

LITERARY TERMS (SHORT STORY AND NOVEL) PART I

Unit Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction to Naturalism
- 1.2 Features of Naturalistic Fiction
- 1.3 Prominent American Naturalist Writers
 - 1.3.1 Frank Norris
 - 1.3.2 Theodore Dreiser
 - 1.3.3 Jack London
- 1.4 The Lost Generation
 - 1.4.1 Introduction
 - 1.4.2 The Features of the Works of the Lost Generation Writers
 - 1.4.3 Prominent Writers of the Lost Generation
- 1.5 African American Literature
 - 1.5.1 Introduction
 - 1.5.2 Prominent African American Novelists
- 1.6 Let us Sum Up
- 1.7 Questions
- 1.8 Suggested Reading

1.0 OBJECTIVES

By studying this unit, the learners will be introduced to three important movements and influences on modern American literature namely, Naturalism, the Lost Generation writers and African American literature. S/he will be able to describe the features of each movement and give a brief survey of the major writers and their works.

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO NATURALISM

Naturalism as a literary movement took place approximately between 1865 and 1900. The concept of literary Naturalism was first propounded by the French author Emile Zola. Naturalists believed that the human character was shaped by social conditions, heredity, and environment; thus, human behavior is a product of these influences. Zola described characters as “human beasts” and emphasized the need to understand human beings in the context of their environment.

Naturalist writers adopt a scientific and detached outlook for understanding human beings. They were deeply influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

Naturalism is opposed to romanticism and it aims to present reality without idealism. The harsh aspects of reality like poverty, vices, violence, taboos are objectively portrayed by naturalists. They do not employ spiritual, fantasy or supernatural elements. Naturalism is often seen as an exaggerated form of realism. Naturalist fiction is also influenced by determinism, the belief that an individual's fate is predetermined, by forces beyond human control; thus, the notion of free will does not exist.

Frank Norris introduced Naturalism into American fiction. The other important naturalist writers are Ernest Hemingway, Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, and Stephen Crane. Dreiser, Crane, and Norris were also journalists, which helped them maintain their stance of detached observation of human nature.

1.2. FEATURES OF NATURALISTIC FICTION

Now, let us discuss the key features of naturalism in literature.

Naturalism, like realism, focuses on facts and logic, rather than imagination and symbolism. There is no attempt to idealise or romanticise reality, rather to present it in accurate detail. The naturalist writers did not avoid the dark aspects of reality like poverty, prostitution, corruption, vice, disease etc.

Due to the influence of determinism, they portrayed human beings as being helpless in the face of powerful forces like heredity, environment, chance and social conditions that shape their fate. Free will and choice are revealed as illusions. Yet, the characters often possess a redeeming humanistic aspect.

The naturalist writers treated the novel as an experiment, whereby they could determine the forces that shaped behaviour, primarily heredity and the environment. They presented a detached observation of their characters without attempting to moralise. The tone was objective and it focused more on what happened to the character rather than the character itself.

The focus of the novels was mainly lower-middle class or middle-class individuals and their problems. The novels detail the commonplace routine existence of the characters interwoven with violence, passion, sexual adventures and death. They did not hesitate to depict themes that were considered sordid by contemporary society and depicted sexuality frankly.

Walcott identifies survival, violence, determinism and taboo as key themes in naturalistic fiction. The novels depict "the brute within" each

character, the greed, lust, desire for control and search for pleasure. The characters struggle to survive in a world that is amoral and hostile or indifferent.

These writers opposed the typical notions of realist novels about middle-class life, which focused on bourgeois individualism. Instead, they attempted to explore the animal or the irrational forces underlying human behaviour, including sexuality and violence.

The naturalists were criticized for their pessimistic view of reality. They emphasized the harsh aspects of reality and presented human beings as powerless to escape their circumstances. Nature was depicted as a powerful force, indifferent to human suffering.

1.3 PROMINENT AMERICAN NATURALIST WRITERS

Let us now proceed to a brief survey of the works of the important American naturalist writers.

1.3.1 Frank Norris

Frank Norris aka Benjamin Franklin Norris (1870-1902) was the first important American naturalist writer. He worked as a news correspondent and a war correspondent and is known for his important novels 'Mc Teague', 'A Deal in Wheat', 'The Octopus', 'The Pit' and 'The Epic of the Wheat'.

'Mc Teague', a novel set in San Francisco, details the story of a slow-witted dentist who brutally murders his stingy wife. He flees through Death Valley to finally encounter his own death. It is regarded as one of the first portraits of the acquisitiveness that characterises American society. 'The Octopus' is the first work in a trilogy by Norris; only two novels were actually published, while the third remained unwritten at the time of his early death. 'The Octopus' deals with the conflict between the wheat farmers in Chicago and the monopolistic railway company. Considered Norris' masterpiece, the novel explores the socio-economic forces that control the production, distribution and consumption of wheat. 'The Pit', the second novel in the trilogy focussed on the Chicago Board of Trade and their speculation on wheat.

Norris is known for his realistic detail and his exploration of how heredity and environment shape human life. He viewed novels as tools for the betterment of society. His novels capture a vivid and minutely detailed picture of life in California towards the end of the 19th Century.

1.3.2 Theodore Dreiser

Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945) is a leading figure among American naturalist novelists. Dreiser's childhood was characterised by poverty; the yearning for wealth and success becomes a preoccupation in his novels. Dreiser worked as a newspaper reporter.

His first novel, 'Sister Carrie' is considered one of the landmarks in American fiction. It depicts a pretty young girl from a small town who comes to the big city to fulfill her dreams. She is exploited by men and eventually learns to exploit them. She achieves her dream of success by becoming a popular actress on Broadway. The novel became controversial for its depiction of a 'kept' woman who breaks the norms of conventional sexual morality without facing dire consequences.

Dreiser's longest novel 'An American Tragedy' depicts the rise and fall of Clyde Griffiths, an anti-hero. Clyde's background is bleak, he rises to success and is ultimately arrested, tried and executed for murder. The novel is a questioning of the American dream and the materialistic obsession of American society.

Dreiser's other important works are 'The Financier', 'Jennie Gerhardt', 'The Bulwark', 'The Genius', 'The Stoic' and 'The Titan'. He is known for his stark, amoral presentation of society as an unequal conflict between the strong and the weak. His novels captured the social problems that were created due to rapid industrialisation.

1.3.3 Jack London

Jack London is a pseudonym adopted by John Griffith Chaney (1876-1916). He is renowned for his naturalistic works 'The Call of the Wild' and 'White Fang' that depict the struggle for survival. His other important works are 'To Build a Fire', 'The Iron Heel', 'Martin Eden', 'The Sea-Wolf', 'The Cruise of the Shark' and 'Burning Daylight'.

'The Call of the Wild' tells the story of Buck, a dog who is a pampered pet. Buck is kidnapped and sold and ends up working as a sled dog, where he is beaten and abused. Buck is forced to adapt to the wild, with its violence and his primitive instincts resurface. He faces various adventures, wins a struggle for supremacy and experiences a growing desire for the wild. He kills the Native Americans who killed the man he loved and moves into the forest to become the leader of a wolf pack. The novel depicts the Darwinian notion of 'survival of the fittest'.

'The Sea-Wolf' combines naturalism with romantic adventure. The novel traces the development of a castaway named Van Weyden who finds employment on a ship. He comes into conflict with the brutal and self-destructive Wolf Larsen as he attempts to protect a fellow castaway named Maud Brewster.

Jack London was one of the most extensively translated American authors of his time.

1.4. THE LOST GENERATION

1.4.1. Introduction

The horrific experiences of World War I (then known as 'the Great War') left an indelible mark on the collective psyche of the youth. The

millions of deaths, the dehumanising, disease-ridden life in the trenches and the impact of chemical warfare led to the questioning of traditional notions of patriotism and heroism.

The young generation that witnessed the after-effects of the war was known as the "Lost Generation." They were the generation born between 1883 and 1900 which reached adulthood during or immediately after World War I.

It is said that Gertrude Stein overheard the owner of a garage saying to a young mechanic that their generation was 'une generation perdue' - a lost generation. She coined the term which came to describe a group of writers and poets including herself, Ernest Hemingway, Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos and T.S. Eliot. Many of these American writers migrated to Europe. Ernest Hemingway used the phrase as an epigraph to his novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926): "You are all a lost generation."

The term 'lost' referred to the disillusionment and the lack of purpose experienced by the youth who had lived through the horrors of the war. They lost faith in the traditional values that their parents had taught them, like courage, innocence, patriotism and fidelity. When the war veterans returned home, they became disillusioned with the government. This generation was uninspired by abstract ideals and values, and turned to materialism instead.

The Lost Generation writers lived and wrote in the decade known as 'The Roaring Twenties', with its predominance of hedonism, alcohol and gangsters. This mood of reckless indulgence ended with the stock market crash of 1929 that marked the beginning of the Great Depression.

1.4.2. Features of the Works of the Lost Generation Writers

The works of the Lost Generation writers were characterised by a sense of aimlessness or lack of purpose. The end of World War I had left the youth disillusioned with authority. The values they had believed in were no longer relevant in the new, post-war society. The war left them spiritually alienated and emotionally barren.

They replaced traditional moral values with excesses of materialism and even decadence. The war had made America prosperous, fuelling this materialism even further. Many of the novels depicted the shallow, frivolous lifestyles and mindless pleasure-seeking of the rich youth.

The Lost Generation writers revealed the deception of the American dream with its ideal of economic success and happiness. The dream became a corrupted version of itself; the focus was no longer on creating self-sufficiency but on becoming unbelievably rich through any available means. They also depicted the barrenness of excessive materialism.

As part of the rebellion against conventional social norms, the writers explored themes like alienation, alcoholism, divorce, sex and questioning of gender roles. Impotence becomes a key theme for these writers. They reflected the shattering of traditional definitions of masculinity by the young men who had witnessed the slaughter of war.

The novels reflect a belief in an impossible future as the writers were unable to come to terms with the bleak present. They present an unrealistic hope for an idealized future while continuing to be disillusioned with the present. 'The Great Gatsby' describes "the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us."

This disillusionment led to many of the Lost Generation writers migrating to Europe from America. Paris, in particular, became a refuge for these artists. Some led a nomadic lifestyle in pursuit of pleasure.

1.4.3. Prominent Writers of the Lost Generation

1.4.3.1 Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) is one of the most influential writers of the 20th Century. He is known for his succinct and lucid prose and his significant works include 'The Old Man and the Sea', 'For Whom the Bell Tolls', 'A Farewell to Arms', 'The Sun Also Rises', 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber', 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place', 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro' and 'Islands in the Stream'.

Hemingway worked as a reporter and then as an ambulance driver for the American Red Cross in World War I. He was injured in war and decorated for heroism. He won the Nobel Prize and the Pulitzer Prize.

His novel 'The Sun Also Rises' is set in the 1920s or 'the Roaring Twenties'. It depicts a group of expatriates in France and Spain who lead aimless lives. Lady Brett Ashley and Jake Barnes represent the cynicism and disillusionment of the Lost Generation. Lady Brett loves Jake but he has become impotent due to a war wound. She indulges in a number of affairs. The novel captures the culture in the aftermath of war, losing itself in alcohol and indulgence. Robert Cohn represents the romantic hero, now irrelevant and absurd.

'Hills Like White Elephants' is a short story known for its irony, symbolism and repetition. Through an American couple waiting for a train, the story explores themes of abortion, lack of commitment and loss of innocence.

A unique aspect of Hemingway's style is his use of language. He uses short, simple sentences, devoid of flair or emotion. The sentences are primarily nouns and verbs, with few adjectives or adverbs. The resulting effect is terse, yet resonant. It creates irony through understatement.

1.4.3.2 Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald (1896-1940) is renowned as a representative of the Lost Generation. His important novels are 'The Great Gatsby', 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz', 'Tender is the Night', 'The Beautiful and the Damned', 'The Last Tycoon', 'Tales of the Jazz Age', and 'This Side of Paradise'.

'The Great Gatsby' portrays the moral vacuum of post-war American society. The narrator, Nick Carraway, visits his rich cousin Daisy and rents a home at West Egg, across the bay from her home. He meets his neighbour, the mysterious Jay Gatsby, a fabulously wealthy man who is self-made. He throws lavish hedonistic parties using wealth gained from criminal activities. Nick learns about how Daisy had betrayed Gatsby in the past to marry Tom, who is now unfaithful to her. Nick brings Daisy to meet Gatsby and she is dazzled by his wealth but Tom becomes jealous of Gatsby. Ultimately, Gatsby is destroyed by his own unattainable dreams, a product of the American society obsessed with materialism. 'The Great Gatsby' is regarded as a masterpiece in American fiction for its portrayal of a society steeped in mindless greed and hedonism.

'The Beautiful and the Damned' revolves around Anthony Patch, who succeeds in courting and marrying the beautiful Gloria Gilbert. They live on his income which is limited, with the prospect of his inheriting a large fortune when his grandfather dies. Their lives deteriorate into a whirl of wild parties and mindless alcoholism. On witnessing this, Anthony's grandfather disinherits him and after his death, Anthony is forced to fight a legal battle for his inheritance. After a long struggle, he wins the inheritance, but by then, his relationship with Gloria has deteriorated and the inheritance does not mean anything to them.

Fitzgerald is best known for his classic novel 'The Great Gatsby' and his sensitive portrayal of American life during 'The Roaring Twenties' or 'The Jazz Age'.

1.4.3.3. John Dos Passos

John Roderigo Dos Passos (1896-1970) is known as an important social historian and critic of American society. The novels 'USA', '1919', 'The 42nd Parallel', 'The Big Money', 'Manhattan Transfer' and 'District of Columbia' are his notable works.

Like Hemingway, Dos Passos volunteered as an ambulance driver in World War I. Later, he worked as a journalist, which is reflected in the objective realism of his later work. His greatest work is the trilogy 'USA'. It was inspired by the execution of the anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in 1927. He understood America as made up of two nations: one comprising the rich and powerful, the other, poor and powerless. 'USA' attempts to capture both these nations. 'The 42nd Parallel' deals with the period from 1900 till the war, '1919' depicts the war and the Treaty of Versailles and 'The Big Money' captures the boom of the 1920s to the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Dos Passos infuses his fictional characters with a semblance of real history. He interweaves newsreels, montages of actual newspaper headlines and popular songs into his narrative. He also interweaves the biographies of representatives of both the USAs such as Henry Ford, Thomas Edison and President Woodrow Wilson along with the socialist Eugene V. Debs, labour organiser Joe Hill and the Unknown Soldier of World War I.

‘Manhattan Transfer’ is a view of the metropolis through the eyes of a rapid-transit commuter. Dos Passos uses impressionism to present the lives of more than a dozen characters through a narrative that moves back and forth.

1.5. AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

1.5.1. Introduction

African American literature can be defined as literature written by Americans of African descent. African American literature encompasses a broad variety of works viz. Fiction, poetry, drama, songs, letters, slave narratives, speeches, sermons and journalistic writing. It offers insight into the issues of identity, race and acceptance into American society.

African American literature has its beginnings in the oral tradition, with the songs, legends and plays performed by the slaves as a respite from their horrid existence. The first important published work is ‘Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral’ by Phyllis Wheatley in 1773. This work asserted that Negroes were equivalent to the whites in spiritual matters. Wheatley’s collection includes poems in a variety of classical forms. This book became a powerful argument against the belief that African Americans were intellectually inferior and thus unable to produce meaningful literature. Another important work is the autobiography ‘The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself’. Equiano pioneered the slave narrative which became a first-hand literary testimony against slavery. ‘The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee’ was the first spiritual autobiography written by an African American woman. ‘Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl’ (1861) by Harriet Jacobs was the first autobiography by an enslaved African American woman that described her experience of being a victim of oppression through sexual exploitation.

‘Clotel or the President’s Daughter’ (1853) by William Wells Brown was the first black American novel. Brown also published the first African American play, ‘The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom’.

The end of the Civil War and Emancipation brought a new sense of freedom for the African Americans. The spread of education among the African Americans led to the rise of a new African American middle class with literary aspirations. The writers had to negotiate the genteel style of contemporary literature with the expression of the socio-political issues of their community.

Paul Laurence Dunbar was the first professional African American writer. His poems, collected as 'Oak and Ivy' were written in the African American dialect. He also wrote poems in standard English and also wrote novels including 'The Sport of the Gods'.

The novel became an important tool for social change. It exposed the prejudices and stereotypes of the whites and depicted the bleak social conditions of the African Americans. Booker T. Washington's autobiography 'Up from Slavery' inspired the African Americans to strive for dignity through economic self-sufficiency. W.E.B. Du Bois, in his 'The Souls of Black Folk' advocated the need for voting and civil rights to ensure social equality.

The Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s was a flowering of African American literature and art, sometimes called The New Negro Movement. This movement included talented poets like Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Claude McKay and the novelists Rudolph Fisher, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jean Toomer.

These writers questioned the traditional 'white' aesthetic standards used for evaluating African American literature. They used literature to assert their racial pride, and as a means for self-expression. The Harlem Renaissance also gave an impetus to drama. Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, writing after the Great Depression, brought in a new and incisive social consciousness through their writing.

The impact of the women's movement in the 1970s led to a literary renaissance of African American women writers. Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Maya Angelou's works explore the complex interactions of race with patriarchy.

1.5.2. Prominent African American Novelists

1.5.2.1 Ralph Ellison

Ralph Waldo Ellison (1914-1994) was encouraged to write by Richard Wright. He was part of the Federal Writers' Project from 1938 to 1942 and also served in World War II. His novel 'Invisible Man' won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1953. The novel is a bildungsroman about an idealistic African American youth, who significantly remains nameless. He moves to Harlem and joins the protests against white oppression. He remains 'invisible' because the people he meets see only his surroundings or figments of their imagination. Ultimately, he is ignored not only by the whites but also by his fellow African Americans. He retreats into a hole in the ground and attempts to seek his identity.

Through stylistic innovations, Ellison attempted to provide a unique construction of the African American identity. The novel captures the modern African American speech and culture.

'The Invisible Man' was Ellison's only novel. He published two collections of essays 'Shadow and Act' and 'Going to the Territory'. His second novel, unfinished at his death was later published as 'Juneteenth'.

1.5.2.2 Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison aka Chloe Anthony Wofford (1931-) is an African American writer who has won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993 and the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. Her works explore the African American female experience. Morrison has worked as an academic and an editor. Her important works are 'Beloved', 'The Bluest Eye', 'Sula', 'God Help the Child', 'The Book about Mean People', 'Paradise', 'Love', 'Home', 'A Mercy', and 'Song of Solomon'.

'Beloved' deals with the destructive aftermath of slavery on a black woman named Sethe. Sethe is freed from slavery but is traumatised by the memories of her life as a slave. The novel is based on a true story. The story begins with Sethe's house being haunted by the ghost of the girl child that she killed. Through flashbacks, we learn that Sethe was passionately devoted to her children and taking them, fled from her abusive owner. They were later caught. In helpless desperation, she tried to kill her children to protect them from slavery. Her two-year old daughter died and the owner decided not to take Sethe back. She got the word 'Beloved' inscribed on her daughter's tombstone. The novel further explores Sethe's relationships with her daughter Denver, a freed slave named Paul D. and a young woman who calls herself Beloved. The novel is experimental, using multiple narrative voices that create ambiguity.

'The Bluest Eye' traces the fatal desire of an African American girl to attain the white ideals of beauty. It exposes the subtle forms of racist bias in American society. Pecola Breedlove is seen as ugly by her family, neighbours and school friends. She desires 'the bluest eye' in an attempt to become acceptable to society. The novel deals with the interaction of gender, race and economics in destroying the innocent protagonist. It critiques the imposition of white masculine culture on the black female body. The structure of the novel is complex and the point of view changes constantly.

1.5.2.3 Alice Walker

Alice Malsenior Walker (1944-) is known for her novels that focus on African American women. Her important works are 'The Color Purple', 'The Third Life of Grange Copeland', 'The Chicken Chronicles', 'Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems' and 'Meridian'.

'The Color Purple' is an epistolary novel. It is a feminist work that centres around Celie, an uneducated African American woman who is a victim of abuse. Her own father rapes her repeatedly and she becomes pregnant twice. He takes away both her babies and marries her off to an abusive man. Celie narrates her life story through letters written to God.

The novel traces Celie's journey towards empowerment and self-realisation. She builds relationships with other African American women who are fighting against oppression. The novel scandalised critics with its explicit language and sexual content; it depicts rape, incest, bisexuality and lesbianism. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1983.

'The Third Life of Grange Copeland' is an epic novel. It tells the story of three generations of a Southern African American family.

1.6. LET US SUM UP

Naturalism is a style that brought scientific objectivity into fiction, taking it beyond realistic representation. The Lost Generation Writers depict the socio-cultural milieu of the inter-war period (between the two World Wars). African American literature depicts the voice of the newly-independent African Americans attempting to gain equal rights and equal respect in the face of racial discrimination.

1.7. QUESTIONS

1. What is naturalism? Describe the features of American naturalistic fiction.
2. Explain naturalism and describe the contribution of the important American naturalistic novelists.
3. Who are the writers of "The Lost Generation"? Explain the contribution of the important writers with reference to their works.
4. How do the novels by the Lost Generation writers reflect the aimlessness and decadence of the inter-war period? Explain in detail.
5. Give a brief survey of the development of African American literature.
6. Describe the contribution of the important African American novelists with reference to their works.

