

**M. A. ENGLISH, SEM-IV, C.NO. ENG-425**

*Centre for Distance & Online Education*

**UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU  
JAMMU**



**SELF LEARNING MATERIAL  
M. A. ENGLISH**

**TITLE OF THE COURSE :-**

**Indian Writing In English Translation**

**SEMESTER : IV**

**Course Code : ENG - 425**

**UNIT : I - V**

**LESSON NO. 1-16**

**2025**

*Teacher Incharge*

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*Course Co-ordinator*

**Prof. Anupama Vohra**

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**M. A. ENGLISH - IV SEMESTER**

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**INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION**

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## **WELCOME MESSAGE**

Welcome to PG English Semester IV!

The basic objective of this course, that is, 425 is to familiarize you with literary achievements of some of the significant Indian Writers whose works are available in English Translation. The course acquaints you with modern movements in Indian thought to appreciate the treatment of different themes and styles in the genres of short story, fiction, poetry and drama as reflected in the prescribed translations. You are advised to consult the books in the library both for preparation of Internal Assessment Assignments and preparation for semester end examination.

Wish you good luck and success!

**Prof. Anupama Vohra**  
**PG English Coordinator**



## **SYLLABUS M.A. ENGLISH**

**Course Code : ENG 425**

**Duration of Examination : 3 Hrs**

**Title : Indian Writing in English**

**Total Marks : 100**

**Translation**

**(a) Semester Examination : 80**

**Credits : 4**

**(b) Sessional Assessment : 20**

**Detailed Syllabus for the examinations to be held in May 2025, 2026, & 2027.**

**Objective :** The basic objective of this course is to familiarize the students with literary achievement of some of the significant Indian Writers whose works are available in English Translation. The course acquaints the students with modern movements in Indian thought to compare the treatment of different themes and styles in the genres of short story, fiction, poetry and drama as reflected in the prescribed translations.

### **UNIT - I**

Premchand

*Nirmala*

### **UNIT - II**

Saadat Hasan Manto,

Short Stories

(i) "Toba Tek Singh"

(ii) "The Dog of Tithwal"

(iii) "The Price of Freedom"

### **UNIT III**

Amrita Pritam

*The Revenue Stamp: An Autobiography*

#### **UNIT IV**

Mohan Rakesh

*Halfway House*

#### **UNIT V**

Gulzar

Poems :

- (i) “Amaltas”
- (ii) “Distance”
- (iii) “Have You Seen The Soul”
- (iv) “Seasons”
- (v) “The Heart Seeks ”

#### **Mode of Examination**

**The Paper will be divided into section A, B and C.**

**M.M.= 80**

#### **SECTION - A Multiple Choice Questions**

Q. No. 1 will be an objective type question covering the entire syllabus. Twelve objectives with four option each will be set and the candidate will be required to write the correct option and not specify by putting a tick mark (✓). Any ten of them are to be attempted.

Each objective will be for one mark.

(10x1=10)

#### **SECTION - B Short Answer Questions**

Q. No. 2 comprises short answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Five questions will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any two questions in 80-100 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 5 marks.

(5x5=10)

## SECTION - C

## Long Answer Questions

Q. No. 3 comprises short answer type questions from the entire syllabus. Five questions will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt all the questions in 300-350 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 12 marks.

(5x12=60)

### SUGGESTED READING

- ◆ Lyengar, K.R.S. *Indian Writing in English*. Sterling Publishers, 1987.
- ◆ Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. Sahitya Akademi, 1982.
- ◆ ....*Aspects of Indian Writing in English*, 1979.
- ◆ Walsh, William. *Indo-Anglican Literature 1800-1970*. Orient Longman, 1976.
- ◆ Varma, Bhagyashree S, editor. *Amrita Pritam: Life as Literature*. Prestige Books, 2006.
- ◆ Manto, Saadat Hassan. *Mottled Dawn*. Translated by Khalid Hassan, Penguin, 1997.
- ◆ Pritam, Amrita. *The Revenue Stamps*. Translated by Krishna Gorowara. Vikas Publishing House, 1977.
- ◆ Varma, Pavan K., and Gulzar. *Selected Poems*. Penguin Random House, 2017.
- ◆ Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Columbia UP, 2019.
- ◆ Menon, Ritu. *Do Women Have a Country? From Gender to nation*. Edited by Rada Ivekovic and Julie Mostov. A Long Editore, 2002, 43-62.
- ◆ Pandey, Gyanendra. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge UP, 2001.
- ◆ Sujit Mukherjee. *Translation as Discovery*, Orient Longman, 1994.

**M. A. ENGLISH SEMESTER IV**  
**COURSE CODE : ENG 425**

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## **LIFE AND WORKS OF MUNSHI PREMCHAND**

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 1.3 Life and Works of Munshi Premchand
  - 1.3.1 Adoption of the name 'Premchand'
- 1.4 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 1.5 Answer Key (MCQs)
- 1.6 Examination Oriented Questions
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Suggested Reading

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Dhanpat Rai, better known by his pen name, Munshi Premchand, was an Indian writer famous for his modern Hindi-Urdu literature. Majority of his work has been translated into English. Through his writing, Premchand highlighted the various socio-cultural issues of his time and he sought to reform the society.

### **1.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME**

Dear Learner, the objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the life and works of Munshi Premchand.

After going through this lesson, you will be

- familiar with the life of Munshi Premchand
- able to list the works written by Munshi Premchand and appreciate him as a writer
- able to tell the circumstances which motivated him to adopt the pseudonym Premchand

### **1.3 LIFE AND WORKS OF MUNSHI PREMCHAND**

Premchand (31<sup>st</sup> July 1880 - 8<sup>th</sup> October 1936) was an Indian writer famous for his modern Hindi-Urdu literature. He is better known as Munshi Premchand, Munshi being an honorary prefix. He is one of the celebrated writers of the Indian subcontinent and is regarded as one of the foremost Hindustani writers of the early twentieth century. A novel writer, a story writer and a dramatist, he has been referred to as the “*Upanyas Samrat*” (“Emperor among Novelists”) by writers.

Premchand was born on 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1880 in Lamhi, a village located near Varanasi (Benaras). His ancestors came from a large Kayastha family and owned *six bighas* (a traditional unit of measurement of area of a land) of land. His grandfather Guru Sahai Rai was a patwari (village land record-keeper). However, his father Ajaib Rai was a post office clerk and his mother was Anandi Devi. Premchand was the fourth child. Premchand was named as Dhanpat Rai (the master of wealth) and was given a nickname “Nawab” (Prince) by his uncle, Mahabir. “Nawab Rai” was the first pen name chosen by Premchand.

At the age of seven, the education of Premchand began at Madrasa (Arabic word used for any type of educational institution) in Lalpur, located near Lamahi. He learnt Urdu and Persian from a maulvi in the Madrasa. His mother died after a long illness when he was eight years old. His grandmother took the responsibility of his upbringing but she also died soon. Premchand felt isolated as his elder sister had already been married and his father was always

engaged with the work. His father was posted at Gorakhpur and he remarried but Premchand received little love from his step-mother. Therefore, Premchand developed a fascination for books and sought solace in fiction. As a child, he heard the stories from the fantasy epic *Tilisim-e-Hoshruba* written in Persian language at a tobacconist's shop. He took the job of selling books for a book wholesaler which gave him the opportunity for reading a lot of books. He learnt English at a missionary school and read several fictional works such as George W.M Reynold's *The Mysteries of the Court of London* written in eight volumes. He composed his first literary work at Gorakhpur which never got published and is now lost. It was a farce based on a bachelor who falls in love with a low-caste woman. The character was based on Premchand's uncle who used to scold him for being obsessed with reading fiction. It was probably written as a revenge for this.

Premchand was enrolled as a day scholar at the Queen's College at Benaras after his father was posted to Jamniya. In 1895, he was married at the age of fifteen, while studying in the ninth grade. The match was arranged by his maternal step-grandfather. The girl belonged to a rich landlord family and was older than Premchand. She found him quarrelsome and not good-looking.

His father died in 1897 after a long illness. He passed the matriculation examination with second division (below 60% marks). However, only the students with first division were given fee concession at the Queen's College. Therefore, Premchand sought admission at the Central Hindu College but was unsuccessful because of his poor arithmetic skills. Thus, he had to discontinue his studies.

Premchand then obtained an assignment to coach the son of an advocate in Benaras at a monthly salary of five rupees. He used to reside in a mud-cell over the advocate's stables, and sent sixty percent of his salary back home. However, he read a lot during these days. After racking up several debts in 1899, he went to a book shop to sell one of his collected books where he met the headmaster of a missionary school at Chunar and was offered a job of a

teacher at a monthly salary of eighteen rupees. He also took up the job of tutoring a student at monthly fees of five rupees. In 1900, Premchand secured a job as an assistant teacher at the Government District School, Bahraich at a monthly salary of twenty rupees. After three months, he was transferred to the District School in Pratapgarh, where he stayed in an administrator's bungalow and tutored his son.

Premchand wrote his first short novel, *Asrar-e-Ma'abid* (*Devasthan Rahasya* in Hindi, "The Secrets of God's Abode") under the pseudonym "Nawab Rai". The novel explores the corruption among the temple priests and their sexual exploitation of poor women. It was published in a series in the Benaras-based Urdu weekly *Awaz-e-Khalq* from 8 October, 1903 to February, 1905. Literary critic Siegfried Schulz remarks that the novel is not well-organised, lacks a good plot, features stereotyped characters and Premchand's "inexperience is quite evident in his first novel." However, Prakash Chandra Gupta calls it an "immature work" showing a tendency to "see life only white or black."

From Pratapgarh, Premchand was transferred to Allahabad for training and subsequently posted at Kanpur in 1905. He stayed in Kanpur for around four years (May 1905-June 1909). There he met Daya Narain Nigam, the editor of the magazine *Zamana*, in which he later published several articles and stories.

Premchand visited his village Lamahi during the summer vacations but he did not find the stay comfortable because of a number of reasons. He did not find the atmosphere conducive for writing. He also faced domestic trouble due to the quarrels between his wife and his step-mother. He once angrily scolded his wife after she unsuccessfully tried to commit suicide by hanging herself. Dismayed, she returned to her father's house while Premchand displayed no interest in bringing her back. In 1906, he married a child widow, Shivarani Devi who was the daughter of a landlord from a village near Fatehpur. The step taken by Premchand was considered revolutionary due to which he faced a lot

of social opposition. After his death, Shivarani Devi wrote a book on him entitled *Premchand Ghar Mein* (“Premchand in House”).

In 1905, Premchand got inspired by the national activism and published an article on Gopal Krishna Gokhale, The Indian National Congress leader in *Zamana*. The article was a criticism on Gokhale’s methods for achieving political freedom. It also recommended adoption of more extremist measures adopted by Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

Premchand’s first published story was *Duniya Ka Sabse Anmol Ratan* (“The Most Precious Jewel in the World”) which appeared in *Zamana* in 1907. According to this story, the most precious ‘jewel’ was the last drop of blood necessary to attain independence. Many of Premchand’s early short stories had patriotic overtones, influenced by the Indian Independence Movement.

His second short novel, *Hamkhurma-o-Hamsavab* (*Prema* in Hindi) was published in 1907 under the name “Babu Nawab Rai Banarsi.” The novel highlights the issue of widow remarriage in the contemporary conservative society. Amrit Rai, the protagonist of the novel overcomes the social opposition to marry the young widow Poorna, giving up his rich and beautiful fiancé Prema. In this context, Prakash Chandra Gupta remarks “while containing seeds of his future greatness in many ways, the novel is still youthful and lacks the discipline which full maturity brings.”

In 1907, Premchand’s short novel *Kishna* was published by the Medical Hall Press of Benaras. It satirises women’s fondness for jewellery. This 142-page work is now lost. During April-August 1907, Premchand’s story *Roothi Rani* was published in serial form in *Zamana*. The publishers of *Zamana* also published Premchand’s first short story collection, *Soz-e-Watan*. The collection contained four stories which sought to inspire the Indians in their struggle for political freedom.

### 1.3.1 Adoption of the name Premchand

In 1909, Premchand was transferred to Mahoba and later posted to Hamirpur as the Sub-deputy Inspector of Schools. Around this time, *Soz-e-Watan* was noticed by the British Government officials who banned it as a seditious work. The British collector of the Hamirpur District ordered a raid on Premchand's house where around five hundred copies of *Soz-e-Watan* were burnt. This incident made him to change his pseudonym from "Nawab Rai" to "Premchand."

In 1914, Premchand began writing in Hindi. By this time, he was already reputed as a fiction writer in Urdu. His first Hindi story *Saut* was published in the magazine *Saraswati* in December 1915. However, his first short story collection *Sapta Saroj* was published in June 1917.

In August 1916, Premchand was transferred to Gorakhpur on a promotion. He became the Assistant Master at the Normal High School, Gorakhpur. At Gorakhpur, he developed a friendship with the bookseller Buddhi Lal who allowed him to borrow novels for reading in exchange for selling exam cram books at the school. Premchand was an enthusiastic reader of classics in other languages and translated several of these works in Hindi. By 1919, he had published four novels of about hundred pages each. In 1919, his first major novel *Seva Sadan* was published in Hindi. It was originally written in Urdu under the title *Bazaar-e-Husn*. It was first published in Hindi by a Calcutta-based publisher who offered him Rs. 450 for his work. The Urdu publisher of Lahore published the novel later in 1924 and paid Premchand Rs. 250. The novel narrates the story of an unhappy housewife who first becomes a courtesan and then manages an orphanage for the young daughters of the courtesans. It was well received by the critics and brought wider recognition to Premchand.

In 1919, Premchand obtained a Bachelor's degree from Allahabad. By

1921, he had been promoted to Deputy Inspector of Schools. On 8<sup>th</sup> February 1921, he attended a meeting in Gorakhpur where Mahatma Gandhi asked people to resign from government jobs as a part of the Non-Cooperation Movement. Though Premchand was physically unwell and with two kids and a pregnant wife to support, he thought about it for five days and with the consent of his wife, decided to resign from his government job. After quitting his job, Premchand left Gorakhpur for Benaras on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1921 and decided to focus on his literary career. He faced severe financial difficulties and chronic ill-health till his death in 1936.

In 1923, he established a printing press and publishing house in Benaras and christened it as “Saraswati Press.” In 1924, Premchand’s *Rangbhoomi* was published. A blind beggar Surdas is its tragic hero. His novels *Nirmala* (1925) and *Pratigya* (1927) surpass his earlier works. *Nirmala* is a novel that deals with the dowry system in India. Before being published as a novel, it was first serialized in the magazine *Chand* between November 1925 and November 1926. However, *Pratigya* (“The Vow”) deals with the subject of widow remarriage.

In 1928, Premchand’s novel *Gaban* (“Embezzlement”) was published. The novel focuses on the greed of middle class people. In March 1930, Premchand launched a literary-political weekly magazine titled *Hans* that aimed at inspiring the Indians to mobilize against the British rule. The magazine though noted for its provocative views, failed to make a profit. He then took over and edited another magazine *Jagaran* which too ran at a loss.

In 1931, he moved to Kanpur as a teacher in the Marwari College but had to leave because of difference with the college administration. He then returned to Benaras and became the editor of the *Maryada*

magazine. In 1932, he published another novel *Karmabhoomi*. He briefly served as the headmaster of the Kashi Vidyapeeth, a local school. After the school's closure, he became the editor of the *Madhuri* magazine in Lucknow.

He arrived in Mumbai on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1934 to try his luck in the Hindi film industry. He had accepted a script writing job for the production house, Ajanta Cinetone with a hope that the yearly income of Rs. 8000 would help him overcome his financial troubles. He stayed in Dadar and wrote the script for the film *Mazdoor* ("The Labourer"). The film was directed by Mohan Bharmani and depicted the poor conditions of the labour class. Premchand himself did a cameo as the leader of labourers in the film. Some influential businessmen managed to get a stay on its release in Mumbai. The film was released in Lahore and Delhi but was banned again after it inspired the mill workers to stand up against the owners. Ironically, the film inspired the workers of Premchand's own loss-making press in Benaras to launch a strike after they were not paid their salaries. By 1934-35, Premchand's Saraswati Press was under a heavy debt of Rs. 4000 and he was forced to discontinue the publication of *Jagaran*. Meanwhile, Premchand was beginning to dislike the non-literary commercial environment of the Mumbai film industry and wanted to return to Benaras. However, he had signed a one-year contract with the production house. Thus, he ultimately left Mumbai on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1935 before the completion of one year. Himanshu Roy, the founder of Bombay Talkies tried to convince Premchand to stay back, but did not succeed.

After leaving Mumbai, Premchand wanted to settle in Allahabad, where his sons Sripat Rai and Amrit Rai were studying. He also planned to publish *Hans* from there. However, owing to his financial situation and ill-health, he had to hand over *Hans* to the Indian Literary Counsel and moved to Benaras. He was elected as the first President of the Progressive Writers' Association in Lucknow in 1936. He died on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1936 after several days of sickness.



*Godaan* (*The Gift of a Cow*, 1936), his last completed work, is generally accepted as his best novel. It is also considered as one of the finest Hindi novels. Hori, a poor peasant is the protagonist of the novel. He desperately longs for a cow which is a symbol of wealth and prestige in rural India.

Unlike other contemporary renowned authors such as Rabindranath Tagore, Premchand was not appreciated much outside India. Siegfried Schulz believes that the reason for this was the absence of good translations of his work. Also unlike Tagore and Iqbal, Premchand never travelled outside India, studied abroad or mingled with the renowned foreign literary figures.

In 1936, Premchand also published *Kafan* (“Shroud”) in which a poor man collects money for the funeral rites of his dead wife, but spends it on food and drink. His last published story was Cricket Match which appeared in *Zamana* in 1938 after his death.

#### 1.4 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

- Q1. When was Premchand born? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1882
  - b.) July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1880
  - c.) July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1883
  - d.) July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1881
- Q2. What was Munshi Premchand’s real name? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) Dharmendra
  - b.) Kunwar Rai
  - c.) Dhanpat Singh
  - d.) Dhanpat Rai

- Q3. Under which pen name did Premchand began writing? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) Nawab Rai
  - b.) Nawab Singh
  - c.) Nawab Ji
  - d.) Nawab Thakur
- Q4. By what name is Premchand referred to by some Hindi writers? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) Upanyas Sagar
  - b.) Upanyas Setu
  - c.) Upanyas Seth
  - d.) Upanyas Ratna
- Q5. Which was his first short novel which explored corruption among the temple priests? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) *Krishna*
  - b.) *Devasthan Rahasya*
  - c.) *Roothi Rani*
  - d.) *Vardaan*
- Q6. Which was his first published story in 1907? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) *Saut*
  - b.) *Bade Bhai Sahab*
  - c.) *Beti ka Dhan*
  - d.) *Duniya ka Sabse Anmol Ratan*
- Q7. Which of his short novels was penned under the name, Babu Nawab Rai Banarsi? \_\_\_\_\_.

- a.) *Roothi Rani*
- b.) *Premashram*
- c.) *Prema*
- d.) *Soz-e-Watan*

Q8. In 1923, he established a printing press and publishing house in Benaras, christened as what? \_\_\_\_\_.

- a.) Saraswati Press
- b.) Ganga Press
- c.) Thomson Press
- d.) Jamuna Press

Q9. Which was his last completed work, considered as one of the finest Hindi novels ever? \_\_\_\_\_.

- a.) *Karmabhoomi*
- b.) *Gaban*
- c.) *Nirmala*
- d.) *Godaan*

Q10. Which was his incomplete work? \_\_\_\_\_.

- a.) *Pratigya*
- b.) *Mangalsootra*
- c.) *Nirmala*
- d.) *Rangbhoomi*

Q11. Which of the following is NOT written by Munshi Premchand? \_\_\_\_\_.

- a.) *Gaban*

b.) *Godaan*

c.) *Guide*

d.) *Mansarovar*

Q12. Which of the following novels of Premchand is banned by the British Government officials? \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) *Rangbhoomi*

b.) *Soz-e-Watan*

c.) *Kafan*

d.) *Nirmala*

Q13. Who wrote the novel *Premchand Ghar mein*? \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) Premchand

b.) Daya Narain Nigam

c.) Buddhi Lal

d.) Shivarani Devi

Q14. When did Premchand's marriage take place? \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) 1896

b.) 1894

c.) 1895

d.) 1893

Q15. Name the film for which Premchand wrote the script. \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) *Mazdoor*

b.) *Maqbool*

c.) Maryada

d.) Maaya

Q16. When did Premchand began writing in Hindi? \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) 1913

b.) 1915

c.) 1914

d.) 1912

Q17. Which of the following weekly magazine is launched by Premchand?\_\_\_\_\_.

a.) *Zamana*

b.) *Hans*

c.) *Maryada*

d.) *Jagran*

Q18. Who convinced Premchand to stay back in Mumbai film industry?\_\_\_\_\_.

a.) Himanshu Roy

b.) Mohan Bhawnani

c.) Sudhanshu Roy

d.) Daya Narain Nigam

Q19. Which is the first Hindi story written by Premchand?\_\_\_\_\_.

a.) *Sapta Saroj*

b.) *Saut*

c.) *Kafan*

d.) *Gaban*

Q20. In which year did Premchand become the President of Progressive Writer's Association? \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) 1936

b.) 1935

c.) 1937

d.) 1934

Q21. Which novel of Premchand is lost now? \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) *Soz-e-Watan*

b.) *Kisna*

c.) *Saut*

d.) *Kafan*

Q22. Which of the following is the last completed work by Premchand? \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) *Godaan*

b.) *Gaban*

c.) *Nirmala*

d.) *Kafan*

Q23. Where did Premchand compose his first literary work? \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) Mumbai

b.) Benaras

c.) Gorakhpur

d.) Lucknow

Q24. Name the last published story of Premchand that appeared after his death.\_\_\_\_\_.

a.) Prema

b.) Saut

c.) Nirmala

d.) Cricket match

Q25. When did Premchand die?\_\_\_\_\_.

a.) 8<sup>th</sup> October, 1936

b.) 8<sup>th</sup> October, 1937

c.) 7<sup>th</sup> October, 1939

d.) 7<sup>th</sup> October, 1935

### 1.5 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)

1.) b 2.) d 3.) a 4.) c 5.) b 6.) d 7.) c 8.) a 9.) d 10.) b  
11.) c 12.) b 13.) d 14.) c 15.) a 16.) c 17.) b 18.) a 19.) b 20.) a  
21.) b 22.) a 23.) c 24.) d 25.) a

### 1.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Describe how the works of Munshi Premchand reflect the social conditions of the Indian society in the early 20th century.
2. “Premchand’s novels are filled with all kinds of powerful characters drawn from all strata of society.” Support the statement by giving suitable examples.

3. Discuss how the works of Munshi Premchand portrays the female characters.
4. Munshi Premchand is a famous Indian writer. Explain.

### **1.7 LET US SUM UP**

The lesson acquaints you with the life of Premchand, his works and his place amongst the writers of Hindi-Urdu canon.

### **1.8 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Naravani, Vishwanath S. *Premchand: His Life and Works*. Vikas, 1980. Print.
- ◆ Gupta, Prakash Chandra. *Prem Chand: Makers of Indian Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2010. Print.

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***NIRMALA***  
**MUNSHI PREMCHAND**

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 2.3 Brief Summary of the novel *Nirmala*
- 2.4 Chapter-wise Detailed Summary of the novel *Nirmala*
- 2.5 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 2.6 Answer Key (MCQs)
- 2.7 Examination Oriented Questions
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Suggested Reading

**2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The novel *Nirmala* by Premchand depicts the pathetic social condition of women. The novel tells the story of Nirmala and the problems she faced after she got married to a widower of her father's age.

**2.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME**

Dear Learner, the objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the story of the novel *Nirmala*.

Dear learner, after reading this lesson, you will be

- able to summarize the novel *Nirmala* in brief
- describe the intricacies of the plot as well as recognize the various important developments in the plot

### **2.3 BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL *NIRMALA***

The novel begins with the introduction of Babu Udaybhan, a lawyer who decides to marry his fifteen years old daughter Nirmala to Bhuvanmohan Sinha, son of Bhalchandra Sinha. He was then murdered by a convict Matai who was once tried by him and sent to jail. The death of Babu Udaybhan causes the refusal of Bhalchandra from the marriage due to dowry reasons as he wanted a huge amount as dowry. This withdrawal of marriage forces Kalyani, Nirmala's mother to marry Nirmala to Munshi Totaram, a lawyer who is twenty years older than Nirmala herself. He tries his best to seduce her but she has only respect and a sense of duty for him, and not love which he expects to develop in her. He has three sons by his first wife, Mansaram, Jiyaram and Siyaram. Mansaram, his eldest son is just a year older than Nirmala. Soon suspecting the beauty of Nirmala, her husband starts doubting the relationship between his son Mansaram and Nirmala and ultimately sends Mansaram to the hostel. All the three children regret this, especially the eldest one.

However, Mansaram falls ill in the hostel. Totaram hesitates on sending his son to a hospital for treatment and so his health soon weakens in the hostel, and he dies. But before his death, he meets Nirmala again in the hospital and it was also the time he realized that "whenever he thought he had thought of death, he had no thought of anyone else, but today he was forced to realize that another person's life was tied up with his own" (91).

Totaram was heartbroken due to this and his role in his son's death. After some days, his second son Jiyaram steals Nirmala's jewels from the household and runs away, and ends his life by suicide. The youngest son, Siyaram also runs away from the house attracted by a false saint. Munshi Totaram,

depressed by these situations, decides to leave the house to find Siyaram. As the novel progresses, Bhuvanmohan Sinha becomes a doctor and also treats Mansaram. At one point of time, he also tries to seduce Nirmala. His wife Sudha who becomes Nirmala's friend, criticizes him for his act and forces him to commit suicide. Depressed by these situations, Nirmala becomes ill and passes away, handing over her daughter Asha to Rukmani, Munshi Totaram's widowed sister. At the burial, old Munshi Totaram reaches the gate to find Nirmala dead. At the end of the novel, it seems as if the death of Nirmala achieves an experience of freedom.

## **2.4 CHAPTER-WISE DETAILED SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL *NIRMALA***

### **CHAPTER ONE**

The chapter one of the novel introduces the character of Babu Udaybhan who has two daughters, Nirmala and Krishna, and a son Chandrabhan Singh. Nirmala in her fifteenth year is playful and full of fun. But when her father for the past months had been looking out for a husband, this makes Nirmala, a seeker of isolation. She feels that she is older that day. Krishna, her younger sister knows that her sister would get all kinds of jewels, and there will be music, festivities, guests, and dancing, and she is very much pleased with that. However, Nirmala is so depressed with the idea of her marriage that she has ceased playing with Krishna and has nightmares at night.

### **CHAPTER TWO**

For Udaybhan, the marriage of Nirmala is of a great financial burden. The whole house by then, is going through serious changes for the preparation of the marriage being a few months away. The whole house is being turned up as a marketplace. There are goldsmiths hammering, tailors sewing, carpenters scarving, and personal servants being recruited at the rate of one for every three guests, so there would be no complaints. The whole question of dowry was purely optional, for the groom had no demands in the matter of dowry. But others were to be treated with generous hospitality, so there would be no mock upon Udaybhan. The estimates of costs were to be of twenty thousand rupees.

His wife Kalyani says that the figures in ten days had gone up from just five thousand to ten thousand, and at that rate, it may even become a lakh. Kalyani tells him to be firm on not to spend anything over five thousand, for they had no savings, and that since the day *Lord Brahma* created the world, no one is ever been able to satisfy a wedding guest and there are always complaints like that by the thousand. If it's not that, then it is something else. This thus resulted in a fight between Udaybhan and Kalyani and he decided to move away from his home for some days, for then she would realize how difficult it would be if there is no man in the house.

This shows the tone of male domination of Udaybhan over Kalyani when she argues with him and he says that he was not like those men who danced to the tunes of their women. For he was the one to go out and earn money and so would spend money in any way he wishes, and nobody had the rights to utter a word. She also says to her husband before leaving that the whole arrangement of the marriage would fall apart within a month. Thus the departure of Udaybhan makes things even more worse. On leaving home, he is beaten up and killed by Matai, a convict. As she has previously prophesized, the whole arrangement fell apart.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

After the death of Udaybhan, Kalyani decides not to postpone the wedding of Nirmala as all the arrangements for the marriage are already made. Therefore, she sends a letter along with the news of the sad demise of Udaybhan to Babu Bhalchandra. She does not send this letter by post but requests the pandit, Pandit Moteram and the matchmaker to deliver it to the bridegroom's family by hand. Pandit Moteram reaches at Babu Bhalchandra's house in Lucknow on the third day. Bhalchandra is a high ranking official in the Excise Department with a full five hundred rupees as salary per month, yet he extracts huge bribes, and was just opposite to a devout Muslim who says their prayers five times, where Bhalchandra drinks alcohol religiously five times every day. It is such that he reached for liquor everytime he felt thirsty. Pandit appreciates

him and says that Nirmala's family would offer hospitality to the gentlefolk coming to the wedding, but the situation now has dramatically changed. However, the death of Udaybhan makes Bhalchandra change his mind. Panditji is surprised when Babuji and even his son withdraw from the marriage.

However, Bhuvanmohan Sinha himself is not willing to marry Nirmala as he wished to be married in some place where he would get a lot of money, at least a hundred thousand or even more. The greed of Bhuvan Mohan is highlighted when he refuses to marry Nirmala due to the dowry reasons. He says "If I marry a rich man's daughter, life will be comfortable. I do not want much, only a lakh in cash or some rich widow with property, even with a child will do" (25).

#### **CHAPTER FOUR**

The system of dowry has now become a great financial burden on the family. When the family of the bride belongs to the upper class, then the family is expected to pay more for her dowry and provide a grand display of wealth, if not then this leads to a forced or unfavourable marriage or no marriage at all. The dowry system also makes Kalyani after the death of Udaybhan to search other suitable person for Nirmala when the father of Sinha rejected Nirmala by the letter delivered by Pandit Moteram informing the death of Udaybhan.

Kalyani now has to come across a lot of proposals for Nirmala with the help of Pandit Moteram. Panditji comes with five suitors for Nirmala. Though in some of the proposal, the boy earns much but still there is a huge demand for dowry. Kalyani arranges Nirmala's marriage with Munshi Totaram who is twenty years older than Nirmala and has three sons from his first marriage, saying finally that if it is happiness or misery, it is all in the hands of fate as destined to Nirmala. Since she is fond of children, she will surely love his children as her own. Kalyani asks the Pandit to put up his trust on God and go and finalise the lawyer and to seek out an auspicious day for the wedding.

After the marriage of Nirmala to Munshi Totaram, he made Nirmala his treasurer. Nirmala also very well fulfilled the duty assigned to her. If there was

a shortfall, she would ask him the reason and she only discussed the matters of the household with him, for she thought he was only fit for that. She did not even approve of the children eating frequently during the day. The anger that Nirmala had on her mother is also revealed. It also shows how a real young bride would feel while she is married off to a man older than herself.

Nirmala has to face the violent criticisms of Rukmani Devi, Munshi Totaram's widowed sister. She was a difficult person as it was difficult to understand what made her happy or angry. Rukmani instigates the sons of Munshi Totaram that earlier they would eat sweets worth many rupees at one time but now they must beg even for pennies and because of this, Nirmala is irritated and gives the boys whatever they asked. However, Rukmani did not stop by that alone, and she also tried to spy and read Nirmala's letters and was eavesdropping on Nirmala's conversations. If Nirmala went to the terrace, she suspected that she was going to see someone else. Rukmani was like a secret police. One day Nirmala asks her husband to ask Rukmani to leave her in peace. Munshi Totaram sees this as an excellent opportunity to demonstrate his love for Nirmala.

Once Siyaram gets beating from Munshi Totaram and is comforted by Nirmala. Siyaram again is transformed to the boy in a different way on the time he saw Nirmala's pitiful sobbing that reminded the child of his own motherless condition. He sits up and weeping in her lap, falls asleep.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

After beating Siyaram, Totaram feels hopeful that he would make a place in Nirmala's heart. However, Nirmala speaks to him even less than before and finds solace in the company of children. Mansaram is another child of Munshi Totaram who is roughly the same age as Nirmala but he is five years behind her in the way of the psychological development. Hockey and football are his world. Whenever Nirmala listens to Mansaram talking about his world to her, she is able to forget herself. She then would go on to her own old days where she

played with dolls and arranged their weddings. However, Munshi Totaram also devotes himself on taking Nirmala to all sorts of entertainments, but he later realizes that all that is not enjoyed by her. This makes him to return again to his solitary ways. This sort of things done by him makes Nirmala to wonder if he was suffering from some sort of madness. He once acts as if he is attacked by many men on the advice of his friend Nayansukh but Nirmala finds flaws in his dramatic acts and Munshi Totaram is unprepared with the question Nirmala asks him.

