historical documented poems are like "The Runner," "The Country North of Belleville," "My Grandfather's Country," "The Battlefield of Batoche" and the long verse cycle for radio that he wrote about the Loyalist heritage, "In Search of Owen Roblin" (1974). Among the most successful of Purdy's many volumes are *Poems for All the Annettes* (1962), *The Cariboo Horses* (1965), -- awarded the Governor General's Award, - - *Sex & Death* (1973), (A.J.M. Smith Award), *The Stone Bird* (1981) and *Piling's Blood* (1984). His *Collected Poems, 1956-1986* (1986) also later received a Gov General's Award. Purdy's oral presentation of his poems, essential for a full understanding of his work, is preserved in the CBC recording.

In 1993 Purdy published his autobiography, *Reaching for the Beaufort Sea*, and a new collection of poems, *Naked With Summer in Your Mouth*.

Purdy's poem "Remains of an Indian Village" (1962) is a poem that describes the glory of the past while his "The Country North of Belleville" is a poem about the land. "Remains of an Indian Village" may be considered as "a complex gesture of historical recuperation as well as an attempt at explanation analogous to other postcolonial poems in which an individual encounters remnants of the cultures that existed in America prior to the arrival of Europeans" (Solecki 161). On the other hand, "The Country North of Belleville" is stronger and evocative as the following lines indicate

sometime
we may go back there
 to the country of our defeat
Wollaston Elzevir and Dungannon
and Weslemkoon lake land
where the high township of Cashel
 McLure and Marmora once were –
But it's been a long time since
and we must enquire the way
 of strangers –
(Beyond Remembering 80-81)

"The Country North of Belleville" is also remarkable for its use of metre and rhyme and like Arnold's "Dover Beach" vividly captures the emergence and disappearance of order in the landscape of eastern Ontario.

PARAPHRASE OF "ELEGY FOR A GRANDFATHER"

Well, he died. They said he did

His wide whalebone hips would make a prehistoric barrow

Men of the future may find it and perhaps not

Where this man's relatives ducked their heads

In real and pretended sorrow

For the dearly beloved gone thank Christ to God,

After a bad century: a tough big bellied Pharaoh

With a deck of cards in his pocket and a Presbyterian grin

Maybe he did die but the boy didn't understand it

The man knows now and the scandal never grows old

About a happy lumberjack who lived on whisky

And died of a sin and oats age 90 or so

But all he was too much for any man to be

A life so complete that could not include one more thing

Neither tell the same story twice if he wanted to and did not and did not

Just the same he is dead.

A syrupy religious voice

Folded his century sideways to get it out of sight
And lowered him into the ground
Who made people uncomfortable?
Barn raiser and backwoods farmer
Become an old man in a one-room apartment
Over a dry goods store
And earth takes him
Just as it does
Populations of countries
Museums and works of art
And women with such a glow
It makes their backgrounds vanish
They vanish too and Lesbos singer in her sunny islands
Stopped when the sun went down
No y grandfather was clearly unashamed
250pounds of scarred slag
And I have some how become his memory
Taking on flesh and blood
The way he imagined me
Floating among the pictures in mind
Where his dead body is

Laid within the earth
And such a relayed picture perhaps
Outlives any work of art
Surviving among the other alternatives.

After you go through the poem read the poem in the text Arnold Anthology and now try and see if you can find the meanings of the following words that is in case you don't know the meaning of it:

Prehistoric, barrow, Pharaoh, Presbyterian, lumberjack, Quakeroats, backwoods farmer, drygoods store, Lesbos singer.

In case you still cannot find Quakeroats, drygoods and Lesbos singer here is the explanation respectively.

Quaker Oats is the name of a brand of oats just as we have Kellogg's cornflakes. Products that are not perishable are referred to as dry goods while Lesbos singer is the reference to Sappho the Greek poet probably born in seventh century AD.

Commentary:

In the poem, "Elegy for a Grandfather" (1956), Purdy incorporates and reworks the distant past by vividly recalling his grandfather, Ridley Neville Purdy, who arrived in Canada in 1858 at the age of eighteen and worked in lumber camps at

the time of the construction of the “colonization roads” in the area between Lake Ontario and the Ottawa River, which is to say, the area to the north of the landscape described in “The Country North of Belleville”. This is a poem based on the pioneer man and is reminiscent of Seamus Heaney’s “Digging”. Not only is Purdy’s “250 pound” grandfather an almost larger-than-life ancestor but, as a migrant and a participant in the process of destruction and construction that is settlement, he is also a precursor of the poet and his wife in their “move ... to Roblin Lake / Prince Edward County in 1957” and in their use of their “last hard-earned buck to buy second-hand lumber / to build a second-hand house” (240, 244).

In this poem Purdy mingles the past and present and thereby juxtaposes and links, the creations of a settler culture with the final stage in what has here been termed an architectural narrative as mentioned in his work, *Logs to Riches*,

... Late 19th-century houses in the village
more scattered thru the countryside
many of these old places being
a silent kind of triumph in survival
their owners celebrated with wood and stone
a dozen panes of glass for each window
where glass had been so scarce in the beginning
sign and signal the green waves of forest
surrounding would not wash over them again
Usually they were “second houses”
the first having been log construction
long gone back into earth

And then there were the “third houses”
some with white gingerbread woodwork
complicated as catacombs of the bone brain
a pattern of wood curlicues entangled with time...
(Beyond Remembering 245)

This poem is also similar to the idea/issue of survival as stated by Atwood in her 1972 study. The poem however celebrates the Canadians as a nation of victims and losers when it uses phrases such as “celebrate, advancement, and creativeness. Purdy further describes that the “gods” may favor “pain and defeat,” but they also “allow ... brief content” and reward human tenacity and artistry. The poet in the poem realizes that human civilization survives first by “sawing boards” and “pounding nails”. As stated by a critic, “The fact that Purdy uses the same word – “interested” – to describe the absorption of the Victorian carpenter as well as his own turn towards Victorian architecture is merely a verbal signal of the sympathetic relationship between the poet and figures in the past that his imaginative response to their creations makes possible”. This poem is one of migration and construction, emplacement and place-creation.

Explanation:

The poem begins with the death of the poet's grandfather and the poet begins with some wonder that this hardy, maybe old and yet robust grandfather should die. He calls him a 'prehistoric barrow' who for future generations may think of him as an inspiration and may not also. He was mourned hypocritically by the relatives but in truth they saw him as one more Presbyterian man who gambled and could make his dream come through.

The second stanza explains how the grandfather may have been seen as a happy lumberjack who lived on rotten whiskey and Quaker Oats till the age of ninety and as maybe a sinful man yet the poet feels that he lived a full heavy life and who had no two experiences that were alike.

The stanza three once again reiterates how this old man filled with the zest of life had died and relives him as pioneer man calling him a barn raiser, a backwoods farmer who finally grew old in a one room apartment above a store. The next few lines also discusses how the old man had become part of the art just like other things such as populations of whole countries, museums and works of art and beautiful women would all vanish. Such losses were remembered by the poet Sappho when the evenings would be long drawn.

The final stanza describes the 250 pound man who was larger than life and how the poet himself has now become the inheritor of his grandfather. The poet slowly imbibes the flesh and blood of his grandpa and thus becomes the survivor.

Comprehension:

- Who is the speaker in the poem?
- What is an elegy?
- Is the grandfather dead or alive in the poem? How do you know he is dead,
- Why is the grandpa called as a big-bellied Pharaoh?
- Who is the boy who does not understand?
- Was the grandfather beautiful? Indicate the lines it discusses his weight.
- Who is the survivor of his grandfather's legacy?
- Write a critical appreciation of the poem
- What is the central theme of the poem?
- What does the title of the poem indicate to you?

F. R. SCOTT: (1899-1951)

F.R. Scott was the son of Frederick George Scott. Francis (Frank) Reginald Scott was born in Quebec City on August 1st, 1899. He was educated at Bishop's College, Lennoxville, Quebec, and at Oxford University, where he held a Rhodes scholarship, receiving a B.A. (1922) and a B.Litt. (1923) for a thesis on 'The annexation of Savoy and Nice by Napoleon III, 1860'. On his return to Canada he taught briefly at Lower Canada College and in 1924 began studying law at McGill University, graduating in 1926. In 1927 he was called to the bar and in 1928 returned to McGill to teach; he was dean of law from 1961 to 1964 and retired from McGill in 1968. In 1952 he was a technical-aid representative for the United Nations in Burma and from 1963 to 1971 a member of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Scott--who has contributed equally to Canadian law, literature, and politics in both official languages [of Canada]--was elected to the Royal Society of Canada in 1947, awarded the Lorne Pierce Medal for distinguished service to Canadian literature in 1962, and received a Molson Prize for outstanding achievements in the arts, the humanities, and the social sciences in 1967. His career as an interpreter of Quebec poetry culminated with a Canada Council Translation Prize for Poems of French Canada (1977), his work as a social philosopher with a Governor General's Award for Essays on the constitution: aspects of Canadian law and politics (1977), and his life as a poet with a Governor General's Award for The collected poems of F. R. Scott (1981). [Biography from wikipedia.com]

Scott is one of the most important catalysts of modern Canadian poetry, partly because of the influence of his own poetry and partly through his personality and his association with several literary groups and 'little magazines'. As a satirist in the late twenties and early thirties, he helped battle an outworn Canadian Romanticism in order to introduce the 'new poetry'; and in landscape poems such as 'Old song', 'Lakeshore', and 'Laurentian Shield' he established a northern evolutionary view of Canadian nature that later influenced such poets as Al Purdy and Margaret Atwood. While achieving distinction as a poet, political activist, and leading authority on constitutional law, Scott also became a figure of extraordinary importance as a commentator on both Canadian society and Canadian literature. All these activities found expression in his poetry, and all stemmed from the nationalistic concerns of Canadian intellectuals in the twenties.

PARAPHRASE OF LAURENTIAN SHIELD:

Hidden in wonder and snow, or sudden with summer,

This land stares at the sun in a huge silence

Endlessly repeating something we cannot hear.

Silent arctic,

Not written on by history, empty as paper,

It leans away from the world with songs in its lakes
Older than love, and lost in the miles.
One day it will choose its language and when it has done so
A language of flesh and of roses will arise.

Now there are only pre-words,
plain Cabin syllables, or Nouns of settlement
Slowly forming, with steel syntax,
The long sentence of its exploitation.

The first cry in this wild was the fur hunter,
And the gold digger a nomad.
Then the bold commands of monopolies, big with machines,
Carving their kingdoms out of the public wealth;
And now the drone of the plane, scouting the ice,
Fills all the emptiness with neighborhood
And links our future over the vanished pole.

But a deeper note is sounding, heard in the mines,
The scattered camps and the mills, a language of life,

And what will be written in the full culture of occupation

Will come, presently, tomorrow,

EXPLANATION:

Before you read about this poem you should know the geographical and geological reference to the Laurentian Shield.

Canadian Shield or Laurentian Plateau (lôrĕn'chən), is U-shaped region of ancient rock, the nucleus of North America, that stretches North from the Great Lakes to the Arctic Ocean. It covers more than half of Canada; it also includes most of Greenland and extends into the United States as the Adirondack Mountains and the Superior Highlands. The first part of North America to be permanently elevated above sea level, it has remained almost wholly untouched by successive encroachments of the sea upon the continent. It is the earth's greatest area of exposed Archaean-age rock; the metamorphic rocks of which it is largely composed were probably formed in the Precambrian era. Repeatedly uplifted and eroded, it is today an area of low relief (c.1, 000–2,000 ft/305–610 m above sea level) with a few monad nocks and low mountain ranges (including the Torngat and Laurentian mountains.) probably eroded from the plateau during the Cenozoic era. During the Pleistocene epoch, continental ice sheets depressed the land surface such

as the Hudson Bay and scooped out thousands of lake basins, and carried away much of the region's soil. Drainage is generally very poor on the shield. The southern part of the shield has thick forests while the north is covered with tundra. The region is largely undeveloped but has great water-power potential and is a source of minerals, timber, and fur-bearing animals. (Britannia Encyclopedia)

This poem is about this geographical wonder and discusses the same with the growth and development of it. The poem also discusses the source of creativity in Canada. Stanza one discusses the silent wonder and the emptiness and barrenness of this geographical marvel. Stanza two begins by stating that this bare, silent land will have its own language and will shape its speech based on the types of settlements that come there.

Stanza three is the descriptions of the various types of people who emerged on this land such as hunters, fur traders, nomads, gold hunters and the way the land was shaped by each one of these different communities. The deep voice of originality and freshness according to the poet in the last stanza is only a futuristic one much later. Thus the poem ends by stating that the culture of the land will be written and articulated by the future millions whose hands can turn this rock into children.

COMPREHENSION:

- Who is the speaker in the poem?
- What is the Laurentian shield?
- How does the land get enriched?
- Why is the land silent?
- Why does it not have any history?
- How does the land attain a life?
- Who are presently living there?
- Why is the use of the miners important at this juncture?
- Write a critical appreciation of the poem.

UNIT 3

LESSON 3: INTRODUCTION

OUTLINE:

- **Women Writers**
- **Margaret Laurence: Her Life and Works**
- **Analysis of Stone Angel.**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Understand the development of Women's writing**
- **Know the life and works of Margaret Laurence.**
- **Figure out the story outline and themes and issues as addressed in the novel, Stone Angel.**

In this section we will introduce to the significance and scopes of Women's writing, and then take you on a short voyage through the life and works of Margaret Laurence. It will also enable you to know the plot summary and thematic issues addressed in Stone Angel.

WOMEN WRITERS:

Canada has from the beginning had a strong base of women writers unlike America. The earlier writing had generally been nostalgic--a longing for the home land, namely, Britain. Later writings too had this mentality but most of the

works were now based on the topography and the landscape of the new land. Thus the colonial outlook induced not just nostalgia but also a sense of amalgamation with the new culture and land. The first writing had been exploratory and was generally in the form of letters, diaries, journals, travelogues and memoirs. Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852) and Catherine Parr Trail's *Backwoods of Canada* (1854) are works that are descriptive and tell the story of the land. Moodie's work is stronger and she reflects a sense of ambivalence in her loyalty to the home-new cultures. She displays a type of rootlessness and a sense of estrangement. If Moodie has attempted to display her double loyalty Sara Jeanette Duncan's *Imperialist* (1904) is a story that thematizes the claims of the Empire and that of Canadian nationalism. She recognizes the folly of the unequal power as displayed by the imperialist against the natives. Elgin the small Ontario town in her novel becomes a microcosm that plays out the drama of the city and tires to pit Canadian identity against the British one. A significant work even before Moodie's was France's Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769). In this four volume novel, Brooke captures her own Canadian life and adopts a narrative and style that is similar to Richardson's *Pamela*. The form of realism and the realist novels can be witnessed in the works of Martha Ostenso's *Geese* and Ethel Wilson's *Swamp Angel*. The period of transition from realism to modernity was the period of Laurence's writing. Margaret Laurence's fictional

commitment to relocate the cultural roots and participate in the ideology of the 1960s where in she tries to strongly uphold the issues of Canadian identity and nationalism. Laurence also tries to reclaim the indigenous cultural heritage and establish a bond between the past and present in her novels. Therefore many of her novels have the discussion based on the Meti family--the Tonneres. Among the late modern writers the leading one is definitely Margaret Laurence does not deny that in her writing she is "writing about the situations of women" and is dealing with women's identities. In Laurence's fiction therefore the quest narrative does not issue from the paradigm of the male/female binary opposition it issues from the tension generated by the women characters inability to perceive and accept the true value of their inheritance. On the other hand, Atwood problematizes the sex and gender roles and protests against patriarchal dominations. She scrutinizes the feminine search for a pathways to resist and break male paradigms. As she herself mentions in an interview, "far from thinking of writers as totally isolated individuals I see them as inescapably connected with their society--the writer may unconsciously reflect the society; he may consciously examine it and project ways of changing it, and the connection between writer and society will increase in its intensity as the society...become she subject of the writer. (Surviving the Critics, 33). Another set of contemporary writers who have made the short story their forte and who use the women's bodies subtly to delineate the woman's powerlessness are the

works of Alice Munro and Audrey Thomas. Munro in her works such as *Who Do You Think You Are* and *Lives of Girls and Women* traces the haunting self quest of the narratives and the source of their individual strengths only later. Later groups of writers such as Daphne Marlatt, Sandra Birdsell and Jane Rule use post modern narratives and draw on the French feminist theory to explain the fictional stances that they adopt.

MARGARET LAURENCE AND HER WORKS: (1926-1987)

Margaret Laurence began her life on July 18, 1926 in the prairie town of Neepawa, Manitoba. Laurence (Jean Margaret Wemyss) suffered the loss of her parents at a very young age. Her mother, Verna Simpson Wemyss, died in 1930 when Margaret was only four years old while her father Robert Wemyss, who later married Verna's sister, passed away only five years after the death of his first wife. From that period Laurence was cared for by her aunt who was a teacher and librarian, and her maternal grandfather. Laurence's love of literature and of writing flourished with her aunt's encouragement and guidance.

Being fascinated by writing Laurence decided early in life to become a writer. She began writing professionally in 1943 when she got a summer job as a reporter for the town newspaper. In 1944 she enrolled in the Honors English program at Winnipeg's United College (known today as the University of

Winnipeg). There, she began to publish her stories and poems in *Vox*, the United College newspaper of which she later became assistant editor. In 1947, after graduating with her BA from United College, Laurence went on to become a reporter for the *Winnipeg Citizen*. Later that same year, she married Jack Laurence, a civil engineer. In 1949, Margaret Laurence and her husband left for England and then, a year later, they moved to the British Protectorate of Somalia (known today as Somalia). They lived in Africa until 1957, spending the last five years of their stay in the Gold Coast (known today as Ghana). This was a crucial period in Margaret Laurence's life. During this period, Laurence wrote a number of short stories on African subjects. These were combined in to the collection, *The Tomorrow Tamer*. (1963). She also started work on her "African novel" *This Side Jordan* (1960). When she returned to Canada she began to pay attention to the issues that were Canadian. She, however still retained an interest in African literature and thereby wrote a critical study of Nigerian literature, *Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952-1966*.

The Laurences returned home in 1957, and settled in Vancouver where they remained for five years. There, Margaret finished *This Side Jordan* for which, after its publication in 1960, she received the Beta Sigma Phi award for the best first novel by a Canadian writer. *The Stone Angel* was the first novel written by Laurence and was set in the fictional Manitoba town of Manawaka. However

Laurence did not stay in Canada for long and moved to England, in 1962 after separating from her husband. It was at England that Laurence completed four of her five Manawaka books: *The Stone Angel* (1964), *A Jest of God* (1966), *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969), and *A Bird in the House* (1970). In 1966, *A Jest of God* won Laurence her first Governor General's Award for fiction and was soon adapted into a movie entitled *Rachel, Rachel*. The great critical acclaim and commercial success of the first four Manawaka novels as well as her consistent output of essays and articles solidly established Margaret Laurence as one of the most important literary figures in Canada. Laurence received the honor of being named a Companion of the Order of Canada in 1971.

In the early 1970s, Margaret Laurence returned to Canada and settled down in Lakefield, Ontario. Over the following several years, she continued to write but also took up writer-in-residence positions at the University of Toronto, the University of Western Ontario, and at Trent University. In 1974 she completed *The Diviners* (1974), her final novel and the fifth book in the Manawaka series. It was for *The Diviners* that Laurence received her second Governor General's Award and in the following year she was awarded with the prestigious Molson Prize. While she did not write any more novels, Margaret Laurence went on to write a book of essays entitled *Heart of a Stranger* (1976), her posthumously published memoirs *Dance on the Earth* (1987), and, continuing what she had

begun in 1970 with *Jason's Quest*, three books for children: *The Olden Days Coat* (1979), *Six Darn Cows* (1979), and *The Christmas Birthday Story* (1980). Laurence also maintained her connection with the university community and served as chancellor of Trent University from 1981 to 1983.

During the last decade of her life, Margaret Laurence was actively involved in speaking and writing about issues that concerned her such as nuclear disarmament, the environment, literacy, and other social issues. Today, that work continues through organizations like the Margaret Laurence Fund and honours like The Margaret Laurence Award for Excellence which continue to support such worthy causes in her name. Margaret Laurence died on January 5, 1987.