1.8 SUGGESTED READING

- ❖ Abrams, M.H.: *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Eleventh Edition, 2015, Cengage Learning)
- ❖ Bradbury, Malcolm: *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature* (UK, 1992, Penguin)



LITERARY TERMS (SHORT STORY AND NOVEL) PART II

Unit Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Diasporic Literature
- 2.2 Jewish American Fiction
 - 2.2.1 Jewish American Writers
- 2.3 Literature of the Chinese American Diaspora
 - 2.3.1. Prominent Chinese American Writers
- 2.4 Literature of the Indian Diaspora in America
 - 2.4.1. Prominent Indian American Writers
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Questions
- 2.7 Suggested Reading

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By studying this unit, the learner will be introduced to the concept of diaspora and diasporic literature. S/he will be able to describe three important groups of diasporic writers in America viz. Jewish American Writers, Chinese American Writers and Indian American Writers. S/he will be able to give a brief survey of the major writers in each group and their works.

2.1 Diasporic Literature

The term 'Diaspora' refers to populations, that originated from a common place but dispersed to different locations. The word diaspora is derived from an ancient Greek phrase referring to 'the scattering of seeds.' Diaspora originally referred to the Greeks in the Hellenic era and the Jews after the fall of Jerusalem in the 6th century BCE. In the second half of the twentieth century, it was applied to the African diaspora in America, and the use of the term has been extended further in the following decades.

Populations migrate due to a variety of reasons including economic, social, political and religious. They move to other places as laborers, convicts, soldiers, as refugees, exiles (forced or voluntary). Several people go to other countries looking for better opportunities and a higher standard of living.

The literature of the diaspora comprises of the literary works by writers living outside their native country and writing about their native culture and background. It attempts to capture the immigrant experience of loss and alienation, resulting from the separation with the homeland. The diasporics share a sense of being uprooted; they suffer the pain of being far away from their homelands. However, they continue to relate to the homeland in various ways through social norms, cultural values, shared memories and spiritual bonding.

The literature of diaspora depicts the feeling of dislocation as well as the identity crisis that afflicts the diaspora population. Alienation from the homeland results in a loss of the old identity and they are forced to negotiate a new identity in a new culture.

The diasporic people face a strange dilemma. On the one hand, they have a desire to assimilate into their host country. On the other hand, they are reluctant to let go of their original culture and identity. They attempt to retain a connection with the homeland through various devices like language, art, music, food, clothing and religion. They make conscious efforts to preserve their native traditions and pass them on to future generations.

Uma Parameswaran has defined the phases of diasporic literature as follows: "...first is one of nostalgia for the homeland left behind mingled with fear in a strange land. The second is a phase in which one is busy adjusting to the new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is the shaping of diaspora existence by involving themselves ethnocultural issues. The fourth is when they have 'arrived' and start participating in the larger world of politics and national issues."

The attempt to integrate with the host culture while also preserving their native identity often results in a dual identity, which is sometimes described as a hyphenated identity. The tensions between the two cultures and the resulting feeling of marginality becomes a key theme in the literature of the diasporic writers.

Other important themes for diasporic writers are memory and nostalgia. The memory of the homeland is marked by a sense of nostalgia and the writers often re-invent the homeland through this vision. Their works are often characterised by a longing to return home; home is an 'imaginary homeland' which is a blend of the real and the imagined.

The concepts of 'nation' and 'borders' are key concerns in diasporic literature. The diaspora struggle with issues of identification and assimilation. Their works question the notion of borders as being absolute and often bring out the fluidity of identity or multi-layered identities. The first generation of diaspora is concerned with the issues of preserving their cultural identity. The second generation, which has been born and raised in the host country, deals with more complex issues of cultural assimilation.

Diasporic women writers deal with the issues of patriarchy intertwined with the tensions of a dualidentity. Diasporic literature deals with themes like cross-cultural interaction, loneliness, fractured identity, nostalgia for the homeland, marginalization, racial discrimination, gender issues, generational differences, disintegration of family relationships.

2.2 JEWISH AMERICAN FICTION

The beginnings of Jewish American Literature can be traced to the memoirs and petitions written by the Sephardic immigrants who came to America in the mid-17th century. Jewish American writers explore the conflicting pulls of secular values and the Jewish tradition. They examine the stereotypes of Jewishness as seen by Americans and often use humour and satire to deflate these notions. Assimilation into mainstream American society and cultural rediscovery become key themes in their works. Zionism, Israel, anti-semitism and its revival in the form of new anti-semitism are depicted by the modern Jewish American writers. They examine the Holocaust as a shaping factor of the modern Jewish American identity. Jewish American fiction thus attempts to portray the struggles of the Jewish American experience.

2.2.1 Prominent Jewish American Writers

2.2.1.1 Saul Bellow

Saul Bellow (1915-2005) is a prominent Jewish American novelist who has been awarded the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize. His notable works are 'Humboldt's Gift', 'Herzog', 'Mr. Sammler's Planet', 'Henderson the Rain King', 'Seize the Day', 'The Adventures of Augie March', 'The Victim', 'Dangling Man' and 'Ravelstein'.

'The Adventures of Augie March' is a picaresque novel as well as a bildungsroman. The protagonist is a poor Jewish young man from Chicago. The novel traces his attempts, often comic, to come to terms with the world around him. It depicts Augie's progress from boyhood to manhood and the relationships and encounters that shape him. Through this book, Bellow dispels the traditional idea of the American hero. Augie hails from a disadvantaged background but does not rise to dizzying success, unlike the stories that capture the American dream. He drifts from one situation to another - homes, jobs, women and education. Augie is a serious reader and develops his own philosophy of life.

'Mr. Sammler's Planet' is set in New York city in the 1960s amid political turbulence. The protagonist, Mr. Sammler, is a Polish intellectual. He is a Holocaust survivor and is physically and psychologically traumatised by the experience. He has lost vision in one eye and he experiences emotional alienation. This gives him a unique dual vision. With the good eye, he sees the world around him. With the blind eye, he analyses the events around him historically and philosophically.

2. 2.1.2 Bernard Malamud

Bernard Malamud (1914-1986) is a Jewish American novelist and short-story writer known for his parables about the lives of Jewish immigrants. 'The Fixer', 'The Natural', 'The Assistant', 'The Magic Barrel', 'A New Life' and 'Idiots First' are his important works. He has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize as well as the National Book Award.

'The Assistant' portrays the complex relationship between Morris Bober and Frank Alpine. The Italian-American Alpine robs Bober, who is a grocer and wounds him. He then tries to help Bober, becomes his assistant and falls in love with Bober's daughter, Helen. Religion is the stumbling block for Alpine's love for Helen and Bober fires Alpine. After Morris dies, Alpine returns to the store and converts to Judaism. The plot contains parallels to the life of St. Francis of Assisi and the legend of the Holy Grail.

The protagonist of 'The Fixer' is Yakov Bok, a Jewish handyman also called a fixer. He discovers the nature of human cruelty and the constant vigilance needed to cherish freedom. Yakov moves to Kiev to escape his broken marriage and make a fortune. He claims to be able to fix everything except the heart. His attempts to help others often result in misfortune; Bok is arrested and put on trial for a murder that he did not commit. The novel ends with Bok dreaming of fixing his nation. He realises that the world itself is broken and probably cannot be repaired. 'The Magic Barrel' is a collection of 13 short stories. Many of the stories feature the poor Jewish residents of New York City. They mirror the rhythm and style of Yiddish folktales. Malamud uses irony and humour to depict the bleakness of life.

2.2.1.3 Philip Roth

Philip Roth (1933-2018) is a Jewish American novelist best known for his works like 'Portnoy's Complaint', 'Nemesis', 'The Humbling', 'Goodbye Columbus', 'American Pastoral', 'The Dying Animal', 'The Ghost Writer', 'Zuckerman Unbound', 'Zuckerman Bound', and 'Indignation'.

His works have been honoured with the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize and the Man Booker International Prize.

Roth's novels focus on the life of middle-class Jews, exploring their family and sexual relationships. His works show a strong preoccupation with mortality and the aging of the body and the mind.

The title story in 'Goodbye Columbus' portrays the crass materialism of a rich Jewish suburban family. 'Portnoy's Complaint' is a comic novel, considered a classic of Jewish American Literature. The plot is revealed through Alexander Portnoy's confession to a psychiatrist. Portnoy was dominated by his overly possessive mother, Sophie, and became obsessed with masturbation in teenage. The novel attracted controversy due to its explicit descriptions of sexuality. The novel also

uses intimate, shameful detail and coarse, abusive language. The 'complaint' in the title refers to the negative impact of the culture that shaped him. Portnoy is successful but is ridden with a constant sense of guilt.

'The Dying Animal' tells the story of David Kepesh, a professor of literature. Kepesh is obsessed with a young and beautiful student, Consuela Castillo, and gets into an erotic relationship with her. He also continues an affair with a former lover, who is now divorced. Kepesh is threatened by the idea of revealing the nature of the relationship to Consuela's family and therefore avoids going beyond the physical in their relationship. Kepesh is ultimately destroyed by his indecision, lust and jealousy.

2.3. LITERATURE OF THE CHINESE AMERICAN DIASPORA

Literature of the Chinese American Diaspora refers to the writings by authors of Chinese descent living in America. Their writings began in the 19th Century and have grown and flourished in the 20th and early 21st Centuries. Most of the Chinese American writers in the 19th Century wrote in Chinese; their works are now being translated and studied. Autobiographies of the first-generation immigrants form an important aspect of this literature. 'My Life in China and America' (1909), the autobiography of the first Chinese student to graduate from Yale is a notable example. Writing by Chinese American authors flourished after the lifting of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

American Chinese women authors have depicted the sexism and patriarchy of Chinese culture. The growing popularity of Chinese American fiction has led to the reshaping of how the Americans view the Chinese Americans.

One of the key themes of Chinese American fiction is racial discrimination. The difficulties of assimilation, both spatial and cultural are also important themes. The gap between the first-generation Chinese immigrants to American and the second generation which was born in America is portrayed in the novels.

The stark differences in Chinese and American cultures lead to a crisis of identity which is reflected in the fiction. Parents are faced with the dilemma of whether their children should be brought up to assimilate with the mainstream white American culture or to stay faithful to the traditional Chinese values.

2.3.1 Prominent Chinese American Writers

2.3.1.1 Maxine Hong Kingston

Maxine Hong Kingston (1940-) is a first-generation Chinese American writer. Her important works include 'Hawaii One Summer',

‘The Fifth Book of Peace’, ‘To Be the Poet’, ‘Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book’, ‘China Men’, and ‘Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts’.

‘China Men’ draws upon the experiences of the men in Kingston’s own family to tell the story of Chinese immigration. She traces their slave labour, the isolation and discrimination that they faced in America. ‘China Men’ won the American Book Award for non-fiction.

Whittman Ah Sing, the central character of ‘Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book’ is named after Walt Whitman. The novel resembles a modern Odyssey. It combines the eastern and western traditions.

2.3.1.2 Amy Tan

Amy Ruth Tan (1952-) is a Chinese-born American novelist, best known for her novel ‘The Joy Luck Club’. Her other novels are ‘The Kitchen God’s Wife’, ‘The Hundred Secret Senses’, ‘Saving Fish From Drowning’, ‘The Valley of Amazement’ and ‘The Bonesetter’s Daughter’. The idea of ‘The Joy Luck Club’ was partly inspired by Tan taking her mother back on a visit to China and meeting her two half-sisters for the first time. The novel explores the disparity between the Chinese and American cultures and the generation gap. It tells the stories of four Chinese American families who struggle to reconcile these tensions. The story is narrated by the mothers and daughters over the mahjong game and the novel itself has a structure like the mahjong game. Each woman narrates a story about her life.

‘The Kitchen God’s Wife’ centers around the relationship between a Chinese mother, Winnie Lou, and her completely Americanized daughter Pearl. The Sino-American female identity is the central issue in the novel. The story is set in California in the 1990s and China during World War II. The novel also describes the lives of Chinese women during the occupation of China by Japan and the brutalities that they were subjected to by the occupying forces.

‘The Bonesetter’s Daughter’ also deals with the mother-daughter relationship, where the daughter cares for her mother who is suffering from Alzheimer’s Disease.

2.3.1.3 Celeste Ng

Celeste Ng (1980-) is a Chinese American novelist. Her first novel ‘Everything I Never Told You’ is a literary thriller set in the 1970s. It depicts a mixed-race Chinese American family, whose middle daughter Lydia Lee goes missing and is later found to have been drowned in the local lake. As the police investigate the case, Lydia’s parents learn how different her life was from their beliefs and expectations. The story explores the lives of her parents before and after the tragedy. The novel is based on her own experiences of racism. The novel has been translated into 15 languages.

‘Little Fires Everywhere’ tells the story of the interrelationship of two families in Ohio. Ng has won the Pushcart Prize for her story ‘Girls at Play’.

2.3.1.4 Anchee Min

Anchee Min (1957-) is a Chinese American author who wrote two memoirs (*Red Azalea* and *The Cooked Seed: A Memoir*) and six historical novels. She is known for portraying strong women characters. Her *Red Azalea*, often compared to Anne Frank’s Dairy, is based on her childhood days in Communist China.

2.4. LITERATURE OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA IN AMERICA

Indians are among the largest groups who have migrated to America. The Indian diaspora in America has not lost contact with the homeland and its culture. They have attempted to remain in touch with their cultural roots while aspiring to assimilation into American society.

The writings of the Indian diaspora reflect the conflict between the two cultures and the tensions of attempting to bridge the gap. There is a question of identity and the portrayal of the pain of being the ‘outsider’ in the native as well as the host community. The problem of emotional displacement is compounded by racial prejudices and discrimination.

The Indian American writers have not faced the problem of language as acutely as the Chinese Americans. This is because most Indians are bilingual and a majority of the writers were either educated in English or had learned English as a second language.

The works of Indian American diaspora reflect the vast linguistic, cultural and social variety of India itself. The novels encompass a variety of themes like alienation, nostalgia, the longing to return home, the failure of the American Dream and the question of identity. The second-generation diasporic writers have dealt with the theme of fluid identities and captured the lives of the immigrants.

2.4.1. Prominent Indian American Writers

2.4.1.1 Bharati Mukherjee

Bharati Mukherjee (1940-2017) is an Indian-born American novelist and short-story writer. Her works capture the cultural changes and alienation faced by the migrants. Her important novels are ‘The Tiger’s Daughter’, ‘Desirable Daughters’, ‘The Holder of the World’, ‘Wife’ and ‘Darkness’. She has won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1988. Her work is recognisable for its sharply-delineated characters and their intricate interrelationships. Mukherjee’s first novel ‘The Tiger’s Daughter’ centres around Tara, a sheltered Indian woman who is born in Calcutta, educated in New York and is married to an American man. She suffers a

culture shock on encountering American culture. Ironically, on her return to India, she finds that Calcutta has also changed. The novel also examines the politics of West Bengal.

‘Wife’ depicts the story of Dimple Dasgupta, a woman who is torn between the cultural expectations of her homeland and the demands of her new home in New York. She enters into an arranged marriage, and experiences cultural alienation and loneliness until she ultimately descends into madness. The novel ends with the murder of her husband Amit. ‘Jasmine’, a novel of emigration and assimilation, depicts a Punjabi woman living in Florida. The story is narrated in the first person and uses flashbacks and time shifts to merge Jasmine’s past with her present. She undergoes multiple identity changes while searching for happiness and acceptance. The novel is characterised by violence. ‘The Holder of the World’ depicts a contemporary American woman fascinated by the history of an ancestor who eloped with a Raja.

2.4.1.2 Chitra Banerjee-Divakaruni

Chitra Banerjee-Divakaruni (1956-) is a professor of creative writing and an author of fiction as well as non-fiction. She was born in Calcutta and migrated to the United States for higher education. Her novels are set in India and the United States. They depict the issues of immigrants. Her writings span numerous genres like poetry, realistic fiction, historical fiction, mythology, magical realism, young adult fiction and fantasy. Her works have been translated into 29 languages.

Divakaruni’s significant works are ‘The Mistress of Spices’, ‘Sister of my Heart’, ‘Queen of Dreams’, ‘Palace of Illusions’, ‘Oleander Girls’ and ‘Before We Visit the Goddess’.

Tilo, the protagonist of ‘The Mistress of Spices’ is an Indian-born shopkeeper who helps customers to fulfil their dreams using the mystical powers of her spices. She falls in love with an American man and consequently breaks the rules of her training. The spices punish her and her loved ones. She leaves her American lover in order to protect him from the punishment of the spices. Her store is destroyed in an earthquake; however, she survives and plans to rebuild the city with the help of her reconciled lover.

‘Palace of Illusions’ is a retelling of the Indian epic Mahabharata from the perspective of Draupadi, who is a strong woman living in a patriarchal world. Draupadi’s marriage to the five Pandavas, her secret love for Karna, her disrobement which perpetuates the war and her relationship with Krishna form the focus of the novel.

Divakaruni’s ‘Arranged Marriage’ won the American Book Award in 1995. It is her debut collection of short stories which feature the stories of Indian immigrants who are caught between two worlds and who are striving to carve out an identity of their own.

2.4.1.3 Jhumpa Lahiri

Jhumpa Lahiri aka Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri (1957-) was born in Calcutta. Her parents migrated to America when she was a young child. Her important works are 'Interpreter of Maladies', 'The Namesake' and 'Unaccustomed Earth'.

'Interpreter of Maladies' is a collection of short stories, which are set in Calcutta and America. They deal with themes like arranged marriage, alienation and cultural loss. They show deep insight into the lives of the people of Calcutta as well as of the immigrants to America. This book won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the 2000 PEN/Hemingway Award for Debut Fiction.

'The Namesake' is a novel that depicts immigration and its impact in the form of conflicts in identity. It explores the nuances of individuals torn between two conflicting cultures in terms of religious, social and ideological differences. The novel follows the lives of a Bengali family in America. Ashoke and Ashima move to America from Calcutta. Ashima gives birth to a son while facing linguistic and cultural barriers. They name their son Gogol as a reference to a life-changing event experienced by Ashoke. They attempt to get Gogol to use the name Nikhil at school but Gogol resents it. Gogol attempts to become more American than Bengali and becomes distanced from his parents.

Following an accident, Ashoke reveals to his son the story behind his name. Gogol gets married and his wife has an affair with another man. Gogol, who is now alone, finally accepts his name.

'Unaccustomed Earth' is a collection of short stories that deal with the problem of assimilation. The title story depicts the interrelationships between three generations: a father, his daughter and her son. The story explores gender roles and the conflict between Bengali and American cultures.

2.5. LET US SUM UP

The literature of the diaspora captures the complex experiences of immigrant communities like the Jewish Americans, the Chinese Americans and the Indian Americans. The works of these writers dwell upon the themes of displacement, search for identity, need for assimilation, cultural pride, breakdown of family structure and relationships, the failure of the American dream and the generation gap. They celebrate the unique culture of their communities while also asserting their Americanness.

2.6. QUESTIONS

- i) What is literature of the diaspora? Describe the works of important Jewish American novelists.

- ii) Explain the literature of the diaspora and describe the contribution of the important Chinese American novelists.
- iii) Who are the important Indian American diasporic writers? Explain their contribution to fiction with reference to their works.
- iv) How do the novels by the Jewish American writers reflect the issues of alienation and discrimination. Explain in detail.
- v) Give a brief survey of the development of Chinese American literature.
- vi) Describe the contribution of the important Indian American novelists with reference to their works.

2.7 SUGGESTED READING

- ❖ Abrams, M.H.: *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Eleventh Edition, 2015, Cengage Learning)
- ❖ Bradbury, Malcolm: *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature* (UK, 1992, Penguin)



A CRITICAL STUDY OF TONI MORRISON'S *SULA* PART I

Unit Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Setting
- 3.3 Plot
- 3.4 Themes
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Questions
- 3.7 Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to study Toni Morrison's *Sula* as a text that speaks not just about racial discrimination but the treatment of women by the African American society and the behaviour that was expected out of them. This is a book that shows a bond of friendship and sisterhood, even in the most trying times, is stronger and is above all other relationships. After studying this unit, the learners will be able to understand plot, setting, and major themes of *Sula*.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison's *Sula* was first published in the year 1973, explores the individualism of a Black woman in contrast to the submission of other Black women to the norms and expectations of the society. *Sula* is Morrison's second book, the first being *The Bluest Eye*. She wrote this book at a time when Morrison herself and most women around her, struggled as single parents – juggling between their jobs, raising their children and keeping a household running. Morrison realized, at this time that they had to be there for themselves, to look after themselves and be their own best friends. There was no one to stop them. It is at this time that Morrison conceived of the concept of *Sula* and the variety of women it held – Sula, Nel, Helene, Hannah and Eva.

3.2 SETTING

The setting of the novel is a place called the Bottom which is a hilly area above the valley town of Medallion, Ohio. The Bottom is said to have

a weirdly funny but unfair history. Frame narrative is used in the story of *Sula* which is placed between 1919 and 1965. The novel begins in the year 1965 and ends in the same year as well. Sula's story is told in the ten chapters in the middle which takes place in the years between 1919 and 1940.

The Bottom is inhabited by the Black community whereas the white landowners live in the valley. The story, which became a significant local lore, behind the settlement of the Bottom, was that a slave owner promised his slave freedom and a piece of rich bottomland in exchange for some difficult work in the previous century. He did the work and got his freedom but the white slave-owner tricked him when it was time to give his slave the land. He gave the freed slave a piece of land on the top of a hill where planting was difficult, the soil would get washed away, and the wind blew hard, instead of giving him the rich bottomland which is good for farming. He told the slave the hill was the Bottom of Heaven, closer to God. The slave felt lucky to have it at first, but soon learned the truth of this cruel trick. But in spite of the hardship, the Bottom soon developed into a lovely town with a close-knit community that inhabited the place.

Ironically, the small black town is levelled in the year 1965 in order to build a golf course and fancy houses for the rich white neighbours forcing the Blacks to move into the valley. Because the rich white neighbours in the valley decide that they liked the Bottom better than their valley.