At the same time, Rukmani comes in flying and says to Munshi Totaram that she has seen a snake in her room and the colour of his face changes and he fears a lot. He runs out to find help. However, at that time there comes in Mansaram who is having his meal, with his hockey stick and beats the snake black and blue until it is dead. Rukmani says to Munshi Totaram “Go away, we’ve all seen how brave you are!” (52) This makes him feel embarrassed. However, this event of fake dramatic act and the incident of snake issue makes Nirmala think that Munshi Totaram has contracted some disease.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

After that day, Nirmala’s attitude and behaviour begins to change. She fully decides to sacrifice herself wholly to the familial duty. She surrenders to her fate believing that all the creatures of God are not destined to be happy and considers her to be one among the many unfortunate people who is chosen by God to carry a burden full of misery. Finally, she considers herself as the one who is sentenced to life imprisonment and therefore cannot afford to go on crying. So from that day onwards, whenever Munshi Totaram returns back home from court, he would find Nirmala smiling at him at the door, eager to welcome him upon his return, this makes him happy. But then the tragedy is brought down again when Nirmala is found to be talking about Mansaram. This makes Munshi Totaram for the first time to deal with Mansaram’s studies, and he wants to ask him a question that Mansaram would not be able to deal with as

he desired to find his weakness. Somehow Munshi Totaram wins with some other questions he has asked, and with this, he makes Mansaram to be boarded into the hostel.

### **CHAPTER SEVEN**

The decision of Totaram to send Mansaram to the hostel makes Nirmala to feel “like a wall standing between father and son” (66-67). This also makes Rukmani to torment but she says nothing at all in response. Nirmala would have liked to explain but she cannot. But only Nirmala notices that Mansaram is sad and is getting weaker. Mansaram even ceases to eat anything. However, Mansaram is still sent to the hostel irrespective of his poor health.

### **CHAPTER EIGHT**

The house became lonely and quiet without Mansaram. Both the boys went to the same school. Nirmala would ask them every day about Mansaram. However, Nirmala comes to know from Bhungi, the housemaid that Mansaram considers his life as shame as he has become aware of his father’s suspicion on him and Nirmala.

### **CHAPTER NINE**

Mansaram is a changed person. Food and education both have become meaningless to him. Living in the hostel, he is unable to complete his homework and receives punishment every day. He loses his sleep in the hostel. The doctor examining the poor health of Mansaram, calls Totaram and advises him to take Mansaram home. However, Mansaram refuses to go home which makes Totaram feel relaxed.

### **CHAPTER TEN**

The next day, Totaram takes Mansaram to the hospital. His eyes are filled with tears on seeing the deteriorating condition of Mansaram and he regrets getting married again.



## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

Mansaram dies in the hospital crying at Nirmala's feet and expressing his emotions to Nirmala.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

The death of his son makes life a burden for Munshi Totaram. However, the doctor who looked after Mansaram becomes friends with Munshiji. His wife Sudha and Nirmala also visit each other occasionally. In the meanwhile, Nirmala gets pregnant.

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

Three events take place in this chapter. Nirmala gives birth to a baby girl who is named Asha. Krishna's marriage is finalized to an extremely well to do family and the house of Munshi Totaram is auctioned. The birth of Asha entangles Totaram to the world again.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

Nirmala goes to her mother's house to attend Krishna's marriage. Krishna has changed ultimately when she comes to a marriageable age. Krishna at one point is seen in her room where she busily in plying her charkha with deep concentration than what she had devoted to entertainments of the past. Even Nirmala is amazed on seeing Krishna making a real fine yarn for a turban for her would-be husband.

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

Doctor Sahib is one of the many doctors to treat Mansaram during his sickness and is also the person who was the first to marry Nirmala. He becomes a family friend, and even his own family member is married off to Krishna with his efforts who asked no dowry in return. In this chapter, Nirmala comes to know about the true identity of Doctor Sahib that he is Bhuvanmohan Sinha who once rejected Nirmala due to the dowry.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

After the marriage of Krishna, Nirmala stayed with her mother. Seeing the poor condition of Munshi Totaram, Sudha comes to Nirmala's house to take her back. However, Sohan Sudha's son falls ill. Instead of taking him to the doctor, 'Mahangu,' the expert for wading away evil eyes and a Maulvi are called in order to see and bless Sohan to get well. However, the health of Sohan gets worse and the child of Sudha and Dr. Sinha dies the next day.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Jiyaram is seen much in the middle of the novel where he grows and when Nirmala has not been there, he begins to become quarrelsome towards his father and accuses him for getting married for a second time which is not a sermon of God according to Jiyaram. Each and every day, the father and the son quarrel about something. One day Jiyaram tells Rukmani: "I'll spare him simply because he's my father, though I have friend who'd willingly beat him up in the bazaar" (144). Rukmani on the other hand reports this to Munshi Totaram who shows unconcern outwardly but fears, stops going out in the evenings.

The Doctor acts as a psychological counselor for Jiyaram. He restrains his laughter with some difficulty when Jiyaram utters these words of hatred towards his father to him and the Doctor replies that "he could quiet as easily have murdered you without getting married!" (145) and then the doctor gives him a speech sympathising with Munshi Totaram. These words hit Jiyaram too hard and he sits there weeping. This shows that he has not lost his feelings of goodness and at that point he realizes how cruel he had been. That day while Jiyaram returns home, he tries hard to convince his father that he has changed but Munshi Totaram does not believe his words. Munshi Totaram fails to act positive to his son's words and thus politeness that Jiyaram possesses just vanishes into thin air just like that.

## **CHAPTER EIGHTEEN**

When Nirmala returns back, she sees the situation of the whole house to be upside down. There is problem everywhere, even for Asha the child Nirmala brought to earth. Munshi Totaram wants to give Asha sweets and asks Siyaram to get some but Siyaram under the spell of Jiyaram, refuses to go. Siyaram the youngest is now in the mind of dilemma and it goes even more when Munshi Totaram comes with a large container and he feels sorry that he disobeyed his father. For now he cannot ask for the sweets for he feels regrets. This again shows the psychological analysis made by Premchand on noticing the temptations that are to be found in certain ages.

## **CHAPTER NINETEEN**

The next chilling moment takes place in this chapter of the novel when Jiyaram steals the jewels of Nirmala. Where during those days, Jiyaram hardly eats anything, his face is drained of all colour. He cannot sleep at nights for the fear of the police officer. If he had known that things would go this far, he would have never done such a crime. Even before the stolen ornaments are found, there are strong rumours going round that it is the son who has made off with the family jewels. Munshi Totaram discovers that it is his second son Jiyaram who steals Nirmala's jewels. Munshi Totaram reports the discovery to Nirmala. This makes Jiyaram later to run away from home for he is ashamed to face Nirmala, Munshi Totaram and others in his home.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY**

The silence of Nirmala to speak up at crucial moments is a fight towards patriarchy. Now with two sons of Munshi Totaram gone, only Siyaram is left behind. The tortures of dowry hits Nirmala, this makes her cut down all the unnecessary spending of money and to be a lot economical. All these fears begin with the theft of her jewels and it changes her nature entirely. Premchand shows the male domination and love for materials. For the females, they have only jewels as their own wealth. Nirmala thought to marry her daughter with the help of the jewels but the theft changed her a lot.

Quarrels between Rukmani and Nirmala are daily affair. It affects Siyaram too in one way for he wouldn't get a single paisa for cherishing on sweets. Nirmala on the other hand remains uncaring even towards her own needs. She would do without buying oil for her hair and even she neglects giving milk to her own infant daughter Asha. Meanwhile Munshi Totaram totally by this time around, surrenders to her control and never interferes on the things she did. He goes to courts almost daily, works harder than he did in his younger ages, even his eyesight is failing and he develops asthma. Nirmala is found to have no sympathy towards him. Even she is found to be in rage everytime she hears a beggar's cry for she is unwilling to spend a single paisa. All this makes Siyaram to think for himself.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY ONE**

Siyaram is sent to the market for Nirmala does not trust Bhungi. Siyaram is not a cautious shopper and has no skills of bargaining. He spends a lot of time running, fetching and returning. Thus one day Nirmala sends him to get ghee and after much effort, he brings the best ghee he can find but Nirmala sniffs it and says "It's no good, take it back" (165). His words make Siyaram to break into tears, for he has no way to prove to his stepmother that ghee is excellent. This scene makes the Sadhu to look deep sympathetically towards Siyaram and wants to bring his misery to an end. He talks to Siyaram in a kindly voice when Siyaram starts walking towards home and the Sadhu follows him and all along the way he speaks gently. Siyaram tells the entire story to him and he in turn says his story. Siyaram is unable to differentiate between what is real and what is fake. He also considers the option of leaving his home several times but the cunning sadhu provokes him.

Nirmala's anger makes Siyaram feel that the end of all these troubles lie in the blessings of the holy man. Siyaram goes in search of the Sadhu. When he thinks of these, he also thinks of his aunt, thinking that she is the only person who would miss him and is on the verge of returning home while then Swami Parmanand comes to take him to Haridwar.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY TWO**

Totaram goes in search of Siyaram.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY THREE**

Dr. Sinha is seen as a changed person. He conducts the marriage of Krishna without any dowry and also advises Jiyaram not to go against his father. But the good character of Dr.Sinha seems to be changed when he witnesses the beauty of Nirmala and feels sad to miss her as a wife just for the want of dowry. His behaviour towards Nirmala makes Sudha furious over him and the words of Sudha force Sinha to suicide.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR**

Rukmani is seen as a totally changed character by the end of the novel. Rukmani says that it is true that she has always dealt with Nirmala unfairly and regrets it till the end of her days. Nirmala before her death days leaves Asha into the full control of Rukmani and she says that if Asha survives, do not marry her to an unsuitable husband.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE**

At the burial, old Munshi Totaram reaches the gate to find Nirmala dead. At the end of the novel, it seems as if the death of Nirmala achieves an experience of freedom.

### **2.5 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)**

1. The novel Nirmala was written by \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Mohan Rakesh
- b. Munshi Premchand
- c. Amrita Pritam
- d. Sadat Hasan Manto

2. To whom Nirmala's marriage was fixed before the death of her father? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Totaram
  - b. Bhuvanmohan Sinha
  - c. Bhalchandra Sinha
  - d. Mansaram
3. Who murdered Udaybhan? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Chandrabhan Sinha
  - b. Bhuvanmohan Sinha
  - c. Kalyani
  - d. Matai
4. How older Totaram than Nirmala? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. 10 years
  - b. 15 years
  - c. 20 years
  - d. 25 years
5. How many children have Totaram from his first wife? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. 2
  - b. 3
  - c. 4
  - d. 5

6. Who died in the hostel? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Mansaram
  - b. Jiyaram
  - c. Siyaram
  - d. Totaram
7. Who was the housemaid of Totaram? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Krishna
  - b. Nirmala
  - c. Rukmani
  - d. Bhungi
8. What was the name of Nirmala's daughter? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Bhungi
  - b. Krishna
  - c. Asha
  - d. Rukmani

## **2.6 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)**

1.) b   2.) b   3.) d   4.) c   5.) b   6.) a   7.) d   8.) c

## **2.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Explain the journey of Nirmala from a fun loving girl to a dutiful wife of Munshi Totaram.
- Q2. What role does the fate play in the life of Nirmala?

- Q3. Justify the title of the novel *Nirmala*.
- Q4. Compare the marital life of Sudha with that of Nirmala.
- Q5. Describe the character of Rukmani Devi from a difficult person to a totally changed character at the end of the novel.

## **2.8 LET US SUM UP**

Dear Learners, in this chapter you have read the summary of the various chapters of the novel. It was introductory and made you familiar with the plot, setting and characters of the novel.

## **2.9 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Premchand, Munshi. *Nirmala*. Noida: Maple Press. Print.

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## **MUNSHI PREMCHAND**

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 3.3 Characters in the novel *Nirmala*
  - 3.3.1 Character of Nirmala, the protagonist of the novel *Nirmala*
  - 3.3.2 Other characters in the novel
- 3.4 Check Your Progress (CYP)
- 3.5 Themes in the novel *Nirmala*
- 3.6 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 3.7 Answer Key (CYP) & (MCQs)
- 3.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 3.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.10 Suggested Reading

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Premchand in the novel *Nirmala* has realistically portrayed the characters as he wanted to depict the problems of the common people. The major themes: poverty, lack of education, ill matched marriages, superstitions, dowry, etc., highlight the problems poor people face due to poverty. Women's pathetic social condition has also been highlighted.

### **3.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the characters

in the novel *Nirmala*. The chapter also aims to familiarize with the various themes highlighted in the novel.

Dear Learner, a reading of this chapter will make you

- identify the characters in the novel as well as their motivations
- analyse the major thematic concerns in the novel
- aware of the social issues such as dowry system, the subordinate status of women, child marriage, etc., and their negative impact on the society

### **3.3 CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL *NIRMALA***

The characters in the works of Munshi Premchand are very varied. He generally writes about cruel moneylenders and exploited poor villagers. The protagonists in his works are real, earthy, flawed, grey and yet evoke compassion from the readers. Through his iconic characters, he explores the real life characters and their situational reactions bound in a shackled society of India before independence.

#### **3.3.1 Character of Nirmala, the protagonist of the novel *Nirmala***

She is the main protagonist in the novel *Nirmala* (Nirmala is a Hindi name of a woman. However, it was translated in English as *The Second Wife*). Nirmala is a Hindu girl who belongs to an Indian middle class joint family. She is bright, lovely and beautiful but unfortunately a woman in a strictly patriarchal society. Despite her qualities, her fate is fixed to her marriage. Like many women of her age, the purpose of her life was to get married to a boy of her parent's choice. Her marriage is fixed to a very eligible bachelor. The match was fixed because her father agreed to pay a good dowry to the bridegroom's family. However, her marriage is broken as her father dies just before the marriage. Her fiancée breaks the engagement as he is unsure of what dowry Nirmala can get now. Suddenly, Nirmala, her mother and her siblings are left destitute. The greedy relatives leech all money possible from her father and since women

were not supposed to look into or know finances, they are left penniless. In order to overcome the situation, and to dispose off a daughter whose marriage had just been called off, Nirmala's mother marries her off to a man who is twenty years her senior and a widower who already has three grown up sons from his previous marriage. His eldest son is of Nirmala's age. Like a typical Indian girl, Nirmala accepts this as her fate. She is respectful towards her husband. However, the generation gap between them makes her feel awkward and uncomfortable to share her thoughts with him. In order to overcome her loneliness in the home, she befriends her three stepsons who are almost her age, particularly the eldest one. The relationship between her eldest stepson and Nirmala is that of a mother and son but more friendly as they are of the same age. However, her conduct is looked down upon by the society which ultimately causes a great deal of stress and feeling of distrust in her aged husband. He starts thinking that Nirmala and his eldest son are in a promiscuous relationship. This results into a conflict between her husband and his stepson that ultimately ruins the whole family but Nirmala becomes the biggest victim just because she is a woman.

### **3.3.2 Other characters in the novel**

**Munshi Totaram-** He is Nirmala's husband. He is thirty-five years old and is a lawyer by profession. After he gets married to Nirmala, he makes efforts to demonstrate his love for Nirmala. Once he beats his son Siyaram in a hope that he will win Nirmala's heart. He also devotes himself on taking Nirmala to all sorts of entertainments, but he later realizes that all that is not enjoyed by her. This makes him to return again to his solitary ways. He later suspects the illicit relationship between Nirmala and his stepson. Nirmala becomes the centre of suspicion in the eyes of Totaram. The death of his son also makes life a burden for Munshi Totaram.

**Mansaram-** He is Totaram's eldest son from his first wife. He is roughly

the same age as Nirmala but he is five years behind her in the way of the psychological development. Hockey and football are his world. Whenever Nirmala listens to Mansaram talking about his world to her, she is able to forget herself. His father suspects him of having a relationship with Nirmala and forces him out of the house to live in a hostel. In the hostel, we find Mansaram as a changed person. Food and education both have become meaningless to him. Living in the hostel, he is unable to complete his homework and receives punishment every day. He loses his sleep in the hostel. The doctor examining the poor health of Mansaram, calls Totaram and advises him to take Mansaram home. However, Mansaram refuses to go home. Mansaram dies in the hospital crying at Nirmala's feet and expressing his emotions to Nirmala.

**Jiyaram-** He is Totaram's second son from his first wife. He blames his father for the death of his older brother and flees from home after absconding with Nirmala's jewellery. He eventually commits suicide.

**Siyaram-** He is Totaram's third son from his first wife. He is lured away from his father's house by a false saint.

**Bhuvanmohan Sinha-** He is former fiancée of Nirmala. After the death of Nirmala's father, he learns that there won't be a dowry and therefore withdraws from marriage.

**Sudha-** She is Bhuvanmohan's wife. It is through her that Bhuvan comes to know about Nirmala that it is the same girl whom he had earlier left. Her criticism forces him to commit suicide.

**Babu Udayabhan-** He is Nirmala's father.

**Kalyani-** She is Nirmala's mother. She is forced by the circumstances to marry Nirmala to Totaram.

**Bhalchandra Sinha-** He is the father of Bhuvanmohan Sinha.

**Pandit Moteram-** He is a priest and a man of wisdom.

**Rukmani-** Totaram's widowed sister. She is a difficult person as it is difficult to understand what makes her happy or angry. Nirmala is unable to have a good relationship with Rukmani Devi. Rukmani instigates the sons of Munshi Totaram. She also tries to spy and read Nirmala's letters and is eavesdropping on Nirmala's conversations. If Nirmala goes to the terrace, she suspects that she is going to see someone else. Rukmani is like a secret police. However, she is seen as a totally changed character by the end of the novel. She says that it is true that she has always dealt with Nirmala unfairly and regrets it till the end of her days. Before dying, Nirmala gives custody of Asha to Rukmani.

**Bhungi-** maid in Totaram's house.

**Asha-** Totaram's daughter from his second wife, Nirmala.

### 3.4 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (CYP)

Dear learner, let us take a break now. You can now try to solve this exercise which will not only provide you a short break but will also make you assess your familiarity with the characters in the play.

1. Nirmala is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the novel. (protagonist/antagonist)
2. Nirmala's marriage is broken because of her \_\_\_\_\_ death. (mother's/father's)
3. Nirmala's husband is \_\_\_\_\_ years senior to him.
4. Totaram's eldest son is named \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Totaram suspects Nirmala to be having an affair with \_\_\_\_\_
6. Totaram forces Mansaram out of the house and forces him to live in a \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Mansaram dies in a \_\_\_\_\_

8. Totaram's son \_\_\_\_\_ commits suicide in the novel
9. Totaram's widowed sister is named \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_ is Totaram's daughter from his second wife Nirmala

### 3.5 THEMES IN THE NOVEL *NIRMALA*

Written in the early twentieth century, Premchand's novels have constantly drawn merit for their depiction of momentous social and political changes that were taking place in the country at that time. As an "imaginative mediator" and a committed writer, he helped steer modern Hindi fiction away from exotic romances and exemplary tales laden with moral didacticism towards more realistic modes of narrative representation. Premchand highlights various themes such as Marxism, feminism, marriage, etc., in the novel *Nirmala*.

**Marxism** – Premchand's *Nirmala* explores the prevalent economic inequality, dependence, unhealthy social relationship and class oppression in the contemporary Indian society that ultimately becomes the root cause for the disintegration of the families. Munshi Premchand represented the contemporary Indian society in a realistic way through his novel *Nirmala* by exposing the then social evils as created by the feudalism of British Colonial period. In the dialect of common people, he vividly exposes the problem of peasant classes in the novel who are commodified in the hands of feudal lords like Balachandra. Munshi Premchand has exposed the contemporary social evils and problems in the novel being instrumental in bringing out the concept of social realism. The plights of the female characters like Nirmala, Rukmani, Sudha, Kalyani suggests the inherent economic inequality in the contemporary Indian society where the females had to undergo double marginalization. Similarly, the plight of male characters like Babu Udaybhan, Munshi Totaram and other unnamed servants highlights the bitter experiences of the lower class people in the bourgeois society in the contemporary India. The fate of the major characters that have been compelled to bear sorrows is resulted from the class oppression prevalent in the society and bourgeois mindset of the people. The novel excavates the social

evils like dowry, child marriage, forced marriage, corruption, exploitation which are the genuine outcome of the bourgeois mindset that eventually lead to the degradation and degeneration of the happy running families. The novel is an exploration of the delineation of the lower class people's position in typical Indian Feudal society where the bourgeoisie imposition works as an inciting force to lead the tragic end of the families.

The novel brings forth the Marxist discourse to portray the pathetic condition of the working class people and females who lack the economic resources at their hand and fall victim to marginalization and class oppression. It also foregrounds the bitter experiences of the characters who cling to the essential social values at any cost in order to retain it for the social respect but that eventually lead to the family disintegration. The novel brings out the institutional realities and oppression that the ruling class has perpetuated over centuries in rural India.

*Nirmala* also exposes the disintegration of a happy family of a lower middle class people like Babu Udaybhan as he is forced to internalize the feudalistic ideology of spending lots of money in his daughter's marriage ceremony. Babu Udaybhan, the father of the female protagonist Nirmala is an ordinary lawyer who works hard to earn for his family. Though there is no precondition for dowry in the marriage, however, the family of Udaybhan clings to maintain the essential social values in order to retain the position of its family in the framework of feudal society. It is the clear indication that the lower middle class tries to make an appropriate space in the framework of feudal society by investing its family income to maintain the basic feudalistic socio-cultural values of marriage. Marxism views such system of arrange marriage as a tool of capitalism to make money in the name of maintaining such social values. The capitalist social system compels the lower class people to invest a huge sum of money to consume the goods produced by the capitalists itself.

**Space and Personhood** - Confinement of women within domesticity naturalizes their labour and erases their individuality. It turns them into "ghostly figure of desire with no place to occupy in the social order." It erases their

suffering and eulogizes their drudgery. As the second wife, Nirmala already feels hemmed in when she enters the household. With a domineering sister-in-law who does not wish for her hold on the family to be undermined, she finds herself lost with no assailable role to play at hand. Towards the end of Chapter five, she consciously chooses to devote herself to the upbringing of the children. This decision to adopt the maternal role is a product of the socio-historical baggage associated with the space of the household and the gendered division of labour within it. However, the adoption of the role does not bring peace in the household. Her inability to feel any sexual attraction towards a man of her father's age and a natural affinity that she feels towards the eldest son, Mansaram because they are of the same age causes Totaram to develop suspicions regarding them. In order to allay his fears, she begins confining herself to her own room and stops taking the lessons in English from Mansaram which she used to do earlier. She begins devoting greater time and attention to Totaram's needs but has to now hear jibes about her neglect of the children. Typecast as the evil stepmother, she is allowed no room for individual action which induces passivity in her: "If I've ever said anything to him, may my tongue fall off. Of course, as a stepmother all kinds of blame attaches to me by rights. I beg you, please ask him to come in" (77). It is only after the loss of the first two sons, that she decides to take the reins of the household into her own hands but the overwhelming anxiety for the future makes her insensitive to the need of the family and leads to further loss and bereavement. Though Nirmala remains firmly located within the domestic space, she is by no means insulated from the network of prevalent social practices as is evident in her life journey through the novel. In contrast to Bachelard's phenomenological study of the home as a "felicitous space," the domestic household as portrayed in *Nirmala*, brings to the fore the "lived" aspect of spatial experience, which due to its corporal nature has the capacity to incarnate into the realm of consciousness. The home in the novel is indicative of the ambiguous continuity of social spaces, where the space of the room or the house though cut off due to barriers or walls and other signs of private property, still remains a part of the very same social space. Therefore,



*Nirmala*, in the process of narrating the “private in public,” reveals a world shaped by a spatial economy which combines the social relations of reproduction with the relations of production. Knowledge of the spatio-temporal matrix which the characters inhabit, reveals the complex interrelation being formed between the exterior and the interior in a world in the first glimpse of modernity. The genre of the novel too, as a new form, offers an ideologically charged space, for the author to represent a world experiencing the formation of new socio-geographical settings.

**Marriage-** Munshi Premchand’s novel *Nirmala* challenges the existing bourgeois social norms by dealing with the sensitive social issues like marriage. *Nirmala* is a women-centric novel which deals with the suffering which the female gender has to go through. In this novel, Premchand highlights the status of Indian women especially in rural India and how they are treated. From the moment she is born, the burden of family and its respect falls on her shoulder and she has to sacrifice and compromise all through her life just to keep her family’s pride and honour intact. Through the character of Nirmala, Premchand has tried to depict the problems associated with the multiple marriages and how a stepmother is being blamed for all the wrong things that happens and thus ultimately leads to the destruction of a healthy rich family. Therefore, the novel presents a nuanced mockery of the institution of marriage.

**Feminism** – Premchand’s *Nirmala* is a careful depiction of the setting, circumstances, language and culture that contributes to the plight and demise of women. The novel highlights the issue of female subjugation in patriarchal society. The novel highlights the deep rooted concepts of ideal womanhood which act as the basis for the women’s continued subordination within the patriarchal framework.

Premchand in his novel *Nirmala* portrays Nirmala as submissive and humble who is being sidelined to the margins and has to undergo lots of sufferings as she does not have access to the economic and social role. *Nirmala* deals with the problems of marriage, a problem created by the compulsions of dowry

and the power of wealth, and producing in its turn a whole set of emotional and psychological consequences. The novel highlights the pathetic life of Nirmala who meets her untimely death after becoming the centre of suspicion in the eyes of her husband. Her husband suspects the illicit relationship between Nirmala and her stepson. However, there was nothing like that. The novel also touches the psychological and emotional consequences in the life of Nirmala brought about by the then contemporary social structure.

**Dowry System-** Dowry system, one of the residues of evils of bourgeoisie culture, is responsible for the disintegration of the lower class of families. The tradition of dowry also has been critically highlighted in the novel to prove it as one of the determining factors of family degeneration. As the working class people tend to manage dowry for the marriage of their daughter, they get plunged in heavy debt by borrowing money from the landlords in heavy interest. The novel elevates this issue of dowry by bringing it into the frame of critical analysis in order to demonstrate its negative impacts and consequences in the lives of working class people that pushes the families towards their tragic ends like that of Nirmala.

In the novel *Nirmala*, Premchand has specially emphasized on the importance of dowry system in Indian society. The novel begins with the preparation for marriage of a girl. Her father and mother are busy in arranging all the requirements for dowry. However, due to her father's death, her would be in-laws refuse to marry her because now they think they cannot get much in dowry. Therefore, her marriage is fixed to an old aged man due to dowry reasons.

**Family-** *Nirmala* revolves around the character of Nirmala, a young woman married to an elderly widower with three sons. Caught in a complex situation where desire, guilt and suspicion, aggravate the situation to such an extent that the entire family falls apart, it is Nirmala's reticence which seems to be responsible for the disintegration of the family. Though, Nirmala on her part tries her best to save the situation each time: "Despite all my care and caution the blame has finally fallen on me!" (163)

**Tradition-** Tradition is another point which Premchand highlights in the novel. It is evident through the customs revealed, read and seen throughout the novel. The novel highlights the horror of going astray the tradition and normal practices. This is seen when Munshi Totaram hesitates on sending his son to a hospital for treatment due to which his health weakens in the hostel and he dies. This is also highlighted in the incident when Sudha's son Sohan falls ill instead of taking him to the doctor, everyone including Nirmala, Sudha and Kalyani try to cure him with the help of superstitious treatments. This ultimately results in his death.

**Child marriage-** Child marriage is another issue that Premchand presses upon in this novel. In the pre-independence era, the parents used to perform marriages of the under-aged girls even with a much elderly man. Some families used to do it in the fear that their children may deviate after reaching teenage. Children are forced to marry as their parents create a pressure on them because if young girls are not married, the whole family is abandoned by the villagers. *Nirmala* is one of the most moving and touching novels in Hindi on the theme of child marriage. Premchand has raised the issue of child marriage in the novel *Nirmala*. It is seen through the marriage of Munshi Totaram to Nirmala. *Nirmala* is a novel that projects the reformist agenda along with the presentation of evils of child marriage.

### 3.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. Who was the protagonist in the novel? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Krishna
- b. Kalyani
- c. Rukmani
- d. Nirmala

2. The novel *Nirmala* was translated in English as \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Premchand in House
  - b. The Secret of God's Abode
  - c. The Most Precious Jewel in the World
  - d. The Second Wife
3. What was the main theme in the novel? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Poverty
  - b. Superstitions
  - c. Lack of education
  - d. Dowry
4. In the end of the novel, Nirmala gave the custody of her daughter to whom? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Kalyani
  - b. Sudha
  - c. Rukmani
  - d. Krishna
5. In the end of the novel, when Nirmala dies, what was it represent? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. She got education
  - b. Successful marriage
  - c. She got poverty
  - d. She got freedom

6. Who among the following represents the feudal class in the novel?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- a. Siyaram
  - b. Totaram
  - c. Balachandra
  - d. Pandit Moteram
7. The ideology which explores economic inequality and class oppression is called? \_\_\_\_\_
- a. Marxism
  - b. Fascism
  - c. Feminism
  - d. Anarchism
8. In Premchand's *Nirmala*, the institution of marriage is projected as \_\_\_\_\_ for women.
- a. liberating
  - b. equal
  - c. beneficial
  - d. restrictive
9. \_\_\_\_\_ is the ideology which deals with the issues of female subjugation in patriarchal societies
- a. Marxism
  - b. Feminism
  - c. Anarchism
  - d. Feudalism

10. Which of these themes is not discussed in the novel *Nirmala*? \_\_\_\_\_
- Dowry
  - Child Marriage
  - Partition
  - Poverty
11. In *Nirmala* Premchand has projected child marriage as \_\_\_\_\_
- evil
  - necessary
  - liberating
  - valuable

### 3.7 ANSWER KEY (CYP) & (MCQs)

#### (CYP)

- |                |             |            |
|----------------|-------------|------------|
| 1. protagonist | 2. father's | 3. twenty  |
| 4. Mansaram    | 5. Mansaram | 6. hostel  |
| 7. hospital    | 8. Jiyaram  | 9. Rukmani |
| 10. Asha       |             |            |

#### (MCQs)

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

### 3.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

Q1. Write a short note on the character of Nirmala.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_

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Q2. *Nirmala* is a nuanced mockery of the institution of marriage. Explain.

Ans. 

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Q3. Discuss the theme of Marxism in Munshi Premchand's *Nirmala*.

Ans. 

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Q4. Describe in brief the theme of dowry system as depicted in the novel *Nirmala*.

Ans. 

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Q5. Discuss the minor characters in the novel *Nirmala*.

Ans. 

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Q6. Critically analyze the character of Munshi Totaram.

Ans. 

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Q7. Evaluate the issue of dowry system as highlighted in the novel *Nirmala*.

Ans. 

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### 3.9 LET US SUM UP

Premchand occupies an important place among the Indian writers and he is famous for his remarkable literary output. His novel ‘Nirmala’ is centered on a young girl Nirmala, who is forced to marry a widower of her father’s age. The novel deals with the question of dowry, mismatched marriages and related issues. The story uses fiction to highlight an era of much needed social reform in 1920’s Indian Society.

### 3.10 SUGGESTED READING

- ◆ Premchand, Munshi. *Nirmala*. Noida: Maple Press. Print. ? 11 January, 2020.
- ◆ Chauhan, Shailendra. “Munshi Premchand : Father of Modern English Fiction” *One India*. 31st July, 2006:10.

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## **LIFE AND WORKS OF SAADAT HASAN MANTO**

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 4.3 Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto
- 4.4 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 4.5 Answer Key (MCQs)
- 4.6 Examination Oriented Questions
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Suggested Reading

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Saadat Hasan Manto was a celebrated writer writing mainly in Urdu. Manto's creative work has helped to put forth the violence of partition and tingled the imaginative instincts of the readers/ leaving them to introspect on the longer questions of war/killing/boundaries/ideology, etc.