A Tree for Poverty (1954) — anthology of Somali poetry and folk stories

This Side Jordan (1960)

The Tomorrow-Tamer (1963) — collection of ten short stories set in West Africa

The Prophet's Camel Bell (1963) — non-fiction account of Laurence's life in Somaliland

The Stone Angel (1964) was set in the fictional town of Manawaka, Manitoba (based on Neepawa, Manitoba, where Laurence grew up).

A Jest of God (1966) was also set in Manawaka. It won the Governor-General's Award in 1967. The book was made into the 1968 movie Rachel, Rachel, starring Joanne Woodward.

The Fire-Dwellers (1969)

Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952-1966 (1968)

A Bird in the House (1970) — collection of short stories

Jason's Quest (1970) — children's book

The Diviners (1974)

Heart of a Stranger (1976) — essays

Six Darn Cows (1979) — children's book

The Olden Days Coat (1980) — children's book

A Christmas Birthday Story (1982) — children's book

Dance on the Earth: A Memoir (1989)

SUMMARY OF STONE ANGEL:

Chapter 1:

Chapter one of the novel is set in a cemetery where the statue of the stone angel is located. The angel is Hagar's mother's tombstone, and it is the largest and the first of its kind. It stands tall in the cemetery overlooking the entire town. Hagar's father had the large marble statue imported and it cost him a great deal

of money. The tombstone reads "Rest in peace. From toil, surcease. Regina Weese. 1886." According to Hagar's narrative we understand that she died from some obscure maidenly disease while giving birth to Hagar.

At the time the story is being told Hagar is ninety plus. She is reliving her own life from the time she was small. She thinks that they, namely her son Marvin and her daughter-in-law Doris live a worthless life. As Hagar reminisces about her childhood she narrates about her cleverness at school and her ability to please her father because of it. At times, whenever Hagar would get a star for her work, her father would reward her with candies from the store. Every night for an hour, Hagar and her two brothers would have to sit at the table and do their homework. If the homework was complete before the hour time span was up, their father would set up sums and would help the children to do them. When the time came Auntie Doll would poke her head in from the kitchen and remind their father of the children's bedtime.

The Wachakwa river always froze over very well and was perfect for skating on. It was also perfect for cutting blocks of ice out as Mr. Doherty always made his sons do, because he owned the Manawaka Icehouse. One day when Dan, Hagar's brother, was showing off for the girls, he skated right into one of the holes where they cut a block of ice. Matt came and pulled him out and then, with the help of Hagar, walked Dan all the way across town to their house. The next day Dan came down with pneumonia, and the next night he died. While on his

death bed Dan wanted his mother so Matt got out her shawl and tried to convince Hagar to comfort him. Nevertheless, she would not so Matt did it himself.

Hagar, rejoining the present day, trips over her bedroom rug on her way downstairs to have a cup of tea. Doris and Marvin both make an extremely big deal about her falling over. They point out that Marvin is getting too old to continue picking her up every time she falls. While having a cup of tea, Marvin and Doris bring up the idea of selling the house. This really disturbs Hagar because it is her house, and her son wants to sell it. After the subject of selling the house causes a great deal of aggravation, they drop the whole idea so not to aggravate Hagar any more. This chapter ends with Doris suggesting that Hagar meet with Mr. Troy, the priest at church.

Chapter two begins with Hagar meeting with Mr. Troy. While meeting with Mr. Troy, although she thinks he does not care much, Hagar starts telling him her life story. She begins her story with her going to the young ladies' academy in Toronto. When Hagar found out that she was going to the Young Ladies Academy she did not think that she should be the one going to college. She thought that Matt should be the one getting the College education. She did not

want to say anything because she wanted to go, but was afraid that if she mentioned anything to her father, he would send Matt instead of her.

Hagar's father did not let her go to many dances. Nevertheless, one time under the supervision of Auntie Doll, Hagar was permitted to go to a dance only because it was a fund-raiser to build a new hospital. At the dance Hagar met Bram Shimpley. He was a great dancer. As heavy as he was he was light on his feet. Bram was previously married but his wife, who was fourteen years younger than he, died. After their dance Lottie told Hagar that Bram was not the person she should be seen with she explained to her that he had been seen with half breed girls. Hagar wanted to marry Bram but her father refused but none-the-less she married him. No one came to their wedding except Auntie Doll. Auntie Doll said that Matt had given her mother's shawl to give to Hagar as a present but at the last minute he changed his mind and took it back. After the wedding, Bram took Hagar to his home where Bram gave Hagar her wedding present, a cut-glass decanter with a silver top.

After recollecting this portion of her life to Mr. Troy Mr. Troy noticed that a great deal of time had passed and he must be on his way so he left. Following Mr. Troy's departure Hagar notices a circled add in the paper but she cannot make it out. She makes her way to the kitchen table to read the add. It reads,

"Only the Best Will Do for MOTHER," the add goes on to describe a nursing home. Doris notices that Hagar has read the paper but avoids talking about the subject altogether. After a bit of small talk Hagar states that there is no way she will go to the nursing home. Doris causes Hagar to drop the subject saying that she is getting worked up so Hagar goes and sits where all her things are around her.

Throughout Hagar's life everyone has called her several things, but they have never really called her Hagar. Bram was the only one that ever called her Hagar not mother or daughter or even wife just simply Hagar.

In chapter three Hagar and Doris are waiting in the doctor's office, while waiting Hagar notices two pictures in the doctor's office. Hagar remembers that when she first went to the Bram Shipley's house, her husband's house, there were no pictures. Throughout the time that she lived in that house she had succeeded to put up a couple of pictures. One picture Hagar particularly liked was one entitled, "The Horse Fair."

Bram never really cared for the picture. He much preferred real horses, which Hagar was terrified of but never let Bram know. Hagar let Bram believe that the smell was what bothered her. One year when Bram made some money, as did

everyone else, because wheat was doing well, he invested in buying horses. Bram bought a strong gray stallion that he called soldier, from Henry Pearl and a few mares. In the spring they had colts but when it came to selling them Bram never got a good price for them, mainly because he was not a very good business man.

One cold winter day Bram left the gate to the horse's stall unlatched. He thought he would only be gone a few minutes but he forgot all about it. When Bram went to check on the horses, they were nowhere to be found. A little while later the mare that was in the stall had returned but Soldier was still missing. Bram loved the horse so much that although it was minus forty outside he took the storm lantern and went out to search for the horse. Bram returned a while later but he did not find the horse. The next spring they found Soldier's body. He had caught his leg in a barbed wire fence and the cold killed him.

After eating supper Marvin and Doris take Hagar for a ride without telling her where they are going. Suddenly they pass through a set of iron gates with SILVERTHREADS written across the top. Hagar suddenly realizes that she is going to the old age home. Hagar really does not want to go to the home and causes a big fuss in the car. Marvin and Doris assure her that they are only visiting to look around. While taking the tour Hagar is very uncooperative but at the end of the tour Hagar agrees to sit on the veranda and have a cup of tea.

While sitting on the veranda, Hagar remembers when she gave birth to Marvin. She remembered how Bram drove down the main area of the town and said hello to people on the way to the hospital. She remembers how cross she was with him when he said that if it were a boy it would be someone to leave the place to. Suddenly out of nowhere an old lady came up to Hagar and starts complaining about how Mrs. Thorlakson did not come down for supper and how Mrs. Thorlakson gets the best of things. Then after the old lady that was talking to her left another came and was a little friendlier toward Hagar. They sat and talked about family and looked at some pictures. They also talk about where Hagar is going to go if she does not go to the home and after a quick word about that Hagar leaves in a hurry. Before she leaves Hagar notices that there are also men at this home after seeing a log cabin with the shadow of a man standing within. Doris runs outside to get Hagar and they get back into the car to go home.

Chapter Four begins with the elderly Hagar complaining to herself about the barrage of X-rays she's had to undergo. After, she is finally called in for the X-rays and proceeds without the accompaniment of Doris. While she is in the X-ray room, she is forced to drink Barium, which Hagar dislikes thoroughly. As she waits for the procedure to commence, she lapses into another flashback. She

recalls her earlier life at the Shipley place, and the effort she put forth to keep the house spotless. Also, she remembers her husband Bram, whom she recalls as being a hard worker, but none too bright. He was caught by the R.C.M.P. "relieving himself" on the steps of Hagar's father's store. Although the X-rays reveal nothing "organically" wrong with Hagar, Doris thinks that Hagar would be better off in a nursing home, while Marvin disagrees, and tells Hagar that she can stay at home if she wants. To settle the issue, Doris schedules a meeting between Hagar and the clergyman, Mr. Troy. Ultimately, the meeting ends in a stalemate. Hagar then remembers her son John, and his relatively easy birth. She recalls how much she loved John, and how much Bram disliked him. Hagar also recalls how she earned some money for herself from the egg money Bram took in. In addition, she remembered the time when Marvin joined the army at the age of seventeen to fight in the First World War. Meanwhile, John suffered embarrassment over Bram, whom the kids made jokes about. As time passed, Hagar's relationship with John became strained. In the present, Hagar wakes up and goes for a walk with Doris, during which she sees a girl with black nail polish. She makes a comment about it, and draws an evil stare from the girl, making her feel miserable. At the end of the chapter, Hagar is told by Marvin, in no uncertain terms, that she will be going to the nursing in one week.

Hagar in chapter five at this point is plotting her "escape" by using her old-age pension check to get her to Shadow Point. When Hagar falls asleep in the middle of her conspiracy, she recalls the day she and John left Bram and Manawaka behind them. While on the train, John confesses to Hagar that he traded his plaid pin for a jackknife. When the elderly Hagar awakens, she recalls her plan to sneak away to Shadow Point. She furtively obtains the check from the den desk, finds her way to the bank, and eventually manages to travel to her destination. She happens across a convenience store, and buys some food items. Hagar then hitches a ride to the "old fish-cannery road." She descends the steps to the Point, and once there she finds an abandoned building. She then establishes the building as her new "home." The scene then switches to the past, and Hagar's stay at Mr. Oatley's house. She served as a maid / cook for Mr. Oatley. John also stayed with his mother at Mr. Oatley's. He led Hagar to believe that he was doing well in school, and that he had acquired many friends. However, Hagar discovered that John was lying about having any friends. Nevertheless, she encouraged John, telling him that he would take after his grandfather and be successful. When John entered high school, he made real friends, as well as girl friends. The chapter ends with the elderly Hagar lying on an old bed in the abandoned house, trying to pray but finding it no more useful now than it was before.

As chapter six begins, Hagar awakens in the abandoned building, and realizes that it is raining outside. She is cold and sore, and fears moving lest she fall with no one nearby to help her. She worries momentarily that the rain would mask the footsteps of a possible intruder. Hagar then becomes confused, thinking that it was Marvin and Doris who left her, and not the other way around. Hagar then enters into another flashback in which she recalls John trying to earn enough money to attend college. Eventually, he decides to return to the Shipley place to work there. When Hagar cries that Bram might be dead, John replies to the contrary, and reveals that he and Marvin have been communicating with Bram through letters. John hitched a ride on a train back to the Shipley place.

Two years later, John wrote to Hagar telling her that Bram was dying. She immediately traveled to the Shipley place. When she arrived, she found Manawaka stricken by drought, John a shadow of his former self, and Bram an invalid. John looked after Bram, while Hagar didn't do much to aid him. It becomes apparent that John has become a great deal like his father, both in the way he talks and the way he acts. Hagar and John later travel to the cemetery to see if the Currie plot has been cared for. When they arrive, they notice that the stone angel has been toppled over. With a great deal of effort, John managed to place the angel upright, and cleaned off the lipstick someone had applied to the statue. A short time later, Bram died. Hagar had him buried in the Currie plot,

the grave stone reading Currie on one side, and Shipley on the other. In the end, it was John who cried for Bram, not Hagar.

In chapter seven Hagar strolls down to the beach to get some water. On the beach there are two children playing house around six, Hagar noting their playing decides to warn the girl to stop being so bossy to the boy, when she speaks up, the children are frightened and run away. She then decides to eat but the food is unappealing to her. She takes a stroll in the forest and sits in her quiet place and notices her surroundings and reviewed the incident with the children on the beach. When Bram died, Hagar informed Mr. Oatley of the death and decided to stay in Manawaka for a few more weeks.

Upon her return, Hagar becomes bored, and decides to clean up the attic. She comes across a wooden box which belonged to Clara, Bram's first wife. Hagar decides to deliver the box to Bram's daughter Jess. When she arrived she noticed that John's car is parked there and she listens in on their conversation. Being annoyed by the intimacy between them, Hagar walks in finally and gives the box to Jess and takes John home with her. Hagar, unaware of the relationship between Arlene and John until she brought him home on one occasion when John got drunk and got into a fight (Hagar was convinced that this was a mocking gesture towards her).

At the beginning of summer, Hagar returned to Manawaka and noticed how clean the house was, finding out that Arlene was responsible for the cleaning. Arlene had lost her job as a teacher and spent the year with John. Arlene was in love with John at this point and wanted to marry him. Hagar hated the idea because John was a drunk and neither of them had two nickels. Arlene argued that Hagar did not know John the way she did. Hagar discussed the situation with John that night, trying to convince him that Arlene family was nothing special. John made it clear it was none of her concern. She retired for the night. One day Hagar was eaves dropping on the conversation of John and Arlene and their plans to marry when Hagar leaves for the coast. Arlene expressed to John about bearing his children, the thought of John and Arlene making love in her home fumed Hagar. After discussing this with Lottie, they agreed Arlene should leave Manawaka for a while. A month passed and finally Hagar objected to her visiting John. John did not bring Arlene to the house for some time after this. Hagar decided she could not return to the old house again, the stairs were too much for her. She would move to the canary building.

The cannery building in chapter eight seems to be a place of remembrance and oddities. A Large room cluttered with boxes, fishing nets and an old boat. She used the boxes as table and chair and was quite content. Suddenly she fell to the

floor, she could not remember what she had done that day and the pain in her chest kept bothering her. A sea gull flew into the house, Hagar remembered the old saying about a sea gull flying onto the house meant death. At that point Murray Lees an insurance salesman barged in and lit a candle, the two shared a bottle of wine were Murray shared his life story with Hagar. Murray had gotten his wife pregnant before they were married and he being an active member evangelical Advocates. Felt that the death of their child was punishment for his sin. Hagar shared her experience of loosing a child. Murray could not decide who's fault it was: his grandfather for being a "bible puncher", his mother who drove him to evangelical religion, his wife or his own. Hagar and Murray settled down to sleep. Hagar recalled that John had mentioned Arlene was moving east for a year. John suspected that Hagar knew of the plan for john to get Arlene pregnant before she left. Hagar never brought back to the Shipley home again. That night, Henry Pearl came to the door, john had been in an accident, and he was in the hospital. John got drunk at a dance and took a bet that he could drive across the railroad trestle bridge. An unscheduled freight train hit John's truck. Arlene was in the truck with him, she was killed on impact. In hospital, John cried out for his mother's help. Before she could speak or move, John looked at her realizing she could not help him. And then he died. Hagar refused to cry in front of stingers, when she got home, she could not cry. She felt a "transformation to stone". She could only think of all the things Hagar never set

right. After John's funeral, she would not go back to the cemetery. She tried to talk to Lottie but she was too ill. Hagar found comforting the presence of Telford. She sent everything of value in her home to Marvin and sold the home. She returned to Mr. Oatley.

The following year he died, leaving Hagar ten thousand dollars in his will. With this she bought a home. Murray sought to comfort her, but insisted that John's death was senseless, and would be angry over it until she died. Again they both settled down to sleep. Hagar awoke vomiting and Murray settled her down so that she could sleep again.

Chapter Nine begins that morning when Hagar awakes stiff and sore, Murray had left but covered her with his jacket to keep warm. She could hardly believe she had gotten drunk with a perfect stranger and then spent the night beside him. She also felt recently bereaved; she did not know why. Murray had brought Marvin and Doris, Hagar was relieved to see Marvin even though she despised her own weakness in rejoicing at being captured. As per usual, Hagar refused the help of Doris. Hagar then apologized for the other night. In the car, there was no doubt that Hagar was going to the old people's home. It had been discovered that Hagar was seriously ill. In hospital, Hagar lay in public ward because he was unable to attain any other accommodations. She felt like a "museum exhibit".

The nurse on duty gave Hagar her pills. Touched by the nurses' sympathy, she wept. The woman in the bed next to her was Elva Jardine, she rattled on incessantly. Hagar got rid of her attention by being rude and the aid of more soothing pills, she settled into "hazy lethargy" When Marvin visited, she was happy to see him, it seem though all she could do was complain about the accommodations. Marvin assured her that he would find a semi-private room. Hagar felt ashamed; she knew that Doris was not well.

When Mrs. Jardine came back from the bathroom, Hagar learned that Mrs. Dobereiner's words in German were in part a prayer of death. Mrs. Reilly prayed a great deal. Mrs. Jardine revealed that her and her husband lived only twenty five miles from Manawaka. Hagar warmed to the interest on Mrs. Jardine.

Hagar is in a semi-private room, when chapter ten begins. In the night, Hagar half asleep, left her bed. She was making for a light; confident that if she reached it Bram would call her name. A Nurse led her back to her room and insisted on restraining her. Hagar apologized and went back to bed. When Hagar woke, the bed next to her was occupied by a sixteen year old girl named Sandra Wong; she was to have an appendectomy. Hagar reassured the girl that everything would be fine. The next day went by slowly, Sandra was recovering from her operation and Hagar was drifting in and out of drugged sleep. Hagar

was visited by Mr. Troy, to which she requested he sing a hymn. The visit caused Hagar to cry. Mr. Troy assumed he failed but Hagar could not assure him that she enjoyed her visit. Doris came by to pick up Mr. Troy and Hagar expressed thanks to Doris and Mr. Troy but Doris did not believe her. Hagar was later visited by her grand son Steven who reminded her of the jaw breakers she would give him. She realized she was nothing more than a grand mother who gave money and candy. When Sandra awoke, she was feeling pain; Sandra was upset at Hagar for lying to her and asked the nurse to be moved. The nurse quietly informed the nurse of Hagar's condition. Sandra then wondered if would happen if Hagar died in the night. In the days that followed Hagar was confused of Sandra's concern for her. She would come over to the bed, bringing water, or pulling the curtains to when Hagar wanted to sleep. When Marvin had visited, Hagar confessed she was frightened. Marvin apologized for the harsh word he said to her, he took her hand and Hagar thought of asking for his pardon but she knew that is not what he wanted at that moment. Hagar recalled her last trip to Manawaka with Marvin and Doris. The Shipley place had vanished and replaced with a new house and a new barn. At the cemetery, the angel was still standing. A young care taker not knowing who they were was enthusiastic about the cemetery. He pointed to the stone bearing the names Currie and Shipley they were the earliest pioneering families in the district. Hagar lay in her "cocoon", Sandra announced she could go home in a few days. When she left Hagar tried

to remember something "truly free" she had done in her ninety years. There were only two things that came to mind. One was a joke, and another was a lie. Yet it had not really been a lie "for it was spoken at least and at last with what may perhaps be a kind of love. As the pain increased she asked Doris for a glass of water in her usual tone and insisted on holding it herself. The novel ends on a note of acceptance of Hagar and also of the possible death of Hagar. This novel has a number of themes such as the theme of love, theme of pride, theme of death and theme of religion. Read through the summary and the novel and then try to think about the various themes.

Comprehension:

- Write an essay either supporting or debating Hagar's view concerning God and the afterlife in general.
- Examine the Biblical archetypes in the novel.
- Elucidate the theme of rebellion and conformity as discussed in the novel.
- Explain the theme of pride as delineated in the novel.

- Discuss the issue of loss and death as portrayed in the life of Hagar.
- Briefly describe John's relationship with Bram. How did it differ from Marvin's relationship with Bram?
- Write an essay either supporting or debating Hagar's view concerning God and the afterlife in general.
- Explain the relevance of the title of the novel to the novel as a whole.
- Briefly describe John's relationship with Bram. How did it differ from Marvin's relationship with Bram?
- Write a short note on Hagar's experience in the hospital and her change of behavior later on.