3.3 PLOT

The plot of *Sula* is set within a frame narrative and has two parts to it. It opens around 1965 with a prologue and after the first section; it goes back in time to the year 1919. It is from that point onwards, the plot moves forward chronologically until the very end of the novel, which is again set in 1965. In between the frame narrative at the beginning and end, each chapter, is titled by a year. Although the book spans a lifetime, it is not difficult to follow the plot because of the time labels.

The plot is developed in a traditional pattern, opening with an introduction to the Bottom which is the setting for the whole novel. It introduces the key characters, starting with Shadrack, a shell-shocked veteran from World War I and his National Suicide Day on January 3. He often marches through the town encouraging citizens to plan the day of their death to defy the horrible suddenness of dying naturally. This closely knit community of the Bottom which is civil and conventional in nature dares to treat Shadrack with familiarity and tolerance.

Helene Wright is one of the upright and outstanding members of the Bottom. She had to move to Medallion from New Orleans, where she was raised by her grandmother because her mother was a prostitute. Helene gets married to a respectable man, establishes herself in the

community as the picture of propriety in an effort to escape the past of her family which was of ill repute. She raises her daughter, Nel, to be like her, and teaches her to live a life free from shame and immorality. This turns Nel in to a good, obedient and traditional daughter. It is only when Helene takes Nel to New Orleans for her grandmother's funeral that Nel witnesses and experiences racism for the first time and is shocked by this. She is also shocked to learn about her mother's insecurities. She returns home to the Bottom determined to be an individual and vowing never to be like her mother.

Sula is introduced in the third section, and the rest of the book focuses on her and her friendship with Nel, which is the rising action of the plot. Sula Peace is Nel's friend, even though they are very different in personality and background and Nel's mother opposes their friendship. Sula lives in a house with her grandmother - Eva is a strong-willed matriarch who had to cut off her own leg to collect insurance money to raise her three children, Sula's mother - Hannah, and several stray boarders, including a white alcoholic named Tar Baby and three young boys all named "Dewey." Eva's son, Plum, returns from the war, a changed man who is a drug addict, who steals and lies. Eva cannot bear to see her son in this state of suffering from his addiction as he had always been her favourite, therefore, one night, when she goes into his room and finds him in a state of stupor, she holds Plum tenderly lights him on fire after pouring kerosene after saying goodbye to him. Eva chooses never to go downstairs again after this incident and runs the entire household and her family from her makeshift wheelchair in the upstairs room.

Sula's mother, Hannah, is a very sensual woman who shies away from any commitment and sleeps with all the men in the Bottom. In spite of her being flirtatious and sleeping around with other men, the women in the community like Hannah as they don't see her as a threat because she only wants to sleep with their husbands and possess them. Sula, however, does not feel close to her mother and is detached to her. Instead, she is attached to Nel and shares all of her thoughts and emotions with her so much so that they even share a dark secret together - of being the cause of Chicken Little's death in the stream. It is this dark secret that changes Sula and haunts both the friends for the rest of their lives. Right after this incident, Sula's mother Hannah catches fire in the yard and dies while Sula only stands and watches this instead of running to save her.

In the seventh chapter, Nel marries Jude, a young boy anxious to prove he is a man. After Nel marries Jude, Sula leaves the Bottom for ten years. When Nel sees Sula leaving, she feels that she had lost her friend to Jude. Thus, Part One of the novel ends with Sula's departure.

When Sula returns to Medallion, Part Two begins, and the plot resumes and moves rapidly toward Sula's death. When Sula returns to the Bottom after ten years, she appears to have changed - she seems more worldly and harsh. Much to the shock of everyone in town, Sula

immediately puts Eva in a nursing home, as the people in the Bottom believed that one shouldn't treat their grandmother in this manner. However, Sula is very glad to see Nel and for a while they seem to be close friends until Nel catches Sula having sex with Jude. Jude leaves Nel and their three children out of shame which shatters Nel over the loss of her husband. Since Nel does not truly display her emotions, her grief takes its own shape and form, and because of which she feels lost.

Sula is blamed for all the evil that happens in the Bottom. Thus, even if someone chokes, it is blamed on Sula, if a child falls on her steps Sula is blamed for it. Thus, Sula becomes a symbol of evil for the community at the Bottom against whom they bond in order to oppose her. There are even rumours about her that begin to circulate. According to which she never ages, loses a tooth, and never belches. The community even whispers that she sleeps with white men. However, in her reaction to these rumours, Sula becomes proud and alone. She starts believing that Nel is just like the rest of the critical community and refers to old friend as small-minded, vicious and inflexible.

In the midst of her loneliness and misery, Sula has an affair with Ajax, and Sula falls in love with him. For the first time she has ever experienced such emotions. Sula, who never believed in commitments, now longs for it. Something, she had never thought she would ever want. But her attachment terrifies Ajax, as a result of which he leaves her. Sula is never able to fully recover from this loss and awfully misses him.

Nel forces herself to visit her old friend Sula, who was dying of an unknown disease, out of a sense of duty. The visit soon turns into an argument when Sula explains her idea of life which Nel questions. Nel questions her as to why did Sula take Jude away from her to which Sula replies that she did not "take" him and that no one can "possess" another person. Sula warns Nel not to pride herself over her own moral superiority. This angers Nel and she leaves but unable to forget Sula's warning. Sula descends into pain and dies shortly after Nel visited her. Her death is considered to be good news by the people of the town. Very few people attend her funeral and those that do are barely able to sing at her graveside. Neither do Nel nor does Eva attend Sula's funeral.

The townspeople expect some good fortune to their community after Sula dies, but they are proved wrong because the events that follow only bring about disaster to the community. A harsh winter arrives early. Since the winter is very harsh, people are unable to work in the cold and ice, therefore, there is no money. Everything gets back to the way it was when Sula was not around. The community that had once bonded against Sula, have no one to blame everything on, so they begin to treat each other as badly as they used to. People would hardly celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas. The weather had just started to warm, and people changed in to a strange and crazy mood, by the time Suicide Day came around. For once, they laughed, danced and followed Shadrack in his Suicide Day

Parade. This weird parade continued through the Bottom towards the river tunnel until people turnso crazy with pent-up frustration that they riot in front of the tunnel and destroy the work of the white men. As they made their way inside the tunnel, some mud and rocks come loose because of the recent thaw resulting in a flood of water quickly drowning most of the people. When this is happening, Shadrack stands above them on the bank, sadly ringing his bell.

The plot then moves to twenty-four years later, in 1965, the Bottom is immensely different. The community changes so much that neighbours barely speak to each other. Nel does not know many people, any longer. As a member of an organization that visits old people in rest homes, Nel, one day meets Eva, whom she had not seen in thirty years. Eva is a little crazy, and seems to recognize Nel only sometimes. Eva reminds Nel of the death of Chicken Little and questions her on his death. Nel dismisses it by saying that she only watched his death. Eva makes a very strong statement of this – she tells Nel that there was no difference between Sula and Nel. This upsets Nel.

While walking back home, Nel sees the cemetery and stops to look at all the graves of the Peace family, including Sula's grave. She started thinking of how Sula was treated badly by everyone including herself. She regrets that no one tried to understand her, instead everyone hurled accusations at her for being evil. Nel also realizes how wrong she was in watching Chicken Little die and although all her life she thought of herself to be innocent when she was actually evil. Nel now starts to realize and regret that though Chicken Little's death was caused by Sula, it was only a mistake and should have reassured her that it wasn't her fault when she felt guilty.

Realization now dawns upon her that she, who always believed herself to be good and Sula to be evil but it was the contrary. She meets Shadrack who is passing in the other direction who doesn't remember her much and the details related to the incident. She walks with him, sadly remembering Sula, whom she treated badly. Her eyes well up with tears at her thought and her heart sinks with grief at the loss and the missed opportunities. Nel acknowledges that Sula was the best thing that happened to her even more than motherhood or marriage.

3.4 THEMES

3.4.1. Good versus Evil

This is the major theme of *Sula*. Sula and Nel had their lives shaped by their beliefs in good and evil, right and wrong. Since, the accidental death of Chicken Little in their childhood, Sula always believed that she was evil whereas Nel believed she was innocent and good. The rest of their lives were shaped by these beliefs. Where on one hand Nel believed herself to be good, she becomes the picture of goodness and propriety and on the other hand Sula who believes herself to be evil, lives a wild and

unconventional life. But it is actually the contrary, Nel realizes after Sula's death that it was Nel who was actually evil because she has enjoyed seeing Chicken Little being drowned whereas Sula felt terrible about his death. Even the community in the Bottom labels Sula as evil because she is unconventional and wild in her behaviour.

3.4.2. Friendship

The entire story of *Sula* is based on the friendship of two friends, Sula and Nel. Their friendship is the most important relationship in their lives, even more than their own families. In their childhood, the girls bonded really well, in spite of having vastly different family backgrounds. But as they grow up their friendship is affected as they are not honest with each other. Added to that, Sula sleeps with Jude, Nel's husband. This really angers Nel and their friendship breaks. Jude leaves Nel and their kids because he is embarrassed, which Nel blames on Sula. On the other hand, Nel never tells Sula that Chicken Little's death was a mistake and she shouldn't blame herself for it. She allows her to feel terrible all her life. Thus, the friends who were so close right from childhood turn to betray each other. Although, Nel realizes her mistakes after Sula's death and it dawns upon her that friendship was the best thing that happened to her and she regrets the loss of her dear friend.

3.4.3. Family

Family is another important theme that plays an important role in the lives of the characters of *Sula*. Nel is raised by her mother Helene to be a righteous woman and lead a good life by getting married, having children and settling down with a respectable family life. The reason that Nel's mother is so strict with Nel about being righteous and leading a respectable life right from Nel's childhood, is that Nel's grandmother was prostitute. Helene was ashamed of this aspect of life and did not want her life to be like her mother's life in any way. Therefore, she never spoke of her past and lead a good and pure life with her husband and daughter in the Medallion.

Sula, on the other hand, was never attached to her mother. Her mother, Hannah, was a sensuous woman who slept with every other man without any sense of attachment. Sula doesn't feel anything when she sees her mother dying from the fire in the yard and stands watching her die. Ironically, Sula grows up to be like her mother. She has no sense of attachment with the men she sleeps with. Thus, she leads a wild life. Sula does not like her grandmother either, as she favours Sula's brother more than her. This is the reason why she has no sense of attachment with her grandmother, Evaas well and sends her to an old age home when she returns after ten years to the Bottom.

The only family that Sula truly has is her friend Nel. But she even destroys that friendship by sleeping with Nel's husband Jude.

3.4.4. Racism

Racism is an underlying theme in *Sula*, where Morrison doesn't very loudly portray it. Rather, it is very subtly present. The very history of the Bottom is etched in racism – a Black slave fooled by his White master in to doing some work for him and rewarding the Black slave a piece of land that he had promised him. Only, the land given to him is on the hill where farming is very difficult and commuting is not easy either. The slave is fooled into believing that the Bottom is actually the bottom of the Heaven. Thus, the Whites settle in the valley where the land is fertile and easy to cultivate and giving the hilly terrain of the Bottom to the Blacks where farming and cultivation is tough.

The New River Road project is used as an excuse to keep the Black community chasing a goal that never ends. The Whites do not give them basic facilities like health care and pretend to care about them by luring them projects like the New River Road that do not exist.

The minds of the Black community at the Bottom is so influenced by the Whites that whiteness is their only standard for beauty, they have no other standard for beauty other than this. Due to these standards, many of them try to straighten their hair and noses to resemble the whites. Many of them dream to be part of the White community. In this attempt, some of them become rich and powerful enough to live in the White neighbourhood but the Whites leave that neighbourhood and move away. Racism is so etched in the minds of the Black community in the Bottom that they begin to hate each other, their community and think of themselves as second-grade citizens.

Thus, racism plays a strong role in this novel in shaping the lives and thinking of its characters.

3.4.5. Treatment of Women

The novel reflects how racism makes them think lowly of each other but worse than this is the treatment of the women by the Bottom community. According to them, freedom to do anything is with a man. Therefore, women are degraded further more. They are supposed to follow a code of behaviour in the society and the ones who don't, are looked down upon -just like Sula. A man can be forgiven any mistake but not a woman, according to the thinking of the women of the Bottom. This is the reason why everybody dislikes Sula and labels her as evil. Since she's a woman who does what she likes and does not conform to the standards of their society.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

Toni Morrison's *Sula* is about the challenges in the lives and friendship of Sula and Nel, the family values that shape their personalities and the circumstances that change them. Morrison has clearly depicted what it was like to be a Black woman in between 1919 to 1965, how Black

women were not expected to do what they liked and were expected to follow the conventions of the society. The unconventional ones like Sula, were labelled as 'evil'.

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. Describe the significance of the setting of the novel *Sula* by Toni Morrison.
2. Discuss the themes in Toni Morrison's novel *Sula*.
3. Trace the life of Sula and the changes in her personality from her childhood until her death.

3.7 SUGGESTED READING

- ❖ Bakerman, Jane S., Review of *Sula*, in *American Literature*, March 1980, pp. 87-100.
- ❖ Bell, Roseann P. "Review of *Sula*." *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1988.
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A CRITICAL STUDY OF TONI MORRISON'S *SULA* PART II

Unit Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Character Analysis
- 4.2 Nel and Sula Relationship
- 4.3 Independent Female Characters
- 4.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.5 Questions
- 4.6 Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to study Toni Morrison's *Sula* as a text that depicts the individualism of the Black women and their bonds of friendship and love with each other. It also compares and contrasts between women who chose to be independent as compared to those who chose to conform to the standards of the society. After studying this unit, the learners will be able to understand characterisation as well as analyse the characters and human relationship and friendship of Toni Morrison's *Sula*.

4.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

4.1.1 Sula Peace

Morrison has portrayed Sula to be a multi-faceted character. She can be called a tragic heroine and having said that she is not devoid of flaws but that's the beauty of her character – she wears her flaws like a medal, she flaunts it. Her character is painted with grey shades. She's good and bad – both at the same time. But the people of Bottom term her as 'evil' and blame her for every bad things that happens to people in the Bottom. Sula thinks of the community in the Bottom to be small-minded and she appears to be right because the community does not just term her as 'evil' but even spreads mythical rumours about her.

Sula becomes of what people around her and circumstances make her. She comes across as detached because her mother does not seem to have any emotional attachment with her. Added to that, she even overhears her mother saying that she did not really like her daughter. This sticks to Sula's mind forever and when her mother catches the fire in the yard and is dying, she just stands and watches her burn without any

feeling. Thus, it can be said that as a result of her mother's lack of affection with her own daughter, Sula becomes emotionally detached herself. This emotional detachment can be seen even when she returns to the Medallion after ten years. The first thing that she does is to put her grandmother, Eva, in a nursing home. The people in the town talk badly about her for doing this but she remains unaffected. The people in the town always thought of her as weird because she was very different from them.

Due to her unusual relationship with her mother, Sula had only one saving grace and that was Nel. They were so close that they came across as one. Sula shared all her secrets with her, even the secret of Chicken Little's death. Chicken Little's accidental death leaves a mark on Sula for the rest of her life. She could never get over it and always thought of herself as evil. This belief that she is evil makes her live in that manner. A few years after this incident, Nel decides to marry Jude. Sula leaves the town after this and returns after ten years.

The ten years away from the town change Sula as a person. She returns as a tougher person, more open-minded and unconventional in her thoughts. She turns into a wild woman who does what she likes. But this does not go down well with the closed-minded people of the town. Their problem was – how can a woman do what she likes because according to them that is a man's right.

After her return, when she tries to strike up her old friendship with Nel, she messes it up by betraying her. The negative shades in her character are more apparent at this stage in the novel. The betrayal comes in the form of Sula sleeping with Nel's husband, Jude. This ends their relationship. The only explanation for Sula's behaviour is that Sula becomes what her mother was. She sleeps around with men without having any sense of attachment with them. In her defense to Nel, she tells her that she only slept with Jude she did not try to possess him.

Since Sula does not believe in commitments she indulged with many men. But the ultimate heartbreak happens when she gets involved with Ajax and falls in love with him. Ajax, like her, does not like commitment. He, therefore, gets paranoid of Sula's feelings and leaves her. This shatters her heart completely. Shortly after this Sula falls ill and dies at the age of thirty. It is only after her death that Nel realizes that her friendship with Sula was the only relationship that meant the most to her and that after her death she has suffered a great loss.

Sula's character is one that is shaped to represent a non-conformist, unconventional, wild and independent Black woman in a Black society where women were regarded at the lowest level of the society. These traits in her make her unacceptable and evil to the people even to her own family and her best friend, Nel.

Sula has emotions and is a sensitive woman at heart, contrary to what other people in the community think of her. One of the examples of this is the death of Chicken Little – when she accidentally drops him and he starts drowning, she runs to the cabin of Shadrack to ask for help. She feels responsible for Chicken Little's death and terrible about it for the rest of her life. The second example is when she falls in love with Ajax. Though she always portrays that she is unattached and does not believe in commitments, she starts caring for Ajax, falls in love with him and behaves possessively with him. Ajax, who does not believe in attachment and commitment himself panics at this and leaves her. This breaks Sula's heart and she never recovers from it. Thus, Morrison has made Sula to be human and not some perfect heroine, someone who has flaws but also has positive qualities. This makes Sula to be a complete person.

4.1.2 Nel Wright

Nel, who befriends Sula and they become best friends to the extent that they become one. Nel's mother, Helene does not approve of Sula because she finds her family to be very improper. Nel, for the most part, is controlled by her mother who wants to make Nel to be a 'good' girl and settle down in life and have a respectable life with her family. Contrary to Sula, Nel is a very obedient girl. She is looked upon as a good girl by everyone in the community. This indicates that she is a conformist and doesn't dare to deviate from the societal norms.

Nel's personality goes about a change after she takes the trip to visit Helene's grandmother. She learns various truths about her mother which changes her as a person and her perspective to life. She learns that her mother is not as confident as she appears to be, she learns about racism, she also learns about her own grandmother who was a prostitute. On her way back to Medallion, Nel promises herself that she won't be like her mother and that is the first reflection of individuality in her. This self realization in Nel makes her ignore her mother's dislike for Sula and she continues to be friends with her. Her mother ultimately gives in and quits stopping her.

There is so much order in Nel's life that likes the chaos in Sula's house. Their closeness grows and they grow up to be best of friends.

Nel gets married to Jude and has a family with him. Then years later, when Sula returns to the Bottom, she betrays Nel by sleeping with her husband. Jude leaves Nel and their children because he is ashamed of what he has done. But Nel blames Sula for everything. She is so traditional and close-minded that she tells Sula that she had no right to do what she wanted because that is a man's right not a woman's.

Nel always believed that she was good and innocent whereas on the inside there was evil in her. She had enjoyed watching Chicken Little drown but she never once tried to console Sula who felt guilty and terrible for causing his death. It is only years after Sula's death that she realized

that she could have told Sula that it wasn't her fault but instead she just let her suffer and believe that she was the cause of his death.

Nel, who always felt a sense of loss thought it was because of Jude. But years after Sula's death she realizes that sense of loss was not because of him but because of losing her best friend Sula. She finally realizes that Sula was the best thing that ever happened to her in her entire life, even better than marriage and motherhood.

Nel's personality is one that hides behind the mask of 'goodness' whereas there's actually evil in her. She is selfish and self-centered as she does not try to understand her friend's perspectives. When the people in the Bottom treat Sula badly and spread false rumours about her, she does not stand up for her even once. On the contrary she becomes one of them too. The only reason she visits Sula before her death is because she feels she should out of 'goodness'. The worse thing about her hypocrisy is that even she portrays of her as 'good', she does not even attend Sula's funeral. However, a few years later, realization dawns upon her and she regrets her actions and her loss of her best friend.

4.1.3 Helene Wright

Helene Wright, Nel Wright's mother, comes across as a very proper, traditional and uptight woman. She is well settled with her husband and her daughter in the Medallion. She is very strict with Nel and exercises a lot of control over her life in an attempt to make her like herself. The truth is that Helene is actually the daughter of a Creole prostitute. She was raised by her grandmother and is ashamed of her past. She is very reluctant to visit her grandmother in New Orleans but has to do so out of respect for her wish because she's the one who raises her. Helene who comes across as a very confident woman has many insecurities. She is not as confident as she comes across. This truth is discovered by Nel when she is visiting her great grandmother.

4.1.4 Hannah Peace

Hannah is Sula's mother. She has a very different approach to life. She lost her husband at a very young age but did not remarry. She however, gets involved with a lot of men. She does not believe in commitments and that is why women in the Bottom like her as she only sleeps with their husbands and does not possess them. She is an unattached mother, especially to Sula which affects Sula's mind in a big way. Sula, one day, overhears her saying that she does not like her daughter. This really hurts her and stays in her mind forever. This is the reason why Sula stands watching her die in the yard fire and does nothing to save her mother. Hannah has a huge impact on the personality and the thinking of Sula. It is because of Hannah that Sula becomes an unattached person and does not believe in commitment. Although, the mother and daughter were unattached but Sula was surely influenced by her mother and that changed her life and her relationships.

4.1.5. Eva

Eva is Hannah Peace's mother and Sula's grandmother. Eva is portrayed as a strong, independent woman who loves her children and does not allow life to put her down. Eva's husband leaves her and her children but she does not allow that to defeat her nor does she indulge in self-pity. On the contrary, she takes matters in her own hands. She leaves her children with the neighbours for a while and comes back with only one leg. It always remains a mystery as to what happened to her. But it is assumed that she cut her leg off to get the insurance money so that she can get financial independence and look after her kids well.