### **4.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the life and works of Saadat Hasan Manto.

Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will be

- able to describe the biographical details of Saadat Hasan Manto
- explain some of Saadat Hasan Manto's major works and the nature of his writing
- recognise the horrors people faced as an aftermath of the partition of India as most of Saadat Hasan Manto's works deal with a painful portrayal of partition

#### 4.3 LIFE AND WORKS OF SAADAT HASAN MANTO

In the South Asian history, Saadat Hasan Manto (11 May 1912 –18 January 1955) was the most popular as well as equally controversial writer of his times. He could be called as the greatest chronicler of the most turbulent episode of his country's history. He was born into a middle class Muslim family of barristers in Paproudi village of Samrala, in the Ludhiana district of Punjab. He traced his ancestral roots to Kashmir and felt proud to follow the Kashmiri cultural ways. He was a novelist, screenwriter, author, playwright, essayist and extremely admired short-story writer. In 1933, Manto got a chance to meet Abdul Bari Alig, a scholar and polemic writer who laid a path for his literary crave for French and Russian authors. He started his literary career translating works of literary giants, such as Victor Hugo, Oscar Wilde, and Russian writers like Chekhov and Gorky. Manto wrote an Urdu translation of Victor Hugo's novel *The Last Day of a Condemned Man* as *Sarguzasht-e-Aseer (A Prisoner's Story)* published by Urdu Book Stall, Lahore. He then joined the editorial team of *Masawat*, daily published from Ludhiana. Till his early 20's, he translated much works of French, English and Russian short stories into Urdu. He used to write an entire story in one go, with minimum corrections and actively displayed his skills by writing on bold subjects of human desires. His first story "Tamasha" is based on the Jallianwala Bagh massacre at Amritsar that shows marked leftist and socialist leanings. In 1934, Manto pursued graduation at Aligarh Muslim University and linked himself with Indian Progressive Writers' Association (IPWA). In March 1935, his second story "Inqlaab Pasand" was published in

Aligarh magazine. Later in 1941, Manto agreed to join writing in Urdu provision for All India Radio. Within a short span of eighteen months, he published collections of four radio plays, *Aao (Come)*, *Manto ke Drame (Manto's Dramas)*, *Janaze (Funerals)* and *Teen Auraten (Three Women)*. He soon came up with next short story collection *Dhuan (Smoke)* followed by "Manto ke Afsane" and "Manto ke Mazamine" (topical essays). In 1943, publication of his mixed collection of "Afsane aur Dramey" came out while soon after a year in July 1942, Manto left his job due to tussle with poet N. M. Rashid, director of the All India Radio. He came back to Bombay and worked with film industry. His skills for screenwriting came in forefront with the release of *Aath Din, Chal Chal Re Naujawan* and *Mirza Ghalib* in 1954. He also wrote short stories during this time like "Kaali Shalwar" (1941), "Dhuan" (1941) and "Bu" (1945). He also published another collection of short stories, *Chugad*. He showcases an unhesitant portrayal of various shades of human desires and sufferings in his works. He portrays the darkness of the human psyche, as humanistic values progressively declined around the partition. In January 1948, he shifted to Lahore, Pakistan after the partition of India and got in touch with well-known scholars like Nasir Kazmi, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Ahmad Rahi and Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi. He actively took part in literary debates and political discussions at Lahore's iconic park, Park Tea House. He produced 22 collections of short stories, 1 novel, 5 series of radio plays, 3 collection of essays and 2 collections of personal sketches. Manto died at the age of 43, due to the addiction to alcohol. He wrote boldly about alcoholics, sex and desire, prostitutes and relationships. In his life time, he was charged with obscenity six times; thrice before 1947 in British India and thrice after independence in 1947 but never convicted. Manto's writings clearly depicted that he was not shy to write about sexual encounters and women's sexual needs. His final works, which grew from the social climate and his own financial struggles, reflected an innate sense of human impotency towards darkness and contained a satirism that verged on dark comedy, as seen in his final work, "Toba Tek Singh." It not only showed the influence of his own demons, but also that of the collective madness that he

saw in the ensuing decade of his life. To add to it, his numerous court cases and societal rebukes deepened his cynical view of society, from which he felt isolated. No part of human existence remained untouched or taboo for him, he sincerely brought out stories of prostitutes and pimps alike, just as he highlighted the subversive sexual slavery of women of his times. On his fiftieth anniversary in 2005, Manto was commemorated on a Pakistani postage stamp. Later, on August 14, 2012, he was posthumously awarded with Nishan-e-imitiaz award by the Government of Pakistan.

Manto was a well-known writer even before the partition of India, but the stories he wrote in reference to the brutal experiences during partition and discussions on human existence became the strong grounds for his literary success. One of his shortstory, “Bu” (“Smell”) depicted a sexual encounter between a rich gentleman and a prostitute. The man is intoxicated and attracted to the smell of the prostitute’s armpits. His stories are termed as radical as they tried to break the shackles of shame and suppression of sexual desires. In “Thanda Gosht” (“Cold Meat”) the confession of raping a corpse comes as shock to the readers as the rigid cultural and traditional structure of the country does not give the liberty to move beyond the moral codes of the society. The haunting era of partition turned the country into the battlefield of man-made massacre. It turned innocent people into criminals and terrible scavengers. The story revolves around a young Sikh gentleman, Ishwar Singh who fails to make sexual relations with his mistress. She suspects him for infidelity. In the fit of anger and jealousy, she stabs him with his own dagger. While dying, Ishwar Singh reveals that he did a heinous act by getting involved in the violent riots. He killed a Muslim family with the same dagger and kidnapped their daughter. He attempted rape on the girl who was actually dead at that time. His works are an amalgamation of political bites and human desires. Similarly, in “My Name is Radha” the male character of the story is raped by a woman. Other than this, Manto’s stories touched the absurdities of partition and the atrocities inflicted on the basis of religion. In one of the popular story “Toba Tek Singh,”

some inmates of the Lahore Asylum had to be shifted to India after the bloody partition of the country. It creates great satire on the situation of people in both the countries which are merely on the verge of insanity due to trauma of partition and loss. The main protagonist Bishan Singh, a Sikh inmate of the asylum depicts the psyche of the disturbed inmates of the country. He belongs to a town named Toba Tek Singh whose location was unknown to him. He used to consult other lunatics in the asylum who gave him false imaginations of his town. Later, Bishan Singh hears that his town is part of Pakistan so he refuses to go to India. At the end of the story, Bishan Singh is found lying in the no man's land between the two barbed fences. He was in a situation where he lost the belonging to his own country which is cut into two unrecognised halves. So, "there, behind barbed wire, was Hindustan. Here, behind the same kind of barbed wire, was Pakistan. In between, on that piece of ground that had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh."

From "Toba Tek Singh" to "Khol Do," Manto had to face difficult situations as his strong thoughts and liberal views always met with criticisms, controversies, discouragement and even legal battles. He commemorates the trauma of partition but his concern is towards the effect of it on human life and sufferings. In "Tithwal ka Kutta," the situation of war and hatred turns normal humans into mysterious beasts. It depicts that the killings and sacrifices of human lives are nothing but loss which does not belong to any warring sides. In the story, the dog is shown shuffling from one enemy camp to the other. The dog's name Jhun Jhun creates a suspicious atmosphere when Pakistan army finds the name to be some secret code from Indian Army. When dog crosses the border to India's side, he is again looked with suspicion for some nasty plans by the enemy. At the end, the dog meets cruel death in the cross border firing by the army. Similarly, in "Khol Do" the story captures the wrath of partition towards innocent people of the land. It is basically a story of a father, Sirajuddin who had left India during the partition time. After the dreadful journey from

Amritsar to Lahore in which hundreds of people were brutally killed, raped and lost, he lay unconscious for hours on the platform of Mughalpur. When he wakes he finds that his wife and daughter are not with him. He reminds himself of the brutal attack on the train when his dying wife pleaded him to run away with Sakina, his daughter. He gets up to find Sakina and tries his level best to trace her. At last, Sakina is found out from their own side of border but in a terrible condition. She was being raped and gang raped by the people of her own religion. Manto carefully examines the inhuman approaches and the hidden beast in human personality which overpowers to satisfy the thirst, thus, crushing the sentiments of every religion. He is still known for his scathing insight into human behaviour as well as revelation of the macabre animalistic nature of an enraged people, who stands out amidst the brevity of his prose.

#### 4.4 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

- Q1. When was Saadat Hasan Manto born? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a) May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1912
  - b) July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1880
  - c) May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1914
  - d) May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1910
- Q2. Which was the birth place of Saadat Hasan Manto? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a) Lahore, Pakistan
  - b) Karachi, Pakistan
  - c) Samrala, Ludhiana district of Punjab in India
  - d) Amritsar, Majha region of Punjab in India
- Q3. Which novel of Victor Hugo was translated into as *Sarguzasht-e-Aseer* (*A Prisoner's Story*) in Urdu by Saadat Hasan Manto? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a) *Toilers of the Sea*

- b) *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*
  - c) *The Last Day of a Condemned Man*
  - d) *The Man Who Laughs*
- Q4. Saadat Hasan Manto's first story "Tamasha" was based on\_\_\_\_\_.
- a) Partition of India
  - b) Jallianwala Bagh Massacre
  - c) Life of Manto
  - d) Women exploitation
- Q5. How many collections of short stories did Manto produce?\_\_\_\_\_.
- a) 15
  - b) 22
  - c) 21
  - d) 29
- Q6. In "Thanda Gosht" what truth is revealed by Ishwar Singh?\_\_\_\_\_.
- a) Confession of attempting suicide
  - b) Confession of raping a corpse
  - c) Confession of robbery
  - d) Confession of child marriage
- Q7. In the short story "Khol do" where is Sakina found at the end?\_\_\_\_\_.
- a) In a hospital in Pakistan
  - b) In a hospital in India
  - c) In refugee camp
  - d) In asylum

#### **4.5 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)**

1. (a) 2. (c) 3. (c) 4. (b) 5. (b) 6. (b) 7. (a)

#### **4.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Write a note on the short stories of Saadat Hasan Manto.
2. Write a note about the impact of partition on Saadat Hasan Manto.
3. Discuss the mastery of Saadat Hasan Manto in depicting the human psyche and sufferings.

#### **4.7 LET US SUM UP**

In this lesson, you have learnt about Saadat Hasan Manto's life, his diverse range of themes and his place in Indian writing in English. His works highlight various social concerns and many of them revolve around the theme of independence. The lesson also makes an assessment of Saadat Hasan Manto as a short story writer.

#### **4.8 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ *The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, by Alok Bhalla. 1997, Indian Institute of Advance Study.
- ◆ *The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*. Introduction by Leslie Flemming; trans. By Tahira Naqvi. Lahore, Pakistan: Van guard Books Ltd., 1985.

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**SAADAT HASAN MANTO'S**  
**“THE PRICE OF FREEDOM”**

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 5.3 Brief Summary of the short story “The Price of Freedom”
- 5.4 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 5.5 Answer Key (MCQs)
- 5.6 Examination Oriented Questions
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Suggested Reading

**4.1 INTRODUCTION**

“The Price of Freedom” by Saadat Hasan Manto talks about the human psyche and comments upon the emotional, religious and social instability in the society during the turbulent era of freedom struggle.

**4.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME**

Dear learner, The objective of this lesson is to familiarize you with the story, theme, ideas and characters in the short story “The Price of Freedom.”

After a thorough reading of this lesson, you will

- be able to offer summary of the short story “The Price of Freedom”
- be able to list the characters in “The Price of Freedom” and explain their role in the plot
- be able to critically analyse the various nationalistic and patriotic ideas as inherently patriarchal in nature which promote patriarchal control and domination

### **5.3 BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE SHORT STORY “THE PRICE OF FREEDOM”**

- **An Introduction**

Manto wrote during the era of modern Indian history fraught with religious/communal tensions which resulted in the bifurcation of national politics. In Manto’s view, literature is the pulse of community – literature gives news about the nation, the community to which it belongs, its health, its illness. His writings are realistic and satirical observations on violence-laced cultural inscriptions that manifest in the blood-thirsty behaviour of a large number of people in the Indian subcontinent. He explores the controversial themes of love, sex, incest, prostitution, rape, murder, patriarchy, etc. in the specific context of the dismal socio-cultural climate of the partition. In his fiction, Manto reveals the suffering of individuals who bore the brunt of communal violence during partition.

- **Brief Summary**

Swaraj ke Liye (“The Price of Freedom”) is a story about two ardent young Congress followers, Shahzada Ghulam Ali and Nigar, who fall in love. The story is set in Amritsar quite a few years after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Ghulam Ali makes a name as a fiery young Congress worker. Every few days a “dictator” is appointed to the Congress camp and Ghulam Ali is the fortieth “dictator” to take over, since his predecessors have all been sent to prison. In

this position one does not last for more than a few days before being sent to jail. The scene is set in the backdrop of Post Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar and the story is about two fervent Muslim Congress workers. The story takes a turn after the coming of Babaji. He heads an ashram and carries a halo about him. All political movements in Amritsar take place only with his blessings. One is not left guessing about what Manto thinks of ashrams: "I had seen many Ashram inmates in my time. There was something lifeless and pallid about them, despite their early morning cold bath and long walks. With their pale faces and swollen eyes, they somehow always reminded me of cow's udders." To a full-blooded man like Manto, this is how an ashram would appear. The artifice creeps in when it is the Baba who joins Ghulam and Nigar in wedlock. How a Hindu Baba, heading an ashram, joins two Muslims in marriage is never explained, perhaps because it is not explicable. The Baba asks Nigar to join the ashram and makes a long speech at the wedding, where he states that the sexual link was not as important as it was made out to be in a marriage. A true marriage should be free of lust, he says, "The sanctity of marriage is more important than the gratification of the sexual instinct." All this stirs Ghulam Ali who states, trembling with emotion, "I have a declaration to make. As long as India does not win freedom, I and Nigar will live not as husband and wife but as friends" (ibid.). He asks Nigar if she would like to mother a child who would be a slave at the moment of his birth. She wouldn't. After marriage Ghulam Ali is bundled off to jail for eight months. After he returns they obviously live together, but in sexual abstinence. The return to conventional life is hum-drum and boring, compared to the excitement of their days with the Congress. Many years later, the narrator meets Ghulam Ali and finds that he is now doing well and owns some shoe stores. However, he does not stock rubber footwear. Ghulam Ali hates rubber, the reason being the use of condoms which he and Nigar resorted to in order to keep their vow to the Baba that he would not father a child in an enslaved India. Later he gives up condoms and has children, but the bitter antipathy against rubbers lingers. The story ends with his child

coming into the shop with a balloon, and Ghulam Ali, in a tantrum, pouncing on the balloon and bursting it and throwing the ugly rubber out of the shop. The story reflects detailed—almost blow-by-blow—plotting, and also displays Manto’s cockiness, which seems to declare that he can carry off almost anything. A Hindu Baba was perhaps needed because he had to talk about freedom and perhaps hint at sexual abstinence. Manto’s distrust of ashrams also comes through when he talks about Nigar joining the ashram, “Why should she, who was herself pure as a prayer, raise her hands to heaven?”. The ending of course is superb (the child’s balloon being pricked) which depicts freedom from the useless religious restrictions.

- **Critical Appreciation of the Story**

In “The Price of Freedom,” Manto explores the manner in which phallogocentric operations wield control and violence over the female body. The author demonstrates the manner in which patriotic, rhetoric and nationalistic ideals and ideology are, actually, an exercise by patriarchy meant to generate a group of people in order to manipulate them to submit to their victimization. In this story, Manto describes the plight of his childhood friend Ghulam Ali who is forcibly held prisoner to a hollow and unfulfilling life while participating in the nation’s fight for freedom. He is an active participant in the civil disobedience movement during which he falls in love with a fellow revolutionary: a girl called Nigar. Being a resident of Amritsar and a good orator, Ghulam Ali is chosen as a “dictator” by the revolutionaries for the prime purpose of addressing a rally at Jallianwala Bagh and then getting himself arrested and thrown into jail as a sign of bravery and rebellion against the British rule (Manto 60). Ghulam Ali wants to marry his beloved before going to prison, and for this conjugal union he seeks the blessings of a religious sage known to the public as Babaji. The character of Babaji seems to be modelled upon Mahatma Gandhi – a visionary who professes practicing abstinence from the material things in life. The writer, however, reveals that Babaji’s proclamation of disinterest in worldly things is,

in fact, a ruse. Manto narrates that Babaji is renowned for his piety and scholarship and has a legion of followers belonging to different religions. On his occasional visits to Amritsar, he resides at the palatial house of a local jeweller. Also, despite his proclivity towards religious activities, Babaji nurtures an avid interest in politics and continually but subtly drops hints and discusses political strategies with people who come to pay homage to him. Even though he lives in an Ashram, Babaji is a man accustomed to living a comfortable life where people cater to his every whim and fancy and follow his orders. His disciples are more like his slaves, with lifeless and ashen appearance, whose life decisions are made and manipulated by their spiritual leader (67). The character of Babaji represents the violence and power that characterize the panoptic function of patriarchy. The concept of panopticism has been investigated and theorized by Michel Foucault. He identifies body as the principal target of power. He says that modern power – disciplinary in its nature – operates in a capillary fashion throughout the social body which can be best grasped in the everyday practices which sustain and reproduce power relations. In his seminal work *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault studies these practices which, according to him, are an exercise in disciplinary power. He suggests that these practices were first cultivated in isolated institutional settings, such as prisons, military establishments, hospitals, factories and schools, but were gradually applied more broadly as techniques of social regulation and control. Their aim is to simultaneously optimize the body's capacities, skills and productivity and to foster its usefulness and docility. It is not, however, only the body that the disciplinary techniques target. Disciplinary power which is initially directed toward disciplining the body, Foucault argues, gradually takes hold of the mind as well to induce a psychological state of conscious and permanent visibility. Here control is achieved by the means of subtle strategies of normalization carried out through the medium of constant surveillance and discourse. Babaji's ashram appears as a form of Foucault's idea of the 'prison' which, in turn, is his metaphor for modern disciplinary society founded on the concept of power,

knowledge and body. Babaji projects himself as a revolutionary who is not enamoured of politics. Instead, he wishes for the spiritual enlightenment that will bring freedom to the citizens of the nation. However, Babaji frequently deviates from his proclamations by dropping hints about the tactics to be followed to the political leaders who were among the group of his followers. Moreover, he couches his political ideology in his influential rhetoric about youth and revolution. Babaji is, in fact, a power-hungry individual who maintains his dominant position in society by devising new means and tactics of control over a legion of followers. He has opened several ashrams and persuades his disciples to come and reside there. These ashrams are, however, more like reformatories where the activities of residents are closely monitored and controlled by Babaji. He declares that his purpose is to guide them towards higher life; so, he prescribes to them a life devoid of any comfort whereas he enjoys all the luxuries provided to him as courtesy by his blinded disciples. The residents of his ashram have a “lifeless” and “pallid” look about them, an after-effect of the hard life they are forced to endure on the command of Babaji (Manto 67). In *The Panopticon Writings*, Jeremy Bentham presents panopticon as an idea of a new principle of construction devised primarily for penitentiary houses which, he argues, can also be applied to other establishments. Here the incarcerated individuals are enclosed within walls but remain isolated from one another, and are subject to scrutiny by an observer who remains unseen. Michel Foucault considers the panopticon to be a discipline mechanism which induces in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power washed by Babaji’s ideology. Ghulam Ali too is one of the willing victims of Babaji. He goes with his girlfriend Nigar to ask for Babaji’s blessings before their nuptials. Babaji expresses extreme displeasure at Ghulam Ali’s decision to marry. He advises Ali to send his fiancée to live in his ashram and then go and get himself arrested in order to show his patriotism. Later, Babaji changes his mind about their wedding and agrees to give them his blessings the next day at the Jallianwala Bagh. The narrator writes that Babaji,

with the makings of an astute politician, declares in front of riveted audience about his gladness over Ghulam Ali and Nigar uniting in wedlock. He states that procreating rather than dedicating one's life to the cause of the country's freedom is evil, indulgent and abnormal behaviour. Babaji, with his cleverly devised rant, quickly inveigles Ghulam Ali to promise to the entire congregation that he will not have children with his future wife and they shall spend their married life as friends. When Ghulam Ali comes out of his revolutionary stupor, he realizes that he has made a mistake by allowing his life to be controlled by another individual and, ultimately, he breaks his vow to Babaji and resumes living a full life. The most obvious yet mute victim in this narrative is Nigar. Manto describes her as an educated, self-assured, and compassionate woman. Nonetheless, she remains voiceless in the face of the manipulation and oppressive dictums of Babaji. Moreover, she does not have any opportunity to take any decisions; she keeps moving between the ideology and the wishes of both Ghulam Ali and Babaji. In effect thus, both are the perpetrators of violence against Nigar. For Babaji, the body of the woman stands as a symbol of indulgence and evil; he considers female body to be a deliberate distraction and obstacle that diverts the freedom fighter from his "normal" calling and conduct. Hence he advises Nigar to join the ashram in order to move Ghulam Ali away from the path of temptation. However, Ghulam Ali is not able to adapt to a life devoid of abstinence. So, he skirts his promise made to Babaji by deciding that he will have sexual relations with his wife but will not beget any children from her. However, he soon begins yearning for children – something to call upon as his legacy. Also, he is agonized on behalf of his wife for he knows that she craves motherhood. Ghulam Ali thus decides to ditch his promise to Babaji and produces a couple of children with Nigar. When Manto meets Ghulam Ali years later, he notices his friend's hatred towards anything made of rubber – be it rubber soles or a deflated balloon. For Ghulam Ali, rubber alludes to condoms: a reminder of stunted and barren marital life. Ghulam Ali seeks transcendence from this desolate existence through natural contact with a woman's body. In

this story, Nigar's body is reduced to a mere womb, an object, a means for Ghulam Ali to achieve the goal he considers to be his life's true purpose. Hence, Ghulam Ali is the primordial phallic subject who represses the subjectivity of the associated other by violating her body. This violation by Ghulam Ali has, in fact, no visible brute force attached to it.

#### **5.4 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)**

1. The short story Price of Freedom was written by \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Munshi Premchand
  - b. Michel Foucault
  - c. Mohan Rakesh
  - d. Saadat Hasan Manto
2. Who were the main characters in the short story The Price of Freedom? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Nirmala and Krishna
  - b. Ghulam Ali and Nigar
  - c. Bishan Singh and Kishan Singh
  - d. Savitri and Mahendra Nath
3. What Babaji said the couple not to do in the short story The Price of Freedom? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Don't meet each other
  - b. Don't live together
  - c. Sexual relationship
  - d. Don't participate in the Congress Party



4. For how many months Ghulam Ali arrested? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. 5
  - b. 6
  - c. 7
  - d. 8
5. How the short story The Price of Freedom ends? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Ghulam and his son came to the shop with balloons
  - b. They don't have any child
  - c. Ghulam and his wife separate from each other
  - d. Ghulam was the leader of the Congress Party

**5.5 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)**

1.) d    2.) b    3.) c    4.) d    5.) a

**5.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Explain the role of Babaji in the short story “The Price of Freedom.”
2. Explain the impact of struggle for Freedom over the psyche of the youth of that time like Ghulam Ali, Nigar and Manto.
3. Explain the journey of Ghulam Ali from a dictator to a family man.
4. Write the character sketch of Nigar and the depiction of women in Manto's story.

**5.7 LET US SUM UP**

In this lesson, you get to read in detail, Manto's short story “The Price of Freedom.” It is remarkable for its portrayal of the times of Indian freedom struggle and is based on events that happened in Amritsar. He,

very craftily has portrayed the difficulties which people were facing because of partition.

## 5.8 SUGGESTED READING

- ◆ *Another Lonely Voice: The Urdu Short Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto*, by Leslie A. Flemming, Berkeley: Centre for South and South east Asian Studies. University of California. 1979.
- ◆ *Madness and Partition: The Short Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto*, Stephen Alter, *Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 14, Madness and Civilization/ al-Junun wa al-Hadarah (1994)
- ◆ *The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, by Alok Bhalla. 1997, Indian Institute of Advance Study.
- ◆ *The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*. Introduction by Leslie Flemming; trans. By Tahira Naqvi. Lahore, Pakistan: Van guard Books Ltd., 1985.
- ◆ *Naked Voices: Stories and Sketches by Manto*, Ed. And tr. By Rakhshanda Jalil. Indian Ink & Roli Books, 2008.

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**SAADAT HASAN MANTO'S  
"TOBA TEK SINGH"**

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 6.3 Critical Summary of the short story "Toba Tek Singh"
- 6.4 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 6.5 Answer Key (MCQs)
- 6.6 Examination Oriented Questions
- 6.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.8 Suggested Reading

**6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aftermath of the partition of the country brought a strange kind of madness, bestiality and horror in the minds of the people of both the countries (India and Pakistan). The in-between situation of the people and their emotional struggle is well depicted in the short story "Toba Tek Singh" by Saadat Hasan Manto.

## 6.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the characters, theme and ideas in the short story “Toba Tek Singh.”

Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will

- be able to summarize the short story “Toba Tek Singh”
- be able to critically analyse the theme of partition as well as the narrative style of the short story
- be critique the arbitrariness of political decisions which have the power to negatively affect millions of lives

## 6.3 CRITICAL SUMMARY OF THE SHORT STORY “TOBA TEK SINGH”

### • Introduction

“Toba Tek Singh,” first published in 1953 in an Urdu magazine *Savera*, was written at a time ‘when Manto’s energies were at their lowest ebb’ in more ways than one. He had migrated to Pakistan in 1948 and since then had been leading an agonized existence. Constantly plagued by memories of the past, Manto could never bring himself to feel that he really belonged to Pakistan. In addition to this, his increasing poverty and failing health drove him to alcoholism and there came a time in his life when he almost got himself admitted to a mental asylum because his circumstances coupled with his attitude to life had pushed him into a deep depression.

Manto locates his story “Toba Tek Singh” in a lunatic asylum and thus takes the theme of partition to the world of the insane highlighting the political absurdity of the partition itself and at the same time lodges a note of protest against the powers that be, who take such momentous decisions as splitting a country into two, without ever thinking of the consequences.

- **The Theme of Partition**

Partition of the subcontinent into two separate geographical entities was that calamitous event in its history that changed not only its physical boundaries forever but also altered the lives of its people in an irrevocable manner. The horror, the madness, the bestiality, the violence, arson, looting and rape that followed in the wake of the political decision was unprecedented. Suddenly, overnight, all those secure walls of a shared tradition, shared culture, shared history came crumbling down. People of different communities, who till then had led a harmonious and peaceful co-existence, now turned into enemies. Reason was the first casualty and fear and then rage were its outcome. Neighbours who till yesterday would have died for each other now thirsted for one another's blood simply because they belonged to different communities. Scenes of senseless carnage were witnessed everywhere. A communal frenzy, a hypnotic obsession with violence overtook the people on both sides of the dividing line. It was ironical that the people of the same country who had set an example of winning a struggle in a non-violent manner, following the ideals of Gandhi and had thrown off the yoke of British subjugation, would now turn against each other. Certainly these were demented times when people had no consideration for either young or old, child or woman and all suffered a horrifying fate. If any managed to escape physical violence or torture, the memory of what they witnessed scarred their minds forever and none emerged unscathed from the holocaust.

For writers who wrote around that time it became almost an inward compulsion to write about the partition of the country. For most of them the memory of what they had suffered or witnessed was too recent to allow for objectivity in their writings about it. There was an obsessive preoccupation with violence as they had been sufferers, eye-witnesses and tragic participants in the horrendous events. The horrors suffered and witnessed had become a part of their experiential world. They were too near and too much involved in the holocaust. The stories that were written immediately after the partition,

therefore, tend to recreate the horror in all its details without many attempts at objectivity or an imaginative rendering of the events being described. These stories could not even offer any historical explanation nor see any political necessity for the suffering. They are marked by a sense of rage and helplessness and also a sense of incomprehensibility of it all due to its utter meaninglessness. Instead of just numbers — so many dead, so many wounded, so many raped, so many homeless—these fictional historical narratives tried to show the actual suffering that lay behind each face, each number. For a historian the holocaust of 1947 can perhaps be covered in two volumes of objective recording. For the fiction writer, however, the sad event threw up unlimited possibilities of delineation and treatment as there were innumerable faces of grief and an equally limitless number of questions that erupted from the sudden barbarism and bestiality of man to man. The writers tried to grapple with their fractured psyches with the basic question ‘why?’ Why did the shared social, cultural, traditional and historical fabric collapse? Why did we turn killers and violators? Why did we forget the past? Why did we give in to rage rather than reason—the questions are endless. The fictional writings took up these questions in one story after another, in one novel after another, looking for answers but failing to find any.

Fictional historical narratives about the partition developed basically on two lines. There were those who re-evoked the senseless carnage, the horrifying brutalities and the numbing meaningless violence that the different communities perpetrated on each other. Then there were those narratives that focused on the fear, the agony, the insanity which resulted from the sudden dislocation of people, uprooting them cruelly from places which had been home to them for generations, only to be thrown into a strange alien land and told that henceforth this was their home. The suffering and anguish that resulted from being wrenched away from familiar surroundings forever, is sensitively delivered in these stories.

Manto’s “Toba Tek Singh” deals with the theme of partition concentrating on the tragedy of dislocation and exile. The madman Bishan Singh who hails

from a small village in Punjab, Toba Tek Singh, is unable to take in the fact that the division of the subcontinent requires him to cross the border line and forget his homeland forever. In the story, we shall see shortly, how the man becomes the place and Bishan Singh refuses to comply with the orders, preferring to give up his life instead.

What emerges from this story is the realization that geographical divisions are possible but how can one divide a shared history, a shared memory and a shared consciousness? It is obvious that the decision makers never took the ordinary man into account and what the partition would do to him. Thus, they could never anticipate the great human tragedy that followed in the wake of their political decision.

Manto has written extensively on the theme of partition with stark realism and powerful evocation of the shocking horror of those times. As Alok Bhatia observes, these stories 'are written by a man who knows that after such ruination there can neither be forgiveness nor any forgetting.' Stories like "Thanda Gosht" ("Cold Meat"), "Khol Do" ("Open It") "San 1919 Ki Baat" ("It happened in 1919"), "Toba Tek Singh" and "Tithwal Ka Kutta" ("The Dog of Tithwal") are just a few of the nerve shattering stories which recreate the horror of the partition. What is remarkable in these stories is the completely detached tone of the narrator as well as an evocation of the event through suggestiveness rather than details. We are just given a tip of the iceberg, as it were and left to imagine the rest. This mode of working through suggestiveness increases the dismay of the stories manifold and at the same time saves them from being merely a perverse indulgence in violence on the one hand and sentimentalization and thereby dilution of the real human tragedy on the other.

- **Detailed Analysis**

The story begins in the manner of a historical narration and the opening line itself places it in its historical context: 'A couple of years after partition it

strikes the government of Pakistan and Hindustan that even as they had exchanged ordinary prisoners, so they should also have an exchange of madmen as well.' The style is that of newspaper reportage but the tone is mock-serious, dispassionate and somewhere along the line, a hint has been placed about the absurdity of it all when Manto takes the theme of partition to the madhouse. Whether it was right to exchange madmen or not, no one knew, but the decision made by 'those who know best,' after some high level meetings had been held on both sides. No one thought of asking the madmen what they wanted. Probably because lunatics cannot make out what is right for them. Only madmen who still had their families living in Hindustan were allowed to stay and the rest had their fate sealed. As for Hindus and Sikh madmen, the question of staying did not arise as there were no Hindu families living in Pakistan so all would have to be dispatched.

- **Narrative Style**

Thus in two short paragraphs, Manto sets the tone of the story and displays the scene of action with a strong suggestion that the madhouse we are about to enter is in fact going to be a mirror of the world outside. The omniscient narrator remains distanced from the scene and records objectively the events subsequent to the pronouncement of the decision. Though grounded in a particular historical context and begun in a deceptive style of reportage, we must notice the difference that will gradually emerge between the rendering of history through a chronicling of facts and through a fictionalization of the same. The irony and satire at play become effective devices for exposing the horrible reality of the historical situation.

- **Madness as Metaphor**

In "Toba Tek Singh" the lunatic asylum becomes a microcosm of the world outside and Manto focuses on the anguish of one man to bring out the trauma and tragedy of dislocation and exile faced by those innumerable others who were forced out of their hearths and homes. Even in the world of



these madmen the realization of a division of their country has gradually percolated through. This small world is peopled by men belonging to the various communities of the subcontinent and the narrator gives us short, though vivid, descriptions of the same. Thus, there is a Muslim madman who has been religiously reading the Urdu daily *Zamindar*, there is the Sikh madman who wants to know why they are being sent to Hindustan when they cannot even speak their language and there is again that Muslim madman who is overtaken by a nationalist zeal while bathing and shouts 'Pakistan zindabad' only to slip and fall and pass out. The madman who climbs a tree to deliver a two- hour lecture on 'the most ticklish matter of Pakistan and Hindustan' lends poignancy to the plight of those who were now forced to make a choice. Thus, he declares 'I want to live neither in Hindustan nor in Pakistan. I had rather live on this tree.' The fact that he is a Muslim is revealed only when he is persuaded to come down and hugs his Hindu and Sikh friends because they would soon be going away. This implies that he must be a Muslim for he will stay back.

- **Insane or Sane?**

Two things are happening here simultaneously. On the one hand there is a note of protest in this madman's declaration that he would rather live on a tree than be forced to make a choice between two parts of the same country. This protest simmered in the breasts of most common people who were driven out from their homes when sudden political decisions were thrust on them. Thus, gradually we see the madhouse becoming a microcosm of the outside world. We have a similar situation here as that in the world outside A political decision has been made without consulting the people concerned and it has been thrust upon them leaving them with no choice but to comply. This note of protest appears again when the young Hindu lawyer from Lahore 'heartily abused all the Hindu and Muslim leaders who had got together to have Hindustan divided.'

