

**B.A. (Hons.)
Semester-1
ELL-AEC-101
English Language & Literature - I**



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Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University

(Established by Government of Gujarat)

B.A. Hons. English

Semester 1

ELL - AEC - 101 English Language and Literature -I

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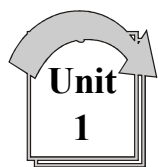
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WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR - RABINDRANATH TAGORE

: STRUCTURE :

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- 1.4 Key Words
- 1.5 Summary of the Poem
- 1.6 Analysis and Explanation of the Poem
- 1.7 Tone of the Poem
- 1.8 Themes of the Poem
- 1.9 Questions (answer in brief)
- 1.10 Multiple Choice Questions
- 1.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.12 Books Suggested

Answers

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall

- be getting an introductory information about the present Poem and Poet
- be having a firsthand experience of the text of the poem
- be getting an overview of the analysis and explanation of the poem
- be learning about the tone and theme of the poem

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore was a great poet, novelist, dramatist, educationist and a multi-faceted artist. He reshaped Bengali literature and music extending its influence on Indian art and music. He was born on May 7, 1861. His collection of poems *Gitanjali* is profoundly fresh, beautiful and spiritual. He was the first non-European to win the prestigious Nobel Prize for literature in 1913.

He was a great humanist, Universalist and internationalist who always believed in the ancient maxim of India “VasudhaivKutumbakam” (The entire world is one family). He was against narrow-minded nationalism and therefore he differed from Mahatma Gandhi on several issues like, Swadeshi movement, spinning of charkha, boycott of foreign goods, etc. Tagore and Gandhiji respected and loved each other deeply despite their difference of opinions. He too denounced the British Rule in India and advocated independence from the British Raj. He founded a famous institution of education ‘VishwaBharati’ that sought to bridge India and the world.

Tagore's major literary works include *Gitanjali*, *Gora*, *GhareBaire* (The Home and the world), etc. He had composed 'Jana GanaMana' which was chosen as the national anthem of India. 'Amar Sonar Bangla' the national anthem of Bangladesh was also composed by Tagore. Tagore died at the age of 80 on August 7, 1941.

1.2 ABOUT THE POEM

The poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear* is taken from the English *Gitanjali* 'Song Offerings'. It is a collection of his 103 poems translated by Tagore himself from Bengali into English. It was published first in November 1912 by the Indian Society of London. It contained translations of 53 poems from Bengali *Gitanjali* and 50 poems from other Bengali collections of his poems *Gitimaya*, *Naivedya* and *Kheya*. The *Gitanjali* became quite popular in the West and was widely translated.

The poem *Where the Mind Is without Fear* is a prayer to the universal father, God Almighty. The poem displays Tagore's vision of true freedom and new enlightened India. The original poem titled "Prarthana" (Prayer) was included in an anthology called *Naivedya*. The poem was translated into English by the poet himself in 1911. It was included in the *Gitanjali* as poem 35 which was published in 1912. Tagore recited its English version at the Indian National Congress Session in Calcutta, 1917.

Rabindranath Tagore envisages an ideal nation in the poem. An ideal nation should be free in true sense, liberal in outlook, united in strength but free from narrow-mindedness. It should be an ideal combination of sensitivity and rational outlook. The people of an ideal nation should be hard working and dynamic. They should always strive for peace, progress and prosperity.

The prayer transcends both time and space, achieving the quality of a universal prayer.

1.3 TEXT OF THE POEM

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high.

Where knowledge is free.

Where the world has not been broken up into
fragments By narrow domestic walls.

Where words come out from the depth of truth.

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening
thought and action

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

- Rabindranath Tagore

1.4 KEY WORDS

Fragments : Pieces, divisions

Domestic : Household, pertaining to home or family

Striving : Trying hard

Tireless	: Without getting tired, indefatigably
Head held high	: with self-respect and dignity
Stream	: Flow, river, brook
Dreary	: Dull
Reason	: Logic, intellect, rationality
Desert	: Dry, sandy area of land
Awake	: to wake up, stretch, extend, to get up from slumber/ sleep
Dead habit	: Conditioning, superstitious temperament, ritualistic mind
Ever -widening	: Always expanding, getting larger and larger

1.5 SUMMARY OF THE POEM

The poet prays to God Almighty that the people of his country should be fearless and their heads should be held high with self-respect and human dignity. They should be free from fear, repression and coercion. The poet dreams of a nation where knowledge is free and education is available to all. Education must not be confined to rich and the elite people only but to all. Children should learn from nature and the world around them. They should be curious enough to learn new things all the time. Tagore's concept of education was quite liberal and therefore he believed that education should not be confined only to four walls of classrooms.

Tagore says that people should be united not only with the people of his country but with the entire world. He thinks that there should not be divisions among people on the basis of caste, creed, religion, colour, and race. Tagore believed that the whole world should be like one extended family. He was against narrow-minded nationalism. Tagore says that people of his country should be truthful. Their words should come out from the depth of their hearts.

Tagore further says that the people of his country should continuously endeavor to stretch their arms towards perfection. All should work hard to achieve their goals. These goals should not be materialistic alone but the realization of the self. Tagore believes that sensitivity is very important in life but one must not be superstitious and irrational. Clear stream of reason must not be lost into the desert of false beliefs, superstitions, prejudices and evil customs. Reason and intellect should always rule over dead traditions and beliefs.

The poet says that the people of his country should be progressive liberal and broad minded. He says that the minds of people should be led towards "ever widening thought and action" by the Lord Almighty. Broad minded people's actions are always generous and humane. They rise above narrow-mindedness and superstitious beliefs. In the final line of the poem, the poet addresses God as father and prays to awaken his country into the heaven of freedom.

Tagore was a mystic poet with profound faith in the Unknown power that operates in the entire Universe. For him, God is not just an incarnation but the Inner self within all of us. He invokes the Inner self to awaken ourselves into the Utopian world of peace, freedom and love.

1.6 ANALYSIS AND EXPLANATION OF THE POEM

Where the Mind is Without Fear was written during the British rule before India achieved independence. Tagore died in 1941, a few years before Independence in 1947. He wrote this poem when India was under the colonial rule and the people of India had become mentally enslaved. They felt that they would never be free. They had lost their self-confidence and dignity. Their spirit had been completely drained and depressed. They lived in poverty and ignorance. They were denied proper education and equal rights. Majority of them were illiterate, irrational and superstitious. The British Government employed the strategy of “Divide and Rule” in India and divided the country into fragments based on caste, creed, religion and economic status. Under the British Rule, the erstwhile Indian princely states fought among themselves and acted like the stooge of the British rulers.

Rabindranath Tagore was profoundly aware of the problems India was facing during the British Rule. He dreamt of free India. For Tagore, mere political freedom was not an end but a means to true inner freedom of the people of India. In this poem, Tagore envisions the “heaven of freedom” for India where the people of the country would live in fearlessness, harmony, love the world of knowledge and persistent efforts for perfection.

Where the Mind is Without Fear is a prayer to God almighty to awaken India into the heaven of freedom. The poem has been composed in simple diction, beautiful vivid images and other poetic devices. The verse form of the poem is free verse with no metrical patterns or rhymes. Though it has no meters and rhymes, it has natural musical flow. It can be called a prose poem too. The poem contains eleven lines with no ending rhymes. However the poem contains only one sentence that ends with the last line.

The poem implies freedom from the shackles that kept the people of India chained and enslaved during the British rule. The people of India were full of fear and their heads were bent in servility. They were ignorant and access to knowledge was limited. Therefore the poet wanted to reverse the prevalent condition of the people under the colonial domination.

Tagore wanted the minds of people to be fearless and free from oppression, narrow-mindedness and despair. He wanted their heads held high with self-confidence and dignity. In the first line the poet prays to God that the countrymen should be free from fear, oppression and slavishness. Their heads should be held high in dignity. They should have a deep sense of self-respect and equality. Bent head symbolizes slavishness and servility, raised head denotes honour and self-respect.

In the second line, the poet says that knowledge should be accessible to all without any restrictions and class distinctions. There the poet refers to education which is a means of providing knowledge to the people. The poet is a strong supporter of free knowledge and therefore he believes that education should not be restricted to the rich and the upper class people only. It should be open and available to all. The doors of the temples of learning should be open for all. Children should learn not only within the confine of classrooms but also from nature and the world around them. Tagore, like Wordsworth, believed that one could learn more from nature than from books. As an educationist, Tagore believed in Gurukul pattern of education of Ancient India

where students learnt directly from nature in a natural way instead of rote learning and bookish instruction. It was Tagore's concept of education which he put into practice in his educational institutions Shantiniketan and Vishvabharati University.

In the next two lines, the poet says that the people of his nation should live unitedly and harmoniously. For Tagore, unity and harmony is not important for the nation only but the entire human world. Therefore he says that the world should not be broken up into divisions based on caste, creed, religion, race etc. The greatest problem of human world is lack of unity, harmony and equality. People of the world are divided on the basis of nationality, religion and race. Every nation thinks that they are the best and others are inferior to them. People are usually intolerant towards others, their religions, beliefs and cultures. If we look at the history of humankind, we realize that most of the wars were fought because of intolerance, hatred towards others and rejection of the other people's religions, race, and colour of their skin. Prejudices and false assumptions about other people create enmity and conflict among people.

Tagore says that these are narrow domestic walls that divide people. India is a country with immense diversity of castes, religions, creeds and cultures. However there is a common thread of secular outlook (SarvaDharmSambhav) that binds all together. Even in Hinduism there are many gods, goddesses and practices of worship. The very idea of multiplicity of beliefs is the acceptance of other's beliefs cultures, religions etc. Unfortunately British Rule in India divided the nation by creating disharmony and conflicts among them. Therefore Tagore wants India to be undivided and united.

In the fifth line, Tagore wishes that the people of his nation are truthful and their words should come out from the depth of their hearts. There should be harmony among one's thought, speech and action. For Tagore, truth is not a remote ideal but it must be essentially human. Tagore says, "What we call truth lies in the rational harmony between the subjective and objective aspects of reality."

Tagore and Albert Einstein met in 1930 and discussed what Truth is. Tagore believed that the Divine is not isolated from the world and it proves that the Truth of the Universe is human Truth. It is interesting to note that for Tagore, Truth is not an inaccessible ideal but the part of human consciousness. One can practice it if one follows the voice from within. This inner voice connects all human world and the entire Universe.

In the sixth line, Tagore wants everyone to strive to achieve their goals and reach perfection. He says that people should continue to work ceaselessly for achieving perfection in all directions whether it is material or spiritual. However, true perfection is always spiritual because it is the flowering of one's inner self. Tagore wants people of his nation to be free from lethargy and laziness.

In the seventh line, Tagore compares 'reason' to a clear stream and 'dead habits' to dreary desert. He says that logical thinking should be clear and unaffected by superstitious beliefs and dull, dry customs and rituals. Tagore always stood for sensitivity but for him rational, intellectual attitude was equally important. If emotions are not monitored by reason, they turn into superstitious beliefs and dull rituals. This passion for freedom underlies his

firm rejection of irrational traditionalism which make people the prisoners of dead past. Tagore stood for modern development and scientific advancement. He differed from Mahatma Gandhi on spinningkhadi, charkha, and boycott of foreign goods. He believed that people should not be dominated by machines but he was in favour of reasonable use of modern technology.

In lines 9 and 10, the poet wants the people of his country to be liberal, broad minded and progressive. He wants minds to be “led forward” into ever widening thought and action by the God Almighty. He wants people of free India to overcome the narrow mindedness and bigotry. He prays to the Divine power to lead the people of India towards the world of liberal outlook and altruistic actions.

In the final line, the poet prays to God to awaken his country into such a heaven of freedom as described in the earlier lines of the poem. He prays to the Universal Father to raise his nation to the heights where freedom could be realized in its culmination. According to Tagore, God is not separate from the world and human heart. Tagore wants to awaken the God within us to free our minds from all shackles and bondages. Finally, the message of the poet is very clear. He wants the people of his country to be free mentally and spiritually. He wants them to be united, fearless, compassionate, self-dignified and truthful. He wants them to be curious to learn and know more with open mindedness. According to Tagore, this is the true freedom which the people of his country should achieve.

Tagore’s attitude toward politics culture, nationalism, internationalism, tradition and modernity is reflected in the poem. His concept of patriotism was quite different. He wanted India to be free from colonial rule but he did not want India to be confined to narrow domestic walls of traditions customs and rituals. He wanted the people of India to be global citizens with liberal outlook and compassion for entire world.

1.7 TONE OF THE POEM

Tone in literary writing refers to the methods by which writers and speakers reveal their attitudes or feelings. As tone is equated with attitude, it is important to realize the techniques and modes of revealing the attitudes. As a literary concept, it is adapted from the phrase ‘tone of voice’ in speech. Tone of voice reflects attitudes toward a particular experience or situation and also toward listeners.

In Tagore’s poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear*, there is a tone of longing or yearning for a free nation where there would be freedom from fear, narrow-mindedness, superstitions and irrational attitude. The first eight lines envision Utopian world of freedom which the poet calls “Heaven of freedom” in which he wants his country awake. He prays to the Universal Father to awaken India where there is peace, harmony, liberalism and equal opportunities for all. The poem was written several decades before independence and it inspired freedom fighters of India guiding them about what kind of freedom India should achieve. Tagore’s concept of freedom is quite radical and the message of the poem is highly relevant even today.

1.8 THEMES OF THE POEM

Themes can be defined as a main idea or an underlining meaning of any literary work which can be stated directly or indirectly. A major theme is an idea

that a writer repeats theme in his literary work making it the most significant idea. A minor theme is an idea that appears in the literary work briefly. Theme and subject are two different categories as subject is a topic of the literary work and theme is an opinion expressed on the subject.

The following are the important themes of the poem “Where the Mind is Without Fear”.

- (1) **Division of Bengal:** In 1905, the Indian State of Bengal was divided into two states West Bengal and East Bengal according to the divisive policy of the British Government known as ‘Divide and Rule’. It was divided on the basis of religion. In West Bengal the majority of population was Hindu while in East Bengal, the majority of people were Muslims. East Bengal came to be known as East Pakistan after partition. In 1971, it became Bangladesh. Tagore wrote this poem in around 1910, five years after Banga-bhanga (division of Bengal). He was profoundly saddened by the division of Bengal and therefore he referred to it in the poem, where he speaks of the nation broken into fragments. Tagore wants the nation undivided, unfragmented and united. He protests against the division based on religion, caste, race or creed. This is one of the major themes of the poem.
- (2) **East and West:** Tagore loved India and her culture profoundly but he was not a narrow-minded nationalist. He believed that both East and West have their own merits which should be incorporated into each other. There are several practices of the West that the East should adopt and the West should also learn certain good things from the East. In his novels *Gora* and *GhareBaire*, Tagore advocates the synthesis of the two cultures. Tagore was influenced by English poets and poetry. He was a great admirer of the Romantic poets. He also used similar themes employed by the Romantic poets in his own poems. He experimented with Bengali lyrics influenced by the Western poetry and their forms. Tagore was highly sensitive poet but he rejected sentimentalism and irrational attitude. He firmly believed the people of India should cultivate intellectual and rational attitude to free themselves from superstitions and blind faith. He was deeply influenced by the Age of Enlightenment that took place in England in 18th century. He believed that the people of India should adopt rational outlook and become open minded and liberal. He believed that India could achieve independence from the colonial rule through rational and intellectual attitude only. To encounter the British rule, India needed to adopt and employ intellectual stance. According to Tagore the ideal combination of the Eastern and the Western values would certainly improve the quality of life and make India a true heaven of freedom.
- (3) **Confluence of Cultures:** Rabindranath Tagore came from a Hindu family of landed gentry. He was against the clash of civilizations and stood for confluence of three cultures: Hindu, Islam and British. Tagore was brought up in a family where the knowledge of Sanskrit, Bengali, English and Persian was essential part of the family tradition. This outlook was non-sectarian and liberal. The greatest example of how Tagore was respected by independent Bangladesh was

the choice of its national anthem ‘Amar Sonar Bangla’ from Tagore’s songs.

- (4) **True Freedom:** Tagore dreamt of free India with rational attitude and broadmindedness. His attitude towards politics, culture, nationalism, internationalism, tradition and modernity is clearly expressed in the poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear*. He was a nationalist with a difference. He rejected unreasoned traditionalism which made people the prisoners of past. For him, humanity was above all beliefs and faiths. He abhorred untouchability but disapproved Gandhiji’s statement that the Bihar earthquake in 1924 was a divine chastisement for the sin of untouchability.
- (5) **Knowledge:** Tagore firmly believed that knowledge should be accessible to all. All people should be educated and knowledgeable. Education leads to true freedom, intellectual life and nation building. Tagore’s views on education are liberal and aim at creating global citizens. He believed that learning should not be confined to four walls of classrooms but rooted in nature and immediate surroundings. For Tagore, true education should aim at self-realization, intellectual development, and physical development, love for humanity, freedom and spiritual development. He advocated nature centered education rejecting bookish rote learning.
- (6) **Structure, Diction and Style :** The poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear* is written in free verse. It has no rhyme scheme or particular metrical pattern. It contains eleven lines. The whole poem is only a single complex sentence with one main clause at the end and several sub-ordinate clauses beginning with ‘where’. The style of the poem seems to have the influence of the Bauls of Bengal and their soulful rendition. The Bauls of Bengal were known for their mendicant’s life and their views on spiritual salvation.

The diction of the poem is simple lucid and rhythmical. Tagore has used several figures of speech that enhance the beauty of the poem. The poet uses the poetic device of metaphor in line 7-8 where he compares ‘reason’ with a stream of water and ‘habit’ with desert. The poet addresses God as ‘Father’ and prays to him to awaken India into the heaven of freedom. Here the poet uses the poetic device called ‘Apostrophe’. There are also several examples of alliteration in the poem such as “the head is held high”, “tireless striving stretches” and “the dreary desert sand of dead habit” etc. Anaphora runs throughout the poem as there is a repetition of ‘where’ at the beginning of seven lines in the poem “Tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection” is a fine example of personification.

Check Your Progress 1

1.9 ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN BRIEF.

- (i) What kind of freedom does Tagore envisage?

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(ii) What does Tagore mean by “narrow domestic walls”?

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(iii) When can people hold their heads high according to Tagore?

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(iv) Where does the clear stream of reason lose its way?

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(v) What does dead habit imply?

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(vi) What does the poet pray to God for?

- (vii) What does Tagore mean by “Where knowledge is free”?

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Check Your Progress: 2

1.10 CHOOSE THE CORRECT OPTION FROM GIVEN BELOW.

1. *Where the Mind is Without Fear* is taken from
 - (a) Gitanjali
 - (b) Tagore’s collection of poetry
 - (c) GhareBaire
 - (d) Gora
2. Tagore received the Nobel Prize in _____
 - (a) 1913
 - (b) 1941
 - (c) 1907
 - (d) 1947
3. *Amar sonar Bangla* was composed by _____
 - (a) Bankimchandra
 - (b) Sharatchandra
 - (c) R.C. Dutt
 - (d) Rabindranath Tagore
4. *Where the Mind is Without Fear* is
 - (a) A Prayer to God
 - (b) A eulogy to God
 - (c) A Complaint to God
 - (d) A Sermon
5. *Where the Mind is Without Fear* was included as poem _____ in Gitanjali.
 - (a) 12
 - (b) 15
 - (c) 35
 - (d) 100
6. The original title of the poem in Bengali was
 - (a) Naivedya
 - (b) Prasad
 - (c) Prarthna
 - (d) Mukti
7. The poem was translated from Bengali into English by
 - (a) The poet himself
 - (b) Isherwood
 - (c) W. B. Yeats
 - (d) KshitimohanSen
8. The British Rule divided India by using the strategy of
 - (a) “bribe and win”
 - (b) “educate to enslave”
 - (c) “divide and rule”
 - (d) “destroy the native culture”
9. The poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear* contains
 - (a) 10 lines
 - (b) 11 lines
 - (c) 14 lines
 - (d) 5 Couplets
10. Tagore founded educational institution called
 - (a) PremNiketan
 - (b) Shanti Niketan

- (c) Gram Vidyalaya (d) MuktiVidyalaya
11. Tagore believed in _____ education
 (a) Knowledge centered (b) Nature-centered
 (c) Village-centered (d) Skill centered
12. Tagore compares reason to
 (a) a clear stream (b) a river
 (c) the ocean (d) the lake
13. Bengal was divided into East Bengal and West Bengal in
 (a) 1905 (b) 1910
 (c) 1943 (d) 1947
14. Tagore advocated the synthesis of
 (a) spirit and matter (b) man and machine
 (c) art and science (d) East and West
15. *Amar Sonar Bangla* written by Tagore is the national anthem of
 (a) Bangladesh (b) Nepal
 (c) Bhutan (d) Brahma Desh

1.11 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we studied the famous poem of Rabindranath Tagore which is highly relevant today. It tells us what a true freedom is. It reflects Tagore's liberal views on education, culture, freedom and rational outlook. It is interesting to note that he has presented the vision of free India but the poem contains an important message for all free democratic and secular nations.

1.12 BOOKS SUGGESTED

Das Gupta T. *Social Thought of Rabindranath Tagore: A Historical Analysis*. AbhinavPrakashan, 1993.

Das Kumar, Sisir, editor. *The English writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, SahityaAkademi, 1994.

Guha, Ramachandra. *Makers of Modern India*. Cambridge, 2011.

Sen, Amartya. *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on History, Culture and Identity*, Picador, 2006.

Tagore, Rabindranath. "Song Offerings", Translated by Joe Wirtter, Writers Workshop, 1998.

W. B. Yeats. *Gitanjali*. Dover Publications, 2000.

Answers

Check Your Progress: 2

1.(a)	2.(a)	3.(d)	4.(a)	5.(a)	6.(c)	7.(c)	8.(a)	9.(c)	10.(b)	11.(b)	
12.(a)	13.(a)	14.(d)	15.(a)								



STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING

- ROBERT FROST

: STRUCTURE :

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
 - 2.1.1 About the Poet
 - 2.2.2 About the Poem
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- 2.3 Key Words
- 2.4 Summary of the Poem
- 2.5 Analysis and Explanation of the Poem
- 2.6 Tone of the Poem
- 2.7 Theme of the Poem
- 2.8 Structure/Diction/Style of the Poem
- 2.9 Questions (answer in brief)
- 2.10 Multiple Choice Questions
- 2.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.12 Books Suggested
- Answers

2.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall

- be getting preliminary information about the Poem and Poet
- be getting an overview of the analysis and explanation of the poem
- be learning about the tone and theme of the poem

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 About the Poet

Robert Frost (1874-1963) was a great American poet known for his realistic portrayal of rural life and immense love for nature. He depicted the rural life of New England in the early twentieth century. His famous poems include:

1. *Home Burial*
2. *The Witch of Coos*
3. *A Servant to Servant*
4. *Directive*
5. *Neither out Too Far nor in Too Deep*
6. *Provide, Provide*
7. *Acquainted with The Night*
8. *After Apple Picking*

9. *Mending Wall*
10. *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*
11. *Birches*
12. *Death of a Hired Man*
13. *The Road Not Taken*
14. *Fire and Ice*

Frost's best poems explore fundamental questions of existence depicting stark loneliness of an individual in the indifferent universe. Frost stood at the cross-roads of 19th century American poetry and modernism. He developed modern idiom, sense of directness and economy that reflect the imagism of Ezra Pound. Frost's theory of poetry links him to both 19th and 20th centuries. He wrote about poetry that, "It begins as a lump in the throat a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a loneliness." Like T.S. Eliot he believed that the man who suffers and the artist who creates are totally separate".

Robert Frost made use of New England dialect which is often discussed as provincialism or regionalism. His regionalism is not political but realistic. Frost had received more than forty honorary degrees and in 1924, he received his first of four Pulitzer Prizes. In 1960, Congress awarded Frost the first congressional Gold Medal. A year later, at the age of 86 Frost was honored to write and recite a poem for President John Kennedy's inauguration ceremony.