The town looks up at her with great respect. For further financial gains, she turns her house into lodging. Losing one leg and crippling herself actually elevates her status in the community. She's the most important character in the novel and the most experienced woman. Her love for her children is indicated in the instance when her daughter catches fire in the yard which makes her jump from her balcony to save her. But her love is very strange, she herself pours kerosene on her son who becomes a drug addict after he returns from the war. Killing him was to save him from further deterioration. Eva is such a strong personality in the community that no one questions her son's death.

Sula does not like her grandmother because she dislikes the control she has over their lives. She, therefore, puts her in a nursing home when she returns to the Bottom after ten years. But Eva, in spite of spending so many years in the nursing home and becoming forgetful, somehow knows that Nel was also responsible for Chicken Little as she just stood there and watched it happen and did nothing about it. It is after this conversation that Nel realizes her truth and her faults.

4.1.6 Shadrack

Shadrack is a shell-shocked resident of the Bottom who has returned from the war and has alcohol for company. He is an important character because the actual story starts and ends with him. The novel starts with Shadrack celebrating the National Suicide Day created by him. This day becomes important in the story of the Bottom. Shadrack's interaction with Sula is only once in the novel. This interaction happens when Sula runs to his cabin for help when Chicken Little is drowning in the river. The only thing he says to her in his state of drunkenness is "always" which Sula takes as a threat but he actually says that in kindness. Sula is the only person who enters his cabin and therefore, thinks of her as his friend. He believes that Sula has given some meaning to his life. He cares for her but she leaves this world unaware of it. He does not find any enthusiasm in celebrating the National Suicide Day after Sula's death.

4.2 NEL AND SULA RELATIONSHIP

Sula and Nel, two girls from the Bottom, with completely different backgrounds, are two friends who have a strong influence over each other's lives. Nel befriends Sula in spite of her mother's dislike of her and her family background. On one hand where Nel comes from a very balanced, well-settled and respectable family, on the other hand, Sula has a chaotic family with all sorts of men coming to her house. Sula's mother is a flirt and sleeps around with every other man. Eva, her grandmother, is a powerful, independent and controlling woman of the town.

Nel likes the disorder in Sula's house as compared to the quiet in her house. Sula, an unattached girl yearning for love, finds an attachment in Nel. She shares everything with her. They even share their darkest secret – the death of Chicken Little. This incident reveals a lot about them during and later in the story. Chicken Little's death impacts Sula forever, she feels guilty for it and never forgives herself. Nel, who portrays herself to be innocent, actually is revealed to be evil on the inside as she admits to herself that she had enjoyed watching him drown. She also never comforts Sula that it was an accident and not her fault and allows herself to live and finally die in her misery.

As these two friends grow up together, they come across as one. They grow apart only when Nel decides to marry Jude. Sula leaves the town after Nel's marriage and comes back after ten years. They try to unite as friends again until Sula betrays Nel by sleeping with her husband, Jude. Added to that, Jude leaves Nel out of embarrassment. Nel blames Sula for breaking her home and destroying her life. Their friendship is over after this.

Nel meets Sula again only when she's very sick and goes to meet her out of her own "goodness" but nothing comes out of the meeting. Instead of putting the past behind, Nel leaves Sula's house in a state of anger as Sula is unapologetic about her actions. Sula dies shortly after this.

Nel does not forgive her even after her death. She does not attend her funeral. But years later realizes that she was wrong and that she was the "evil" one. She also realizes that Sula was the best thing that happened to her, even more than marriage and motherhood. On this realization she feels a sense of loss. The truth is Nel had this feeling of loss in her entire life not because Jude had left her but because she did not have Sula in her life. Towards the end of the novel Nel realizes this truth.

4.3 INDEPENDENT FEMALE CHARACTERS

Morrison has depicted very strong female characters in *Sula*. Sula, Nel, Helene, Hannah and Eva are the strong female characters around

whom Morrison weaves this story. All women had female characters that inspired them.

Helene shapes the life of her daughter so that her own past does not affect her life. She wants Nel lead a respectable life. Though filled with insecurities herself, she emits confidence and command. She takes control of her life to make it better and has a grandmother to thank for. Helene grew up without a father as her mother was prostitute and she was raised by her grandmother.

Hannah loses her husband at a very young age but brings up her children with a lot of courage. She does not have any man to support her – emotionally or financially. But despite this, she manages to raise her children and has her own mother, Eva, as a very strong support system.

Eva, Sula's grandmother, has to raise her kids by herself because her husband abandons her and her children. She faces this challenge, loses her leg to get insurance so that she can raise her children without any dependence on any one. She also starts loading people in her house to lead a comfortable life with a steady financial income.

Nel has very strong female characters that she is inspired by. First it is her own mother who teaches her to lead a morally righteous life. Then it is Sula, who fills her life with meaning and love. She is also inspired by Sula's grandmother, who is a very powerful lady, herself. She, herself, raises her children alone when her husband abandons her after cheating on her.

Sula, though has a lot of strong women to be inspired from, is an inspiration herself. She has her own mind and does not conform to the beliefs of her community. She's open-minded and though people consider her to be evil, she is innocent at heart. She's not pretentious as she does what she believes in.

All these female characters in Morrison's novel *Sula* have a one thing in common – their lives are inspired by women and they make a mark without men having to support them. They do not need the validation of men to make them into strong personalities. On the contrary, the absence of men in their lives makes them strong and independent. Each of them has their own individuality which they discover through their experiences with each other. There isn't one strong male character in this story which indicates that women do not need a man to support them to realize their potential and to establish themselves as individual beings.

4.4 LET US SUM UP

Toni Morrison's *Sula* is a novel with inspirational female characters that brave the difficulties of life and make their presence felt. These women have no men to support them. The strongest character is

particularly that of Sula that defies the community to live her life according to her beliefs. In addition, Toni Morrison also portrays a strong and irreplaceable bond that women have with each other and no other relationship can replace that bond.

4.5 QUESTIONS

1. Analyse the character of Sula in Toni Morrison's novel *Sula*.
2. Discuss the relationship between Sula and Nel in Toni Morrison's novel *Sula*.
3. How does Toni Morrison represent the traits of freedom and individuality in her female characters in her novel *Sula*?

4.6 SUGGESTED READING

- ❖ Bakerman, Jane S. "Failures of Love: Female Initiation in the Novels of Toni Morrison." *American Literature* 52 (January, 1981): 541-563.
- ❖ Bryant, Cedric Gael. "The Orderliness of Disorder: Madness and Evil in Toni Morrison's *Sula*." *Black American Literature Forum* 24 (Winter, 1990): 731-745.
- ❖ Peterson, Nancy J., ed. *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.
- ❖ Stepto, Robert B. "'Intimate Things in Place': A Conversation with Toni Morrison." *Massachusetts Review* 18 (Autumn, 1977): 473-489.



A CRITICAL STUDY OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA* PART I

Unit Structure

- 5.0. Objectives
- 5.1. About the Author
- 5.2. Introduction to the Novel
- 5.3. Introduction to Plot
- 5.4. Plot Overview
- 5.5. Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Questions
- 5.7. Suggested Reading

5.0. OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to make the learners acquainted with American novelist Ernest Hemingway, his literary writing and plot summary of his novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*.

5.1. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961) born in Oak Park, the United States of America, is an American novelist and a short story writer and was one of the most influential modern writers of the group of the 'Lost Generation' American writers who had relocated to Europe after World War I.

The impact of his experience as a journalist could be seen in his style of writing. His journalistic style of writing is his great contribution to the 20th century fiction.

As he witnessed two World Wars, the liberation of Paris, the 1945 schism within Cuban communist party and also to many deaths and hardships, the elements of depression, rebellion against patriotism and emptiness strongly dominate his work. Hemingway's work finds similarity to *Ulysses* and *The Great Gatsby* which show toughness and hardship of the human condition and the pity thereby.

His personal experiences during his visits or stay at various unique places like Cuba (where he spent twenty years of his life) and his active participation in various escapade such as hunting, fishing, boxing and bullfighting reflecting mythic breed of masculinity are beautifully depicted in his work.

His 'On the Blue Water: A Gulf Stream Letter', for Esquire, an account of a Cuban fisherman's struggle has inspired him to write his last major work, *The Old Man and the Sea* (a literary fiction, published in 1952), which made him a Nobel Laureate in 1954 and a Pulitzer Prize winner for fiction in 1953.

5.2. INTRODUCTION TO THE NOVEL

The Old Man and the Sea, a modern classic novella (a short novel) about bravery and gallantry, is thematically biographical story which shows the writer's jagged, masculine approach towards life/universe and also his love for adventure which led him to participate actively in bull fighting, deep sea fishing and Spanish Civil War. The writer's fishing experience in Gulf Stream and the Caribbean has provided this novel with the necessary background.

The novel, which is a blend of facts and fiction, deals with the main theme: grace under pressure. The sub-themes which are discussed here are determination, honor, friendship, defeat and death, endurance and struggle, and love for Nature. The theme focused here helps us to understand man's position in this world.

The novel narrates a very heart-breaking story of the struggle between the jinxed old man and the marlin. Santiago, who is an old experienced poor Cuban (Spanish) fisherman, in his attempt to end his hard luck, ventures to go beyond the boundaries and hooks a large fish after a long struggle just to get it ravaged by sharks. However, though defeated, he is not a loser because despite his age he is exuberant and confident about his capabilities. His confrontation with a worthy opponent rather elevates him irrespective of he wins or loses.

5.3. INTRODUCTION TO PLOT

The story is neatly woven and its plot develops systematically through the below given structure:

1. **Issue:** Santiago's misfortune haunts him as he cannot catch fish for eighty-four days. Even his assistant, Manolin as per his parents' instructions has to leave him to join more successful fishermen due to the old man's bad luck.

2. **Call toAction:** Santiago determines to reverse his bad luck and so he ventures into the deep sea to get a good catch.

3. **Climax:** Santiago hooks a large marlin but fails to pull it in his boat. Instead, the marlin pulls his boat in opposite direction. Here the adventure begins and the climax takes place when he kills the marlin after three days' struggle and when he has to fight the second battle with a swarm of sharks to save the marlin.

4. **Falling Action:** On his way back, the old man fights a futile battle with sharks. All his attempts to take home the giant fish meet with no success as the sharks destroy the marlin completely and leave only its skeleton and head.

5. **Perseverance** Both the old man and Manolin plan to be partner for fishing again.

The novel is a simple story of luckless Santiago who fails to catch fish for eighty-four days. Like other fishermen, this old man also sets out to sea everyday but has to return empty handed. So, some of his fellow fishermen those, who are aware of his talent, feel sorry for his situation while others ridicule him and call him 'SALAO' which means tough luck. But the old man does not bother about all this. However, he gets disturbed when his assistant Manolin, a young boy is forced by his parents to leave him to join more leading fishermen. This saddens both of them since they love each other and have developed father-son relation. But the boy against his parents' will, continues to run small errands for him.

For the old man, facing such a bad luck in fishing career is not at all a new experience. Since he has a profound knowledge about the sea and ability to catch fish, he is quite optimistic and confident about his success. Therefore, he does not want to give up so easily and hence decides to take a risk of going into the deep sea to try his luck. Accordingly, on the eighty fifth day in the wee hours of the morning, he sails into the Gulf Stream in the high sea far beyond the shallow waters. All these show his bravery, determination, self-confidence, forbearance, and dedication.

Being sensitive, he loves not only human beings but also Nature/sea and its creatures/animals. In tune with the natural world around him, he understands Nature's hints easily.

At about noon on the first day, he expertly hooks a large marlin (fish), but he can't pull it in. On the contrary the fish starts pulling the boat in the opposite direction against the current as it knows to stay away from the shore, where it can be easily caught.

Here the ferocious struggle between the two begins. This physical as well as psychological battle which he fights all alone against a giant,

lasts for three days as both of them are not ready to give up easily. In this process, though the old man gets all bruised, wounded and fatigued, he ignores all his tiredness and the pain. He also sympathises with the marlin and is impressed with its size, beauty, strength and amour propre. Yet finally he decides to kill the fish as it is a must for his survival. Certainly, the very idea of the marlin's fetching him a good price pleases him, but the thought of people, who are unworthy of such a marvellous creature, eating it, disturbs him. This deadly struggle ends on the third day, when Santiago successfully spears the marlin. But his misfortune doesn't end here. It persists. On his way back to home, the marlin's blood trails attract sharks and here he gets involved in the second encounter to defend his catch. It is, however, a losing battle as the scavengers devour the marlin completely. By the time the old man reaches his destination, he is left only with its carcass skeleton and head. Thus, both are ruined. Sad and in pain, he reaches home, and goes off to sleep.

The next morning his fellow fishermen find the old man half-delirious and surround the boat carrying the carcass of the fish and get impressed with its gigantic size and feel pity for the old man as his sincere efforts meet with no success. The tourists, totally ignorant of the old man's struggle, just observe the marlin and mistake it for a shark.

Manolin, who is worried about the old man, is happy to see him back. When Santiago wakes up, the boy kindly fetches him coffee and brings the newspaper. Then against his parents' will, Manolin assures the old man that he will, henceforth, be his partner when he goes fishing. With this promise, the old man again goes off to sleep and dreams of lions on the African beach.

At the surface level, this novel seems to be deceptively simple. This is a tragedy of a hero, Santiago who sincerely works towards the cause but is not rewarded as sharks ruin his giant catch which he gets after a long struggle. But at the deeper level, it is very puzzling as it can be interpreted symbolically. In all this long struggle, Santiago proves himself to be a real hero who has really won a victory over the sea (life) and overcome all barriers (sharks) in his life and thus, brings out his ability to fight/ survive/ win even in the adverse situation. His humility, grace, determination, strength are proved here. No matter he gets destroyed in the struggle, yet he remains undefeated. Since the old man is physically and psychologically strong, he survives successfully. So, he comes out as a hero at the end.

The author has developed the plot by dividing Santiago's struggle with the marlin into the three stages: 1. The time before Santiago knows his rival 2. The time when he realizes the strength of the adversary 3. The time when the old man kills the marlin. To unify with the plot even his second battle with sharks is developed into the three stages.

The first half of the book describes the beautiful form of Nature like calmness of the sea, Santiago's love for Nature and the marlin. But the second half of the book depicts the destructive form of Nature: hurricane, attack of the shovel-nosed sharks. The author has described the old man's potentials such as courage, determination, modesty also his sufferings, and his love for Nature to bind the story.

5.4. PLOT OVERVIEW

The novel is all about a struggle between Santiago and a giant marlin (fish). Like other fishermen, Santiago also wakes up at sunrise every day and sails towards the sea in his old small traditional boat to catch fish. On one particular day he comes back empty-handed. Instead of this being the case one day, this spell of bad luck persists, and he fails to catch fish for another eighty-four consecutive days. Hence his fellow fishermen criticise him for his failure and call him the unluckiest. His problem gets aggravated when his young assistant, Manolin as per his parents' instructions leaves him to join other more successful boats. Yet out of respect and love for the old man, the boy keeps going to him every night, and helping him by bringing him food, hauling his fishing gear back, discussing baseball and the player- Di Maggio. One day his strong desire to end his bad luck makes him to cross the boundaries and reach the deep sea in the Gulf for fishing all alone. This time he succeeds in catching a large marlin. But he is not able to drag it in the boat. Instead, the marlin easily drags Santiago's boat into the deep sea. This Tug-of-war lasts for three days. Finally, he has to kill the marlin for his survival. But on his way back, a swarm of sharks attacks the marlin. Santiago kills several of these predators to save the marlin's precious flesh. But his efforts meet with no success as sharks eat away the marlin completely. Totally exhausted, wounded and bruised, he reaches home only with the marlin's head and skeleton and goes off to sleep and dreams of lions on a beach of Africa. He blames himself for going far away into the sea and ended up sacrificing his great adversary. Thus, both of them are destroyed. Though the old man loses, he cannot be called a loser. In fact, at the end, he comes out as a hero who can fight and survive even in unfavourable conditions. It demonstrates his victory over the sea and sharks. His grace, determination strength are rather proved here.

Throughout the text, Santiago is referred to as 'the old man' and the young boy Manolin as 'the boy'.

5.5. LET'S SUM UP

American writer, Hemingway, the Nobel Laureate, is one of the influential writers of Lost Generation. He is remembered for his 'Theories of Omission' and 'Code Hero' which you are going to study in the next unit. The present novel narrates a very heart-breaking story of the struggle between the jinxed old man and the marlin. Santiago, who is an old

experienced poor Cuban (Spanish) fisherman, in his attempt to end his hard luck, ventures to go beyond the boundaries and hooks a large fish after a long struggle just to get it ravaged by sharks. However, though defeated, he is not a loser because despite his age he is exuberant and confident about his capabilities. His confrontation with a worthy opponent rather elevates him irrespective of he wins or loses.

5.6. QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the literary contributions of Ernest Hemingway.
2. Write an introductory note on the novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*.
3. Discuss the plot structure of *The Old Man and the Sea*.
4. Give the overview of the novel in your own words.

5.7. SUGGESTED READING

1. *A biography of Hemingway*
<http://longman.awl.com/kennedy/hemingway/biography.html>
2. Melling, Philip. *Cultural Imperialism, Afro-Cuban Religion, and Santiago's Failure in Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea*. *Hemingway Review* 26.1 (2006): 6-24.
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A CRITICAL STUDY OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA* PART II

Unit Structure

- 6.0. Objectives
- 6.1. Key Literary Elements
 - 6.1.1. Style and Mood
 - 6.1.2. Setting
 - 6.1.3. Symbols
- 6.2. Character Analysis
- 6.3 Code Hero
- 6.4. Let Us Sum Up
- 6.5. Questions
- 6.6. Suggested Reading

6.0. OBJECTIVES

The learners will be familiarised with various themes, points of view, setting, symbols of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Further, the unit will make the learners acquainted with character analysis and Hemingway's 'Code Hero'. They will learn how to analyse the text considering different perspectives. This unit will also facilitate their reading/writing comprehension and encourage logical thinking, and language competence.

6.1. KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

6.1.1. Theme

Hemingway's writing deals with popular themes of American Literature such as war, love, wilderness and loss.

His predominant theme discussed in this novel is "grace under pressure" which has also dominated the writer's own life. The other sub-themes such as determination, honour, friendship, defeat and death, endurance and struggle are explained through a depiction of splendid story of the novel.

6.1.1.1. Theme of Grace under Pressure

The story of Santiago, the old fisherman brings out the theme of grace under pressure that is the nobility of human endeavour in

extremely odd conditions. He has been passing through difficulties such as old age, misfortune, ill-fed, loneliness etc. Since he is refused help due to his bad luck, he has to fish by himself. But he fails to catch fish for consecutive eighty-four days. Still being very strong and confident, he does not accept his defeat and decides to sail beyond the boundaries into the deep sea to catch the biggest fish and thus reverse his misfortune. Finally, he succeeds in catching a marlin after three days struggle. In the process he is badly wounded, injured and tired. Yet he praises the marlin as a worthy opponent. This shows his nobility. But he kills the fish against all odds. However, sharks destroy the marlin and the old man's battle against sharks proves to be futile. In spite of all these problems, his confidence and courage do not allow him to give up.

This theme of grace under pressure is also described through the scene where the bullfighters when enter the ring risk their lives.

6.1.1.2 Theme of Perseverance and Persistence

The story also brings out the theme: "A man can be destroyed but not defeated". Since both possess qualities such as honor, pride and valour they are not ready to give up easily. The eternal law of 'kill or be killed' rules them. Santiago being firm on his opinion that man cannot be defeated, determines to face the marlin who is equally strong. However, though a rival, he loves and respects the marlin due to its endurance, struggle and beauty. Hence, he repents when he has to sacrifice his great opponent. But at the same time destroying such a worthy opponent brings honour, dignity and shows bravery. At the end, both are ruined when sharks devour the marlin totally. Yet the old man wins as he exhibits his strength, capability, patience, courage, and determination. Santiago's qualities make him a hero who is destroyed but is never defeated.

6.1.1.3 Theme of Pride and Determination

The story depicts how pride and determination can cause greatness. Like the ancient classic heroes, even Santiago possesses heroic qualities such as strength, bravery and morality but also has a tragic flaw - his pride which though a strong motivator also causes his downfall. He is well aware of it. His pride ruins both him and the marlin. He blames himself for this and repeatedly apologises to the marlin.

Pride proves to be a source of strength, a strong motivator which encourages him to reach the deep sea to catch fish. Here he enters into the epic struggle with the marlin who is killed due to the old man's pride which also motivates him to fight off sharks. Though he returns home only with the marlin's skeleton, he is not a loser because he is determined to fight, and act and not to give up. His determination and pride stimulate him to fight off these battles which bring him glory and respect. His award is the pride he feels in completing his work.

6.1.1.4 Theme of Friendship

The story is also about friendship. Santiago loves Manolin, the young boy who is his assistant. Even Manolin has high regards for him

and keeps admiring his fishing skills. His love for the old man is expressed through his actions. He begs and steals money for him. Though his parents force him to leave the old man to join more successful fishermen, he continues helping him. Without his support the old man would have starved to death. At the end the boy decides to be the old man's partner in fishery against his parents' will. The author has thus given the importance of friendship in our life.

6.1.1.5 Theme of Love and Respect for Nature

The novel also describes Santiago's love and respect for Nature. He has strong bonding, love and feeling of brotherhood for Nature, the sea and its creatures, birds, fish. He loves the marlin who is both his friend and enemy (opponent).

6.1.2. Point of View

A third person omniscient fictional narrator, who is not a character from the novel, but an outsider narrates the story. The narrator considers characters and also the events in the novel objectively. Santiago's thoughts, struggle, deep feelings, dreams and external events are considered/narrated.

The first section of the novel has a small Cuban fishing village of September, 1950 as the setting. Here the point of view is an omniscient narrator. Mainly Santiago's character and his actions and sometimes Manolin's character are considered here. This enhances our understanding of Santiago's thoughts.