The second noteworthy fact which emerges from the protest of the madman when he prefers to live on the tree, is located in the manner in which

he embraces his Hindu and Sikh friends and begins to cry. At this point Manto writes: 'his heart grew heavy at the very thought that they would leave him and go away to Hindustan.' For him they are still his friends and it does not matter that they are not Muslims. We might well ask ourselves who in fact is mad here — the madmen in the asylum or the sane men outside the madhouse? Humanity seems to be still intact in this madhouse, in these madmen. Ironically the mad seems to be saner than the so called sane predators prowling the streets in the world beyond the confines of the asylum. The 'madmen' in the madhouse still value friendship despite differences of religion or community. It is the apparently sane people who have gone berserk and are killing their friends and neighbours. It is they who are saying that the place that has been your home since birth is no longer your home.

Confusion about their status is now rampant in the madhouse. The suddenness of the change is underlined because even those madmen who were not completely mad were perplexed as to where they actually were at that moment. They knew that a person called Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who was known as Qaide Azam, the great leader, had created a separate nation for Muslims and had named it Pakistan. But where it was and what its geographical dimensions, no one had any idea. Manto is highlighting here a very important aspect about the gap between decision makers and the affected people. For the political leaders it was easy to run a dividing line through the country and have clear cut physical boundaries drawn between Hindustan and Pakistan. But for the common people the words remained mere territorial abstractions. For them home was where they had been born, lived and would have died had history not played such a cruel trick. For them it did not matter whether that home was in Pakistan or Hindustan but if in the name of division of the country they were driven out of that home then they would rather not belong to any of those countries. This hopelessness and despair is evoked in the mild protest of the madman who would prefer to live in the tree rather than in Hindustan or Pakistan and be separated from family and friends in the process.

- **Breakdown of Language**

Having set the scene of his story, the narrator then shifts his focus to the central character Bishan Singh, who has been in the asylum for fifteen years. We are told that in those fifteen years he has never laid down to rest and had never slept a wink. He stood on his feet all the time because of which his calves were distended and his feet swollen. The first noticeable thing about him, however, is the gibberish he speaks all the time: ‘Opar di rumble tumble di annexe of the thoughtless of the green lentils of the lantern.’ As the story progresses, you will notice that new words are added to this gibberish which seems to be a curious mixture of sense and nonsense. What could be Manto’s intention here apart from the obvious fact that this gibberish is coming out of a madman’s mouth? In the utter nonsense that Bishan Singh speaks, Manto seems to be commenting on the breakdown of all communication in these times of sheer devastation. Language which should enable people to connect, often betrayed. Those who migrated and came to their new home felt that they could neither understand the language there nor make themselves understood. (This point is effectively brought out in Umme-Ummara’s story ‘More Sinned against than Sinning’ and Ibrahim Jaleez’s ‘Grave Turned Inside Out’). Thus, the language was reduced to gibberish as it failed to communicate. In addition to this Manto seems to be implying that division of the country had led to a fracturing of the language too. Till the partition happened, the various languages of the subcontinent had a common repository of tradition and culture to draw upon from. What would happen to language now when such a shared repository was also divided? Would it not lead to language being reduced to unintelligible gibberish? Bishan Singh voices this apprehension in his constant, apparently meaningless speech.

- **The Sense of Place in One’s Identity**

Manto next gives us some information from Bishan Singh’s past and informs us how he came to be there in the mental asylum. This ferocious looking though mild mannered and harmless Sikh had been a wealthy landlord in Toba

Tek Singh, a small town in Pakistan about 150 kilometres South-West of Lahore. We are told that his brain had tripped suddenly and his family had brought him to the asylum, all tied up in chains and had him locked up in the madhouse. Now he listens attentively whenever there is a discussion about the formation of Hindustan and Pakistan and about 'their imminent transfer from one to the other.' When asked for his opinion he replies in the same meaningless gibberish but gradually 'the green lentils of the lantern' get replaced at first by 'the green lentils of the government of Pakistan' and subsequently by 'of the government of Toba Tek Singh.' It is at that moment that the other madmen start asking him where this Toba Tek Singh was. How could one be certain where it was now for such were the times that one moment Sialkot was in Pakistan and the next instant it was in Hindustan? How could anyone tell where a place was when the next instant it could be transferred like a plastic block. The chaos and confusion evident in the actions of these madmen is merely a reflection of what was actually happening in the larger world outside.

Manto takes the credit by recreating the chaos, the bewilderment and the pathos of the situation outside through his short and deep strokes of the events in the madhouse subsequent to the news of the partition. Narrating the reaction of the madmen, in a tone laced with black humour, brings out the absurdity of the state highlighting the underlying irony.

### **The Trauma of Dislocation**

The omniscient narrator then proceeds to give us a short glimpse into the past telling us about the only times when Bishan Singh would almost as if wake up from his general stupor to prepare for his 'visitors,' i.e. his family members and friends who would come once a month to inquire about his well being, bringing him sweets and fruits from home. This was the only time when this 'frightful looking' Sikh would clean and scrub himself, oil and comb his hair nicely and would wait for his visitors all dressed up. If at any time of the year he was asked what day it was he would have been unable to tell. But 'he always knew unprompted and exactly when it was time for his family to come

and visit.’ With the partition of the country, however, their visits had come to an end and the narrator tells us that ‘now it was as if the voice of his heart which had earlier signalled their visits to him had fallen silent.’ From the general, the focus has now shifted to the particular and individual. Manto is now going to work towards highlighting the trauma of dislocation and exile through the anguish of this one man and he moves towards it step by step. He begins by first creating a basic desire to know which side of the dividing line one’s place of origin now existed. So the need to know where Toba Tek Singh was, intensifies in the heart and mind of the mad Bishan Singh. He now waits for his visitors especially because he is certain that they would be able to tell him where Toba Tek Singh was for he was sure they themselves hailed from that place.

Gradually this need to know drives Bishan Singh to a madman in the madhouse who calls himself ‘Khuda’ or ‘God.’ Bishan Singh’s question only makes the ‘Khuda’ laugh with a loud guffaw and say that Toba Tek Singh is neither in Pakistan nor in Hindustan, ‘for we haven’t passed our orders yet!’

- **Arbitrariness of Political Decisions**

Notice how in this short exchange, Manto has highlighted the unpredictability of political decisions which affect millions of lives. For the decision makers who remain unaffected, it is simply a matter of saying a few words. But these few words can turn the lives of some people completely upside down making them vagabonds and aliens in the land which till then had been their home. Manto is being intensely ironical when he makes this madman call himself ‘khuda.’ There is a similar appropriation by the political decision makers, the self-styled godmen, who hold the strings of millions of lives in their hands — those lives whose fate hinges so precariously on one word from the lips of these arbitrary Gods of the strife torn world.

When Bishan Singh is not answered by this ‘khuda’ about where Toba Tek Singh was, he immediately launches into his gibberish which interestingly

includes few new words in it. This time he says ‘Opar di rumble tumble di annexe of the thoughtless of the green lentils of Wahe Guruji da khalsa and Wahe Guruji di Fateh and God Bless him who says Sat Sri Akal!’ The narrator tells us that what he probably meant to say was that ‘this God was the God of the Musalmans and would surely have heeded him had he been the God of the Sikhs instead.’ The significance of this apparent nonsense lies in the fact that even in the madman’s consciousness the realization of new boundaries is filtering in. The God who refuses to answer must be from the enemy camp of the Musalmans according to Bishan Singh.

Lest we may think that Manto is beginning to get judgemental and critical of particular communities here we are immediately told in the paragraph that follows, about a Musalman friend of Bishan Singh, who now comes to meet him and bring him favourable news of his family having safely, crossed the border. This man is Fazaldin, who also lives in Toba Tek Singh and had been Bishan Singh’s friend for years. He now tells the latter how he had done whatever he could to help his family to escape. All had crossed over but the slight hesitation before taking the name of Roop Kaur, Bishan Singh’s daughter, speaks volumes for what the girl might have endured. It is in suggestive strokes like these that Manto avoids definitiveness and limitation and also the perverse indulgence in violence so evident in writings about the partition. Here it is all left to the imagination of the readers. The writer merely leaves it at the level of suggestion rather than imposing a limitation on feelings and response. This device opens the floodgates as it were for the readers to imagine the horrors that the innocent girl might have faced. When Fazaldin haltingly adds ‘... she too... is very well,’ the words ring hollow for they are immediately followed by the information that ‘she too had gone with them.’ Speaking of her in past tense can only mean one thing that the girl is probably lost to her family now either through abduction or death or both combined.

The manner in which Fazaldin refers to Bishan Singh’s brothers and wife, calling them ‘brethrens’ (‘Bhai’ in the original) and ‘sister’ (‘Behan’ in

the original) respectively, points to a crucial fact of shared community life and kinship amongst people of various communities. This fact was overlooked conveniently by a handful of political decision makers. Fazaldin feels closeness towards his Hindu friends. This voice from the outside world which had intruded into the world of the madhouse only reinforces the same closeness we had witnessed earlier in an apparently ridiculous but actually poignant scenes when a Muslim madman had embraced his Hindu friend and had cried because of the knowledge that they will be separated from him soon. The same peaceful co-existence is shared in the world of the mad and the world of the sane as well. Fazaldin too, however, is thrown into confusion when Bishan Singh asks him the same question ‘where is Toba Tek Singh?’ This time Manto points out the similarity of confusion shared by the mad as well as the sane for Fazaldin too is unable to answer his friend. At first he says with some surprise that Toba Tek Singh is ‘right where it always was.’ But when asked whether it was in-Pakistan or Hindustan, he can only stammer: ‘In Hindustan—no, no, I mean in Pakistan,’- as if out of his wits.

What we see emerging from this short exchange is different perceptions about the same place. For Fazaldin, Toba Tek Singh is right where it always was because being a Muslim he will not be thrown out of his home. He will continue to live in Toba Tek Singh where he always has. Thus, the question whether it is in Pakistan or Hindustan has probably not occurred to him. The situation, however, changes drastically for the person who will be driven out of his home on the basis of his different faith, different religion. Therefore, it is crucial for Bishan Singh to know which side of the dividing line is Toba Tek Singh now, for if it is in Pakistan then he will lose his home for ever, to be thrown into the oblivion of uncertain and unfamiliar surroundings.

Fazaldin is unable to answer his friend and calls upon him the latter’s wrath who leaves muttering, ‘Opar di rumble-tumble di annexe of the thoughtless of the green lentils of Pakistan and Hindustan and shame on the lot of you.’ Bishan Singh’s apparent gibberish seems to be getting increasingly politically

conscious. Not only have the two difficult boundaries of Hindustan and Pakistan interjected into his perception but he is holding both equally responsible for the fate of people like him. Thus, his angry mutterings about ‘shame on the lot of you’ are almost akin to an authorial intervention where Manto seems to be speaking through this mad character that is much wiser than the sane.

- **Identity of a Person Linked to Place**

The last section of the story is a logical progression of the plot. Having familiarised us with the situation Manto is now going to work towards a climax and then a resolution. In the preceding sections Manto has been able to bring out the intensity of feelings that a man can have towards the place where he belongs and comes from. Even though Bishan Singh has been locked up in the asylum for the past fifteen years, yet it is crucial for him to know where Toba Tek Singh lies now; here or there, in Pakistan or Hindustan and he asks the same question to the concerned official when the Hindu and Sikh madmen are taken to Wagah, the border between the two countries for an exchange with those Muslim madmen who wait on the other side to be transferred to Pakistan. This time, however, Bishan Singh gets a definite answer and the official laughs and says that Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan. The description that follows is almost heart rending even though the narrative tone remains dispassionate and detached. Like a trapped animal Bishan Singh refuses to go to the other side and runs back to where his friends were. When the Pakistani policeman catches hold of him and tries to lead him back to the other side he starts shouting at the top of his voice, ‘Opar di rumble-tumble di annexe of the thoughtless of the green lentils of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan.’ The two however are divided here because though Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan yet Bishan Singh cannot be a Pakistani since he is a Sikh, notwithstanding the fact that all his life he has lived in Toba Tek Singh. For some Muslims their religious identities did become their national identities but what about those countless millions like Bishan Singh for whom the same didn’t happen? This is the very crucial question being implicitly asked in the apparent gibberish of the mad Bishan Singh.



- **The Person Becomes the Place**

In a skillful and obtrusive manner, Manto has succeeded in investing the identity of a person with the identity of a place. Bishan Singh and Toba Tek Singh have almost become synonymous and interchangeable by the time we come to the last two paragraphs of the story. The plot is gradually moving towards its climax wherein after should also lie a resolution. The climax does take place but the resolution which should have followed inevitably in its footsteps evades the dialectic of the story. Bishan Singh refuses to be coaxed into believing that Toba Tek Singh will be moved where he wants it to be moved. He runs and stands firmly at a spot in the middle of the two countries refusing to be stirred. The narrator observes that since he was a harmless enough fellow, the officials let him remain where he was and carry on with the rest of the proceedings. It is just before dawn that everyone hears a piercing cry coming out of Bishan Singh. The man, who had stood on his legs day and night for all of fifteen years spent in the asylum, now lies face down on the ground. On one side of him lay Hindustan and on the other lay Pakistan : ‘In the middle on a strip of no man’s land lay Toba Tek Singh.’

In his death Bishan Singh succeeds in avoiding the exile that stares him in the face. In his death too he is able to determine where Toba Tek Singh lay for him. The person and the place merge into one.

- **The Unresolved Questions**

The person ultimately becomes the place. But does anything get resolved in the larger contest of things? Can everyone have the freedom of making a choice and a decision as that available to Bishan Singh? Is he the one who is mad in choosing death over being uprooted and humiliation and a severance from all that was familiar or are those mad who choose to flee to a strange land to turn into refugees just to escape the slaughter. These are the questions that the ending of the story leaves unanswered. Partition itself is rejected completely in the protest lodged in the physical death of Bishan Singh. Madness thus

becomes a metaphor for sanity in one sense and for partition itself in the other because the incomprehensibility that attends dementia is the same as the one that was ubiquitous in the division of the two countries. The whole partition was an act of insanity which undoubtedly damaged the psyche of the people driving some to despair while others to rage which blinded them to all feelings of compassion and kinship. A severance from ones roots, a sudden displacement from familiar surroundings was enough to drive a man insane because a place was not just physical surroundings of the four walls of one's house or the lanes and by lanes of one's neighbourhood. It was much more than that. It was the security of the known and the familiar, it was the deep roots of tradition and culture that one carried wherever one might go. It was impossible to sever these ties overnight. Such a severance can only lead to madness. Manto himself went through this experience when he migrated to Pakistan against his will. Recounting his experience in a memoir he writes: 'I lived in Bombay for twelve years. And what I am, I am because of those years. Today I find myself living in Pakistan. It is possible that tomorrow I may go to live elsewhere. But wherever I go I will remain what Bombay made me. Wherever I live, I will carry Bombay with me.'

#### **6.4 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)**

- i. The short story "Toba Tek Singh" by Saadat Hasan Manto was published in \_\_\_\_\_.
  1. 1945
  2. 1953
  3. 1960
  4. 1961
- ii. The short story "Toba Tek Singh" is based on the background of \_\_\_\_\_.
  1. Bloody partition of India

2. Two-three years after the partition
  3. Before partition
  4. During the constitutional setup
- iii. What were the decisions taken by the governments of India-Pakistan in “Toba Tek Singh?” \_\_\_\_\_.
1. To exchange goods and services
  2. Exchange of lunatics and criminals
  3. To frame out peaceful policies
  4. None of the above
- iv. Who said, “Don’t you know? A place in India known for manufacturing cut-throat razors?” \_\_\_\_\_.
1. A Sikh lunatic
  2. Government of Pakistan
  3. A Muslim lunatic
  4. None of the above
- v. Who asked, “Sardar ji, Why are we being deported to India? We don’t even know their language?” \_\_\_\_\_.
1. Muslim lunatic
  2. Sikh lunatic to Sardar ji
  3. Government officials
  4. Army people
- vi. The idea of partition of India-Pakistan became a matter of \_\_\_\_\_.
1. Easy freedom for country people
  2. Violence, confusion and mystery for lunatics and criminals

3. Discussion to choose the country they want to go
  4. None of the above
- vii. Toba Tek Singh was the home town of \_\_\_\_\_.
1. Criminals in the prisons
  2. Bishan Singh
  3. One of the Muslim lunatic
  4. Some of the officers in Pakistan Army
- viii. Who said to whom: “It’s neither in India nor in Pakistan. In fact, it is nowhere because till now I have not taken any decision about its location.” \_\_\_\_\_.
1. Criminal to lunatic
  2. Pakistan Army Chief to Indian Government
  3. Lunatic who declared himself as God to Bishan Singh
  4. All of the above
- ix. Who gave the information to Bishan Singh about his family and daughter that they had moved safely to India? \_\_\_\_\_.
1. Government of Pakistan
  2. Jailor
  3. One of the lunatic
  4. Fazaldin
- x. Where was Toba Tek Singh situated at the end of the story? \_\_\_\_\_.
1. Behind the barbed wires of India
  2. Behind the barbed wires of Pakistan
  3. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name or no man’s land
  4. All of the above

xi. “Toba Tek Singh” is a short story written by \_\_\_\_\_.

1. Premchand
2. Gulzar
3. Amrita Pritam
4. Saadat Hasan Manto

### 6.5 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)

- (i) 2 (ii) 2 (iii) 2 (iv) 3 (v) 2 (vi) 2 (vii) 2  
(viii) 3 (ix) 4 (x) 3 (xi) 4

### 6.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- A. What political event has upset the inmates of the lunatic asylum?
- B. What event seems to have made Bishan Singh especially frustrated?
- C. At the end of the story, how does Bishan Singh try to resolve his frustration? Is he successful? Explain.
- D. The nonsense phrase, which Bishan Singh utters from time to time, changes during the course of the story. What is the significance of the words that are changed?

### 6.7 LET US SUM UP

‘Toba Tek Singh’ is the famous short story about partition that explores the theme of confusion and identity. The story has been discussed in detail in the present section and you get to know that it has its roots in partition and its aftermath. Manto uses madmen as his characters and through their conversations, he deeply penetrates into human psychology.

### 6.8 SUGGESTED READING

- *Naked Voices: Stories and Sketches* by Manto, Ed. and Tr. By Rakhshanda Jalil. Indian Ink & Roli Books, 2008.

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**SAADAT HASAN MANTO –  
“THE DOG OF TITHWAL”**

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 7.3 Critical Analysis of the Short Story “The Dog of Tithwal”
  - 7.3.1 Check Your Progress (CYP)
  - 7.3.2 The Story as an allegory
  - 7.3.3 Boundaries extended to animals
  - 7.3.4 The Question of Identity.
  - 7.3.5 The Partition
  - 7.3.6 Tension and foreshadowing
- 7.4 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 7.5 Answer Key (CYP) & (MCQs)
- 7.6 Examination Oriented Questions
- 7.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.8 Suggested Reading

## **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

After the partition of India, a bitter hostility grew between India and Pakistan. The situation of the people was confused and their lines were disrupted as they were unable to comprehend which country they actually belonged to. This idea is built in the short story “The Dog of Tithwal” by Saadat Hasan Manto.

## **7.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the subject matter of the short story “The Dog of Tithwal.”

Dear Learner, after an in-depth reading of this lesson, you will

- be acquainted with “The Dog of Tithwal”, one of the best known short stories of Saadat Hasan Manto
- be able to describe the plot of the story and evaluate the story as per certain critical parameters
- critique the event of Partition and be sensitized towards the plight of animals who also become victims of humankind’s power politics

## **7.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT STORY “THE DOG OF TITHWAL”**

The literary acclaimed work of Saadat Hasan Manto’s “The Dog of Tithwal,” was first published in English, within a collection of Manto’s stories titled *Kingdom’s End and Other Stories*, translated by Khalid Hasan in 1987. These stories carry the stimulation from the partition of India in 1947. The partition split India into Muslim Pakistan and secular (but Hindu-dominated and Hindu-ruled) India, resulting in violent upheavals. A communal frenzy, a hypnotic obsession with violence overtook the people on both sides of the dividing line. It was ironical that the people of the same country, who had set an example of winning a struggle in a non-violent manner, following the ideals

of Gandhi and had thrown off the yoke of British subjugation, would now turn against each other. Certainly these were demented times when people had no consideration for either young or old, child or woman and all suffered a horrifying fate. If any managed to escape physical violence or torture, the memory of what they witnessed scarred their minds forever and none emerged unscathed from the holocaust. Manto's short stories appear to be allegories which are satirical at times and question the futility of war. His writing allows a re-telling of the story of partition that can be seen as a form of literary resistance against the dominant structures and hegemonies. The political history overpowers the personal history which is often silenced. In the process of venerating the national narrative of both the nations, the personal narratives of people got neglected for whom the partition was a nightmare. The amalgam of politics, religion, communalism, and nationalism creates dismal situations, which Manto has tried to depict in his stories. They portray the consequences of communal politics and the perplexed case of forgotten identities. Looking beyond the irony of identities, these stories are marked by the trope of resistance. Resistance here is the resistance against partition and boundaries. These stories underline the meaninglessness of partition and the futility of borders.

In 1948, India and Pakistan went to war over territorial boundaries, principally which nation would govern Kashmir. The war, however, spread all along the frontier. This tragedy was the impetus for "The Dog of Tithwal," which gives a microcosmic view of the hateful struggle. The unfortunate division between the people of the two countries is a legacy of the brutal partition. Manto presents the horrors of partition from the level that has been much neglected otherwise. He did not engage in futile political commentary, instead, he wrote about the people, the common people who were placed at the lowest ranks of class, caste, and even gender: "Manto vividly recreates the anger and horrors of this period and the trauma of refugees uprooted and victimized by the delineation of arbitrary borders" (Alter, 1994: 91).

In the story of "The Dog of Tithwal," nature continues in harmony in



the mountain setting, where Pakistani and Indian soldiers face each other as there cannot be any peace at the borders. As against the man-made calamity Manto gives us an idyllic description of the natural world which goes about its business 'oblivious to the battle.' The tranquillity of the mountains pervades in spite of the tension. Manto gives us an almost poetic description of the peace and harmony in nature. In the world of nature, peace is palpable. Flowers continue to bloom, bees go about their business of sipping nectar, birds are singing, and fluffy white clouds sail lazily in the skies. The occasional shot strikes a discordant note in the peaceful scene. The action begins in the Indian camp, with Jamadar Harnam Singh on night watch. At two o'clock, he wakes Ganda Singh to take over the watch and lies down to sing a romantic song about a pair of shoes with stars on them. Banta Singh joins in with a song about love and tragedy. The soldiers feel sadness creeping over them; perhaps they are reminded that life should be about love rather than about war: "Buy me a pair of shoes, my lover. A pair of shoes with stars on them. Sell your buffalo, if you have to But buy me a pair of shoes With stars on them" (1). The barking of a dog interrupts this pensive scene. Banta Singh finds the dog in the bushes and announces that his name is Jhun Jhun. The soldiers are in a good humour and pleased to see the dog, until Harnam Singh decides that the dog cannot eat if it is a Pakistani dog. The other soldiers think he is joking but he then declares that all Pakistanis will be shot, even Pakistani dogs. The dog recognizes something in his tone and reacts with fear, which seems to please Harnam Singh. Another soldier responds by leading the men in a declaration of "India Zindabad!" (an expression of nationalistic fervour).

Banta Singh makes a sign with the dog's name on it, along with the information that it is an Indian dog, and hangs it around the dog's neck:

They laughed. Banta Singh patted the animal and said to Harnam Singh, 'Jamadar sahib, Jhun Jhun is an Indian dog.' 'Prove your identity,' Harnam Singh ordered the dog, who began to wag his tail.

‘This is no proof of identity. All dogs can wag their tails,’ Harnam Singh said.

‘He is only a poor refugee,’ Banta Singh said, playing with his tail.

The next morning the dog appears in the Pakistani camp. It turns out that it had spent a few days with the Pakistani soldiers before it went to the Indian camp. Like the Indian soldiers, the Pakistanis are tired of the war that has been dragging on for months. As Subedar Himmat Khan twirls his moustache and studies a map of the Tithwal sector of India, Bashir begins to sing a song about where a lover spent the night. When the dog appears, Subedar Himmat Khan turns the lines of the song into an accusation against Jhun Jhun: “Where did you spend the night?” he screams. Bashir takes this as a joke and sings his song to the dog but Subedar Himmat Khan throws a pebble at Jhun Jhun. Bashir discovers the sign around the dog’s neck. The soldiers ponder the sign to see if it could be in code. Subedar Himmat Khan reports the incident to his platoon commander, who ignores the report because he finds it meaningless. While the commander is correct that the report is not of tactical significance. It is implied that his failure to investigate indicates a lack of discipline in the ranks. The soldiers are bored and seem to feel that their presence here is meaningless. The Pakistani soldiers rename Jhun Jhun and put a sign around his neck saying that he is Shun Shun, a Pakistani dog. Subedar Himmat Khan then sends Jhun Jhun back to his “family,” urging him to take the message to the enemy, “Go and take this message to the enemy, but come back. These are the orders of your commander.”(2) The dog trots off, and Subedar Himmat Khan fires in the air. Feeling bored, he decides to fire at the Indians. For half an hour, the two sides exchange fire, after which Subedar Himmat Khan orders a halt. As he combs his hair, he wonders where the dog has gone: “Dogs can never digest butter, goes the famous saying,” Banta Singh observed philosophically (3). When Jhun Jhun comes around the hill where the Pakistanis are entrenched, it seems to infuriate Subedar Himmat Khan. He shoots at the dog, hitting some stones: “That’s him all right and there’s something round his neck. But, wait, that’s the

Pakistani hill he's coming from, the motherfucker" (3). He picked up his rifle, aimed and fired. The bullet hit some rocks close to where the dog was. Jhun Jhun continues to run toward him, and Subedar Himmat Khan continues to shoot at the dog. Meanwhile, Harnam Singh fires. The two opposing soldiers enjoy scaring the terrified dog until Harnam Singh wounds the dog:

It soon became a game between the two soldiers, with the dog running round in circles in a state of great terror. Both Himmat Khan and Harnam Singh were laughing boisterously. The dog began to run towards Harnam Singh, who abused him loudly and fired. The bullet caught him in the leg. He yelped, turned around and began to run towards Himmat Khan, only to meet more fire, which was only meant to scare him.(3)

Still, Subedar Himmat Khan will not let Jhun Jhun return to the Pakistani camp. Khan tells the dog it is his duty to continue going toward the enemy camp. It is clear that, in Subedar Himmat Khan's mind, fanaticism has overcome rationality. When the wounded dog drags himself toward Harnam Singh, Jamadar Harnam Singh shoots and kills him. While the Pakistani Subedar Himmat Khan compares the killing to martyrdom, Harnam Singh says that Jhun Jhun "died a dog's death."

Even in the waning moments of the story, Manto continues to stress similarities and contrasts between the soldiers to highlight the painful absurdity of the partition. The Indian soldier Harnam Singh and the Pakistani soldier Himmat Khan both shoot at Jhun Jhun at the same time, and both find the "game" between them a source of great humour. They shoot at the dog for very different reasons, however, which are reflected in the words each says when Jhun Jhun is finally dead. Himmat Khan shoots at the dog to encourage him to complete his "mission" and do his "duty" in delivering the message to the Indians that Jhun Jhun is, according to the sign they have attached to him, "a Pakistani dog." According to Himmat Khan, Jhun Jhun dies a martyr's death. Harnam Singh, on the other hand, shoots at Jhun Jhun because he is seen as an enemy

dog approaching the Indian camp from the “Pakistani hill.” He portrays the dog as a traitor and declares that Jhun Jhun “died a dog’s death.”

Not only do the contrasts and peculiar similarities highlight the absurdities of war, but they ultimately allow Manto to question what constitutes a nation. Manto challenges the meaning and value of nationality when he has the soldiers claim that a stray dog can hold Pakistani or Indian citizenship. The border this dog crosses is meaningless to him, as he sees the soldiers, not as Pakistanis or Indians, but as humans who have sometimes been kind to him. There are no contrasts for Jhun Jhun, only similarities. From the vantage point of the story’s beginning, above the ground and looking down on the scene, there are no obvious lines clearly showing where one country ends and another begins. The natural world is enduring and seamless and shows no false borders that impulsively restrict the movements of birds or rivers: “The birds sang as they always had,” notes the narrator, indicating certain timelessness to natural events and nature’s disregard for such erratic events as war. The story’s soldiers, on the other hand, are part of the species that insists on creating and defending artificial borders to separate and isolate large numbers of people from one another. By creating these named divisions between people, humans in “The Dog of Tithwal” have constructed distinctions—the ultimate contrast between “us” and “them”—where there are none naturally occurring, and the result is certain pain and death.

### **7.3.1 Check Your Progress (CYP)**

Learner, now it is the time for you to take a break and engage with the text for a while. Go through this exercise and try to recollect what all you have read in the previous section.

1. “The Dog of Tithwal” was first published in Saadat Hasan Manto’s short story collection titled \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The backdrop to most of Saadat Hasan Manto’s short stories is \_\_\_\_\_

3. In his short stories, Saadat Hasan Manto questions the futility of war. (True/False)
4. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are the two main literary elements of Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories.
5. India and Pakistan's war in the year \_\_\_\_\_ became the impetus for "The Dog of Tithwal"
6. The pensive mood of the soldiers in "The Dog of Tithwal" was disrupted by firing across the border. (True/False)

### **7.3.2 The Story as an Allegory**

By now we realize that Manto's story is gradually shaping up as an allegory. An allegory in its simplest form means a piece of writing where characters are not individuals but personified abstractions and the happenings are purely symbolic. 'An Allegory is a form of extended metaphor, in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative, are equated with the meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. The underlying meaning has moral, social, religious, or political significance, and characters are often personifications of abstract ideas as charity, greed, or envy. Thus an allegory is a story with two meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning.' Additionally allegories are designed to teach something – an idea, a moral lesson and in an allegory character and event mean more than themselves. In Manto's story the dog becomes symbolic of all those innumerable refugees for whom the question of their identity had become questionable, doubtful overnight and who had been shunted from one side to the other not being able to find a place they could call their own. Additionally, it also becomes symbolic of all innocent victims of violence who pay the price for the cruel acts of others.

In the narrative, the dog is shunted from one camp of soldiers to the other where the two camps belong to the two warring sides. The 'two

sides' are of course the state machinery of the two newly defined nations and whose arbitrariness, irrationality but at the same time ruthless power is exemplified in the soldiers of both sides.

It is ironic that the dog is fired at merely because it is approaching the Hindustani camp from the opposite side. Jamadar Harnam Singh expresses his concern: "He's coming our way . . . The rope is tied around its neck . . . but he's coming from there . . . the enemy camp." This is enough to infuriate Harnam Singh and he fires at the dog. It is pathetic the way the poor innocent dog runs to save its life at first towards one camp and then towards the other. The senselessness behind the violence is severe and unmistakable. The dog that had been christened by the Hindustanis as well as by the Pakistanis is killed because its identity is put under a scanner. It had been safe when no such classifications had been thrust on its head.

### **7.3.3 Boundaries extend to the Animal Kingdom**

In Manto's story the national boundaries seem to extend to the animal kingdom as well. The dog that strays into the Hindustani camp is given a Hindustani name and the point is reinforced by the label the soldiers put around its neck pointing to the fact that it is a Hindustani dog. The dog however is merely a dog, an animal and has no understanding of such divisions between humans. It wags its tail for both. But the way it meets its end exposes the animosity that lurks beneath the surface lives of the people on the two sides and also the senselessness of the violence that such animosity generates. The dog exemplifies the fate of all innocent victims of such violence.

On the dog's first appearance in the Hindustani camp it is affectionately named 'Jhun Jhun' by Banta Singh. Harnam Singh expresses his anxiety that the dog could be a Pakistani. A soldier who is not named, but whose anger is evident in the way he digs up the ground with the heel of his

boot, gives expression to the senselessness of the political decision that had thrust this division on a people who had till very recently lived shared lives within a shared culture. “Now even dogs will have to be either Hindustani or Pakistani,” he says.

The dog being christened ‘Jhun Jhun’ and being given a Hindustani identity brings an element of cheer in that camp. “From time to time, each one would affectionately address it as Chapad jhunjhun and cuddle it,” writes Manto.

When the same dog appears at the Pakistani camp in search for food, completely oblivious of the fact that there is a cruel division between the two sets of humans even though outwardly they appear to be the same, it is greeted with familiarity. Obviously, the dog had been to the Pakistani camp earlier too. On this visit, however, it carries a label around its neck which gives rise to some anxiety in the Pakistani camp. Subedar Himmat Khan is prompted to report the matter to his platoon Commander and we learn that the dog had previously stayed at the camp for several days. This time, however, its name on the tag and the line declaring “This is a Hindustani dog” causes a flutter and some consternation in the Pakistani camp. Manto is almost amused at Himmat Khan’s anxiety but effectively brings out the paranoia concerning the question of one’s identity in the changed times and also the absurd limits to which the same was being taken by both sides.

To counter the Hindustani move, the Pakistanis tie another name tag around the dog’s neck, this one declaring him to be ‘Shun Shun’ and a Pakistani dog. The dog is of course ignorant of what’s going on. All it wants is food and probably shelter. When it is redirected towards the Hindustani camp it goes without a second thought.