The following are the notable qualities of Robert Frost's poetry:-

- (i) Tenderness, sadness and humour
- (ii) Sad acceptance of things as they are
- (iii) Love for nature and rural life.
- (iv) Classical understatement and restraint
- (v) Clarity and simplicity
- (vi) Democratic spirit
- (vii) Realistic depiction of life and nature
- (viii) Pastoral element
- (ix) Picturesque quality
- (x) Lyrical quality

Robert Frost's style is lucid, simple and rhythmical. He often employs dialogues in his poems. He uses colloquial diction of New England. There is vivid imagery in his poetry that creates visual pictures in the minds of the readers. His poetry is often symbolic and metaphorical.

2.1.2 About the Poem

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening is one of the most popular poems by Robert Frost. It was published in 1923 and soon it became a poem that people recited, quoted and kept in memory. On the surface, the poem is simple, at metaphorical level. It tells of a man's temptation to answer the call of beauty and his ultimate decision to respond to the call of duty.

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep
But I have promises to keep

And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep”

This concluding stanza of the poem has a deeper meaning. It has an interesting allegory of life and death, of duty and irresistible temptation and pleasures of life. The poem begins with a traveller passing through woods on a beautiful snowy evening. Woods are dark, deep and lonely. The traveller is tempted by the solitude of dark woods and snow-laden land. The enchanted traveller stops his little horse to watch woods fill up with snow. The little horse thinks it strange as there is no farmhouse nearby. It was the darkest evening of the year. On one side, there was a frozen lake and on the other dark, lonely but lovely woods.

The horse shakes his bell to ask if there was any mistake. The traveler wakes up from his dreamy state of mind. He remembers that it is necessary for him to go home and keep his promise. He has still to travel many miles before he reaches home and sleep. In the final stanza, there are three words that signify deep, philosophical meaning ‘Promise’ indicate one’s duties in life; be it physical or spiritual. ‘Miles’ refer to a journey of life, the period of time to live in years or decades. ‘Sleep’ signifies eternal slumber, the death, the end of the journey of life. Life’s journey includes pleasures, hardship, duties and distances.

In life, we make promises to ourselves and to others. These promises have to be fulfilled before we cover the long distance of the journey of life and yield to our final commitment: eternal slumber i.e death. In our life and the world around us, we face many temptations and distractions. These temptations can be material and physical pleasures, worldly success, fame and wealth. If these things become our center of focus, we miss the true goal of our life. The true goal of human life is self-actualization, the realization of one’s potential. We should strive to reach our true goal before we meet our final destination of our life-Death.

The poem can be interpreted in several ways but the central idea of the poem is commitment to duty. Louisa May Alcott has summed up this philosophy in a very poetic manner she wrote:

“I slept, and I dreamed that life was beauty;
I woke, and found that life was duty.”

2.2 TEXT OF THE POEM

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though:
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow
My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.
He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.

The only other sound's the sweep
 Of easy wind and downy flake.
 The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
 But I have promises to keep,
 And miles to go before I sleep.
 And miles to go before I sleep.

– Robert Frost

2.3 KEY WORDS

Woods	: forest
Queer	: strange
Harness	: a set of strap by which a horse or other animal is fastened to a cart plough etc.
Sweep	: long swift curving movement
Downy	: covered with soft hair or feathers
Easy wind:	slow breeze of wind
Flake	: a small flat, very thin piece of something (Downy flake' refers to soft layer of snow)

2.4 SUMMARY OF THE POEM

The speaker in the poem is passing through woods on a cold snowy evening. He is riding on his little horse. It is a lovely dark wood that enchants the speaker by its beauty and silence. The speaker says that he probably knows the owner of the woods. He lives in a nearby village. As he is not there in the woods, he will not see the speaker trespassing. The little horse of the speaker shakes his harness bell to ask if there is any mistake. The horse does not understand why the speaker has stopped here. He thinks that there is no reason to stop in the woods. Even a farmhouse is nowhere nearby.

The place was between dark woods and frozen lake and it was the darkest evening of the year (probably in the month of December). Little horse shakes his harness bells to awaken the speaker from his dreamy state of mind. He seems to have lost in the beauty and silence of the beautiful woods. Deep silence mesmerizes the speaker. There are only sounds of cold, slow breeze and falling snow like white feathers. The speaker is suddenly awakened by the sound of the harness bells of the horse. He does not like to leave this beautiful place as it is so quiet and beautiful. However, he is reminded of his promises that he had to fulfill. He realizes that he should move ahead and reach home in time. He has to perform certain duties before he could rest his head on the pillow.

The poem ends with a message that life and the world may be full of temptations. They may compel us to stop and hinder our journey but we must remember that before we 'sleep' we have to fulfill our duties and keep our promises. We have our duties towards our family, society and the world. We also have duties towards ourselves and to God. Before we die, we should try to fulfill them all. Therefore we should avoid temptations of worldly pleasures and focus our attention on performing our duties. We should focus more on DUTY than BEAUTY.

2.5 ANALYSIS AND EXPLANATION OF THE POEM

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening is a well-known poem by Robert Frost. It was written in 1922 and published in 1923 in his collection of poems "New Hampshire". He had written this poem when he lived in the village Franconia in New Hampshire.

The poem consists of four stanzas of quatrains (four lines) each. In each stanza, the first, second and fourth lines rhyme but the third does not. However, the third line is a connection link to the other stanzas. It determines the rhymes of the other line of the stanza. For example, in the first stanza the first, the second and the fourth line rhyme with words 'know', 'though' and 'snow'. The third line ends with 'here' which does not rhyme with other lines. The rhyme scheme of the poem is aaba, bbcd, ccde, dddd. There are no punctuations to create pauses and therefore all lines have a nice smooth flow. Let us now discuss the poem in detail.

Lines 1-4

The speaker (may be the poet himself) is passing through the woods on a dark, chilly winter evening on his little horse. He stops amidst the beautiful woods. He says that he probably knows the owner of the woods. He lives in a village nearby. He is not present in the woods therefore he will not be able to see the speaker's trespassing in the woods. He is so enchanted by the beauty of the woods and the entire surrounding that he stops there with his horse and watches the natural beauty of snow covered woods. It is snowing filling up woods with white layers of snow.

Here the dark woods symbolize the mystery of life. Like dark woods, life is in- penetrable and mysterious. Snow is a cold destructive force called Death. The mystery is always luring and so the speaker has an irresistible urge to stop there and watch the mysterious beauty and solitude of the woods.

Lines 5-8

In the second stanza, the speaker says that his little horse thinks it strange that they have stopped at the wrong place. There is no farmhouse nearby or any other reason to stop there. The speaker has stopped his horse between the woods and the frozen lake. The weather is very cold and the lake is frozen. It is also the darkest evening of the year, probably 22nd December when the winter solstice occurs in the northern hemisphere. The speaker says that his horse is little. It suggests that it is an ordinary horse or probably a pony. He loves his little horse who is quite loyal and obedient. The speaker is not a wealthy man and therefore he does not have an expensive horse. Though he is an ordinary man with limited financial resources, he is a great lover of nature. He is a highly sensitive person who is mesmerized by the beauty and mystery of nature.

The speaker's strange behavior creates a surprise to his little horse. The 'little horse' stands for common sense and pragmatism. He thinks that his master has probably made a mistake by stopping at the wrong place and wrong time.

Lines 9-12

The little horse shakes its harness bells to ask the speaker if there is some mistake or any problem. The horse thinks that there is no reason to stop at such a dark and chilly place. He wants to draw the attention of the speaker

and correct his mistake, There are only two kinds of sounds slow cold wind and falling of white feather like snow. For the horse, these sounds were strange and scaring but for the speaker, it was mysterious and enchantingly beautiful. He was spell bound by the solitude of the woods and frozen lake.

Lines-13-16

The last stanza is an epitome of Frost's philosophy of life. These four lines are popular among readers. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India liked these lines so much that he kept them under the glass top of his table in the Prime Minister's office.

The speaker in the last stanza says that the woods are lovely dark and deep. They fascinate the speaker with its beauty and mystery. 'lovely', 'dark' and 'deep' are suggestive of 'beauty', 'mystery' and 'profundity'. Very often beauty is inexplicable, incomprehensible and impenetrable. It enchants the speaker and he stops there lost in the beauty and mystery of the woods.

The horse's intrusion into his meditative state makes him aware of his duties and responsibilities. He realizes that he has to fulfill promises after travelling many miles. Therefore, he cannot stay there. He must move on and reach his home in time. He can rest only after keeping his promises and fulfilling his duties. Here 'sleep' refers to death. Before we die, we have to fulfill our duties. We have to play various roles in our life such as the role of a son or daughter, husband or wife, father, mother and so on. We have to maintain family relationships and social relations. We have duties towards family, society, nation and the world. We should fulfill them sincerely before we meet the final destination of our life i.e 'Death'.

In our life, we make 'Promises' to ourselves, to society and the nation. People also make 'promises' to us. Fulfilling mutual promises is equally important in life. It is the duty of an ideal individual towards himself and to the world.

We know that the journey of life is never smooth. There are distractions, temptations and innumerable obstacles on the path of life. We are often distracted by such temptations and forget our duties and commitments. Worldly pleasures and beauty of nature are alluring. We indulge in them and we want to continue to enjoy them forever. Failure in performing our duties is the failure of our life.

The speaker realizes this and decides to move on hurriedly. He thinks that keeping promises must be his priority. He must reach home, complete his tasks and then go to bed. This is the surface idea of the poem. The inner meaning is profoundly philosophical. It reminds us of the great message of the 'Bhagavad Gita' about duty, the importance of Karma (action). Life is beautiful and full of enchanting pleasures but the ultimate aim of life is to do one's duties and not to indulge in material pleasures of life.

The famous poem by Louisa May Alcott beautifully sums up the message of this poem.

"I slept and I dreamed that life was beauty.

I woke and found that life was duty."

Robert Frost uses symbols and imagery very beautifully in his poems. The imagery of the poem *Stopping by woods on a Snowy Evening* is vivid and picturesque. His language and diction are simple and colloquial. He creates

rhythm and music using short and simple words. In this poem, he has employed only monosyllabic and disyllabic words often repeating them as in the last stanza of the poem.

“And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep”

For Frost sound was equally important as the meaning of the words. He emphasized on dramatic element and metaphor in poetry.

2.6 TONE OF THE POEM

Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* conjures a tone of quiet reflection and remembrance of a winter evening. The narrator passes through the forest with his little horse on a chilly winter evening. He stops amidst the forest which is laden with fine feathery snow. It was the darkest evening of the year. The narrator is mesmerized by the beauty and mystery of the lovely dark surrounding. On one side, there is deep forest and on the other, there is a white frozen lake. The deep solitude affects the meditative mood of the narrator. There are only two sounds slow breeze of cold wind and downy flakes of falling snow. The narrator reflects upon the mysterious beauty and solitude of the lovely, dark and deep woods.

The little horse reminds the narrator posing the question why he stopped in the forest. There was no farm house nearby. He shook this harness bells disrupting the reflective mood of the narrator. The narrator wakes up to the job at hand and realizes that he has certain promises to keep, some duties to perform before he would go to sleep. Here the word 'sleep' indicates 'Death' which always makes us aware of uncertainty of life, and duties to be performed within that short span of life.

The tone of the poem is not sad or painful but the meditative realization of duties, to be performed and promises to keep.

2.7 THEMES OF THE POEM

At the literal level, the poem tells us about the speaker's passing through the dark and deep woods on a cold wintry evening. He stops amidst the dark and mysterious surrounding. The little horse finds the narrator's stopping by the woods quite queer and shakes his harness bells to alert the narrator. The narrator realizes that he should move on and reach home in time to complete his tasks and fulfill the obligations on hand before going to bed. However, the poem has deeper symbolic meaning. There are serious themes like death, duty, choices, obligations, isolation and beauty etc. in the poem. Let us discuss the major themes of the poem briefly.

- (1) **Beauty:** The beauty of nature is enchanting. It attracts human beings making them negligent towards their duties. Beauty creates repudiation of action and obligation. The darkness of woods is mesmerizing and mysterious but it is treacherous. It cuts itself off from action. The peace and solitude of the woods move one forget one's duties and obligation. The poet says that such beauty and solitude must be left behind to fulfill one's promises. According to Indian philosophy, beauty of the world creates illusion, maya that entraps human beings creating amnesia about their duties.
- (2) **Loneliness and Isolation:** The speaker finds himself lonely in the

dark and deep woods. He is far away from hustle and bustle of human world. Even the owner of the woods is not there. So his trespasses into his woods and enjoys the loneliness and isolation. He likes to stay there enjoying the solitude of the woods and the frozen lake. There are no sounds except slow cold breeze of wind and falling of snow.

- (3) **Choices:** The speaker in the poem stops in the woods. He enjoys the beauty and solitude of dark woods. He has choice to stay or go home. At first, he feels that he should stay there and relish the beauty and peace of the forest and frozen lake. However, his little horse reminds him of his mistake. Now the speaker is torn between two choices to stay in the woods or go home. It was difficult to take the decision but finally, the speaker decides to go home and keep his promises. He feels that it is necessary for him to fulfill his obligations before sleep. In human life, we often face such choices but to make the right choice is not an easy task. It is the test of life that symbolizes our attitude towards beauty, duty, life and death etc.
- (4) **Man and Nature:** Human beings are part of nature. They feel enticed towards the beauty of nature because man is also the creation of nature. Civilized men have tried to separate themselves from nature but when they are amidst nature, they become captivated by its beautiful beauty and peace. Nature is not always soothing and beautiful. It is scary and fierce too. The speaker in the poem likes, to stay in dark woods laden with snow but it is not safe to be there for long. The horse is a practical animal and he reminds the speaker to move on. The narrator also realizes that it is more important to reach home and perform his duties before going to bed. It is also safer to be at home in its cozy environment and warmth of the family.
- (5) **Duty and Obligations:** All human being have duties and responsibilities towards family, society and the world at large. We are not islands separated from one another. We are all connected with one another. We have duties towards the earth we live in. If we do not care for environment, time would soon come when the earth would be depleted of all its resources. It would ultimately destroy all lives. Therefore duties are important for the survival of mankind. We have to play roles as sons, daughters, husbands, wives, brothers and soon. We have obligations and responsibilities towards our country, our state and our city or town. In India, we believe that we have duties towards the Creator (God) who has created us as human beings, the highest species on earth. 'The Bhagavad Gita' says that we should perform our duties. First we should not think of the results but of action only. Lord Krishna says that Karma (actions) alone must be the priority of all human beings.
- (6) **Death:** Death has always been an enigma. Is it the end of life or transition to another life? We, in India believe that death is not the end of life. It is like changing clothes. The Gita says that life is eternal. Soul does not die, it is the body that dies. The soul exists forever, it has no beginning or end only body is born and it is the body that dies and is reborn.

Death is often compared with sleep in literature, philosophy and psychology. Sleep and death are brothers according to old Greek proverb. In sleep, we experience temporary death. We experience peace and rest in sleep. It relieves us from stress and pain of our hectic schedule. Death, like sleep also liberates us from pain and stressful journey of life. Robert Frost uses the theme of Death by calling it 'sleep'.

“And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep”

2.8 STRUCTURE/DICTION/STYLE OF THE POEM

The poem '*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*' has four stanzas of four lines each. All quatrains have metrical pattern of iambic tetrameter. Each line has four iambic feet which are made up of one unstressed syllable followed by stressed syllable.

U/ | U/ | U/ | U/
U/ | U/ | U/ | U/

The woods | are love | ly dark | and deep

Syllable:

Note : (U) indicates unstressed syllable and (/) indicates stressed syllable.

Unstressed syllable is a low beat and the stressed one is high beat. In Iambic Tetrameter, there are four feet with rising rhythm.

The rhyme scheme of the poem is aaba, bbcd, ccde, dddd

Whose woods these are I think I know	A
His house is in the village though;	A
He will not see me stopping here	B
To watch his woods fill up with snow	A

(‘Know’, ‘though’ and ‘snow’ rhyme while the third line does not rhyme)

Robert Frost’s diction is simple and often colloquial. The poem contains simple images from rural life like horse, woods, darkness, freezing cold, snow, promises, distance and sleep etc. These simple images are symbolic, for example, ‘dark wood’ symbolize mystery of life, promises stand for obligations and ‘sleep’ stands for death. The poet has used several poetic devices like alliteration, metaphors and personification. The horse ‘thinks’ and ‘asks’ the speaker like a human being and therefore the ‘horse’ is an example of personification. The examples of alliteration are; whose woods/his house/ watch his woods fill up with/ he gives his harness/dark and deep.

The repetition of final line reiterates and reaffirms the idea of promises and obligations the narrator has to fulfill.

Check Your Progress: 1

2.9 ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN BRIEF.

1. Where does the speaker stop? Why?

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2. Does the speaker know about the owner of the woods? Where does the owner of the woods live?

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3. Why does the horse think the speaker's stopping by the woods queer?

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4. Describe the place where the speaker stops in the woods.

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5. Why does the horse give his harness bells a shake?

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6. In silence of woods, what are the two sounds the speaker hears?

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7. Why does the speaker decide to move on?

8. Explain the message of the poem in brief.

Check Your Progres: 2

2.10 CHOOSE THE CORRECT OPTION FROM GIVEN BELOW.

1. *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* is poem by
 (a) Robert Frost (b) John Keats
 (c) William Wordsworth (d) Emily Dickinson
2. *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* was published in
 (a) 1921 (b) 1923
 (c) 1947 (d) 1950
3. *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* has
 (a) five stanzas (b) four stanzas
 (c) three stanzas (d) two stanzas
4. Quatrain contains _____lines
 (a) five (b) four
 (c) three (d) two
5. The horse is puzzled why the speaker
 (a) is unhappy (b) is shocked
 (c) stopped by the woods (d) stopped by the lake
6. The horse gives his harness bells a shake
 (a) to awaken him (b) to caution him
 (c) to ask him if there was any mistake
 (d) to ask him to move on
7. It was the _____ evening of the year.
 (a) hottest (b) coldest
 (c) darkest (d) the most fearful

8. The speaker was enticed by
 - (a) the beauty of woods
 - (b) the dark evening
 - (c) deep forest
 - (d) frozen lake
9. The speaker finally decides
 - (a) to stay in the forest
 - (b) to rest amidst woods
 - (c) to move on
 - (d) to go to a farm house
10. To keep promises means
 - (a) to obey orders
 - (b) to follow rules
 - (c) to live honestly
 - (d) to fulfill one's obligations
11. 'Sleep' symbolizes
 - (a) death
 - (b) suicide
 - (c) life
 - (d) uncertainty
12. The speaker finally realizes that
 - (a) life is mysterious
 - (b) life is full of beauty.
 - (c) life is full of temptations
 - (d) life is not just beauty but it is duty.

2.11 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have learnt that poetry is the most compact and meaningful form of literature. Great poetry is always profoundly philosophical, reflective and meditative. Poetry deals with the issues of life aesthetically. As we have stated earlier, a single stanza of a poem can epitomize the philosophy of life that a volume of prose work can do. It holds mirror up to nature and the world vividly.

2.12 BOOKS SUGGESTED

1. Works by Robert Frost at Project Gutenberg
2. Robert Frost, Poetry Foundation
3. Robert Frost (1995) Poirier, Richard, Richardson, Mark eds. Collected poems.
4. Deirdre, J. Fagan (1 January 2009) critical companion to Robert Frost: A Literary Reference to its life and work.
5. www.britannica.com
6. Wikipedia.org
7. <https://www.aresearchguide.com/>
8. www.enotes.com
9. <http://study.com>

Answers

1. (a), 2. (b), 3. (a), 4. (b), 5. (c), 6. (c), 7. (c), 8. (a), 9. (c), 10. (a), 11. (a), 12. (d)



Unit 3

THE EYES ARE NOT HERE **- RUSKIN BOND**

: STRUCTURE :

- 3.0 Objectives**
- 3.1 About the Author**
- 3.2 About the Short Story**
- 3.3 Text of the Story**
- 3.4 Key Words**
- 3.5 Summary of the Short Story**
- 3.6 Critical Analysis and Appreciation of the Story**
- 3.7 Tone of the Story**
- 3.8 Themes of the Story**
- 3.9 Style and Diction of the Story**
- 3.10 The title of the Story**
- 3.11 Questions (answer In brief)**
- 3.12 Multiple Choice Questions**
- 3.13 Let Us Sum Up**
- 3.14 Books Suggested**
- Answers**

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be introduced

- to one of the most popular forms of literature i.e. Short story.
- to a brief prose narrative.
- to a single episode with limited characters.
- to five important elements namely; plot, characters, setting, conflict and resolution.

Here you will study a beautiful short story by Ruskin Bond one of the greatest short story writers in Indian writing in English.

3.1 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruskin Bond is an Indian author of British descent. He was born on May 19, 1934 in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh. He spent his early childhood in Jamnagar (Gujarat) and Shimla. After his father's death he went to live at his grandmother's place in Dehradun. He was raised by his mother and step father. He studied at Bishop Cotton School in Shimla. After his high school education, he went to his aunt's place in the Channel Islands (U.K.) in 1951 and stayed there for two years. In London, he wrote his first novel *The Room on the Roof*, semi-autobiographical story of an orphaned Anglo Indian boy 'Rusty'. He won the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1957. He returned to India and settled in Dehradun.

Ruskin Bond went to live in Mussoorie in 1963. He became fulltime writer

who wrote novels, short stories, poems, essays, ghost stories and autobiographical works and travelogues. He has written over five hundred short stories, fifty books for children, novels and two volumes of autobiography. Presently he lives in Landour, Mussoorie's Ivy Cottage with his adopted family. He started writing at the age of 17 and he still writes regularly even at the age of 83.

The Major works of Ruskin Bond include:

1. *The Room on the Roof* (1956)
2. *The Blue Umbrella* (1974)
3. *The Night Train at Deoli* (1988)
4. *A Flight of Pigeons* (1978)
5. *Delhi is Not Far* (1994)
6. *Our Trees still Grow in Dehra* (1991)
7. *Cherry Tree* (1980)
8. *Angry River* (1972)
9. *Rusty, the Boy from the Hills* (2002)
10. *A Season of Ghosts* (1999)
11. *Panther's Moon* (1969)
12. *Vagrants in the Valley* (2016)
13. *Landour Days* (2002)
14. *The Adventures of Rusty*
15. *The Lamp is Lit* (1998)

Ruskin Bond received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1992 for *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2014. His several works have been adapted into films. The Bollywood film *Junoon* was based on his historical novella *A Flight of Pigeon*. In 2005, the famous film director Vishal Bhardwaj made a film based on his popular novel for children *The Blue Umbrella* which won the National Award for Best Children's film.

Ruskin Bond says that writing is his passion. He loves words and putting them together and creating a beautiful sentence. Nature always inspires him to write. He loves India so much that he would like to be reborn in India and nowhere else and be a writer.

3.2 ABOUT THE SHORT STORY

The Eyes Are Not Here is a marvellous story by Ruskin Bond. He has used the first person narrative technique in the story. The narrator is a blind person who narrates the story from his perspectives. His eyes are sensitive only to light and darkness. While he is travelling by train to Dehradun, he comes across a girl who enters his compartment. He hears the sound of her slippers and imagines about her beautiful face. He liked her voice as they began to converse. Gradually, he gets interested in her. He tries to hide his blindness tactfully from the girl. He tries to impress her by describing the trees that seem to be moving. The girl asked him if he saw any animals. The narrator replied that there were hardly any animals left in the forests near Dehra.

Daringly, the narrator told the girl that she had an interesting face. She laughed

and said that she was tired of people telling her about her pretty face. The narrator could now realize that she had a pretty face. The girl called her a gallant young man. Soon, the girl's destination Saharanpur arrived where her aunt had come to receive her. The girl stood up to collect her luggage. The narrator wondered whether she wore her hair in a bun or it was plaited or it hang loose over her shoulders or it was very short.

As the girl stood very close to the narrator the perfume from hair tantalized his sense of smell. As she moved away, the perfume still lingered where she had stood. The girl bade good bye to the narrator and got down on the platform of the railway station. The train started again and a new male passenger entered the compartment. The narrator asked him whether the girl had a long or short hair. The man said that he had not noticed her hair but he noticed her eyes. He said that her eyes were beautiful but they were of no use to her as she was completely blind. The revelation shocked the narrator and he felt that he had deceived himself. The ironical twist at the end makes the story highly appealing.