UNIT 4

Caribbean:

Jean Rhys: *The day they burned the Books* (SF)

V. S. Naipaul: *House for Mr. Biswas* (N)

Derek Walcott: *Ruins of a Great House*. (P)

Jamaica Kincaid: *A Small Place* (N)

UNIT 4

LESSON 1: INTRODUCTION

OUTLINE:

- **Definition and Scope of Caribbean writing**
- **Theoretical Perspectives**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Understand the concept of Caribbean literatures.**
- **Figure out the background and rise of Caribbean literatures.**

In this section we will introduce to the significance and scope of Caribbean writing, and then explain to you the identity of the Caribbean writing. This section would enable you to understand the poetry and fiction that you deal with in the later part of the unit.

CARRIBEAN LITERATURE:

According to Britannica Online, the Caribbean writing has no culture or tradition of its own. Further the encyclopedia mentions the fact that the natives who were present before Columbus's "discovery" of the islands left very few

pictorial representations. Due to invasions and colonization the oral traditions were soon lost and as such anything Caribbean is hardly in existence. Subsequently, the civilization that replaced the native Indians was made up of a heterogeneous mixture of several different West African peoples brought to the West Indies as slaves. These groups of people had no language or written script of their own. Moreover they were not allowed to develop one while in bondage. In spite of this the Africans did in some measure pass on a culture of morality, of storytelling and song. It is these conventional rites/rituals/ceremonies that writers like Kamau Brathwaite point to as evidence of an African heritage in the Caribbean.

The first literary breakthroughs, departing from mere imitation of the conventions of the European colonizers, came outside the Anglophone Caribbean, in the French and Spanish islands. Beginning in the 1920s, writers like Aimé Césaire of Martinique, Luis Palés Matos of Puerto Rico, Jacques Roumain of Haiti, Nicolás Guillén of Cuba, and Léon Damas of French Guiana were the first to attempt carving out a distinctive Caribbean literary identity. This identity was based not on European ideals but on links between the black communities of the Caribbean. The British West Indies did not really pick up this challenge until after World War II. With the growth of newly independent states like Barbados, Trinidad, and Jamaica, Anglophone writers finally began to

develop a tradition that focused on a distinctly Caribbean consciousness. Pioneers in this movement include Vic Reid, who published *New Day* in 1949, George Lamming with *In the Castle of My Skin* in 1953, and V.S. Naipaul, who penned *Mystic Masseur* in 1957 and the canonized *A House for Mr. Biswas* in 1961. Today a wide variety of Caribbean writing in English exists, finally including female as well as male writers and beginning to take on not only Caribbean issues but (in writers such as Derek Walcott or Wilson Harris) contemporary issues such as Deconstruction. (www.postcolonial.org). Thus the origin of Caribbean perspective one can say is a move to decolonize and indigenize imaginatively. The literature articulates to reclaim and restore alter/native cultural traditions.

One must remember that Caribbean writing at one point of time was addressed as West Indian writing. The shared experience of colonialism was a part of almost all the West Indian islands and as such to a great extent the term 'West Indian' indicated literature of a colonized region. However around 1950 as mentioned by Donnell and Welsh articles began to appear in which the term West Indian was used to explore the possibilities of a unified regional identity. It also enabled some writers to gain a sense of an emergent West Indian literature as opposed to island literatures and a gradual shift from West Indian to

Caribbean began to happen. This was strengthened when the West Indian Federation came into existence in 1960s.

Recent writers see the term Caribbean as representative of literatures of a free region rather than as representative of literature of colonized islands. The 1950s and 60s was a period of growth in Caribbean writing with seminal works by writers such as George Lamming, Sam Selvon, Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott and Kamau Braithwaite. In the 1960s and 70s the literature of these regions moved from aesthetic concerns and became works that were seeking avenues of empowerment. Literature, thus, became more oriented towards establishing black consciousness and an ideology of their own. The writing of this period also came up with critical studies constructing the dominant tropes, thematic preoccupations and stylistic devices. As stated by Donnell and Welsh in The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature, “The critical preoccupations with naming the landscape; validating the local; the architecture of a literature; accommodation; alienation; personhood and community; the autobiographical mode; childhood and matrilineal links; exile; nostalgia; rewriting histories, and a realist tradition, persist as classic areas of enquiry.” (8).

Caribbean literature uses certain terminology which is unfamiliar to many. Words such as Creole and nation language have certain significance in

Caribbean works. The term creole is a word that has roots in the Spanish, *criolo* which means ‘born in, native to, committed to the area of living’. In Caribbean works, the term ‘Creole’ is used to describe the people of predominantly European descent who regard the Caribbean as home but are functionally white. But again in the Caribbean the various European descents have different names such as white West Indians, Euro-Creoles, expatriates, ‘red legs’ etc. The term creole according to Donnell and Welsh “denotes the linguistic forms which are closest to dialect or nation language and which considered to be broken are often erroneously or approximate language systems.” (11). On the other hand the term, ‘nation language’ was a word used by Edward Braithwaite. According to him it is a more culturally specific and neutral term which affirms a positive status for Caribbean non-standard linguistic forms. Again as mentioned by Donnell and Welsh “Dialect and patois are more pejorative and less linguistically accurate terms for what we call creole or nation language. The significance of creole expanded with a number of linguistic studies of the Caribbean region. Moreover the emphasis on indigenous, folk and grassroots sources furthered the literary use of creole. Braithwaite argues about creole emerging as a submerged language with the potential for cultural resistance. Similarly another critic, Hodge in Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty thinks that creole is an empowering linguistic medium for writers. One can thus

conclude that Caribbean literature is a literature with a remarkable history of creative struggle, adaptation and fusion.

COMPREHENSION:

Write an essay on the identity of Caribbean literature.

UNIT 4

LESSON 2: JEAN RHYS: HER LIFE & WORKS

OUTLINE:

- **Jean Rhys: Life and Works**
- **Analysis of ‘The day they burned the Books’**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Understand the importance of Jean Rhys’s literary works.**
- **Comprehend the major theme and plot of ‘The day they burned the Books’**

JEAN RHYS AND HER WORKS: (1890-1979):

Have you heard the name of Jean Rhys? Have you read Wide Saragasso Sea. Most people know about Jean Rhys through her famous novel, Wide Sargasso Sea. This was published in 1966 when she was 76 years old. This novel is based on the English novel, Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte. Well, in case you don’t know much about her then go through this biography to get an understanding of her and her works. The dominant themes in her novels and short stories are a sense of exile, loss, and alienation. These were themes that were part of Rhys’s

life too. Rhys died in 1979 not as a renowned writer but with doubt in her heart with regard to the merit of her work.

Jean Rhys was born as Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams, in Roseau. Her mother was a Creole hailing from the Dominican Lockhart family while her father was a Welsh-born doctor, William Potts Rees Williams. According to her biographer, Carole Angier, Rhys associated her mother with conformity and the "civilizing" mission of the English in the colonies at the end of the Victorian period. Her mother, Rhys claimed, was cold, disapproving, and distant. In one of the notebooks she kept during her life, Rhys recorded a time when her mother, after an attempt to discipline her daughter, gave her "a long, sad look," and said, "I've done my best, it's no use. You'll never learn to be like other people." Rhys writes, "There you are, and there it was. I had always suspected it, but now I knew. That went straight as an arrow to the heart, straight as the truth. I saw the long road of isolation and loneliness stretching in front of me as far as the eye could see, and further. I collapsed and cried as heartbrokenly as my worst enemy could wish."

Being a white and living among a predominantly black community, Jean Rhys felt socially and intellectually isolated. She left the island for schooling in England in 1907 and returned later only once in 1936. Even though Rhys had a major part of her education in England the Caribbean region shaped her

sensibility. Even in England, she remained nostalgic for the emotional vitality of the Caribbean people and the conflict between Caribbean beauty and its violent history became enmeshed in the tensions of her own often-fraught personality.

Rhys was as a child and adolescent, quite alone with just books around her and heard voices which she felt had to be written down. She did not find much solace at home, and began to explore other worlds available to her. At a convent school that she attended, Rhys, an Anglican Protestant, was drawn to the ritual of Catholic worship. During the Church service she noticed the intermingling of the races—black and white and felt happy about it. For Rhys, the black women who worked in her house as servants offered her access to a secret world and a secret language, both far different from the disinterestedness of her mother. In her writing, Rhys would explore the tension between the ordered world of colonial life and the seductive world of island sensuality. But in her life, her sense of abandonment remained acute. "Gradually," she wrote, "I came to wonder about my mother less and less until at last she was almost a stranger and I stopped imagining what she felt or what she thought."

In 1907, Rhys left Dominica for England, where she enrolled in the Perse School for Girls in Cambridge. However this was not a happy phase due to her nostalgic memories of her homeland. Moreover the loss of the hot sunny climate

also increased her feeling of despair. Along with this there was a feeling of isolation and alienation as her class and schoolmates disapproved of her Creole background and her quick mind. Rhys spent two years at the Perse School before enrolling in the Academy of Dramatic Art in 1909, intending to become an actress. Her stay was brief, but before she left, Rhys signed a contract to become a chorus girl. When her father died and money became scarce, she began touring England with a theater troupe.

Jean Rhys's great-grandfather, John Potter Lockhart, acquired Geneva plantation in 1824. After his death in 1837 his widow was left to run the estate. The "Census Riots" at Grand Bay, also called "La Guerre Negre", in 1844 following Emancipation, led to the destruction of the estate and the burning of all the Lockhart possessions in the yard after rioters raided the house. In 1930 the Geneva Estate house was completely burned by arsonists. Rhys visited the plantation during her trip to Dominica in 1936 and was affected by the experience. An awareness of this may help to explain some of the more ambiguous attitudes in Wide Sargasso Sea, such as Antoinette's caustic remarks to Christophine and Tia about their blackness. Rhys's own background, as well as Antoinette's, was that of the former slave-owning Creole community. The attacks on Geneva became the scene of the burning of Coulibri in Wide Sargasso Sea.

Rhys identified with the black community in her childhood, and indeed throughout her life, although she came to realize that her world could never align itself with that of her nursemaid, Meta, and other black mentors. She envied the black community its vitality and often contrasts the sterility of the white world with the richness and splendor of black life. Themes of attempted friendship with black girls recur in her work, an obvious example being the figures of Tia and Christophine in Wide Sargasso Sea, but Anna Morgan in Voyage in the Dark also attempts to find a friend among the black community.

Between 1930 – 1940 Rhys wrote three novels-- After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie, (1930); Voyage in the Dark, (1935); and Good Morning Midnight, (1939). Describing her style Ann Hulbert, a reviewer for the New Republic, writes: "The style of her novels is pristinely pared down in describing depravity and excess, perfectly balanced in evoking instability; she is a master of dialogue between characters for whom communication is mostly a lost cause." After the publication of Quartet, Rhys met Leslie Tilden Smith, a literary agent who helped her find publishers for her novels. They married in 1934, after living together for five years. During the time she wrote most of her early novels, Rhys depended on Smith to type her manuscripts, subsidize trips to Paris, and manage

her writing life. The process of writing for Rhys was always a difficult one; over the course of these years she became severely depressed.

Rhys's short fiction shows a remarkable variety of themes. A significant number of stories recall her childhood in the Caribbean and range from a girl's cruel sexual awakening ("Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose") to incisive sketches of the narrowness of small-island life ("The Day They Burned the Books"). Others, such as "Vienne," reflect Rhys's restless bohemian life in Europe. In "Let Them Call it Jazz," she assumes the personality of Selina, a black West Indian in London, whose struggles parallel her own. However, although Rhys declared, "I have only ever written about myself," it is important that her life and her writing not be confused. Her first published novel was Postures (1928, American title Quartet: A Novel, 1929). While it lacks the confidence of her later work, in the character of Marya Zelli it introduced what was to become the recognizably Rhys heroine -- sensitive, sexually attractive, and vulnerable, with a tendency to self-defeat. It also shows Rhys's stylistic control in moving within characters and in observing them objectively, without irony.

In After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie (1930), the heroine is Julia Martin, who is recovering from the experience of sexual betrayal and attempting a futile liaison with the decent but inadequate Mr. Horsfield. The moral descent is completed in

Good Morning Midnight (1939), a brilliant evocation of psychic disorientation and despair. The heroine, Sasha Jensen, remembers a life of love and defeat and faces the ultimate darkness suggested by the novel's title. Told in first person narrative, alternating between the past tense and the continuous present, Good Morning, Midnight is a technical tour de force.

Voyage in the Dark (1934), Rhys's third published but first-written novel, is her most autobiographical work of fiction. Its heroine, Anna Morgan, aged nineteen, has come to England from Dominica. The novel opens with a compelling evocation of the Caribbean, its colors, sights, smells, and warmth. As the novel recounts Anna's attempt to come to terms with her new life the inner narrative traces a remembered life in the Caribbean.

Rhys disappeared from public view until 1958, when the BBC dramatized her Good Morning, Midnight. The publication of Wide Sargasso Sea followed in 1966. Rhys's final years brought fame and freedom from financial anxiety, but no work of similar importance. She published a collection of new short stories, Sleep it off Lady, and worked on her autobiography, unfinished at death, and published later posthumously as Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography (1979). Her letters were published in 1984 in England as Jean Rhys's Letters: 1931-1966, edited by Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly.

In case you want to know more about Jean Rhys then here is a short list of her selected work:

The Left Bank and Other Stories, 1927

After Leaving Mr Mackenzie, 1931

Voyage in the Dark, 1934

Wide Sargasso Sea, 1966

Tigers Are Better-Looking, with a Selection from the Left Bank, 1968

My Day: Three Pieces, 1975

Sleep It Off, Lady, 1976

Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography, 1979

Jean Rhys Letters 1931-1966, 1984

Early Novels, 1984

The Complete Novels, 1985

Tales of the Wide Caribbean, 1985

The Collected Short Stories, 1987

THE DAY THEY BURNT THE BOOKS:

Jean Rhys's 'The Day They Burnt the Books' is set in the Caribbean. In this story Rhys explores the colonial constructions of the motherland. The child narrator's confusion with regard to the idea of England, the home land is quite ambivalent. There is a complex interweaving of the cultural and ethnic issues in this story. Mrs. Sawyer in the story also raises the question of literary values and Mrs. Sawyer in clearing up the books and sorting the ones to be burnt displays a bias for texts that are European. In the story she uses the prejudice of the colonized for the colonizer by showing marked preference for texts such as the Encyclopedia Britannica and poetry by Byron and Milton. Mrs. Sawyer also reveals her philistine and middle class snobbishness by also preferring books by their surface looks rather than the content present in it. Rhys's story gives space for the children to show postcolonial stances when they without prior knowledge retrieve Kipling's novel Kim and the French work Fort Comme le Mort. Unfortunately the first few pages of the book, Kim are missing and the second one is in French.

SUMMARY:

This story is told by a child narrator. The story revolves around the story of the Sawyer's family. Mr. Sawyer is a white man who has married a colored woman. They have a son, Eddie who is small and thin. Eddie's friend is the narrator here. As far as the people in the Caribbean town recognize Mr. Sawyer was a strange man. He had no occupation like the others: "He was not a planter or a doctor or a lawyer or a banker. He didn't keep a store. He wasn't a schoolmaster or a government official. He wasn't – that was the point – a gentleman". (457-58)

The story goes on to narrate the meanness of Mr. Sawyer at different times. Mr. Sawyer had a room built in the back of his house and lined it with bookshelves. He got a package every time the Royal Mail steamer came in. Gradually the room was filled with books. Eddie used to spend a lot of time in the room and Eddie's friend noticed that Mrs. Sawyer whenever she saw the room and books displayed an emotion close to hatred. Even though the other white boys spoke of England, the home land Eddie did not do so and during the discussions of the delights of England he would always be quiet. Mr. Sawyer on the other hand displayed a hatred for the Caribbean and the colored life itself. He suddenly dies and Eddie and the narrator occupy the room with books whenever they are free. However to their disappointment Mrs. Sawyer along with the maid, Mildred decides to clear up the room. The two children in deep agony pull two books and run out. In the meantime Mrs. Sawyer sorts some of the books and decides to burn some. Eddie and his friend eagerly open the book they have taken only to

find that they have taken the book Kim and moreover the book has first twenty pages missing. At night when the narrator eagerly opens the book she has flicked she finds it is in French.

COMPREHENSION:

Who is the narrator in the story?

Who is Eddie in the story?

Write a note on the relationship of Mr. and Mrs. Sawyer.

Explain the significance of the books and the room of Mr. Sawyer.

Why does Mr. Sawyer collect the books?

What does Mrs. Sawyer decide to do with the books?

Write a character sketch of Eddie.

Why are the children disappointed at the end of the story?

Explain the significance of the title, 'The Day They Burned the Books'

Explain the postcolonial aspects in the story.

UNIT 4

LESSON 3: V. S. NAIPAUL: HIS LIFE & WORKS

OUTLINE:

- **V.S. Naipaul: Life and Works**
- **A House for Mr. Biswas.**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Understand the literary significance of V.S. Naipaul.**
- **Know the different themes and contexts in Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas.**

V.S. NAIPAUL: LIFE AND WORKS: (1932-)

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born in a small town in Trinidad. His ancestors were Brahmins who hailed from India. His father, Seepersad Naipaul, was not only a correspondent for the Trinidad Guardian but he also published few short stories. The family moved to Port of Spain, when Naipaul was six. Seepersad Naipaul encouraged Naipaul in his writing aspirations, telling him in a letter: "Don't be scared of being an artist. D. H. Lawrence was an artist through

and through; and, for the time being at any rate, you should think as Lawrence. Remember what he used to say, 'Art for my sake.'"

Naipaul was educated at Queen's Royal College, Port of Spain, and in 1950 he won a scholarship to Oxford. After a period of depression and some amount of ups and downs in his personal life, Naipaul began to travel for long periods in India and Africa. As mentioned in a biographical note, "It was at a time of decolonization, when so many people the whole world over had to reassess their identity. Naipaul saw for himself the resulting turmoil of emotions, that collision of self-serving myth and guilt which make up today's bewildered world and prevents people from coming to terms with who they really are, and to know how to treat one another. On these travels he was exploring nothing less than the meaning of culture and history".

From 1954 to 1956 Naipaul was a broadcaster for the BBC's Caribbean Voices, and between the years 1957 and 1961 he was a regular fiction reviewer for the *New Statesman*. Naipaul published his first books in the late 1950s, but they did not make much money for him or his publisher, André Deutsch Limited. Naipaul's first work, The Mystic Masseur (1957), about a bright young man, who dreams of becoming a famous writer, was adapted for the screen by Ismail Merchant. Miguel Street (1959) was a novel that described the parting from Port

of Spain, Trinidad. In 1961 appeared A House for Mr. Biswas, often regarded as his masterpiece, which tells the tragicomic story of the search for independence and identity of a Brahmin Indian living in Trinidad. The protagonist, Mohun Biswas, was partly modeled after the author's father. Biswas has been unlucky from his birth, but all he wants is a house of his own - it is the solid basis of his existence. The story, which fuses social comedy and pathos, follows his struggle in variety of jobs, from sign painter to journalist, to his final triumph. Later Naipaul returned to the theme of his father in Between Father And Son (1999), a record of their correspondence in the early 1950s. In 1961 Naipaul received a grant from the Trinidad government to travel in the Caribbean. His first non-fiction book was The Middle Passage (1962), in which he described his first revisiting of the West Indies. Its examination of racial tensions made black West Indians call Naipaul a 'racist.' From the wide period of travels in the 1960s and early 1970s in India, South-America, Africa, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and the USA, Naipaul produced among others India: A Wounded Civilization (1977), and A Bend In The River (1979), a pessimistic novel about Africa, proclaiming the corruptibility of mankind.

In his semi-autobiographical novel The Enigma Of Arrival (1987) Naipaul depicts a writer of Caribbean origin, who finds joys of homecoming in England after wandering years - during which world stopped being a colony for him.