Manto’s choice of a dog to be the innocent victim of brutality in “The Dog of Tithwal” is appropriate and effective in many ways. Although

the story's subject matter is remote from the experience of contemporary Western readers, Manto's use of the dog gives the story universal impact.

The relationship between dogs and humans is, of course, unique. With no other animal have humans formed a bond so close and complex. In most cultures, the dog is esteemed and even loved, though in a few parts of the world dogs are shunned by humans. The vast majority of human beings respond to dogs as innocents and as members of a species with which humans have entered into a mutual relation.

#### **7.3.4 The Question of Identity**

Men have created insurmountable barriers between themselves; barriers that are based on the differences of culture, community, religion and more recently nation. The sense of difference percolates through the use of words like 'the two sides,' 'Hindustan' and 'Pakistan,' 'Sikh' and 'Musalman,' 'this side,' 'that side' and so on. Identity in Manto's story is now being determined and defined by one's belonging to a particular nation. Geographical boundaries which determine a nation's identity now by extension determine the identity of those who live within those demarcated lines. One should not forget the fact that for India as well as for Pakistan the concept of a separate state was a new and recent phenomenon. The sense of a shared culture, however, comes as a reminder in the song being sung by a Hindustani soldier. The tales of Heer Ranjha were equally beloved of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Thus, when Banta Singh begins singing a 'Heer' in a melancholy voice, he is committing no treason or crime since he is drawing on a deep repository of a shared culture between the two countries that goes back hundreds of years. Manto places other similar indications within the story – the smoke from fires on both sides rises and mingles in the air; Subedar Himmat Khan can read as well as write Gurmukhi—all pointing to the fact that till very recently the warring sides had belonged to one and the



same country. A geographical division, however, seems to have divided the hearts of the people as well. In “The Dog of Tithwal” Manto explores the concept of a nation as understood, defined and enforced by the state machinery and exposes the rigidity and senselessness behind it through his poignant description of a dog’s fate at the hands of those who protect the physical boundaries that define the nation.

### **7.3.5 The Partition**

Partition of the subcontinent into two separate geographical entities was that calamitous event in its history that changed not only its physical boundaries forever but also altered the lives of its people in an irrevocable manner. The horror, the madness, the bestiality, the violence, arson, swaging and rape that followed in the wake of the political decision was unprecedented. Suddenly, overnight, all those secure walls of a shared tradition, shared culture, shared history came crumbling down. People of different communities, who till then had led a harmonious and peaceful co-existence, now turned into enemies. Reason was the first casualty and fear and then rage were its outcome. Neighbours who till yesterday would have died for each other now thirsted for one another’s blood simply because they belonged to different communities. Scenes of senseless carnage were witnessed everywhere. For writers who wrote around that time it became almost an inward compulsion to write about the partition of the country. For most of them the memory of what they had suffered or witnessed was too recent to allow for objectivity in their writings about it. There was an obsessive preoccupation with violence as they had been sufferers, eye-witnesses and tragic participants in the horrendous events. The horrors suffered and witnessed had become a part of their experiential world. They were too near and too much involved in the holocaust. The stories that were written immediately after the partition, therefore, tend to recreate the horror in all its details without many attempts at objectivity or an imaginative rendering of the

events being described. These stories could not even offer any historical explanation nor see any political necessity for the suffering. They are marked by a sense of rage and helplessness and also a sense of incomprehensibility of it all due to its utter meaninglessness. Fictional historical narratives about the partition developed basically on two lines. There were those who re-evoked the senseless carnage, the horrifying brutalities and the numbing meaningless violence that the different communities perpetrated on each other. Then there were those narratives that focused on the fear, the agony, and the insanity which resulted from the sudden dislocation of people, uprooting them cruelly from places which had been home to them for generations, only to be thrown into a strange alien land and told that henceforth this was their home. The suffering and anguish that resulted from being wrenched away from familiar surroundings forever, is sensitively delivered in these stories.

### **7.3.6 Tension and Foreshadowing**

The contrast between the pleasant natural surroundings and the camouflaged soldiers creates tension and a mood of suspense that subtly foreshadow the tragedy to come. Tension builds as Manto describes the soldiers' boredom and melancholy. When the dog enters the Indian camp, Jamadar Harnam Singh does not greet him in a friendly manner, even though the other soldiers seem amused by his arrival. Jamadar Harnam Singh's mean treatment of the dog as a potential enemy is further foreshadowing. Subedar Himmat Khan repeats the harsh treatment in the Pakistani camp. As the story builds, the soldiers treat Jhun Jhun both as a potential enemy and as an informant being sent to the enemy camp—neither of which bodes well for the dog. The doom that has been hinted at throughout the story culminates when the dog, scrambling from one side to the other, can find no safe haven. Jhun Jhun's pitiful end is foreshadowed by the increasingly irrational and brutal behaviour of the soldiers, which is emphasized by its contrast to their peaceful setting.

#### 7.4 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. Who wrote the short story “The Dog of Tithwal?” \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Gulzar
  - b. Vikram Seth
  - c. Saadat Hasan Manto
  - c. Mohan Rakesh
2. Where were the soldiers of the two countries positioned? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. On the sea front
  - b. In an impregnable situation on the two hills facing each other
  - c. On the deserts
  - d. None of the above
3. They laughed, “Jamadar Sahib Jhun Jhun is an Indian dog.” Who were they? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Banta Singh while patting the dog said to Harnam Singh
  - b. Army Chief of Pakistan
  - c. Talks between Pakistani soldiers
  - d. All the above
4. The Pakistani soldier found \_\_\_\_\_ hanging in the neck of the dog. \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Some mysterious element of explosion
  - b. A map tied to his neck
  - c. A small piece of cardboard on which his name was written Jhun Jhun
  - d. A bone tied to his neck

- 5 What did the Pakistani soldier do with the dog? \_\_\_\_\_.
- Tries to kill him as he sees the name
  - Punishes him by not giving food
  - Changes his name from Jhun Jhun to Shun Shun
  - Ties him with tree
- 6 Why did Subedar Himmat Khan shot fire on the dog when he was going to Indian side? \_\_\_\_\_.
- Because he was scared that dog might bite someone
  - Because the dog got scared from the cross border firing and returning towards Pakistan
  - Because soldiers used to play and feed him
  - None of the above
- 7 What happened to the dog at the end of the story? \_\_\_\_\_.
- He returned to Indian side
  - He came back to Pakistan
  - He died in the cross firing
  - He ran away

### 7.5 ANSWER KEY (CYP) & (MCQs)

#### (CYP)

1. Kingdom's End and Other Stories 2. Partition of India  
 3. True 4. Allegory, Satire 5. 1948  
 6. False

#### (MCQs)

- (i) 3 (ii) 2 (iii) 1 (iv) 3 (v) 3 (vi) 2 (vii) 3

## 7.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- a. What do you think the dog, Jhun Jhun represents in the short story “The Dog of Tithwal?”
- b. How does the dog, Jhun Jhun get killed in the story?
- c. Whom do you think wins at the end of the story, Pakistan or India?
- d. Do you think the condition of displacement, uprooted and violence covers the backdrop of the story?
- e. Discuss the main themes of the story.

## 7.7 LET US SUM UP

‘The Dog of Tithwal’ is a short story by Manto that explores the theme of conflict, connection, ignorance, pride and struggle. The story takes place just after the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, and narrates how a dog named Jhun Jhun becomes a victim of the hostility of people on both sides. The story discusses how the dog is used as a tool to promote the nationality as well as respective ideals and goals.

## 7.8 SUGGESTED READING

- ◆ *Another Lonely Voice: The Urdu Short Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto*, by Leslie A. Flemming, Berkeley: Centre for South and South east Asian Studies. University of California. 1979.
- ◆ “Madness and Partition: The Short Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto”, Stephen Alter, *Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 14, Madness and Civilization/ al-Junun wa al-Hadarah (1994).

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***LIFE AND WORKS OF***  
**AMRITA PRITAM**

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 8.3 Amrita Pritam's Life
- 8.4 Amrita Pritam's Times and her Legacy
- 8.5 Check Your Progress (CYP)
- 8.6 Amrita Pritam's Works
- 8.7 Awards
- 8.8 Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs)
- 8.9 Answer Key (CYP) & (SAQs)
- 8.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 8.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.12 Suggested Reading

**8.1 INTRODUCTION**

Amrita Pritam (31 August 1919 – 31 October 2005) was an Indian writer and poet, who wrote in Punjabi and Hindi. She is most remembered for her poignant poem, *Ajj aakhaan Waris Shah nu* (Today I invoke Waris Shah – “Ode

to Waris Shah”), an elegy to the 18th century Punjabi poet, an expression of her anguish over massacres during the partition of India. As a novelist, her most noted work was *Pinjar* (*The Skeleton*, 1970, in which she created her memorable character, Puro, an epitome of violence against women, loss of humanity and ultimate surrender to existential fate). The novel was made into an award-winning film, *Pinjar* in 2003.

## 8.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

Dear learner, the aim of the lesson is to introduce you to the writer, her work and the times in which she lived.

After reading this lesson, you will be

- familiar with the life of Amrita Pritam
- able to describe the times Amrita Pritam wrote in and her legacy, including the awards and honours bestowed on her
- establish Amrita Pritam as a renowned woman writer and appreciate her literary contribution

## 8.3 AMRITA PRITAM’S LIFE

Amrita Pritam was born as Amrit Kaur in 1919 in Gujranwala, Punjab, in present-day Pakistan. She was the only child of Kartar Singh Hitkari who was a school teacher, poet and scholar of Braj Bhasha and also edited a literary journal. Besides this, he was a *pracharak*—a preacher of the Sikh faith. Amrita’s mother Raj Bibi, died when she was eleven. Soon after, she and her father moved to Lahore, where she lived till her migration to India in 1947. Confronting adult responsibilities, and besieged by loneliness following her mother’s death, she began to write at an early age. She was sixteen when her first anthology of poems, *Amrit Lehran* (*Immortal Waves*) was published in 1936. It was the same year when she married Pritam Singh, an editor to whom she was engaged in

early childhood, and changed her name from Amrita Kaur to Amrita Pritam. Half a dozen collections of poems were to follow between 1936 and 1943.

Though she began her journey as romantic poet, soon she shifted gears, and became part of the Progressive Writers' Movement and its effect was seen in her collection, *Lok Peed (People's Anguish)* (1944), which openly criticized the war-torn economy, after the Bengal famine of 1943. She was also involved in social work. After independence when social activist Guru Radha Kishan took the initiative to bring the first Janta Library in Delhi, which was inaugurated by Balraj Sahni and Aruna Asaf Ali, she contributed to the occasion wholeheartedly. This study centre cum library is still running at Clock Tower, Delhi. She also worked at Lahore and Delhi Radio stations, as an announcer and writing poems, stories, novels, articles on various themes.

She is considered the first prominent woman Punjabi poet, novelist, and essayist, and the leading twentieth century poet of the Punjabi language, who is loved in India as well as Pakistan. With a career spanning over six decades, she produced over 100 books of poetry, fiction, biographies, essays, a collection of Punjabi folk songs and an autobiography that were translated into several Indian and foreign languages.

When the former British India was partitioned into the independent states of India and Pakistan in 1947, she migrated from Lahore to India, though she remained equally popular in Pakistan throughout her life, as compared to her contemporaries like Mohan Singh and Shiv Kumar Batalvi.

Known as the most important voice for women in Punjabi literature, in 1956, she became the first woman to win the Sahitya Akademi Award for her magnum opus, a long poem, "Sunehade" ("Messages"). Later she received the Bharatiya Jnanpith, one of India's highest literary awards, in 1982 for *Kagaz Te Canvas (The Paper and the Canvas)*. Padma Shri came her way in 1969 and finally, Padma Vibhushan, India's second highest civilian award, in 2004, and



in the same year she was honoured with India's highest literary award, given by Sahitya Akademi (India's Academy of Letters), Sahitya Akademi Fellowship given to *the "immortals of literature"* for lifetime achievement.

### **Marital life**

In 1935, Amrita married Pritam Singh, son of a leading hosiery merchant of Lahore's Anarkali bazaar. In 1960, Amrita Pritam left her husband. She is also said to have an unrequited affection for poet Sahir Ludhianvi. The story of this love is depicted in her autobiography, *Rasidi Ticket (The Revenue Stamp)*. When another woman, singer Sudha Malhotra came into Sahir's life, Amrita found solace in the companionship of the renowned artist and writer Imroz. She spent the last forty years of her life with Imroz, who also designed most of her book covers and made her the subject of his several paintings. Their life together is also the subject of a book, *Amrita Imroz: A Love Story*.

### **Death**

She died in her sleep on 31 October 2005 at the age of 86 in New Delhi, after a long illness. She was survived by her partner Imroz, daughter Kandala, son Navraj Kwatra, daughter-in-law Alka, and her grandchildren—Taurus, Noor, Aman and Shilpi. Navraj Kwatra was killed in 2012.

## **8.4 AMRITA PRITAM'S TIMES AND HER LEGACY**

Million people—Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs—died from communal violence that followed the partition of British India in 1947. She left Lahore at the time of partition and moved to Delhi as a refugee. Subsequently in 1948, while she was pregnant with her son, and travelling from Dehradun to Delhi, she expressed anguish on a piece of paper as the poem, "Ajj akhaan Waris Shah nu" ("I ask Waris Shah Today"). This poem became the most immortal work of her creations and became the most poignant reminder of the horrors and violence of partition. The poem addressed to Sufi poet

Waris Shah, Author of the tragic saga *Heer* and *Ranjha* and with whom she shares her birth place. Some excerpts of the poem is like this,

*“Ajj Aakaan Waris Shah Nu keiton Kabraan Vichchon vol,*

*Te Ajj Kitab-e-Ishq Daa Agla varkaphol UtahDard Dia uthtak  
apane Punjab,*

*Ajj bele Lakhan Bicchian Te Ik Roi Si di Punjab Di Tu likh mare  
vane*

*Ajj Lakahann Dhian Rondia Tainan Warish Shah Khain Lahu  
Di Bhari Chenab.”*

English Version

*“Today I call Waris Shah speak from your grave and turn Today, the  
book of love next affectionate page once a daughter of Punjab cried and  
you wrote availing saga Today a million Daughters cry to you Waris Shah  
Rise! O narrator of the graving: rise ! Look at your Punjab today, fields are  
lined with corpses, and blood fills the Chenab.”*

After her divorce in 1960, her works became feminist oriented. Many of her stories and poems drew on the unhappy experience of her marriage. A number of her works have been translated into English, French, Danish, Japanese, Mandarin and other languages from Punjabi and Urdu, including her autobiographical works *Black Rose* and *Rasidi Ticket (The Revenue Stamp)*.

The first of Amrita Pritam’s books to be filmed was *Dharti Sagar te Sippiyan*, as ‘Kadambari’ (1965), followed by ‘Unah Di Kahani,’ as *Daaku (Dacoit, 1976)*, directed by Basu Bhattacharya. Her novel *Pinjar (The Skeleton, 1970)* narrates the story of partition riots along with the crisis of women who suffered during the times. It was made into an award winning Hindi movie by Chandra Prakash Dwivedi, because of its humanism: “Amritaji has

portrayed the suffering of people of both the countries.” *Pinjar* was shot in a border region of Rajasthan and in Punjab.

Amrita Pritam also worked in the Punjabi service of All India Radio, Delhi. She edited “Nagmani,” a monthly literary magazine in Punjabi for several years, which she ran together with Imroz, for 33 years; though after Partition she wrote prolifically in Hindi as well. Later in life, she turned to Osho and wrote introductions for several books of Osho, including *Ek Onkar Satnam*, and also started writing on spiritual themes and dreams, producing works like *Kaal Chetna (Time Consciousness)* and *Agyat Ka Nimantran (Call of the Unknown)*. She had also published autobiographies, titled, *Kala Gulab (Black Rose)* (1968), *Rasidi Ticket (The Revenue Stamp)* (1976), and *Aksharon kay Saayee (Shadows of Words)* (2004).

### **Legacy**

In 2007, an audio album titled, ‘Amrita recited by Gulzar’ was released by noted lyricist Gulzar, with poems of Amrita Pritam recited by him. A film on her life is also on the anvil.

### **8.5 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (CYP)**

Dear learner, a reading of the preceding sections in this lesson has familiarised you with the life of Amrita Pritam. You can now take a break from the reading of this lesson and attempt to answer the questions. Make sure to check the Answer Key to see whether you have got the answers correct.

1. Amrita Pritam wrote in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ languages.
2. Amrita Pritam’s novel titled \_\_\_\_\_ epitomises violence against women, loss of humanity, and ultimate surrender to existential fate
3. Amrita Pritam won the Sahitya Akademi Award for her poem \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Amrita Pritam’s real name was \_\_\_\_\_.

5. Amrita Pritam began a member of \_\_\_\_\_ Writer's Movement
6. Amrita Pritam's poem titled \_\_\_\_\_ criticised the war-torn economy after the Bengal famine of 1943.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are Amrita Pritam's autobiographical works.

## **8.6 AMRITA PRITAM'S WORKS**

In her career spanning over six decades, she penned 28 novels, 18 anthologies of prose, five short stories and 16 miscellaneous prose volumes.

### **Novels**

- i. *Pinjar*
- ii. *Doctor Dev*
- iii. *Kore Kagaz, Unchas Din*
- iv. *Dharti, Sagar aur Seepian*
- v. *Rang ka Patta*
- vi. *Dilli ki Galiyan*
- vii. *Terahwan Suraj*
- viii. *Yaatri*
- ix. *Jilavatan* (1968)
- x. *Hardatt Ka Zindaginama*

### **Autobiography**

- i. *Kala Gulab (Black Rose)* (1968)
- ii. *Rasidi Ticket (The Revenue Stamp)* (1976)
- iii. *Shadows of Words* (2004)

### **Short stories**

- i. *Kahaniyan jo Kahaniyan Nahi*
- ii. *Kahaniyon ke Angan mein*
- iii. *Stench of Kerosene*

### **Poetry anthologies**

- i. *Amrit Lehran (Immortal Waves)* (1936)
- ii. *Jiunda Jiwan (The Exuberant Life)* (1939)
- iii. *Trel Dhote Phul* (1942)
- iv. *Gitan Valia* (1942)
- v. *Badlam De Laali* (1943)
- vi. *Sanjh de laali* (1943)
- vii. *Lok Peera (The People's Anguish)* (1944)
- viii. *Pathar Geetey (The Pebbles)* (1946)
- ix. *Punjab Di Aawaaz* (1952)
- x. *Sunehade (Messages)* (1955) – Sahitya Akademi Award
- xi. *Ashoka Cheti* (1957)
- xii. *Kasturi* (1957)
- xiii. *Nagmani* (1964)
- xiv. *Ik Si Anita* (1964)
- xv. *Chak Nambar Chatti* (1964)
- xvi. *Uninja Din (49 Days)* (1979)
- xvii. *Kagaz Te Kanvas* (1981)- Bhartiya Jnanpith

xviii. *Chuni Huyee Kavitayen*

xix. *Ek baat*

### **Literary journal**

i. *Nagmani*, poetry monthly

### **8.7 AWARDS**

Amrita is the first recipient of *Punjab Rattan Award* conferred upon her by Punjab Chief Minister Capt. Amarinder Singh. She is first woman recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1956 for *Sunehade* (poetic diminutive of the word ‘sunehe,’ that is *Messages*). Amrita Pritam received the Bhartiya Jnanpith Award, India’s highest literary award, in 1982 for *Kagaj te Canvas* (*Paper and Canvas*). She received the Padma Shri (1969) and Padma Vibhushan, India’s second highest civilian award, and Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, India’s highest literary award, in 2004. She received D.Litt. honorary degrees, from many universities including, Delhi University (1973), Jabalpur University (1973) and Vishwa Bharati (1987).

She also received International Vaptsarov Award from the Republic of Bulgaria (1979) and Degree of Officer des, Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (Officer) by the French Government (1987). She was nominated as a member of Rajya Sabha 1986–92. Towards the end of her life, she was awarded by Pakistan’s Punjabi Academy, to which she had remarked, *Bade dino baad mere maike ko meri yaad aayi* (My motherland has remembered me after a long time). Punjabi poets of Pakistan, sent her a *chaddar*, from the tombs of Waris Shah, and fellow Sufi mystic poets Bulle Shah and Sultan Bahu.

### **8.8 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS (SAQs)**

1. Puro is the protagonist in \_\_\_\_\_ novel.
  - (a) *Pinjar*
  - (b) *Doctor Dev*

- (c) *Dilli ki Galiyan*
- (d) *Yaatri*
2. Amrita Pritam is \_\_\_\_\_ writer.
- (a) Punjabi
- (b) Dogri
- (c) Marathi
- (d) Tamil
3. “Ajj aakhaan Waris Shah nu” is \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) a novel
- (b) an elegy
- (c) an autobiography
- (d) none of the above
4. Pritam, the suffix added to her name after her \_\_\_\_\_
- (a) Mother
- (b) Friend
- (c) Husband
- (d) Father
5. At what age her first anthology of poem was published ?
- (a) 16
- (b) 10
- (c) 17
- (d) 14

6. Her mother's name was \_\_\_\_\_
- (a) Amrita Kaur
  - (b) Raj Bibi
  - (c) Pritam Kaur
  - (d) Tanmeeta Kaur
7. Amrita Pritam's father was a \_\_\_\_\_
- (a) leader
  - (b) preacher
  - (c) doctor
  - (d) singer
8. Her first anthology of poem was \_\_\_\_\_
- (a) *Amrit Lehran*
  - (b) *Jiunda Jiwan*
  - (c) *Gitan Valia*
  - (d) *Lok Peera*
9. The theme of "Ajj aakhaan Waris Shah nu" is \_\_\_\_\_
- (a) Partition
  - (b) Romanticism
  - (c) Domestic
  - (d) none of the above



**10.** She received Padma Shri in \_\_\_\_\_

- (a) 1970
- (b) 1969
- (c) 1978
- (d) 1979

**8.9 ANSWER KEY (CYP) & (SAQs)**

**(CYP)**

- 1. Punjabi, Hindi      2. Pinjar      3. “Sunehade”
- 4. Amrit Kaur      5. Progressive 6. Lok Peed
- 7. Kala Gulab, Rasidi Ticket

**(SAQs)**

- 1. (a) 2. (a) 3. (b) 4. (c) 5. (a) 6. (b) 7. (b) 8. (a) 9. (a) 10. (b)

**8.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- 1. How was Amrita Pritam impacted by the partition?
- 2. What was the achievements of Amrita Pritam?
- 3. What are the autobiographics of Amrita Pritam?
- 4. Was Amrita Pritam a feminist?

**8.11 LET US SUM UP**

Amrita Pritam is recognized as one of India’s most important and influential writers, and her novels have focused on the women’s oppression, religion, caste, community, partition, spirituality. In short, her works are a reflection of her life experiences and the times in which she lived.

## 8.12 SUGGESTED READING

- ◆ “Amrita Pritam.” *Wikipedia.org*. Wikipedia, n.d. Web. 1 Jan 2017.
- ◆ “Amrita Pritam Biography.” *Poemhunter.com*. Poem Hunter, n.d. Web. 15 Jan 2017.
- ◆ Ranvir, Ranga. *Woman Writer*. “Literacy Interviews.” New Delhi, B. R. 1998. Print.

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***THE REVENUE STAMP***  
**AMRITA PRITAM**

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 9.3 General picture of *The Revenue Stamp*
- 9.4 Detailed and Critical Summary
- 9.5 Check Your Progress (CYP)
- 9.6 Important Excerpts from the Autobiography
- 9.7 Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs)
- 9.8 Answer Key (CYP) & (SAQs)
- 9.9 Examination Oriented Questions
- 9.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.11 Suggested Reading

**9.1 INTRODUCTION**

*The Revenue Stamp* was published originally in Punjabi as *Rasidi Ticket* in 1976. It was translated into English as *The Revenue Stamp* by Krishna Gorowara and published in 1994. *The Revenue Stamp* is the autobiography of the famous poet, novelist and short story writer, Amrita Pritam. Explosive in its revelations and poetic in its content, the book is a candid account of her extraordinary life.

## 9.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

Dear Learner, the lesson's objective is to introduce Amrita Pritam's autobiography, *The Revenue Stamp* to you.

Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will be

- able to summarize the novel *The Revenue Ticket* as well as recognize the significant points in the plot
- critically evaluate the novel by establishing it in the tradition of women's autobiographical writing

## 9.3 GENERAL PICTURE OF *THE REVENUE STAMP*

Amrita Pritam reflects on her full and creative journey of life—her uneasy relationship with her father, her forays into the world of literature, accolades received, brickbats borne and the rather turbulent equation she had with society at large. Amrita Pritam, who spent her early life in Lahore, was a first-hand witness to the tragedy of the partition and this deeply influenced her writing. Always considered a controversial figure in the realm of literature, she was often criticized for her outspoken and allegedly explicit writing. Several of her books and poetry collections were banned for either being disrespectful to religion or being sexually vivid. In her autobiography, she has expressed her anguish over her contemporaries' malice against her and the narrow-mindedness of the world.

On the personal front, Amrita Pritam has dwelt on her failed first marriage, her relationship with Imroz—the noted artist and writer and her rather unique and probably unrequited love for Sahir Ludhianvi—the famous poet and Hindi films lyricist. In her beliefs and writings, Amrita Pritam was much ahead of her times and consequently, had to face the angst of society. All this has been beautifully and lyrically brought out in this autobiography.

#### 9.4 DETAILED AND CRITICAL SUMMARY

*The Revenue Stamp* is an autobiography of a woman who evolves from a sentimental girl to an emotional woman and then to a passionate individual. *The Revenue Stamp* confirms her artistic skills. It is an affirmation of the life she lived as a woman and as a poet. Her autobiography is her stamp on the cognitive life vision of a woman, who has not only loved poetry, but also lived poetry. *The Revenue Stamp* reflects her rebellious ideas; it is an expression of romantic mind and the sufferings of a woman.

*The Revenue Stamp* is a self-discovery of a mind. Amrita reveals an uncommon sense of self-analysis with no conscious regard for social criteria of moral judgments. Being a poet, she maintains the grace of her creativity while narrating the story of her life. Her vision of life is broad enough to make her story the 'Stamp of Truth.' Her unusual feminine awareness explores a process of development and she visualizes this process as a fulfillment of her quest for life.

Amrita Pritam was born on 31 August 1919 at Gujranwala, Punjab, now in Pakistan, the only child of a school teacher and a poet. Her father was a *pracharak*, a preacher of the Sikh faith. Amrita's mother died when she was eleven and there after she and her father moved to Lahore. She was eleven years old and had not developed the sense of reciprocity by then with either of her parents. She suffered a profound feeling of loneliness, since she had no brother or sister to share her grief.

In her sixteenth year, Amrita started writing love poems secretly and tore them, as she was afraid of her father. He encouraged her to write poems but only on religious and patriotic matters. Her father represents the patriarch of discipline and orderliness of life. Amrita had no option but to follow the orders obediently. Apparently, she was praying to show obedience to her father, but actually was thinking and visualizing about her friend whom she had named 'Rajan.' Her inner self was already moving towards the unconventional ideas.

At the age of four, Amrita was engaged and was a teenager of sixteen when she was married off to Pritam Singh, an Editor, of Lahore. Thus, the name ‘Pritam’ was suffixed to her name after her marriage with Pritam Singh.

Amrita’s autobiography *The Revenue Stamp* was first published in 1976. There are vivid pictures of her memories related meaningfully to the outer events and the inner experiences. The book consists of six chapters entitled as:

- (1) Resurrecting Time
- (2) Meeting With Centuries
- (3) Ordeal By Fire
- (4) In Silence Passion Smote
- (5) The Phoenix Dynasty
- (6) On One Palm Henna—On The Other Blisters.

The autobiography reflects on the writer’s deep impulse for the inward dimensions of the self, springing from the compulsion to mediate and introspect.

*The Revenue Stamp* is an extraordinary example of contemplative and indulgent interpretation of her life, depicting the acquisition of her outlook. It is the illumination of that sense of self-discovery, by the writer of which she was not fully aware before she began to write.

An autobiography is usually expected to begin with the details of one’s birth, native place, description of parents and childhood. Amrita Pritam takes back imprints of life from the earliest memories in childhood. *The Revenue Stamp* begins in the usual way, stating the times, climate of society as backdrop to her birth and childhood. Amrita Pritam traces back the source of her mental structure of ideas, traits and tendencies to her childhood. She does not open her life story in the past tense; but the beginning of her self-narrative with dramatically exclaimed interrogative, actually questions the pastures of the past. She has entitled the first chapter ‘Resurrecting Time.’ It starts:

*“Is it doomsday? Moments of my life in the womb  
of time, lived a while and after the span of time,  
seemingly entombed are today alive again, stalk  
past me.”*

The lost childhood becomes a part of the present alive existence, in the process of recollection and contemplation for autobiography. The memories of childhood lie buried in the ‘womb of time’ but never die. She recalls how she had a troubled sense of truth and its utterance right from her childhood:

*“I never told an untruth to father; I can never lie  
to myself either”*

She confesses her first revolt to the father’s creed, when her faith in God was shaken. She had offered a prayer to God during her mother’s sickness for her longer life and recovery but her mother passed away. She refused to follow the routine of prayer and argued with her father for the first time:

*“I burst out in red-hot rage, God heeds no one,  
not even children ... there is no God”*

*‘You mustn’t say that’*

*‘He has ways of showing his worth’*

*‘Let Him! But how can he when he isn’t there?’*

*‘How do you know?’*

*‘Would He not have heard me...?’*

*Had He been anywhere! I said please don’t let my  
Mother die.’*

*‘Is He deaf?’”*

It was the first moment of disillusionment and Amrita Pritam gave up all her practice of routine prayer and meditation. This proves that rebellion is rooted in the soil of discontent, disillusionment and disabling circumstances. Being a

very emotional girl she found it very difficult to be alone and happy. She inclined to imagine a companion who would protect her everywhere. Her analysis is automatically profound to explicate the rise of artist in her.

Not that her father objected to her act of writing poems but he expected her to compose either religion poems or conventional ones and she had no courage initially to break his expectations. To make her father happy, she wrote some orthodox poems and presented herself, like an obedient child. However, her real spirit conquered her soon and she explicitly started asserting her individuality. She recalls:

*“I questioned parental authority, I questioned the value of doing my work at school by rote; I questioned what had been preached to me and I questioned the entire stratified social scheme... I was thirsty for life... what I got instead was advice and constraint, which only fed my rebellion.”*

Amrita deeply penetrates how those small things and events in childhood affected her development:

*“I suppose everyone goes through this phase. However, it happened to me with three times greater impact. First, there was the drabness of middle class morality; then; the dosage of ‘don’ts’ thrust down my throat, which somehow I felt I would have been spared, had my mother been alive. There was the over bearing presentation of my father, a man of religion.”*

The seed of her creativity and rebellion was thus down in her childhood and teenage agony. This agony was resultant of loneliness and lack of love. Amrita’s childhood and youth passed without any great happy event. She put



up with the loss of her mother with whom she also lost her faith in God. A woman's life is related to love in various forms. The affinity between the two is so close that both seem to constitute the very core of existence. The concept of love and woman's existence are so closely interrelated that love occupies a very valuable space in woman's life. As a determiner of life, it also occupies a very important place in *The Revenue Stamp*. The complete texture of her book is threaded by her personal feeling. *The Revenue Stamp* reveals her feminine agony and depicts her agonized experiences and feelings. Amrita Pritam's self-reflections in *The Revenue Stamp* are the passages appropriately analyzing how a sensitive woman finds it very difficult to talk about, to write about her love and life in love. Amrita Pritam as a woman felt everything concretely and with strange sense of being in touch with life:

*“Abstraction has no meaning for me. Each entity must take on some sort of shape that I can touch ... that in fact, can thrill me with a touch.”*

She has created the image of an ideal lover in her mental visions in girlhood. She cherished this image with a romantic quest for realizing it in life. It was her dreamy instinct in the beginning and a philosophical vision later on, she recalls:

*“A deep dark shadow walked along my side... the face of my ideal lover and mines that imagined growing wiser, stronger, and more mature. The layer deepest down was inspired in which I sought to reveal something luminous in quality.”*

Her long cherished love was not voiced until the last stage of Sahir's life. It is essential to note here that Amrita despite all her rebellious ideas and bold expression was a shy woman. In *The Revenue Stamp*, she confesses how she modeled her male protagonists after Sahir and her deep love for him.

Amrita Pritam's apprehension of her 'self' within a sexual code impelled her to shield the image and reality of her ideal love that she could fictionalize. Amrita made friends with Muslim poets and artists like Sajjad, Imroz, and Sahir. She liked Sajjad Haider very much and she never concealed her love for Sahir. At one place, Amrita writes that when Sahir would come to see her he would go on chain smoking and she would intensively long to touch him but:

*"Could not overcome... My own reservation."*

Her own reservation is an intensely painful revelation of her feminine code of conduct. In her reaction to Sahir's death, she recalls the purity she cherished in their relationship:

*"No words care between our friendships. It was a beautiful relationship in silence. The dignity of a blank paper is even there today."*

Another lover in her life is Imroz the painter who devoted himself to her care and she finally accepted him as her ultimate man. In her narration she accepts:

*"The course my lonesome state has been broken through... by Imroz... in the years that followed I had Imroz he has had only loneliness."*

The romantic love of Amrita Pritam's creative and unfathomable sensitivity was a force sustaining her desire for life in the face of her doomed fall. She had accepted the agonizing fact that her dream of love for Sahir would never come true and her compatibility with Imroz as an artist would never cease her respect for him.