The story *The Eyes Have It* was originally published in *Contemporary Indian English Stories*. Later it was included in several other collections with different titles such as *The Eyes Are Not Here* and *The Girl on the Train*, etc. The story has only three characters the narrator, the girl and the new male passenger. It is an ideal short story that can be read in one go. Ruskin Bond's art of story-telling is simple and striking. It shows the author's deep insight into human psychology. The plot is well knit and coherent. The story ends with a striking discovery like O. Henry's short stories.

There are ironical twists and turns in the story as the narrator tries to hide his blindness but at the end he realizes that the girl is also blind. He realizes that the eyes are neither here nor there. Ruskin Bond deals with the theme of blindness showing that the blind people are more sensitive than those with eyes "The people with good eyesight fail to see what is right in front of them. Whereas the blind people take in only the essentials, whatever registers most tellingly on their remaining senses" remarks Ruskin Bond in the story. We are reminded of beautiful words of Helen Keller's *Three Days to See* where she says, "only the deaf appreciate hearing, only the blind realize the manifold blessings that lie in sight".

3.3 TEXT OF THE STORY

I had the compartment to myself up to Rohana, and then a girl got in. the couple who saw her off were probably her parents; they seemed very anxious about her comfort, and the women gave the girl detailed instructions as to where to keep her things, when not to lean out of the windows, and how to avoid speaking to strangers. They said their good-byes; the train pulled out of the station.

As I was totally blind at the time, my eyes sensitive only to light and darkness, I was unable to tell what the girl looked like; but I knew she wore slippers from the way they slapped against her heels. It would take me some time to discover something about her looks and perhaps I never would. But I liked the sound of her voice, and even the sound of her slippers.

'Are you going all the way to Dehra?' I asked. I must have been sitting in a dark corner because my voice started her. She gave a little exclamation and

said, 'I didn't know anyone else was here.'

Well, it often happens that people with good eyesight fail to see what is right in front of them. They have too much to take in, I suppose. Whereas people who cannot see (or see very little) have to take in only the essentials, whatever registers most tellingly on their remaining senses.

'I didn't if I would be able to prevent her from discovering that I was blind, I thought. 'Provided I keep to my seat, it shouldn't be too difficult.'

The girl said, 'I'm getting down at Saharanpur. My aunt is meeting me there.' Then I had better not be too familiar. I said, 'Aunts are usually formidable creatures.'

'Where are you going?' she asked.

'To Dehra, and then to Mussoorie.'

'Oh, how lucky you are, I wish I were going to Mussoorie. I love the hills. Especially in October.'

'Yes this is the best time, 'I said calling on my memories. The hills are covered with wild dahlias, the sun is delicious, and at night you can sit in front of a log-fire and drink a little brandy. Most of the tourists have gone, and the roads are quite and almost deserted. Yes October is the best time.'

She was silent, and I wondered if my words had touched her, or whether she thought me a romantic fool. Then I made a mistake.

'What is it like?' I asked.

She seemed to find nothing strange in the question. Had she noticed already that I could not see? But her next question removed my doubts.

'Why don't you look out the window?' she asked.

I moved easily along the berth and felt for the window-ledge. The window was open, and I faced it, making pretence, of studying the landscape. I heard the panting of the engine, the rumble of the wheels, and in my mind's eye, I could see the telegraph-posts flashing by.

'Have you noticed,' I ventured, that the trees seem to be moving while we seem to be standing still?

'That always happens,' she said. 'Do you see any animals?

Hardly any animals left in the forests near Dehra.'

I turned from the window and faced the girl, and for a while we sat in silence.

'You have an interesting face,' I remarked. I was becoming quite daring, but it was a safe remark. Few girls can resist flattery.

She laughed pleasantly, a clear ringing laugh.

'It's nice to be told I have an Interesting face. I am tired of people telling me I have a pretty face.'

'Oh, so you do have a pretty face.' Thought I, and aloud I said:

'You are very gallant young man,' she said. 'But why are you so serious?

I thought then, that I would try to laugh for her,' but the thought of laughter only made me feel troubled and lonely.

We'll soon be at your station,' I said.

'Thank goodness it's a short journey. I can bear to sit in a train for more than

two or three hours.'

Yet I was prepared to sit there for almost any length of time,

Just to listen to her talking. Her voice had the sparkle of a mountain stream. As soon as she left the train, she would forget our brief encounter; but it would stay with me for the rest of the journey and for some time after.

The engine's whistle shrieked, the carriage wheels changed their sound and rhythm.

The girl got up and began to collect her things. I wondered if she wore her hair in a bun, or if it was plaited, or if it hung loose over her shoulders, or if it was cut very short.

The train drew slowly into the station. Outside, there was the shouting of porters and vendors and a high-pitched female voice near the carriage door which must have belonged to the girl's aunt.

'Good-bye,' said the girl.

She was standing very close to me, so close that the perfume from her hair was tantalizing. I wanted to raise my hand and touch her hair,' but she moved away, and only the perfume still lingered where she had stood.

'You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will, but the scent of the roses will linger there still.....

There was some confusion in the doorway. A man, getting into the compartment, stammered an apology. Then the door banged shut, and the world was shut out again. I returned to my berth. The guard blew his whistle and we off. Once again, I had a game to play with a new fellow- traveler.

The train gathered speed, the wheels took up their song, the carriage groaned and shook. I found the window and sat in front of it, staring into the daylight that was darkness form me. So many things were happening outside the window. It could be a fascinating game, guessing what went on out there.

The man who had entered the compartment broke into my reverie. 'You must be disappointed,' he said, ' I'm not as attractive a travelling companion as the one who just left.'

'She was an interesting girl,' I said.' Can you tell me –did she keep her hair long or short?'

'I don't remember,' he said, sounding puzzled.' it was her eyes I noticed, not her hair. She had beautiful eyes but they were of no use to her, she was completely blind. Didn't you notice?'

- Ruskin Bond

3.4 KEY WORDS

Anxious	: Eager, Concerned, worried
Instructions	: Information about how to do, make or use something
Slap	: Hit, Strike, Smack
Startle	: Surprise, alarm, frighten
Essentials	: Necessary or important things
Register	: Express or convey an opinion or emotion
Tellingly	: Significantly, strikingly, effectively

Formidable	: Frightening, dreadful, threatening
Dahlia	: A flower plant with bright coloured flowers
Log fire	: Wood fire
Tantalizing	: Something that is tempting or alluring but unlikely to provide a way of satisfying that desire
Deserted	: Empty of people
Romantic fool	: Passionate stupid person
Berth	: A fixed bunk on train, ship or other means of transport
Window-ledge	: Windowsill
Telegraph post	: Telegraph pole
Flash by	: Shine, sparkle, blaze, glimmer
Resist	: Counter, combat, try to prevent, defy.
Flattery	: Excessive and insincere praise
Pleasantly	: Happily, Joyfully
Gallant	: Brave, Courageous
Brief	: Short
Encounter	: To come in contact, come across, confront
Shriek	: Scream, Screech, Cry out loudly
Vendors	: Sellers, traders in the street
Linger	: Remain, stay, wait around, stick around
Perfume	: Fragrance, fragrant liquid, Scent
Confusion	: Disorder, chaos, turmoil
Stammer	: Stutter, speak haltingly, falter, fumble
Apology	: Expression of regret, beg pardon
Bang	: A sudden, loud, sharp noise
Fellow-traveler	: Companion in travelling
Groan	: Moan, whine, whimper (painful sound)
Fascinating	: Attractive, Charming
Reverie	: Day-dream
Bun	: A hairstyle drawn back into a tight tail at the back of the head
Rumble	: Continuous deep, resonant sound
In mind's eye	: In one's imagination or visualization
Plaited	: Hair formed into a plait
Puzzled	: Confused, perplexed, unable to understand
Guess	: Estimate, speculate, surmise, reckon

3.5 SUMMARY OF THE STORY

The narrator was travelling to Dehra by train. He was alone in the compartment. He was a blind man whose eyes were sensitive to light and darkness only. At Rohana railway station, a girl gets into the compartment. Her par-

ents give her many instructions about her luggage, safety and her well-being as she takes her seat in the compartment. They advise her to take care, not to lean out of the window and to avoid talking to strangers.

The train starts and narrator begins to talk with the girl. The voice of the narrator startles her as she thought that she was alone in the compartment. The girl told him that she was going to Saharanpur where her aunt would come to receive her. The narrator tells her that he was going to Mussoorie a lovely hill station which was full of colorful flowers in October. The girl says that she too loved hills, particularly in October. The narrator's description of Mussoorie touches her heart.

The narrator is blind but he tries to hide his blindness from the girl. After some talk, the narrator tells her quite daringly that she has an interesting face. The girl replies happily that people generally said that she had a pretty face. Soon the destination of the girl arrives and she bids goodbye to the narrator. The narrator wonders whether she had a long hair or short hair. He wonders if her hair was plaited or tied in a bun. She stood up near the narrator and filled his sense of smell with lovely, tantalizing perfume from her hair. She moved away but the perfume still lingered where she was standing.

The girl gets down from the carriage and another male passenger enters the compartment. He apologizes to the narrator for not being an attractive travelling companion as the previous one. The narrator asks him about the girl's hair whether it was long, short, plaited or tied in bun. The man replies that he had not noticed her hair but he saw the eyes of the girl which were really beautiful but of no use to her as she was completely blind. The man asks the narrator if he had not noticed her blindness. The narrator felt that he tried to cheat her but he too was cheated. The train moved on and the narrator continued to pretend that he was a man with normal eye-sight.

3.6 CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND APPRECIATION OF THE STORY

The Eyes Are Not Here is one of the most appealing stories by Ruskin Bond. It has other two titles too- *The Eyes Have it* and *The Girl on the Train*. The story is in first person narrative by the narrator who is blind. He is travelling to Dehra by train. He is alone in the compartment. He is blind but his eyes are sensitive to light and darkness. At Rohana, a girl enters the compartment. Her parents had come to see her off. They were giving her detailed instructions about her safety and well-being. They told her not to lean out of the window and avoid talking to the strangers. They said goodbye and the train moved on.

The narrator was curious to know about the girl's appearance. He was naturally unable to tell what the girl looked like. He liked the slapping sound of her shippers. He began to talk to her asking her whether she was going all the way to Dehra. She was surprised and exclaimed that she thought that there was nobody else in the compartment. The narrator liked her voice which was like sparkling mountain stream. The narrator wanted to hide his blindness from the girl and therefore he behaved and talked like a man with a normal vision.

The narrator remarks that people with good eyesight fail to see what is right in front of them as they have so many things to see. Whereas the blind people

or people with weak eyesight have to take in only the essentials that their remaining senses register most effectively.

Here we are reminded of the famous essay *Three Days to See* by Helen Keller who was deaf and blind but she overcame her disabilities with the help of her great teacher Ann Sullivan. In her essay "Three Days to See" she describes how she would feel and do if she was blessed with three days to see. She remarks that people with ability to see, hear and talk take such privileges for granted. She suggests that darkness makes one appreciative of light and sight. The voice and sounds make one appreciate the ability of hearing. People with normal eyes and ears take all sights and sounds hazily without concentration and with little appreciation.

The narrator who is blind understands the importance of eyesight and other senses. He suggests that those with eyes are often blind towards beauty and sights around them. The narrator is very curious to know about the appearance of the girl. During their conversation, the narrator comes to know that the girl was going to Saharanpur where her aunt was to come to railway station to receive her. She asked the narrator where he was going. The narrator replied that he was going to Dehradun and then to Mussoorie. The girl exclaimed that he was very lucky and wished that she were also going to Mussoorie. She added that she loved hills especially in October. The narrator described the beauty of the hills covered with wild dahlias in October. He said that in October, the sun was delicious and at night people would sit in front of log-fire and drink a little brandy. He added that as most of the tourists had left the hill station, the roads were quiet and desecrated. The narrator agreed with the girl that October was the best time to visit Mussoorie.

The girl was impressed by the words of the narrator. She probably thought that the narrator was a romantic fool. The narrator thought that probably she had come to know that he was not blind. However, soon she said that he should sit near that window to see things outside. The narrator moved near the window and pretended to see things outside. He could only feel the telegraph-poles flashing by. The girl asked him if he saw any animals. The narrator replied that hardly any animals could be sighted in the forests near Dehra.

The narrator then moved away from the window and sat facing the girl. For a while, silence prevailed. Then the narrator daringly remarked that she had an interesting face. She laughed pleasantly and said that it was nice to be told that she had an interesting face because she was tired of hearing that she had a pretty face. The narrator then realized that she was a pretty girl. The girl called him a gallant young man.

The narrator told her that they would soon be at her station. The girl said that she preferred short journey as she could not bear to travel for more than two or three hours. The narrator liked to travel for any length of time, hearing the sweet voice of the girl. Soon, the train whistled and arrived at Saharanpur Railway station. The girl got up and began to collect her luggage. The narrator wondered whether she had a long hair or short hair, or they were plaited or tied in a bun. As the train drew into the station, there were shouting of the porters and vendors and a high pitched voice of the girl's aunt who had come to receive her.

The girl bid good bye to the narrator. She was standing quite close to her and the perfume from her hair tantalized him. He had a desire to touch her hair

but then she moved away leaving the fragrance lingering behind. He remembered the words of a beautiful verse that said.

“You may break; you may shatter the vase if you will,
but the scent of the roses will linger there still.....”

The girl left and a male passenger got into the compartment. The door banged shut and the narrator returned to his berth. The guard blew the whistle and the train started again. The narrator decided to hide his blindness from the fellow traveler once again. The man said to the narrator, “You must be disappointed. I’m not as attractive a travelling companion as the one who just left.”

The narrator asked the man whether the girl had a long or a short hair. The fellow traveler said that he had not noticed her hair but he had noticed her beautiful eyes. Though her eyes were beautiful, they were of no use to her. He added that she was completely blind. He asked the narrator if he had not noticed it. The story ends with an ironical twist which makes it very appealing and effective. Like O. Henry, Ruskin Bond has employed the technique of abrupt and surprising ending. The narrator feels that he tried to deceive the girl and the fellow traveler but in fact it was he who was deceived in the end.

The Eyes Are Not Here is an ideal short story that can be finished in a short single sitting. The story contains only three characters, the narrator, the girl and the new passenger. The setting is a train compartment with no other passengers except the narrator, the girl and the new passenger who enters after the girl gets down at Saharanpur. The time span of the story is a few hours of travelling between Rohana and Saharanpur though the narrator was travelling all the way to Dehra. It was the month of October when Mussoorie looked enchantingly beautiful.

Ruskin Bond’s art of storytelling is simple and poetic. His style of narration is lucid and appealing with profound insight into human psychology, particularly the thought processes of the blind people. Ruskin Bond very aptly describes the narrator’s sharp sense of hearing and smell. The blind people’s senses of hearing, smell, taste and touch are far more powerful than the people with a normal eye-sight.

The plot of the story is well-knit without any frills. The language and writing style of Ruskin Bond is quite precise and compact. The description of beautiful Mussoorie in October is vivid and picturesque. Bond uses the word ‘delicious’ for the warmth of the sun in October creating sensuous appeal. The story ends strikingly with ironical twist. The narrator’s attempt to hide his blindness is humorous but it ends ironically at the end of the story. Ruskin Bond does not pity the blind but highlights their profound curiosity and sensitivity towards life and nature.

The story is about limited human perception even if a person has eyes or not. Eyes can see things but what one sees is not whole. Human perception or understanding is often limited by assumptions. The narrator in the story hides his blindness but realizes at the end that the girl was also blind. The girl proves herself more intelligent and smarter than the narrator. The narrator tried to deceive the girl by pretending that he was not blind but at the end, he felt that not only the girl but he too was deceived. It is like “hunter was hunted”.

3.7 TONE OF THE STORY

Tone is the opinion about characters and events conveyed by the narrator. When the narrative is first person and participant in the story, tone and mood can overlap. Mood is an emotional quality of the story which is related to setting and also influenced by the narrator's psychological states.

The tone of the narrator in *The Eyes Are Not Here* is observational. The narrator plays the game of hiding his blindness as pastime. Though the tone strives to be objective, it slips into subjective sometimes. Ruskin Bond's story is more focused on narrator's efforts to prevent his fellow passengers from discovering his blindness.

3.8 THEMES OF THE STORY

There are several themes, in the short story *The Eyes Are Not Here* by Ruskin Bond. The major theme is blindness which the writer sees from a different angle. Blindness is generally taken as a disability but it is a fact that those with normal eyesight take things for granted. They do not see many things as their eyes take in everything. On the other hand those who are blind take in only essentials through their other senses such as touch, hearing, smell and taste. Their perception is more sensitive and profound.

This story by Ruskin Bond is quite brief but also quite intriguing and complex. It deals mainly with the theme of human perception. In this story, there are three characters that prove to be imperceptive in various ways. Human perception is usually limited by assumptions. As J. Krishnamurti used to say, our seeing is conditioned and limited by our assumptions thinking or conditioning. When we look at a rose, we forget to see its real beauty but compare it with our previous experience of seeing the rose.

The story begins with a blind man sitting in a compartment of the train which is heading towards Dehra. At Rohana, a girl enters the compartment. She does not notice that her companion was blind. The blind man and the girl converse pleasantly while the man tries to hide his blindness. At Saharanpur, the girl gets off the train and another male passenger enters the compartment who tells the blind man that the girl who just left the compartment was blind. The male passenger too fails to see that his fellow passenger was blind. Thus the game of hiding goes on but the blind man realizes that he tried to deceive the girl but in fact, he too was deceived. The eyes were neither here nor there.

Ruskin Bond suggests that we take our assumptions as reality and they influence our perceptions turning them into illusions. The joke of the narrator about people with eyes turns into a joke about the narrator too. At the end, we all learn a very important lesson that our assumptions mar the perception of the reality whether we are blind or people with normal eyes. Both the real blind and the people with normal vision turn in to 'blind' people as they fail to see reality an account of false assumptions. The eyes are the means to see but the mind and thoughts determine how we "see" things around us.

3.9 STYLE AND DICTION OF THE STORY

Ruskin Bond's writing style reflected his lonely childhood and love for nature. Many of his stories are based on his personal experience of Dehradun and Mussoorie where he grew up and lived for major part of his life. His

language is lucid, simple and engaging. His sentences are well formed, descriptive and often poetic. Sharing his secrets of a writer's life, Ruskin Bond gives a few useful tips for growing writers. He says that writing is a craft that requires discipline and rigour. One must write regularly to make one's conscience clear.

Ruskin Bond further adds that "Solitude is something you seek as a writer." As a writer he has kept away from modern technology like laptops, cell-phones etc. He also shuns the company of people at various times. Instead, he chooses to spend his time having regular siestas that beget dreams and push his imagination into creativity. He finds joy in different aspects of nature and they have become the part of his writing.

Ruskin Bond says that a writer must be an avid reader of good literature and study the style of great writers. For him, writing is therapeutic that heals the wounds of difficult and lonely childhood. "The Eyes Are Not Here" reflects Ruskin Bond's views on writing and his love for language.

Ruskin Bond is gifted with exceptional power of minute observation and curiosity. For him, characters play an important role in shaping the plot structure of the stories. His stories are nostalgic, vivid and full of poetic imagination.

3.10 TITLE OF THE STORY

The story *The Eyes Are Not Here* has two other titles: *The Girl on the Train* and *The Eyes Have It*. At the beginning of the story, we learn that the man in the compartment of the train is blind. He can only distinguish between light and darkness. It is true that "the eyes are not here". The girl who enters the compartment is also blind. When she enters, the narrator takes her as a girl with normal eyesight. The narrator also tries to hide his blindness from the girl who takes him as a man with normal eyes. The true realization takes place only when the next passenger enters and apologizes for not being as attractive as the girl who had just got off the train at Sahranpur. The narrator asks him about the girl's hair (whether it was long or short) the new passenger replies that he had not noticed her hair but he had seen her beautiful eyes which were of no use to her because she was blind.

So, the passenger with good eyesight fails to see what is right in front of him. He fails to notice that the man in the compartment was also blind. The title of the story shows that the eyes of the girl and the man "are not here" because both are blind. The irony of the story is that even people who can see are often blind.

Check Your Progress: 1

3.11 ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN BRIEF.

- (i) What are the other titles of the short story *The Eyes Are Not Here* by Ruskin Bond?

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- (ii) Who are the three main characters in the story?
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- (iii) How did the narrator pretend to hide his blindness?
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- (iv) Describe the conversation between the narrator and the girl?
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- (v) What did the narrator remark about the girl's face? What was her reaction?
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- (vi) What did the narrator want to know about the girl's hair?
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(vii) What is the ironical twist at the end of the story?

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(viii) What did the new male passenger say about the girl's eyes?

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(ix) Discuss briefly the author's remark about people with eyes and without eyes ?

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Check Your Progress: 2

3.12 CHOOSE THE CORRECT OPTION FROM GIVEN BELOW.

1. *The Eyes Are Not Here* is written by _____
(a) John Ruskin (b) Ruskin Bond
(c) O. Henry (d) Somerset Maugham
2. The narrator was a _____ man.
(a) deaf (b) lame
(c) blind (d) lumb
3. The girl entered the compartment at _____
(a) Saharanpur (b) Dehra
(c) Meerut (d) Rohana
4. The blind narrator was travelling to _____
(a) Dehra (b) Haridwar
(c) Ronana (d) Delhi

5. The girl was travelling to _____
 (a) Rohana (b) Saharanpur
 (c) Haridwar (d) Rishikesh
6. The girl said that she loved hills during the month of _____
 (a) April (b) May
 (c) October (d) December
7. The girl's _____ was to come to receive her.
 (a) uncle (b) aunt
 (c) brother (d) father
8. The narrator said that the girl had _____ face.
 (a) an interesting (b) an attractive
 (c) a pretty (d) a lovely
9. The narrator remarks that people with normal eyesight fail _____
 (a) to see everything (b) to hear everything
 (c) to understand everything
 (d) to see what is right in front of them
10. The girl probably thought that the narrator was
 (a) a romantic man (b) a foolish man
 (c) a talkative man (d) a romantic fool
11. The narrator was curious to know about _____
 (a) the girl's face (b) the girl's appearance
 (c) the girl's clothes (d) the girl's hair
12. The narrator compares the voice of the girl with
 (a) the ringing of the bell (b) the music
 (c) the sparkle of the mountain stream
 (d) the murmur of the flowing river
13. After the girl got off the train, a new passenger who entered was
 (a) a beautiful girl (b) a blind girl
 (c) a new man (d) a new woman
14. The new passenger told the narrator that
 (a) the girl had a nice long hair
 (b) the girl had a short hair
 (c) the girl had a plaited hair
 (d) the girl was blind
15. Another title of the story *The Eyes Are Not Here* is _____
 (a) *The Girl Traveller* (b) *The Eyes Are Everywhere*
 (c) *The Eyes Have It* (d) *The Eyes Are Not here*

3.13 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied a very appealing story by Ruskin Bond. This short story is an example of an ideal story that contains only three characters,



Unit 4

THE LAST LEAF **- O. HENRY**

: STRUCTURE :

- 4.0 Objectives**
- 4.1 About the Author**
- 4.2 About the Story**
- 4.3 Text of the Story**
- 4.4 Key Words**
- 4.5 The Summary of the Story**
- 4.6 Critical Analysis of the Story**
- 4.7 Tone of the Story**
- 4.8 Theme of the Story**
- 4.9 Diction and Style of the Story**
- 4.10 The title of the Story**
- 4.11 Questions (answer in brief)**
- 4.12 Multiple Choice Questions**
- 4.13 Let Us Sum Up**
- 4.14 Books Suggested**

Answers

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall study

- The famous short story *The Last Leaf* by O. Henry.
- The characters' analysis of the story.
- An introductory information about the present Poem and Poet
- The text of the story
- The critical analysis and tone of the story
- The diction and style of the story
- The plot, setting and characters of the story

4.1 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

O. Henry (1862-1910) was born under the name William Sydney Porter in North Carolina in 1862. His father was a physician. He lost his mother when he was only three years old. After his mother's death he and his father went to live with his paternal grandmother. As a student, he was an avid reader and read classics. He was also a skilled guitar and mandolin player. He began to work in a drugstore of his uncle in 1879. Then in 1881, he became a licensed pharmacist.