Central themes in Naipaul's works are damaging effects of colonialism upon the people of the Third World, but he doesn't believe in the imported ideas of revolutionaries or the ability of the former colonies to avoid mistakes made by the Western consumer societies. In the 1990s Naipaul concentrated on non-fiction. In 1994 appeared his long-awaited novel, A Way In The World, an autobiography and a fictional history of colonialism, presenting stories from the times of Sir Walter Raleigh to the nineteenth-century revolutionary Francisco Miranda. In Half A Life (2001) the protagonist is Willie Somerset Chandran, born in India in the 1930s. His second name he has got from the English writer Somerset Maugham, who has met his father. Willie moves to London, drifts in bohemian circles, publishes a book, marries Ana, a woman of mixed African descent, and moves with her to Africa, to her family estate. Willie has problems to come in terms with himself, as the son of a Brahman, who has married an "untouchable." His father is a rebel who ends at a monastery. Willie rebels against his own background and the wishes of his father, with whom he has more in common than he admits. In his wife's home country, in which colonial system is breaking down, Willie is also an outsider. After eighteen years he decides to leave her, and find his true identity. He has lived half a life, a shadow life, but Naipaul doesn't tell will happen to him. Willie's existential search continues and the rest of his story is left open.

- The Middle Passage, 1962
- Mr Stone And The Knight's Companion, 1963
- An Area Of Darkness, 1964
- A Flag On The Island, 1967
- The Mimic Men, 1967 - Vallan Hinta (Suom. Paavo Lehtonen)
- The Loss Of Eldorado, 1969
- In A Free State, 1971 - Vapaassa Maassa (Suom. Sakari Ahlbäck)
- The Overcrowded Barracoon And Other Articles, 1972
- Guerillas, 1975 - Gerillat (Suom. Seppo Lopenen)
- India: A Wounded Civilization, 1977
- A Bend In The River, 1979 - Joki Tekee Mutkan (Suom. Seppo Lopenen)
- A Congo Diary, 1980
- The Return Of Eva Perón, 1980
- Among The Believers: An Islamic Journey, 1981 - Matka Islamin Maailmaan (Suom. Raija Mattila)
- Finding The Centre, 1984
- The Enigma Of Arrival, 1987 - Saapumisen Arvoitus (Suom. Erkki Haglund)
- A Turn In The South, 1989
- India: A Million Mutinies Now, 1990
- Homeless By Choice, 1992 (With R. Jhabvala And S. Rushdie)
- Bombay, 1994 (With Raghbir Singh)
- A Way In The World, 1994
- Beyond Belief, 1998 - Islamin Äärillä (Suom. Arto Häilä)
- Between Father And Son: Family Letters, Edited By Gillon Aitken, 1999
- Half A Life, 2001 - Elämän Kuva (Suom. Juhani Lindholm)

- The Writer And The World, 2002
- Magic Seeds, 2004 - Lumotut Siemenet (Suom. Juhani Lindholm)

A HOUSE FOR Mr. BISWAS:

A House for Mr. Biswas portrays the story of a poor journalist turned civil servant in Port of Spain, Trinidad, in the years before and after World War II. Mr. Biswas was born into an Indian family whose father worked in the sugar cane estates, Mr. Biswas, as he is called by the author from infancy on, becomes a sign painter, and at the age of sixteen, is tricked into marrying Shama, the daughter of the large and powerful Tulsi family.

From one room in the Tulsi House, he moves into a home he is building in "the chase", an area near the fields where he becomes an overseer. But Mr. Biswas does not have enough money to complete the house. He loses his mind temporarily, and moves back with the Tulsis. Shama is now expecting their fourth child.

When his madness abates, Mr. Biswas decides to move into the city of Port of Spain, and gets a job with a newspaper, "The Sentinel" as a sign painter again. From this position, he is promoted to a journalist. Because of a series of stories

he writes about the "Deserving Destitute", he secures a position in the civil service as a Community Outreach person, complete with a company car but his mother-in-law persuades him to move with the family into a palatial estate she buys in Shorhills, an hour from the city.

From one room here, he moves back into Port of Spain where he buys a two storey home that is falling to pieces. Mr. Biswas's life, always begun, in his abortive attempts to write, "At the age of thirty-three, when he was already the father of four children, never allowed him to complete a short story, or live in a well build house. But the indifferent attitude with which he endures his adventures allows him to transcend the indignities he suffers.

Please read the novel to understand the various issues addressed by Naipaul. In case you would like to look through a study guide you could go through the following website: http://wg.glencoe.com/sec/writerschoice/litlibrary/pdf/house_f_or_biswas.pdf

COMPREHENSION:

Discuss A House for Mr. Biswas as a postcolonial text.

Delineate the portrayal of Mr. Biswas as a tragic character.

Write a note on the Tulsi Family.

Explain how the father-son and mother-daughter are contrasted in the novel.

Examine A House for Mr. Biswas as a tragic-comedy.

Explain the significance of the title of the novel and also discuss the symbolism of the house.

Parts of the Nobel Prize lecture are given herewith to make you understand the literary growth of V.S. Naipaul. If you want to read the complete lecture go to the website indicated below.

Two Worlds:

...Proust has written with great penetration of the difference between the writer as writer and the writer as a social being. You will find his thoughts in some of his essays in *Against Sainte-Beuve*, a book reconstituted from his early papers.

...Those words of Proust should be with us whenever we are reading the biography of a writer - or the biography of anyone who depends on what can be called inspiration. All the details of the life and the quirks and the friendships can be laid out for us, but the mystery of the writing will remain. No amount of documentation, however fascinating, can take us there. The biography of a writer – or even the autobiography – will always have this incompleteness.

...Each book, intuitively sensed and, in the case of fiction, intuitively worked out, stands on what has gone before, and grows out of it. I feel that at any stage

of my literary career it could have been said that the last book contained all the others.

It's been like this because of my background. My background is at once exceedingly simple and exceedingly confused. I was born in Trinidad. It is a small island in the mouth of the great Orinoco river of Venezuela. So Trinidad is not strictly of South America, and not strictly of the Caribbean. It was developed as a New World plantation colony, and when I was born in 1932 it had a population of about 400,000. Of this, about 150,000 were Indians, Hindus and Muslims, nearly all of peasant origin, and nearly all from the Gangetic plain.

This was my very small community. The bulk of this migration from India occurred after 1880. The deal was like this. People indentured themselves for five years to serve on the estates. At the end of this time they were given a small piece of land, perhaps five acres, or a passage back to India. In 1917, because of agitation by Gandhi and others, the indenture system was abolished. And perhaps because of this, or for some other reason, the pledge of land or repatriation was dishonored for many of the later arrivals. These people were absolutely destitute. They slept in the streets of Port of Spain, the capital. When I was a child I saw them. I suppose I didn't know they were destitute – I suppose

that idea came much later – and they made no impression on me. This was part of the cruelty of the plantation colony.

I was born in a small country town called Chaguanas, two or three miles inland from the Gulf of Paria. Chaguanas was a strange name, in spelling and pronunciation, and many of the Indian people – they were in the majority in the area – preferred to call it by the Indian caste name of Chauhan.

I was thirty-four when I found out about the name of my birthplace. I was living in London, had been living in England for sixteen years. I was writing my ninth book. This was a history of Trinidad, a human history, trying to re-create people and their stories. I used to go to the British Museum to read the Spanish documents about the region. These documents - recovered from the Spanish archives - were copied out for the British government in the 1890s at the time of a nasty boundary dispute with Venezuela. The documents begin in 1530 and end with the disappearance of the Spanish Empire.

....

We lived on the Chaguanes' land. Every day in term time - I was just beginning to go to school – I walked from my grandmother's house – past the two or three main-road stores, the Chinese parlor, the Jubilee Theatre, and the high-smelling

little Portuguese factory that made cheap blue soap and cheap yellow soap in long bars that were put out to dry and harden in the mornings – every day I walked past these eternal-seeming things – to the Chaguanas Government School. Beyond the school were sugar-cane, estate land, and going up to the Gulf of Paria. The people who had been dispossessed would have had their own kind of agriculture, their own calendar, their own codes, their own sacred sites. They would have understood the Orinoco-fed currents in the Gulf of Paria. Now all their skills and everything else about them had been obliterated.

The world is always in movement. People have everywhere at some time been dispossessed. I suppose I was shocked by this discovery in 1967 about my birthplace because I had never had any idea about it. But that was the way most of us lived in the agricultural colony, blindly. There was no plot by the authorities to keep us in our darkness. I think it was more simply that the knowledge wasn't there. The kind of knowledge about the Chaguanes would not have been considered important, and it would not have been easy to recover. They were a small tribe, and they were aboriginal. Such people - on the mainland, in what was called B.G., British Guiana – were known to us, and were a kind of joke. People who were loud and ill-behaved were known, to all groups in Trinidad, I think, as warrahoons. I used to think it was a made-up word, made up to suggest wildness. It was only when I began to travel in Venezuela, in my

forties that I understood that a word like that was the name of a rather large aboriginal tribe there.

There was a vague story when I was a child - and to me now it is an unbearably affecting story - that at certain times aboriginal people came across in canoes from the mainland, walked through the forest in the south of the island, and at a certain spot picked some kind of fruit or made some kind of offering, and then went back across the Gulf of Paria to the sodden estuary of the Orinoco. The rite must have been of enormous importance to have survived the upheavals of four hundred years, and the extinction of the aborigines in Trinidad. Or perhaps - though Trinidad and Venezuela have a common flora - they had come only to pick a particular kind of fruit. I don't know. I can't remember anyone inquiring. And now the memory is all lost; and that sacred site, if it existed, has become common ground.

What was past was past. I suppose that was the general attitude. And we Indians, immigrants from India, had that attitude to the island. We lived for the most part ritualized lives, and were not yet capable of self-assessment, which is where learning begins. Half of us on this land of the Chaguanes were pretending - perhaps not pretending, perhaps only feeling, never formulating it as an idea -

that we had brought a kind of India with us, which we could, as it were, unroll like a carpet on the flat land.

My grandmother's house in Chaguanas was in two parts. The front part, of bricks and plaster, was painted white. It was like a kind of Indian house, with a grand balustrade terrace on the upper floor, and a prayer-room on the floor above that. It was ambitious in its decorative detail, with lotus capitals on pillars, and sculptures of Hindu deities, all done by people working only from a memory of things in India. In Trinidad it was an architectural oddity. At the back of this house, and joined to it by an upper bridge room, was a timber building in the French Caribbean style. The entrance gate was at the side, between the two houses. It was a tall gate of corrugated iron on a wooden frame. It made for a fierce kind of privacy.

So as a child I had this sense of two worlds, the world outside that tall corrugated-iron gate, and the world at home - or, at any rate, the world of my grandmother's house. It was a remnant of our caste sense, the thing that excluded and shut out. In Trinidad, where as new arrivals we were a disadvantaged community, that excluding idea was a kind of protection; it enabled us – for the time being, and only for the time being – to live in our own way and according to our own rules, to live in our own fading India. It made for an extraordinary

self-centeredness. We looked inwards; we lived out our days; the world outside existed in a kind of darkness; we inquired about nothing.

There was a Muslim shop next door. The little loggia of my grandmother's shop ended against his blank wall. The man's name was Mian. That was all that we knew of him and his family. I suppose we must have seen him, but I have no mental picture of him now. We knew nothing of Muslims. This idea of strangeness, of the thing to be kept outside, extended even to other Hindus. For example, we ate rice in the middle of the day, and wheat in the evenings. There were some extraordinary people who reversed this natural order and ate rice in the evenings. I thought of these people as strangers – you must imagine me at this time as under seven, because when I was seven all this life of my grandmother's house in Chaguanas came to an end for me. We moved to the capital, and then to the hills to the northwest.

But the habits of mind engendered by this shut-in and shutting-out life lingered for quite a while. If it were not for the short stories my father wrote I would have known almost nothing about the general life of our Indian community. Those stories gave me more than knowledge. They gave me a kind of solidity. They gave me something to stand on in the world. I cannot imagine what my mental picture would have been without those stories.

The world outside existed in a kind of darkness; and we inquired about nothing. I was just old enough to have some idea of the Indian epics, the Ramayana in particular. The children who came five years or so after me in our extended family didn't have this luck. No one taught us Hindi. Sometimes someone wrote out the alphabet for us to learn, and that was that; we were expected to do the rest ourselves. So, as English penetrated, we began to lose our language. My grandmother's house was full of religion; there were many ceremonies and readings, some of which went on for days. But no one explained or translated for us who could no longer follow the language. So our ancestral faith receded, became mysterious, not pertinent to our day-to-day life.

We made no inquiries about India or about the families people had left behind. When our ways of thinking had changed, and we wished to know, it was too late. I know nothing of the people on my father's side; I know only that some of them came from Nepal. Two years ago a kind Nepalese who liked my name sent me a copy of some pages from an 1872 gazetteer-like British work about India, Hindu Castes and Tribes as Represented in Benares; the pages listed - among a multitude of names - those groups of Nepalese in the holy city of Banaras who carried the name Naipal. That is all that I have.

Away from this world of my grandmother's house, where we ate rice in the middle of the day and wheat in the evenings, there was the great unknown - in this island of only 400,000 people. There were the African or African-derived people who were the majority. They were policemen; they were teachers. One of them was my very first teacher at the Chaguanas Government School; I remembered her with adoration for years. There was the capital, where very soon we would all have to go for education and jobs, and where we would settle permanently, among strangers. There were the white people, not all of them English; and the Portuguese and the Chinese, at one time also immigrants like us. And, more mysterious than these, were the people we called Spanish, 'pagnols, mixed people of warm brown complexions who came from the Spanish time, before the island was detached from Venezuela and the Spanish Empire – a kind of history absolutely beyond my child's comprehension.

In Trinidad, bright boy though I was, I was surrounded by areas of darkness. School elucidated nothing for me. I was crammed with facts and formulas. Everything had to be learned by heart; everything was abstract for me. Again, I do not believe there was a plan or plot to make our courses like that. What we were getting was standard school learning. In another setting it would have made sense. And at least some of the failing would have lain in me. With my limited social background it was hard for me imaginatively to enter into other

societies or societies that were far away. I loved the idea of books, but I found it hard to read them. I got on best with things like Andersen and Aesop, timeless, placeless, not excluding. And when at last in the sixth form, the highest form in the college, I got to like some of our literature texts - Moliere, Cyrano de Bergerac - I suppose it was because they had the quality of the fairytale.

When I became a writer those areas of darkness around me as a child became my subjects. The land; the aborigines; the New World; the colony; the history; India; the Muslim world, to which I also felt myself related; Africa; and then England, where I was doing my writing. That was what I meant when I said that my books stand one on the other, and that I am the sum of my books. That was what I meant when I said that my background, the source and prompting of my work, was at once exceedingly simple and exceedingly complicated. You will have seen how simple it was in the country town of Chaguanas. And I think you will understand how complicated it was for me as a writer. Especially in the beginning, when the literary models I had – the models given me by what I can only call my false learning – dealt with entirely different societies. But perhaps you might feel that the material was so rich it would have been no trouble at all to get started and to go on. What I have said about the background, however, comes from the knowledge I acquired with my writing. And you must believe me when I tell you that the pattern in my work has only become clear in the last

two months or so. Passages from old books were read to me, and I saw the connections. Until then the greatest trouble for me was to describe my writing to people, to say what I had done.

I said I was an intuitive writer. That was so, and that remains so now, when I am nearly at the end. I never had a plan. I followed no system. I worked intuitively. My aim every time was do a book, to create something that would be easy and interesting to read. At every stage I could only work within my knowledge and sensibility and talent and world-view. Those things developed book by book. And I had to do the books I did because there were no books about those subjects to give me what I wanted. I had to clear up my world, elucidate it, for myself.

I had to go to the documents in the British Museum and elsewhere, to get the true feel of the history of the colony. I had to travel to India because there was no one to tell me what the India my grandparents had come from was like. There was the writing of Nehru and Gandhi; and strangely it was Gandhi, with his South African experience, who gave me more, but not enough. There was Kipling; there were British-Indian writers like John Masters (going very strong in the 1950s, with an announced plan, later abandoned, I fear, for thirty-five connected novels about British India); there were romances by women writers.

The few Indian writers who had come up at that time were middle-class people, town-dwellers; they didn't know the India we had come from.

...

When I began I had no idea of the way ahead. I wished only to do a book. I was trying to write in England, where I stayed on after my years at the university, and it seemed to me that my experience was very thin, was not truly of the stuff of books. I could find in no book anything that came near my background. The young French or English person who wished to write would have found any number of models to set him on his way. I had none. My father's stories about our Indian community belonged to the past. My world was quite different. It was more urban, more mixed. The simple physical details of the chaotic life of our extended family – sleeping rooms or sleeping spaces, eating times, the sheer number of people – seemed impossible to handle. There was too much to be explained, both about my home life and about the world outside. And at the same time there was also too much about us - like our own ancestry and history - that I didn't know.

At last one day there came to me the idea of starting with the Port of Spain street to which we had moved from Chaguanas. There was no big corrugated-iron gate shutting out the world there. The life of the street was open to me. It was an intense pleasure for me to observe it from the verandah. This street life was what

I began to write about. I wished to write fast, to avoid too much self-questioning, and so I simplified. I suppressed the child-narrator's background. I ignored the racial and social complexities of the street. I explained nothing. I stayed at ground level, so to speak. I presented people only as they appeared on the street. I wrote a story a day. The first stories were very short. I was worried about the material lasting long enough. But then the writing did its magic. The material began to present itself to me from many sources. The stories became longer; they couldn't be written in a day. And then the inspiration, which at one stage had seemed very easy, rolling me along, came to an end. But a book had been written, and I had in my own mind become a writer.

The distance between the writer and his material grew with the two later books; the vision was wider. And then intuition led me to a large book about our family life. During this book my writing ambition grew. But when it was over I felt I had done all that I could do with my island material. No matter how much I meditated on it, no further fiction would come.

Accident, then, rescued me. I became a traveler. I travelled in the Caribbean region and understood much more about the colonial set-up of which I had been part. I went to India, my ancestral land, for a year; it was a journey that broke my life in two. The books that I wrote about these two journeys took me to new

realms of emotion, gave me a world-view I had never had, extended me technically. I was able in the fiction that then came to me to take in England as well as the Caribbean - and how hard that was to do. I was able also to take in all the racial groups of the island, which I had never before been able to do.

This new fiction was about colonial shame and fantasy, a book, in fact, about how the powerless lie about themselves, and lies to them, since it is their only resource. The book was called *The Mimic Men*. And it was not about mimics. It was about colonial men mimicking the condition of manhood, men who had grown to distrust everything about themselves. Some pages of this book were read to me the other day - I hadn't looked at it for more than thirty years - and it occurred to me that I had been writing about colonial schizophrenia. But I hadn't thought of it like that. I had never used abstract words to describe any writing purpose of mine. If I had, I would never have been able to do the book. The book was done intuitively, and only out of close observation.

I have done this little survey of the early part of my career to try to show the stages by which, in just ten years, my birthplace had altered or developed in my writing: from the comedy of street life to a study of a kind of widespread schizophrenia. What was simple had become complicated.

Both fiction and the travel-book form have given me my way of looking; and you will understand why for me all literary forms are equally valuable. It came

to me, for instance, when I set out to write my third book about India – twenty-six years after the first – that what was most important about a travel book were the people the writer travelled among. The people had to define themselves. A simple enough idea, but it required a new kind of book; it called for a new way of traveling. And it was the very method I used later when I went, for the second time, into the Muslim world.

I will end as I began, with one of the marvelous little essays of Proust in *Against Sainte-Beuve*. "The beautiful things we shall write if we have talent," Proust says, "are inside us, indistinct, like the memory of a melody which delights us though we are unable to recapture its outline. Those who are obsessed by this blurred memory of truths they have never known are the men who are gifted... Talent is like a sort of memory which will enable them finally to bring this indistinct music closer to them, to hear it clearly, to note it down ..."

Talent, Proust says. I would say luck, and much labor.