The second section has sea as the setting. Here the novel's central action that is the struggle between the old man and the marlin which lasts for three days and the related dramatic moments take place. Santiago's struggle can be viewed collectively or it can be discussed according to the perspectives of his three main rivals: the marlin, the mako sharks and shovel-nosed sharks.

In this section there are frequent shifts from the omniscient narrator to Santiago's viewpoint. Therefore, different narrative modes are used. The devices such as Santiago's speaking aloud to himself, his third person narration of his thoughts, interior monologue etc are used here.

6.1.3. Style/Mood

The novel is written in a journalistic style which is marked by economy, simplicity and understatement. It consists of short sentences, short paragraphs, minimum words, monologues, minimum figurative language, vigorous language and a positive tone. All this makes it strong, direct, simple, short and very effective. He avoids the use of clichés, informal expressions, hyperboles, and flowery language.

The mood runs through the book is monotonous, stressful, and depressing. This is enhanced by the setting which is mainly Santiago's (a weak old fisherman) small old, frail boat in the sea. A large marlin keeps

pulling the boat for three days. This monotony gets interrupted by killing of the marlin and sharks' attack. But the monotony also helps the old man maintain his grace and thus doesn't allow the depression to affect him. This tone, however, suits the situation as well as Santiago's inner feelings especially when he ventures into deep sea all alone.

6.1.4. Setting

The novel's setting and timing (September, late 1940s) facilitate the mood and tone of the novel and thus effectively support the atmosphere creation of the novel.

Hemingway's stay near Havana, Cuba for 20 years (1940-1959) has provided setting for this novel. The story begins in Spanish speaking small fishing village on the Northern coast of Cuba, below the Tropic of Cancer, near the capital city Havana on Tuesday evening, September 12, and Wednesday morning, September 13, 1950. Cuba is an island in Caribbean where fishing is the main industry.

The second section has sea as the setting. Mostly it is set in Santiago's (the old Man's) boat in North of Cuba in the Gulf stream which attracts marlin in month of September/October. Here the novel's central action that is the struggle between the old man and the marlin which lasts for three days and the related dramatic moments take place. The setting here is quite symbolic.

6.1.5. Symbols

The author has used the iceberg theory: the reader has to analyse the interpretation provided to him effectively. The novel is full of symbolism which helps to develop plot and themes.

As the novel is a kind of Biblical parable, the Christian symbolism is used here. Hence it shows more religious impact. The incidents and characters given here are related in a sense, to the life of Jesus.

The writer considers Santiago as a metaphor and his struggle as an extended metaphor for the human condition. How we have to struggle and go through precariousness in the sea of the unknown.

The crucifixion imagery is used to compare Santiago to Christ. As he possesses qualities of patience, humility and kindness he is similar to Christ who converts defeat into victory, loss into gain and death into life. Like Christ, he has to suffer terribly and fight the destructive forces. The old man's struggling with his mast on his shoulders is similar to Christ's march towards Calvary. His position on his bed with his bleeding arms stretched out evokes the image of Christ on the cross.

Since the marlin also possesses Christian virtues such as endurance, kindness and determination, it symbolises Christianity. Considering its grace and strength, the marlin represents fisherman's perfect opponent.

Sharks symbolize natural rival for both Santiago and the marlin. In fact, sharks are more interested in the marlin than in Santiago. But they have to handle the old man who fights off sharks to save the marlin.

The shovel-nosed sharks symbolically represent the deadly forces of evil.

The numeric symbolism such as three, seven, and forty numbers which have special importance in the Bible, helps to bring out the meaning effectively and shows the religious influence throughout. For example, the old man is without fish for forty days; his struggle lasts for three days; three stages of the struggle; kills the fish on the seventh turn; seven sharks etc.

Nature has been symbolically used. The major symbol is that of the Sea which stands for life/universe. Santiago in his journey on the sea (life) comes across many hurdles which he overcomes bravely. In this voyage, he kills the marlin and gets treasure. He fights off the sharks (difficulties in life) to defend the marlin. Santiago in all this comes out as a hero as though he loses the treasure, he wins the sea battle (life)

Santiago's dreams of lions on the beach of Africa suggest his approach towards life, his love for Nature. He gets these dreams thrice: the first one on the eve of his endeavour; the second one during the epic struggle and the third one at the end of the novel. The lions as cubs stand for his youth, while as adults, they stand for his nobility and strength.

In his childhood, he used to see the lions while in the ship sailing and fishing along the coast of Africa. Lions represent the destructive forces of Nature and also Santiago's lost youth, strength, courage and his pride. Like the lions, the old man being courageous, dares to go into the deep sea for fishing. Being old and weak, he cannot participate actively in life and so he fulfils his desire to see himself strong and adventurous through these dreams of lions. After his long struggle with the marlin, he returns home all exhausted, worn out and wounded. Yet he is not defeated as he just does not give up. His love for both lions, his predators and the marlin are similar. Though he loves the marlin, he kills it for his survival. At the end, his dream of lions suggests that he is not defeated and hence he feels revitalized.

Di-Maggio is another symbolic character here. He is partially handicapped base baller who acts as an inspiration for the old man.

All these symbols used here try to bring out the theme effectively.

6.2. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

6.2.1. Santiago

The author's approach to life is reflected in Santiago's character. He cherishes the old man's life style.

Santiago, the protagonist in this novel, is the old, experienced Cuban (Spanish) fisherman who is all alone. He is so poor that he cannot even afford his own food and drink and has a very frail and traditional fishing boat. His physical appearance a wrinkled neck, bruised hands reflect his age. But this bright, cheerful blue-eyed person is physically tough. Also, this old man with young eyes has more positive approach towards life.

This genius, skilled fisherman is so well versed with Nature that he can easily read Nature's signals. His prudent preparations, excellent knowledge about the sea, its creatures, and his craft facilitate his profession.

Since he is very brave, confident, cheerful, determined, and optimistic, his inability to catch even a single fish for eighty-four days does not discourage him. On the contrary, his sense of pride and determination motivates him to reach the deep sea to get a good catch. He has to face many challenges in his life. The greatest one that he comes across is his fight with a marlin in the deep sea. This epic struggle lasts for a long time. Their endurance and strength are tested and proved here. As both of them are worthy, they do not give up. In the process, he gets badly bruised, wounded, and exhausted. Yet he admires the marlin's beauty, strength, patience, and greatness and addresses it as his worthy rival. Finally, his intelligence and will wins him the battle. But when the marlin is ruined by sharks, he feels ruined. He blames himself for this ruin and apologises the marlin. His nobility, humility is seen here. Even though he loses the marlin, he is not a loser as his pride helps him to be more honest to himself and rather elevates him as it brings him honour and respect and also retains his precious friendship with Manolin.

Thus he is a perfect example of Hemingway's 'Code Hero' who fights against all odds and shows valour and maintains grace even in unfavourable situation.

His dreams of the Lions on the African beach and a wrestling match with a strong person and Great Di Maggio, a baseball player suggest his lost youth, strength and ability. They act as strong motivators and morale booster/source of inspiration for the old man in his struggle.

Since Santiago follows the Christian values such as love, kindness, patience, humility, he is compared to Christ. He represents Jesus Christ who suffers a lot but yet remains undefeated as he gains spiritual victory and thus transforms death into life and defeat into triumph. During the struggle, even the old man suffers terribly. In spite of his wounds and bruises in the nature of Christ's stigmata, he is not willing to give up and is ready to sacrifice his life. Thus, he is a martyr like Christ. Certainly, his refusal to accept his defeat is also human nature.

The old man admires his friendship with Manolin, a young boy who keeps helping him though his parents due to Santiago's bad luck, stop him from going to the old man and ask him to join more successful boats. This saddens both of them as they have developed a rapport, father-son relation.

Manolin prefers to be the old man's staunch follower and considers him as his mentor and teacher. So, at the end he promises him to be his partner while going for fishing. Thus, the old man will continue to live through Manolin.

6.2.2. Manolin

The young boy, Santiago's helper, friend and companion stands for Santiago's youth and represents a new generation. The empowering relation between the old man and the boy symbolises the relation between different generations.

This character appears only at the beginning and at the end of the novel. Yet it helps us understand and cherish the old man's efficacy as a fisherman and as a person. Manolin's character becomes symbolic due to his purity and singleness of purpose.

He first accompanies the old man at the age of five. Considering his love and respect for the old man, he could be called a perfect companion who has to leave the old man as per his parents' will to join more successful fishermen. This saddens him and so he continues to run small errands for the old man. Since he possesses humane quality, he can handle such difficult decision and proves to be the old man's strong physical and mental support. As both love each other, they develop father-son relation.

He considers the old man as his mentor and teacher. So, at the end he admires him for his achievement and decides to be his partner in fishing, and thus becomes his follower against his parents' will. This shows that the old man will exist even after his death through Manolin who will continue spreading the teachings of the old man.

6.2.3. Rogelio

This is a young boy, a villager, who helps Santiago with his luggage – fishnets. This character is static and flat.

6.2.4. Perico

Perico too does not appear in the novel. He has bodega (a small shop) in Santiago's village. He plays an important role in the fisherman's life. He provides him with the newspapers that report the baseball scores. Since the old man is very much interested in this type of news, Perico is seen as a kind man who helps and supports Santiago.

6.2.5. Pedrico

He is another fisherman in Santiago's village. He makes hooks and fish traps for other fishermen and takes care of Santiago's gear. This is a symbolic character. He stands for Saint Peter, a great fisherman and Jesus' closest apostle. As Peter helps Jesus to fish for souls, similarly Pedrico extends his support to Manolin and Santiago by offering them fish for food. Santiago gives the marlin's head to Pedrico. This is symbolic and suggestive of St Peter being the head of the Christian Church and the first Pope.

6.2.6. Martin

This character does not appear physically in the novel. He is introduced through Manolin, the young boy. Martin is a café owner who has a Terrace Restaurant in Santiago's village. He supplies food free of charge to the old man which Manolin fetches for him. The old man appreciates his kindness.

6.2.7. Joe Di Maggio

Joe DiMaggio, one of the greatest baseball players of all time, does not appear physically in the novel, yet plays a significant role throughout. He remained a great famous American baseball player, best all-rounder who was a centre fielder for the New York Yankees from 1936 to 1951.

Santiago loves baseball and especially Yankees and considers Joe DiMaggio as the hero of the Yankee team. This character is used symbolically in the novel as he acts as a role model of strength, hope, and dedication, a morale booster for Santiago. As and when Santiago needs to boost himself, he turns to Di Maggio for inspiration. He keeps motivating Santiago especially during his sufferings and loneliness.

6.2.8. John J. McGraw

He is the coach and manager of the American baseball team. He often visits Terrace restaurant in Santiago's village.

6.2.9. Fishermen

These fishermen are more successful than Santiago as they use modern techniques for fishing and also their boats are well equipped whereas Santiago is still with traditional old stuff for fishing. But these fishermen represent those people who are nasty, selfish and enjoy criticising and discouraging others. Like sharks they snatch away things from Santiago who is more like the marlin. They mock at Santiago on his bringing the skeleton of the marlin.

6.2.10. Marlin

The giant marlin is a large and heavy 18-foot fish with a dark purple head and lavender-striped back and sides, and with weight more than 1500 pounds. It is a sharp contrast to sharks. While it represents a beautiful constructive form of Nature, sharks stand for vicious side of Nature.

Being Santiago's counterpart/alter-ego, the marlin represents him. So, the old man sees it as male and old.

Though Santiago hooks a marlin, the strong fish pulls the boat in the opposite direction and proves its strength, perseverance, power and patience which make it a worthy strong foe. This epic grapple between the two lasts for three days and three nights in the middle of the sea. This is a kind of tug of war which challenges Santiago fully. Both are not ready to give up. Here Santiago wants to subjugate his wimpiness and also to conquer the fish whereas the marlin's purpose is to avoid death which is in fact unavoidable for all living beings. Considering its size, beauty, and courage, Santiago praises it and aptly calls it a noble strong adversary. Rather he considers it nobler and stronger than he is. Struggle with such a worthy rival certainly brings dignity as it reflects endurance, gallantry, and love. Hence at the end, he honestly declares that though he loves it, he has to kill it for survival. When sharks devour the fish totally, Santiago also feels devastated and blames himself for ruining the marlin. But this battle with the marlin resuscitates Santiago.

6.2.11. Sharks

Sharks are Santiago's antagonists. Mako-a mackerel shark has rows of large, sharp teeth and target their prey aggressively. The Shovel-nosed sharks, scavengers, represent the destructive negative force of Nature. They are a sharp contrast to the marlin. They are vicious-the evil elements of the sea whereas the marlin is a majestic and noble companion and a worthy rival to Santiago. Being scavengers, sharks are attracted to the trails of the marlin's blood and attack it to destroy it completely and devastate the old man though he kills several of them. Sharks also represent the people of Jerusalem whose jealousies and rivalries led to the crucifixion of Jesus.

6.2.12. Harpoon

Harpoon plays a crucial role in the novel. This is a tool which fishermen use on the sea to kill or fight off the sea creatures. Santiago uses it to kill the marlin and fight off Sharks. But while fighting off sharks, his harpoon is lost. This aggravates his problems. Its loss is suggestive of Santiago being unarmed and is at the mercy of the powerful sea.

6.2.13. Nature

Nature has a prominent role to play here. It helps to create the necessary ambience and thus facilitates the setting. Its symbolic use helps to depict the story more effectively.

Santiago loves Nature and looks at it as his source of income and guidance and hence its place in his life is of utmost importance. He has been rather its integral part as he has developed a strong connection to different elements of Nature. Even his destiny and tempers of his environment are interconnected. This bonding with Nature/sea is beautifully depicted through various incidence.

He is so well-versed with Nature that he easily understands birds' hints locating fish, understands guidance given by the fish, and depends on stars which he considers his brothers for finding the way/ guidance. He can easily sense the arrival of morning while it is still dark by the trembling sound of flying fish while rowing. Since he treats the creatures and animals of the sea as his friends, he has concern, affection, and sympathy for them. This is seen through his conversation with a small bird; his high regards for the marlin, his opponent: "I love you but have to kill you", his adoration of the marlin and addressing it as a worthy combatant; addressing flying fish as his best friends on the ocean and his empathy and love towards turtles and hawk-bills.

The novel portrays Nature as destructive as well as constructive force. These two forces are closely linked. The description of the old man's physical appearance (he has brown blotches of skin cancer, deep-creased scars, assailed skin, wrinkled neck) shows his long struggle with Nature and also represents Nature's cruelty. The depiction of Shovel-nosed Sharks is another example of the negative destructive representation of Nature. But his dreams of lions suggest his lost youth, strength, and nobility. Lions act as strong motivators for the old man.

The marlin, a strong, large fish, which is more like Santiago, represents the beautiful form of Nature. The epic struggle between the two lasts for three days. Since both are not ready to give up, they have to endure. The fish pulls the boat easily away from the shore and thus wants to avoid death. But the old man is determined to kill it as it is a must for his survival. In this situation also, the old man develops rapport with it because he loves it. He praises its beauty, size and regards it as a worthy rival. He is happy and excited at the good price he will get for the marlin. But the very idea of unworthy people eating the great marlin disturbs him. Here Santiago seems to identify himself with the marlin and other creatures such as the flying fish, turtle, warbler, mako shark. All of them possess the virtue of nobility. All of them are directly related to survival and hence follow the principle of 'survival the fittest'. In the natural order, all will face devastation.

The Sea, the antagonist, plays a strong role throughout the novel as it facilitates the setting as well as the theme. The title of the novel includes the word 'Sea' which is suggestive of its importance here. The sea, for the old fishermen like Santiago, is feminine— "la mar"— a Spanish word which means mother of life. On the contrary, for young fishermen, the sea is masculine. Also, its dangerous form makes it so.

The sea has occupied the maximum portion of the earth. As compared to the land, which we consider as our home, the sea is always scary, deep, profound and obscure. Being mighty, it evokes the feeling of getting lost or being very much trivial.

Symbolically the sea stands for the Universe-- life on which mankind should sail and an individual's role in life. Sea voyage indicates

journey through life. In this voyage, we may come across precious treasure or dangers. The undesirable forces must be defeated.

Both the ship and sea are suggestive of prolificacy as these are sources of livelihood for fishermen/people. Boats/ship also stand for an expedition, escapade or inquisition and represent real-life people who may be active or passive participants. Inactive people due to their limited exposure will have less knowledge whereas people like the old man who love to accept challenges in life, explore life, acquire knowledge and thus become valiant. Fearless as he is, the old man shows guts in accepting the challenge, and ventures into the deep sea. Though he is defeated at the end, he cannot be called a loser because as compared to other fishermen, he acquires more strength and knowledge. His profound experience of the sea helps him to establish a strong connection with the sea easily.

The sea has created a perfect background and mood for the story here. The main event of the story that is the heroic tussle between Santiago and the marlin, a large fish takes place in the sea. In this process, the old man is all alone. This suggests his loneliness and also his abilities, determination, strength and grace under pressure are proved here.

Thus, water and fish play a significant role here. They are related to life and to Christianity.

Another characteristic feature of Nature/sea is its changelessness. The sun rising/setting, the old man's and the other fishermen's routine of going out to sea with the boats, catching their fish and then coming back – all these are set and there is no change.

6.3. THE HEMINGWAY CODE HERO

'Code' means a set of rules for behaviour/conduct. The term 'Code hero' is often used to describe the protagonist and his values in Hemingway's novels.

Hemingway Code Hero manifests certain approach towards the surrounding world. He is an individualist who lives correctly and strictly follows the ideals such as honour, valour, and resilience in life/world that is sometimes full of immense disorder, distress, and tragedy. He thus guards his emotions. Being brave and adventurous person, he likes to participate actively in various manly activities such as travelling, bull-hunting, fishing etc. Violence and disorder are the part and parcel of his world. So, he should be prepared to repel even death. He should be so bold and fearless that death should not scare him. He is expected to behave honourably even though he is facing defeat/suffering and thus should prove his masculinity, grace, and ability.

Santiago's character described in *The Old Man and the Sea* is a very good example of code hero who possesses all these ideals of honour,

valour, and endurance. He has been going through hardship in his life. The depiction of paradoxical values such as grandeur /nobility; determination/incertitude; and conquest/defeat explain his character very well. Noble as he is, he doesn't hate other fishermen even though they ridicule him. In fact, he accepts the situation as his bad luck; admits his flaws and thus avoids dispute. All this elevates him. His bitter experience with sea does not affect his love for it. At the end, his realisation and acceptance of his inability, insufficiency, and so resorting to prayers to God – all this shows his modesty. A perfect blend of chastity and nobility in Santiago's character makes him an ideal code hero.

6.4. QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the importance of setting in this novel.
2. Write short notes on the following:
 - a. Style of Writing
 - b. Point of View
 - c. Mood/Tone
3. Elaborate the epic struggle between Santiago and the marlin.
4. What does Santiago do to revert his misfortune?
5. Discuss the main theme and subthemes of the novel.
6. "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." Illustrate your answer with a special reference to *The Old Man and the Sea*.
7. Write a detailed note on symbols used in this novel.
8. Discuss the plot of this novel.
9. "Santiago's character is the best example of Hemingway's Code Hero". Illustrate.
10. How does Nature/sea play a significant role in this novel?
11. Who is Manolin? What role does he play in the old man's life?
12. What is the importance of the lions in the novel?
13. Is Santiago a successful fisherman? Give reasons for your answer.
14. Give the character analysis of the following:
 - a. marlin
 - b. Fishermen
 - c. Joe DiMaggio
 - d. Sharks
 - e. Perico
 - f. Pedrico
 - g. Harpoon

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A CRITICAL STUDY OF JOHN STEINBECK'S "THE CHRYSANTHEMUMS" AND ALICE WALKER'S "EVERYDAY USE"

Unit Structure

7.0. Objectives

7.1. John Steinbeck's "The Chrysanthemums"

7.1.1 Introduction

7.1.2. Plot

7.1.3. Themes

7.1.4. Symbols

7.1.5. Characters

7.1.6. Questions

7.1.7. Suggested Reading

7.2. Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"

7.2.1. Introduction

7.2.2. Plot

7.2.3. Themes

7.2.4. Symbols

7.2.5. Characters

7.2.6. Questions

7.2.7. Suggested Reading

7.0. OBJECTIVES

In this unit, learners will read two representative stories pointing the failure of the American Dream. John Steinbeck's "Chrysanthemums" shows how individual happiness is marred because of fixed gender roles in society and Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" presents the racial discriminations leading to the Civil Rights in America. After studying this unit, the learners will be able to understand two American short story writers of the 20th century American Literature.

7.1. JOHN STEINBECK'S "THE CHRYSANTHEMUMS"

7.1.1. Introduction

The Chrysanthemums is one of the most popular stories by John Steinbeck, the 1962 Nobel Laureate in literature. He was born in 1902, in

Salinas, California. Salinas was a prosperous farming valley then. The rich soil, beauty and the people of the valley formed the sensibilities of Steinbeck and therefore, most of his works such as “Mice and Men” (1937) and the “East of Eden” (1952) are set in this valley. His first success came with the “Tortilla Flat” (1935) and proved himself as a classic writer of America with the Pulitzer Prize winning “Grapes of Wrath” in 1939.

“Chrysanthemums” was first published in 1937 and was later included in “The Long Valley” in 1938. The story is set in the Salinas Valley in winter. The beauty of the valley and the agricultural activities during this time comes alive to the reader. Many writers point to biographical elements in the story saying that Elisa Allen could be modelled on his wife Carol and story may reflect their difficult marriage. But since Steinbeck did not confirm anything directly, it is difficult to prove.