O. Henry moved to Texas in 1882 hoping to get rid of persistent cough that he had developed. He began to live in a sheep ranch, learned shepherding, cooking and baby-sitting. He tried different jobs from pharmacy to drafting, journalism and banking. In 1891, he joined the First National Bank in Austin

as a book-keeper and teller. In 1894, he was charged with embezzlement of funds and he lost his job.

After losing his bank job, he devoted full time to the weekly *The Rolling Stone* that published his sketches and short stories. He relocated to Houston with his family in 1895 and began working as a columnist, reporter and cartoonist at *The Houston Post* drawing monthly remuneration of 25 dollars. In 1896, he was arrested for embezzlement at the First National Bank. He took an impetuous step and escaped on July 6, 1896 a day before his trial to Honduras.

Sydney Porter stayed in a hotel in Peru and wrote *Cabbages and Kings* which was published in 1904. It is one of his notable works that included his short stories that displayed facets of life in a crippled town of Central America. He had coined a word 'banana republic' to depict unstable Country of Latin America. In 1897, he heard the news of his wife dying of tuberculosis, so he returned to Austin to be with his wife and family. His father-in-law posted a bail so that he could remain with his wife until her death in 1897. Then he was sentenced to five years imprisonment. At the prison hospital, he worked as a pharmacist and he did not have to live in a cell in the jail.

During this period, he wrote stories which made him quite popular. In 1902, he was released from the jail and went to New York City where he began writing short stories under the pen name O. Henry. He wrote one short story every week for a newspaper in addition to other stories for magazines. His popular collections of short stories include: *The Four Million* (1906) *Heart of the West* (1907) *The Trimmed Lamp* (1907) *The Gentle Grafters* (1908) *The Voice of the City* (1908) *Options* (1909) *Whirligigs* (1910) and *Strictly Business* (1910).

O. Henry's representative collection of short stories was *The Four Million* which stood for New York City and its people. Many stories of this collection depict the everyday lives of the Manhattan inhabitants. O. Henry was skilled in plotting short stories writing in humorous, witty style with surprise endings. Even after his death, O. Henry's stories continued to be collected under the following titles.

1. *Sixes and Sevens* (1911)
2. *Rolling Stones* (1912)
3. *Waifs and Strays* (1917)
4. *O. Henryana* (1920)
5. *Letter to Lithopolis* (1922)
6. *Postscripts* (1923)
7. *O. Henry Encore* (1939)

O. Henry's stories are witty and often lightly humorous. They have twisted endings, life-like characters and realistic setting. His famous story *The Gift of the Magi* is about a young married couple who want to buy Christmas gifts for each other. The wife sells her long beautiful hair to buy a nice chain for her husband's watch. The husband sells the watch to buy lively combs for his wife. *A Retrieved Reformation* is about a safecracker Jimmy Valentine who saves the life of a girl by using his safe cracking expertise. *The Cop and the Anthem* is about New York City hobo who attempts to save himself from

terrible cold by getting arrested and sent to jail. He hears the Church anthem that makes him decide to get out of criminal life. But the police officer arrested him for his suspicious wandering near the Church gate. The court sends him to jail for three months the very next morning.

O. Henry's writing has vivacity, variety and interest. He employs simple, day-to-day speech patterns and rhythm of common folks. His diction is pungent and glittering with an eccentric symbolism. His vocabulary contains a lot of slang words and phrases. His was the most original talent. There is a fine blending of technical excellence, sparkling, wit, abundant humour and fertile imagination.

Towards the end of his life, things began to fallout. His last years were darkened by alcoholism, ill-health and financial problems. In 1907, he married Sara Lindsay Coleman but the marriage was not a happy one and they separated after one year. O. Henry died of cirrhosis of liver on June 5, 1910 in New York. The funeral was held in New York city but he was buried in North Carolina, the state of his birth.

The 'O. Henry Award' is given every year for remarkable short stories in his memory. The federal court house where he was convicted is named as O. Henry Hall. A film was made in 1952 featuring his five stories called *O. Henry's Full House*. The episode based on *The Cop and the Anthem* earned high critical acclaim. It was started by Charles Laughton and Marilyn Monroe. The other stories included in the films were, *The Clarion Call*, *The Last Leaf*, *The Ransom of Redchief* and *The Gift of the Magi*.

In 1962, The Soviet Postal Service issued a stamp commemorating O. Henry's 100th birthday. In 2012, the US Postal service issued a stamp commemorating the 150th anniversary of O. Henry's birth.

4.2 ABOUT THE STORY

The Last Leaf by O. Henry is one of the most acclaimed and widely read short stories. The story begins with sketchy background of the old Greenwich Village where artists have their studios in crisscrossing streets. A traveller would lose his way in these mazy streets. The description of the streets reflects queer, psychological morbidity of the place.

Then the story focuses on the main theme of artist duo Sue and Johnsy. They had met at a hotel and found themselves sharing certain common tastes. Both were aspiring painters who had come to try their luck in New York. They decided to share the apartment living together. Then comes winter with extreme cold, rain and wind Johnsy becomes the victim of pneumonia. The doctor examines her and tells Sue that Johnsy won't have much chance of survival if she does not have a strong will to live, Johnsy had already lost hope to live. She awaited her death watching the falling leaves of an ivy vine on a brick wall nearby. She watched and counts the leaves thinking that she would die with the fall of the last leaf.

Sue scolds her for her stupid belief but Johnsy's mind is gripped by the falling of the last leaf and her death. Sue tells this to Behrman, an old painter who had nurtured the dream of painting a masterpiece. He was a frustrated artist who survived by painting ads and posters. To save young Johnsy, the old Behrman painted the last leaf on the wall after all the leaves had fallen. It was a rainy night and he climbed the ladder with a lantern in his hand and painted his masterpiece.

The painted leaf inspired Johnsy to live and she began to recover soon. Sue told Johnsy that old Behrman had died of pneumonia as he had painted the moveless last leaf on the brick wall on a rainy and windy cold night. She said that it was his real masterpiece.

Behrman sacrificed his own life to save Johnsy, proving that art triumphs over death. The ironical twist to the plot makes the story very interesting. It comes unexpectedly resulting into tragic-comic note.

The Last Leaf is a perfect short story with brevity compactness and neatness. All the elements of the story-plot, characters, dialogue, setting and description are organically connected with one another. There is an ironical twist at the end of the story which is both surprising and convincing. The story epitomizes the Christian parable of Resurrection and sacrifice. The story *The Last Leaf* displays O. Henry's writing skills compact plot, terse dialogues that suit the speakers and twisted ending. Behrman's chivalric action forms the main theme of the short story. Sue and Johnsy's close bonding represents true and sincere friendship. O. Henry has employed sound imagery and sight imagery very effectively. Howling wind and beating rain express sound imagery while Johnsy's watching of the falling leaves from the ivy vine through the window displays sight imagery. *The Last Leaf* is a story of passion, hope and sacrifice with a message that real art is human love and sacrifice.

4.3 TEXT OF THE STORY

In a little district west of Washington Square the streets have run crazy and broken themselves into small strips called "places." These "places" make strange angles and curves. One Street crosses itself a time or two. An artist once discovered a valuable possibility in this street. Suppose a collector with a bill for paints, paper and canvas should, in traversing this route, suddenly meet himself coming back, without a cent having been paid on account!

So, to quaint old Greenwich Village the art people soon came prowling, hunting for north windows and eighteenth-century gables and Dutch attics and low rents. Then they imported some pewter mugs and a chafing dish or two from Sixth Avenue, and became a "colony."

At the top of a squatty, three-story brick Sue and Johnsy had their studio. "Johnsy" was familiar for Joanna. One was from Maine; the other from California. They had met at the table d'hôte of an Eighth Street "Delmonico's," and found their tastes in art, chicory salad and bishop sleeves so congenial that the joint studio resulted.

That was in May. In November a cold, unseen stranger, whom the doctors called Pneumonia, stalked about the colony, touching one here and there with his icy fingers. Over on the east side this ravager strode boldly, smiting his victims by scores, but his feet trod slowly through the maze of the narrow and moss-grown "places."

Mr. Pneumonia was not what you would call a chivalric old gentleman. A mite of a little woman with blood thinned by California zephyrs was hardly fair game for the red-fisted, short-breathed old duffer. But Johnsy he smote; and she lay, scarcely moving, on her painted iron bedstead, looking through the small Dutch window-panes at the blank side of the next brick house.

One morning the busy doctor invited Sue into the hallway with a shaggy, grey eyebrow.

"She has one chance in - let us say, ten," he said, as he shook down the

mercury in his clinical thermometer. "And that chance is for her to want to live. This way people have of lining-u on the side of the undertaker makes the entire pharmacopoeia look silly. Your little lady has made up her mind that she's not going to get well. Has she anything on her mind?"

"She - she wanted to paint the Bay of Naples someday." said Sue.

"Paint? - bosh! Has she anything on her mind worth thinking twice - a man for instance?"

"A man?" said Sue, with a jew's-harp twang in her voice. "Is a man worth - but, no, doctor; there is nothing of the kind."

"Well, it is the weakness, then," said the doctor. "I will do all that science, so far as it may filter through my efforts, can accomplish. But whenever my patient begins to count the carriages in her funeral procession I subtract 50 per cent from the curative power of medicines. If you will get her to ask one question about the new winter styles in cloak sleeves I will promise you a one-in-five chance for her, instead of one in ten."

After the doctor had gone Sue went into the workroom and cried a Japanese napkin to a pulp. Then she swaggered into Johnsy's room with her drawing board, whistling ragtime.

Johnsy lay, scarcely making a ripple under the bedclothes, with her face toward the window. Sue stopped whistling, thinking she was asleep.

She arranged her board and began a pen-and-ink drawing to illustrate a magazine story. Young artists must pave their way to Art by drawing pictures for magazine stories that young authors write to pave their way to Literature.

As Sue was sketching a pair of elegant horseshow riding trousers and a monocle of the figure of the hero, an Idaho cowboy, she heard a low sound, several times repeated. She went quickly to the bedside.

Johnsy's eyes were open wide. She was looking out the window and counting - counting backward.

"Twelve," she said, and little later "eleven"; and then "ten," and "nine"; and then "eight" and "seven", almost together.

Sue look solicitously out of the window. What was there to count? There was only a bare, dreary yard to be seen, and the blank side of the brick house twenty feet away. An old, old ivy vine, gnarled and decayed at the roots, climbed half way up the brick wall. The cold breath of autumn had stricken its leaves from the vine until its skeleton branches clung, almost bare, to the crumbling bricks.

"What is it, dear?" asked Sue.

"Six," said Johnsy, in almost a whisper. "They're falling faster now. Three days ago there were almost a hundred. It made my head ache to count them. But now it's easy. There goes another one. There are only five left now."

"Five what, dear? Tell your Sudie."

"Leaves. On the ivy vine. When the last one falls I must go, too. I've known that for three days. Didn't the doctor tell you?"

"Oh, I never heard of such nonsense," complained Sue, with magnificent scorn. "What have old ivy leaves to do with your getting well? And you used to love that vine so, you naughty girl. Don't be a goosey. Why, the doctor

told me this morning that your chances for getting well real soon were - let's see exactly what he said - he said the chances were ten to one! Why, that's almost as good a chance as we have in New York when we ride on the street cars or walk past a new building. Try to take some broth now, and let Sudie go back to her drawing, so she can sell the editor man with it, and buy port wine for her sick child, and pork chops for her greedy self."

"You needn't get any more wine," said Johnsy, keeping her eyes fixed out the window. "There goes another. No, I don't want any broth. That leaves just four. I want to see the last one fall before it gets dark. Then I'll go, too."

"Johnsy, dear," said Sue, bending over her, "will you promise me to keep your eyes closed, and not look out the window until I am done working? I must hand those drawings in by to-morrow. I need the light, or I would draw the shade down."

"Couldn't you draw in the other room?" asked Johnsy, coldly.

"I'd rather be here by you," said Sue. "Beside, I don't want you to keep looking at those silly ivy leaves."

"Tell me as soon as you have finished," said Johnsy, closing her eyes, and lying white and still as fallen statue, "because I want to see the last one fall. I'm tired of waiting. I'm tired of thinking. I want to turn loose my hold on everything, and go sailing down, down, just like one of those poor, tired leaves."

"Try to sleep," said Sue. "I must call Behrman up to be my model for the old hermit miner. I'll not be gone a minute. Don't try to move 'til I come back."

Old Behrman was a painter who lived on the ground floor beneath them. He was past sixty and had a Michael Angelo's Moses beard curling down from the head of a satyr along with the body of an imp. Behrman was a failure in art. Forty years he had wielded the brush without getting near enough to touch the hem of his Mistress's robe. He had been always about to paint a masterpiece, but had never yet begun it. For several years he had painted nothing except now and then a daub in the line of commerce or advertising. He earned a little by serving as a model to those young artists in the colony who could not pay the price of a professional. He drank gin to excess, and still talked of his coming masterpiece. For the rest he was a fierce little old man, who scoffed terribly at softness in any one, and who regarded himself as especial mastiff-in-waiting to protect the two young artists in the studio above.

Sue found Behrman smelling strongly of juniper berries in his dimly lighted den below. In one corner was a blank canvas on an easel that had been waiting there for twenty-five years to receive the first line of the masterpiece. She told him of Johnsy's fancy, and how she feared she would, indeed, light and fragile as a leaf herself, float away, when her slight hold upon the world grew weaker.

Old Behrman, with his red eyes plainly streaming, shouted his contempt and derision for such idiotic imaginings.

"Vass!" he cried. "Is dere people in de world mit der foolishness to die because leafs dey drop off from a confounded vine? I haf not heard of such a thing. No, I will not bose as a model for your fool hermit-dunderhead. Vy do you allow dot silly pusiness to come in der brain of her? Ach, dot poor leetle Miss Yohnsy."

"She is very ill and weak," said Sue, "and the fever has left her mind morbid

and full of strange fancies. Very well, Mr. Behrman, if you do not care to pose for me, you needn't. But I think you are a horrid old - old flibbertigibbet."

"You are just like a woman!" yelled Behrman. "Who said I will not pose? Go on. I come with you. For half an hour I have been trying to say that I am ready to pose. Gott! this is not any place in which one so good as Miss Johnsby shall lie sick. Someday I will paint a masterpiece, and we shall all go away. Gott! yes."

Johnsby was sleeping when they went upstairs. Sue pulled the shade down to the window-sill, and motioned Behrman into the other room. In there they peered out the window fearfully at the ivy vine. Then they looked at each other for a moment without speaking. A persistent, cold rain was falling, mingled with snow. Behrman, in his old blue shirt, took his seat as the hermit miner on an upturned kettle for a rock.

When Sue awoke from an hour's sleep the next morning she found Johnsby with dull, wide-open eyes staring at the drawn green shade.

"Pull it up; I want to see," she ordered, in a whisper.

Wearily Sue obeyed.

But, lo! after the beating rain and fierce gusts of wind that had endured through the livelong night, there yet stood out against the brick wall one ivy leaf. It was the last one on the vine. Still dark green near its stem, with its serrated edges tinted with the yellow of dissolution and decay, it hung bravely from the branch some twenty feet above the ground.

"It is the last one," said Johnsby. "I thought it would surely fall during the night. I heard the wind. It will fall to-day, and I shall die at the same time."

"Dear, dear!" said Sue, leaning her worn face down to the pillow, "think of me, if you won't think of yourself. What would I do?"

But Johnsby did not answer. The loneliest thing in all the world is a soul when it is making ready to go on its mysterious, far journey. The fancy seemed to possess her more strongly as one by one the ties that bound her to friendship and to earth were loosed.

The day wore away, and even through the twilight they could see the lone ivy leaf clinging to its stem against the wall. And then, with the coming of the night the north wind was again loosed, while the rain still beat against the windows and pattered down from the low Dutch eaves.

When it was light enough Johnsby, the merciless, commanded that the shade be raised.

The ivy leaf was still there.

Johnsby lay for a long time looking at it. And then she called to Sue, who was stirring her chicken broth over the gas stove.

"I've been a bad girl, Sudie," said Johnsby. "Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me how wicked I was. It is a sin to want to die. You may bring me a little broth now, and some milk with a little port in it, and - no; bring me a hand-mirror first, and then pack some pillows about me, and I will sit up and watch you cook."

And hour later she said:

"Sudie, someday I hope to paint the Bay of Naples."

The doctor came in the afternoon, and Sue had an excuse to go into the hallway as he left.

“Even chances,” said the doctor, taking Sue’s thin shaking hand in his. “With good nursing you’ll win. And now I must see another case I have downstairs. Behrman, his name is-some kind of artist, I believe. Pneumonia, too. He is old, weak man, and the attack is acute. There is no hope for him; but he goes to the hospital today to be made more comfortable.”

The next day the doctor said to Sue: “She’s out of danger. You’ve won. Nutrition and care now- that’s all.”

And that afternoon Sue came to the bed where Johnsy lay, contentedly knitting a very blue and very useless woolen shoulder scarf, and put one arm around her, pillows and all.

“I have something to tell you, white mouse,” she said. “Mr. Behrman died of pneumonia today in the hospital. He was ill only two days. The janitor found him on the morning of the first day in his room downstairs helpless with pain. His shoes and clothing were wet through and icy cold. They couldn’t imagine where he had been on such a dreadful night. And then they found a lantern, still lighted, and a ladder that had been dragged from its place, and some scattered brushes, and a pallette with a green and yellow colors mixed on it, and-look out the window, dear, at the last ivy leaf on the wall. Didn’t you wonder why it never fluttered or moved when the wind blew? Ah, darling, it’s Behrman’s masterpiece-he painted it there the night the last leaf fell.”

- O. Henry

4.4 KEY WORDS

Quaint	: odd strange and attractive.
Greenwich Village	: District of Lower Manhattan borough in New York City, the home of painters and writers
Tabled ‘note	: Meal at fixed price.
Gables	: triangular part of the house below the roof.
Chicory salad	: Dish of uncooked herbs quite popular in America.
Bishop Sleeves	: Full Sleeves in lady’s dresses.
Mite	: Very small in size
Zephyr	: Gentle wind
Undertaker	: A person who arranges funerals and burials.
Pharmacopeia	: Book of medicinal prescriptions and directions for use
Ivy Vine	: Every green plant with dark shiny leaves.
Goosey	: Foolish person
Satyr	: Greek god of woods, represented as partly man and partly goat.
Juniper Berries	: Berries that give its characteristic flavor to gin.
Serrated	: Having a toothed edge like a saw.
Janitor	: A person hired to take care of a building.
Palette	: A painter’s dish for mixing colours.
Crazy	: mad, passionate

Traverse	: Travel across, go across
Prowl	: move about restlessly, slink, sneak
Congenial	: like-minded, kindred, compatible
Ravager	: Destroyer, destructive
Smite	: Strike with a firm blow
Chivalric	: Characteristic of the time of chivalry and knight hood.
Shaggy	: long, thick and unkempt
Pulp	: soft, wet, shapeless mass of material, mash
Illustrate	: to serve as an example, show demonstrate, adorn
Solicitously	: Carefully, attentively with concern
Bare	: open, uncovered
Dreary	: dull, drab, uninteresting, wearisome
Gnarled	: Rough, twisted and knotty
Imp	: a small, mischievous devil or sprite
Fierce	: ferocious, vicious, and untamed
Confounded	: confused, perplexed, befuddled
Flibbertigibbet	: frivolous, excessively talkative, chatterer
Peer	: look minutely with concentration.
Persistent	: continuous, tenacious, untiring, and unrelenting
Endure	: suffer, undergo, and remain in existence
Dissolution	: Ending an assembly or partnership
Decay	: decompose, rot, perish, and deteriorate.
Acute	: severe, drastic, dreadful, grave, serious.
Nutrition	: nourishment, sustenance, food.
Contented by	: satisfied and happy, gratified.
Dreadful	: terrible, frightful, appalling, horrible.
Drag	: haul, pull, tug.
Scatter	: throw in various random directions, toss, fling.
Flutter	: flap, fly unsteadily, quiver, hover.

4.5 SUMMARY OF THE STORY

The Last Leaf takes place in Greenwich Village, a place where artists live in New York City. The story centers around two young women artists-Sue and Johnsy who share a studio at the top of an old apartment building. When winter comes Johnsy becomes seriously ill with pneumonia. The doctor who examines her says that Johnsy will not survive if she does not have a will to live. He says that Johnsy has already left hope for life and she awaits death. The doctor asks Sue if Johnsy has any unfulfilled ambition or a passion for a man. She says that Johnsy wanted to paint the Bay of Naples but the doctor says that it is not a great cause that would inspire her to live.

Johnsy watches leaves falling from the ivy vine that clings to the brick-wall nearby. She begins to count leaves thinking that she would die with the fall of

the last leaf. It was a stormy and rainy night. Leaves keep falling and Johnsy is waiting for her death. Sue is deeply worried and she tells their old neighbour Mr. Behrman who was an unsuccessful artist about Johnsy's illness and her obsession about imminent death. Behrman always hoped to paint a masterpiece which he never did. However, Behrman stays out on a rainy, chilly night to paint a realistic-looking leaf on the wall. Seeing the unmoved leaf, Johnsy gathers courage and hope and begins to recover. Behrman catches pneumonia from exposure to the rain and cold and dies a few days later. She tells Johnsy about the cause of Behrman's death and remarks that Behrman's masterpiece was the last leaf that saved her life.

4.6 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE STORY

The Last Leaf is one of the most appealing short stories by O. Henry. Its setting is Greenwich Village which is a heaven of aspiring artists and bohemian people. O. Henry depicts the place as the vibrant colony of artists who live in poverty and starvation. Many of them are starving artists who suffer from shortage of food and expose to sickness, cold and hunger. Greenwich Village had been a home for lesbians and gay people in New York a fact which becomes significant in the story as two female characters are romantically involved like true lovers.

The story centers around two young women artists Sue and Johnsy. They meet in a restaurant and discover that they had some common interests in art and food. They decide to work together and share an apartment at the top of a run-down old building. The basis of the friendship of Sue and Johnsy was a shared interest in art and creativity. They soon became emotionally attached. O. Henry describes the dreadful visit of Mr. Pneumonia to the neighbourhood and Johnsy becomes the victim of the fatal disease. O. Henry describes pneumonia as a strange male visitor to depict man as an antagonistic presence in the lives of Sue and Johnsy.

A doctor visits and tells Sue that Johnsy had a one in ten chance of living. He adds that only her passion to live will help her to survive. If she loses hope to live, no medicines will help her in recovery. The doctor asks her if Johnsy is depressed over a man. She tells him that there is no man in the Johnsy's life. The doctor's diagnosis reveals the fact that there is always a strong link between hope and health. She firmly rejects the doctor's suspicion about Johnsy's involvement with any man. She knew that Johnsy was focused only on travelling and developing her talent as an artist. She was quite sure that Johnsy was not interested in man, marriage and children.

Sue sits beside Johnsy's bed and works on an illustration for a magazine. She notices that Johnsy looked out of the window and counted falling leaves from an ivy vine on the brick wall nearby. When she asks her what she was counting, she replies that she would die when the last leaf would fall to the ground. Sue tells her that it was a silly thought as the doctor had already told her that there was a good chance of her recovery. Sue promises Johnsy to buy more food and wine after she sells her illustration for the magazine. However, Johnsy remains unaffected and she says that she wants to turn loose "her hold on everything and go sailing down, down just like one of those poor, tired, leaves".

Sue's work for the magazine shows her poor economic condition. She struggled as an artist and earned a meager income from her work. However,

her promise to buy more food and wine shows her care and love for Johnsy. She looks after all household work in addition to drawing and painting. She tells a lie about the doctor's remark about her health and recovery to motivate her to live. However, Johnsy's desire to die like the falling of the last leaf shows her fading hope to live.