In patriarchy woman is expected to present herself as being fulfilling the roles designed by patriarchy. But Amrita Pritam narrates the public side of her life as a writer and puts her career in the next of her role as a beloved.

*The Revenue Stamp* offers her chance to view herself as individual in the surrounding social ethos and to explore her private life as woman. At the same time, the writer's position is multi-faceted in autobiography. She as an autobiographer re-organizes the vision of life from all perspective as aesthetic, social, cultural or religion. For Amrita Pritam the act of writing autobiography carries a dark burden on one hand and on the other she has to maintain the aesthetic interest and the subjective shades of self. As a writer, Amrita Pritam was disturbed to observe the religious riots at the time of partition and afterwards the political upheavals due to it. She expresses her anguish in her autobiography as she cannot ignore that socio-cultural ethos which has been the very source of her conflicts and sufferings.

It is very significant to notice that Amrita Pritam did not offer much space rather ignored the details of her marital life and relationship with her husband. In her narrative, there are brief references to marriage; husband and domestic life. She exploits the autobiographers' freedom of editing and omitting especially about the details of marriage and the husband. It can be inferred that Amrita Pritam's desperate omission of the marital life and related details may be because of her search for self, with a new acquired vision and clarity of values. In the notes of her diary included in the autobiography, she has recorded her reluctance and helplessness about marriage:

*"I went up to the terrace and wept my heart out in the pitch-black dark, father knew about my state of mind... I kept on telling him repeatedly, I do not want to be married. The bridegroom and his party had already arrived. Both father and I had given prolonged thought to this wedding... not having so much hard cash, he was stung to the quick when he told me of this more from their side... my one and only thought was to put myself to death then and there."*

Amrita Pritam's silence about her husband and in-laws in autobiography carries a double sense of the experiences she had in marriage. She creates an impression that she hates him enough not to mention even his name in her life story. The reasons why she had to marry seems to be rooted in socio-familial compulsions, as she states:

*"I had to repay, debt to society... but speaking for myself, I surely feel the weight of that doubt."*

She communicates that marriage was a social bondage forced upon all women of her times. The reasons why she got separated from her husband on the other hand, seem to be rooted in personal psychological compulsions.

In *The Revenue Stamp* she does not even mention about her children, their birth, childhood and growth. However, she mentions that motherhood was an aspired dream for her and recalls how, she longed for a baby until it was born. She mentions her desire that her baby's face should be like her ideal love, imagined by her in Sahir:

*"I had read about how a child is shaped by his mother's thoughts and I said to myself if you always have Sahir's face in your mind's eye, he will groom to resemble him. I know that I was merely feeding my frustrations. In this state of crazy love when my baby was born... it was the face of Sahir in my mind."*

Autobiography as a self-oriented writing holds the consciousness of the woman writer's perceptions in life-experience. Amrita Pritam in her autobiography came out candidly with her exploration of the private self so clearly that the day's prime-minister Indira Gandhi admired her through a letter:

*“It is you and yet there is something universal... most people bury their real selves in some unfathomable depth of their being and just skin the surface of life. It is the privilege of the artist and the poet to be more poignantly aware.”*

For a creative writer Amrita Pritam seems to use her autobiography as a way to self-acceptance than self-appraisal. It is the reality that the author seeks and finds effortlessly, within the private self. Amrita Pritam is so acutely aware of the misconceptions in the collective mind about autobiography that she clarifies in her text:

*“All art consists of re-creating what was created before... As against the myriad of fictional characters, the writer of autobiography attracts concentrated attention. The reader and the writer are face to face. The writer invites the reader to his house beyond the threshold of normal constraint. In addition, compromised with the truth is an insult...not to the invited but to the one extending the invitation?”*

Amrita Pritam’s autobiography *The Revenue Stamp* is the journey of her mind into the world of private self where she combines her present insights with the visions of past. It is in her mid-forties and afterwards that Amrita Pritam had a profound emotional and spiritual sense of harmony and fulfillment in her life with Imroz. Imroz accepted her with all her dreams. He tried to bring her private self to perfection. She narrates:

*“With Imroz... I have no regrets about the path chosen by us. Imroz’s personality is like the flow of river uncontrolled by locks and slices should he be restrained; Imroz would impetuously divert*

*his course. A relationship with him can last any so long as there is nothing to bind it...for hours we submerged in our silences very deep...then the silence gives way to the beauty of words, Imroz breaks it with here we are giving each other the Yogic exercise necessary for our health.”*

The vision of self does reflect her isolation, involvement and identity.

*“Life is a strange book, constructed by letters and sounds that combines and break, to scatter away and change. After a long journey of consciousness, then comes a point when one finds the courage of introspecting and scrutinizing all those past moments of failures and frustration of restless noon’s and gloomy evenings of painful mornings and sleepless nights... through which one finds the hope of new sense of continuity and confidence to step forth to transcend the consciousness of ‘I’ was trading upon the sense of me.”*

*The Revenue Stamp* presents Amrita Pritam’s vision of womanhood. Her mind was communicative in its perceptions and she could visualize the male mind through her characters and could also sympathize with their agonies. She never denied the harsh gender orientation affecting a woman’s world. The recognition of gendered experiences and that of gender roles was felt by her as an artist more profoundly than any common being. She has been too sensitive to adopt the posture of a radical feminist. She seemed to offer some feminist implications in her philosophized observations of woman’s identity and existence.

In the life narrative by woman what is significant is her self-presentation. *The Revenue Stamp* is a like a shell in which the waves of her emotional crisis are still surging. Its her lonely mind, that crept into the writings of her passionate

verses, in quest for warmth and truthful self-investigation. G. D. Narsimhiah observes:

*“Amrita Pritam of India hardly had any to run down Indian society considering the Europhobia that surrounds her in and outside her language. Yet she permitted - herself to complain that it is easier for a woman to be accepted as a harlot than as a poet in Indian society.”*

It has been an instinctual - collaboration of the creative ‘I’ with the feminine ‘I.’ *The Revenue Stamp* is the record of her creativity and poetic career more than of the biographical or physical life experience. The re-publication of her autobiography after a gap of thirty years in the new form *Akshoron ke Saye (Shadows of Words)* 2004 proves the writers’ quest for progressive and mature manifestation of ‘I.’ She calls it ‘antaryatra,’ the journey of inner mind :

*“The writer’s own need. A conscious process leads to one reality to another.”*

To conclude, Amrita Pritam’s autobiography is shaded by her romantic idealism, which is self-imagined. In the world of self, she forgets the external drudgery of life, escapes into, visions that inspire her creativity. Her autobiography reveals her courage of consideration and psychological insight yet believes in the intuitive knowledge of prophetic gestures and suggestive dreams.

The ‘self-preferentiality’ becomes an important part in *The Revenue Stamp*. The autobiographer refers to herself modestly, confidently, apologetically, boldly, proudly and feelingly. Her language is both expressive and impressive. She writes in a self-restrained style with powerfully scholastic references recurring in the flow of her thinking. The account is a fine collaboration of poetic expression that romanticizes, and philosophizes.

## 9.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (CYP)

Dear learner, let us stop for a minute. Now that you have read summary of *The Revenue Stamp* in detail, you can take a moment to go through the exercise given below.

1. *The Revenue Stamp* is a/an \_\_\_\_\_ (fiction/autobiography)
2. Amrita Pritam was deeply influenced by the partition of India. \_\_\_\_\_ (True/False)
3. Amrita Pritam was born at Gujranwala (True/False)
4. At sixteen years of age Amrita Pritam was married off to Imroz (True/False)
5. Amrita Pritam's autobiography *The Revenue Stamp* was published in the year \_\_\_\_\_
6. *The Revenue Stamp* consists of \_\_\_\_\_ chapters

## 9.6 IMPORTANT EXCERPTS FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

### 9.6.1 Is it Doomsday?

Moments of my life in the womb of time—lived awhile, and after Time's span, seemingly entombed—are today alive again, stalk past me...

9.6.2 I did not then think of the world or of what the world thought of me. My only Desire was to please Father.

9.6.3 Shadows have a reality longer than is recognized. Faces too have a reality. But for how long? Shadows for as long as you like. For a life time, if you will....Shadows are related to entities; they are subservient to entities. Yet some do not fit into such pattern. Sometimes it seems as if a shadow is cast on you from nowhere. Broken away, it falls in your path, and you have to carry it along with you to whichever



part of the world you go—in search of the entity from which it broke off.

**9.6.4** Had mother been alive, my sixteenth year would have been different; it would have come like a friend, a near relative... But without Mother, there was a great deal missing from my life. To shield me from outside influences, Father thought it right that I should have no familiarity with anyone: not with any girl from school nor with any boy from the neighbourhood.

**9.6.5** I questioned parental authority, I questioned the value of doing my work at school by rote; I questioned what had been preached to me and I questioned the entire stratified social scheme... I was thirsty for life... what I got instead was advice and constraint, which only fed my rebellion.

**9.6.6** I put a sheet of paper on the table in front of me and, pen in hand, began writing in a trance, the name of the one for whom I had written *Sunhere*. 'Sahir, Sahir, Sahir...' I had completely filled the sheet with that name.

**9.6.7** True, there was nothing loud or objectionable about him; indeed I detected a strain of sternness in the way he conducted himself. He also had about him an abominable air of superiority ... as if everyone he came across was no better than a worm! While I wrote my periodic reviews for the radio, he would inflict himself on me and insist on dictating to me who exactly to include and who to leave out and how much was to be said about whom.

**9.6.8** In the totality of myself as a writer, the woman in me has had only a secondary role to play. So often have I nudged myself into an awareness of the woman in me. The writer's role is obvious. But the existence of that other being I have increasingly discovered through my creative works.

**9.6.9** I was fully aware that they did not share my sense of community. Principles and values do not find a place in their minds. Yet I feel there is something common between them and me and between all those anywhere in the world who live by the pen...And that includes my past, my present, as well as my future. It could be true of anyone thousands of years ago or with anyone in as many years' time in the future...

**9.6.10** She stands face to face with her own self. And she begins to realize that what truth is at one time need not necessarily be truth at another.

### **9.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS (SAQs)**

1. *The Revenue Stamp* is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) a novel
  - b) a poem
  - c) an autobiography
  - d) none of the above
2. What is the title of Chapter 1? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) Resurrecting Time
  - b) Meeting with Centuries
  - c) Ordeal by Fire
  - d) In Silence Passion Smote
3. *The Revenue Stamp* is originally written in \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) Dogri
  - b) Urdu
  - c) Hindi
  - d) Punjabi

4. With whom Amrita Pritam found spiritual love? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a) Sahir
  - b) Imroz
  - c) Pritam Singh
  - d) None of the above
5. At what age Amrita Pritam got married? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a) 16
  - b) 10
  - c) 24
  - d) 21
6. \_\_\_\_\_ was the imaginative character with whom Amrita Pritam imagined relationship in order to fulfill her own sense of rebel.
- a) Sahir
  - b) Rajan
  - c) Imroz
  - d) None of the above
7. *The Revenue Stamp* is divided into \_\_\_\_\_ chapters.
- a) seven
  - b) six
  - c) four
  - d) no chapters

## 9.8 ANSWER KEY (CYP) & (SAQS)

### (CYP)

- |                  |         |         |
|------------------|---------|---------|
| 1. autobiography | 2. True | 3. True |
| 4. False         | 5. 1976 | 6. six  |

### (SAQs)

1 (c), 2 (a), 3 (d), 4 (a), 5 (a), 6 (b), 7 (b)

## 9.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. Discuss *The Revenue Stamp* as an autobiography.
- Q2. How Imroz became an important part in Amrita Pritam's life?
- Q3. Discuss the relationship between Amrita Pritam and Sahir Ludhianvi.

## 9.10 LET US SUM UP

The memories and experiences of Amrita Pritam form the base of *The Revenue Stamp*. It narrates the journey of narrator from innocence to experience. It narrates the women's self—what she feels and what she thinks. *The Revenue Stamp* is the narration of her experiences as an individual, as woman, as writer and as a human seeking self-perfection.

## 9.11 SUGGESTED READING

- ◆ “Amrita Pritam's *The Revenue Stamp* critical study.” *Shodhganga.inflibnet*. Shodhganga, n.d. Web. 16 Jan. 2017.
- ◆ Pritam, Amrita. *The Revenue Stamp: An Autobiography*. Trans. Krishna Gorowara. New Delhi: Times Group Books, 1994. Print.

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***THE REVENUE STAMP*****AMRITA PRITAM**

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 10.3 Title
- 10.4 *The Revenue Stamp* – An Insightful Woman in a Confessional Mode
- 10.5 Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs)
- 10.6 Answer Key (SAQs)
- 10.7 Examination Oriented Questions
- 10.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.9 Suggested Reading

**10.1 INTRODUCTION**

*The Revenue Stamp* is an autobiography of Indian woman writer Amrita Pritam. In her autobiography, Amrita Pritam is the protagonist. Gender, community and religion perform an imperative role in her experiences as an individual. The autobiography reflects how the social and communal violence affects an individual's psyche. In *The Revenue Stamp*, Amrita Pritam speaks as an individual, as woman, and as woman writer.

## 10.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of the lesson is to discuss various facets of the autobiography *The Revenue Stamp*. The lesson aims to touch upon different theoretical issues on the basis of which the autobiography can be interpreted.

Dear Learner, after reading this lesson, you will be

- able to analyse how women's most intimate and personal experiences are recounted in an autobiography, that is, *The Revenue Stamp* written in the confessional mode
- able to describe the title and the symbolic significance attached to it

## 10.3 TITLE

It was a casual suggestion to her from author, Khushwant Singh that she should write an autobiography exceptional in its reflection of her creativity. The autobiography, metaphorically proved the 'Stamp' of self on her 'revalue of writings.' He asked, "What is there in your life? Just one or two incidents...If you wish to write an autobiography the back of a Revenue stamp is sufficient space!"

He said 'a Revenue Stamp' probably to suggest that all other stamps keep changing their size. However, the Revenue Stamp remains the same. He suggested, "Your life could be contained on the back of a revenue stamp." He was right, as Amrita Pritam observes that whatever happened in her life, inside the depths of mind and it was all submitted to novels and poems:

"Then what remained? Still, I am writing some lines as if to place the revenue stamp upon the accounts of life; as if to confirm those rough writings finally as mine."

A writer of uncommon passion, Amrita responded to the provocative challenge with an aptly titled *Rasidi Ticket (The Revenue Stamp)*. The account of her life became so popular that it was translated into half a dozen Indian languages. This much-maligned story of a Punjabi rebel is adored for the manner

in which she says what her readers may decry from the core of their hearts. Reading the story one feels that in the male-dominated world, a woman is more sinned against than sinning.

Amrita Pritam's attitude to worn out social norms and traditions was so candid that she earned the wrath of many but never faltered from the path she chose. She rose to be the voice of the entire Indian womanhood and sowed the seeds of rebellion in the minds of her readers against values that were wrong and unjust, according to her. Her autobiography became a 'revenue stamp' a mark of female rebel on the male-dominated society which marginalized woman not only in social space but also in literary space. Amrita has ardently highlighted man's disaffection with woman. Throughout her life, Amrita had been a symbol of liberation for contemporary women writers.

Amrita has succeeded in presenting the theme of rebel and resurrection with all the sophistication of a protagonist seeking change. She has been in the forefront when it came to defying all that was outworn and obsolete in society. One may not agree with her solutions but one has to accept that her writings did set the ball rolling in so far as challenging wrongs in society was concerned.

#### **10.4 THE REVENUE STAMP—AN INSIGHTFUL WOMAN IN A CONFESSIONAL MODE**

Amrita Pritam is a prolific writer and a versatile genius. Her essays, short stories and novels written in Hindi and Punjabi have been translated into more than thirty regional and foreign languages. Among the contemporary Indian writers she occupies a unique position. This 'uniqueness' arises because of her foray into both lovely and harsh imaginative world which, apart from being confessional outpouring of a sensitive soul, is also a reflection on the patriarchal social constrains.

*The Revenue Stamp* is an autobiography which captures her entire life in its fold. The confessional strains are very much evident here in that Amrita makes a candid confession of the intimate experiences of her life. Even a casual

reading of autobiography suggests that all the experiences of her life since childhood have been created and lived under some shadow or another: the shadows of death, weapons, words, dreams, patriarchy, and shadows of authoritarian power, shadows of contemplation and shadows of unrequited love.

In a patriarchal social setup, writing autobiography is indeed a very difficult task for a woman writer. Keeping in mind the social and cultural constraints Tharu and Lalita point out:

“Autobiography as a genre exhibits a certain ambivalence. The accent is on the personal. The existential contours of a life and the preoccupation with intimate, even confessional details often obscure the fact that autobiography always draws on the repertoire of life scripts that cultures provide at particular junctures in their history. Recurrent themes in many nineteenth century memoirs are the woman’s joy in the love and support of a progressive husband and her education and the new possibilities that opened out to her. But even in relatively conventional accounts we come across passages that give us a glimpse of many-faceted struggles involved: the pain of being constantly watched and corrected; the feeling that they were not good enough; the exhausting demands of the new housework; the uncertainty and anxiety involved in raising children in the new mode, outside the reassuring circle of the traditional family; the longing for the support of a world they had lost, and so on.”

Amrita Pritam has woven a prodigious mass of personal experiences into the texture of her writings. It is necessary, therefore, to peep into those experiences of her life which have direct bearing on her writings. Her experience of growing up as a recluse accounts for acute emotional vacuum in her writings. Her marital life was not successful, the evidences of which we very often get in *The Revenue Stamp*. *The Revenue Stamp*, therefore, is a personal testimony of the new sense of worth she experienced as ‘individual,’ whose specific life is of interest and importance. Despite her preoccupation with the intimate, and the confessional aspects, she does not ignore the existential contours of life. The



materials that she has gleaned from her personal experiences, whether real or visionary, have been converted into an artifact of beauty and order. Narrating the predicament of a woman writer Shobha De says:

“For a woman, a book in progress is like a secret lover she has to hide from her family and so people are terrified at the thought of writing about themselves. They find all kinds of excuses. They lie. They make up. They invent. They rub out.”

Yet the expression of the self is a major feminist concern for her as “an unbearable pain reverberates through the entire body.” A woman autobiographer finds herself in this awful predicament due to the oppressive effects of patriarchy which maintains double moral standard toward sexes. This attitude gets manifested in women’s autobiographies in both explicit as well as implicit ways. These spoken/unspoken ordeals are very much pronounced in *The Revenue Stamp*.

The most conspicuous trait that is evident in *The Revenue Stamp* is a woman’s battle against authoritarian and male hegemonic discourse and her determination to dare to live the life she imagines. *The Revenue Stamp* is celebrated for its sensuous imagery and evocative rhythm and is widely read and appreciated, though it has also been criticized as “the book was hurting religious sentiments.” She writes:

“Society attacks anyone who dares to say its coins counterfeit, but when it is a woman who says this, society begins to foam at the mouth. It puts aside all its theories and arguments and picks up the weapon of filth to fling at her.”

Her autobiography deals more and more with woman who acknowledges her desires and independence and accept responsibilities for her life even at the cost of love. Her mother was the sole inspiration behind this spirit of rebellion in her. Her mother, she writes, “never failed in the slightest degree to honor and obey my father’s male will... [but] collected all the anger from her mind and poured it into my infant being.” Women writers have to resurrect and heal

a self that has been mutilated by patriarchal constraints. In dealing with the chaos inflicted by society the woman writer glimpsed a power within her own psyche.

The two dominant emotions which become explicit are that this autobiography is about ‘inner consciousnesses’ or ‘inner journey’ of the narrator. The inner journey ranges from darkness to the spiritual enlightenment. In between is the experience of travail she has undergone because of her unrequited love for Sahir Ludhianvi, the noted Urdu poet. The teenager in Amrita Pritam is a sensitive soul, rather love-smitten and emotionally starved soul. She has attached considerable importance to this phase when she experienced the first flush of youth. The sixteenth year is the most precious and glorious but extremely turbulent phase of a youth’s life. When the first flush of youth knocks at heart’s door, turmoil begins within and without. Ironically, however, it creeps into mind and soul stealthily. Amrita describes the first touch of love in the sixteenth year of her age:

“Came my sixteenth year – like a stranger. Inside me, there was an awareness I could not explain... Like a thief, came my sixteenth year, stealthily like a prowler in the night, stealing in through the open window at the head of my bed.”

The said passage is imbued with metaphorical implication. The description of the sixteenth year that follows is emotional and poetic and characterizes the colossal emotional appetite of a teenager:

“Every apsara disturbing the meditations of a rishi was, mythologically speaking, the commissary of Lord Indras. My sixteenth year must also have been Lord Indra’s work, invading the purity of my childhood. It was now that I began to write poetry, and on every poem I wrote, I carried the cross of forbidden desires. Just as the rishis became restless as each apsara appeared, so my rebellious thoughts pursued me, giving me no peace...”

This beautiful dream and lovely imaginative vision emerge into ecstatic experience and she is transported into the world where bliss forever reigns. She thanks God for being trapped into the network of love, inflicting this pain, rather romantic pain, in her:

“I thank the fates that conspired to break through the years of my innocence. That conspiracy relates not only to that one year alone but to the whole of my life.”

However, despite having a “clandestine relationship” with this phase of life, this sixteenth year is also the year of awakening for Amrita when life took on a different meaning. It was the beginning of a new dawn, marked by a new awareness about life. A rebel in her challenged the orthodox, conservative and conformist attitude of society. Though nothing very significant happened, yet it marked a distinct phase in her life. She says:

“Yet life took on a different meaning; it was the beginning of an uneven road of life with all its hairpin bends, its ups and downs. It was also the beginning of curiosity. I questioned parental authority. I questioned the value of doing my work at school by rote. I questioned that had been preached to me and I questioned the entire stratified social scheme. What I had so far learnt was like a strait-jacket that gives way at the seams as the body grows. I was thirsty of life. I wanted living contact with those stars I had been taught to worship from afar. What got instead was advice and constraint which only fed my rebellion.”

The said passage is significant in that it outlines the future course that rebel in Amrita will take: “Life took on a different meaning” suggests her questioning of the ‘entire stratified social scheme.’ “I was thirsty for life” suggests the acute emotional vacuum that had crept quite early in her life. She opines that everyone goes through this phase, but “it happened to me with three times greater impact. First, there was the drabness of middle class morality, then the dosage of “don’ts” thrust down my throat which I somehow felt I would have been spared, had my mother been alive. Here was the overbearing

presence of my father, a man of religion. Poor Father. He wanted me to be an obedient, self-effacing daughter and here was I in my sixteenth year bearing my cross like the pang of an unfulfilled love. I was sixteen and the memory creeps into every phase of my life.”

Out of several precious moments which both enlighten and consume her heart is the memory of unrequited love for Sahir. Because of the conservative family milieu and its hatred towards Muslims, there existed hatred between the two. Amrita recalls an incident whenever her father’s Muslim friends visited her house, they were offered tea in glass tumblers which were kept away from all other pots and pans on a shelf in the corner of the kitchen, in their ‘ostracized niche.’ The rebel in Amrita could not tolerate this and she revolted against this custom of her grandmother: “thereafter, not a single utensil was labeled ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim.’” She says, “Deep down in the layers of my mind, was the first impact of a religion against which I had risen as a child, when I had seen that glass tumbler touched by someone with a different faith became impure.” Ironically, however, she confesses, “Neither Grandmother nor I knew then that the man I was to fall in love with would be of the same faith as the branded utensils were meant for.” The said confession brings her passionate longings for Sahir as ‘love, all alike nor season knows nor clime’; in other words, it transcends cultural and religious boundaries. Its worth becomes supreme even if it remains at platonic level, even if it is visionary, “Shadows are related to entities; they are subservient to entities even if they do not fit into any such pattern.” Her poignancy of feelings has been expressed in the following words:

“Young as I was, I wonder whether the shadow of my fate had not so been cast on me already... Shadows have a reality longer than is recognized. Faces too have reality. But for how long? Shadows for as long as you like. For a lifetime, if you will. Years come and go. They do not wait. Some shadows, on the other hand, hover around is with an existence of their own. Sometimes it seems as a shadow is cast on you from nowhere. Broken away, it falls in your

path, and you have to carry it along with you to whichever part of the world you go – in search of the entity from which it broke off.”

It is the ‘shadow’ of Amrita’s first meeting with Sahir that haunts her and kept on haunting throughout her life. Her passionate longings for Sahir remained a constant source of both her hopes and despair. She missed him much in life, but bore the pangs of bereavement with stoical fortitude. In 1944 Amrita met the poet Sahir Ludhianvi. They enjoyed a long and mutually supportive friendship, but Amrita declared her love for him only in her poetry. The long poem “Sunehade” (“Message”), for which she won the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1953 and many other poems in her early collections were inspired by their friendship. She recalls an incident when a press photographer came to her with the news of Akademi Award for “Sunehade.” This testifies to the depth and intensity of her love for Sahir:

“Late that evening, came a reporter and a photographer from the press. The photographer wanted me to pose as one engrossed in the act of writing. I put a sheet of paper on the table in front of me and, pen in hand, began writing in a trance, the name of the one for whom I had written Sunehade “Sahir, Sahir...” I had completely filled the sheet with that name.”

Out of several reminiscences which flash upon her eyes, the one which is striking is as follows:

“Whenever Sahir came to see me in Lahore, it was as if he had somehow been conjured up by my silences. He had become so much a part of them, still still in the chair until it was time for him to go away...!

He would quietly go on chain-smoking... he would smoke half a cigarette, stub it out, and light another. When he was gone, the place was littered with cigarette ends...

Sometimes, I intensely longed to touch him but I could not overcome my own reservations.

It was a time when I lived in my imagination a great deal.

When he was gone, I would collect the stubs and preserve them secretly in a little cupboard. And then I would salvage them one by one and quietly sit and light them, one after the other... I would feel the touch of his fingers by holding the stubs he once held... !”

One can guess the depth of sorrow in these lines. Throughout *The Revenue Stamp* Amrita talks about distress. However, this is not merely the song of sadness but also of delight. Suffering is the touchstone of the innate goodness of the human nature. The pain that she experiences is unbearably pathetic and it has been expressed by her through the immortal lines of Oscar Wilde:

“I determined to commit suicide. After a time that evil mood passed away, and I made up my mind to live, but to wear gloom as a king wears purple: never to smile again: to turn whatever house I entered into a house mourning: to make my friends walk slowly in sadness with me...

Some people advised me to forget all this. It was ruinous advice. I would mean-the beauty of the sun and the moon, the music of daybreak and the silence of great nights, the rain falling through the leaves or the dew – creeping over the grass and making it silver – would all be tainted for me... to deny one’s experience is to put a life into the lips of one’s own life. It is no less than the denial of the soul.”

Bharat Muni, the reputed founder of the ancient Indian theatre, in his monumental work on dramaturgy, known as *The Natya Shastra*, has made a distinction between the feelings of life and the emotions of art. The former may be painful, but as they are manifested in a work of art they become capable of yielding delight. Her reflections on tragedy of life are exceedingly remarkable:

“Tragedy is, when the silver plating peels off and the contents of the bowl turn poisonous and penetrate into your imagination...

Tragedy is, when you write your life's letter to your love and you yourself go and lose his address...

Tragedy is, when with solely bleeding feet you stand where no pathway opens before you..."

Amrita's *The Revenue Stamp* is a brilliant piece of a work of art. As a work of art it presents a world which has a strong semblance of the real life, but is essentially unlike it, because in this world things are logical, orderly and intelligible, bound as they are by the law of cause and effect or of probability or necessity. The result is a sort of 'distancing' where the world of realities is viewed not closely but at a distance. In this process the interested spectators slowly rise above their personal limitations and prejudices, their selfish intents and concerns and contemplate on the human struggle against the odds of a life in a mood of entranced detachment. Amrita's meditative posture has been reflected when she reflects on the essence of life:

"During the first phase, like a Bodhisatva, I sat looking upon everything with an eye of a wonder, the minutes were somehow magnified, though for no reason that I can explain.

By the second, I had developed an overwhelming consciousness – it was the vigor of youth in revolt against the bastions of social tradition. The hatred and wrath rising up in me was like the precious stone in a toad's head.

The third one was the courage to forget and demolish the present and to build a new future, the courage to shuffle dreams like cards before they are dealt out... the courage to take the losses in a game and to shuffle the cards again and deal them out afresh in the hope that luck would change.

The fourth is this sense of isolation."

The most powerful evidence of Amrita Pritam's confessional strain that brings to the fore her unspoken ordeal is evident in the passages dealing with the delicate human relationship, her unrequited love. Love, the first need of

nature, the first prayer of heart, becomes the first martyr to this unspoken ordeal before it gets kindled and finds expression in words. If the language of love is silence, Amrita bears the pangs of separation with Sahir with stoical fortitude. She is quite open in telling about her illicit relationship with Sahir outside the laws of wedlock. At that time she was engaged to Imroz, but her physical relationship with Sahir was an ecstatic experience. It is not the guilt emanating from the hot heat of sexual passion that pains her but something else. This confession exudes a quiet courage with which Amrita Pritam faced the tormenting pain and desolation she suffered. It shows her rare sensitivity, intensity and passion. Hidden secrets of relations with the opposite sex, and twisting of the soul in unbearable pain throws ample light on the lot of the fellow sufferers on highway to love.

She is pale with longing for him. Casting off all shame and oblivious of all scandals she seizes on every possible pretext and tries to meet him. The pain of this love smitten lady cannot be diagnosed as it is in her heart that has been afflicted.

The intensity of Amrita's devotion to Sahir and her courage in resisting every pressure to deviate from her chosen way of life can be demonstrated when we see her crazy love for Sahir. When her first baby was born and when she first looked upon his face, "it was the face of Sahir in mind...." She says that she was merely feeding her frustration: "Like divinity aiming at the creation of a wonderful one....Free from the claims of the flesh....Free from all that flesh and blood has been heir to....From the dawn of creation...." At the same time, she confesses that she did it because:

"I had read about how a child develops and how his mind is shaped by his mother's thoughts... My imagination drew me away from the world around me and I said to myself: if you always have Sahir's face in mind's eye, he'll grow to resemble him."

Amrita's love for Sahir is reminiscent of a Sufi poet of Punjab, Mirza,



who having seen the bewitching, exquisite and matchless beauty of Sahiba exclaimed with delight, 'Man Mirza tan Sahiba.' It means, when Mirza meets a beautiful girl, Sahiba, she feels that Mirza is a mind who has made her body his abode. In similar way, when Amrita describes her love for Sahir, it seems that Sahir has made her heart his abode; the bodies of Amrita and Sahir have become like holy shrines, where even the sternest puritans have come to learn about love. In her passionate description one can experience the union of two souls, not two bodies. And in this supreme meeting one experiences within the limits of the bodies the super consciousness which can make it boundless.

Why has love found this place in life? Amrita has found the answer to that mystery when these bodies of flesh and blood become a temple where, arising from within, the fragrance of incense offered in prayer begins, "Because a drop of your love got mixed in my cup/I could drink the bitters of life..."

#### **10.5 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS (SAQs)**

- Q1. On whose suggestion Amrita Pritam wrote her autobiography?
- (a) Imroz
  - (b) Sahir
  - (c) Khushwant Singh
  - (d) None of the above
- Q2. *The Revenue Stamp* is written in \_\_\_\_\_ mode\_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Confessional
  - (b) regret
  - (c) Both (a) and (b)
  - (d) None of the above
- Q3. Amrita Pritam, in *The Revenue Stamp*, shares her experience as\_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Daughter

- (b) Mother
- (c) Woman
- (d) None of the above

Q4. *The Revenue Stamp* is celebrated for its\_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Religious sentiments
- (b) Sensuous imagery
- (c) Political arguments
- (d) None of the above

Q5. Whose name Amrita Pritam does not mention in *The Revenue Stamp*?\_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Husband
- (b) Father
- (c) Lover
- (d) Friend

#### **10.6 ANSWER KEY (SAQs)**

1 (c), 2 (a), 3 (c), 4 (b), 5 (a)

#### **10.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

Q1. Analyze the title of the autobiography *The Revenue Stamp*.

Q2. In *The Revenue Stamp* Amrita Pritam talks as an individual. Discuss.

Q3. *The Revenue Stamp* is written in confessional mode. Evaluate.

## 10.8 LET US SUM UP

*The Revenue Stamp* presents the narrator as an insightful woman writing in confessional mode. She neither hesitates to talk against the institutions responsible for her marginalization nor in narrating her mistakes as well as her romantic relationship with her male friends. Amrita Pritam symbolizes the rebel against the traditional set image of woman.