7.1.2. Plot

After describing the Salinas valley in the winter and the agricultural activities at this time of the year, the story spots on Elisa working in her flower garden. She was in her gardening costume and was cutting down the previous year’s chrysanthemum stalk. She was eagerly looking every now and then at her husband who was talking to two men in business suits. They were standing by the tractor shed. This brings to light her interest in the outside world. She is thirty-five years old with “lean and strong” face, her eyes are “as clear as water”. She works with vigour and her hand is “over-eager, over powerful”- “The chrysanthemum stems seemed too small and easy for her energy”. The reader becomes aware of her underutilised potentialities and energies. Henry, her husband comes and appreciates her strong new crop of chrysanthemums. He says with well-meant banter that he wished she could grow apples that big in the orchards. Thrilled by the prospect, Elisa confidently says she could do it as she knew a lot about crops. Henry rejects her offer with his conviction that Elisa’s skill works only with flowers. She asks him about the two men he was talking to. He replies that they bought his three years old steers and got a good price. He offered her to go for dinner and a movie and then goes out to arrange for some couple of horses. Elisa returns to her work with her vigorous fingers but interrupted by the arrival of a strange caravan drawn by a horse and a little burro. She notices the “big stubble bearded man” who drives up to her house and asks for direction and work to “mend pots and sharpen knives and scissors”. To her, he was “a very big man” and although he had grey hair, he did not look old. Elisa and the man involve into a flirty and boisterous conversation. He begs for work to Elisa. Elisa refuses to have any work. He is clever enough to resort to flattery. He appreciates Elisa’s flowers. Elisa feels excited and passionately tells the man about her chrysanthemums and gives him some sprouts. Elisa gets deeply interested in the man’s life. Elisa admires the adventurous life of the Tinker. She asks him whether he sleeps in the wagon itself she wished women could live the life he does. But the man says that it will be scary and lonesome for a woman. Elisa speaks to him

from a kneeling position and in her excitement, almost reaches to touch him. He leaves her soon and she notices the disappearing wagon. When he leaves, she returns to her house and bathes and gets ready for the dinner with her husband. Henry arrives home and gets ready too. As they head for the town, she sees the chrysanthemum sprouts she had given to the tinker lying by the side of the road. Soon after, their car passes the wagon. Elisa does not look. Henry says she is different again. Elisa assures that she is looking forward to the dinner. She asks Henry whether they can have wine and Henry agrees. She asks about the fights and whether women go to fights. Henry says that some women do ask jokingly whether she would love to come to one. She declines and turns her face from Henry with her coat collar and cries.

7.1.3. Themes

Gender disparity is the most obvious idea that persists the entire story is the failure of the society to recognition a woman's true potentialities. Elisa is ambitious, powerful and strong and has planter's hand. But her husband fails to recognise her potentialities as he cannot rise above his deep-seated beliefs in stereotypical patriarchal values. She is unsatisfied as her energies are underused and her desire to enter the outside world is thwarted. She remains suffocated in the "closed pot" of her house and garden. Although her husband, the two businessmen and the tinker lack her spirit and imagination, they are able to live a much-fulfilled life than hers.

Isolation is another theme of the story. Elisa is isolated -physically as well as emotionally. She keeps her feelings of isolation to herself.

Inhibitions and control is another theme. Elisa wants to unleash her free spirit as we see in her appreciation of the life of the tinker but she succumbs to the norms that society demands from her as a woman. Inhibitions win at the end whenever she tries to loosen her restraints whether it be the appreciation of her naked body or watching a masculine fight.

7.1.4 Symbols

The chrysanthemums may symbolise Elisa's femininity and sexuality which is strong, lovely and thriving but deemed powerless and insignificant. It has only ornamental value. Elisa herself identifies with the chrysanthemums. When tinker notices the flowers, she brightens as if he noticed her instead. The tossed chrysanthemums devastates her. The rejection of the flowers parallels the rejection a woman's desire beyond the boundaries defined by society.

The heavy clothes she is wearing in the beginning may represent the restraints the society imposes on women.

The chrysanthemums may also symbolise Elisa's children. The way she nurtures and protects them from pests with her 'terrier fingers' represents a mother's engagement.

The Salinas valley may symbolise Elisa's emotional life. The valley looks like a "closed pot" representing the emotional suffocation of Elisa. There is no sunshine in the valley like there is no penetration of light and hope in Elisa's emotional and physical life.

7.1.5 Characters

Elisa Allen

Elisa Allen is the tragic protagonist of the story. She is strong, ambitious and passionate -very unlike a woman her husband imagines her to be. She is seen working in her flower gardens when the story unfolds. The reader is immediately made aware of her energy and interest. She is described as a woman with "lean and strong" face with "eyes as clear as water". She works with vigour and "The chrysanthemum stems seemed too small and easy for her energy". She has 'terrier fingers' to destroy pests. These descriptions make us aware of the underutilised potentialities and energies. Elisa offers her husband to work in the ranches but is rejected. Her desire to see and involve in the outside world is thwarted. She does not have children and uses all her energy in maintaining her house and her garden. The pride she takes in housekeeping is exaggerated and pathetic. Her stifled and frustrating life makes her look for the tinker for stimulating conversation. She rarely gets a chance to express her real feeling and emotions as her husband lacks the imagination to penetrate her feelings and unconventional desires. We can see the witty and livelier side of Elisa only when she talks to the tinker. The tinker brings to light Elisa's thirst for adventure and romance in her life. In the tinker Elisa finds a man whose energy matches hers. This brings a feminine aspect to her which otherwise is missing in the story. Elisa seems to be trapped perennially in the patriarchal mindset that refuses to delve beyond the boundaries.

Henry Allen

Henry Allen is Elisa's husband. The author avoids direct description of the man. Reader gets to know him only through his interactions with Elisa. We can assume that he is hardworking and successful as we are told that there is little work to be done in his ranch by the foothill. He apparently seems to be loving and caring. We can see him offering his wife to go out for dinner and movie, treating her with respect and care. But, at the same time we also see that he fails to understand his wife's deeper emotions. This failure ensues from his beliefs in the patriarchal values. The banters he meant to share with his wife are based on the conventional gender roles. We see this in the very beginning when he appreciates Eliza's strong new crop of chrysanthemums and teasingly offers her work at the apple orchards. He is unable to see the sparkle in Elisa's eyes at the offer. When she proposes to do it, he refuses to believe in her power and admits that all her knowledge works well for flowers. Towards the end, he further teases his wife whether she would like to go for fights. He believes that a woman likes movies and dinner and a man likes fight and ranching. Therefore, he seems to be a total foil to Elisa who is imaginative and transcends typical gender boundaries.

The Tinker

The tinker is a “big stubble bearded man” who rides a “curious vehicle” drawn by a horse and a little burro. He moves around places in this caravan and “mends pots and sharpen knives and scissors”. His visit excites Elisa’s otherwise unromantic life. Elisa idealises the life of the tinker to be adventurous and smart. She finds him physically attractive and a match to her energy. He flirts and banters with Elisa and is clever enough. He becomes successful in convincing a sceptical Elisa to give him work. He first begs for work and later resorts to flattery. The fact that he tossed away the chrysanthemum shoots given by Elisa proves that he does not have any business with Elisa other than to sell his services. The brief meeting with the Tinker brings forth to us the best in Elisa- she becomes bright, expressive and her feminine, erotic potentiality is revealed.

7.1.6. Questions

1. Critically appreciate the story the Chrysanthemums
2. Write a note on the plot of the story the Chrysanthemums
3. Discuss the themes in the Chrysanthemums
4. Write a short note on the symbols in in the Chrysanthemums
5. Write a note on the characters of the story.
6. Write a note on the setting of the story.

7.1.7 Suggested Reading

1. Steinbeck Quarterly Pellow, C. Kenneth. “The Chrysanthemums Revisited”
2. Busch, Christopher S. "Longing for the Lost Frontier: Steinbeck's Vision of Cultural Decline in 'The White Quail' and 'The Chrysanthemums'." *Steinbeck Quarterly* 26.03-04 (Summer/Fall 1993): 81-90.
3. Pellow, C. Kenneth. "'The Chrysanthemums' Revisited." *Steinbeck Quarterly* 22.01-02 (Winter/Spring 1989): 8-16.
4. Palmerino, Gregory J. "Steinbeck's The Chrysanthemums." *Explicator* 62.3 (2004): 164-167.
5. Dickmann, Denise "John Steinbeck's "The Chrysanthemums": A Woman Bound by Society". In Kennedy, X.J.; Dana, Gioia. *Literature: an introduction to fiction, poetry, drama, and writing* (13 ed.). Boston: Person. pp. 237–244. ISBN 9780321971661.

7.2. ALICE WALKER’S “EVERYDAY USE”

7.2.1 Introduction

“Everyday Use” is one of the most illustrious stories by Alice Walker. She is a prolific writer and an avowed activist for civil rights and anti-war movements. She advocates “feminism of colour” and coined the term "womanist" in 1983 to refer to a black feminist. She was born in 1944

in Georgia and has been actively participating and writing for peace, humanity and justice. Her signature novel –“The Color Purple” (1982), won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

“Everyday Use” was first anthologized in 1973 in “Love and Trouble”. The story is set during the Civil Rights Movement in America, a movement that started in the 1940s to end racial discrimination and to establish equal rights for the black Americans. This was the time when many African Americans tried to redefine their social, cultural, and political identity in American society and to assess their own contribution in the culture-scape of America. In the process, they delved into their own African past and heritage to establish themselves as a visible and unified group. Two groups-Black Panthers and Black Muslims - were formed to resist the white dominated culture. Two of the characters of the story -Dee and Hakim perhaps represents these two groups.

The story ironically criticizes the shallow understanding of these values and ideals by some of the younger militant generation through the characters of Dee and Hakim-a-barber. Both these characters talk apparently about their involvement with the black cause and heritage but fails to understand the deeper meaning of it. Both shun hard labour- Dee rejects the knowledge of making a quilt for herself but wants to display it on her wall as a mark of respect for black heritage. When Mama enquired whether Hakim is one of those Muslims who lives down the road, leading a busy life with feeding cattle, Hakim dismisses it immediately saying “farming and raising cattle is not my style”. Both Dee and Hakim are unwilling to commit to the hard work of the cause and faith they claim to embrace.

7.2.2. Plot

The story is narrated in the first person by Mama. It begins with Mama’s decision to wait in the yard for her daughter Dee. She thinks over her other daughter Maggie who will remain nervous till Dee stays in the house because of her burn marks. Mama dreams of reuniting with Dee in a TV show appearing exactly like Dee wants her to be – “a hundred pounds lighter”, fair and with a quick and witty tongue. But Mama knows even before she wakes up that it is a mistake as she cannot think of looking a white man in the eye. Dee is more assertive. Mama’s thoughts are interrupted when Maggie arrives in the yard. She recalls the house fire when she carried Maggie, badly burnt, out of the house. Dee was watching the flames engulf the house.

Mama believed that Dee hated Maggie too like the house that caught fire until she raised enough money with the help of the church to send Dee to school in Augusta. Mama hated when Dee tried to impose ideas and life-style of others onto her family when she came home. Mama eagerly awaits Maggie’s marriage to John Thomas. Then only she can relax and sing peacefully at home.

Dee arrives and Mama stops Maggie from scuttling back into the house. The arrival of Maggie with Hakim-e-barber is described critically by Mama showing strong disapproval of the style and appearance of both Dee and the strange man. Hakim-a-barber greets and tries to hug Maggie, who retreats.

Dee brings her Polaroid camera and snaps pictures of Mama and Maggie in front of their house. Then, she kisses Mama on the forehead. Hakim awkwardly tries to shake Maggie's hand. Dee corrects her mom when Mama called her Dee that she has changed her name to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo as she could not bear it anymore to be named after her oppressors. Mama informs Dee that she was in fact named after her Aunt Dicie, who was named after Grandma Dee, who bore the name of her mother as well.

Mama is unable to pronounce Dee's new African name and Hakim-e-barber. Mama also wonders whether Hakim-a-barber and Dee are married. While eating Hakim-a-barber says that he *does* not eat collard greens or pork. Dee enjoys her meal and is delighted to *see* the family using the benches her father made. She then, jumps to the butter churn in the corner and asks Mama for its top.

After Dinner, Dee searches the trunk at the foot of Mama's bed while Maggie worked in the kitchen. Dee comes with two quilts made by her mother, aunt, and grandmother. Dee *asks* her mother for the quilts. Mama hears Maggie dropping something in the kitchen and slamming the door after that. Mama offers Dee some other quilts as she had promised Maggie to give her the quilts. Dee is *stung* and argues that Maggie will put the quilts for everyday use as she will not be able to appreciate the value of it by preserving them. Mama replies that Maggie knows how to quilt and can make more. Maggie comes and offers Dee the quilts. Mama is hit by a strange feeling *when* she saw Maggie. She impulsively hugs Maggie and pulls her into the room. She snatches the quilts out of Dee's hands, and places them in Maggie's lap and tells Dee to take one or two of the other quilts.

When Dee and Hakim-a-barber leave, Dee tells Mama that she does not understand her own heritage. Kissing Maggie, Dee advises her to try and improve herself. She says it's a new day for black Americans but the way she and Mama live their lives, they will never be able to know it. Mama saw Maggie smiling and opined that it may be at the sunglasses but it was a real smile. They then enjoyed sitting in the quiet of the yard until bedtime.

7.2.3 Themes

Heritage

The true meaning of heritage is the predominant theme of the story. Dee has a very superficial understanding of the meaning of heritage and has constructed a new heritage for herself rejecting the real one. Her

adoption of a new name suggests her failure to understand her own family legacy. Besides, Dee is unable to see heritage as a living, ongoing creation. She sees it as dead, a thing of the past, unable to see how her own sister and mother is contributing to keep it alive by “living” it.

The Divisive Power of Education

Education in the story comes as a disruptive power rather than a valuable one. Mama send Dee to school with lot of struggles. Mama and Maggie are barely educated. Whenever Dee comes back home, she unsettles their simple happy domestic life by “forcing” strange ideas unto them “without pity”.

The lofty ideals of education and the opportunities that came with it, split Dee from her family. It also strips her of the sense of identity. Dee comes home as a “threatening ambassador of a new world that has left Maggie and Mama behind.”

7.2.4. Symbols

Quilts

Quilts symbolize the continued heritage of different generations. They are fragments of living legacy and connects one generation with the other. They document the stories of struggle and shared family life that passes it on to the next generations. Mama and Maggie too are capable to weave their own stories and pass it on to continue the legacy.

Yard

The yard symbolizes a free space. Mama meticulously prepares the yard for Dee’s arrival in the beginning and sits peacefully when Dee leaves the house. She praises the comforts of the yard and prefers it to the confining house. The yard is a place where air passes freely perhaps blowing away Mama’s mental agony and regrets. The yard seems to evoke safety, a place where they can exert their own selves.

Sunglasses

The sunglasses that Dee wears may symbolize her ornamental perspective-an artificial viewpoint she wears to adorn herself without understanding the real and the deeper meaning. When Dee leaves at the end, Mama notices Maggie smile, a real smile and comments it might be the sunglasses.

7.2.5. Characters

Mama

Mama is the narrator of the story. She voices that she is a “large, big-boned woman with rough man working hands”. She describes her strength with full power and conviction that she can ‘kill and clean a hog as mercilessness as a man” and knocked a bull calf once. Her fat keeps her warm in winter and she can work all day outside. There is no resentment when she describes herself like that although she dreams of reuniting with

Dee on TV shows and appearing as her daughter wants her to be lighter, fairer and with quick wit. But she knows that all these are a mistake and the TV shows will not show the reality. She is frank and open and is not deluded easily. Mama shows strong control and understanding of her life and family legacy.

Maggie

Maggie is the total opposite to her flashy sister Dee. She is shy and reticent and lives with Mama. She was burnt as a young girl when their house caught fire. Maggie lacks confidence and lumbers when she walks. She often runs and hangs in the background when there are other people around. She is unable to make eye contact but is kind and dutiful. She is willing to let Dee have the quilts that was promised to her as she can make the quilts herself. Her lack of confidence also seems to arise from Dee's imposing ideas and criticism of her own sister.

Dee

Dee is Mama's flashy and educated elder daughter. She arrives home in a bright yellow-orange dress that hurt Mama's eyes. She is imposing and does not allow her desires to be thwarted. When Mama did not let her have the quilts to display, she becomes furious claiming that Mama and Maggie don't understand their heritage.

Hakim-A-Barber

Hakim-A-Barber is a Black Muslim and adds humour to the story with his superfluous style and mannerisms. He is short and stocky, and has waist-length hair and bushy beard. Hakim-e-barber's relation with Dee is confusing to Mama. She does not know whether he is Dee's boyfriend or husband.

7.2.6. Questions

1. Critically appreciate the story 'Everyday Use'
2. Write a note on the plot of the story 'Everyday Use'
3. Discuss the themes in the story 'Everyday Use'
4. Write a short note on the symbols.
5. Write a short note on the characters of the story.
6. Write a short note on the setting of the story.

7.2.7. Suggested Reading

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- ❖ Mullins, Matthew (2013). "Antagonized by the Text, Or, It Takes Two to Read Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use'". *Journal of the Southern Comparative Literature Association*. 37: 37–53.

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A CRITICAL STUDY OF AMY TAN'S 'TWO KINDS' AND BERNARD MALAMUD'S 'THE GERMAN REFUGEE'

Unit Structure

8.0. Objectives

8.1. Amy Tan's 'Two Kinds'

- 8.1.1. Introduction to Amy Tan
- 8.1.2. Introduction to 'Two Kinds'
- 8.1.3. Plot
- 8.1.4. Identity
- 8.1.5. Intergenerational and Intercultural Conflicts
- 8.1.6. Narrative Resolution
- 8.1.7. Symbol
- 8.1.8. Characterization
- 8.1.9. Questions
- 8.1.10. Suggested Reading

8.2. Bernard Malamud's 'The German Refugee'

- 8.2.1. Introduction to Bernard Malamud
- 8.2.2. Plot
- 8.2.3. Themes
- 8.2.4. Setting
- 8.2.5. Symbols
- 8.2.6. Title
- 8.2.7. Questions
- 8.2.8. Suggested Reading

8.0. OBJECTIVES

In this unit, the learners will be able to understand two short stories from the 20th century American Literature. Amy Tan's short story explores the filial relationship, while Malamud's *The German Refugee* explore social realism and ethnic identity. After studying this unit, the learners will be able to critically examine Amy Tan's *Two Kinds* and Bernard Malamud's *The German Refugee*.

8.1. AMY TAN'S TWO KINDS

8.1.1. Introduction to Amy Tan

Amy Tan is an American writer whose works explore mother-daughter relationships and the Chinese-American immigrant experience. She was born in the U.S. immigrant parents from China. 'Two Kinds' is part of her first novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) which became the longest-running New York Times bestseller for that year. When we read this story as a chapter in "The Joy Luck Club", "Two Kinds" completes Tan's collection of stories that are about hope and the way she looked at the world (2010). Amy Tan's other famous and acclaimed novels include *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), and *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005).

8.1.2. Introduction to 'Two Kinds'

The story is set in San Francisco, America and are retrospectively told to cover the period of the 1950s. In 'Two Kinds,' we find the theme of hope, American dream, assimilation, and acceptance, success vs failure, rebellion and acceptance, identity, responsibility, blame and independence.

8.1.3. Plot:

The story is a part of *The Joy Luck Club*. It describes the lives of four Asian women who fled China in the 1940s and their four very Americanized daughters. The novel focuses on Jing-mei "June" Woo, a thirty-six-year-old daughter, who, after her mother's death, takes her place at the meetings of a social group called the Joy Luck Club. The old woman starts with the stories of the old times and wishes her daughters also experience the richness of the past. Jing-mei gets highly influenced by these stories. The narrator is Suyuan Woo, the founder of the Joy Luck Club. She has experienced war-torn China when she had to escape China but left her twin daughters behind. She has one American born daughter Jing-mei who meets her twin half-sister after her mother's death.

The title of this short story "Two Kinds" describes the theme of this story. The mother had stated that there are only two types of daughters. "Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind." Jing-Mei did not understand the truth or meaning behind that declaration until after her mother's death. She understands the importance of her stress over the character building. Jing-Mei realized that her mother only meant that she could be an obedient child by listening to her mother while at the same time follow her own heart and want her own prodigy in life. The last paragraph in this story also indicates the theme of two halves being equal to one.

"It was not the only disappointment my mother felt in me" (Tan 327). Growing up with a mother like mine, disappointment came very easily. In Amy Tan's "Two Kinds" the mother and daughter were always on edge because the mother expected too much and the daughter could never meet up to the standards that she had set. After thirty years went by after their big falling out the mother gives the daughter a piano as a sign of

forgiveness, but the daughter has a remaining feeling of guilt for a long time. "In my story, my mother expected a lot from me, and my big mistake that changed our lives forever was forgiven, but I will carry that shame forever. We had just celebrated the new year, a sign of new beginnings. The past fall my mother and I had a fight and were only communicating on a need to know. I had a boyfriend at the time, we had been dating for almost two years. I loved him and he loved me and I felt like nothing could ever go wrong, boy was I wrong. It was a cold morning; I woke up feeling strange but I could not quite figure out why. Jacob, my boyfriend, was the one who put the idea in my head. A couple of hours later my life had gone from just a normal nineteen-year-old to being a nineteen-year-old facing being a mother."

In Amy Tan's "Two Kinds" Jin-Mei mother had dreams as she was coming to America. "My mother believed you could be anything you wanted to be in America. You could open a restaurant. You could work for the government and get a good retirement. You could buy a house with almost no money down. You could become rich. You could become instantly famous" (Tan 377). She is not alone. There are many people who come to America to make all these dreams come true. They all come with their children with the hope of finding a better life, to get away from the insecurities in their countries. However, parents who immigrate to America can put too much pressure on their children to fulfill the parents' dream, and by putting too much pressure on their children it leads the children to live a limited life with fewer choices.