She then goes downstairs to visit her neighbor, Mr. Behrman who was an old, unsuccessful artist. He had tried to paint a masterpiece all his life but in vain. He was a frustrated artist who had turned alcoholic smelling of gin all the time. He was very protective of Sue and Johnsy and cared a lot for them. When Sue told him about Johnsy's crazy obsession about the falling of the last leaf connecting it to her death; he was a bit angry and called her foolish. Sue asked him to pose as model for her drawing; he agreed and came to Sue's studio. While Johnsy was asleep, Behrman kept looking solemnly at the ivy vine.

Behrman was a failure as an artist but he was a man with a milk of human kindness. His angry words about Johnsy displayed his profound concern for her. Under his gruff exterior, there throbbed a sensitive heart. His solemn look at the ivy vine made him worried about the fading life of a nice young Johnsy. He probably decided then to paint the last leaf on the wall that night.

It was a stormy, windy and rainy night. But the next morning, she saw that the last leaf clung tenaciously to the vine. Johnsy was sure that the last leaf would have fallen that night but she found it clinging to the vine bravely. Naturally she was surprised but she still believed that it would certainly fall that day. She was also convinced that pneumonia would take her away from Sue and the world.

Another night was also windy and rainy but the last leaf remained unmoved. Johnsy sat up and asked for soup and a mirror. She said that the last leaf showed her that it was a sin to want to die. She told Sue that she would soon paint the Bay of Naples. The doctor visits again and tells Johnsy that she would soon be all right. Her request for food and a mirror suggests her reclamation of desire to live. The mirror symbolizes her rebonding with herself. Her desire to paint the Bay of Naples demonstrates that her hope had returned with her health. This underscores the story's central idea that life and hope are inseparably intertwined.

The doctor tells Sue and Johnsy that he has to visit another patient Mr. Behrman. He has caught pneumonia and needs to be hospitalized. The next day, Sue tells Johnsy that Behrman has died. The janitor found him sick in his room with wet clothes as if he has been out on a stormy night. In his room, Behrman had a ladder, and painting materials which revealed that he had been out all night to paint the last leaf on the brick wall. The leaf that saved Johnsy's life was not real but it was the masterpiece painted by Behrman.

The story ends with surprising ending that the 'last leaf' was in fact a painting by Behrman who sacrificed his own life to save Johnsy. He knew that the survival of the leaf alone would rekindle Johnsy's hope to live. He always wanted to paint a masterpiece which he could never do but his selfless act of sacrifice made the painting of the last leaf his true masterpiece.

4.7 TONE OF THE STORY

The general tone of the story *The Last Leaf* is bit sarcastic and serious. Though the themes of the story are sickness, poverty and death, the author treats them in less serious manner. He makes fun of the residents of Greenwich Village which serves as the setting of the story. The story begins with sarcastic tone describing cross streets in Greenwich Village where poor artists struggle to survive. O. Henry makes fun of his characters and their shallowness and frivolous temperament. The story is an ideal example of the third person omniscient point of view in which the author shows the attitude thoughts and emotions of the characters clearly and realistically. The story depicts the mood of hopelessness as Johnsy abandons her hope to live waiting for imminent death with the falling of leaves from the ivy vine.

4.8 THEMES OF THE STORY

There are several themes in the story *The Last Leaf*. Let us discuss them in detail:

- (i) **Hope and Health :** Johnsy becomes victim of pneumonia during cold winter. She connects her life with the falling of ivy leaves on the brickwall nearby. It rained heavily and cold wind blew all the time. Leaves kept falling from the vine. Johnsy's obsession that she would soon die when the last leaf would fall down was quite obstinate. The leaf symbolizes life and death. The old artist Behrman paints the last leaf on the brick wall on a rainy night. It gives her hope to live but Behrman dies of pneumonia which he catches because of staying outside on a chilly, rainy night. The doctor tells Sue that the real problem with Johnsy was that she had lost the desire to live. He says that if she had some unfulfilled desires for future, her chances for life would be better. However Johnsy has already abandoned her desire to live and she wants to go sailing down like those poor tired ivy leaves.

When Johnsy sees that the last leaf has remained moveless and clung tenaciously, she is motivated to live. She realizes that it is a sin to want to die. Johnsy begins to recover soon sitting on bed, eating food and hoping to paint the Bay of Naples. Behrman used his art to transfer his hope to Johnsy proving that the last leaf painted by him was his real masterpiece.

O. Henry suggests that physical health is always connected with hope for the future. For restoring physical health, hope is the most powerful cure. Thus hope and health are inextricably inseparable.

- (ii) **Death:** The title of the story *The Last Leaf* conveys the theme of death. The word 'last' signifies close to end or close to death. The life of a tree is connected with the growth and health of branches and leaves. In the story, ivy leaves keep falling due to autumn. Autumn is the season of death of leaves. Johnsy becomes the victim of pneumonia which symbolizes death. Johnsy regains her hope to live and restores her health but Behrman who painted the last leaf to save Johnsy died of pneumonia.
- (iii) **Optimism and Pessimism:** Life is made of dualities such as life and death, hope and despair, day and night, spring and autumn, hot and cold etc. Here there is a theme of pessimism and optimism. Pessimism

deals with gloomy aspects of life; optimism deals with positive aspects of life. Johnsy had plunged into deep abyss of pessimism, waiting for death. She counted the falling leaves. She thought that she would die when the last leaf falls down. However, when she saw that the last leaf clung to the wall moveless, she was inspired to live. Restoration of her hope makes her fill with desire to live and soon she begins to recover. O. Henry conveys the message that one should never lose hope and optimistic approach to life as it is a sin to want to die.

- (iv) **Self-sacrifice:** One of the important themes in the story *The Last Leaf* is self-sacrifice. Behrman risked his life to save Johnsy from death. He painted the last leaf on the brick wall on a rainy and stormy night. He caught pneumonia due to cold and rain and died in a few days. This alludes to Christian doctrine of self-sacrifice that epitomizes the noblest human deed. Behrman always wanted to paint a masterpiece which he could never do. However, the last leaf that he painted on the brick wall proved to be his masterpiece. O. Henry suggests that kindness and passion are far greater than art.
- (v) **Gender and Sexuality:** O. Henry depicts Sue and Johnsy as young female artists who struggle to make way in male dominated world of art. Their behaviour can be termed as feminist in the sense that they challenge accepted notions of women's roles in the society. It is generally believed that women are destined to marry, produce children and devote their energy to domestic duties. Sue and Johnsy thought out of the box and wanted to live independent life in the pursuit of art. They were aspiring artists who struggled a lot leading financially precarious life. They met in a restaurant and discovered that they shared common interests in art and food. They decided to live together in the same apartment confronting the disapproval of the prevalent society.

In the story, we come across several examples where men belittle Sue and Johnsy. For example when the doctor diagnoses Johnsy's pneumonia, he asserts that art is "not anything worth thinking about". The doctor asks Sue if Johnsy was upset over a man. Sue contradicts the doctor's view by saying that for Johnsy no man was so important as her love for art. This shows that both Sue and Johnsy were career-oriented and professional. During the 20th century women struggled to rise above their female sexuality and protested against gender bias and social norms fixed by male dominated society.

- (vi) **The Prevalent Condition of the Artists:** *The Last Leaf* by O. Henry is set in Greenwich Village, a bohemian neighbourhood in New York city. It was famous as a gathering place and residential colony of the painters and writers. The place had criss-cross streets with strange curves and angles. The artists who lived here led financially precarious life earning a very little income. The building in the area was old and dilapidated with low house rent. The place was overcrowded and with lack of proper sanitation. It was exposed to cold weather and outbreak of diseases like pneumonia.

Sue, Johnsy and Behrman tried to make a living by painting but could hardly make both ends meet. Poverty, alcoholism and diseases prevailed in the area making people weak and sick. Behrman always dreamt of painting a masterpiece but he never succeeded in doing so all his life. He made a small income as a model for the artists. Sue also earned a little by painting illustrations for magazines. Johnsy nurtured a dream of painting the Bay of Naples but her poor health and poverty made her trip to Italy almost impossible.

The Last Leaf suggests that even starving artists have stronger social bonding with their neighbours. For them, painting is not only a personal achievement and source of income. O. Henry suggests that a great art is always imbued with humanistic attitude, compassion and love. The friendship between Sue and Johnsy displays sincerity, love and loyalty. Behrman was careless about his health but he was profoundly concerned about Johnsy's deteriorating health. He painted the last leaf to save Johnsy's life which finally resulted into his true masterpiece.

4.9 DICTION AND STYLE OF THE STORY

O. Henry's style of writing is sarcastic and funny. He used diction with colloquialism and slangs. He used literary devices like metaphors, personification and similes. The story also contains symbolism and imagery. There is a lot of colour imagery in the story. O. Henry's stories have surprising ending with ironical twist. His dialogues have speech patterns and rhythms of the language of the common folks with vivacity, variety and vibrancy. His narration in the story is in third person omniscient narrator mode. His description is picturesque and colourful. His style is also humorous just like his plot and characters. In his plots, co-incidences play a very important role creating humorous situations. There is a beautiful combination of wit, humour and irony in his writing style.

4.10 TITLE OF THE STORY

The title of the story *The Last Leaf* is quite appropriate as it is the last leaf painted by Behrman that saves the life of a young artist Johnsy. Johnsy suffered from pneumonia losing hope to live. She thought that she would die when the last leaf from the ivy vine falls down. It was a stormy rainy weather and the leaves kept falling rapidly. The old painter who lived downstairs painted the last leaf on the wall when he saw that the last leaf (the real one) fell down. He caught pneumonia due to rain and chilly wind. Soon he died but the last leaf that remained unmoved filled Johnsy with a new hope to live. Behrman had a dream of painting a masterpiece which he could never do all his life but the last leaf that saved Johnsy's life proved to be his real masterpiece. The last leaf suggests both desire for death and hope for life.

Check Your Progress: 1

4.11 ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN BRIEF.

(i) Describe the visit of Mr. Pneumonia to Greenwich Village.

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- (ii) What is the significance of ivy leaves in *The Last Leaf*?
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- (iii) Describe the friendship between Sue and Johnsy.
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- (iv) What is the twist in the ending of the story *The Last Leaf*?
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- (v) How did Behrman catch pneumonia?
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- (vi) Why is the last leaf painted by Behrman his true masterpiece?
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(vii) What does the title *The Last Leaf* suggests?

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(viii) How did Johnsy's hope for life revive?

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Check your Progress 2

4.12 CHOOSE THE CORRECT OPTION FROM GIVEN BELOW.

1. *The Last Leaf* is a _____
 - (a) poem
 - (b) novel
 - (c) epic
 - (d) short story
2. *The Last Leaf* is penned by _____
 - (a) O. Henry
 - (b) Somerset Maugham
 - (c) Guy de Maupassant
 - (d) Ruskin Bond
3. Greenwich village was inhabited by _____
 - (a) farmers
 - (b) labourers
 - (c) teachers
 - (d) artists
4. Sue was from _____
 - (a) Philadelphia
 - (b) Florida
 - (c) California
 - (d) Maine
5. Johnsy was from _____
 - (a) Maine
 - (b) New York
 - (c) California
 - (d) Canada
6. Sue and Johnsy shared common interests in _____
 - (a) poetry
 - (b) clothes and fashion
 - (c) food and art
 - (d) sports
7. "Mr. Pneumonia" is the example of _____
 - (a) simple
 - (b) metaphor
 - (c) personification
 - (d) climax

8. The doctor said that there was one chance in _____ for Johnsy's recovery from pneumonia.
 - (a) 100
 - (b) 10
 - (c) 20
 - (d) 50
9. Johnsy wanted to paint _____.
 - (a) The Tajmahal
 - (b) The Leaning Tower of Pisa
 - (c) The Bay of Naples
 - (d) The Dal Lake of Kashmir
10. Behrman was a _____ artist.
 - (a) successful
 - (b) rich
 - (c) matured
 - (d) frustrated
11. Behrman had a dream of painting _____.
 - (a) a masterpiece
 - (b) a portrait of Sue
 - (c) a portrait of Johnsy
 - (d) a natural scene of Italy
12. Behrman died of _____.
 - (a) pneumonia
 - (b) cholera
 - (c) typhoid
 - (d) cancer
13. The last leaf painted by Behrman inspired Johnsy.
 - (a) to die
 - (b) to live
 - (c) to work
 - (d) to paint
14. The last leaf painted by Behrman proved to be his.
 - (a) real masterpiece
 - (b) passion for life
 - (c) monumental work
 - (d) piece of art
15. O. Henry was famous for _____ in his stories.
 - (a) figurative language
 - (b) simple diction
 - (c) twisted ending
 - (d) rustic characters

4.13 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have studied one of the most famous stories by O. Henry. The story depicts the important features of an ideal short-story such as single compact plot, small number of characters, realistic dialogues, twisted ending and universal themes. You should have realized how a novel differs from a short-story. A novel has detailed narrator, a large number of characters, multiple setting, dialogues and detailed description of characters and setting. A novel is like a movie while a short story is like a snapshot. O. Henry's short stories have twisted ending that makes his short stories very appealing and effective.

4.14 BOOKS SUGGESTED

Smith, C. Alphonso "The Strange Case of Sydney Porter And O. Henry". *The World's Work: A History of Our Time*, 1916.

<http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/LasLea.shtml#7>



THE VERGER

- SOMERSET MAUGHAM

: STRUCTURE :

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 About the Author
- 5.2 About the Story
- 5.3 Text of the Story
- 5.4 Key Words
- 5.5 Summary of the Short Story
- 5.6 Critical Analysis of the Story
- 5.7 The Tone of the Story
- 5.8 The Themes of the Story
- 5.9 Style and Diction of the Story
- 5.10 The Title of the Story
- 5.11 Maugham's Views on Short Story
- 5.12 Question (answer in brief)
- 5.13 Multiple Choice Questions
- 5.14 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.15 Books Suggested

Answers

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall

- learn the most popular form of literature
- discuss the plot, characters, setting and themes of the story

5.1 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Somerset Maugham was a great novelist playwright and short story writer. He was born on January 25, 1874 in Paris, France. His father was a lawyer handling the legal affairs of the British Embassy in Paris. He lost his mother at the age of eight. His father died of cancer two years later. He was sent back to England to be cared by his uncle. He boarded at King's school, Centerburg where he was teased for his short stature, stammering and shy introvert nature. At the age of 16, he went to Germany where he studied literature, philosophy and German language at Heidelberg University. Then he studied in London and qualified as a surgeon, at St. Thomas Hospital. In his novel *Of Human Bondage* he has recounted his unhappy childhood and experiences as a medical student.

During the World wars I and II, Maugham served in the British Intelligence service. In 1914, he was the member of Red Cross Unit in France. Later, he acted as a secret agent in Geneva. Maugham's travels filled his interest in the orient and South Sea Islands. His novel *The Moon and the Six Pence* (1919) is based on the life of the famous painter Paul Gauguin. His novel *The Painted*

Veil was originally set in Hongkong which he later changed into fictional Tching-Yen.

As a short story writer Maugham was influenced by Anton Chekhov, the famous Russian short-story writer who conveyed an over whelming sense of the mystery of life in his stories. However, unlike he knows he was focused on story-telling in a dramatic manner. He believed that dramatization intensifies the lives of characters in the stories. Thus, Maugham stands as a great modern exponent of the art of the literary narrated stories. This characteristic method is to tell the story himself in the first person using spoken style and verbal clichés to unfold a scene or character. In Maugham's stories the narrating 'I' is objective.

Maugham's major collections of short stories include *Orientation*, *The Casuarina Tree*. First Person singular *cosmopolitans*, *The Mixture as Before*, *The creatures of circumstances* etc. Maugham was a versatile writer who wrote 20 novels 16 collections of short stories, 25 plays and 189 articles.

Somerset Maugham achieved commercial success with high sales of his books, successful productions of plays and film adaptations of his novels. Despite his success on a writer, he could not attract much respect from the critics and his peers. He lacked *Lyrical quality* and the use of metaphor in his works. Anthony Burgess and George Orwell were influenced by Maugham's writing style. Maugham died on 16, December 1965 at the age of 91.

Maugham's stories are marked by irony, satire and wit. His style was simple and economical. His novel *The Razor's Edge* is considered his magnum opus. In 1938, Maugham had met the great spiritual holy man Sri Raman Maharshi in his ashram. His novel *The Razor's Edge* is the story of an American Spiritual seeker who meets the Guru Shri Ganesha and undergoes ecstatic mystical experience. The novel portrays Maugham's personal spiritual experience in the presence of Sri Raman Maharshi through the American protagonist of the novel Larry Darrell who was traumatized by his experiences of World War I and sets off in search of some transcendent meaning of life. The novel shows Maugham's spiritual inclination and belief that true happiness lies within and not outside in the material world.

5.2 ABOUT THE STORY

The Verger is a story with an unexpected twist at the end. The protagonist Albert Edward Foreman was a Verger at St Peter's Church, Neville

Square. He had been the verger there for sixteen years never thinking or imagining that he might lose his job because of his ignorance of reading and writing. He was an illiterate man who could not read or write but as a verger, he worked quite successfully never entertaining any complaint about his work and behavior. However, everything in the World is not what it looks like. A new Vicar is appointed at St.Peters who comes to know that Foreman could not read or write. He called Foreman and made an unpleasant announcement that he should either learn to read or write soon or resign from his job.

The new Vicar believed that illiteracy can be dangerous at a church like St.Peters. The new vicar was a red-faced energetic man in his early forties who always fussed over everything in the church with his finger in every pie. The new Vicar admitted that Foreman had managed his work quite well de-

spite his lack of literacy but now it was necessary for him to learn to read and write as it was a matter of prudence as well as of principle.

Foreman politely replied that it was too late for him to learn to read and write. He said

“I’m too old a dog to learn new tricks”. Foreman lost his job and walking along the street, he had an intense desire to smoke to relieve his depressive mood. He could not find any tobacco shops in the street. An idea came to his mind to open a tobacco shop in the street. Soon he opened his first shop and within a few years, he had a number of shops and lot of money. He became a successful business man as a tobacconist.

Maugham introduces irony at the end of the story. The irony makes the story reach its climax. Foreman had already become a successful businessman with more than 10 tobacco shops of his ownership. He went to the bank for his regular depositing of earned money. The bank manager told him that he had already deposited around thirty thousand pounds with the bank. The bank manager advised him to invest his money to earn a better rate of interest. Foreman said that he did not want to invest in stocks and shares but he had a full trust in the banker. He added that he would leave it all in his hands. The manager told him that Foreman required to sign some papers for transfer.

Foreman told the manager that he did not know how to read and write. The manager was utterly surprised thinking it was the most extraordinary thing he had ever heard. He started at Foreman as if he were a prehistoric monster. He asked: “Good God, man, what would you be now if you had been able to?” Foreman replied, “I’d be verger of St. Peter’s, Melville Square.

The reply hardly contains ten words but all of them are sharp and thought-provoking. Had Foreman been, literate, he would have been nothing but the verger at St. Peter’s all his life. It is generally taken for granted that literacy brings success but in case of Foreman, had he accepted the new vicar’s order to read and write, he would still have been a verger, success and literacy have no connection at all. Educated persons turn out to be officers, clerks, teachers, or employees in general. Uneducated even illiterate persons turn out to be successful businessmen, industrialists and powerful politicians. In fact, it is the uneducated people who rule the entire society. It is an irony that knowledge is always enslaved to power and wealth.

Somerset Maugham never tried to teach moral lessons in his stories. On the contrary, he always turned the moral lessons upside down in ironical endings of his stories.

5.3 TEXT OF THE STORY

There had been a christening that afternoon at St. Peter’s, Neville

Square, and Albert Edward Foreman still wore his verger’s gown. He kept his new one, its folds as full and stiff though it were made not of alpaca but of perennial bronze, for funerals and weddings (St. Peter’s, Neville Square, was a church much favoured by the fashionable for these ceremonies) and now he wore only his second-best. He wore it with complacency for it was the dignified symbol of his office, and without it (when he took it off to go home) he had the disconcerting sensation of being somewhat insufficiently clad. He took pains with it; he pressed it and ironed it himself. During the sixteen years he had been verger of this church he had had a succession of such gowns, but he had never been able to throw them away when they were

worn out and the complete series, neatly wrapped up in brown paper, lay in the bottom drawers of the wardrobe in his bedroom.

The vergers busied himself quietly, replacing the painted wooden cover on the marble font, taking away a chair that had been brought for an infirm old lady, and waited for the vicar to have finished in the vestry so that he could tidy up in there and go home. Presently he saw him walk across the chancel, genuflect in front of the high altar and come down the aisle; but he still wore his cassock.

"What's he 'anging about for?" the vergers said to himself "Don't 'e know I want my tea?"

The vicar had been but recently appointed, a red-faced energetic man in the early forties, and Albert Edward still regretted his redecessor, a clergyman of the old school who preached leisurely sermons in a silvery voice and dined out a great deal with his more aristocratic parishioners. He liked things in church to be just so, but he never fussed; he was not like this new man who wanted to have his finger in every pie. But Albert Edward was tolerant. St. Peter's was in a very good neighbourhood and the parishioners were a very nice class of people. The new vicar had come from the East End and he couldn't be expected to fall in all at once with the discreet ways of his fashionable congregation.

"All this 'ustle," said Albert Edward. "But give 'im time, he'll learn."

When the vicar had walked down the aisle so far that he could address the vergers without raising his voice more than was becoming in a place of worship he stopped.

"Foreman, will you come into the vestry for a minute. I have something to say to you."

"Very good, sir."

The vicar waited for him to come up and they walked up the church together.

"A very nice christening, I thought sir. Funny 'ow the baby stopped cryin' the moment you took him."

"I've noticed they very often do," said the vicar, with a little smile.

"After all I've had a good deal of practice with them."

It was a source of subdued pride to him that he could nearly always quiet a whimpering infant by the manner in which he held it and he was not unconscious of the amused admiration with which mothers and nurses watched him settle the baby in the crook of his surpliced arm. The vergers knew that it pleased him to be complimented on his talent.

The vicar preceded Albert Edward into the vestry. Albert Edward was a trifle surprised to find the two churchwardens there. He had not seen them come in. They gave him pleasant nods.

"Good afternoon, my lord. Good afternoon, sir," he said to one after the other.

They were elderly men, both of them and they had been churchwardens almost as long as Albert Edward had been vergers. They were sitting now at a handsome refectory table that the old vicar had brought many years before from Italy and the vicar sat down in the vacant chair between them. Albert

Edward faced them, the table between him and them and wondered with slight uneasiness what was the matter. He remembered still the occasion on which the organist had got in trouble and the bother they had all had to hush things up. In a church like St. Peter's, Neville Square, they couldn't afford scandal. On the vicar's red face was a look of resolute benignity but the others bore an expression that was slightly troubled.

"He's been naggin' them he 'as," said the vergers to himself. "He's jockeyed them into doin' something, but they don't like it. That's what it is, you mark my words."

But his thoughts did not appear on Albert Edward's clean cut and distinguished features. He stood in a respectful but not obsequious attitude. He had been in service before he was appointed to his ecclesiastical office, but only in very good houses, and his deportment was irreproachable. Starting as a page-boy in the household of a merchant-prince he had risen by due degrees from the position of fourth to first footman, for a year he had been single-handed butler to a widowed peeress and, till the vacancy occurred at St. Peter's, butler with two men under him in the house of a retired ambassador. He was tall, spare, grave and dignified. He looked, if not like a duke, at least like an actor of the old school who specialised in dukes' parts. He had tact, firmness and self-assurance. His character was unimpeachable.

The vicar began briskly. "Foreman, we've got something rather unpleasant to say to you. You've been here a great many years and I think his lordship and the general agree with me that you've fulfilled the duties of your office to the satisfaction of everybody concerned."

The two churchwardens nodded.

"But a most extraordinary circumstance came to my knowledge the other day and I felt it my duty to impart it to the churchwardens. I discovered to my astonishment that you could neither read nor write."

The vergers' face betrayed no sign of embarrassment.

"The last vicar knew that, sir," he replied. "He said it didn't make no difference. He always said there was a great deal too much education in the world for 'is taste."

"It's the most amazing thing I ever heard," cried the general. "Do you mean to say that you've been vergers of this church for sixteen years and never learned to read or write?"