## 10.9 SUGGESTED READING

- ◆ Tiwari, Shubha. “An Insightful Woman in The Confessional Mode.” *Boloji.com*. Boloji, 1 Oct. 2011. Web. 2 Jan. 2017.
- ◆ Tharu, Susie, and K. Lalita. *Women Writing in India 600 B.C. to the Present*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1991. Vol. I. Print.
- ◆ De, Shobha. *Selective Memory*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2015. ebook.

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***THE REVENUE STAMP***  
**AMRITA PRITAM**

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 11.3 Feminism in Amrita Pritam's *The Revenue Stamp*
- 11.4 Check Your Progress (CYP)
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- 11.9 Examination Oriented Questions
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**11.1 INTRODUCTION**

*The Revenue Stamp* is the second autobiography by Amrita Pritam. In *The Revenue Stamp*, she speaks as a woman who rebels against the institution and public thinking responsible for the subjugation of woman. The autobiography is a beautiful artistic blend of realism with romantic idealism and imaginary world.

## 11.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The aim of the lesson is to help learner get a grasp of the autobiography and the female sensibility reflected in it. The objective is to also make the learner familiar with realism and romantic idealism in the work.

Dear learner, after reading this lesson, you will

- be able to describe feminism and analyse *The Revenue Stamp* within the theoretical perspective of feminism
- get clarity regarding realism and romantic idealism and the imaginary world as reflected in *The Revenue Stamp*

## 11.3 FEMINISM IN AMRITA PRITAM'S *THE REVENUE STAMP*

Amrita Pritam has been the centre of a great deal of journalistic and critical attention. In her works, issues of gender relations and women's oppression have always remained one of the most important centers of focus. Religion, caste and class have played major roles in forming her consciousness as well as in the representation of gender relations and women's oppression both in her poems and prose.

Though it was through her father Giani Kartar Singh Hitkari that she acquired her love of books and learning. He knew Sanskrit and the skill of the *hakims* and was a scholar of *Brij Bhasha*. It was his over whelming religious presence which she began to rebel against. This theological influence is apparent in her early poems and in her first collection "Amrit Laheran" (1936).

The circumstances of her birth, the meeting and marriage of Nand Sadhu her father with Raj Bibi her mother are narrated in her autobiography *The Revenue Stamp* where she also points out the contradictory pulls of a life of renunciation and riches faced by her father and the mark left on her.

In a girl's life, mother occupies an important place which nobody can fill. The death of her mother when she was eleven is perceived as another shattering experience so that puberty was no longer a natural experience but

one which led to the suppression of desires and a consequent questioning of parental authority, middle class morality, rigid religious practices and the entire stratified social structure. An early engagement at the age of four and marriage at sixteen and the consequent trauma of separation and divorce in the face of social opposition also played a major role in shaping her consciousness and making her question middle class norms. All these female emotions get expression in her poems like “Jeonda Jiwan” (1939) “Pathar Geetay” (1946) “Lamian Vatan.”

A reflection of her most persistent concern ‘the oppression of women’ can be seen in *The Revenue Stamp* replete with satire, wit and irony. Contradictions clearly remain of, on the one hand, opposing middle class norms and on the other, trying to fit in with the image, as is evident from her attempt at comparison sought in religion in trying to “justify” her smoking and drinking. In “Life and Times,” her autobiographical work in English, she writes, “I am a chain smoker. I love a drop of whisky too, occasionally. Indeed, I sometimes have a craving for it. But I am not an addict and I do not drink every day. I am acutely aware of the prevailing attitudes towards a woman who smokes and drinks. A peculiar comparison occurs to me. After all, I was born in a Sikh family. When a plate of sweet Semolina “halwa” is placed in offering before the great Sikh book “Guru Granth Sahib” the blade of a sword is passed through it. There upon the simple ‘halwa’ becomes Kraah Prasad, which is distributed to congregation. Similarly, the cigarette between my fingers or the glass of drink in my hands transforms themselves into something infinitely purer.”

The press, literary institutions and critics have shown similar contradictory reactions to her writing which she describes at length in “Life and Times,” so that her works are either highly acclaimed or denounced. In the section “On One Palm Henna—On The Other Blisters,” she comments upon the reaction to her autobiography “Rasidi Ticket” (*The Revenue Stamp*) which was published in 1976 in Punjabi. In 1977 there was a protest from the Punjabi Government to ban the book, with the case going on for months. On the other

hand the book became a course book in SNDT Women's University of Bombay and was prescribed as classic literature for two years.

Amrita Pritam's *The Revenue Stamp* is intensely subjective. It is a record of her personal female experiences. The essential trait of *The Revenue Stamp* is reconstruction of her own self. A sense of neglect tormented her psyche. In her autobiography, one finds the evidence of awakened and agonized female soul in anguished turmoil over her lonesome existence.

Love forms the most important theme. However, this romantic love takes a spiritual meaning when she describes her relation with Sahir Ludhianvi:

*"No words care between our friendships. It was a beautiful relationship in silence. The dignity of a blank paper is even there today."*

Another lover in her life is Imroz the painter who devoted himself to her care and she finally accepted him as her ultimate man. In her narration she accepts:

*"The course my lonesome state has been broken through... by Imroz... in the years that followed I had Imroz he has had only loneliness."*

The romantic love of Amrita Pritam's creative and unfathomable sensitivity was a force sustaining her desire for life in the face of her doomed fall. Love becomes the means to achieve spiritual perfection. The description of her affection and attraction towards Sahir and Imroz outside the marriage can be seen as the act of rebel against the marriage institution which makes marriage as the soul existence of woman and refuse to see woman as individual. She is taken as an object to fulfill the sexual and emotional needs of husband but there is no consideration for a woman's needs and emotions.

In her life narrative, she also describes that how in literary space, as a woman, she was expected to remain at the periphery. She became the centre of criticism and wrath of patriarchy as she with her talent surpassed the male writers of the times:

"Some of them are off on a new track. They have branded my work as

pornographic. After I had been elected Chairperson of the Reception Committee of the 1970 Asian Writers' Conference, this campaign became more insistent.”

Her repressed inner urges and emotions of rebellion found expression in *The Revenue Stamp*. She emerges out of the inner darkness into a sunlit valley. She chose her writings as a medium of self-expression to relieve herself of her unhappiness and *The Revenue Stamp* is one of them. The charm and power of her autobiography testify to its wide appeal among writers. Her autobiography paves the way for self-realization in a world designed to defeat such a quest.

In women's autobiography, the subject and self of the author coalesce to form a coherent unity. A woman's writing tends to be a contradiction between fact and fiction as it is generally metaphorical and digressive. *The Revenue Stamp* turns out to be a spontaneous and instinctive expression. Female autobiographers talk about their parents, their marriages, their husbands and their in-laws at length. However, in *The Revenue Stamp* it is significant to notice that Amrita Pritam did not offer much space rather ignored the details of her marital life and relationship with her husband. In her narrative, there are brief references to marriage; husband and domestic life. She exploits the autobiographers' freedom of editing and omitting especially about the details of marriage and the husband. It can be inferred that Amrita Pritam's desperate omission of the marital life and related details may be because of her search for self, with a new acquired vision and clarity of values. The focus is more on the emotional aspects of life. She remains conscious of herself as woman and writes from a woman's point of view. Thus, it is against the background of her personal experiences of life that *The Revenue Stamp* must be viewed. Her literary journey is a continual exercise of self-revelation.

To conclude, the autobiographical impulse and act is central to woman's writing in India. The gamut of Indian women's writing generates an unending discourse on personalities, selves, woman's emotions and ways of life. In a way, it presents the socio-cultural scenario in India from a woman's standpoint. It affords a peep into Indian feminism too. Besides giving a historical perspective,



it throws ample light on woman's psychic topography. It takes us to the deepest emotions of a woman's inner being. Love finds a spontaneous response in a woman's heart. She seeks her god in her love. The varied aspects of woman's personality find expression in the female autobiographical literature.

Amrita Pritam was a self-realized woman who never let the prevalent customs and traditions deter her from achieving her goal. The most attractive traits in her personality were her extraordinary courage and her unshakable conviction in truth. She met the adverse situations of her life with fortitude and emerged with greater phoenix-like strength. Amrita Pritam's *The Revenue Stamp* (1977) opened up new vistas for women writers. Her life writing is marked by a ruthless dissection of intimate matters. Extra-marital affairs are discussed at length along with the freedom of the individual spirit. Amrita Pritam retains her primal impulses. She had a deep abhorrence for all types of ostentation. *The Revenue Stamp* claims to have established an honest and selfless relationship with her readers. She was an intensely confessional writer. Her autobiography captures her individuality, points of view, and establishes her distinctive personality, reaching out to readers across all barriers of time and space.

#### **11.4 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (CYP)**

Dear learner, stop here! Make an assessment of what you have read in the previous section by going through the CYP exercise given below:

1. Issues of gender relations and women's oppression have always remained one of the most important concerns in Amrita Pritam's works \_\_\_\_\_ (True/False)
2. Amrita Pritam acquired the love of books and learning from \_\_\_\_\_
3. Amrita Pritam's mother died when she was two years old \_\_\_\_\_ (True/False)
4. Amrita Pritam married at the age of \_\_\_\_\_

5. “Jeonda Jiwan” and “Pathar Geetay” are written by Amrita Pritam \_\_\_\_\_ (True/False)
6. Amrita Pritam’s work titled \_\_\_\_\_ is a reflection of her most persistent concern, the oppression of women
7. *The Revenue Stamp* was originally published in \_\_\_\_\_ language
8. “It was a beautiful relationship in silence. The dignity of a blank paper is even there today” Amrita Pritam said this in her relationship with \_\_\_\_\_

### **11.5 REALISM WITH ROMANTIC IDEALISM AND IMAGINARY WORLD**

*The Revenue Stamp* emphasizes women’s experience under patriarchy and brings the marginalized to the centre. It narrates Amrita Pritam’s desires, dreams and idealism. Retrospectively, when Amrita Pritam disclosed her plans to write an autobiography to Khushwant Singh, he commented: “What is there to your life? Just an incident or two...you could use the back of a revenue stamp to write it.” Then she decided to write the realistic things happened in her life. In a brief prologue to *The Revenue Stamp*, she shot back, “Whatever happened in my life happened between the layers of thought that found their way into novels and poems. What was left? Still, I thought I might write a few lines—something to complete the account book of my life and at the end, seal it with this revenue stamp as it were. Or am I with this revenue stamp setting a seal to my novels and poems...my entire, literary work...I wonder.” The title of the book symbolizes the writer’s own soul. She recalls her memory and begins her life story thus: “Is it Doomsday? Moments of my life in the womb of time lived a while and after Time’s span, seemingly entombed are today alive again, stalk past me...However all the graves yielded to resurrect those moments? It must indeed be Doomsday...” There are vivid pictures of her memories related meaningfully to the outer events and the inner experiences.

*The Revenue Stamp* is an extraordinary example of contemplative and tolerant interpretation of her life. It gives glimpses into the realistic events which happened in her life and her times. For example her fight for equality right from her childhood days. As a writer, she was disturbed to observe the religious riots at the time of partition and afterwards the political upheavals due to it, "At the time of partition all social, political and religious values came crashing down lives glass smarted those crushed pieces of glass bruised my soul. I wrote my hymns for the sufferers of those who have abandoned and raped. The passion of those monstrous times has been with me since, like some consuming fire." At the time of partition she moved to New Delhi as refugee. She began to write in Hindi as opposed to Punjabi, her mother tongue. Till 1961, she worked for All India Radio. As it was the male dominated society, her father wanted Amrita to be an obedient, submissive daughter. Her sixteenth year questioned the parental authority. She was married to Pritam Singh of Lahore. Thus, the name 'Pritam' was suffixed to her name. She depicts her sweet sixteenth: "Like a thief came my sixteenth year, stealthily like a prowler in the night, stealing in through the open window of the head of my bed...." Later on she started working at Lahore and Delhi Radio stations, as an announcer and writing poems, stories, novels, articles on various themes. She divorced her husband Pritam Singh in 1960 and dedicated her later part of life to writing.

Amrita made friends with Muslim poets and artists like Sajjad, Imroz, and Sahir. She liked Sajjad Haider. Their true friendship made other people surprised. The local people thought whether there can be a friendship between man and woman. In spite of religious and social taboos, she continued her friendly gestures with Sajjad. They usually met in Lahore. He became like a family friend to her. Once he celebrated her daughter's birthday. When she moved from Lahore to Dehradun, they used to send letters regularly. They shared their ideas through letters. After so many years, Sajjad translated one of her poems entitled 'Neighbouring Beauty' and got it published in *Pakistan Times*. There are no disputes between them. They are very close to each other. In 1971, Sajjad's death took her into deep depression.

Amrita loved a painter, called Imroz who helped her and devoted himself to her care. Her relationship with him was fascinating. He was younger than her. They together lived in the heart of middle class Delhi and her children lived in the same apartment complex but a floor below hers. Finally she accepted him as her man as: “The course my lonesome state has been broken through...by Imroz...in the years that followed I had Imroz he has had only loneliness.” She herself says that she had no regrets about the path chosen by her. She continues: “A relationship with him can last any so long as there is nothing to bind it... for hours we submerged in our silences very deep...then the silence gives way to the beauty of words, Imroz breaks it with here we are giving each other the Yogic exercise necessary for our health.” She went to Nepal, where she was honoured for the pen with which she had written love songs for Imroz. At this juncture, she wrote to Imroz; “Way farer! Why did you the first time meet me at an evening hour! I am approaching the turning point of my life. If you had to meet me at all why did you not meet me at high noon when you would have felt its heat?”

One of Amrita’s favourite persons is Sahir Ludhianvi. He was a famous Urdu poet. She used many anecdotes in her works. She nurtured a silent intimate relationship with Sahir for many years. She always remained truthful and observed: “I never told an untruth to father; I can never lie to myself either.” She had romance with Sahir with the classical romance of Laila-Majnu. She recalls her first meeting with Sahir when he presses his thumb full of ink on her palm and admits that she had written *Sunehade* for Sahir and not for a Sahitya Academy Award. Amrita and Sahir behave like lovers outside also. When she saw Sahir’s photograph with his new girl friend on Blitz magazine; she was astonished. She turned on the brink of madness. When Muslims and Sikhs opposed their relationship, she did not mind. She wrote that when Sahir would come to see her, he would go on chain smoking and she would intensively long to touch him but “Could not overcome...My own reservation.” She is confessional and candid in her tone. One day her son came to her and said that

“People say that I am Sahir Uncle’s son.” Since she was a bold lady, she replied; “I wish you were Sahir Uncle’s son.” She had inner courage and conviction. She wrote his name hundreds of times on a sheet of paper while addressing a press conference. After his death, she said she hoped he would come back. She recalls the purity she got in their relationship, “No words care between our friendships. It was a beautiful relationship in silence. The dignity of a blank paper is even there today.”

Amrita Pritam’s autobiography is about her romantic idealism, which is self-imagined. In her imaginary world, she finds her creativity and her innovative ideas for her writings. The autobiography talks about her bravery to accept the relation that she had with poets and artists. Like many contemporary writers, marriage was a social bondage forced on all women. Regarding the treatment to women in the society, she says:

“I don’t claim any ideal in womanhood. I do not idealize woman what is important for me is the mental set-up and its evaluation. The only difference between male mind and the female mind is that their drawbacks are different. Economy in man’s control makes him forceful and imposing while the lack of power makes woman reserved, jealous and slavish...I think slavery is a part of mind rather than gender. It is equally related to man as to woman...the difference is in face not in the mind.”

*The Revenue Stamp* did not mention about her children, their birth, childhood and growth. It was about her career and personal life with the poets. She did not mention how her children reacted when she had friendship and love with Sahir Ludhianvi. She, indeed, survived in her imaginary world. She never cared about people and their ideas and gossips. But she was not far away from her contemporary era. She has wonderfully mingled political, social, religious and literary conditions of her times and given a full length portrait of twentieth century.

In her autobiography, Amrita dares to be true to herself. But sometimes

she chooses to express herself indirectly. In her literary autobiography there are gaps and silences which need to be read into.

## 11.6 IMROZ

In *The Revenue Stamp*, Amrita Pritam has made her 'self' as a center of investigation and observation. None of the persons like her husband, children and friends are discussed in much detail except Imroz. She confesses her attraction towards Sahir Ludhianvi. But one can observe that she never talks about Sahir Ludhianvi in detail. She only talks about what she feels for him. The character which finds pages of discussion in *The Revenue Stamp* is Imroz. Amrita celebrates her relationship with Imroz in *The Revenue Stamp*. He is "The 15th August" for her. Her bereaved soul received the balm of love from Imroz. Her life-long quest for love ended in Imroz who fused meaning into her life. She shares with Imroz the wonderful emotion of love which turns a mundane existence into a meaningful journey. She writes, "With Imroz, on the other hand, barring the few earlier years, I have reached the region ecstasy." She describes Imroz as an easy man to know. She found him full of ideas which he expressed through a variety of media—paper, canvas, wood, and so forth. This was the quality which attracted her towards him. However, it was only she who could observe the creativity in him: "...those who own the mills do not have the eyes to see the beauty of his designs." He was much ahead of his times. He was aware of her love for Sahir but he accepted her as what is important for him was his love for her:

"Upon that I once said to him, 'Imroz! if I had got Sahir, I wouldn't have got you!'

Quick came the reply, 'I certainly would've got you even if I'd had to pull you out from his house...'

Imroz was confident and had full belief on his love for Amrita Pritam.

To conclude, in Imroz, Amrita Pritam found a true friend, lover, mentor and support. She writes:

No relationship with man,

Not one word—father, brother, friend, husband

Could have described you...

Each of these words now gain in depth.

### 11.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS (SAQs)

Q1. *The Revenue Stamp* is a rebel against \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Patriarchy
- (b) Politics
- (c) Both (a) and (b)
- (d) None of the above

Q2. *The Revenue Stamp* is an artistic blend of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Realism and Romantic Idealism
- (b) Realism and Politics
- (c) Romantic Idealism and Politics
- (d) None of the above

Q3. Who commented “what is there to your life? Just an incident or two...you could use the back of a revenue stamp to write it.” \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Pritam Singh
- (b) Khushwant Singh
- (c) Imroz
- (d) Sahir

Q4. Khushwant Singh is a \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Singer

- (b) Politician
  - (c) Writer
  - (d) Painter
- Q5. Who translated Amrita Pritam's poem entitled 'Neighbouring Beauty'? \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Khuswant Singh
  - (b) Imroz
  - (c) Sajjad
  - (d) Sahir

#### 11.8 ANSWER KEY (CYP) & (SAQs)

##### (CYP)

1. True    2. her father    3. false    4. sixteen  
 5. true    6. *The Revenue Stamp*    7. Punjabi    8. Sahir Ludhianvi

##### (SAQs)

- 1(a),    2 (a),    3 (b),    4 (c),    5 (c)

#### 11.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. *The Revenue Stamp* is a rebel against patriarchy. Discuss.
- Q2. *The Revenue Stamp* is a narration of female experiences. Analyze.
- Q3. Evaluate *The Revenue Stamp* as an artistic blend of realism with romantic idealism.

#### 11.10 LET US SUM UP

*The Revenue Stamp* is the autobiography of a woman who suffered not only because of her gender but also because of religion. The autobiography is a rebel voice against the traditional thinking. Realism and romantic idealism both cannot be separated in the present literary work.



### 11.11 SUGGESTED READING

- ◆ Komuraiah, A. “Amrita Pritam’s *The Revenue Stamp*: A Realistic Story with Romantic Idealism and Imaginary World.” *Research Scholar*. 2.4 (2014): 394-397. Web. 17 January 2017.
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**COURSE CODE : 425**

**LESSON NO. 12**

**SEMESTER : IV**

**UNIT - IV**

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**LIFE AND WORKS OF  
MOHAN RAKESH**

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 12.3 Mohan Rakesh's Personal Life
- 12.4 His Academic and Professional Life
- 12.5 Check Your Progress (CYP)
- 12.6 His Writing Career
  - 12.6.1 Novels
  - 12.6.2 Plays
- 12.7 List of Literary Works
- 12.8 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 12.9 Answers Key (CYP) & (MCQs)
- 12.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 12.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.12 Suggested Reading

**12.1 INTRODUCTION**

Madan Mohan Guglani, better known by his pseudonym Mohan Rakesh was one of the prominent writers of Hindi Literature in the 1950s. He was born

in Amritsar. He made a significant contribution to novel, short story, memoirs and drama writing. His stories primarily revolve around man-woman relationship.

## **12.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME**

Dear Learner, the objective of this lesson is to acquaint you with the biographical sketch of Mohan Rakesh.

After going through this lesson, you will

- be acquainted with the personal life of Mohan Rakesh as well as his professional and academic career
- get clarity about the major literary works and main ideas of Mohan Rakesh's works

## **12.3 MOHAN RAKESH'S PERSONAL LIFE**

Mohan Rakesh (8 January 1925-3 December 1972) is the pseudonym of Madan Mohan Guglani. He was born in Vaishnav family on 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1925 at Chandigali in Amritsar. His father Karamchandra Guglani was a respectable advocate of the city. Mohan Rakesh was actively associated with literary and cultural activities. Literary discourses at his place among his father's friends shaped his taste. During his childhood, he was not allowed to play with street urchins due to which he was drawn to the books in his father's personal library. He used to play with books. There were strict rules inside the house laden with superstitious beliefs of his grandmother. She was strict in her do's and don'ts. She wanted to protect him from bats, ghosts, spirits, witches, gnomes and other obnoxious elements. This gave rise to fear psychosis in the child and he became scared of darkness and was frightened in dreams. His own feelings did not matter in the house. He wanted to play in the street, play with flies, ants and run wayward but his grandmother did not allow him to do so. It might have sown the seeds of a rebel in him.

Mohan Rakesh, the writer never got rid of his past experiences. He lived

a life of penury and saw creditors knocking at his father's door. His mother's trial and tribulation made him highly sensitive to her. She seemed to him the living image of *Annapurna* goddess. He says: "The greatest personality that I am introduced to in this life till date is my mother."

Mohan Rakesh was greatly affected by two incidents that took place in 1947- the division of India and the death of his sister. The first uprooted him and threw him out of his environment and soil and the second made this consciousness of uprootedness very deep in him. He was at Lahore where he witnessed and lived the trauma of partition. He was uprooted from Lahore and kept wandering for the next ten years in search of permanent place from Jodhpur to Bombay, from Jalandhar to Shimla and finally to Delhi. He lived there in a rented house that he kept changing. It was so difficult for him to remain at one place with the same wife for a long time.

He married three times. The first two marriages were legal while the third can be called *gandharb* marriage. His first wife was Sheela. With her, he had one son Navneet. In 1957, they divorced each other. It left him broken and he remained in depression for quite sometime. His writing was deeply affected during this period. He lived with the bottle of whisky, sip of coffee in the coffee house, and with the gossips with his friends that included girls willing to step out of virginity. He wrote a lot about his interpersonal relationships with his friends. Upendranath Ashka was his childhood friend. He developed friendship with Raj Bedi, Kamaleshwar, Rajendra Yadav, Manu Bhandari, Chaman, Dharmveer Bharati, Pushpa Bharati and other writers of his time.

He then married a homely girl, Pushpa from a small town of Punjab. But he could not remain happy with her. He writes in his Diary: "With the first wife I had the feeling of sand and stone and with the second I had the feeling of dirty water. However, sand cannot be turned into flour, while dirty water can be filtered." Later on, he developed liaison with Anita. On 22 July, 1963 he married her secretly without getting divorce from his second wife. It was a controversial marriage. Only his mother and Kamleshwar knew about it. An abortive attempt

was made to stab him. Soon after that he escaped with Anita to Bombay. But within six months of elopement their relationship turned sour.

However, time has taught Rakesh to make some compromises and some sort of a home he could develop with Anita and their daughter Purva and son Shalin. It gave stability to his life. The death of his mother left a vacuum in his life. He could not survive long. On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1972, he died all of a sudden at the age of about 48.

#### **12.4 HIS ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE**

Rakesh had his early education at Amritsar and then higher education at Lahore. He got the degree of Shastri and did M.A. in Sanskrit from Oriental College, Lahore. After partition, he came to Jalandhar and settled over there. He passed M.A. in Hindi with first division. When he was young, he used to write in Sanskrit. After the death of his father, he started writing short stories in Hindi. He lived the life of a wanderer looking for a suitable job. He spent months after months in hunger and misery spending his nights at pavements. Hard and pinching road of his life made him old in his consciousness at an early age of twenty-two. It is the ceaseless tension, inner conflict, anger and uncompromising rebellious attitude in him that did not allow him to concentrate at one place or a job. This is the reason that his professional life is replete with appointments and resignations.

In 1945, he worked in a film company as a story writer. But he resigned soon. He had a hard and fast mindset with which he worked. However, he left that job and set on a new quest. In 1947, he joined Eliphinston College in the Hindi faculty for teaching Hindi as an extra language. But in 1946, he lost his job because of his poor eyesight. Having spent his days of unemployment in Delhi, he joined D.A.V. College, Jalandhar but he was retrenched very soon. His next job was at Missionary School, Shimla. But even there he was never at ease. The routine life frightened him. He could not continue it for so long and resigned in 1952 and decided to live by writing and retain his freedom. But it

was difficult to live by writing and he was forced to accept the job when the same D.A.V. College, Jalandhar offered him the post of the Head of the Department of Hindi. He continued there for five years. But again he resigned in 1957. He once again tried to live by writing. But economic compulsion forced him to join Delhi University as a lecturer in 1960 and his nature made him quit it soon. He stepped in a new field in 1962. He became the editor of *Sarika* in Bombay. Initially, he enjoyed it but he was disillusioned soon and left it. He lived till death as a free lance writer.

### 12.5 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (CYP)

Dear learner, it is time to move to the next section. But wait a moment! Before moving on to the next section here is a simple exercise which you can try to solve.

1. Mohan Rakesh was born in \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Mohan Rakesh's father was an \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The two events which greatly affected Mohan Rakesh were \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Mohan Rakesh did M.A. in Sanskrit from \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Mohan Rakesh has not written about his interpersonal relationships \_\_\_\_\_. (True/False)
6. Mohan Rakesh married the third time without getting divorce from his second wife \_\_\_\_\_. (True/False)
7. Mohan Rakesh worked as Head of the Department of Hindi in D.A.V. College \_\_\_\_\_. (True/False)

### 12.6 HIS WRITING CAREER

Mohan Rakesh made significant contribution to novel, short story, travelogue, criticism, memoirs and drama. He was a writer by birth. He had been writing right from his childhood. He began his writing career by choice

and with conscious deliberation. That is why he changed his name on the pages of the first story “Nanhe” itself in 1944. His new sir name, Rakesh was written on its pages in several ways. But he did not publish it. After his death, Kamaleshwar published it in *Sarika* in March 1973. However, his first published short story is *Bhikshu* that appeared first in *Sarswati* Volume 46.

Rakesh wrote sixty-six stories from 1944 to 1972, twelve of which were not published in his lifetime. They are mainly his early stories. His early stories throw ample light on questions related to his life and writing career, questions like how he crossed through the vicissitudes of life, how he broke the limitations of creativity, what mental trauma he had to undergo, how was his concern with his society and to what extent he stood for the new values and on questions pertaining to his creative process and development. His stories delve deep into interpersonal relationship but that is primarily man-woman relationship around which his stories revolve. In man-woman relationship he does not find love, bliss, happiness and completeness. His characters try to attain happiness but fail to do so. In reality, his own personal experiences loom large over the characters and situations in his stories or plays. We find in them density of experience and intensity of feeling. They are not the works of social concern or political orientation or protest against the social absurdities or social problems facing the contemporary society. Man is in the centre not society. Only partial side of society gets viewed through the characters.

Rajendra Yadav, Mohan Rakesh and Kamaleshwar were the pillars of a movement in story writing in Hindi called ‘New story.’ After independence, Indian creative writers both in Hindi and English discarded the prevalent Romantic and idealistic orientation in writing and tried to bring literature close to the soil, life and the inherent reality of life that is frequently tried and tested in the social context in the writings of Mohan Rakesh. The world of his reality is continuously expanding in his works. In the ‘New Story’ the story writer or teller is in the centre and is integrated with his surroundings. About ‘New Story,’ Rakesh writes in his diary *Bakalmkhud*:

New story is in the process of expansion. The story-teller of today is continuously reconstituting himself with an eye to expressing the spirit of his time. By trying to integrate the changing socio-political horizon around him to his consciousness he tries to identify that basepoint so that his time is reflected in his works...As for expression, he is in search of such images and symbols which are born out of the reality of time and could meaningfully express the whole struggle for existence...

### **12.6.1 Novels**

Mohan Rakesh has written three novels; *Andhere Band Kamare* (*Closed Dark Rooms*, 1961); *Na Anewala Kal* (*The Tomorrow That Never Comes*, 1968) and *Antaral* (1972).

In the period of 1956 to 1961 he completed two books; *Ashad Ka Ek Din*, his first play and *Andhere Band Kamare*, a voluminous novel. The narrative in *Andhere Band Kamare* highlights today's Delhi, autobiography of Madhusudan and inner conflict in Harbans and Nilima and their married life.

*Na Anewala Kal* is Rakesh's second novel published in 1968. It is an autobiographical novel. It takes into account the period of his life spent in a Missionary School at Shimla as a Hindi teacher and his ultimate resignation. However, unsuccessful marriage life is depicted in this novel. The hero Saxena undergoes the trauma of married life besides his trouble with the routine school life, internal politics and all that. His wife leaves him and returns to her first husband.

*Antaral* is his third and last novel published in 1972. It narrates the story of Shyama, a widow and Kumar. The novel is an attempt to articulate a complex mental situation born out of subtle man-woman relationship.



### 12.6.2 Plays

Though Rakesh began his career with story writing and then tried his hand at novel-writing and plays, he came to be recognized more as a playwright than as a storywriter or novelist. He turned to play-writing very late and could produce only three plays- *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* (*One Day in Ashadh*, 1958), *Lahron Ke Rajhans* (*The Swans of the Waves*, 1963) and *Adhe Adhure* (*The Incomplete Ones or Halfway House*, 1969). He died before completing his fourth play *Pair Tale Ki Jameen*. It was completed by his friend Kamleshwar. Besides these he wrote some one-act plays for radio and they are collected and published in *Ande Ke Chhilake*, *Anya Ekanki Taha Bij Natak* and *Rat Bitane Tak tatha Anye Dhwani Natak*. In 1945, he directed a play *Veni Shanhar*.

In his plays the reality he lived comes out so vividly that one cannot escape its living effect. The reality of Rakesh is the reality of his age and of the modern urban life around him. His plays also highlight the themes like man-woman relationship, incompleteness, bitterness, constant nagging, utter helplessness and endless pain and suffocation in domestic or married life. He presents the simmering side of the picture of married life in India. Mohan Rakesh remarks, “a writer’s real commitment is not with an ideology but with himself and with his time” (*Bakalmkhud* 112).

#### ***ASHADH KA EK DIN (1958)***

It is considered as the best one of his time. It was produced and staged at the time when Hindi theatre was in decadence. Thus, this play revived Hindi theatre. The play won Sangit Natak Akademi Award.

The characters have historical bearings but they are born of his imaginative flight. Kalidasa is not the real Kalidasa but an imaginary one. Kalidasa is a budding poet living in poverty and always seems to be lost in the clouds, hills, trees, and every object of nature in his place. He is in love with Mallika, a poor, gentle, emotional girl of the village who

is in blind and pure love with Kalidasa. She is the essence of love. Their relationship has no worldly and physical basis. However, her mother Ambika is against this relationship and she wants solid worldly ground in their relationship. That is why she does not like Kalidasa. Therefore, they represent the conflict between the realism and idealism. One day Kalidasa finds a wounded deer calf. He takes it to Mallika who feeds it with milk and nurses its wound. In the meantime Dantul, an officer of Ujjain state comes there following him and asks for the deer as it is his prey. Kalidasa does not yield to his rude insistence and goes away with the deer calf. When Dantul comes to know that the person who took away his prey is Kalidasa, the great poet of *Ritusanhar* he feels sorry for it. He reveals to Mallika that the state of Ujjayini wants to give him the honour of Rajakavi, the poet laureate of the state and it is for this purpose that he along with Acharya Varuchi have come over here. Mallika and villagers are thrilled to learn this news. But Ambika is indifferent and Maul, the maternal uncle of Kalidasa under whose care he grew up turned angry at the proposal. Nikshep, a villager and Mallika come to Jagdamba Temple to convince Kalidasa that he must accept the offer. She convinces him that it will make his poems popular and he deserves it. Ultimately he succumbs to the pressure and goes to Ujjayini. He gets so involved in the statecraft that he does not come back to his village. He loses his natural self. He is appointed as the ruler of Kashmir and is married to a royal girl. On his way to Kashmir, he pays a short visit to the hills of his village but does not meet anyone, not even Mallika. However, his wife Priyangu Manjari calls on Mallika and sympathetically offers her marriage proposal with any of her officers and also offers her money, clothes and new house. It is shocking to her feelings, and she turns down all offers and prefers to live in penury. After sometime Ambika passes away, and she is left alone. Later we find that she had a baby with Vilom.