From :

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2001/naipaul-lecture-e.html

UNIT 4

LESSON 4: DEREK WALCOTT: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

OUTLINE:

- **Derek Walcott: Life and Works**
- **Analysis of ‘Ruins of a Great House’**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Know the background to the poet, Derek Walcott.**
- **Comprehend thematically the poem, ‘Ruins of a Great House’.**

Derek Walcott: Life and Works: (1930-)

Derek Alton Walcott was born in Casties, St. Lucia, West Indies, on January 23, 1930. The son of a civil servant and a teacher, he was of mixed African, Dutch, and English heritage. He received a B.A. from St. Mary's College, St. Lucia, in 1953 and attended the University of the West Indies at Kingston, Jamaica. A Rockefeller fellowship brought him to the United States in 1957; he studied under the American stage director Jose Quintero, returned to the islands in 1959 to found the Trinidad Theatre Workshop. He taught in St. Lucia, Grenada, and Jamaica and at many American universities: Boston, Columbia, Harvard, Rutgers, and Yale.

Walcott was married to dancer Norline Metivier and had three children by previous marriages. Unlike fellow West Indian writer V. S. Naipaul, he kept a home in Trinidad and was a familiar and revered figure in his homeland. Walcott received a five-year "genius" grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in 1981. Central to both Walcott's drama and his poetry is an exhilarating tension between two disparate cultural traditions, the Caribbean and the European. Sometimes the two idioms jostle uncomfortably; yet upon occasion they combine with stunning effect to form a brilliant synthesis.

Walcott observed: "My society loves rhetoric, performance, panache, melodrama, carnival, dressing up, playing roles. Thank God I was born in it..." In his dramatic works, this vivacious island culture, with its historical roots and its political subtexts, takes precedence. Henri Christophe: A Chronicle (1950), his first play, explores the popular story of a 19th-century slave who became king of Haiti. Another early play, The Sea at Dauphin (1953), experiments with French/English island patois, transforming it into a powerful poetic tool. Dream on Monkey Mountain (Obie Award winner, 1971) illustrates the way the dreams of a poor charcoal vendor, however flawed and quixotic, help preserve tribal memories within the sterile colonial world. O, Babylon (1974) employs interludes of dance, along with a contemporary score by Galt McDermott, to

recount events in a small Rastafarian community during the 1966 visit of Haile Selassie.

In all these dramas, Walcott struggled to be true to his roots without sacrificing literary virtuosity. (www.wikipedia.com)

PARAPHRASE OF 'RUINS OF A GREAT HOUSE' (1956):

*though our longest sun sets at right declensions and
makes but winter arches, it cannot be long before we
lie down in darkness, and have our light in ashes . . .*

--Browne, *Urn Burial*

Stones only, the *disjecta membra* of this Great House,
Whose moth-like girls are mixed with candle dust,
They remain to file the lizard's dragonish claws.
and the mouths of those gate cherubs shriek with stain;
Axle and coach wheel is silted under the muck
Of cattle droppings.

Three crows flap for the trees
And settle, creaking the eucalyptus boughs.
A smell of dead limes quickens in the nose
The leprosy of empire.

"Farewell, green fields,"
"Farewell, ye happy groves!"

Marble like Greece, like Faulkner's South in stone,
Deciduous beauty prospered and is gone,
A spade below dead leaves will ring the bone
Of some dead animal, or human thing
Fallen from evil days, from evil times.

It seems that the original crops were limes
Grown in the silt that clogs the river's skirt;
The rakes are gone, their bright girls gone,
The river flows, obliterating hurt.

I climbed a wall with the grille ironwork
of exiled craftsmen protecting that great house
and when a wind shook in the limes I heard
What Kipling heard the death of a great empire, the abuse
of ignorance by Bible and by sword.

A green lawn, broken by low walls of stone,
Dipped to the rivulet, and pacing, I thought next
Of men like Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, Drake,
Ancestral murderers and poets, more perplexed
In memory now by every ulcerous crime.
The rot remains with us, the men are gone.
But, as dead ash is lifted in a wind
That fans the blackening ember of the mind,
My eyes burned from the ashen prose of Donne.

Ablaze with rage I thought,
Some slave is rotting in this manorial lake,
But still the coal of my compassion fought
That white too was once
A colony like ours, "Part of the continent, piece of the main,"

Nook-shotten, rook o'erblown, deranged
By foaming channels and the vain expense
Of bitter faction.

All in compassion ends
Differently from what the heart thinks:
"as well as if a manor of thy friend's . . ."

COMMENTARY:

His poem begins with a statement from Browne's *Urn Burial*. The beginning of the poem indicates that when the longest sun sets and winter begins when the light is down. The word 'declensions' here mean the angular distance of the sun north of the equator. This poem is about the ruins of a house. In the poem this aspect gains extra meaning in the sense of the destroyed land. The land is considered to be ruined by the colonizer. The poet makes use of various names from the English such as Blake, Horace, Kipling, etc to indicate the idea of a colonizer.

SUMMARY:

Stanza one of the poem is about the Great House that has become stones only. The poet refers to them as *disjecta membra* meaning scattered fragments. The phrase is picked from Horace. The stones speak of the individuals of the land who are destroyed and ruined. The various references to reptiles and animals such as lizard, dragon claws are used to indicate the ancient heritage of the land which remains unrecognized due to the white domination. The poet further adds in the next stanza the approach of the three crows which sit on the Eucalyptus boughs and one can smell the leprosy of the Empire. The poet in a way seems to parody the three wise men who carried prophecies into the three crows and the word eucalyptus also indicates the notion of imperialism. The poet unhappily bids farewell to the land and the green fields.

The poet then goes on to refer to the land that shines marble like and is like Faulkner's south. The reference to Faulkner is to the American novelist who was known as a regional writer. Here the digging indicates maybe the existence of dead bones which maybe that of an animal or human. By these references the poet indicates how the human and animal are not distinguished. Today in this land what originally could be distinguished as original crops in a row are no longer present and what one sees is the loss of the land and also the young girls. The only thing alive is the river flowing removing in a way the hurt and pain.

The poet tells us about his attempt to climb on the wall and see the house and notices that as Kipling the English poet had mentioned the death of a great empire. He also states very powerfully the feeling of domination by the phrase, “Of ignorance by Bible and by sword”. He sees a green lawn which is broken by low walls of stone and dipped not the rivulet. Seeing this the poet thinks of English statesman and soldiers such as Hawkins, Drake, Walter Raleigh and links the names to the idea of ancestral murderers and poets. He states that the rot remains even though the men have gone away. He is at this stage revived by the sparks from the ashes of Donne’s prose and poems.

The poet further more describes his rage as he thinks of the slaves languishing in the manorial lake of the house he sees and still he feels compassion for Britain which was also at one time just a colony like theirs. He quotes a line from Donne at this point: ‘Part of the continent, piece of the main’. The line, ‘Nook-shotten, rook o’er blown, deranged...’ is a reference to the exhausted corner of the universe. The land is now filled with bitterness and factions.

He ends the poem with a line from Donne stating that what the heart felt cannot any longer be true. Earlier he had mentioned one more statement of Donne that no man is an island. Thus he concludes the poem on a note of compromise and

indicates to some extent a interlinking of cultures and possibly some level of compromise on the part of the natives in any land.

Now read the poem in full in the Arnold anthology and then answer the questions below:

COMPREHENSION:

Who is the speaker in the poem?

What is the central idea of the poem?

What is the significance of the title of the poem?

Why does the poem use names such as Kipling, etc.

How does the poem depict the bitterness of the Caribbean people?

Explain the ending of the poem.

Why does the poet use the words of Donne?

Write a critical appreciation of Derek Walcott's poem.

In case you are interested in reading part of Walcott's noble lecture is included here. This is only an extract. If you want the complete one then please visit the website mentioned at the end. This lecture is indicative of many of the feelings expressed in the poem you have just read.

NOBEL LECTURE:

The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory

Felicity is a village in Trinidad on the edge of the Caroni plain, the wide central plain that still grows sugar and to which indentured cane cutters were brought after emancipation, so the small population of Felicity is East Indian, and on the afternoon that I visited it with friends from America, all the faces along its road were Indian, which, as I hope to show, was a moving, beautiful thing, because this Saturday afternoon Ramleela, the epic dramatization of the Hindu epic the Ramayana, was going to be performed, and the costumed actors from the village were assembling on a field strung with different-coloured flags, like a new gas station, and beautiful Indian boys in red and black were aiming arrows haphazardly into the afternoon light. Low Blue Mountains on the horizon, bright grass, clouds that would gather color before the light went. Felicity! What a gentle Anglo-Saxon name for an epic memory.

Under an open shed on the edge of the field, there were two huge armatures of bamboo that looked like immense cages. They were parts of the body of a god, his calves or thighs, which, fitted and reared, would make a gigantic effigy. This effigy would be burnt as a conclusion to the epic. The cane structures flashed a predictable parallel: Shelley's sonnet on the fallen statue of Ozymandias and his empire, that "colossal wreck" in its empty desert.

Drummers had lit a fire in the shed and they eased the skins of their tables nearer the flames to tighten them. The saffron flames, the bright grass, and the hand-woven armatures of the fragmented god who would be burnt were not in any desert where imperial power had finally toppled but were part of a ritual, evergreen season that, like the cane-burning harvest, is annually repeated, the point of such sacrifice being its repetition, the point of the destruction being renewal through fire.

Deities were entering the field. What we generally call "Indian music" was blaring from the open platformed shed from which the epic would be narrated. Costumed actors were arriving. Princes and gods, I supposed. What an unfortunate confession! "Gods, I suppose" is the shrug that embodies our African and Asian diasporas. I had often thought of but never seen Ramleela, and had never seen this theatre, an open field, with village children as warriors, princes, and gods. I had no idea what the epic story was, who its hero was, what enemies he fought, yet I had recently adapted the *Odyssey* for a theatre in England, presuming that the audience knew the trials of Odysseus, hero of another Asia Minor epic, while nobody in Trinidad knew any more than I did about Rama, Kali, Shiva, Vishnu, apart from the Indians, a phrase I use pervertedly because that is the kind of remark you can still hear in Trinidad:

"apart from the Indians".

It was as if, on the edge of the Central Plain, there was another plateau, a raft on which the Ramayana would be poorly performed in this ocean of cane, but that was my writer's view of things, and it is wrong. I was seeing the Ramleela at Felicity as theatre when it was faith.

Multiply that moment of self-conviction when an actor, made-up and costumed, nods to his mirror before stopping on stage in the belief that he is a reality entering an illusion and you would have what I presumed was happening to the actors of this epic. But they were not actors. They had been chosen; or they themselves had chosen their roles in this sacred story that would go on for nine afternoons over a two-hour period till the sun set. They were not amateurs but believers. There was no theatrical term to define them. They did not have to psych themselves up to play their roles. Their acting would probably be as buoyant and as natural as those bamboo arrows crisscrossing the afternoon pasture. They believed in what they were playing, in the sacredness of the text, the validity of India, while I, out of the writer's habit, searched for some sense of elegy, of loss, even of degenerative mimicry in the happy faces of the boy-warriors or the heraldic profiles of the village princes. I was polluting the afternoon with doubt and with the patronage of admiration. I misread the event

through a visual echo of History - the cane fields, indenture, the evocation of vanished armies, temples, and trumpeting elephants - when all around me there was quite the opposite: elation, delight in the boys' screams, in the sweets-stalls, in more and more costumed characters appearing; a delight of conviction, not loss. The name Felicity made sense.

Consider the scale of Asia reduced to these fragments: the small white exclamations of minarets or the stone balls of temples in the cane fields, and one can understand the self-mockery and embarrassment of those who see these rites as parodic, even degenerate. These purists look on such ceremonies as grammarians look at a dialect, as cities look on provinces and empires on their colonies. Memory that yearns to join the centre, a limb remembering the body from which it has been severed, like those bamboo thighs of the god. In other words, the way that the Caribbean is still looked at, illegitimate, rootless, mongrelized. "No people there", to quote Freud, "in the true sense of the word". No people. Fragments and echoes of real people, unoriginal and broken.

...Visual surprise is natural in the Caribbean; it comes with the landscape, and faced with its beauty, the sigh of History dissolves. We make too much of that long groan which underlines the past. I felt privileged to discover the ibises as well as the scarlet archers of Felicity.

The sigh of History rises over ruins, not over landscapes, and in the Antilles there are few ruins to sigh over, apart from the ruins of sugar estates and abandoned forts. Looking around slowly, as a camera would, taking in the low blue hills over Port of Spain, the village road and houses, the warrior-archers, the god-actors and their handlers, and music already on the sound track, I wanted to make a film that would be a long-drawn sigh over Felicity. I was filtering the afternoon with evocations of a lost India, but why "evocations"? Why not "celebrations of a real presence"? Why should India be "lost" when none of these villagers ever really knew it, and why not "continuing", why not the perpetuation of joy in Felicity and in all the other nouns of the Central Plain: Couva, Chaguanas, Charley Village? Why was I not letting my pleasure open its windows wide? I was enticed like any Trinidadian to the ecstasies of their claim, because ecstasy was the pitch of the sinuous drumming in the loudspeakers. I was entitled to the feast of Husein, to the mirrors and crepe-paper temples of the Muslim epic, to the Chinese Dragon Dance, to the rites of that Sephardic Jewish synagogue that was once on Something Street. I am only one-eighth the writer I might have been had I contained all the fragmented languages of Trinidad.

... Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the

original continent.

And this is the exact process of the making of poetry, or what should be called not its "making" but its remaking, the fragmented memory, the armature that frames the god, even the rite that surrenders it to a final pyre; the god assembled cane by cane, reed by weaving reed, line by plaited line, as the artisans of Felicity would erect his holy echo.

Poetry, which is perfection's sweat but which must seem as fresh as the raindrops on a statue's brow, combines the natural and the marmoreal; it conjugates both tenses simultaneously: the past and the present, if the past is the sculpture and the present the beads of dew or rain on the forehead of the past. There is the buried language and there is the individual vocabulary, and the process of poetry is one of excavation and of self-discovery. Tonally the individual voice is a dialect; it shapes its own accent, its own vocabulary and melody in defiance of an imperial concept of language, the language of Ozymandias, libraries and dictionaries, law courts and critics, and churches, universities, political dogma, the diction of institutions. Poetry is an island that breaks away from the main. The dialects of my archipelago seem as fresh to me as those raindrops on the statue's forehead, not the sweat made from the classic

exertion of frowning marble, but the condensations of a refreshing element, rain and salt.

Deprived of their original language, the captured and indentured tribes create their own, accreting and secreting fragments of an old, an epic vocabulary, from Asia and from Africa, but to an ancestral, an ecstatic rhythm in the blood that cannot be subdued by slavery or indenture, while nouns are renamed and the given names of places accepted like Felicity village or Choiseul. The original language dissolves from the exhaustion of distance like fog trying to cross an ocean, but this process of renaming, of finding new metaphors, is the same process that the poet faces every morning of his working day, making his own tools like Crusoe, assembling nouns from necessity, from Felicity, even renaming himself. The stripped man is driven back to that self-astonishing, elemental force, his mind. That is the basis of the Antillean experience, this shipwreck of fragments, these echoes, these shards of a huge tribal vocabulary, these partially remembered customs, and they are not decayed but strong....

And here they are, all in a single Caribbean city, Port of Spain, the sum of history, Trollope's "non-people". A downtown babel of shop signs and streets, mongrelized, polyglot, ferment without a history, like heaven. Because that is what such a city is, in the New World, a writer's heaven. A culture, we all know,

is made by its cities.

Another first morning home, impatient for the sunrise - a broken sleep. Darkness at five, and the drapes not worth opening; then, in the sudden light, a cream-walled, brown-roofed police station bordered with short royal palms, in the colonial style, back of it frothing trees and taller palms, a pigeon fluttering into the cover of an cave, a rain-stained block of once-modern apartments, the morning side road into the station without traffic. All part of a surprising peace. ...So visitors to the Caribbean must feel that they are inhabiting a succession of postcards. Both climates are shaped by what we have read of them. For tourists, the sunshine cannot be serious. Winter adds depth and darkness to life as well as to literature, and in the unending summer of the tropics not even poverty or poetry (in the Antilles poverty is poetry with a V, *une vie*, a condition of life as well as of imagination) seems capable of being profound because the nature around it is so exultant, so resolutely ecstatic, like its music. A culture based on joy is bound to be shallow. Sadly, to sell itself, the Caribbean encourages the delights of mindlessness, of brilliant vacuity, as a place to flee not only winter but that seriousness that comes only out of culture with four seasons. So how can there be a people there, in the true sense of the word?

They know nothing about seasons in which leaves let go of the year, in which

spires fade in blizzards and streets whiten, of the erasures of whole cities by fog, of reflection in fireplaces; instead, they inhabit a geography whose rhythm, like their music, is limited to two stresses: hot and wet, sun and rain, light and shadow, day and night, the limitations of an incomplete metre, and are therefore a people incapable of the subtleties of contradiction, of imaginative complexity. So be it. We cannot change contempt.

Ours are not cities in the accepted sense, but no one wants them to be. They dictate their own proportions, their own definitions in particular places and in a prose equal to that of their detractors, so that now it is not just St. James but the streets and yards that Naipaul commemorates, its lanes as short and brilliant as his sentences; not just the noise and jostle of Tunapuna but the origins of C.L.R. James's *Beyond a Boundary*, not just Felicity village on the Caroni plain, but Selvon Country, and that is the way it goes up the islands now: the old Dominica of Jean Rhys still very much the way she wrote of it; and the Martinique of the early Césaire; Perse's Guadeloupe, even without the pith helmets and the mules; and what delight and privilege there was in watching a literature - one literature in several imperial languages, French, English, Spanish - bud and open island after island in the early morning of a culture, not timid, not derivative, any more than the hard white petals of the frangipani are derivative and timid. This is not a

belligerent boast but a simple celebration of inevitability: that this flowering had to come.

On a heat-stoned afternoon in Port of Spain, some alley white with glare, with love vine spilling over a fence, palms and a hazed mountain appear around a corner to the evocation of Vaughn or Herbert's "that shady city of palm-trees", or to the memory of a Hammond organ from a wooden chapel in Castries, where the congregation sang "Jerusalem, the Golden". It is hard for me to see such emptiness as desolation. It is that patience that is the width of Antillean life, and the secret is not to ask the wrong thing of it, not to demand of it an ambition it has no interest in. The traveler reads this as lethargy, as torpor.

Here there are not enough books, one says, no theatres, no museums, simply not enough to do. Yet, deprived of books, a man must fall back on thought, and out of thought, if he can learn to order it, will come the urge to record, and in extremity, if he has no means of recording, recitation, the ordering of memory which leads to metre, to commemoration. There can be virtues in deprivation, and certainly one virtue is salvation from a cascade of high mediocrity, since books are now not so much created as remade. Cities create a culture, and all we have are these magnified market towns, so what are the proportions of the ideal Caribbean city? A surrounding, accessible countryside with leafy suburbs, and if

the city is lucky, behind it, spacious plains. Behind it, fine mountains; before it, an indigo sea. Spires would pin its centre and around them would be leafy, shadowy parks. Pigeons would cross its sky in alphabetic patterns, carrying with them memories of a belief in augury, and at the heart of the city there would be horses, yes, horses, those animals last seen at the end of the nineteenth century drawing broughams and carriages with top-hatted citizens, horses that live in the present tense without elegiac echoes from their hooves, emerging from paddocks at the Queen's Park Savannah at sunrise, when mist is unthreading from the cool mountains above the roofs, and at the centre of the city seasonally there would be races, so that citizens could roar at the speed and grace of these nineteenth-century animals. Its docks not obscured by smoke or deafened by too. Much machinery, and above all, it would be so racially various that the cultures of the world - the Asiatic, the Mediterranean, the European, and the African - would be represented in it, its humane variety more exciting than Joyce's Dublin. Its citizens would intermarry as they chose, from instinct, not tradition, until their children find it increasingly futile to trace their genealogy. It would not have too many avenues difficult or dangerous for pedestrians, its mercantile area would be a cacophony of accents, fragments of the old language that would be silenced immediately at five o'clock, its docks resolutely vacant on Sundays.

This is Port of Spain to me, a city ideal in its commercial and human proportions, where a citizen is a walker and not a pedestrian.