"I went into service when I was twelve sir. The cook in the first place tried to teach me once, but I didn't seem to 'ave the knack for it, and then what with one thing and another I never seemed to 'ave the time. I've never really found the want of it. I think a lot of these young fellows waste a rare lot of time readin' when they might be doin' something useful."

"But don't you want to know the news?" said the other churchwarden.

"Don't you ever want to write a letter?"

"No, me lord, I seem to manage very well without. And of late years now they've all these pictures in the papers I get to know what's goin' on pretty well. Me wife's quite a scholar and if I want to write a letter she writes it for me. It's not as if I was a bettin' man."

The two churchwardens gave the vicar a troubled glance and then looked

down at the table.

“Well, Foreman, I’ve talked the matter over with these gentlemen and they quite agree with me that the situation is impossible. At a church like St. Peter’s Neville Square, we cannot have a verger who can neither read nor write.”

Albert Edward’s thin, sallow face reddened and he moved uneasily on his feet, but he made no reply.

“Understand me, Foreman, I have no complaint to make against you. You do your work quite satisfactorily; I have the highest opinion both of your character and of your capacity; but we haven’t the right to take the risk of some accident that might happen owing to your lamentable ignorance. It’s a matter of prudence as well as of principle.”

“But couldn’t you learn, Foreman?” asked the general.

“No, sir, I’m afraid I couldn’t, not now. You see, I’m not as young as I was and if I couldn’t seem able to get the letters in me ‘ead when I was a nipper I don’t think there’s much chance of it now.”

“We don’t want to be harsh with you, Foreman,” said the vicar. “But the churchwardens and I have quite made up our minds. We’ll give you three months and if at the end of that time you cannot read and write I’m afraid you’ll have to go.”

Albert Edward had never liked the new vicar. He’d said from the beginning that they’d made a mistake when they gave him St. Peter’s. He wasn’t the type of man they wanted with a classy congregation like that. And now he straightened himself a little. He knew his value and he wasn’t going to allow himself to be put upon.

“I’m very sorry sir, I’m afraid it’s no good. I’m too old a dog to learn new tricks. I’ve lived a good many years without knowin’ ‘ow to read and write, and without wishin’ to praise myself, self-praise is no recommendation, I don’t mind sayin’ I’ve done my duty in that state of life in which it ‘as pleased a merciful providence to place me, and if I could learn now I don’t know as I’d want to.”

“In that case, Foreman, I’m afraid you must go.”

“Yes sir, I quite understand. I shall be ‘appy to ‘and in my resignation as soon as you’ve found somebody to take my place.”

But when Albert Edward with his usual politeness had closed the church door behind the vicar and the two churchwardens he could not sustain the air of unruffled dignity with which he had borne the blow inflicted upon him and his lips quivered. He walked slowly back to the vestry and hung up on its proper peg his verger’s gown. He sighed as he thought of all the grand funerals and smart weddings it had seen. He tidied everything up, put on his coat, and hat in hand walked down the aisle. He locked the church door behind him. He strolled across the square, but deep in his sad thoughts he did not take the street that led him home, where a nice strong cup of tea awaited; he took the wrong turning. He walked slowly along. His heart was heavy. He did not know what he should do with himself. He did not fancy the notion of going back to domestic service; after being his own master for so many years, for the vicar and churchwardens could say what they liked, it was he that had run St. Peter’s, Neville Square, he could scarcely demean himself by accept-

ing a situation. He had saved a tidy sum, but not enough to live on without doing something, and life seemed to cost more every year. He had never thought to be troubled with such questions.

The vergers of St. Peter's, like the popes Rome, were there for life. He had often thought of the pleasant reference the vicar would make in his sermon at evensong the first Sunday after his death to the long and faithful service, and the exemplary character of their late verger, Albert Edward Foreman. He sighed deeply. Albert Edward was a non-smoker and a total abstainer, but with a certain latitude; that is to say he liked a glass of beer with his dinner and when he was tired he enjoyed a cigarette. It occurred to him now that one would comfort him and since he did not carry them he looked about him for a shop where he could buy a packet of Gold Flakes. He did not at once see one and walked on a little. It was a long street with all sorts of shops in it, but there was not a single one where you could buy cigarettes.

"That's strange," said Albert Edward. To make sure he walked right up the street again. No, there was no doubt about it. He stopped and looked reflectively up and down.

"I can't be the only man as walks along this street and wants a fag," he said. "I shouldn't wonder but what a fellow might do very well with a little shop here. Tobacco and sweets, you know."

He gave a sudden start.

"That's an idea," he said. "Strange 'ow things come to you when you least expect it."

He turned, walked home, and had his tea.

"You're very silent this afternoon, Albert," his wife remarked.

"I'm thinkin'," he said.

He considered the matter from every point of view and next day he went along the street and by good luck found a little shop to let that looked as though it would exactly suit him. Twenty-four hours later he had taken it and when a month after that he left St. Peter's, Neville Square, for ever, Albert Edward Foreman set up in business as a tobacconist and newsagent. His wife said it was a dreadful come-down after being verger of St. Peter's, but he answered that you had to move with the times, the church wasn't what it was, and 'enceforward he was going to render unto Caesar what was Caesar's.

Albert Edward did very well. He did so well that in a year or so it struck him that he might take a second shop and put a manager in. He looked for another long street that hadn't got a tobacconist in it and when he found it and a shop to let, took it and stocked it. This was a success too. Then it occurred to him that if he could run two he could run half a dozen, so he began walking about London, and whenever he found a long street that had no tobacconist and a shop to let he took it. In the course of ten years he had acquired no less than ten shops and he was making money hand over fist. He went round to all of them himself every Monday, collected the week's takings and took them to the bank.

One morning when he was there paying in a bundle of notes and a heavy bag of silver the cashier told him that the manager would like to see him. He was shown into an office and the manager shook hands with him.

“Mr. Foreman, I wanted to have a talk to you about the money you’ve got on deposit with us. D’you know exactly how much it is?”

“Not within a pound or two, sir; but I’ve got a pretty rough idea.”

“Apart from what you paid in this morning it’s a little over thirty thousand pounds. That’s a very large sum to have on deposit and I should havethought you’d do better to invest it.”

“I wouldn’t want to take no risk, sir. I know it’s safe in the bank.”

“You needn’t have the least anxiety. We’ll make you out a list of absolutely gilt-edged securities. They’ll bring you in a better rate of interest than we can possibly afford to give you.”

A troubled look settled on Mr. Foreman’s distinguished face. “I’ve never ‘ad anything to do with stocks and shares and I’d ‘ave to leave it all in your ‘ands,” he said.

The manager smiled. “We’ll do everything. All you’ll have to do next time you come in is just to sign the transfers.”

“I could do that all right, said Albert uncertainly. “But ‘ow should I know what I was signin’?”

“I suppose you can read,” said the manager a trifle sharply.

Mr. Foreman gave him a disarming smile.

“Well, sir, that’s just it. I can’t. I know it sounds funny-like but there it is, I can’t read or write, only me name, an’ I only learnt to do that when I went into business.”

The manager was so surprised that he jumped up from his chair.

“That’s the most extraordinary thing I ever heard.”

“You see it’s like this, sir, I never ‘ad the opportunity until it was too late and then some’ow I wouldn’t. I got obstinate-like.”

The manager stared at him as though he were a prehistoric monster.

“And do you mean to say that you’ve built up this important business and amassed a fortune of thirty thousand pounds without being able to read or write? Good God, an, what would you be now if you had been able to?”

“I can tell you that sir,” said Mr. Foreman, a little smile on his still aristocratic features. “I’d be verger of St. Peter’s, Neville Square.”

- W. Somerset Maugham

5.4 KEY WORDS

Verger	: an official in a church who acts as an attendant
Alpaca	: a long haired domesticated animal valued for wool
Perennial	: Everlasting, ceaseless
Complacence	: Self-satisfaction, contentment
Disconcerting	: Disturbing, perturbing
Clad	: Clothed, dressed
Wrapped	: Covered, overjoyed, delighted
Succession	: Sequence, series, progression
Infirm	: Frail, weak, debilitated

Vestry	: A room attached to a church used as an office
Genuflect	: To bend, to lower one's body for worship
Aisle	: Passage between rows of seats in a church, theatre train or aircraft
Cassock	: Full length gown worn by Christian clergy
Energetic	: Full of Vigour, Energy
Predecessor	: Former, previous holder post, precursor
Aristocratic	: High-born, well-bred, elite
Parishioner	: An inhabitant of a particular church parish
Fuss	: A display of unnecessary excitement, activity or interest
Finger in every Pie	: Interference in all matters.
Tolerant	: Open minded, unprejudiced, broad-minded
Congregation	: A group of people assembled for religions workshop
Whimper	: Cry, moan, groan, wail
Amuse	: Entertain, gladden, make laugh
Crook	: A bend in something, curve/wicked person
Surplice	: A loose linen vestment worn over a cassock by the clergy
Hush up	: Silenced, quieted, gagged
Scandal	: Unethical behavior, outrageous, wrongdoing
Resolute	: Determined, purposeful, firm
Be dignity	: Kindness or tolerance toward others.
Slightly	: a little, moderately to a small degree
Jockeyed	: Struggle by every available means to achieve something
Obsequious	: Servile, submissive
Ecclesiastical	: Related to church or clergy
Deportment	: Posture, gait, way of standing
Inapproachable	: not accessible, difficult to approach
Page-boy	: a page in a hotel or attending a bride at wedding
Footman	: A servant whose duty is to admit visitor and wait at a table
Butler	: Chief servant of house
Peeress	: a woman holding the rank of a peer
Unimpeachable	: Not able to be doubted/unquestionable
Embarrassment	: a feeling of self-consciousness or shame/uneasiness
Knack	: talent , skill, ability, capability, aptness
Glance	: a brief, hurried look, take a quick look
Lamentable	: deplorable, unfortunate, regrettable

Ignorance	: Lack of knowledge, unfamiliarity with
Prudence	: Wisdom, understanding
Principle	: proposition, concept, idea, system of belief
Brash	: Unpleasantly rough or jarring to the senses
Providence	: Fate, destiny, nemesis, God's will
tidy up	: An act of tidying something
Stroll	: Wander, roam, amble, saunter
Notion	: Idea, belief, concept, thought
Abstainer	: One who keeps away from one who refrains from doing something
Reflectively	: Thoughtfully in pondering state
Tobacconist	: tobacco-seller
Dreadful	: Terrible, frightful, horrible
Come-down	: loss of status, mortification, demotion
Anxiety	: Feeling of worry, apprehension, unease
Gilt-edged	: Reliable stocks for investment
Distinguished	: Famed, renowned, dignified
Disarming	: Famed, renowned, dignified
Trifle	: unimportant thing/trivial matter, inessential
Obstinate	: Stubborn, headstrong, unyielding
Prehistoric	: Primitive, primeval, ante-diluvia
Monster	: Large, ugly, frightening imaginary creature
Amass	: accumulate, collect, stockpile

5.5 SUMMARY OF THE STORY

Albert Edward Foreman was a Verger at St. Peter's church, Neville Square. He started his career as a foot-man rising to the position of the verger. He was an honest, sincere and hard-working man. He loved his work and took pride in his position. People of the parish respected him for his sincerity and positive attitude. He was self-confident but with humility. However, a new vicar who was appointed at the church told him that he should learn to read and write as it was necessary for every churchman to be literate. Foreman said that it was too late for him to learn to read and write. The Vicar told him that in that case, he would lose his job. Foreman lost his job and while walking home from church, he had a desire to smoke. He could not find a single tobacconist shop. He found a vacant shop on rent. He started his new career as a tobacconist and newsagent. The shop ran quite well and he took another shop in a lane where there was no tobacco shop. Then he walked down the streets of London and started tobacco shops wherever he noticed that there was no tobacco shop. In ten years, he became the owner of ten tobacco shops earning huge income.

One day, he went to the bank to deposit money. The bank manager suggested to him to invest some of his money in stocks and shares for higher rate of returns. Foreman said that he knew nothing about share market and he wanted his money to be safe. The bank manager was a trust worthy man who assured

Foreman that he would manage his investment in such a way that he would get higher rate of returns without any risk. Foreman agreed and the manager requested him to sign some papers. Foreman replied that he was illiterate and did not know how to read and write.

The bank manager was shocked and surprised because he had never seen a person who had earned so much money despite total lack of literacy. He asked Foreman what he would here become if he had been a literate man. Foreman replied that he would have been the verge of St.Peter's church.

5.6 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE STORY

Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) was a well-known novelist, playwright and short story writer. His works are characterized by clear unadorned style, cosmopolitan settings and a shrewd understanding of human nature. He travelled extensively and during the World War I he worked as a secret agent. His reputation rests, mainly on his novels *of Human Bondage* (1915), *The Moon and the Sixpence* (1919), *Cakes and Ale* (1930) and *The Razor's Edge* (1944). *The Razor's Edge* is considered his magnum opus. It is a novel about a young American war Veteran who goes to India in search of a satisfying way of life. He met a great spiritual saint Shri Ganesha from whom he achieved peace and inner harmony. He was profoundly impressed by his silence, tranquility, renunciation and resignation.

Somerset Maugham's short-stories often have twisted ending in an ironical manner Maugham often presented funny sides of life which is full of contradictions. Generally we believe that honest people prosper and the wicked suffer but in his famous story *Ant and the Grasshopper*, he depicts Tom who led prodigal life become a rich man at the end of the story as he marries a wealthy widow who dies and leaves all her property and luxurious mansions in inheritance to her husband. Tom lived like a grasshopper enjoying life extravagantly. His elder brother George lived an honest and hard-working life like an industrious ant. He retires from his work and lives a mediocre life. Maugham takes a different turn from the famous fable of Aesop that bad deeds might not always be punished and good deeds many often go unrewarded.

The Verger is a story of Albert Edward Foreman who had been the Verger at St.Peter's Church, Neville square for 16 years. One day, a new Vicar was appointed there who fired Foreman for being illiterate. He told him to learn to read and write but Foreman refused to do so saying that he was too old to learn new tricks. Finally he left his job and while walking back home, he had an intense desire to smoke a cigarette. There were no tobacco shops in the streets. An idea came to his mind that he should open a tobacco shop in the street. Soon he opened a tobacco shop which ran very well. In a few years, he opened other shops and learned a lot of money. Within ten years he had as many as ten shops in London. He deposited his accumulated income in a bank which rose to thirty thousand pounds or more.

Foreman became a successful business man. Once he visited the bank and the bank manager suggested that he should invest his money into shares and stocks to get higher returns. Foreman wanted to take no risk but the bank manager told him that he would manage his investment prudentially incurring no risk. Foreman trusted the bank manager and told him to undertake

necessary procedure. The bank manager said that he would have to sign some papers. The climax in the story comes when Foreman said that he was quite illiterate and he could neither read nor write. The bank manager was shocked and surprised. He told Foreman that he had become a wealthy businessman despite his being illiterate. He asked him what he would have been if he had been a literate man. Foreman replied that he would have been nothing but a verger at St. Peter's church had he been a literate person. Foreman's reply can be taken as denouement in the story.

The author wants to suggest that illiteracy is not equal to ignorance. It is a sarcastic remark which carries a proven truth that formal education literacy has nothing to do with practical success in the world. There is a story that the topper in the class became a teacher and his classmate who was a back bencher became the minister of education. We find many such examples in the world around us.

The story is about church wardens and therefore we find many words related to church such as vicar, vestry, cassock, surplice, congregation, parishioners, ecclesiastical etc.

The story has been told from the third person singular, the omniscient narrator. The tone of the narrator is detached and impassive. The over-all mood of the story is peaceful without any tension or conflict. Even when Foreman is dismissed from the job, he remains calm and composed and soon finds out what he should do to maintain his family. As the verger, he had done his job honestly and sincerely never entertaining any complaint from the parishioners. He loved his job and his positive attitude made him quite popular. He was fired from his job but soon he became a successful businessman on account of his practical, calm and placid temperament. He was quite egoless, gentle and agreeable. These qualities place him on a higher pedestal than the vicar and other church people. The story even poses a question whether so-called religious people possess spiritual virtues like love, compassion equanimity and sobriety.

The author has used the simple past and past perfect tenses in his narration. There are themes like appearance, opportunity, dedication, independence and humility. The author highlights the strength of human spirit that can triumph over obstacles through courage, determination and dedication.

Somerset Maugham wrote more than hundred stories and burnt about fourteen as Winston Churchill warned that they violated the official secrets Act. Maugham's writing career extended over 65 years and he insisted that a writer should be judged by his best work. He placed himself in the first of the second-raters.

In Maugham's essay on the short story he says that the essence of short story is story telling. Maugham preferred to tell stories that were sparked by incidents he had witnessed or heard about. Many of his stories are like dramatized maxims. He had skeptical world view that turns popular beliefs upside down. He was fascinated by men and women who were destroyed by code of honor, an appetite or a passion. He liked characters who were gay amusing and unscrupulous.

The narrator in Maugham's short stories is uninvolved and impersonal. He often presents cynical or pessimistic world view quite dispassionately.

Maugham believed religion was an illusion to help humanbeing endure the accident of existence. Maugham was a great traveler who sojourned in the most parts of the world. His extensive travel gave him wider experiences of human nature. He wrote ordinarily like a speaker in prose. He had gone the renders authentic pleasure in words, settings and depiction of his characters. His dialogues are realistic and befitting the characters and situations. Twisted ending makes his stories entertaining and pleasurable. Even if all things perish, there will remain story tellers who will entertain the listeners near the fireplace at home or campfire in the forest. Maugham firmly held that true beauty of short stories lies in story telling that entertains and shocks the readers with a surprising, ironical twist.

5.7 THE TONE OF THE STORY

Somerset Maugham was a great story teller. Good story telling requires dispassionate and impersonal tone. In his stories there is always a predominant tone of irony and objective treatment of characters and incidents. In his theory and practice of the short story, Maugham shifts the whole emphasis of craftsmanship away from the point of ‘single effect’ to the other basic question of who is the narrator. The typical Maugham situation is built around a sense of disillusion which comes from “Seeing through” the veil of outward appearances. The underlying theme of most of his stories is that the reality is usually different from outward appearances.

The over-all mood of the story is free of conflict or tension. Foreman loses the job of the Verger but he is not utterly depressive. He remains calm and composed and solved the problem of the loss of job by starting a tobacco shop. Even after earning a lot of money, he shuns arrogance, vanity and ambitiousness. Maugham was a rational man who looked at things unemotionally and intellectually. Though he was interested in spirituality, his attitude always remained analytic and dispassionate. This is a true of his treatment of themes, character and incidents.

5.8 THEMES OF THE STORY

In *The Verger* there are themes of appearance opportunity, dedication, independence and humility. Foreman is a dedicated verger who is quite conscious about appearance. For example, he prefers to keep his new verger’s gown for occasions like wedding and funerals. The new vicar too thinks that appearance is important. He believes that literacy is important for church officials and other church people. He thinks that the ability to read and write for the church people reflects the reputation and prestige of St.Peter church. Foreman who is unable to read and write had to lose his job as the Verger, despite his honesty, sincerity and hard work. For the Vicar, literacy is important because it adds to the appearance of cultured and sophisticated behaviors.

Another important theme in *The Verger* is opportunity. Foreman loses his job but he remains calm and composed turning the loss of job into an opportunity for new enterprise. He sets up, tobacco a successful businessman owning ten tobacco shops in London. He seized the opportunity turning defeat into victory. He was a dedicated verger who earned the love and respect of the parishioners. His deep sense of sincerity and dedication makes his successful as a businessman also. Maugham seems to suggest that mere literally

is not an asset. It is dedication and steadfastness that earn success and reputation.

After losing his job, Foreman decided to set up an independent business. He became his own boss with no servility to anyone. He decided to be and wearable to nobody but himself. When the new Vicar told him to learn to read and write, he politely refused to do so. He said that he was too old a dog to learn new tricks. The new Vicar told him that if he failed to learn to read and write, he would have to lose his job. Foreman abandoned his job without blaming the new Vicar. However he shows his independent, free-willed nature.

Despite his independence and freewill, Foreman is never arrogant and vain. Humility is one of his greatest virtues. Though he amasses a lot of wealth, his healthiness and success never go to his head. When the bank manager asks him to sign papers, he says that he did not know how to read and write. The bank manager was utterly shocked and surprised. He asked Foreman what he would have been if he had been a literate man. Foreman humbly replied that he would be the Verger at St. Peter's Church if he had been able to read and write. He does not ridicule literacy but shows his humility about his past life and the present worldly success. He displays his ingenuity and flexibility in his life.

5.9 STYLE AND DICTION OF THE STORY

The style of Somerset Maugham in his stories is simple, lucid and ironic. He usually wrote in the prose without figurative language. His style lacked poetic beauty but its dominating trait was effective story-telling. He avoided romantic and emotional narration. He relied more on rational attitude towards life and the world. He said about himself that. "I have never pretended to be anything but a story teller". Most of his stories are narrated in third person singular in an impersonal and dispassionate manner.

5.10 THE TITLE OF THE STORY

The title of the story is *The Verger* the church official who worked dedicatedly. He is illiterate man without formal education. He does not claim to be intelligent or knowledgeable. He believes in preforming his duties honestly and sincerely. He is quite popular as the Verger among the parishioners. When the new Vicar insists that he should learn to read and write, he refuses to do so politely. He had to lose his job and he starts his tobacco shop earning huge amount of money. When he goes to the bank, the bank manager asks him to sign papers for transfer of money into better investment schemes. He says that he did not know how to read and write. The bank manager was surprised and he asked what he would have been if he had been literate. He replied "I would still be the Verger at St. Peters".

5.11 MAUGHAM'S VIEWS ON SHORT STORY

Maugham believed that the literature finds truest and fullest expression in the essay or the short story. He says in his essay on the short story that it is an innate nature of men to tell tales. Regarding the form Maugham says that he liked stories with beginning, middle and end. For him, lucidity, euphony and simplicity were the important traits of a good short story. He stressed on reality rather than imagination. He wrote his stories based on what he had seen or heard. He dramatized maxims and popular proverbs turning them upside down these characters are suggested by someone he had known.

In his short stories, the narrator is a thin disguise for the author. In his book *The Summing Up*, he wrote about topic related to writing and his life. The book reflects his deep insights about his career as a writer and his views on writing.

Maugham studies medicine and worked in hospital where he came in contact with suffering people. This has a profound effect on his life and writing. Many writers wrote about the virtue of self-suffering and how it ennobled the suffers. Maugham did not agree to it. He felt it was exactly the opposite and he wrote about its negative impact.

Regarding creative process, he wrote that he let things simmer in his brain for longtime before putting them on paper. The ultimate aim of literature is to entertain and not to teach. He believed that no reading is worthwhile unless one enjoy it. Maugham said that a good short-story must represent expression on the following levels.

1. Narrative level of characters and events.
2. Emotional level: nature of emotional experience.
3. Interpretative level: Meaning beneath the apparent conflict
4. Cultural level: elements that generalize the events and make them applicable to the world of realities.

Check Your Progress: 1

5.12 ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN BRIEF.

(i) What was Albert Foreman's profession?

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(ii) What kind of person was Albert Foreman?

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(iii) What were the feelings of Foreman about the new Vicar?

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- (iv) Why did the new Vicar want Foreman to leave his job?
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- (v) What happened to Foreman when he walked out of the church?
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- (vi) How did Foreman turn into a successful businessman?
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- (vii) How was the bank manager surprised?
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- (viii) What did foreman say to the bank manager in the end of the story?
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- (ix) What is ironic twist in the end of the story?
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(x) Why did Foreman refuse to learn to read and write?

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(xi) What are the virtues of Albert Foreman that made him successful
verger and then a wealthy business man?

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Check Your Progress: 2

5.13 CHOOSE THE CORRECT OPTION FROM GIVEN BELOW.

(1) Albert Edward Foreman was a _____ at St. Peter's.