This story is about a mother and daughter who came to America to find a better life. They moved from China. In the story, the mother wants to turn her daughter into a 'prodigy' so she can be famous. The mother works as a housekeeper, and she "Believes you could be anything you wanted to be in America" (Tan 377). In this quote one can see that the mother believed, but just not for her; instead, she believed that her daughter will have the American life.

"Two Kinds" by Amy Tan is a heart-breaking story, it's a powerful example of conflicting personalities and needs that cause a struggle between parent and child. In every family, parents have, at one point, imposed their failures and expectations on their children and in worse cases have even tried to live through their children. At times, it can be in the best interest of the child to have a parent motivate them in a specific direction, but as in this story it can sometimes backfire, and the child can be left with feelings of disapproval and questions of self-worth.

Jing-Mei is a complicated character who is battling with many conflicts throughout the story on what she really wants to do. She can't decide whether to please her mother or herself... The mother seems to be a bit controlling. But after researching on the Asian society, I have discovered that is the norm. The climax of the story is a piano recital and the events that unfold the day after. Her mother is so proud of Amy's musical talent; she

even invites Auntie Lindo and Waverly to Amy's first piano recital. Although Amy slacked on her practicing during the rising action of the story, she actually feels confident about doing well at the recital. She is overconfident, in fact, and her performance was a disaster. She disappoints her mother, and makes a fool of her mother or herself? It is also clear that she has disappointed herself, and she regrets not taking lessons more seriously. The next day, Amy's stubborn mother expects her to practice piano as if nothing has gone wrong. This is when Amy puts her foot down and refuses. To get her mother to back off, she tells her mother that she wished she were dead.

An-mei Hsu grew up in the home of the wealthy merchant Wu Tsing. She was without status because her mother was only the third wife. After her mother's suicide, An-mei came to America, married, and had seven children. Like Jing-mei Woo, An-mei's daughter Rose is unsure of herself. She is nearly prostrate with grief when her husband, Ted, demands a divorce. After a breakdown, she finds her identity and learns to assert herself.

Lindo Jong was betrothed at infancy to another baby, Tyan-yu. They married as preteens and lived in Tyan-yu's home. There, Lindo was treated like a servant. She cleverly tricked the family, however, and gained her freedom. She came to America, got a job in a fortune cookie factory, met and married Tin Jong. Her daughter, Waverly, was a chess prodigy who became a successful tax accountant. Ying-Ying St. Clair grew up a wild, rebellious girl in a wealthy family. After she married, her husband deserted her, and Ying-Ying had an abortion and lived in poverty for a decade. Then she married Clifford St. Clair and emigrated to America. Her daughter, Lena, is on the verge of a divorce from her architect husband, Harold Livotny. She established him in business and resents their unequal division of finances.

'Two Kinds' by Amy Tan, we have the theme of hope, identity, rebellion, responsibility, blame, independence, and acceptance. Narrated in the first person by a woman called Jing-mei Woo the story is a memory piece and after reading the story the reader realizes that Tan may be exploring the theme of hope. Jing-mei's mother has hopes for her daughter. She wants her to be famous or at least to be a prodigy. She devotes a lot of her energy in trying to make Jing-mei into something that Jing-mei isn't. Something which would play on the theme of identity. It is also interesting that Jing-mei's mother believes that once you live in America you can be anything. This may be important as Jing-mei's mother appears to be chasing the American dream. However, she is doing so through Jing-mei. If anything, she is living her life vicariously. There is also no doubting that Jing-mei's mother is a hard-working woman however she doesn't seem to realize that not every child is a prodigy and Jing-mei herself probably understands that she is not a prodigy. Though at times she aspires to be one which may be the case for many children. To have the aspirations that they too can be seen to be special or gifted or

different from their peers. What child would not like the focus to be placed on them? Particularly if the spotlight placed on them is positive. Each and every child likes to be thought of as special. However, the definition of special is different for each parent.

Jing-mei's mother also appears to be boastful about Jing-mei's talents. It is not so much that she is proud of Jing-mei's achievements it is more a case that she wishes to be better than others. Which is understandable considering that she has had a hard life. Losing a husband and children while in China. However, there does not seem to be any type of reality check when it comes to Jing-mei's mother. It is okay to have a child of average ability, which Jing-mei is, however that is not good enough for Jing-mei's mother. It is as though she wants to distance herself from the pain of her past and the only way, she knows how to do that is by forcing Jing-mei into being something she is not. Which again plays on the theme of identity. Jing-mei's relationship with her mother is strained due to her mother's wishes that Jing-mei is something that she either is not or will never be.

It is inevitable that Jing-mei is going to rebel against her mother. It is as though she is forced to after her efforts at the talent contest. Jing-mei doesn't want to accept responsibility for her own actions and the fact that she played badly. She wants her mother to give out to her. To start an argument with her in order that Jing-mei can blame her mother. When the reality is that Jing-mei set the bar too high for herself just like her mother has. It is also interesting that Old Chong is the only one that claps for Jing-mei at the talent contest. His actions show loyalty regardless of how badly Jing-mei played. If anything, the talent contest acts as the catalyst for Jing-mei to gain independence from her mother. She knows that she may not be good enough to be a prodigy and the embarrassment that she felt at the talent contest has in some ways shattered her confidence. It is easier for Jing-mei to give up than pursue something that she may not necessarily hit the mark for (a prodigy).

It is also interesting that Jing-mei doesn't play the piano again. Not till her mother dies. It is possible that her confidence took a sufficient knock that playing the piano became impossible to Jing-mei. It acts as a constant reminder of her own failings. The end of the story is also interesting as Tan appears to be exploring the theme of acceptance. By having Jing-mei play the piano in her parent's house Tan may be suggesting that despite what had happened when she was a young girl Jing-mei no longer has any ill will towards her mother. The two pieces she plays at the end also act as symbolism. The first piece the 'Pleading Child' in many ways mirrors how Jing-mei felt as a child. Pressurized by her mother to be something she wasn't. While the second piece 'Perfectly Contented' suggests exactly that. That Jing-mei is content in her life. She may have had a childhood she did not wish for but she also appears to have found acceptance. Jing-mei knows who she is. Jing-mei's mother wanted the best for her daughter. Though unfortunately for her Jing-mei

was on a different path. Jing-mei was always going to disappoint her mother no matter what she did as a child. In reality, the hopes and aspirations that Jing-mei's mother had for Jing-mei were really her own hopes and aspirations. She was living her life through Jing-mei.

Jing-Mei's mother, Mrs. Woo has high hopes for her daughter and wants her daughter to be a child prodigy. She is always urging Jing-Mei to try new things and discover new talents. "My mother believed you could be anything you wanted to be in America. [...] America was where all my mother's hopes lay." This reflects her chase of the American dream and hope for her daughter's assimilation into the American culture. While the mother may not exactly know where her daughter's prodigal talents lie, she is nevertheless adamant that her daughter is destined for greatness, by virtue of having been born in America.

8.1.4. Identity

The tension arises when Mrs. Woo's belief in American dream meets Jing-Mei's conscious reason; meaning Mrs. Woo thinks that her daughter can perform as being a prodigy through hard work, while Jing-Mei cannot show promise in her mother's chosen areas. We find Jing-Mei striving to find her actual identity over the forced identity Mrs. Woo is trying to impose upon her. Initially, she is as excited as her mother to find the right prodigy. When she looks at herself in the mirror, Jing-Mei feels strange to herself. Realizing her identity – understanding that *"it would always be this ordinary face,"* she cries crazily; and tries to scratch out the face reflected in the mirror. She then saw what seemed to be the prodigy side of herself. She saw an angry powerful girl that only wanted to use that energy to resist her mother's hopes for her. Jing-Mei continues to look at the "ugly girl" she sees in the mirror, as anger and rebellion become sources of her identity. She knows that she may not be good enough to be a prodigy and the embarrassment that she felt at the talent contest has in some ways shattered her confidence. After the repeated *"raised hopes and failed expectations"*, she feels that Mrs. Woo is trying to make Jing-Mei into something that Jing-Mei isn't. "You want me to be someone that I'm not." Her mother seems to have set a very high bar for Jing-Mei and when she cannot satisfy them, she feels inadequate, "I'll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be." She always felt that she was disappointing her mother. The constant comparison with Auntie Lindo's daughters fuels her inferiority complex. Jing-Mei wonders between her being and becoming and when failed, she cries at her mother, "Why don't you like me the way I am?"

8.1.5. Intergenerational and intercultural conflict

"Two Kinds" successfully depicts the struggles that an immigrant mother and her bicultural daughter go through, and bring awareness to this particular mother-daughter dyad in America. The tension arises when Mrs. Woo's belief in American dream meets Jing-Mei's conscious reason; meaning Mrs. Woo thinks that her daughter can perform as being a prodigy through hard work, while Jing-Mei cannot show promise in her

mother's chosen areas. The psychological interior of Mrs. Woo's self is shaped by her belief in the discourse of the American Dream's promise of success. On the other hand, since Jing-Mei's thinking, born in modern America, is structured by reason. *"Unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be me"*

In Tan's words, *"American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these things do not mix?"* It is Mrs. Woo's character that pushes Jing-Mei into American "circumstances." By rebelling against her mother – despite having internalized American values for her daughter's benefit – the girl is rejecting her mother's dreams and asserting an identity devoid of perfection. (Chinese character to be the best and achieve something?)

After the embarrassing experience at the talent show, Jing-Mei started to just fail and not try to do anything right hoping her mother would give up. Only two days after the terrible recital, Mrs. Woo tells her to practice the piano again. After yelling back and forth to each other, her mother pulls Jing-Mei towards the piano and shoves her hard onto the bench. A tear-streaked Jing-Mei replies: *"You want me to be someone that I'm not! [...] I'll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!"* Mrs. Woo says, *"Only two kinds of daughters [...] Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!"*

It isn't until this fight between the two that we see the mother's loss while fleeing China years before as being a contributing factor to the relationship between Chinese-American Jing-Mei and her immigrant mother. Up until now, Jing-Mei's mother has tried to force American talents on to her daughter. Not realizing that Jing-Mei's mentality of rebelling against parental rules is truly American, her mother is frustrated by Jing-Mei's resistance.

8.1.6. Narrative Resolution

At the end of the story, Tan appears to be exploring the theme of acceptance. When Mrs. Woo offered Jing-Mei her piano on her thirtieth birthday, she *"saw the offer as a sign of forgiveness, a tremendous burden removed."* By having Jing-Mei play the piano in her parent's house Tan may be suggesting that despite what had happened when she was a young girl Jing-Mei no longer has any ill will towards her mother. At the end of the story, she had the piano tuned for sentimental reasons which show that Amy really did care about her mother and the piano.

The two pieces she plays at the end also act as symbolism. The first piece the *'Pleading Child'* in many ways mirrors how Jing-Mei felt as a child. Pressurized by her mother to be something she wasn't. While the second piece *'Perfectly Contented'* suggests exactly that Jing-Mei is now content in her life. She may have had a childhood she did not wish for but she also appears to have found acceptance. *It isn't until Jing-Mei plays*

both pieces that she realizes just how deeply she remains connected to her mother. These songs seemed to represent her life and the meaning behind her and her mother's attitudes and relationship with one another.

The title of this short story "Two Kinds" describes the theme of this story. The mother had stated that there are only two types of daughters. "Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind." Jing-Mei did not understand the truth or meaning behind that declaration until after her mother's death. Jing-Mei realized that her mother only meant that she could be an obedient child by listening to her mother while at the same time follow her own heart and want her own prodigy in life.

The last paragraph in this story also indicates the theme of two halves being equal to one. She realizes the pieces "were two halves of the same song" just as she and her mother were. As the mother's character was seemingly over-bearing, she and her mother wanted the same thing; both wanted the best in life for Jing-Mei. Despite Jing-Mei and her mother's differences they were like the songs, they may disagree but made one stunning song. Her mother only wanted her to use the capability she knew she had and wanted Jing-Mei to be her best.

8.1.7. Symbol

- Piano piece (as discussed above)
- Piano symbolizes the forgiveness
- Piano symbolizes peace and acceptance
- Piano symbolizes a moment of victory for the narrator, which was a source of dissatisfaction and embarrassment as a child

8.1.8. Characterization

The learners may sketch the characters based on the traits and qualities of the characters given below:

• Mother

- Harassing
- Pushy
- Aggressive
- Demanding
- Chinese
- Family loss (two daughters and first husband)
- She wants everything for her daughter (Loving); works extra in order to get something for the child (Sacrifices)
- Unknowingly selfish at the same time? Living her dream through her daughter?
- Hopeful; she sees America as her hope because of "so many opportunities"

- **Jing-Mei (narrator)**

- Brave
- Nervous
- Wants to do “something” but is defeated once thinking that she will not please her mother
- Wants to please her mother
- Disrespectful – rebellious
- Preteen

8.1.9. Questions

1. Critically appreciate the short story ‘Two Kinds’ by Amy Tan.
2. Discuss the mother-daughter relationship in Tan’s short story, *Two Kinds*.
3. Give the character sketches of mother and daughter as portrayed by Amy Tan in her *Two Kinds*.

8.1.10. Suggested Reading

1. Bloom, Harold, ed. *Amy Tan*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2000.
2. Kramer, Barbara. *Amy Tan, Author of The Joy Luck Club*. Springfield, NJ: Enslow, 1996.
3. Shields, Charles J. *Amy Tan*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2002.

8.2. BERNARD MALAMUD’S ‘THE GERMAN REFUGEE’

8.2.1. Introduction to Bernard Malamud

Malamud emerged as a talented artist, depicting the life of the Jewish poor in New York. His creative works are appreciated for his allegory and mastery in the art of storytelling. Malamud was the son of Jewish grocers and he grew up in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn. Some argue that this was the reason that he wrote stories “set in small, prisonlike stores of various kinds”

Malamud explores the social realism and ethnic identity in most of his short stories – ‘The Jew Bird,’ ‘Black is my Favorite Color,’ ‘The German Refugee’. Malamud's fictional works also include themes of *compassion, redemption, new life, the potential of meaningful suffering and self-sacrifice*, all of which can be found in “The German Refugee”

“The German Refugee” concludes Bernard Malamud's second collection of short stories, *Idiot's First* (1963). The setting is New York City in the *summer of 1939, just before the outbreak of World War II*.

8.2.2. Plot

‘The German Refugee’ is a true to life story depicting the struggles of many victims during and after the Second World War. This particular story takes place in the USA Broadway sometime during the Polish

Invasion in 1939. The main characters Oskar Gassner and Martin Goldberg show just how difficult those times were for all the refugees and what connection and strength it took to keep them have faith and start a new life. This is one of the most popular stories of Bernard Malamud. The narrator Martin Goldberg explains and describes his efforts and it tends to teach English to German refugee named Oskar Gassner. He required giving a lecture in English about American poet Walt Whitman's relationship to some German poets.

The plot of this short story runs into many distinct stories. The first one is of Oskar's frustration for a failure to learn English as well as the irony and anguish of the narrator's failure to understand why he is not able to do so. When the narrator is teaching Oskar English language, the German Army begins its summer training of 1939. The narrator is not able to understand his student's deep involvement in Germany's role in the World War. The narrator is a senior in college he provides tutoring to immigrants for English language learning to make some extra money. Because of the poor economy and social condition of the period of the great depression in America, many students were working part-time. Oskar is much like the other student who is a refugee and wants to study in America but he turns out to be a challenge for the tutor. He comes to America as a lecturer in the college but the thought of delivering the lecture in English makes him nervous. He has left his wife who was badly affected by the depression; he is tired of his life and suffering a lot. It changes into a beautiful friendship between the two men as they continued the English lesson. Even after Oskar had to give up on the lessons, the American still visited Oskar it is placed and tries to help him correct his lecture.

The language barrier is what creates the emotion of a link between Oskar and Martin. He had discussed disappointments, shame, and depression in his own country because of the language barrier he cannot completely talk about his feelings of fears to Martin. Living his gentle wife- the daughter of a virtual anti-Semitic mother behind, Oskar comes to New York and tries to perfect his English so that he can deliver his lectures to the American audience in Germany. The story is in the first person's account of trying to help Oskar and of the friendship- the force between them, as Oskar struggle with his pronunciation and the vagaries of American English.

He tells Martin about his one failed attempt to commit suicide during his initial weeks in America. Martin is very kind and compassionate and tries to help Oskar in many ways to write and translate his lectures. Oskar develops a different habit and instead of writing the lecture on every visit, both men sit in silence and experience the hot and sticky month of July to understand each other. The narrator decides to gift a fan for Oskar and that shows the kind of personal bond he has developed for this refugee.

Oskar had a very troubled life in America and he gets very frequent undercurrent about despair and depression. Because of his mental and physical conditions, he has nightmares about Nazi inflicting tortures on him and sometimes forcing him to look upon causes of people. He also keeps visiting his wife in his dreams where is directed to a cemetery. On the tombstone, he reads another person's name but her blood seeps out of the shadow grave.

Despite his efforts to help Oskar master English so that he can write and deliver a lecture on Walt Whitman in Germany, Martin begins to feel that it is hopeless and a failure. In a last desperate attempt to assist him, Martin sends Oskar some notes he has taken on *Leaves of Grass*. By this time, the Germans have invaded Poland and the Second World War has begun. He has changed and has come back to life but only to lose everything. Two days after hearing the lecture Martin goes up to Oskar's room and finds a big crowd over there and finds him dead having gassed himself. A week after this tragic event when he was going through Oskar's belonging as his only friend, Martin finds an explanation for the suicide in a letter from his anti-Semitic mother-in-law. His wife has converted to Judaism and had been seized by the Brown shirts along with other Jews in the apartment building, taken to a Polish border town and shot in the head. She was then toppled into an open ditch with a naked Jewish man and their wife and children who were Polish gypsies and another countryman.

Barnard Malamud's story is a powerful account of the effect of the Holocaust even on the common and those who manage to escape the direct onslaught of the enemies in Germany. Oskar affected fatally but Martin who is an American and his friend and tutor is also terribly influenced by the life events.

On the whole, this is a tragic story where both the characters show how terrible the War can be and how one comes to humanity as a healing Force for all the refugees. Oskar has given up long ago in his life and his faith has least the moment he became refugee he has planned to finish the lecture and kill himself against all odds. Ultimately the language barrier, disbelief in humanity and lack of Faith are what have killed Oskar.

Not only is "The German Refugee" a personal story with a tragic ending, but it is based on personal experience. Scraping to make a living during the Depression, Malamud taught English to German-Jewish refugees. Exposure to these now-unemployed, struggling intellectuals made the young writer "*suddenly [see] what being born Jewish might mean in the dangerous world of the thirties*." Sadly, the narrative is based on Malamud's fifty-five-year-old student, Dr. Friedrich Pinner, an economist and past financial editor of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, who, all his European clients gone, despaired of beginning again in a new country and with his wife, committed suicide by turning on the gas. As the story's puzzled English tutor and narrator Martin Goldberg comments: "*Not*

everyone drowns in the ocean,” and Malamud’s Ocean is filled with history.

8.2.3. Themes

Language barrier and Language – the basis of self-identity

The narrator describes how he met the German refugee, Oskar Gassner, in his *“disordered cheap hotel room,”* that was cluttered with clothing, boxes of books, and some paintings. The narrator was sent by his college to teach English to Oskar, a recently arrived refugee in New York. Oskar had found a new job in the Institute for Public Studies in New York and was supposed to give a lecture on *“The Literature of the Weimar Republic”* in English. As a critic and journalist in Berlin, he had never taught and was terrified of having to speak publicly in English. The story describes the challenges and frustration that Oskar experiences as he struggles to learn English and forget German. It also describes the anguish of a man in his mid-fifties who must completely start over in another country attempting to talk without an accent when giving lectures, a job that is his only source of survival.

Oskar wants to dissociate himself from his roots by learning to speak English and forgetting German. In his attempt to learn English properly and to write a successful lecture Oskar constantly moves between hope and despair. His frustration and hatred towards Germany reflected in the narrator’s words: *“He cursed the German language. He hated the damned country and the damned people.”*

The narrator explains the struggles that the loss of language felt like to the refugees: *“Too many of these people, articulate as they were, the great loss was the loss of language—that they could no longer say what was in them to say. They could, of course, manage to communicate, but just to communicate was frustrating.”*

The narrator further quotes the words of Karl Otto Alp: *“I felt like a child, or worse often like a moron. I am left with myself unexpressed. What I know, indeed, what I am, becomes to be a burden. My tongue hangs uselessly.”*

The story subtly stresses the degree to which an immigrant’s very identity and self-worth are tied up with the ability to communicate in a foreign language. However, in the later part of the story, the narrator is influenced by the student’s optimism and positive thinking, so that at the end he has almost become “another man” who believes that he has a future. This also directs us to the development of “another” identity as Oskar successfully progresses in polishing his English without an accent.

The narrator describes the difficulty he faced while tutoring the recent refugees as a student, *“I had my nerve associating with them, but that’s what a world crisis does for people – they get educated.”* Here, the term

‘educated’ emphasizes the importance of English as a language to secure social, cultural, and intellectual identity in America.

Faith and humanity

To survive in America, Oskar must have faith in his own ability to learn and speak English and in his tutor’s ability to teach him. In fact, the narrator stresses the difficulties that these acts of faith pose by describing how difficult it was for a foreign refugee to deal with the loss of language. Placing Whitman’s belief in humanity’s divine spirit in a story crowded with humanity’s most savage acts certainly challenges one’s faith in God. For Malamud, Whitman’s faith in humanity’s divine spirit and love is our only escape from spiritual exile, that is, loss of faith in God.