The finest silhouettes of Port of Spain are idealizations of the craftsman's handiwork, not of concrete and glass, but of baroque woodwork, each fantasy looking more like an involved drawing of itself than the actual building. Behind the city is the Caroni plain, with its villages, Indian prayer flags, and fruit vendors' stalls along the highway over which ibises come like floating flags. Photogenic poverty! Postcard sadnesses! I am not re-creating Eden; I mean, by "the Antilles", the reality of light, of work, of survival. I mean a house on the side of a country road, I mean the Caribbean Sea, whose smell is the smell of refreshing possibility as well as survival. Survival is the triumph of stubbornness, and spiritual stubbornness, a sublime stupidity, is what makes the occupation of poetry endure, when there are so many things that should make it futile. Those things added together can go under one collective noun: "the world".

...These travelers carried with them the infection of their own malaise, and their prose reduced even the landscape to melancholia and self-contempt. Every endeavor is belittled as imitation, from architecture to music. There was this conviction in Froude that since History is based on achievement, and since the

history of the Antilles was so genetically corrupt, so depressing in its cycles of massacres, slavery, and indenture, a culture was inconceivable and nothing could ever be created in those ramshackle ports, those monotonously feudal sugar estates. Not only the light and salt of Antillean mountains defied this, but the demotic vigor and variety of their inhabitants. Stand close to a waterfall and you will stop hearing its roar. To be still in the nineteenth century, like horses, as Brodsky has written, may not be such a bad deal, and much of our life in the Antilles still seems to be in the rhythm of the last century, like the West Indian novel.

By writers even as refreshing as Graham Greene, the Caribbean is looked at with elegiac pathos, a prolonged sadness to which Levi-Strauss has supplied an epigraph: *Tristes Tropiques*. Their tristesse derives from an attitude to the Caribbean dusk, to rain, to uncontrollable vegetation, to the provincial ambition of Caribbean cities where brutal replicas of modern architecture dwarf the small houses and streets. ...

These writers describe the ambitions of our unfinished cities, their unrealized, homiletic conclusion, but the Caribbean city may conclude just at that point where it is satisfied with its own scale, just as Caribbean culture is not evolving but already shaped. Its proportions are not to be measured by the traveler or the

exile, but by its own citizenry and architecture. To be told you are not yet a city or a culture requires this response. I am not your city or your culture. There might be less of *Tristes Tropiques* after that.

Here, on the raft of this dais, there is the sound of the applauding surf: our landscape, our history recognized, "at last". *At Last* is one of the first Caribbean books. It was written by the Victorian traveler Charles Kingsley. It is one of the early books to admit the Antillean landscape and its figures into English literature. I have never read it but gather that its tone is benign. The Antillean archipelago was there to be written about, not to write itself, by Trollope, by Patrick Leigh-Fermor, in the very tone in which I almost wrote about the village spectacle at Felicity, as a compassionate and beguiled outsider, distancing myself from Felicity village even while I was enjoying it. What is hidden cannot be loved. The traveler cannot love, since love is stasis and travel is motion. If he returns to what he loved in a landscape and stays there, he is no longer a traveler but in stasis and concentration, the lover of that particular part of earth, a native. So many people say they "love the Caribbean", meaning that someday they plan to return for a visit but could never live there, the usual benign insult of the traveler, the tourist. These travelers, at their kindest, were devoted to the same patronage, the islands passing in profile, their vegetal luxury, their backwardness and poverty. Victorian prose dignified them. They passed by in

beautiful profiles and were forgotten, like a vacation.

Alexis Saint-Leger Leger, whose writer's name is Saint-John Perse, was the first Antillean to win this prize for poetry. He was born in Guadeloupe and wrote in French, but before him, there was nothing as fresh and clear in feeling as those poems of his childhood, that of a privileged white child on an Antillean plantation, *Pour Feter une Enfance*, *Eloges*, and later *Images a Crusoe*

....The fragrant and privileged poetry that Perse composed to celebrate his white childhood and the recorded Indian music behind the brown young archers of Felicity, with the same cabbage palms against the same Antillean sky, pierce me equally. I feel the same poignancy of pride in the poems as in the faces. Why, given the history of the Antilles, should this be remarkable? The history of the world, by which of course we mean Europe, is a record of intertribal lacerations, of ethnic cleansings. At last, islands not written about but writing themselves! The palms and the Muslim minarets are Antillean exclamations. At last! the royal palms of Guadeloupe recite *Éloges* by heart.

Later, in "Anabase", Perse assembled fragments of an imaginary epic, with the clicking teeth of frontier gates, barren wadis with the froth of poisonous lakes, horsemen burnoused in sandstorms, the opposite of cool Caribbean mornings,

yet not necessarily a contrast any more than some young brown archer at Felicity, hearing the sacred text blared across the flagged field, with its battles and elephants and monkey-gods, in a contrast to the white child in Guadeloupe assembling fragments of his own epic from the lances of the cane fields, the estate carts and oxens, and the calligraphy of bamboo leaves from the ancient languages, Hindi, Chinese, and Arabic, on the Antillean sky. From the Ramayana to Anabasis, from Guadeloupe to Trinidad, all that archaeology of fragments lying around, from the broken African kingdoms, from the crevasses of Canton, from Syria and Lebanon is vibrating not under the earth but in our raucous, demotic streets.

A boy with weak eyes skims a flat stone across the flat water of an Aegean inlet, and that ordinary action with the scything elbow contains the skipping lines of the Iliad and the Odyssey, and another child aims a bamboo arrow at a village festival, another hears the rustling march of cabbage palms in a Caribbean sunrise, and from that sound, with its fragments of tribal myth, the compact expedition of Perse's epic is launched, centuries and archipelagoes apart. For every poet it is always morning in the world. History a forgotten, insomniac night; History and elemental awe are always our early beginning, because the fate of poetry is to fall in love with the world, in spite of History.

There is a force of exultation, a celebration of luck, when a writer finds himself a witness to the early morning of a culture that is defining itself, branch by branch, leaf by leaf, in that self-defining dawn, which is why, especially at the edge of the sea, it is good to make a ritual of the sunrise. Then the noun, the "Antilles" ripples like brightening water, and the sounds of leaves, palm fronds, and birds are the sounds of a fresh dialect, the native tongue. The personal vocabulary, the individual melody whose metre is one's biography, joins in that sound, with any luck, and the body moves like a walking, a waking island.

This is the benediction that is celebrated, a fresh language and a fresh people, and this is the frightening duty owed. I stand here in their name, if not their image - but also in the name of the dialect they exchange like the leaves of the trees whose names are suppler, greener, more morning-stirred than English - laurier canelles, bois-flot, bois-canot - or the valleys the trees mention - Fond St. Jacques, Matoonya, Forestier, Roseau, Mahaut - or the empty beaches - L'Anse Ivrogne, Case en Bas, Paradis - all songs and histories in themselves, pronounced not in French - but in patois.

It is not that History is obliterated by this sunrise. It is there in Antillean geography, in the vegetation itself. The sea sighs with the drowned from the Middle Passage, the butchery of its aborigines, Carib and Aruac and Taino,

bleeds in the scarlet of the immortelle, and even the actions of surf on sand cannot erase the African memory, or the lances of cane as a green prison where indentured Asians, the ancestors of Felicity, are still serving time.

That is what I have read around me from boyhood, from the beginnings of poetry, the grace of effort. In the hard mahogany of woodcutters: faces, resinous men, charcoal burners; in a man with a cutlass cradled across his forearm, who stands on the verge with the usual anonymous khaki dog; in the extra clothes he put on this morning, when it was cold when he rose in the thinning dark to go and make his garden in the heights - the heights, the garden, being miles away from his house, but that is where he has his land - not to mention the fishermen, the footmen on trucks, groaning up mourns, all fragments of Africa originally but shaped and hardened and rooted now in the island's life, illiterate in the way leaves are illiterate; they do not read, they are there to be read, and if they are properly read, they create their own literature.

But in our tourist brochures the Caribbean is a blue pool into which the republic dangles the extended foot of Florida as inflated rubber islands bob and drinks with umbrellas float towards her on a raft. This is how the islands from the shame of necessity sell themselves; this is the seasonal erosion of their identity, that high-pitched repetition of the same images of service that cannot distinguish

one island from the other, with a future of polluted marinas, land deals negotiated by ministers, and all of this conducted to the music of Happy Hour and the rictus of a smile. What is the earthly paradise for our visitors? Two weeks without rain and a mahogany tan, and, at sunset, local troubadours in straw hats and floral shirts beating "Yellow Bird" and "Banana Boat Song" to death. There is a territory wider than this - wider than the limits made by the map of an island - which is the illimitable sea and what it remembers.

All of the Antilles, every island, is an effort of memory; every mind, every racial biography culminating in amnesia and fog. Pieces of sunlight through the fog and sudden rainbows, arcs-en-ciel. That is the effort, the labor of the Antillean imagination, rebuilding its gods from bamboo frames, phrase by phrase.

Before it is all gone, before only a few valleys are left, pockets of an older life, before development turns every artist into an anthropologist or folklorist, there are still cherishable places, little valleys that do not echo with ideas, simplicity of rebeginnings, not yet corrupted by the dangers of change. Not nostalgic sites but occluded sanctities as common and simple as their sunlight. A place as threatened by this prose as a headland is by the bulldozer or a sea almond grove by the surveyor's string, or from blight, the mountain laurel.

One last epiphany: A basic stone church in a thick valley outside Soufrière, the hills almost shoving the houses around into a brown river, a sunlight that looks oily on the leaves, a backward place, unimportant, and one now being corrupted into significance by this prose. The idea is not to hallow or invest the place with anything, not even memory. African children in Sunday frocks come down the ordinary concrete steps into the church, banana leaves hang and glisten, a truck is parked in a yard, and old women totter towards the entrance. Here is where a real fresco should be painted, one without importance, but one with real faith, mapless, Historyless.

How quickly it could all disappear! And how it is beginning to drive us further into where we hope are impenetrable places, green secrets at the end of bad roads, headlands where the next view is not of a hotel but of some long beach without a figure and the hanging question of some fisherman's smoke at its far end. The Caribbean is not an idyll, not to its natives. They draw their working strength from it organically, like trees, like the sea almond or the spice laurel of the heights. Its peasantry and its fishermen are not there to be loved or even photographed; they are trees who sweat, and whose bark is filmed with salt, but every day on some island, rootless trees in suits are signing favorable tax breaks with entrepreneurs, poisoning the sea almond and the spice laurel of the

mountains to their roots. A morning could come in which governments might ask what happened not merely to the forests and the bays but to a whole people.

They are here again, they recur, the faces, corruptible angels, smooth black skins and white eyes huge with an alarming joy, like those of the Asian children of Felicity at Ramleela; two different religions, two different continents, both filling the heart with the pain that is joy.

But what is joy without fear? The fear of selfishness that, here on this podium with the world paying attention not to them but to me, I should like to keep these simple joys inviolate, not because they are innocent, but because they are true. They are as true as when, in the grace of this gift, Perse heard the fragments of his own epic of Asia Minor in the rustling of cabbage palms, that inner Asia of the soul through which imagination wanders, if there is such a thing as imagination as opposed to the collective memory of our entire race, as true as the delight of that warrior-child who flew a bamboo arrow over the flags in the field at Felicity; and now as grateful a joy and a blessed fear as when a boy opened an exercise book and, within the discipline of its margins, framed stanzas that might contain the light of the hills on an island blest by obscurity, cherishing our insignificance.

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http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/walcott-lecture.html

UNIT 4

LESSON 5: JAMAICA KINCAID: HER LIFE AND WORKS

OUTLINE:

- **Jamaica Kincaid: Life and Works**
- **Analysis of A Small Place**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- **Get acquainted with the works of Jamaica Kincaid.**
- **Understand the themes and issues discussed in A Small Place.**

JAMICA KINCAID: (1949-)

Jamaica Kincaid was born on the island of Antigua in 1949. She was originally named as Elaine Potter Richardson. She lived with her stepfather, a carpenter, and her mother until 1965 when she was sent to Westchester, New York to work as an au pair. She completed her secondary education under the British system due to Antigua's status as a British colony until 1967. She went on to study photography at the New York School for Social Research after leaving the family for which she worked, and also attended Franconia College in New Hampshire for a year. Her first writing experience involved a series of articles for the Ingénue magazine.

As his family disapproved of her writing she changed her name to Jamaica Kincaid in 1973. Through her writing, she befriended George W.S. Trow, a writer for the New Yorker, who began writing "Talk of the Town" pieces about her. As a result of this limelight, Kincaid met the editor of the magazine, William Shawn, who offered her a job. Kincaid later married Shawn's son, Allen, a composer and Bennington College professor.

Most readers of Kincaid's work will notice the elements of rage in her works. In some it is directed at the British. Her rage also finds expression in *Lucy*, where it is directed toward herself, her mother and her island, and the people Lucy meets and lives with in the U.S. It reappears even more forcefully in Kincaid's most recent novel, *The Autobiography of My Mother*, published in 1995. This is a dark and bitter book about the losses and hatred caused by colonialism.

She now resides in Bennington Vermont with her husband and children.

Kincaid's status as an exile informs so much of her writing. It allows (or perhaps forces) her to maintain distance from both her past and her present, as she critically examines the suffocating smallness (and small-mindedness) of her native Antigua, then juxtaposes it against the ignorant opulence of North America. Her narrators too seem alienated from all those around them, seeking

both control over and freedom from these human connections known as relationships. But no discussion, no matter how brief, can be complete without mention of the central relationship in Kincaid's life--that with her mother. Kincaid's tight, lyrical prose guides the reader through her tortured recollections of her mother, as that relationship takes on the dual gravity of mother-daughter relationships that many readers can relate to as well as of the hegemonic interactions between mother country (here England) and daughter island (Antigua). Stacking these parallel visions on top of each other and infusing them with her own feelings of anger and suffocation, Kincaid draws the reader through the struggle for personal development not only of her narrators but of the writer herself.

Antigua became self-governing in 1967, but did not achieve the status of an independent nation within the Commonwealth until 1981. Within the structure of the British educational system imposed upon Antiguans, Kincaid grew to "detest everything about England, except the literature" (Vorda 79). She felt first-hand the negative effects of British colonialism as the colonists attempted to turn Antigua "into England" and the natives "into English" without regard for the native culture or homeland (Kincaid 24). The effects of colonialism serve as the major theme for A Small Place in which Kincaid expresses her anger both at the colonists and at the Antiguans for failing to fully achieve their independence.

She feels that Antiguan failed to adopt the positive aspects of colonialism, for instance a good educational system which might help the population to better their lives. This inability to promote the importance of education and hope for the future is symbolized in the failure to rebuild Antigua's only library, St. John's, which was "damaged in the earthquake of 1974" and years later, still carries the sign "REPAIRS ARE PENDING" (Kincaid 9).

Although Kincaid has faced heavy criticism for her angry tone and simple writing style in *A Small Place*, she wears her anger like "a badge of courage," blaming her intimate connection to her homeland for creating "a sort of traumatic history" (Perry 132). In many ways, the identity Kincaid has developed is a result of English upbringing and the lack of a native culture due to colonialism, and "nothing can erase [her] rage...for this wrong can never be made right" (Kincaid 32). This rage provides the tone for this tract; as in other works, Kincaid's writing becomes an expression of her.

In *A Small Place*, Kincaid calls attention to the fact that in many ways, conditions in Antigua worsened with the achievement of independence; she communicates her frustration with her people and capitalism. In a nation free from colonialism, Antiguan "do to [themselves] the very things [colonists] used to do to [them]" (Kincaid 36). Just as they have adopted the behaviors of

colonialism, the natives have "absorbed" the event of tourism "so completely that they have made the degradation and humiliation of their daily lives into their own tourist attraction" (Kincaid 69). Through her critique of colonialism and the development of an exploitative tourist industry in *A Small Place*, Kincaid addresses several other major themes which include the influence of homeland on identity, culture, and the desire for independence.

In her other novels, Kincaid reflects on the influence of the mother-daughter relationship in shaping a female identity in a male-dominated society and explores the phenomenon of female bonding. Because colonialism involves politics and public life, often thought to be male spheres of influence, Kincaid's *Annie John*, *My Mother*, and *At the Bottom of the River* provide the opportunity to explore Kincaid's relationship with her mother as well as her development of identity in light of cultural expectations. *Lucy*, in turn, incorporates these cultural expectations and how they result in different interpretations of the same events. Kincaid also examines a mother's role in her daughter's socialization and explores the ideas of love, affection, hostility, death and their impact on self-discovery. In fact, in an interview with Kay Bonetti, Kincaid states that "I don't really write about men unless they have something to do with a woman." Kincaid often portrays sex as a tool of independence for women, adding another dimension to the feminist aspects of her writing.

COMMENTARY:

Jamaica Kincaid's A Small Place constructs and reflect back images of the British Empire and reevaluate imperialistic economies. Kincaid's polemic works to demythologize the glories of a British imperial economy by exposing its insidious residual effects in places like emancipated Antigua. A Small Place paints a miniature of European Empire as it continues to appear in its former colonies. Kincaid's A Small Place addresses the history of European imperialism and its aftermath in Antigua, an island so peripheral to Mrs. Musgrove's world that she would be unlikely to have heard of it. Kincaid accesses our indifference to and designation of the peripheral in her use of the nonspecific word "event" to describe how the British Empire happened to Antigua. The present tense of "event" is accessed as Kincaid directs the narrative along several paths, covering a lot of historical, geographical, and emotional territory to prove that the evils of European colonialism continue to unfold, or happen, in Antigua even after Emancipation. She accomplishes this goal by employing a number of narrative strategies, like anecdotes, digressions, embedded narratives, and direct address, as well as different narrative points of view. To answer her own question, "Is the Antigua I see before me, self-ruled, a worse place than it was when it was dominated by the bad-minded English and all the bad-minded things they

brought with them" (41), Kincaid sets up a long digression in which she details the history of Antigua's old library and recalls the pleasant afternoons she spent there as a child. Kincaid suggests with her meandering narrative that her original question wrongly presupposes that Antiguanians are free from the legacy of corrupt British rule. Their inheritance of "bad-minded things" and ways from the British colonizers prolongs Antiguanians' cultural and economic enslavement, making the idea of self-rule seem like an unrealistic premise (41).

A Small Place sets the British navy in a rather different light, or rather, on a different island. Re-contextualized, the heroes of the British Empire become the criminals of Antigua's colonial history. She writes that the street she lived on was "named after an English maritime criminal, Horatio Nelson," and that, "all the other streets around us were named after some other English maritime criminals" (24). Similarly, the sort of captured booty that goes unspecified in *Persuasion* is given the face of slavery in *A Small Place*. Kincaid's polemic enters post-colonial discourse by giving voice (or voices) to the losing side of imperialism, the side that is still losing, and challenges anyone who would claim the West got rich by legitimate means. Kincaid mimics the omission of slavery in Western economic histories when she writes that the West got rich not from the free (free-in this case meaning got-for-nothing) and then undervalued labour, for generations, of the people like me you see walking around you in Antigua

but from the ingenuity of small shopkeepers in Sheffield and Yorkshire and Lancashire, or wherever; and what a great part the invention of the wristwatch played in it, for there was nothing noble-minded men could not do when they discovered they could slap time on their wrist. [10]

Kincaid imagines the root cause of imperialism to be loneliness and emptiness, "a European disease" (80). Kincaid writes of the British colonizer, "you loved knowledge and wherever you went you made sure to build a school, a library (yes, and in both places you distorted or erased my history and glorified your own)" (36). In its business of glorifying the British navy, *Persuasion* both distorts and erases the histories of West Indian peoples and their awesome contributions to the wealth of European empires. Fortunately, *A Small Place* gives us the opportunity to reread important novels like *Persuasion* with peripheral vision.

THEMES IN THE NOVEL:

The novel can be analyzed thematically on the following lines.

Theme of anger and rage: This has already been discussed in the earlier section.

Conflict of Cultures: She writes in the novel about the domination of one culture over the other. This type of culture clashes within the novel explain the conditions that prevail to create deeply conflicted, divided individuals who cannot accept the culture of the dominant and who sometimes devalue or despise their own cultures because they cannot help but see them through white eyes.

Theme of Subjugation: Kincaid in the novel A Small Place describes the issues of exploitation and subjugation and juxtaposes it with the issue of subjugation and servility. She also critiques the nature of colonialism and its consequences.