- (a) Vicar (b) Priest
(c) Warden (d) Verger

(2) Foreman had been the verger at St. Peter's for

- (a) ten years (b) fifteen years
(c) sixteen years (d) twenty years

(3) Foreman kept his new gown for _____

- (a) Weddings (b) Funerals
(c) christening (d) weddings and funerals

(4) The new Vicar was in his early _____

- (a) forties (b) fifties
(c) thirties (d) sixties

(5) Foreman had started his career as a _____

- (a) warden (b) vicar
(c) verger (d) pageboy

(6) The new vicar told Foreman that he should learn

- (a) To address the audience

- (b) to look after the church
 (c) to read and write
 (d) To help the vicar
- (7) The new vicar told Foreman that if he did not learn to read and write.
 (a) he would have to suffer
 (b) he would have to leave the job
 (c) he would be punished
 (d) he would be transferred to another church
- (8) Albert Edward was _____
 (a) a smoker (b) a teetotaler
 (c) a non-smoker (d) a vegetarian
- (9) As Foreman walked out of the church he had a desire _____
 (a) to drink (b) to eat
 (c) to erg (d) to smoke
- (10) As Foreman found no tobacco shop in the streets, he decided to open _____ there
 (a) a medical store (b) a shoe store
 (c) a tobacco shop (d) a sweet shop
- (11) Within ten years, Foreman could set up _____ tobacco shop in London.
 (a) ten (b) twenty
 (c) hundred (d) fifty
- (12) During ten year, Foreman earned _____
 (a) ten thousand pound (b) twenty thousand pound
 (c) forty thousand pound (d) thirty thousand pound

5.14 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit you have,

- learn the most popular form of Literature
- learn the importance of plot, setting in the story

5.15 BOOKS SUGGESTED

Damon Knight *Creating Short Fiction: The Classic Guide to Writing Short Fiction*

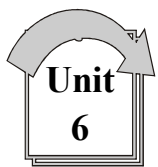
Sharon Sorenson *How to Write Short Stories* 1991

Nancy Day *How to Write Winning Short Stories* 2015

Answers

Check Your Progress: 2

1. (D), 2. (C), 3. (D), 4. (A), 5. (C), 6. (C), 7. (B), 8. (C), 9. (D),
 10. (C), 11. (A), 12. (D)



THE SHROUD
- MUNSHI PREMCHAND
(TRANSLATED FROM URDU BY FRANCES W. PRITCHETT)

: STRUCTURE :

- 6.0 Objectives**
- 6.1 About the Short Story Writer**
- 6.2 About the Story**
- 6.3 Text of the Story**
- 6.4 Key Words**
- 6.5 The Summary of the Story**
- 6.6 Critical Analysis of the Story**
- 6.7 Tone of the Story**
- 6.8 Themes of the Story**
- 6.9 Style and Diction in the Story**
- 6.10 The Title of the Story**
- 6.11 Questions (Brief Answers)**
- 6.12 Multiple Choice Questions**
- 6.13 Let Us Sum Up**
- 6.14 Books Suggested**
- Answers**

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, We shall

- Learn famous story of the prominent Writer Munshi Premchand
- Themes, style, tone and critical analysis of the story
- Cultural elements of the story

6.1 ABOUT THE SHORT STORY WRITER

Munshi Premchand whose original name was Dhanpat Rai was born on 31 July 1886 in a village Lamhi near Varanasi in the present state of Uttar Pradesh. His father was a clerk in the post office. Premchand's parents died young: his mother died when Dhanpat was seven and his father died when he was fourteen. Premchand was left responsible for his stepmother and step siblings. He was married at the age of fifteen but the marriage did not succeed. His wife and his step mother quarreled frequently. His stepmother was also very quarrelsome and she created discord in the family.

As Premchand's first marriage failed, he married again to a child widow named Shivarani. She supported Premchand in his struggles for life and creative writing. Premchand faced financial problems all his life. He tutored students and worked as a teacher in different schools in various towns and cities. He passed his B.A. with English, Persian and history. Later, he worked as a school inspector.

Premchand wrote in Urdu contributing to various magazines and literary journals. He was a voracious reader and also worked as a book seller, editor

and press owner. He began to write under the pen name *Nawab Rai* in Urdu but in 1909, his book *Soz-e-Watan* was banned by the British Government as a seditious work. Then he started writing under the pen name 'Premchand'. In 1914, he switched to Hindi from Urdu writing as it was difficult to find publishers in Urdu.

By 1919, Premchand had published four novels which included his first novel *Seva Sadan*. In 1921 he attended a meeting at Gorakhpur where Mahatma Gandhi asked people to resign from government jobs as protest against the British rule.

In 1923, he quit his job and decided to focus on his literary career. He started a printing press called *Sarswati Press*. In 1924, his novel *Rangbhumi* was published, followed by *Nirmala* in 1925, *Pratigya* in 1927 and *Gaban* in 1928. As his printing press suffered a great financial loss, he went to Bombay to try his luck in Hindi Film Industry. He wrote script for the film *Mazdoor* but he did not like commercial environment of Bombay Film Industry. He therefore left Mumbai and returned to Banaras. Premchand was elected as the first President of the Progressive writers Association in Lucknow in 1936. He died on October 8, 1936.

Munshi Premchand wrote more than three hundred short-stories, fourteen novels many essays, letters, plays and translated works. Some of his works have been translated into English and Russian after his death. His major works include: *Seva Sadan*, *Rangbhumi*, *Nirmala*, *Gaban*, *Karmabhoomi*, *Godan* and collection of short stories. His notable short stories include *Kafan*, *Gupt Dhan*, *Poos ki Raat*, *Lottery*, *Do Bail ki Katha*, *Idgah*, *Thakur ka Kuan*, *Boodhi Kaaki*, *Namak Ka Daroga*, *Bade Bhai Sahab*, *Nasha*, *Panch Parmeshwar* etc.

Premchand's works are marked by his profound social concern and social realism. His works depict a rationalistic outlook. He exposed so-called religious hypocrites and wealthy exploiters of Indian society. His novels and short stories focused on national and social issues like child widows, prostitution, poverty, feudal system, corruption and freedom movement. He was influenced by Gopal Krishna Gokhle, Lok Manya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi.

Munshi Premchand lifted contemporary literature from emotionalism and romanticism to realistic representation of social problems of rural India.

6.2 ABOUT THE STORY

The Shroud (1936) is the last story by Munshi Premchand. The title of the story is *Kafan* in original Hindi story. The story we shall study here is translated version in English by Frances W. Pritchett. This is one of the most appealing stories by Premchand that depicts the harshness and morbid comic effect. The story is about two Dalits Ghisu, the father and his son Madhav. The only female character is Budhia, Madhav's pregnant wife who undergoes intense labour pain and dies. This Dalit family is utterly poor and suffers from abject poverty and starvation. Premchand has presented a vivid heart rending picture of rural India which is devastated by cruel, inhuman caste system and untouchability.

The story starts with conversation between Ghisu and Madhav who are utterly lazy pain idlers. They are talking about Budhia who is undergoing a severe labour pain inside the hut. Ghisu and Madhav are sitting outside the

hut greedily devouring stolen potatoes. Madhav is unwilling to go inside the hut and help his wife fearing that his father might devour a larger share of roasted potatoes. Ghisu then recounts in detail a feast that he had attended twenty years ago at a landowner's house. It was a wedding procession of the landowner's daughter. The family fed all invitees with puris, raita, chutney, vegetables, sweets, yogurt and paan at the end. Ghisu had eaten so much that he could not stand up and staggered off lying on his blanket. Ghisu remarks that new people do not spend much on weddings and religious festivals as they have turned economic and thrifty.

Madhav listens to his father's vivid account of the feast with vicarious pleasure. Budhia writhes in pain while the father son duo sleeps unconcerned about her. The next morning Budhia dies and both start crying. The arrangements for the cremation are to be made but they had no money to arrange for the funeral rites. They go to the zamindar who gives them two rupees contemptuously deriding them for their laziness. The landlord flung money towards Ghisu without even looking at him. Other people also gave them some money for cremation and the amount went up to five rupees.

They went to buy the cloth to wrap the dead body of Budhia for cremation but they thought that it was of no use to burn the shroud with the dead body, as when she was alive, she did not have even a rag to cover her body. They went to a wine shop, ordered for puris, meat stew, spiced liver and fried fish along with a bottle of wine. They drank a lot getting fully intoxicated. They said that Budhia would certainly go to heaven because even though she died, she fulfilled the greatest desire of their lives, the desire of drinking wine and eating the best food. Ghisu consoled his son by saying that Budhia was liberated from the net of illusion of worldly pain and pleasures.

At the end, they start singing, dancing and then collapse on the ground due to over drunkenness.

The Shroud is a controversial story that has been interpreted from different perspectives. Munshi Premchand understates the miseries of the down trodden hiding his own personal opinions. The story is descriptive and analytical rather than prescriptive and didactic.

6.3 TEXT OF THE STORY

At the door of the hut father and son sat silently by a burnt-out fire; inside, the son's young wife Budhiya lay in labor, writhing with pain. And from time to time such a heart-rending scream emerged from her lips that they both pressed their hands to their hearts. It was a winter night; everything was drowned in desolation. The whole village had been absorbed into the darkness.

Ghisu said, "It seems she won't live. She's been writhing in pain the whole day. Go on – see how she is."

Madhav said in a pained tone, "If she's going to die, then why doesn't she go ahead and die? What's the use of going to see?"

"You're pretty hard-hearted! You've enjoyed life with her for a whole year – such faithlessness to her?"

"Well, I can't stand to see her writhing and thrashing around."

It was a family of Chamars, and notorious in the whole village. If Ghisu

worked for one day, then he rested for three. Madhav was such a slacker that if he worked for an hour, then he smoked his chilam for an hour. Thus nobody hired them on. If there was even a handful of grain in the house, they both swore off working. When they'd fasted for a couple of days, then Ghisu climbed trees and broke off branches, and Madhav sold the wood in the market; and as long as that money lasted, they both spent their time wandering idly around. *When their hunger grew intense, they again broke off branches, or looked for some work.* There was no shortage of work in the village. It was a village of farmers; for a hard-working man there were fifty jobs. But people only sent for those two when they were forced to content themselves with getting out of two men the work of one.

If only the two had been ascetics, then they wouldn't have needed any exercises in self-discipline to achieve contentment and patience. This was their very nature. Theirs was a strange life. Except for two or three clay pots, they had no goods at all in the house. Covering their nakedness with torn rags, free from the cares of the world, laden with debt – they suffered abuse, they suffered blows too, but not grief. They were so poor that without the smallest hope of repayment, people used to lend them something or other. When peas or potatoes were in season, they would dig up peas or potatoes from the fields and roast and eat them, or break off five or ten stalks of sugarcane and suck them at night. Ghisu had spent 60 years of his life in this pious manner, and Madhav, like a dutiful son, was following in his father's footsteps – or rather, was making his name even more radiant.

This time too, both were seated by the fire, roasting potatoes that they had dug up from somebody's field. Ghisu's wife had passed away long ago. Madhav's marriage had taken place the year before. Since this woman had come, she had laid the foundations of civilization in the family. *Grinding grain, cutting grass, she arranged for a couple of pounds of flour,* and kept filling the stomachs of those two shameless ones. After she came, they both grew even more lazy and indolent; indeed, they even began to swagger a bit. If someone sent for them to work, then with splendid indifference they demanded double wages. That woman was dying today in childbirth. And these two were perhaps waiting for her to die, so they could sleep in peace.

Pulling out a potato and peeling it, Ghisu said, "Go see what shape she's in. We'll have the fuss over a ghost-witch – what else! And here even the exorcist demands a rupee – *from whose house would we get one?*"

Madhav suspected that if he went into the hut, Ghisu would finish off most of the potatoes. He said, "I'm afraid to go in."

"What are you afraid of? I'm here, after all."

"Then you go and see, all right?"

"When my wife died, for three days I never even left her side. And then, won't she be ashamed in front of me? I've never seen her face – and today I should see her naked body? She won't even have bodily ease: if she sees me, she won't be able to thrash around freely."

"I'm thinking, if a child is born – what then? Dried ginger, brown sugar, oil – there's nothing at all in the house."

"Everything will come. If Bhagwan gives a child – those people who now aren't giving a paisa, will send for us and give us things. I've had nine sons.

There was never anything in the house, but this is how we managed every time.”

A society in which those who labored night and day were not in much better shape than these two; a society in which compared to the peasants, those who knew how to exploit the peasants’ weaknesses were much better off – in such a society, the birth of this kind of mentality was no cause for surprise. We’ll say that compared to the peasants, Ghisu was more insightful; and instead of joining the mindless group of peasants, he had joined the group of clever, scheming tricksters. Though indeed, he wasn’t skillful in following the rules and customs of the tricksters. Thus while other members of his group became chiefs and headmen of villages, at him the whole village wagged its finger. But still, he did have the consolation that if he was in bad shape, at least he wasn’t forced to do the back-breaking labor of the peasants, and others didn’t take improper advantage of his simplicity and voicelessness.

Pulling out the potatoes, they both began to eat them burning hot. They had eaten nothing since the day before. They were too impatient to wait till the potatoes cooled. Both burned their tongues repeatedly. When the potatoes were peeled, their outer parts didn’t seem so extremely hot. But the moment the teeth bit into them, the inner part burned the tongue and throat and roof of the mouth. Rather than keep that ember in the mouth, it was better to send it quickly along inward, where there was plenty of equipment for cooling it down. So they both swallowed very fast, although the attempt brought tears to their eyes.

Then Ghisu remembered a landowner’s wedding procession, in which he had taken part 20 years before. The repletion that had been vouchsafed to him in that feast was a memorable event in his life, and even today its memory was fresh. He said, “I’ll never forget that feast. Never since then have I had that kind of food, or such a full stomach. The girl’s family fed puris to everyone. As much as they wanted! Great and small, everyone ate puris – ones made with real ghi! Chutney, raita, three kinds of green vegetables, a flavorful stew, yoghurt, chutney, sweets. How can I tell you now what relish there was in that feast! There was no limit. Whatever thing you want, just ask! And however much you want, eat! People ate so much, ate so much, that nobody could even drink any water. And there the servers were setting hot, round, sweet-smelling pastries before you! You refuse, saying you don’t want it. You push away the tray with your hand. But that’s how they are – they just keep on giving it. And when everybody had wiped their mouths, then everybody got a pan as well. But how could I be in any shape for a pan? I couldn’t stand up. I just staggered off and lay down on my blanket. He had a heart as big as the ocean, that landowner!”

Enjoying the story of these grand festivities, Madhav said, “If only somebody would give us such a feast now!”

“As if anybody would feast anybody now! That was a different time. Now everybody thinks about economy – ‘don’t spend money on weddings, don’t spend money on religious festivals!’. Ask them – what’s this ‘saving’ of the poor people’s wealth? There’s no lack of ‘saving’. But when it comes to spending, they think about economy!”

“You must have eaten 20 or so puris?”

“I ate more than 20.”

“I would have eaten up 50.”

“I couldn’t have eaten less than 50. I was hale and hearty. You’re not half of what I was!”

After eating, they drank some water, covered themselves with their dhotis, curled up, and went to sleep right there by the fire, as if two gigantic serpents lay coiled there.

And Budhiya was still moaning.

In the morning, when Madhav went into the hut and looked, his wife had grown cold. Flies were buzzing on her face. Her stony eyes had rolled upward. Her whole body was covered with dust. In her stomach, the baby had died.

Madhav came running to Ghisu. Then they both together began loudly lamenting and beating their breasts. When the neighbors heard the weeping and wailing, they came running. And following the ancient custom, they began to console the bereaved.

But this wasn’t the occasion for an excessive show of grief. They had to worry about the shroud, and the wood. Money was as scarce in their house as meat in a raptor’s nest.

Father and son went weeping to the village landlord. He hated the very sight of their faces. A number of times he had beaten them with his own hands – for theft, or for not coming to work as they had promised. He asked, “What is it, Ghisu, why do you weep? Nowadays we don’t even see you around. It seems that you no longer want to live in the village.”

Ghisu fell prostrate on the ground, and said with tear-filled eyes, “Master, I’m in great trouble! Madhav’s wife passed away last night. All day she was writhing in pain, Master; we two sat by her bed till midnight. Whatever medicines we could give her, we did. But she slipped away. Now we have no one to care for us, Master – we’re devastated – our house is destroyed! I’m your slave. Now who but you will take care of her final rites? Whatever money we had at hand was used up on medicines. If the Master will show mercy, then she’ll have the proper rites. To whose door should I come except yours?”

The Landlord Sahib was a compassionate man. But to show compassion to Ghisu was to try to dye a black blanket. He felt like saying, “Get out of here! *Keep the corpse in your house and let it rot!* Usually you don’t come even when you’re called – now when you want something, you come and flatter me! You treacherous bastard! You villain!” But this was not the occasion for anger or revenge. Willingly or not, he pulled out two rupees and flung them down. But he didn’t open his lips to say a single word of consolation. He didn’t even look in Ghisu’s direction – as if he’d discharged a duty.

When the Landlord Sahib gave two rupees, then how could the village merchants and money-lenders have the nerve to refuse? Ghisu knew how to beat the drum of the landlord’s name. One gave two paisas, another gave four paisas. In an hour, Ghisu had collected the sum of five rupees in ready cash. Someone gave grain, someone else gave wood. And in the afternoon Ghisu and Madhav went to the market to get a shroud. Meanwhile, people began to cut the bamboo poles, and so on.

The sensitive-hearted women of the village came and looked at the body. They shed a few tears at its helplessness, and went away.

When they reached the market, Ghisu said, "We've got enough wood to burn her, haven't we, Madhav?"

Madhav said, "Yes, there's plenty of wood. Now we need a shroud."

"So let's buy a light kind of shroud."

"Sure, what else! While the body is being carried along, night will come. At night, who sees a shroud?"

"What a bad custom it is that someone who didn't even get a rag to cover her body when she was alive, needs a new shroud when she's dead."

"After all, the shroud burns along with the body."

"What else is it good for? If we'd had these five rupees earlier, we would have given her some medicine."

Each of them inwardly guessed what the other was thinking. They kept wandering here and there in the market, until eventually evening came. [Sometimes they went to one cloth-seller's shop, sometimes to another. They looked at various kinds of fabric, they looked at silk and cotton, but nothing suited them.] The two arrived, by chance or deliberately, before a wine-house; and as if according to some prearranged decision, they went inside. For a little while they both stood there in a state of uncertainty. [Then Ghisu went to the counter and said, "Sir, please give us a bottle too."] *Ghisu bought one bottle of liquor, and some sesame sweets.* [After this some snacks came, fried fish came]. And they both sat down on the verandah and [peacefully] began to drink.

After drinking a number of cups in a row, both became elevated.

Ghisu said, "What's the use of wrapping her in a shroud? After all, it would only be burned. Nothing would go with her."

Looking toward the sky as if persuading the angels of his innocence, Madhav said, "It's the custom of the world – why do these same people give thousands of rupees to the Brahmins? Who can tell whether a reward does or doesn't reach them in another world?"

"Rich people have wealth – let them waste it! What do we have to waste?"

"But what will you tell people? Won't people ask where the shroud is?"

Ghisu laughed. "We'll say the money slipped out of my waistband – we searched and searched for it, but it didn't turn up. [People won't believe it, but they'll still give the same sum again.]"

Madhav too laughed at this unexpected good fortune, *at defeating destiny in this way*. He said, "She was very good, the poor thing. Even as she died, she gave us a fine meal."

More than half the bottle had been finished. Ghisu ordered two sers of puris, a meat stew, and spiced liver and fried fish. There was a shop right next to the wine-house. Madhav ran over and brought everything back on two leaf-plates. The cost was fully one and a half rupees. Only a few paisa were left. Both then sat eating puris, with all the majesty of a tiger in the jungle pursuing his prey. They had no fear of being called to account, nor any concern about disgrace. They had passed through these stages of weakness long ago.

Ghisu said in a philosophical manner, “If my soul is being pleased, then won’t she receive religious merit?”

Madhav bowed his head in pious confirmation. “Certainly she’ll certainly receive it. Bhagwan, you are the knower of hearts – take her to Heaven! We’re both giving her our heartfelt blessing. The feast I’ve had today – I haven’t had its equal in my whole life!”

After a moment a doubt arose in Madhav’s heart. He said, “How about it – we’ll go there too someday, won’t we?”

Ghisu gave no answer to this childish question. *He looked reproachfully at Madhav.* [He didn’t want the thought of heavenly matters to interfere with this bliss.]

“When she asks us, there, why we didn’t give her a shroud, what will you say?”

“Oh, shut up!”

“She’ll certainly ask.”

“How do you know that she won’t get a shroud? Do you consider me such a donkey? I’ve lived in this world for 60 years – and have I just been loitering around? She’ll get a shroud, and [a very good one] – *a much better than we would have given*.”

Madhav was not convinced. He said, “Who will give it? You’ve gobbled up the rupees! [It’s me she’ll ask – I’m the one who put the sindur in the parting of her hair.]”

Ghisu grew irritated. “I tell you, she’ll get a shroud. Why don’t you believe me?”

“Who will give the money – why don’t you tell me?”

“The same people will give it who gave it this time. But they won’t put the rupees into our hands. *And if somehow we get our hands on them, we’ll sit here and drink again just like this, and they’ll give the shroud a third time.*”

As the darkness deepened and the stars glittered more sharply, the tumult in the wine-house also increased. One person sang, another babbled, another embraced his companion, another pressed a glass to his friend’s lips. Joy was in the atmosphere there. Intoxication was in the air. How many people becomes “an ass with a glass”! *They came here only to taste the pleasure of self-forgetfulness.* More than liquor, the air here elevated their spirits. The disaster of life seized them and dragged them here. And for a while they forgot whether they were alive or dead – or half-alive.

And these two, father and son, were still sipping with relish. Everyone’s eyes had settled on them. How fortunate they were! They had a whole bottle between them.

After he had finished eating, Madhav picked up the leaf-plate of leftover puris and gave it to a beggar who was standing there looking at them with hungry eyes. And for the first time in his life he felt the pride and delight and thrill of giving.

Ghisu said, “Take it – eat your fill, and give her your blessing. She whose earnings these are has died, but your blessing will certainly reach her. Bless her with every hair on your body – these are the payment for very hard labor.”

Madhav again looked toward the sky and said, “She’ll go to Heaven – she’ll become the Queen of Heaven!”

Ghisu stood up, and as if swimming in waves of joy he said, “Yes, son, she’ll go to Heaven! She never tormented anyone, she never oppressed anyone; even while dying, she fulfilled the greatest desire of our lives. If she doesn’t go to Heaven, then will those fat rich people go – who loot the poor with both hands, and go to the Ganges to wash away their sin, and offer holy water in temples?”

This mood of piety too changed; variability is the special quality of intoxication. It was the turn of despair and grief. Madhav said, “But the poor thing suffered a great deal in her life. Even her death was so painful!” Covering his eyes with his hands, he began to weep, [and sobbed loudly].

Ghisu consoled him: “Why do you weep, son? Be happy that she’s been liberated from this net of illusion. She’s escaped from the snare; she was very fortunate that she was able to break the bonds of worldly illusion so quickly.”

And both, standing there, began to sing, “Temptress! Why do your eyes flash, temptress?”

The whole wine-house was absorbed in the spectacle, and these two drinkers, deep in intoxication, kept on singing. Then they both began to dance – they leaped and jumped, fell down, flounced about, gesticulated, [strutted around]; and finally, overcome by drunkenness, they collapsed.