While talking about what German poets had embraced from Whitman, the narrator listed down Whitman’s “love of death.” Thus, provoked for a response from the narrator, Oskar reveals the ideal he cherishes: humanity.” *Then he said, no, it wasn’t the love of death they had got from Whitman – that ran through German poetry – but it was most of all his feelings for Brudermensch, his humanity.*” At the same time, he also states that this ideal no longer to be found in Germany. *“But this does not grow long on German earth,” he said, “and is soon destroyed.”* This statement reflects the extent of Oskar’s frustration. He seems to have come to believe that there is a contrast between “humanity” and Germany. Based on his own experiences, Oskar feels that Germany and the Germans have failed him in regard to the idea of “Brudermensch” – humanity.

According to Oskar, German poets have adopted Whitman’s belief in a unifying love between people. The narrator chooses one quote from Whitman and states, *“Oskar reads it as though he believed it”* By this statement, he implies that Oskar no longer believes in those words anymore. Yet, it seems that the narrator overestimates the support that Whitman’s poetry gives Oskar. *“Warsaw had fallen, but the verses were somehow protective”*

He is also astonished that Oskar had left all his possessions to him – Martin Goldberg. Throughout the story, we can trace how the narrator has developed close emotional ties with his student. His relationship with Oskar goes beyond a teacher-student relationship: he takes a human interest in his student and worries about him, to a point that he was sometimes afraid that he was himself becoming melancholy. By leaving his possessions to Martin Goldberg, Oskar wants to express his gratefulness. It showed that he had realized that his young teacher had shown a great deal of “brotherly love” towards him and had maintained an undying faith in his capabilities. Moreover, the gift symbolizes that his teacher had not failed.

8.2.4. Setting

The setting is New York City in the summer of 1939, *just before the outbreak of World War II*. The story very few changes of place and they contribute to the symbolic effects of the story. To Malamud, the central metaphor for Jewishness is imprisonment. This imprisonment in Malamud's fictional world can be in the physical environment like a real prison cell, a grocery store, or anything he feels confined in. It can also lie within one's self, being confined by one's incompetence, thus becoming a victim of one's own self as it is seen in the Hebrew writings. Metaphorically this prison becomes an acceptance of life's limitations and responsibilities. The "disordered cheap hotel room" was cluttered with clothing, boxes of books, and some paintings.

8.2.5. Symbols

Language is the most significant cultural symbol in "The German Refugee." Parallel with history: Malamud works a careful parallel between historical time and Oskar's experience in New York. Oskar's progress in New York parallels the dramatic events in Europe in the summer of 1939. Initially, Oskar is paralyzed by his fear of a new life in America due to his struggle with learning the English language, but Martin's support helps him to get back his faith in the future. The refugee's spiritual rebirth is symbolized by his successful lecture, the delivery of which coincides with the fall of Warsaw, a coincidence that produces a powerful effect in the story.

Seasons

Oskar and the narrator are held throughout the summer by a heat wave that objectifies the refugees' boiling inner life. Spring is the welcome season for Malamud's characters and it is conducive for them to experience salvation and redemption from a spiritually empty life. Oskar is able to complete his lecture and deliver it successfully. In September, *"The weather had changed, and so, slowly, had he."* The change of season has changed Oskar's mind, attitude, his efficiency and thus one witness the influence of seasons in his life.

The narrator also highlights the change in the health and appearance of Oskar as he progresses through his initial days in the stuffy hotel room, *"He had difficulty breathing," "His eyes, too, were heavy, a clouded blue. . ."* to the cool days of September when he completes writing his lecture – *"His blue eyes returned to life and he walked with quick steps, as though to pick up a few for all that he hadn't taken during those long, hot, days he had lain torpid in his room"*

Dream

Malamud through the device of dream exposes the inner conflict of Oskar, his agonies, failures, guilt and also examines his deepest motives and acts.

One night Oskar dreams of his wife and this dream reveals his guilt for deserting her. Oskar's dream reveals that he longs for his wife and worries about his destiny. In his dream, she is buried with a strange name – an identity he is not familiar with. When he finally learns about his wife's death, he has to accept with grief that he did not know her at all. Through his mother-in law's letter, he discovers that his wife converted into Judaism after he had left her and was subsequently shot by the Nazis along with other Jews.

In the light of her conversion and death, an old quote from a letter she wrote becomes transparent. The quote, written in German, meant "*I have been faithful to you for twenty years*" "*Faithful*" here, thus, reflects her positive attitude towards her husband's Jewish identity. While her husband suspects her of hidden prejudices against Jews, she has actually developed such close links to his Jewish heritage, that she decides to embrace the Jewish community of fate. Additionally, Oskar has to cope with the fact that it is he, who has possibly been the partner in the marriage who was prejudiced, and that he incorrectly suspected his wife of anti-Jewish notion solely on the basis of her gentile identity. Oskar's failure to judge his wife correctly leads him to commit suicide as he somehow realized that he was indirectly responsible for her death. He seems to be unable to cope with his personal moral failure as he thinks he has not shown humanity to her wife by rejecting her and moving to America.

In the end, his originally non-Jewish wife who "sacrificed" herself for him appears as the symbol of moral righteousness, whereas the refugee himself comes forth as lacking compassion for other human beings.

8.2.6. Title

The symbolism of the title of the story makes it clear that the German scholar has sought refuge not only from Hitler's Holocaust but also from his human responsibility. The final discovery does not appear until the last lines. The guilt-ridden Oskar commits suicide during the fourth week of September, three weeks after the German troops had broken down the rule of law by marching into the Free City of Danzig.

Malamud's story illustrates how the fate of two people who meet by chance can easily be intertwined. It also highlights how the Holocaust affected even those who managed to escape the direct onslaught of the Nazis (as did Oskar) as well as other people, who were far beyond the direct impact of the Nazi violence. The narrator and the wife of the protagonist illustrate the central philosophical idea of the story: the brotherhood of men.

8.2.7 Questions

1. Give character sketches of Oskar and Martin Goldberg
2. The German Refugee is personal story with tragic ending. Explain with suitable examples
3. Bring out various themes of the short story *The German Refugee*
4. Write a short note on the use of symbolism in *The German Refugee*

8.2.8. Suggested Reading

1. Bloom, Harold. *Bernard Malamud (Modern Critical Views)*. Chelsea House Publications, 1986.
2. Davis, Philip. *Bernard Malamud: A Writer's Life*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2007.
3. Malamud, Bernard. *The Stories of Bernard Malamud*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983.



A CRITICAL STUDY OF JHUMPA LAHIRI'S 'UNACCUSTOMED EARTH'

Unit Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Diasporic Elements
- 9.3 First Generation Immigrants- Ruma's Parents
- 9.4 Second Generation Immigrants – Ruma and Her Brother
- 9.5 Ruma's Relationship with Her Father
- 9.6 Ruma's New Family Life
- 9.7 Nostalgia
- 9.8 Double Displacement
- 9.9 Loneliness
- 9.10 Ruma's Conflict
- 9.11 Let Us Sum It Up
- 9.12 Questions
- 9.13 Suggested Reading

9.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to study the diasporic elements in this short story with respect to the effects of migration on the first generation, second generation and third generation immigrants and their way of life, beliefs and their relationships. Analysing, particularly, Ruma's struggles with herself, her family and her American life. It also brings to light the apparent and hidden adjustments that her parents had to make with the American life and their American-born children.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Unaccustomed Earth is a collection of Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories which portrays, through various and distinct situations, the struggles of the characters adjusting to the alien land, struggling to find their identities, holding on to their culture and values (First Generation immigrants), adjusting and accepting the culture and values of the foreign land as the children of the immigrants (Second Generation immigrants), loneliness, sense of loss, displacement, etc.

The first short story of this collection is named after the title of the collection 'Unaccustomed Earth'. This story is a perfect depiction of the struggles of a Bengali couple who have migrated from India to a foreign land, the United States, the complicated relationship that they share with their children who have assimilated with the American culture to the extent that the daughter, Ruma marries an American, barely speaks Bengali such that her three-year-old son Akash understands only a few words and phrases in Bengali taught to him.

9.2 DIASPORIC ELEMENTS

Diaspora is a term used to describe the people who migrated from their homeland to other parts of the world. It also refers to their future generations. Quest for identity, uprooting and re-rooting, insider and outsider syndrome, nostalgia, nagging sense of guilt, sense of loss, dislocation, alienation, assimilation and loneliness are some of the important features of diasporic writing.

Jhumpa Lahiri, a Pulitzer Prize winner, an Indian diasporic writer, is herself a second generation immigrant. Since she is a product of immigration, she very aptly portrays alienation, biculturalism, the loss of identities, nostalgia, etc. in her characters in her fictional works, in this case, her short story 'Unaccustomed Earth'.

9.3 FIRST GENERATION IMMIGRANTS- RUMA'S PARENTS

The First-Generation Diaspora is all about preservation of the culture and the identity of their native country. These first-generation migrants are true to their culture and traditions in the foreign land. Ruma's parents are examples of the first-generation immigrants - a Bengali couple, who moved to a foreign land only for good career prospects for the husband, i.e., Ruma's father. His wife, who merely accompanied her husband, had to deal with more, namely, staying away from her family, her culture, her traditions, the local streets of Calcutta where she grew up, etc.

".... her mother's example – moving to a foreign place for the sake of marriage, caring exclusively for children and a house hold -"

Ruma's mother, in a foreign land, tried to preserve her culture as much as possible. She spoke only in Bengali to her children, Ruma and Romi,

"Her mother had been strict, so much so that Ruma had never spoken to her in English."

Her mother could hardly adjust to the isolated life in an American suburb, something she often complained of. Her father, on the other hand, liked this isolation.

The reason for the stark difference between the couple was that Ruma's father had migrated to America willingly, for his bright career, whereas, her mother migrated only because her husband had migrated. Thus, he didn't miss home and his culture as much as his wife did, in fact, it can be said that he hardly missed home. Ruma's father had quite comfortably adjusted to his life in another land. He didn't mind conversing in English instead of Bengali as well as adopting the lifestyle of the Americans.

9.4 SECOND GENERATION IMMIGRANTS – RUMA AND HER BROTHER

The Second-Generation Diaspora is about cultural hybridity. They are the children of the first-generation migrants who are torn between two cultures. They are pressurised by their parents to follow their native culture and traditions on one hand whereas on the other hand, they want to blend in and be accepted by the culture that they are immigrants to and are now a part of.

Rumi and Romi are both instances of Second-Generation immigrants. Both of them become a version of individuals that their mother did not quite approve – Ruma by marrying an American and Romi by moving away to New Zealand.

“You are ashamed of yourself, of being an Indian, that is the bottom line.” was her mother's reaction when she learnt that Ruma had decided to marry Adam, an American. It is with time that her mother could accept Adam, not only as her son-in-law, but she started loving Adam as a son - as a replacement for her son, Romi.

“Romi, who had crushed them by moving abroad and maintaining only distant ties.”

Though, it is only after Ruma had her first child that her relationship with her mother became “harmonious”,

“For the first time in her life Ruma felt forgiven for many expectations she'd violated or shirked over the years.”

Even when Ruma's father visited her for a week in Seattle, they did not bring up Romi - “They did not discuss about her mother, or about Romi, the brother with whom she had always felt so little in common, in spite of their absurdly matching names.”

Although, Ruma and Romi, were siblings and both were Second-Generation immigrants, they did not share a bond that most Indian siblings or rather siblings that grow up together share with each other.

Thus, it is very clear that both the children grew up to shirk their culture and adopted the American culture as they identified themselves with it. But Ruma, as she became a mother herself, became a lot like her mother in many ways, after her mother's death.

9.5 RUMA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HER FATHER

The diasporic element of complicated family relationships is reflected in Ruma's character. She shares a very distant, rather formal relationship with her father. An example of this formal and distant relationship is that he sent postcards to her from when he was on a trip to Europe, and these postcards were usually very impersonal and usually, the correspondence was one-sided. "In her thirty-eight years he'd never had any reason to write to her."

Her father, in spite of being a first-generation immigrant, adopted the American lifestyle very easily. In fact, he preferred it more than his lifestyle of his homeland. Therefore, he was a man who preferred isolation and quiet. He was career-oriented and that is why left the filial responsibilities to his wife. In her years of growing up, Ruma had her mother around for every stage of her life that is why Ruma always thought of the bond that she had with her mother, but not her father.

Her distant and complicated relationship with her father makes her feel that his visit will be an extra burden on her as he is retired and has distributed every possession that he had. Ruma was more American than Indian, she was comfortable with the idea of nuclear families unlike Indian families where parents live with their children by default. Thus, the very idea that her father was going to visit her for a week made her very uncomfortable. She had imagined that he would come in her way of her everyday chores and her way of life. But despite this, she still felt the obligation that she should ask her father to move in with her and her family, especially after her mother's death. During his stay with her, her father proves anything but a burden or a hindrance to her. He helps her in the household chores, doesn't come in her way, encourages her to go back to her career and not be a housewife like her mother, strikes a bond with Akash, which she herself could never build with her own father.

"But it was Akash who brought out a side of her father that surprised Ruma most. "So much so that Ruma finds it comforting to have her father around. She saw a completely different side to him.".... she realized that for the first time in his life her father had fallen in love."

She now feels that it would be nice for Akash to have him around which is why she wants him to stay back to which he refuses and says he

prefers living his retired life as he was too old for the shift and that he would visit her whenever she would want him after having her second baby.

Their relationship is so distant that her father does not reveal about his relationship with Mrs. Bagchi. When Ruma accidentally learns of this relationship, she quietly accepts it without questioning and this can be proved by Ruma posting the postcard to Mrs. Bagchi, which he had intended to.

9.6 RUMA'S NEW FAMILY LIFE

Ruma's example is of upward mobility. She is well-educated, hardworking, becomes a lawyer in New York. She has an equally successful family life: an American husband, a three-year-old son, Akash, one more pregnancy and a new residence on the west shore, in Seattle, the place where the family shifts after Ruma's husband gets another job. But all of this does not make her happy. Her professional life comes to a sudden halt; she quits most of the things she has accomplished so far: her career and independence. She decides to take care solely of the family and household. Ruma's existence stuck between Indian and American culture is a continuous reconciliation between them. Though, Ruma follows the American way of clothing, has a flavour for American cuisine, she does not make use of Bengali, her parents' language but it is her mother's death that makes her identify strongly with the Indian heritage. Since she lives engrossed in the memories of her departed mother, and even though it goes against her American upbringing, she starts replicating her example. She now assumes her position according to the Indian tradition: assisting her husband - the way her mother always did it, being mainly a mother and a homemaker and giving up her career and freedom in which she so strongly believed and worked for most of her life. This decision is entirely Ruma's. Adam does not ask her to make a choice between her career and family. He even asks her to hire help to look after Akash but she chooses what her family, subconsciously following in her mother's footsteps.

9.7 NOSTALGIA

Ruma is nostalgic for the emotional safety she had enjoyed with her mother, and also remembers her childhood home. Thus, the element of nostalgia is an integral part of the story. Ruma's father thinking about her mother and how Ruma resembles her also brings back old memories to him. Despite being emotionally distant from each other and belonging to the First and Second generation of immigrants, both Ruma's father and Ruma respectively cannot escape from nostalgia of the past. The western modern life does not, in any way, help her to be busy enough to forget the past and the childhood days. Ruma feels that she has grown closer to her mother after her death than she was when she was alive so much so that

she starts replicating her mother's life. This is the reason she gives up her job and takes on the role of a fulltime mother for Akash.

“Growing up, her mother's example – moving to a foreign place for the sake of marriage, caring exclusively for children and a household – had served as a warning, a path to avoid. Yet this was Ruma's life now.”

She's upset about the fact that Akash does not remember her mother and is even more upset that her next child won't get to see her or be with her at all.

“The new baby would know nothing of her mother at all, apart from the sweaters she had knit for Akash, which he's already outgrown and which the new baby would eventually wear.” She often reminds Akash about how ‘Dida’ did things for him but the only thing that Akash knows about his grandmother is that “she died”.

Ruma often thinks of the past, especially of her childhood. Since her father always stayed away from filial duties and was a distant parent who only focused on his career, it was her mother who played the active role of a parent in her life. Therefore, she misses her in every situation especially when she is about to have her second baby and she feels terribly lonely since Adam is away for work most of the times.

It's not just Ruma, her father missed his wife, too. He often thought of their initial days of struggle when they moved from India, their vacation to India to visit their parents and family, “...it had been an unquestioned fact that visiting family in Calcutta was the only thing worth boarding a plane for.” The filial responsibilities that she undertook because of which he could focus solely on his studies and career. He thinks of her in the smallest of things, “He associated the biscuits deeply with his wife – the visible crystals of sugar, the faint coconut taste – their kitchen cupboard always contained a box of them.”

He finds a strong resemblance between Ruma and his wife when he comes to visit her for a week. The fact that Ruma had given up her career to look after her son and family was something totally unacceptable to him because he did not want his daughter to live a lonely life that his wife had led.

9.8 DOUBLE DISPLACEMENT

Ruma is unable to identify with her Indian culture as well as with the American culture, as she suffers from “double displacement”. She suffers as a second-generation immigrant. Ruma's example very clearly depicts how the Second-generation immigrants neither match into their Indian (Bengali) nor American cultures fully and feel the pang of alienation and displacement. The leaning towards different value systems have also resulted in the feeling of alienation. Thus, it was difficult for

Ruma, to neither accept her parent's native culture (language, food, clothing, etc) nor was she able to accept the American values completely. This caused her to be in a state of dilemma even when she willingly gave up her job to take care of her family and household but wasn't able to find happiness and even when she felt the need to ask her father to stay at her place (an obligation she felt as she had an Indian upbringing), although, neither Adam nor her father pressurised her to do any of this. Even here she felt uncomfortable thinking that her father would be a burden and hindrance to her quiet life.

9.9 LONELINESS

In the 'Unaccustomed Earth', the element of unhappiness, despite financial and economic success, somehow seem to be a constant element in the lives of Ruma and her family. For her parents, it is the adjustment to the new culture and loneliness that it brings as a part of it. On one hand, where her father likes being alone, on the other hand, Ruma's mother is forced to this life of loneliness as she's away from her homeland, parents, family and the familiar surroundings. During their initial days of immigration, her mother was lonely because her husband was first busy with her studies and later with his work. But even after Ruma and Romi are born to her, her busy life still feels lonely, more so because her children grow up to be American and distant from their parents. As the children grow up, they're even more engrossed in their professional and personal lives. Romi moves away to New Zealand, breaking her heart. Ruma, on the other hand, marries Adam, adding to her mother's anxieties. But later, she really takes to Adam, more like a son than a son-in-law.

Their daughter, Ruma, faces the same loneliness as her mother did when she becomes a mother. Ruma, a second-generation expatriate and familiar with the American lifestyle, is not an exception to the solitude of life. Though she marries an American, is educated, career oriented but ultimately falls into the same pattern of life that her mother led. Though, she is not asked to make a choice between her career and her son, Akash, by her husband Adam. Yet, she chooses to initially work part time and then finally quit her job to take care of her son Adam since her husband is away for work most of the time.

She shared a closer bond with her mother. Ruma, in this state of loneliness and isolation, understood her mother's loneliness and displacement as a newly arrived immigrant. There were times Ruma felt closer to her mother in death than she had in life as she thought of her so often and always missed her. Her only brother is settled in New Zealand. Thus, Akash is the only company that she has most of the time. This feeling of loneliness is also the reason she, later, wants her father to stay with her, as she saw that he had a very positive influence on Akash. She realized that Akash, too, wanted company. She, therefore, asks her father to stay with her but he refuses saying that he's too old for this shift. His refusal comes because he loves isolation and prefers to travel and stay by

himself. Also, he has a personal life again since he became involved with another Indian (Bengali) immigrant, Mrs. Bagchi, who also lives alone in the US.

Thus, loneliness in the lives of all the characters is a very strong theme in this short story.

9.10 RUMA'S CONFLICT

Ruma is torn between the claims of the two cultures, the Bengali culture that she inherited, and the American culture that she rebelliously accepted. This brings about the element of loss of identity and assimilation with the culture of the foreign land. Born in America to Bengali parents, Ruma's life is marked by a permanent conflict between the culture inherited by her parents and of her birthplace and homeland, America, which results in bewilderment and failure to accept the American culture completely.

She believes in the modern western family which is mostly nuclear, and hence, isolates the elders; where everyone composes a family for himself / herself. The effect of such Western family pattern puts Ruma in a dilemma despite her Indian origin. Her father turns out to be a great help, rather than a burden to her surprise and contrary to her expectations. Her father's living pattern of self-reliance and preferring to do everything himself keep him busy even after retirement. This habit of her father makes her son grow closer to him making her recall the past life and its joys merely with the company of her father.

9.11 LET US SUM IT UP

The characteristics of Diaspora, thus, are very evident in the selected short story 'Unaccustomed Earth' authored by Jhumpa Lahiri, who very aptly represents the feelings of alienation, isolation, displacement, guilt, nostalgia and unhappiness resulting out of them, in her characters. Familial issues, complications in relationships, cultural assimilation or the resistance to it, are also important elements portrayed in Lahiri's short story 'Unaccustomed Earth'.

9.12 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss loneliness and double displacement as diasporic elements in Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Unaccustomed Earth'.
2. Analyse Ruma's relationship with her father in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story 'Unaccustomed Earth'.
3. Immigration and Isolation are the important themes in Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Unaccustomed Earth'. Discuss.

4. Explain Ruma's struggle as a Second-Generation immigrant in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story 'Unaccustomed Earth'.

9.13 SUGGESTED READING

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