Theme of Independence: The British had established an economic and political system to benefit primarily white land owners and international commerce. They failed to include West Indians significantly in economic development and advancement. They did not prepare the majority population for governing. She is harshly critical of both the British and the Antiguan governments.

COMPREHENSION:

Write an essay on the theme of rage in A Small Place.

Discuss the issue of colonialism in A Small Place

Examine A Small Place as a postcolonial novel.

UNIT 5

South Asia:

Lakdasa Wikkramsinha: Don't Tell Me about Matisse (P)

Jean Arasanayagam: Passages (P)

Kamala Wijeratne: To a Student (P)

Bapsi Sidhwa: Ice-Candy Man (N)

Alamgir Hashmi: So what if I live in a House made by Idiots (P)

Kiswar Naheed: I am not that Woman (P)

UNIT 5

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LESSON 5

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Kishwar Ahmed

UNIT 5

LESSON 1: INTRODUCTION

OUTLINE:

Definition and Scope of South Asian writing

Themes and Issues in the Literature

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

Understand the concept of literary trends in South Asian countries.

Become acquainted with works of South Asian region.

Figure out the social and political conditions depicted in the literature.

In this section we will introduce to the significance and scope of South Asian writing, and then take you on a trip around the various literary trends that have emerged in this region. This section would enable you to understand the poetry and fiction that you deal with in the later part of this unit.

In recent years a number of South Asian writers have emerged on the global literary scene. After the end of the colonial era, South Asian writing has increased thereby offering a substantial contribution to world literature. Writing either from the South Asian subcontinent itself or from abroad, many of the writers featured in recent anthologies/studies course have had a significant

impact in places like the United States and England, where they have won prizes and earned recognition. Generally postcolonial writing is now interested in questioning issues such as: how comfortable are the writers and their writing in the world of 'English' literature? To what extent does the English establishment accept and incorporate South Asian writing? Or is it more correct to understand the emergence of writing from this region of the world as maybe comic and interesting but essentially marginal to 'canonical' American, British, European writers? In fact serious academicians are wondering if many European nations are viewing South Asian literature as simply 'exotic' and 'different,' and not as important or lasting literature.

Along with this is the question of canonicity for the South Asian writing is quite diverse and plural. Therefore studies may continuously be making the canons. However what is to be appreciated is the originality of the works. Those of you who go through this section will immediately notice the multiplicity of voices and the diversity of topics discussed here. Moreover the texts themselves display new ways of using the English language and the works try to display the writers' ways of decolonizing the colonial metaphors. Many of the writers also use European techniques such as modernism and postmodernism, and modify or inflect them in unique ways. The attempt in the next few units is to display different approaches to read these literatures. A good understanding of the

historical and cultural background elements is important to comprehend the works. As much as possible an attempt at this level has been made. At the same time it is necessary to realize the western paradigms used in the literary works and the ways in which they have been transformed and reinvented.

Many of the works from India and Pakistan concern themselves with the liberation movement and also the socio-political backgrounds of the period. Thus much writing from these regions have the following issues in their works-- the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971, which led to the founding of Bangladesh; Emergency in India in 1975; the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984; the civil war in Sri Lanka in the 1970s and 80s; or the recent border conflicts between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. Another new trend noticeable in these works is the work by diaspora writers. Many of these writers discuss the way of life in their new home lands be it London, Chicago or Montreal as well as the nostalgia about their own native lands. Also many of the women writers in these regions are bothered about the status of women and the cultural and traditional forms of life that have impinged on their individual identities. A recent surge of interest in South Asian culture has met with a wealth of outstanding works not by Indian, Pakistani, but also from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

LESSON 2: SRI LANKAN LITERATURE

OUTLINE:

Definition and Scope of Sri Lankan writing

Lakdasa Wikkramasinha: His Life and Works

‘Don’t Tell Me about Matisse’

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

Understand the works of Sri Lanka

Become acquainted with the works of Lakdasa Wikkramasinha.

Be able to follow the central idea of ‘Don’t Tell Me about Matisse’

In this section we will introduce to the significance and scope of Sri Lankan writing, and then help you to analyze Lakdasa Wikkramasinha’s poem, ‘Don’t Tell Me about Matisse’.

SRI LANKAN WRITING:

Sri Lanka too had in case you don’t know been occupied by the British and gained independence in 1948. The period before Independence had seen very

little of creative writing. The first novel in English was Lucien de Zilva's The Dice of the Gods (1917). The first novel by a woman was A Chandala Woman. In 1935 Jinadasa Vijayatunga's Grass for My Feet was published in London and was stated as a novel comparable to the work of Mark Twain. The Indian struggle for Independence to a certain extent inspired the Sri Lankan writers too. Writers such as Sarojini Naidu and Rabindranath Tagore helped to inspire groups such as the Kandy Lake Poets.

During this period names that are mentionable are D.F. Karaka and Ediriwira Sarachandra (1914-1996). Due to the Indian struggle for Independence Sri Lanka too was freed but unlike India there had been no conscious nationalist struggle in Sri Lanka. As a result of this the literature does not display any strong national consciousness. However the election of S.W.R.D. Bandanaikē in 1956 led to a social revolution in Sri Lanka. English which had been the official language now was pushed aside and more and more emphasis was given to the local languages—Sinhala and Tamil. As a result of this writing in English did not grow considerably. The only writer who can be mentioned during this period is Patrick Fernando whose poetry collection, The Return of Ulysses was a work that had the tones of the standard British English. In 1970 the establishment of the journal, New Ceylon Writing by Yasmin Gooneratne helped to increase literary works in English.

Much of the writing from 1950s to 60s displayed the same concerns as in other colonized nations such as the reconciling of sensibility, indigenous traditions and forms with western sensibilities and western traditions and forms. The predicament of the writer at this stage is illustrated by Ashley Halpe's poem, "The Boyhood of Chitha". The same note of servility is expressed in the works of Lakdasa Wikkramasinha. Moreover Lakdasa's poetry displays originality and English which one may address as Sri Lankan English. Later writers such as Jean Arasanaygam and Kamala Wijeratne are troubled by the ethnic conflicts and reveal this to large extent in their poetry. Novelists such as Carl Muller, Raja Procter and Suvimalee Karunaratna display the racial and cultural hybridity of Sri Lanka. Carl Muller's The Jam Fruit Tree (1993), Raja Proctor's Illicit Immigrant (1977) and Suvimalee's Lake Marsh (1993) are illustrations of this hybridity. The other significant writers are Punyakante Wijeratne, Romesh Gunashekar and Ranjini Obeyesekere. Diaspora writers such as Michael Ondaatje and critics such as Chelva Kanganaygam have created more awareness for the writing from this region. Recent awards such as the Gratien award for the work in English have enabled many writers to become consciously aware of creative writing. The recent awardee of the Gratien award was Jagath Kumarasinghe for his Kider Chetty Street. This collection of short stories is a fine example of the postmodern narrative style adapted by the writer and at the

same time the innovative style of the writer blending this form with a Sri Lankan ethos. One can say that modern Sri Lankan writing has moved from the earlier concerns of colonialism to new themes and issues such as predicament of the modern human, the anguish of the human caught in ethnic conflict, the goriness and the violence present in the new environment, etc.

LAKDASA WIKKRAMASINHA'S POETRY:

Lakdasa is a poet is considered as a poet who has a style that is innovative. He uses his poems to critique the English culture and the fascination by the Sri Lankans for the Western aristocratic set-ups. Lakdasa Wikkramasinha seems to use the narrative style based on his own native style. He uses the names, characters and idiomatic phrases common in the local spoken language pattern prevalent in the narration of a folktale in the rural areas of Sri Lankan society. Lakdasa Wikkramasinha has given a local touch and appearance to much of poetry. The use of local vocabulary deviating from standard British poetry creates the appropriate imagery to suit the situations created. The aspect of Sri Lankan lifestyle is dealt with in this poem. Lakdasa Wikkramasinha, though he has an 'aristocratic ancestry' has highlighted the pathetic state of the poor villager, the under-privileged in the local society and the kind procedure of the

Menike of the Walawwa though only a few such people existed in Sri Lanka at that time.

PARAPHRASE OF 'DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT MATISSE':

Don't talk to me about Matisse, don't talk to me
About Gauguin or Van Gogh, the earless painter
Or about the woman sleeping on a blood spread
And the aboriginal painted by the white hunter, Matisse.
Gauguin crucified the aboriginal
The syphilis spreader.

Don't talk to me about Matisse
The European style of 1900
The picture of the nude woman reclines
On a sheet of blood.

Talk to me instead of the culture
Of how the murderers were sustained
By the beauty of savages
To the remote painters came

And the white-washed mud-huts were splattered with gunfire.

EXPLANATION:

This poem is written in four stanzas with lines of uneven length. The poem's central theme is about forgetting the painter Matisse. The first section of the poem asks the reader to forget about the art of European greats such as Matisse and Van Gogh. The reference to a woman reclining on a blood spread and the aboriginal shot by the great white hunter are references to the art of the painter, Matisse. The poet commands the reader to forget the European style of 1900.

The poet finally asks the reader to tell him about their culture instead. It asks people to think about the murderers who robbed the beauty of the countryside and made the people of the land savages. It ends on the pictorial description of how the invasion of the whites ended on a note of blood splattering the walls of the huts. This poem is addressed to the Sri Lankan audience. It critiques their fascination for the western models and expects his countrymen to get up and understand the conscious brain washing that had happened over a period of time.

As one critic states,

I am reminded of Lakdasa Wikkramasinha's poem, "Don't Talk To Me About Matisse", which I first read many years ago. The words "don't talk to me" were like a loud shout, as if the poet was saying, "Don't give me that bullshit!" To understand this one has to recall the cultural milieu of the sixties and seventies, when it was considered very sophisticated to be able to talk about Matisse, Gauguin, Van Gogh and other big names in the world of art. Wickremesingha's loud protest was against such talk, considered chic by the "elite" of the time. The poet was distancing himself from such pretensions, disgusted by this chatter of his class, which shares the colonizers' view of the "natives". If and when it feels concern for the plight of non-Westernized classes, it is patronizing and pompous.

Read the poem in the original and then go through our lesson again before answering the comprehension.

COMPREHENSION:

- Write a note on the issue of colonization as explained by the poet, Lakdasa Wikkramasinha.
- Explain how the poet uses cleverly the names of painters such as Matisse and Van Gogh to critique the white race.
- Write a critical appreciation of the poem.

LESSON 3: ARASANAYAGAM & WIJERATNE

OUTLINE:

Jean Arasanayagam and ‘Passages’

Kamala Wijeratne and ‘To The Students’

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

Understand the works of Jean Arasanayagam and Kamala Wijeratne.

Be able to follow the central idea of ‘Passages’ and ‘To the Students’

In this section we will introduce to the significance and scope of Two Women Poets of Sri Lanka, namely Jean Arasanayagam and Kamala Wijeratne. We will then examine in detail the central concerns in their poems, ‘Passages’ and ‘To a Student’ respectively.

JEAN ARASANAYGAM AND HER WORKS: (1940-)

Jean Arasanayagam has written prolifically. While her writing reflects her own life and immediate experience, her short stories and poems also reflect the tragic ethnic, social and political conflicts of her native country, Sri Lanka. She refers

to herself as an "outsider". Jean Arasanayagam was born into one of Sri Lanka's minority communities, and married into another. By birth she is a "Dutch Burgher" - one of her ancestors was among the men who embarked on the Colonial ships in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. The "Dutch Burghers" are the offspring of intermarriages between Dutchmen and women of the indigenous communities.

She herself married a Tamil, and this marriage proved to be wrought with difficulties as her husband's family did not want to accept her. Her writing expresses, time and again, the pain of being ostracized by them. In some of her poems she also makes a reference to their high caste lineage:

Can you see me, stranger at your doorway of a ruined house or standing where
your home once was, a mound of earth
and later, nothing; through my sifting fingers
seeps the ghostly light of gems that spill
from plenteous coffers, the palanquin rocks
from side to side as the swift runners
bear you on a bridal path
I wait upon the road hopeful that
the curtain lifts to see me as you

recline upon the cushions, swaying
with your glittering body adorned with
sparkling stones, gold at your throat and
ears, your nostrils, wrists and waists and ankles

In July 1983, the antagonism between Sri Lanka's Tamil minority and its Sinhalese majority culminated in bloody riots. Jean along with her family became refugees. Jean Arasanayagam bore a writer's testimony of these events. These episodes along with fear and violence also helped to liberate her. Jean Arasanayagam has attracted attention in the world for her scintillating poetry. Some of the mentionable ones are: Collections such as Apocalypse '83 (1984), Trial by Terror (1987). A Colonial inheritance (1985) explores the writer's own Burgher background and identity. Out of Our Prisons We Emerge (1987) is a more introvert, personal collection while Reddened Waters Flow Clear (1991) and Shooting the Floricans (1993) are Jean Arasanayagam's contemporary poetry.

As stated by a critic Arasanayagam poetry is the vivid pictorial pieces:

In the writings of Jean Arasanayagam, I find her playing two main roles, one as a painter, the other as an explorer. These roles are both complementary and contradictory. As a painter in words, Jean Arasanayagam allows the landscape, in its broadest sense, to come to the

fore. Light, colours, destinies, faces, voices and characters are all part of a painted picture, an atmosphere, a cultural pattern with a shimmer of ritual and enigma. The writer does not tell her own story. Rather, she is a medium, observing and listening. Simultaneous with the painting, comes a deeper exploration of the meanings of culture and history, the examination of injustices and painful change. Jean Arasanayagam questions the traditions that hold such fascination for her, and realizes that the picture she is painting is a transient one.

Besides poetry Jean Arasanayagam is also a reputed short story writer. Her first work, The Cry of the Kite (1984) is a collection with intense poetic descriptions of the bare, desert-like landscape in the neighborhood of Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka, the traditional homeland of the Tamils. It also describes the decay of the small villages. Peacocks and Dreams (1996), is a series of vignettes from Tamil village life, narrated from the point of view of a boy. It is characterized by a finely tuned, precise and objective prose. Fragments of a Journey (1992) and All is burning (1995) show us once again the writer's poetic qualities. As a critic mentions, "Jean Arasanayagam is, as always, an excellent observer. She seldom tells a straightforward story in the conventional sense. Different time planes, insightful character portraits, a circular composition and a rhythmic, detail-shimmering prose are some of the characteristics of her short stories. Some of

the stories explore the bitter truth of ageing and loneliness; some bring the bitter fighting between the armed forces and the guerilla of the Tamil Tigers into focus”.

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POETRY:

- Shooting the Floricans (Kandy : Samjna, 1993);
- Reddened Waters Flow Clear (London&Boston : Forrest Books, 1991);
- Trial by Terror (Hamilton : Rimu, 1987);
- Out of Our Prisons We Emerge (Kandy, 1987);
- A Colonial Inheritance and Other Poems (Kandy, 1985);
- Apocalypse '83 (Kandy, 1984);
- Poems of a Season Beginning and a Season Over (Kandy, 1977);
- Kindura (Kandy, 1973)

PROSE:

- Peacocks and Dreams (New Delhi : Navrang, 1996);
- All is Burning (New Delhi : Penguin Books India, 1995);
- Fragments of a Journey (Colombo : WERC, 1992);
- The Outsider (Nagasaki University: Bulletin of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, 1989);

- The Cry of the Kite. A collection of short stories (Kandy, 1984)

Read the poem in the Arnold Anthology before you read the explanation and the comprehension.

EXPLANATION OF 'PASSAGES':

This poem describes the violence that has ravaged the land and its people. She tells of the fact that she should have been dead by now or migrated but unfortunately she exist in Sri Lanka and cherishes the once upon time joy of the region. She describes her youthful past by stating, “Steps for a phantom costume ball wearing those/Clothes, heavy with their mothball scent that once belonged to youthful summers, ...”She goes on to mention how during that period of violence there was no time to mourn and yet one remembers ‘Joy’. She uses imagery to describe and render evocatively the word joy when she states that ‘joy is a single thread’ that is ‘snarled between the interstices of those ruined pillars’. She talks of her being alive and also of how her being alive is like being ‘time’s Ghost and is like having the stones of martyrdom being lifted’ and making her speak ‘for all whose breath is less than vapor in a misty dawn, whose bodies enchanted herb can bring to life...’. She further states that these lives make the others who are living converts and makes them realize the idea of God.

The living watch the violence 'through the telescope of years' and the poet herself feels 'life flat, a trampled shadow as the hobnailed boots tramp over and over again.' This part of the poem describes the lurking fear and terror that exists in the heart: 'know fear chill as a clammy toad/Perched on my belly feel the gnaw of night rats...Have thought of exile, dig many times over/My own grave hearing the thump fall of heavy sod/Tumbling in its quick descent within the pit;' She explains how strangers watched their moves and their attempts to mask their lifestyles. She notices that she and others have similar feelings when she mentions; 'We were birds of a feather, yes, flocking in that/Closed sanctuary, thought that no one would displace/Us...' she emphasizes that their lives had become secret and was kept in wraps like Christmas gifts which were surprises for the celebrators containing wonders such as 'surprises, snowballs and nuts, apples and books...' People were moving into 'country cottages or manor house or cowslip meadows' to escape from the attackers/killers. The walls of places outside were filled with blood and what were once coloured decorations are now transformed into 'entrails and intestine,/Bloodied heads and hearts and slaughtered flanks...' The dead are at peace as their act of death has removed the suffering and yet those who live have to suffer and wait for their secure futures. Amidst this strife one notices tourists who come to view the history of the land: 'Of sight seers come back to visit colonies of lost/Empires

the flagstones of old churches slabbed/With ancient tombstones, plaques, memorial tablets/Names, dates, epochs of conquest that have gone...'. She ends the poem saying that we will watch and wait to see the horror awaiting us in the future.

The poem is a critique of the ethnic conflicts and is also describing at the same time the dread that has captured the humans. It evocatively imagines the gruesome atmosphere present in the country.

COMPREHENSION:

- Describe the major issues described by Arasanayagam in the poem, 'Passages'.
- Discuss critically the title of the poem and the theme of violence that the poem, 'Passages' describes.

KAMALA WIJERATNE AND HER WORKS:

Kamala Wijeratne, a graduate of the University of Peradeniya joined the teaching profession and subsequently became a lecturer at the Teachers' College, Peradeniya. In 1988 she joined the National Institute of Education at Maharagama as a chief project officer. She retired from service in 1999 and is presently attached to the Faculty of Education, University of Colombo and the

Department of English, University of Sri Jayawardhanapura as a visiting lecturer. Her first collection of poems The Smell of Araliya was published in 1983. This was followed by five anthologies of poetry and a collection of short stories

PARAPHRASE OF ‘TO A STUDENT’

I know why your eyes leap away

When they meet mine

Why they quickly stray

From their quiet contact

I do know your ears are stopped

Against my voice

The echoes of the gun shots have blocked

All outside sound

Blasts of grenades

My eyes as they see yours

See torn pieces of human flesh

suspended from bushes and trees

Fragments of broken bones

Shreds of olive green

The roads spewing human blood
My ears echo the sound of landmine
But why cannot your eyes look into mine
Our ears stop al unkind sound
Let us shake off these brand names
And search for an herb that heals
And make a cooling poultice to cure lunacy
Leave behind those Ilions and Carthages to antique dealers
Let us plan fresh methods to stop other Hiroshimas.

EXPLANATION:

The poem is an indictment of the violence in Sri Lanka and moves the readers by asking them to search for herbs to heal and poultices to be made to cure the lunacy in the minds of the killers. The last two lines of the poem powerfully express the glory and brutal nature of human kind and asks the countrymen to leave aside Ilions and Carthages and to stop Hiroshimas. The reference to Ilions and Carthages in case you have no idea is the reference to Greek and Roman empire which promoted and publicized bloody games and sports. Similarly the term, Hiroshima is used to indicate symbolically the issue of nuclear terrorism.

COMPREHENSION:

- Explain in your own words the central theme of 'To a Student'
- Write a critical appreciation of the poem.

LESSON 4: BAPSI SIDHWA:

OUTLINE:

Bapsi Sidhwa: Her Life and works

Ice-Candy Man

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

Understand the status of bapsi Sidwa in Pakistani literature.

Be able to comprehend the central issues and some of the themes exposed in the novel, Ice-Candy Man.