- Translated by Frances. W. Pritchett

6.4 KEY WORDS

Writhe	: Wriggle, jolt, make twisting of body (in pain)
Desolation	: a state of complete emptiness, barrenness
Absorbed	: engrossed, fully occupied, gripped
Hard-hearted	: cruel, merciless
Notorious	: infamous, ill-famed, known for bad qualities
Slacker	: idler, one who avoids work, lazybone
Chilam	: smoking pipe made of clay
Swear off	: abjure, promise to abstain from
Idly	: lazily/ in an aimless, lazy manner
Intense	: very powerful, acute, potent, profound
Ascetic	: austere, self-denying, non-indulgent, self-disciplined, self-controlled, one who controls one’s feelings in contentment, satisfaction
Laden with debt	: debt-ridden, burdened with debt
Stalks	: stems, twigs (To stalk: pursue stealthily)
Pious	: sacred, holy, virtuous
Radiant	: brilliant, illuminated, shining, luminous
Roast	: cook by prolonged exposure to heat in an oven or over fire
Shameless	: barefaced, brazen
Swagger	: stride, walk or behave in an arrogant manner

Exorcist	: one who is able to cast out the evil
Suspect	: doubt, have suspicion, to be skeptical
Thrash ground	: to make wild movements
Peasant	: farmer, farm-worker
Insightful	: perceptive, intuitive, penetrative
Trickster	: A person who cheats or swindles other
Consolation	: give condolences to, comfort at a time of grief
Peel	: remove the outer cover of fruit, vegetables etc.
Ember	: live coal, cinder, burning coal or wood
Swallow	: gulp down, gobble up, stuff down
Repletion	: the state of being full, well supplied
Vouchsafe	: give someone in a gracious manner, favour with
Stew	: a dish of meat or vegetables cooked in liquid.
Yogurt	: semi solid Souris food prepared from milk fermented
Relish	: enjoy, delight in, be pleased by
Pastries	: baked dishes of cream, flour, jam, fruits etc.
Stagger off	: lurch, walk unsteadily, stumble, falter
Feast	: celebration meal, banquet, large celebratory meal
Moan	: groan, cry in pain, lament
Buzz	: low humming, continuous sound, murmuring sound
Wail	: lament, cry loudly, whine, high-pitched sound
Lament	: cry loudly, a passionate expression of sorrow
Bereaved	: to be deprived of a close relation or friend though death
Prostrate	: lying stretched on the ground with face downward
Corpse	: dead body of a human being
Flatter	: over-praise, lavish praise or compliments to some one
Rag	: torn piece of cloth, old tattered clothes
Fabric	: cloth, textile material
Liquor	: wine spirit, alcoholic beverage
Snacks	: small quick meal or something eaten between meals
Waistband	: a strip of cloth round the waist sewn on trousers or skirt, girdle, sash
Ser	: old weight measurement of almost half a kilo
Pursue	: follow, chase, trail, track
Prey	: quarry, game, kill
Confirmation	: verification, testimony, authentication
Reproachfully	: disappointedly, disparagingly
Interfere	: get in the way of, disrupt, stand in the way of

Gobble up	: eat greedily or hastily in large pieces
Sindur	: Red lead powder applied on forehead and on the partings of hair by Hindu woman
Tumult	: disorderly agitation, hubbub, din, confused state.
Intoxication	: a strong feeling of excitement or happiness the condition of being drunk
Sip	: drink slowly in small portions
Thrill	: excitement, exhilaration, stimulation
Torment	: agony, suffering, torture, anguish, distress
Oppress	: maltreat, abuse, tyrannize, persecute
Variability	: lack of consistency or fixed pattern
Liberate	: make free, emancipate, rescue, release from slavery
Illusion	: hallucination, fantasy, deceptive appearance
Flounce	: March, strut, move in exaggerated manner
Gesticulate	: Use gestures, make signs or signals
Strut around	: walk around in a stiff manner swagger
Overcome	: to conquer, win, overpower
Collapse	: fall down, crumble, slump down

6.5 SUMMARY OF THE STORY

The Shroud is a famous story by Munshi Premchand. It is about two chamars (Dalits) Ghisu and Madhav. Ghisu is the father and Madhav is the son. Both are great idlers who do not like to work. They always avoided work and rested all the time. Madhav's wife Budhia was pregnant and suddenly she had the labour pain that made her cry loudly whole night. Ghisu and Madhav sat outside the hut eating stolen potatoes after roasting them in fire. They had no money or food or clothes. They were clad in rags. Poverty had made them quite indifferent and insensitive. Budhia's constant whining did not affect them much. In fact they thought that her death would liberate her from suffering. They probably thought that her death would also relieve them from their problems.

The next morning, Budhia died and they began to lament loudly. Soon, people came to console them. Ghisu and Madhav had no money to arrange for Budhia's funeral rites. They went to the local Zamindar to beg money. The Zamindar reproached them for their laziness but gave them two rupees. Other people also gave some money. Thus they could collect five rupees which was quite a good amount for them. They went to purchase Kafan (shroud) but they found it quite costly and unnecessary. They thought that it was an evil custom to wrap a dead woman in such a cloth who had not been able to wear any proper clothes all her life.

So, they decided to spend money on wine and food. They drank a lot of wine and ate nice food which they had never enjoyed during their life. They ate puris, meat stew spiced liver and fried fish. Intoxicated and over-drunk, they sang, danced and collapsed on the ground. They said that Budhia's soul would

go to heaven as she had earned great punya (virtue or merit) by providing them the best food and drink at the time of her death. Though she died, it was due to her death that they could enjoy the most delicious food and strong intoxicating wine that made them forget all the miseries of the world.

The story ends in a shocking manner depicting the realistic picture of poverty-ridden people of rural India. Poverty is a curse that makes people cruel, heartless and inhuman. In Sanskrit, it is said “Budhukshito Kim Na Karoti Paapam” (The hungry and starving people commit heinous crimes)

6.6 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE STORY

The Shroud (Kafan) was the last story written by Munshi Premchand. It was published in 1936. The story we are dealing with is a translated version in English by Frances W. Pritchett. Frances W. Pritchett has taught South Asia Literature at Columbia University since 1982. She had taught and written about South Asian literature especially Urdu poetry. She has written about Ghalib of Mirza Ghalib and Urdu poetry. There are several English translation of *Kafan* by Munshi Premchand but Frances W. Pritchett’s translation is more authentic which does justice to the original short story.

Translation is a complex process and it involves translating cultural elements like proverbs, idioms, metaphor, colloquial language etc. of the source language to the target language. Premchand’s writing style is simple and he used dialect and colloquial expressions. Most of his stories deal with rural India and the poor, deprived people that inhabit there. Pritchett’s translation has succeeded in carrying the cultural elements of the original story *Kafan*. The characters of the story are from deprived class called charmars. They were treated as untouchables who lived in a small hut outside the village. They were poverty ridden and sustained themselves by begging left over food.

Though they were poor and starving, they did not like to work. They worked very little resting all the time. The farmers of the village needed them for labour work in their fields. They were ready to pay reasonable charges but they shunned work by making some excuses. Probably, utter poverty had made them quite indifferent, careless and insensitive. Ghisu and Madhav are father son duo. They are very lazy and negligent. They are victims of caste discrimination which is the greatest evil in India. Their poverty is the result of this evil. Munshi Premchand has presented social reality of India dispassionately without censoring or favoring anyone or anything.

The story begins with Madhav’s wife Budhia writhing in labour pain inside the hut while Ghisu and Madhav are sitting outside the hut talking and devouring roasted potatoes which they have stolen from someone’s field. Ghisu recalls and recounts a wonderful feast he had enjoyed twenty years ago. While Budhia is crying in unbearable agony, Madhav and Ghisu are lost in the world of vicarious pleasure.

The next morning, they find Budhia dead with flies buzzing around her dead body. Ghisu and Madhav start lamenting loudly. The neighbours come and console them. Ghisu and Madhav have no money to arrange for Budhia’s funeral. Therefore they go to Zamindar to beg for money. The Zamindar gives them two rupees deriding their laziness contemptuously. Other people also give them some money for Budhia’s cremation. The amount they receive goes up to five rupees and they go to purchase the shroud. They look for

cheap shroud but they feel that it was no use to waste money on shroud as it was to be burnt with the dead body of Budhia who had always covered her body in rags all her life.

In the evening, they go to a wine shop and buy a bottle of liquor and snacks. They sat down on the verandah and began to drink. They ate puris, meat stew, spiced liver and fried fish relishing delicious spicy food with strong, intoxicating liquor.

Madhav remarked that even as she died, she gave them a nice meal. Ghisu remarked in a philosophical manner that Buddha had earned religious merit (punya) by feeding them after the end of her life and therefore her soul would certainly go to heaven. Soon darkness descended and stars began to shine in the sky. The father son duo sang, danced and babbled out of intoxication. Ghisu said that Budhia had liberated herself from the net of illusion of worldly sufferings. The people witnessed the spectacle absorbingly as the duo leaped and jumped madly. Finally, they collapsed on the ground losing their consciousness in inebriated state.

Kafan (The Shroud) is the most controversial story that invited numerous interpretations by the critics. Premchand keeps his own opinions hidden. His objective and impassioned outlook makes the story highly impressive. The story raises questions that go unanswered. The story is more descriptive than prescriptive. There is no derision of Ghisu and Madhav's laziness because in a caste ridden society, hard work and honest labour do not raise the depressed people from animal level. Readers dare not condemn them because their behavior and attitude are shaped by the evils of caste system and exploitative society. There is bestiality on one side and hypocrisy on the other.

Premchand's style is totally devoid of poetic quality. It is full of colonialism and slangs. Bhisma Sahni finds the story as one that strikes "the note of deep anguish and tragedy" Premchand's stories depict stark realities of oppressed classes of rural India. There are no comments, sermons or rhetorical embellishments. The story is both realistic as well as symbolic. It raises several questions about contemporary social economic and cultural systems that prevailed in India.

Munshi Premchand's stories depict the oppressed lives of the Dalits have been interpreted by Dalit writers and critics from the Dalit point of view. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Premchand had profound sympathy for the deprived people but at the same time he favoured 'Varna' (caste) system which was the root cause of untouchability and exploitation of the oppressed people. Many Dalit critics feel that *Kafan* was an anti-Dalit story which derided and ridiculed the life of Dalits in the story. During 1930's North India was amply influenced by Gandhian ideology rather than Ambedkar's discourse on Dalits and caste system. Munshi Premchand was profoundly influenced by Gandhian ideology of political liberation and social equality. Mahatma Gandhi prescribed transformation of hearts to remove untouchability and inequality. He made untouchability a moral issue rather than social and political issue.

However Munshi Premchand was the first writer among the upper caste writers who voiced the sufferings of the Dalits and their liberation from the evil of untouchability and poverty. *Kafan* (the shroud) depicts exploitation, dehumanization and isolation suffered by the Dalits in rural India. Their weaknesses were the result of stark poverty and starvation they underwent rather

than vices nurtured deliberately. Their laziness and insensitivity can be juxtaposed with the hypocrisy and exploitative attitude of the upper-class Hindu society. In *Kafan* the responsibility towards Budhia is bracketed against hunger and desire for intoxication and drunkenness. Ghisu and Madhav forget all sufferings and miseries of their life as they sing and dance in abandoned manner with amnesia caused by heavy drinking.

Munshi Premchand presented his views on fiction in his essay *Upanyas* in 1925. His views reflect the naturalistic views of Balzac the famous French writer. Premchand believed that fiction as a form of literature explores the variety of human species. He said that all human beings are made from the same mould but environment creates variety. Individuals differ from one another in degrees. A fiction writer needs to understand human psychology and represent their peculiarities. He remarked, "The splendor of the novelist lies in the creation of characters that captivate readers with their good conduct and ideas."

For Munshi Premchand plot is equally important as characters. An ideal character is not just an abstraction but real and life-like. The ideal character must have realistic narrative that constitutes a good coherent plot. Therefore an ideal must exist beside the real on a parallel ground. Though Ghisu and Madhav are low caste people, they are also the part of Hindu Caste system. Premchand has used religious vocabulary in the story in the conversation between Ghisu and Madhav. They refer to heaven (swarg), religious merit (punya), Bhagwan (God) etc. in their conversation. Even the name *Madhav* is the name of Lord Krishna according to the Hindu customs and rituals. All these things show that the Dalits were the part of the Hindu society but the caste hierarchy placed them at the lowest level turning them into untouchable outcast. The satiric barbs are not directed only at Hindu religious hypocrisy and exploitation but at religious hypocrisy and exploitation in general.

Munshi Premchand gives a vivid picture of the poverty-ridden family of Ghisu, Madhav and Budhia. He avoids sentimentalism in his description of their poverty, starvation and miserable life. There is a realistic blending of tragic and comic elements in the story that make the readers spell-bound.

6.7 TONE OF THE STORY

Tone in literature refers to the attitude of the writer towards the subject and audience (readers). Tone is generally converged thorough the choice of words or the view point of a writer on a particular subject. The tone can be formal informal, serious, comic, sarcastic, sad or cheerful. Premchand's general tone is realistic and sarcastic. In the story *Kafan* (The shroud) the tone is morbid and borders on disgusting. From the point of view of the famous Indian theory of 'Rasa' the story is dominated by Bibhatsa Rasa (the emotion of disgust) Karuna Rasa (Tragic) and Hasya (comic) Munshi Premchand is a realistic writer who always avoided emotionalism and imagination in his writing. He dealt with realities of life of the poor and the deprived. Ghisu and Madhav are low caste father and son who do not like to work. They suffer from poverty and starvation. Madhav's wife dies of labour pain because of the negligence of her husband and her father-in-law. While she was dying, they were talking about food. After Budhia's death they beg for money to arrange for her funeral rites. They get five rupees which they spend on food and wine. Budhia's dead body lay unattended inside the hut and Ghisu and Madhav sign and

dance in drunken state. At the end of the story, they collapse on the ground unconsciously falling in an abyss of amnesia of the miseries they experienced throughout their life.

6.8 THEMES OF THE STORY

The themes of *The Shroud* are poverty starvation inhuman caste system, untouchability, feudalism, hypocrisy of the upper-class people, indolence and idleness of the poor people etc. Munshi Premchand presents the vivid picture of rural India where caste system dominates lives of the people. Ghisu and Madhav are Chamars-the low caste people who live in a hut outside the village. The author depicts them as slothful duo who always shirks work and labour. The upper caste people always exploited the poor low caste people by paying them cheap wages for their Ghisu and Madhav were labeled as useless crooked fellows as they defied the upper caste people's demand for their labour work.

Even if they had a handful of grain in the house, they swore off work. After spending two or three days without food, Ghisu would climb a tree and break some twigs for firewood. Madhav would go into the village and sell it to arrange for some food. Ghisu and Madhav never worried about future. Ghisu said that the peasants exploited them more if they surrendered to them in a servile manner therefore; they never allowed the peasants to take undue advantage of their simplicity and innocence. They suffered from poverty and deprivation but they were free from worries and wants. They had nothing except two pots of clay as worldly possessions in their house. They covered nakedness of their bodies with tattered rags. Madhav was married a year ago and his wife Budhia was pregnant. She suffered from labour pain thrashing and screaming in intense agony. Ghisu and Madhav sat outside the hut eating roasted potatoes without caring for Budhia who writhed in pain inside the hut. Even Madhav did not go inside the hut to see his wife thinking that his father would devour his share of roasted potatoes. Here we can see the de-humanizing effect of poverty.

While they were eating potatoes, Ghisu described his memorable experience of eating delicious dishes twenty years ago in a wedding party of a wealthy man's daughter. He had entered so much that he collapsed on the ground at the end. Food is a source of pleasure for everyone. Even the description of food by Ghisu made Madhav's mouth water giving him a vicarious pleasure. Food and drink, always made them forget all the miseries of their life. Poverty is directly connected with lack of food and starvation. Ghisu and Madhav had become negligent and insensitive because of starvation and hunger. Their attitude is inhuman and beastly but Munshi Premchand does not condemn their animalistic behavior as their vice. He treats it as the inscrutable outcome of poverty and starvation. Thus, food and hunger also constitute an important theme of the story.

Caste system is the greatest evil India has been facing for thousands of years. In India, caste system is not based on occupation or work but on birth. A son of a Brahmin is entitled to social prestige and reputation while the son of a shudra (low caste) has to suffer from social discrimination, public humiliation or even untouchability. As the low caste people were denied education and opportunities for growth, they remained poor and oppressed. They faced poverty, deprivation and starvation. They were ostracized from the main-

stream society. Munshi Premchand depicts the social evil of caste system in India quite vividly and dispassionately. He treats the theme of caste system without favoring or condemning it. The upper caste people were often cruel, exploitative and insensitive. They oppressed the low caste people treating them as subalterns. The low caste people could never rise above their dismal position and therefore they became lazy, dirty and depressive. They ate dirty food like flesh of dead animals or left-over given by the upper class people. The rich people were often hypocritical snobs with arrogant attitude, loose character and immoral practices. Indolence of the lower caste people kept them in poverty and servility. Munshi Premchand in many of his stories has successfully presented this evil of caste system very realistically.

Munshi Premchand was a progressive writer who was against imperialistic exploitation and colonialism. He also fought against poverty and caste system that plagued the oppressed people. Some of his later writings show the influences of Gandhian ideology and the Russian Revolution. He often dealt with the themes of corruption, caste system, problem of the landless labourers and social and economic inequalities in his stories and novels. Munshi Premchand was elected as the first president of all India writers' body of Progressive Writers. He believed that good literature should be the vehicle of truth, beauty, freedom and humanity. True literature should reflect present society and the age.

6.9 STYLE AND DICTION IN THE STORY

Premchand wrote in Hindi and Urdu. His language and diction are quite simple and lucid. He used slangs and colloquial diction in his dialogues. His power of description is quite vivid and realistic. In translation too, the language is quite simple and descriptive. Premchand's narration is quite engrossing. The readers are lost in rapt attention as the story moves on. *The Shroud* is a story with a sarcastic and comic tone and therefore there is ironic stance in his diction. As he believed in realism, he avoided romantic, imaginative and poetic language and style of narration.

6.10 THE TITLE OF THE STORY

The title of the original story by Premchand is *Kafan* ('The Shroud'). It is an Urdu word derived from Persian and Arabian languages. It refers to a cloth wrapped round the dead body for burial or cremation. In English, it is called *Shroud*. Munshi Premchand's original story has the title *Kafan* and in English it is *The Shroud*. The title epitomizes the tragi-comic story that deals with a low caste woman who dies of labour pain. Her husband Madhav and his father Ghisu are negligent, insensitive idlers. They collect money for her shroud from the Zamindar and other people of the village and instead of buying the shroud, they buy food and a bottle of wine. They gorge food madly and get overdrunk. Finally, they collapse on the ground in drunken state. The story has a morbid and yet comical stance that depicts the tragic fact that for the poor people, life and death are synonymous. The entire story is wrapped in the shroud of poverty and starvation.

Check Your Progress: 1

6.11 ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN BRIEF.

1. Why was Budhia waiting with pain?

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2. Why did Madhav not go inside the hut to help his wife?

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3. Discuss the indolent nature of Ghisu and Madhav briefly.

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4. Describe the poverty of Ghisu and Madhav.

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5. How did Budhia help the family?

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6. What did Ghisu tell Madhav about food he had enjoyed twenty years ago at a wedding procession of landowner's daughter?
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7. What happened to Budhia next morning?
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8. Whom did Ghisu and Madhav approach for money to arrange the funeral rite for Budhia?
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9. Describe the landlord's lord's attitude towards Ghisu and Madhav.
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10. What did Ghisu say about buying the shroud? Discuss his remark about the useless custom.
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11. What did Ghisu and Madhav buy instead of shroud?

12. Why did Madhav and Ghisu believe that Budhia would go to heaven?

13. Describe the end of the story *The Shroud*.

14. Discuss briefly Munshi Premchand's attitude towards the down trodden.

Check Your Progress: 2

6.12 CHOOSE THE CORRECT OPTION FROM GIVEN BELOW.

- (1) Munshi Premchand was a _____ writer.
 (a) Realistic (b) Romantic
 (c) Surrealist (d) Classical
- (2) *The Shroud* focuses on
 (a) the condition of women
 (b) the condition of old people
 (c) caste system and poverty (d) corrupt society

- (3) Ghisu and Madhav were
- (a) land lords (b) poor peasants
(c) corrupt people (d) low caste chamar
- (4) Budhia was writhing in the pain of
- (a) stomach (b) labour
(c) fever (d) pneumonia
- (5) Ghisu and Madhav were
- (a) hard working (b) honest
(c) lazy (d) skilled workers
- (6) Ghisu and Madhav sat outside the hut and ate.
- (a) Sweets (b) Sweet potatoes
(c) Puris (d) Roasted potatoes
- (7) Madhav did not go inside the hut because
- (a) he thought that his father would eat his share of potatoes.
(b) he thought that his father would hide potatoes.
(c) he thought that his wife would have died
(d) he thought that his father would leave him
- (8) Ghisu worked for a day and rested for
- (a) three days (b) one day
(c) a week (d) five days
- (9) Madhav and Ghisu went to _____ for money to buy shroud for Budhia.
- (a) Tehsildar (b) Money lender
(c) land lord (d) Goldsmith
- (10) Ghisu remembered a great feast at a landowner's daughter's wedding procession Ghisu
- (a) ten years ago (b) twenty years ago
(c) one year ago (d) five years ago
- (11) Ghisu said to Madhav that people did not spend money on feasts because of
- (a) poverty (b) miserliness
(c) lack of saving (d) economy
- (12) The Zamindar gave _____ rupees to Ghisu and Madhav for buying the shroud.
- (a) five (b) three
(c) two (d) ten
- (13) Ghisu remarked that it was no use to cover Budhia's dead body in the shroud as
- (a) they had enough wood to burn her dead body.
(b) they had no money
(c) they did not want to spend money on it.
(d) she did not get a rag to cover her body when she was alive

- (14) Ghisu and Madhav spent money for.
(a) the shroud (b) the funeral rites
(c) feeding poor people (d) wine and food
- (15) At the end of the story Ghisu and Madhav
(a) sing bhajans (b) lament loudly
(c) collapse in drunken state (d) fall and die

6.13 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have studied Munshi Premchand's famous story *Kafan* translated into English by Frances. W. Pritchett titled *The Shroud*. Premchand was a progressive writer profoundly influenced by socialist ideology and Gandhian values. He has presented a very realistic picture of Indian caste system poverty, social and economic condition of rural India.

Translation by Frances Pritchett is quite effective as it provides realistic picture of the poor and deprived Dalits who suffer from poverty and exploitation but they do not suffer mutely. They protest in their own way subverting the general expectation of the upper class people.

You are advised to see the film based on Premchand's famous story *Kafan*. You can also watch the videos on 'YouTube' related to the story.

6.15 BOOKS SUGGESTED

1. Plot & Structure: Techniques and Exercises for Crafting a Plot that Grips Readers from Start to Finish By James Scott Bell
2. On Writing Well: An Informal Guide to Writing Nonfiction By William Zinsser
3. <http://www.columbia.edu>

Answers

Check Your Progress: 2

1. (A), 2. (C), 3. (D), 4. (B), 5. (C), 6. (D), 7. (A), 8. (A), 9. (C),
10. (B), 11. (A), 12. (B), 13. (D), 14. (D), 15. (C)

યુનિવર્સિટી ગીત

સ્વાધ્યાય: પરમં તપ:

સ્વાધ્યાય: પરમં તપ:

સ્વાધ્યાય: પરમં તપ:

શિક્ષણ, સંસ્કૃતિ, સદ્ભાવ, દિવ્યબોધનું ધામ
ડૉ. બાબાસાહેબ આંબેડકર ઓપન યુનિવર્સિટી નામ;
સૌને સૌની પાંખ મળે, ને સૌને સૌનું આભ,
દશે દિશામાં સ્મિત વહે હો દશે દિશે શુભ-લાભ.

અભણ રહી અજ્ઞાનના શાને, અંધકારને પીવો ?
કહે બુદ્ધ આંબેડકર કહે, તું થા તારો દીવો;
શારદીય અજવાળા પહોંચ્યાં ગુર્જર ગામે ગામ
ધ્રુવ તારકની જેમ ઝળહળે એકલવ્યની શાન.

સરસ્વતીના મયૂર તમારે ફળિયે આવી ગહેકે
અંધકારને હડસેલીને ઉજાસના ફૂલ મહેકે;
બંધન નહીં કો સ્થાન સમયના જવું ન ઘરથી દૂર
ઘર આવી મા હરે શારદા દૈન્ય તિમિરના પૂર.

સંસ્કારોની સુગંધ મહેકે, મન મંદિરને ધામે
સુખની ટપાલ પહોંચે સૌને પોતાને સરનામે;
સમાજ કેરે દરિયે હાંકી શિક્ષણ કેરું વહાણ,
આવો કરીયે આપણ સૌ
ભવ્ય રાષ્ટ્ર નિર્માણ...
દિવ્ય રાષ્ટ્ર નિર્માણ...
ભવ્ય રાષ્ટ્ર નિર્માણ