In this section we will introduce to the significance and scope of Bapsi Sidhwa in Pakistani literature. We will then examine in detail the central concerns and themes in the novel, Ice-Candy Man.

BAPSI SIDHWA: HER LIFE & WORKS: (1938-)

Bapsi Sidhwa is Pakistan's leading diasporic writer. She has produced four novels in English that reflect her personal experience of the Indian subcontinent's Partition, abuse against women, immigration to the US, and

membership in the Parsi/Zoroastrian community. Born on August 11, 1938 in Karachi, in what is now Pakistan, and migrating shortly thereafter to Lahore, Bapsi Sidhwa witnessed the bloody Partition of the Indian subcontinent as a young child in 1947. Growing up with polio, she was educated at home until age 15, reading extensively. She then went on to receive a BA from Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore. At nineteen, Sidhwa had married and soon after gave birth to the first of her three children. The responsibilities of a family led her to conceal her literary prowess.

After receiving countless rejections for her first and second novels, The Bride and The Crow Eaters, she decided to publish The Crow Eaters in Pakistan privately. Though the experience was one she says, "I would not wish on anyone," it marks the beginning of her literary fame (Sidhwa "Interview" 295). Since then, she has received numerous awards and honorary professorships for these first two works and her two most recent novels, Cracking India and An American Brat. These include the Pakistan National honors of the Patras Bokhri award for The Bride in 1985 and the highest honor in the arts, the Sitari-I-Imtiaz in 1991. Her third novel, Cracking India was awarded the German Literaturepreis and a nomination for Notable Book of the Year from the American Library Association, and was mentioned as a New York Times "Notable Book of the Year," all in 1991. A Bunting Fellowship from Harvard

and a National Endowment of the Arts grant in 1986 and 1987 supported the completion of Cracking India. Most recently she was awarded a \$100,000 grant as the recipient of the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award in 1993. Her works have now been translated into Russian, French and German. She is currently working on collections of short stories and essays, while fulfilling her duties as Writer-in-Residence and English professor at Mt. Holyoke College. She has also taught college-level English courses at St. Thomas University, Rice University, and The University of Texas, all in Houston, as well as at the graduate level at Columbia University, New York. Some of the awards she has received and worth mentioning are:

The Bunting Fellow at Radcliffe/Harvard - Mary Ingraham Institute, 1986-1987. And the 1987 Fellow for the National Endowment for the Arts. She was also given by Pakistan in 1991 the Sitara-i-Imtiaz, the highest national honor in the arts. Later in 1991 she received the National Award for English Literature by the Pakistan Academy of Letters. She also was by Germany with the Literaturepreis for Ice-Candy-Man (Cracking India) in 1991. She has been inducted into the Zoroastrian Hall of Fame during the millennium celebrations in Houston. She has been a judge during many literary awards programmes.

Some of her mentionable works are:

The Crow Eaters: St. Martin's Press - 1982

The Bride: St. Martin's Press - 1983

Cracking India: Milkweed Editions – 1991 also known as Ice-Candy Man

An American Brat: Milkweed Editions – 1993

COMMENTARY OF ICE-CANDY MAN:

Ice candy man is a powerful and dramatic novel that has surely impressed many readers. Using her own childhood memories, Bapsi has given the novel further depth and resonance making it a novel worth reading. The novel Ice-candy man has dealt with the partition of India in the most remarkable manner. 'Ice-candy man' describes the events of the riots and massacres of 1947 through the eyes of the Parsee's. Up till now, most accounts of the partition have been retold by the Muslims and Hindus who were involved in it. Bapsi puts the subject in a whole new perspective.

The story centers on Lenny, an eight year old, and her world that ends at the Mozang Chungi and the 'distant canal' in Lahore. She is a sharp and extremely curious girl who is always on the move. Whether going out for walks with her beautiful young Ayah or just visiting her various Aunties and Uncles on the Jail Road, she seeks adventure and interesting companionship.

Bapsi has created many characters in this story, each having unique qualities and each so rich in hilarious and accurate detail, so alive and active, that long after one has closed the book, they contrive to perform their extraordinary and wonderful feats before our eyes. Ayah is a very popular character in the story. She is a human magnet, attracting men with her charm where ever she goes. They worship her, bringing her gifts of all sorts to please her. Her long list of admirers includes the hero of the novel, 'Ice candy man'. Her admirers include Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Pathans, and through these men, Bapsi has represented the changing moods of the people of the subcontinent. Lenny likes to go to the Queen's Garden with her Ayah. It provides her with an opportunity to observe and socialize, if only with the young. The mood throughout the novel changes, gradually, until by the end the Garden becomes a place where people of the same religion prefer to keep to themselves. Friends become enemies. The atmosphere becomes tense as reports of endless atrocities reach Lahore, day and night from the various Hindu, Muslim and Sikh villages.

Bapsi Sidhwa also brings to light the innocence of youth in the form of Lenny. In the book's most poignant moments, she betrays the hiding place of her beloved Ayah, trusting the ice-candy man. It is as if her childish innocence is as powerful as a devil, and she cannot help telling the truth. Lenny is established so

firmly as a truthful witness that the mounting unease in Lahore, the riots, fires and brutal massacres become real through the child's experience. The novel also includes a heart wrenching scene, showing how the Sikhs uprooted a Muslim village, raping women and then slicing them in half and burning the men alive. This part of the story is told by the only survivor of the attacked village, a small boy, Ranna.

To give you a clearer picture of the novel here is a part of a book review of Ice-Candy Man by Ayesha Fatimah Rasul

Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani, is an intriguing exception. Her book, Ice-Candy-Man is one of the great masterpieces of Sub-Continental literature. The story is not about partition per se, though partition looms large in its pages; it is about "Lame Lenny," a little girl who has polio, who turns 8 at a time when no one feels like celebrating birthdays and who is as concerned about her dawning pubescence as about the freedoms (and fears) of midnight. Ms. Sidhwa's novel is about a child's loss of innocence, about a world peopled with characters called Electric-aunt and Slavesister and Old husband, about servants and

laborers and artisans caught up in events they barely understand, but in which they play a terrible part.

Lenny, like Ms. Sidhwa, is a Parsi, a member of one of India's myriad minorities, descendants of Zoroastrians who fled Muslim persecution in Persia in the eighth century and found refuge in the coastal state of Gujarat. When partition came, the Parsis (like the Christians) stayed on the sidelines; they were not targeted by the mobs nor forced to flee across the new frontiers that vivisected their country.

So Lenny and her family are not personally threatened, but they live amid Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs who are. Ms. Sidhwa's superb re-creation of Lenny's early life richly evokes the colors, sounds and smells of pre-partition Lahore. She has a particular talent for the larger-than-life Parsi eccentrics she portrayed so well in her first novel, *The Crow Eaters*. But her most successful characters here are the working-class adults little Lenny spends most time with: her Hindu nursemaid, Ayah; the gruffly paternal cook Imam Din; the untouchable gardener Hari; the Sikh zoo attendant Sher Singh, and Ayah's Muslim admirers -- a nameless masseur, the knife-sharpener Sharbat Khan and the mercurial Ice-candy-man.

It is the suggestively zaftig Ayah, desired by every man, who is the focus of the book. "Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee are, as always, unified around her," Lenny observes. But looming over the narrative is the enigmatic shadow of Ice-candy-man, who undergoes transformations that dramatically prefigure those of the world around him. Through Lenny's eyes, we see him as the eager popsicle vendor whose toes sneak under Ayah's sari early in the story; the fake Sufi, with copper wiring coiled around his neck and chest, who declares he is Allah's telephone; the fanatic mob leader who sickeningly betrays his love; and the pimp-poet with amber eyes and oval face, reciting Urdu verses to woo the woman he has destroyed. It is impossible not to see in Ice-candy-man a metaphor for his society, as well as for the dangerous, transient unreliability of humankind.

"One day everybody is themselves," Lenny observes, "and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols." But Ms. Sidhwa sees beyond the symbols to the poignant humanity of both fanatic and victim. The scene in which an inflamed Muslim mob comes to Lenny's house looking for Hindus, while intensely moving, is written with

remarkable power and restraint. Ms. Sidhwa leaves us with an unforgettable image of the woman they abduct, "staring at us as if she wanted to leave behind her wide-open and terrified eyes."

Ice-Candy-Man is a novel in which heartbreak coexists with slapstick, where awful jokes about fore fathers and foreskins give way to lines of glowing beauty ("The moonlight settles like a layer of ashes over Lahore"). The author's capacity for bringing an assortment of characters vividly to life is enviable.

In reducing partition to the perceptions of a polio-ridden child, a girl who tries to wrench out her tongue because it is unable to lie, Bapsi Sidhwa has given us in Ice-Candy-Man a memorable book, one that confirms her reputation as Pakistan's finest English-language novelist.

ANALYSIS OF ICE-CANDY MAN:

Ice-Candy man is told in the present tense by Lenny Sethi. Lenny is stricken with polio, lives in Lahore, and is a Parsi. She is clever and extremely observant narrator, though many times her understanding is limited by her young age. This naivete is apparent when she ponders if the earth will bleed when the adults 'crack' India. The historical scene of the [1947] Partition [dividing India and

Pakistan] is integrated well into the novel through Lenny's young eyes. To give a more balanced view of parallel atrocities committed against Muslims, by Hindus and Sikhs during the Partition, Sidhwa inserted chapters of narration voiced by a young Muslim boy, Ranna. The portrayal of Ranna is based on a man Sidhwa knew named Rana Khan, who "lives in Houston, and still bears the deep crescent-shaped scar on the back of his head, and innumerable other scars" [see *Cracking India* prefatory acknowledgement]. Ranna will bear witness to the terrible violence committed against his family and other members of his Muslim village [Pir Pindo] in an East Punjab province. Sidhwa's widely varied narration alternates between opulent description, subtle humor, and bone-chilling strife. The narrator, Lenny, is astute beyond her years, yet the questioning nature of the child is portrayed so skillfully that it allows the author to effectively deal with serious subjects both firmly and with subtlety, whichever suits her purpose. When she discovers that her mother is illegally stockpiling gasoline, Lenny wrongly assumes that her mother is responsible for the bombings that are plaguing Lahore. When the citizens of Lahore become more apprehensive of the impending Partition, they stratify strictly upon religious lines. Lenny's perceptions of the differences in people changes at the same time.

Themes such as the Women's issues, the implications of colonization, and the bitterly divided quagmire of partisan politics that the British left in their wake

are reevaluated in the novel, picked apart by the sharp questions of a child. As Shashi Tharoor comments, "The issues dealt with in the book are as numerous as they are horrifying. The thousands of instances of rape, and public's subsequent memory loss that characterize the Partition are foremost. In the hatred that has fueled the political relations between Pakistan and India since that time, these women's stories were practically forgotten. Sidhwa replaces flowing, poetic sentences with forceful criticism when she theorizes about what caused the fires to keep burning. Sidhwa repeatedly condemns the dehumanizing impact that religious zealotry played in promoting mob mentality, during the Partition.

Ice-Candy-Man, has some autobiographical elements. Like Sidhwa, the young girl, Lenny, is a polio survivor who was kept out of school because of her temporary disability. In World II, Sidhwa explains that Lenny was, to an extent, her "alter ego," but far more sophisticated than Sidhwa was at a similar age. The novel explores the interrelationship of different religions by cleverly intermixing Muslim, Parsi and Hindu characters. The novel is also a historical account of the British colonization, the Partition and the split that arose in the nationhood of India. The story has multiple points of view and succinctly explains the horrors of the partition from different angles thereby giving an objective and dispassionate account.

The Novel is available in Penguin classics. Read the novel once before you answer the comprehension questions.

COMPREHENSION:

- Write a note on the character of Lenny.
- Describe some of the major characters in the novel.
- Write a short note on the family background of Lenny.
- Discuss how the novel promotes inter-cultural relationships.
- Describe the historical and social background presented in the novel.
- Discuss the postcolonial concerns in the novel.
- Examine the novel as a critique of Partition in 1947,

LESSON 5: PAKISTANI LITERATURE

OUTLINE:

Scope of Pakistani writing

Themes and Issues in the works of Alamgir Hashmi and Kishwar

Ahmed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After reading this lesson you should be able to

Understand the concept of literary trends in Pakistan.

Become a

Acquainted with works of Alamgir Hashmi and Kishwar Ahmed.

Be able to follow the themes and narrative of the poems, ‘So what if I

live in a House made by Idiots’ and ‘I am not that Woman’

In this section we will introduce to the significance and scope of Pakistani literature, and then make you acquainted with two Pakistani writers.

PAKISTANI LITERATURE:

This note on Pakistani writing has been stated by Alamgir hashmi in one of his essays:

Pakistani literature, that is, the literature of Pakistan, as a distinct literature came into being when Pakistan gained its nationhood as a

sovereign state in 1947. The common and shared tradition of Urdu literature and English literature of India was inherited by the new state. Over a period of time, a body of literature unique to Pakistan has emerged in nearly all major Pakistani languages, including Urdu, English, Punjabi, Balochi, Pushto and Sindhi.

The nature of Pakistani literature soon after independence aroused controversy among writers due to its being centred heavily on the negative events related to the India-Pakistan partition. According to Gilani Kamran (GC University), Pakistani literature was expected to take a new direction along with the new state of Pakistan at this point, but did not immediately meet this expectation.

Saadat Hassan Manto (1912-1955), a prominent writer of short stories of the South Asia, produced great literature out of the events relating to the India-Pakistan independence. The literature, which came out of the period that followed, is considered to have been progressive in its tone and spirit. According to several critics it had not only evolved its own identity, but also had played a significant role in documenting the hardships and hopes of Pakistan in the latter part of the 20th century.

ALAMGIR HASHMI: HIS LIFE & WORKS: (1951-)

Alamgir Hashmi was born November 15, 1951) is a major English poet of Pakistani origin in the latter half of the 20th century. Considered *avant-garde*, both his early and later works were published to universal critical acclaim and widespread influence. His was a remarkable new voice since the 1970s; each of his successive books attested to an expanding world of cultural discernment and harmony, which he created in poems of peerless beauty.

As a practicing transnational humanist and educator in North American, European and Asian universities, he wrote and taught from a unique vantage. His contributions to literary theory, literary criticism, historiography and cultural studies had a far-reaching impact as several disciplines began to be remade in the 1980s. As a result, curriculum and pedagogy underwent substantial changes, so that a paradigm shift was clearly in view. However, its full significance was not to be realized until a couple of decades later, through the period of globalization, in a world where fast communication still had to find the means to meet the twin challenge of ignorance and mis-understanding partly caused by knowledge. Hashmi had begun to deal with such (what then appeared, or as he termed, hypothetical) questions a quarter century earlier than anyone else, offering sharp canonical analysis and effectively arguing for a "comparative" aesthetic to foster humane cultural norms. He showed new paths of reading the

classical and modern texts, and also emphasized upon the sublime nature, position and pleasures of language arts to be shared when these were being reduced to social or professional utilities. Alongside his scholarly books and articles in journals, his series of lectures and essays (like "Modern Letters") in the general press (print as well as radio and television) also drew interest both for the originality of their content and their lucid prose.

Alamgir Hashmi has been writing poetry for the last forty years. He won the poetry prize in the All-Pakistan Creative Writing Contest in 1972 and the Patras Bokhari Award (National Literature Prize) of the Pakistan Academy of Letters in 1985, and was the first English-language writer to bring such recognition to English writing in Pakistan. He is also widely published abroad — in the United Kingdom, Australia, India, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. Equally well-known as author of several scholarly books, he has been Professor of English and Comparative Literature in Pakistan, Europe and the United States. He was a judge of the Commonwealth Writers Prize 1990, and a member of the 1996 jury for the Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

Some of his significant works are:

- The Poems of Alamgir Hashmi: Collected Poems
- The Ramazan Libation: Selected Poems

- Pakistani Short Stories in English
- An Old Chair
- Inland and Other Poems
- America is a Punjabi Word
- Neither This Time / Nor That Place
- The Oath and Amen: Love Poems
- This Time in Lahore: New Poems
- Sun and Moon and Other Poems
- A Choice of Hashmi's Verse
- My Second in Kentucky

PARAPHRASE OF ‘SO WHAT IF I LIVE IN A HOUSE MADE BY IDIOTS?’

So what if I live in a house made by idiots?

In the last one hole were filled with toothpaste

And it was so airtight that breathing became difficult

Its bomb shelters were excellent

And made you feel ready

This has the walls wet and sloughs every three months

The floors are the best thing that get cleaned

As the monsoon may blow off the roof

Can you think of a house without floors?

The lawn now has few flowers but the grass keeps getting debits

The municipal waters give it lease

Send the insects introduce you to yourself.

The sun can kiss the face and the back of its neck

At the same time, I call it a place to live.

Read the poem in the Arnold Anthology and then answer the comprehension questions. The poem is a statement of the state of affairs in Pakistan and also metaphorically questions the notion of a house itself.

COMPREHENSION:

- Analyze critically the central concerns of Hashmi's poem.

KISHWAR AHMED: HER LIFE &WORKS (1940-):

Born in Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh, India in 1940, Kishwar Naheed is one of the best-known feminist poets of Pakistan. In a field dominated by traditional male voices, Naheed, writing in Urdu, was a pioneer of a new, distinctively feminine voice and has produced over the span of thirty years a body of work that is innovative, defiant, political, and self-aware. Her poetry dared to go

beyond the prescribed accepted 'feminine' realms to include hitherto unmined fields of female sexuality, politics, and social issues. In an interview with Rakhshanda Jalil for the Indian daily *The Hindu* (11/4/2001), Kishwar Naheed explained her writing as an attempt to redefine the man-woman relationship. Rejecting being branded as a radical or a bohemian, she declared herself "a realist" who "never let her get pushed around by men or by circumstances."

Born into a traditional family that moved to Lahore, Pakistan during the 1947 Partition of the sub-continent, Naheed had to fight to pursue an education in a milieu where women did not go to school and "were not allowed to speak to boys." She studied at home and obtained a high school diploma through correspondence courses, but went on to receive a master's degree in Economics from Punjab University.

Naheed's first collection of poetry, *Lab-i goya*, published in 1968, won the prestigious Adamjee Prize of Literature. This collection of traditional ghazals was followed by a collection of nazms, by translations of foreign poetry, and by many works in free verse. She also wrote for children and for the daily *Jang*, published her autobiography in 1994 (it appeared the following year in India), and in 2001 saw her collected poetic work released in a 1312 page volume entitled *Dasht-i qais men Lail'a*. Her daily columns in *Jang* were also collected

and published in 1999. Her poetry has been translated into English and Spanish and her famous poem "We, sinful women" gave its title to a path-breaking anthology of contemporary Urdu feminist poetry translated and edited by Rukhsana Ahmad, published in London by The Women's Press in 1991. Kishwar Naheed has held the position of Director General of Pakistan National Council of the Arts before her retirement, has edited a prestigious literary magazine Mah-i naw, and has founded an organization named Hawwa (Eve) whose goal is to help homebound women become financially independent through cottage industries and the marketing of handicrafts.

The Library of Congress has twenty-five works by Naheed in its collection. She read for the Library in Lahore on December 13, 1977 (www.sasialit)

PARAPHRASE OF 'I AM NOT THAT WOMAN':

I am not that woman

Selling you socks and shoes

Remember me I am the one you hid

In your walls of stone

While you wandered free not knowing

That my voice cannot be shut down by stones.

I am the one you crushed
With the burden of custom and tradition
Not realizing that light can be hidden in darkness
Remember me in whose lap y
You picked flowers and sowed thorns and embers
not realizing that chains cannot bind fragrances.

I am the woman whom you bought
And sold
In the name of chastity not knowing
That I can walk on water even as I drown.

I am the one you married off
To get rid of burden
Not realizing
that a nation of imprisoned minds cannot be free

I am the product you traded
My chastity my motherhood my loyalty
Now it is time for me to flower tree

The woman on that poster

Half naked selling shoes and socks--

No No I am not woman.

I am sure that this poem is simple and needs no explanation. The poem discusses the status of women and the hold patriarchal values have over women.

COMPREHENSION:

- Discuss the feminist concerns in 'I am not that woman'
- Write a critical appreciation of the poem, 'I am not that woman'.