The story takes a turn. The king of Ujjayini is dead and Kashmir faces a coup. Kalidasa rechristened as Matrigupta flees away. He sheds off the cloak of Matrigupta and returns to his natural self, the same old Kalidasa. She returns to Mallika fully drenched in rain and reveals the dilemma of his life and his inner conflict. He wants to accept her but it is too late. Her baby cries from inside and Vilom, her husband comes in. Having realized the fact that the present and the past cannot come together, he stealthily leaves the place. Kalidasa is the 'past' of Mallika and her baby is her present. When the past in Mallika tries to follow him in the rain, her present brings her back. The drama ends her.

The play begins with the rain of day in *ashadh* and ends with it. It is a well-knit play.

### ***LAHRON KE RAJHANSA (1963)***

*Lahron Ke Rajhansa* is a unique play. It went through a long creative process and could take its final shape in 1968 though it was conceived in 1946 in his story "Anam Aitihāsik Kahani." Rakesh was not happy with it. He later changed it into a radio drama *Sundari*. In 1956-57, he rewrote it and named it *Rat Bitane Tak* on his friends' request. But even this version could not satisfy him. It took him five years to develop it into a full length play *Lahron Ke Rajhansa*. When Shyam Jalan decided to stage it in 1966 at Calcutta he raised several questions and doubts on its third Act. Ultimately Rakesh came to Calcutta and stayed over there for a month and after a long deliberation between the two and its rehearsal, several changes were made in the play and in 1968 its development came to its fruition.

*Lahron Ke Rajhans* is a symbolic title in which waves (Lahron) are the symbol of worldly and sexual pleasures and the two swans (Rajhans) are Nanda, the brother of Buddha and Sundari. By the end of the play, the swans fly away and Nanda too gets rid of his attachment with the

worldly life. Thus it is also cast in a historical background. The action begins at the bedroom of Sundari in Kapilvastu.

Buddha, after a long gap, arrives in the city and the people throng to see him and to take Diksha from him. Yashodhara is going to join him. Even Nanda is drawn to him. But he is being torn between the two opposite poles of attraction. Sundari does not want to lose him. She organizes Kamotsav (carnal celebration) at the same night and tries to draw the people in dance and drinks. Nanda unwillingly helps her but the guests do not turn up. Even Nanda could not help meeting his brother Buddha who forcefully got his head shaven. Nanda was not fully ready for renunciation. On his way back to home, he fights with an angry tiger and gets wounded. Bhikshu Ananda accompanies him to his palace. Through dialogue between them, we come to know the inner conflict in Nanda, his uncertainties and doubts. Sundari is astonished to see his shaven head and does not accept him. His soliloquy reveals that he is in great turmoil. He instantly leaves his place to seek answers of his questions.

In 1968 version of the book, there is long conversation between the two- Nanda and Sundari in which their loneliness, incompleteness and lack of understanding between the two are revealed. The nature of this dialogue and their tone come close to the dialogue between husband and wife of today. Rakesh uses history as if to affirm the failure of marriage.

### ***ADHE ADHURE (1969)***

*Adhe Adhure* is different from his first two plays. It does not have any historical background. It is the story of a single family- Mahendranath and Savitri and their two daughters and one son- suffocating in the married life.

Mahendranath, the husband is shown as a weakling who has been unemployed for several years. His wife Savitri is the only earning member in the family. Their relationship is unfriendly and they are shown always quarrelling and nagging. The play starts with the scene of disheveled house and Savitri castigating her husband. Their elder son is also unemployed looking for a job and elder daughter has spoiled her married life. Not only this, the play also hints at Savitri's relationships with several men but it is never candidly stated. At one point of time, Mahendranath leaves his house with an intention of not returning for ever. But ultimately he comes back defeated and depressed. Thus the play tells the experiences of internal agony and helplessness owing partly to the fact that despite differences they want to stick. They are still not fully ready to say goodbye to one another. Therefore, the play embodies the trauma of transition.

*Adhe Adhure* seems to be the final point for Rakesh as a playwright. He wrote the last play *Pair Tale Ki Jameen*. It was also staged but it could not impress the viewers as well as the critics. It neither touches the heart nor the intellect. It relates to the contemporary life like *Adhe Adhure* but its style, technique and language are not so effective.

*Ande Ke Chhilake* consists of four one-act plays- "Ande Ke Chilake," "Sipahi Ki Ma," "Pyalinyan Tutati hai" and "Bahut Bara Sawal", two *bij* dramas- "Shayad" and "Hah" and one *parshav* drama- "Chhhatariyaa." *Rat Bitane Tak Tatha Anya Dhwani Natak* comprises eight plays- "Rat Bitane Tak," "Swapnawasavdattam," "Subah SE Pahale," "Kanwari Dharati," "Uski Roti," "Ashadh Ka Ek Din," "Doodh aur Dant" and "Akhiri Chattan Tak." "Akhiri Chattan Tak" is based on his travelogue of the same name. "Swapnawasavdattam" is the Hindi translation of a radio play of Bhasa.

Rakesh also wrote essays, autobiographical and children literature. He was a regular diary writer and his diaries were published under the head *Mohan Rakesh Ki Diary* in 1985 and his autobiography *Bakalamkhud*

was published in 1974. His Diary has daily account from 1948 to 1968. They are relevant not only for understanding Rakesh but also for understanding the contemporary literature, society, and the environment which shaped its consciousness and in which he struggled to write and to survive.

*Parivesh* (1972) and *Mohan Rakesh, Sahityik aur Sanskritik Drishti* (1975) are the collections of his essays published in different journals and magazines. They also consist of some interviews, discourses, evaluative essays on Pant and Tulasi Dasa, and travel essays. They give us an insight into Rakesh's perspectives on literature, culture, theatre, stories and the contemporary society.

*Samay Sarathi* is the collection of the lives of twelve great men of the world who had illumined the world in the last two and half thousand years. They are Gautam Buddha, Sukarat, Askok, Joan of Arc, Kabir, Meera, Swami Dayananda, Bhagat Singh, Gandhi, Nehru, and Martin Luther.

He also wrote prose-work for children *Bina Har Mansa Ka Adami*.

One more dimension of Rakesh's literary journey is his translation. He translated Kalidasa's *Abigyan Shakuntalam* into '*Shakuntal*' and Shudrak's *Mricchakatika* into Hindi under the same title. Interestingly he translated three English novels into Hindi. He translated Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* into *Ek Aurat Ka Chehara*, Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* into *Usa Rata Ke Bad* and Edita Morris' *Flowers of Hiroshima* into *Hiroshima Ke Phool*. It shows not only his extensive reading, scholarship and the command on English language but also his expertise in the art of translation.

His story "Uski Roti" (One's Bread) was made into an eponymous film by Mani Kaul in 1971, for which he also wrote the dialogue. In July 1971, he received the Jawarharlal Nehru Fellowship for research on 'The

Dramatic Word,' however he could not complete it and died in December, 1972 at the age of 47.

## **12.7 LIST OF LITERARY WORKS**

### **Novels**

*Andhere Band Kamre* (1961)

*Na Aanewala Kal* (1968)

*Antaraal* (1972)

*Bakalama Khuda* (1974)

### **Plays**

*Aadhe Adhure* (Halfway House, 1969)

*Leheron Ke Raj Hans* (1968)

*Ashadh Ka Ek Din* (One Day in Ashadha, 1958)

*Mohan Rakesh ke Sampurn Natak* (1993)

### **Posthumously published**

*Pairon Tale Ki Zameen* (1973)

*Ande Ke Chilke, anya ekanki tatha beej natak* (1973)

*Rata Bitane Taka Tatha Anya Dhvani Nataka* (1974), *Radhakrishna Prakashan* (Radio plays)

### **Translation**

*Mrichchkatikam*, (Sanskrit play)

*Shakuntalam* (Sanskrit play)

### **Story Anothologies**

*10 Pratinidhi Kahaniyan* (Mohan Rakesh)

*Rat ki Bahon Mein*

*Mohan Rakesh ki meri prem Kahaniyan*

**12.8 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)**

- Q1. When is Mohan Rakesh born? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) 8 January, 1926
  - b.) 7 January, 1925
  - c.) 8 January, 1925
  - d.) 7 January, 1926
- Q2. What is the real name of Mohan Rakesh? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) Karamchandra Guglani
  - b.) Kamleshwar
  - c.) Upendranath Ashka
  - d.) Madan Mohan Guglani
- Q3. From where he gets uprooted? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) Lahore
  - b.) Delhi
  - c.) Bombay
  - d.) Jalandhar
- Q4. How many times he married? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) One
  - b.) Two
  - c.) Three
  - d.) Four



- Q5. Which of the following is the first wife of Mohan Rakesh? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) Sheela
  - b.) Anita
  - c.) Pushpa
  - d.) Kunti
- Q6. Which of the following is his childhood friend? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) Upendranath Ashka
  - b.) Raj Bedi
  - c.) Chaman
  - d.) Kamaleshwar
- Q7. When did he die? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) 3 December 1973
  - b.) 3 December 1974
  - c.) 3 December 1972
  - d.) 2 December 1972
- Q8. Which magazine is edited by Mohan Rakesh? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) *Sarika*
  - b.) *Savita*
  - c.) *Bhikshu*
  - d.) *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*
- Q9. Name his first published short story? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) *Bhikshu*

b.) *Andhere Band Kamare*

c.) *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*

d.) *Veni Shanhar*

Q10. How many short stories he has written? \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) 64

b.) 135

c.) 70

d.) 66

Q11. Mohan Rakesh is a part of which movement? \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) Story

b.) New Story

c.) Unique Story

d.) Different Story

Q12. Which of the following is his first play? \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) *Andhere Band Kamere*

b.) *Na Anewala Kal*

c.) *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*

d.) *Pair Tale Ki Zameen*

Q13. Name his first voluminous novel? \_\_\_\_\_.

a.) *Andhere Band Kamere*

b.) *Na Anewala Kal*

c.) *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*

d.) *Pair Tale Ki Zameen*

- Q14. When does his second novel *Na Anewala Kal* get published? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) 1967
  - b.) 1966
  - c.) 1968
  - d.) 1965
- Q15. Which of the following is his autobiographical novel? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) *Andhere Band Kamere*
  - b.) *Na Anewala Kal*
  - c.) *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*
  - d.) *Pair Tale Ki Zameen*
- Q16. When does his novel *Antaral* get published? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) 1971
  - b.) 1972
  - c.) 1973
  - d.) 1975
- Q17. Which is the incomplete play of Mohan Rakesh? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) *Andhere Band Kamere*
  - b.) *Na Anewala Kal*
  - c.) *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*
  - d.) *Pair Tale Ki Zameen*
- Q18. Who completed Mohan Rakesh's last play *Pair Tale Ki Zameen*? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a.) Kamaleshwar

- b.) Upendranath Ashkas
- c.) Raj Bedi
- d.) Chaman

Q19. Which play is directed by Mohan Rakesh? \_\_\_\_\_.

- a.) *Veni Shanhar*
- b.) *Na Anewala Kal*
- c.) *Andhere Band Kamere*
- d.) *Pair Tale Ki Zameen*

Q20. Which play won Mohan Rakesh Sangit Natak Akademi Award? \_\_\_\_\_.

- a.) *Andhere Band Kamere*
- b.) *Na Anewala Kal*
- c.) *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*
- d.) *Pair Tale Ki Zameen*

## 12.9 ANSWER KEY (CYP) & (MCQs)

### (CYP)

1. Amritsar    2. advocate    3. partition of India, death of his sister  
 4. Oriental College, Lahore    5. False    6. True    7. True

### (MCQs)

1. C; 2. D; 3. A; 4. C; 5. A; 6. D; 7. C; 8. A; 9. A; 10. D;  
 11. B; 12. C; 13. A; 14. C; 15. B; 16. B; 17. D; 18. A; 19. A; 20. C

## 12.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Name the writings of Mohan Rakesh.

2. What was the first story collection of Mohan Rakesh?
3. What kind of themes Mohan Rakesh use in his works?

### **12.11 LET US SUM UP**

The lesson acquaints us with the life of Mohan Rakesh and his literary oeuvre. He occupies top most place in literary tradition of India, the lesson discusses his literary works and also highlights various social concerns in them.

### **12.12 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Chandra, Subash. Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House: Critical Perspectives*. Asia Book Club, 2001. Print.
- ◆ Khatri, C.L. *Halfway House: A Critique*. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2003. Print.

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***HALFWAY HOUSE*****MOHAN RAKESH**

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 13.3 Significance of the Title of the Play *Halfway House*
- 13.4 Brief Synopsis of the Play *Halfway House*
- 13.5 Detailed Summary of the Play *Halfway House*
- 13.6 Check Your Progress (CYP)
- 13.7 *Halfway House* An Existential Play
- 13.8 *Halfway House* : Sexuality And Textuality- A Feminist Persective
- 13.9 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 13.10 Answer Key (CYP) & (MCQs)
- 13.11 Examination Oriented Questions
- 13.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.13 Suggested Reading

**13.1 INTRODUCTION**

*Halfway House* (1969) by Mohan Rakesh is a play about search for meaning and identity. The play is primarily about Savitri who is convinced that she deserves better in life. Failed to get happiness in her married life, Savitri seeks marital happiness beyond conjugal relations.

### 13.2 Objectives and Outcome

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the summary of the play *Halfway House*.

Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will

- be able to summarize the play *Halfway House*
- be able to describe the aptness of the title to the story
- have clarity about the concept of existentialism and how it is used in the play *Halfway House*
- be able to analyse the elements of sexuality and textuality and their interconnectedness in the play from a feminist perspective

### 13.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE OF THE PLAY *HALFWAY HOUSE*

Mohan Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure* is translated into English by Bindu Batra under the title, *Halfway House*. Play is entirely written in dialogic form in which the story, dilemmas, conflict and the angry mood of characters is expressed through dialogues. Moreover, dialogues highlight not only the overall personality of the characters but also their educational standard, socio-cultural status, general habits and mental condition.

The translation of the title is not literal. 'Halfway House' does not seem to be a lexical equivalent of 'Adhe Adhure.' The connotative or implied meaning of 'Adhe Adhure' is synonymous to half-hearted, incomplete home, a sense of incompleteness. However, the play also deals with the disintegration of family, disordered home, quest of modern woman for completeness, lack of satisfaction in home and relationship. In the play *Adhe Adhure*, husband, Mahendranath and wife, Savitri attempt to leave house in dejection. Even they want to live their life on their own terms but at the end of the play they have to return home. Moreover, Savitri struggles for many years to make a happy home and maintain economic conditions without any help from her husband. Consequently, she

searches a complete man in Singhanian, Jagmohan and Juneja but fails in it because each individual behaves alike in a given situation. Therefore, in context to Savitri, the title Half-Hearted or Half stay quest would have been the most appropriate title for the play.

#### **13.4 BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY *HALFWAY HOUSE***

Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* (1969) highlights the predicament of a single-unit family in an urban setting. The play revolves around Savitri, the main protagonist of the play, who is a modern homemaker as well as the breadwinner of her family. She is married to Mahendranath, who is a failed entrepreneur. Savitri, who is educated enough, takes up a job and becomes the financial controller of the household. The job brings her into contact with men who are dynamic, smart and rich. She starts finding faults with her un-employed husband Mahendra who in the state of extreme depression fails to gratify even the biological urge of his wife. Savitri's attitude towards her husband also has adverse effect on their children- son Ashok, who is unemployed and seemingly unemployable; and two daughters – Binni, who elopes to marry, but has returned seemingly forever; and Kinni, the rebellious teenager who frequently tries to get the attention that she constantly craves for. There are three other characters – all men, who are intricately linked to the family's failing fortunes.

The play is primarily about Savitri who is convinced that she deserves better in life. She is convinced that her no-good husband Mahendranath is unlikely to ever become successful. She is frustrated that her life has not shaped in the manner that she had envisaged two decades ago when she was young and just starting up with Mahendranath. As the play unravels, the audience learns of the many desperate attempts Savitri makes to change her circumstances, seeking relationships with successful men. Despite her desperation, and the abuse she suffers from her husband, she continues to labour hard to keep the family from drowning in penury. It is a sacrifice that she makes without having a choice, and she is clearly unhappy about it. Unfortunately, all her attempts to change her life prove futile. The play ends with both Savirti and Mahendranath



returning home, perhaps realizing that they don't have anyone else but each other.

### **13.5 DETAILED SUMMARY OF THE PLAY *HALFWAY HOUSE***

*Halfway House* projects a minute depiction of relations in family life and also exposes a transformation of principles in the modern India. Mohan Rakesh in his play *Halfway House* projects marital home of Savitri and Mahendranath who get married and procreate three children to raise a family- Binni, their elder daughter; Ashok, their son and Kinni, younger daughter. It is a modern family which is devoid of traditional Indian ethics.

*Halfway House* begins with a prologue by a Man in a black suit. It conveys that all men behave alike in a given situation. It prepares the audience mentally to receive the play. It also partially hints at the type and purpose of the play that the audience is going to witness. The Man in black suit is actually the writer himself. It is shown in the Prologue that the Man in black suit is a Sutradhar (A commentator) who expresses the perspective of the dramatist. This man also plays all roles of -Man one, Man two, Man three, and Man four as Mahendranath, Singhania, Jagmohan and Juneja respectively. The first male character, who is not really a participant in the action of the play but performs a special introduction to the play, is the speaker of the Prologue. The Prologue is very symbolic and it attempts to set up contraries by highlighting the concept of definite versus indefinite. Paradoxically, he says:

The Man in Black Suit: (pensively flicking ash from his cigar) Once again, the same thing all over again...(stands up, as if to meet a challenge). I do not know, who you think I am, nor what you suppose I am about to say. Perhaps you think I have a well defined function in this play-as actor, director, stage manager or something else. But you would be wrong-for, I am amorphous. And this play is as undefined as I am.

In the above lines, the speaker suggests disappointment with the recurrent

cycle of events in life. In other words, the normal circumstances of life seem to be stifling and stationary to him. In order to free himself from this state, he takes in an indefinite or amorphous state of things. He even introduces an element of suspense regarding his exact role in the play. In fact, he declares that he has no definite role to play. The implications of 'amorphous' are – the speaker's perception that he is 'undefined,' he suggests that he does not want a single conventional identity. In the context of the play, in the form of the five men who come into Savitri's life projects same thing all over again. In other words, the Man in black suit's capability to exchange places with any other male character, represents a selfish sameness about and a worthless individuality in Savitri's life. It conveys that all men behave alike in a given situation.

Before the actual play begins, woman character is described with age and what kind of sari she should wear and it is also mentioned that second special sari should be worn in special occasion. The action of the play takes place in the living room. In the opening scene, the stage-properties are described as-'a disorderly living room in what was once a fairly well-to-do middle class home, several pieces of broken furniture-sofa set, dining table, cupboard, dressing-table etc.' These words represent home which has lost proper function and this language obviously projects an insight into the state of affairs, the position of the characters which is totally worn out but lingering on somehow in the house. The opening representation of the play is nothing but a sad projection of familial life in *Halfway House*. Savitri comes weary after a day's lengthy labour in the place of work and finds that the house is unclean. She expresses her anger as:

The woman: Phe-e-ew...! No one's ever at home! Kinni! Out I suppose!...Another torn book! And Ashok's been...! Idle all day but he can't look after his clothes...or even clear the table! Everything's left for me to do.

In the above, woman's dialogue begins with the word- 'Phe-e-ew...!' which expresses the feelings of discomfort, disgust, impatience or astonishment.

Therefore, this word represents the mood and feelings of the character. This expression of Savitri exposes the unenthusiastic impression of the home. At the outset, this familial structure can be remembered as a matriarchal family, the main cause is financial. Therefore the husband Mahendranath feels very sad about his worse condition in his family. Savitri calls Kinni looking at the door. Then she picks up a book from Kinni's bag. Savitri encounters the first man while carrying the tray towards the courtyard door. When the man calls the woman while she was going to make tea, the woman stops and turns to him. Savitri encounters the first man while dusting the furniture:

The Woman: Why did you stand up?

The First Man: Why? Can't I?

The Woman: (in weary mood and sarcastic voice) You can. But inside the house only.

Savitri's dialogue reveals that she did not hesitate to humiliate her husband and it shows the cowardly personality of Mahendranath. Savitri continuously compares her husband to other males such as Singhanian, Jagmohan and Juneja. She seems to be such woman who finds on both sides of two worlds, the one of individual satisfaction as well as the children accountability. Nevertheless, the conventional Indian wife desires her husband to give all needs in the familial life, but Savitri's husband is not capable to offer and Savitri starts to think that her life is worthless with her companion.

However, Mahendranath's dialogues communicate the nervousness and the psychological commotion. In his dialogues, repetition and omission of expressions replicate the unseen agitation:

The Older Girl: There is Something.

The First Man: It's nothing. Your mother was saying....

The Older Girl: What was she saying?

The First Man: Nothing...actually....I was just saying.

Uncertainty of Mahendranath is exposed from the beginning till the end

in his dialogues. Even his utterances have dissimilar tones. He is shown as confused when he desires to express his dilemma. Thus, Mahendranath is very displeased when he learns about Savitri's invitation of her boss, Singhanian. Consequently, he always departs from the house whenever her boss comes to meet him. On the other hand, Mahendranath has no submissiveness when he remarks:

The First Man: Yes, I do. For how many years have I been bearing the burden of life? And for how many years have I been looking after this family? And despite that, what have I come to ... that everyone answers me back, is rude, disrespectful, impertinent and ....

Mahendranath is mistreated in his own domicile. Therefore, he engages himself in meeting with his friend. But whenever he gets chance to express his emotions, he says:

The First Man: On no grounds. I am of no use, of no use at all. I'm only an idler... to be kicked and bullied just as you please. Can anyone tell me why I should stay here? (Silence) You can't, can you?

Mahendranath's personality seems to be aggravated. He begins to hate Savitri because of her relations with Singhanian and Jagmohan. Savitri always blames her husband as he is unable to fulfill his household duties. He follows patriarchal principles where he wants to be a dominating colleague while Savitri is not ready to accept this. That is the reason why this attitude leads to the wedded dispute between husband and wife. Therefore, Binni blames her father as:

The Older Girl: you can't imagine what it was like...Daddy's rages when he tore Mama's clothes to shreds...when he gagged her and beat her up behind closed doors...dragging her by the hair to the WC....(*shudders*) I can't even recount the fearful scenes I've witnessed in this house!

Nevertheless, Savitri's prospect is very different, she desires to have very bold and wealthy husband. She says: "What is it that makes a man really a man?" She expects a lot from her husband. She wants that her husband must keep all strength as a complete modern man. She remarks: "For that he has to be complete in and for himself." Such critical situation projects that Mahendranath's marriage is on the verge of destruction. He is very sad with his wife and its influence finds deep submissive condition on other family members.

### **Savitri's relations with Singhanian, Jagmohan and Juneja**

Singhanian is wearing jacket and trousers. He is chief in workplace where Savitri works. He is a triumphant man. He is really praised by Savitri. He is disdainful, and full of narcissism. He starts his discussion with rudeness. When Singhanian inquires Savitri about a job for her son, he replies:

The Second Man: What?

The Woman: That if...that if you have a good job in view.

The Second Man: It's delicious!

The Woman: You were kind enough to....

The Second Man: Yes, yes... you did mention something. For a cousin of yours. no, that was Mrs. Malhotra. Who was it you mentioned?

The Woman: (looks at the Boy) Him.

The Second Man: Hmm, hmm what exam has he passed? B. Com.?

Singhanian's bumbling way of communication creates more confusion than throw clear light upon any subject. He is such a confused mind that when he is offered tea he starts giving a talk on tea, and then on coffee and then on the climate, labour problems at home, youth unrest and so on. He has to be constantly reminded that the job is for the boy. Savitri has to repeat Ashok's bio-data again. He confuses Air Freeze with Air India. He starts praising coffee again. By this way, he pretends to be an extremely busy mind. He is a definitely confused man when he asks Ashok again, "What division did you get in your

B.Sc.?” He seems to be more interested in Savitri and Binni than to help others. For instance, he persistently believes that the older girl, Binni appeared for an interview obviously implying that her placement is due to his goodwill. Binni had of course not appeared in any such interview. By this way, Singhanian engages Binni in cozy conversation. He seems to be interested in Binni. He assures Savitri that he would help Ashok. However, while leaving he asks Savitri to visit his house. Savitri says that she would come to see his Baby. The debased moral character of Singhanian is highlighted in the lines:

The Second Man: She keeps asking why Aunty hasn't been over.  
She loves her Aunties! Not having a mother, the poor thing.

Thus, Savitri is not the only one who visits Singhanian. There are other women employees who have been visiting the widower boss who has a big house and thus ample scope for entertaining himself with other women. Here, Mohan Rakesh highlights the character of boss through Singhanian who uses his status to exploit his women employees for immoral purposes. Singhanian is full of self-importance and every bit of conversation is twisted to show that he has travelled all over the world. Self-praise is the key-word with him:

The Second Man: Oh I see, see... the climate of this country is such, what can one do? Now take the climate of Italy for instance. I did a lot of travelling last year. One has to in my position. I went all over Europe but... no other country can compete with Italy! Do you know what is so special about...It's delicious! Where did you get it? (looks at his watch) It's already five past seven. I think.

However, Singhanian remains unappealing and exploitative. The boss represents the class of exploitative employers who prey upon weaknesses of people in subordinate positions to their advantage. What he offers to Savitri is opportunity for her son and the role of 'Aunty' to Savitri. Thus, he represents only another face of tyranny and so is entirely unsuitable for the women.

Nevertheless, Savitri continues to entertain him in the hope of gaining even little from his higher status. At last, Singhanian starts his car to go but it does not start and Ashok is sent to push the car. Savitri notices the sketch and it reminds her of her husband. When Binni tells her that Ashok has drawn this portrait of Singhanian, she gets angry. But Ashok seems in jovial mood and his sarcastic comment makes him laugh, “what a face and what a car! ...the engine of the car may start up with a push but as far as (points to his forehead) this engine is concerned....”

On the other hand, Jagmohan’s transfer back to Delhi was hinted by Mahendranath to Savitri. Savitri feels so confident to meet Jagmohan and to open her heart. Before Jagmohan’s arrival, the conversation takes place between Savitri and Binni which reveals Savitri’s decision to leave the house forever. She feels so confident that she informs Binni that the next time she comes, she ‘may not be here’:

The Women: I want to tell you something.

The Older Girl: May I put these away? The room is so untidy!  
Before Uncle Jagmohan comes I should...

The Woman: I’ll make it brief.

The Older Girl: Well?

The Woman: When you come next time I may not be here.

The Older Girl: Mama!

The Woman: That is why I telephoned Jagmohan today.

The Older Girl: So..?

The Woman: So now...whatever happens, will happen.

The Older Girl: You’ve really thought it over and decided ...?

The Woman: Yes. You can go now.

The Third Man, Jagmohan enters from the street door. He is dressed in a sports shirt and trousers, carries a cigarette tin in his hand and makes chain-smoke throughout his stay. Jagmohan arrives to meet her while Savitri is busy

observing the negative effects of time on her face and brooding over her rebellion. Jagmohan blows smoke, rings and addresses her 'Hello, Cuckoo.' This is how Jagmohan greets her and during their conversation Savitri calls him Jog, which shows their intimacy. Jagmohan is only interested in playing with a woman and Savitri's seriousness has no meaning for him. He is very casual to chat:

The Woman: But I told you to come straight here, without wasting a moment!

The Third Man: I didn't waste a moment! At the Pole Star...

The Woman: Never mind, your excuses are not new to me...

The Third Man: (sit down) Have it your way. It isn't new to me either...being blamed without reason...

The Woman: Aren't we going?

The Third Man: In a minute. Sit down. (The Woman sits down unwillingly) The way you rang up suddenly made me think that...

The Woman: (puts her hand on his) Jog!

The Third Man: What is matter, Cuckoo! (17)

Thus, Jagmohan shows his careless nature towards Savitri. Infact, she is hoping much from him and her voice is choking with tears. But his interest shifts from mother to daughter and then to a book. However, he takes her to a hotel. But his responses give her an ample indication of the futility of her endeavour. It also shows meaninglessness of relationship in the modern age. Jagmohan is very polished man and now that he has matured enough, he has drastically changed. Now he is extremely conscious of his status, his position in society and is wary of reviving an affair with a mother of three children after a long gap of eighteen to nineteen years. Savitri tells Jagmohan that she wants to talk to him about something serious. Jagmohan suggests that they could talk in the house, but Savitri wants to go out to some place where she can talk to him freely and open up her mind. He has no objection and they walk out without



taking tea which Binni was preparing. However, Savitri returns to her house with dejected and defeated mood. Her return clearly shows that Jagmohan has rejected her proposal and she cannot think of starting her individual life alone. She does not tell anything about her meeting with Jagmohan, but Juneja correctly guesses what might have happened. He says:

The Fourth Man: But every other year you've tried to free yourself by looking around for another man!..You met Jagmohan. You admired him of his excellent contacts, his smart way of life, his generosity. But the real reason was the same; no matter what he was, he was Jagmohan...not Mahendra.

Thus, Juneja speaks with great confidence when he analyses the cause of Savitri and Mahendranath's misery. The words reveal what might have happened between Jagmohan and Savitri. The accuracy of Juneja's description is confirmed by Savitri's astonishment when he recounts the whole incident between her and Jagmohan as if he had been a witness to it. The purpose of Juneja's revelations is to make Savitri aware and recognize her responsibility in the familial life.

At the beginning, Juneja is a very practical man. Mahendranath always meets him whenever he has problems. However, Juneja presents Savitri's illegal relationship with insensitive words:

The Fourth Man: But every other year you've tried to free yourself by looking around for another man! In the beginning I was one of these men. After me, you were enamoured of Shevjeet...his university degree, his trips abroad, or whatever. Then you met Jagmohan. You admired him for his excellent contacts, his smart way of life, his generosity.

Juneja's dialogue exposed the true nature of Savitri. Savitri desires to have an ideal husband in her life. She is always looking for a decent man who

will fulfill her wishes. Even she does not observe traditional Indian cultural principles in her life as she keeps illegal relationship with Shevjeet and Jagmohan. So Juneja added:

The Fourth Man: You would still have encountered a Mahendra, a Juneja, a Shevjeet or a Jagmohan and thought and reacted in the same way. Because the meaning of life to you is how many different things you can have and enjoy at the same time. One man alone could never have given them to you, so no matter whom you married, you would always have felt as empty and as restless as you do today...

Savitri always finds some incongruity in husband so she keeps relationship with Shevjeet, Manoj and Jagmohan. In short, Juneja presents the past of Savitri's illegal relationship with other men.

### **Savitri and her children**

*Halfway House* exposes the conflict between husband and wife, mother and children, father and children. It projects the breakdown of traditional cultural Indian values which enable every family member to join as one being. On the other hand, familial life of Mahendranth and Savitri seems to be very sad with their own shortcomings. The economic irresponsibility and patriarchal norms have come into a direct conflict in the context of Mahendranath and Savitri. It creates a crisis and disintegration in their family. Being a wife, Savitri feels that her husband should succeed in business and earn every luxury that she dreams of having. Therefore, Savitri says:

The Woman: Let me tell you about the reality I know. Why does one get married? In order to fulfill a need...an inner...void, if you like; to be self-sufficient...complete. But that's not why Mahendra got married! The object of his existence is ... as if...he were there only to fill in the gaps in the lives of others...whatever

other people expect of him ...or in whichever way they think they can use him...(26)

Savitri is a typical middle class woman. She wants to marry a man who can help her to climb up the ladder of socio-economic status. Mahendranath's frustration is made worse by his harassing nature. Both Mahendranath and Savitri begin to get dominant role instead of solving their problems together. So they go on conflict in the familial life. Consequently, their children feel alienated in the family. That is the reason why the husband is of no count for the wife. The wife, because of the power of being the breadwinner, asserts herself in the routine matter of domestic life and dominant in the familial life.

Generally in a typical patriarchal family, father plays the role of persecutor and mother, the rescuer in familial crisis between children and parents. When father hurts children, mother rescues them. But the roles also change according to the place. Father rescues mother and children by earning money and arranging things outside the house while they persecute him by being ungrateful for what they are provided and by demanding more things without any consideration for his difficulties. Mother rescues father and children by doing all the housework and striving to satisfy all their needs. But in the context of Mahendranath and Savitri, it is contrary to the patriarchal cultural norms of society. Savitri rescues Mahendranath by taking up a job to feed the family. So, Mahendranath seems frustrated and starts beating his wife inhumanly. Binni explains Juneja how Mahendranath exploits Savitri:

The Older Girl: Uncle! When I lived here it was like being...you can't imagine what it was like...Daddy's rages when he tore Mama's clothes to shreds...when he gagged her and beat her up behind closed doors...dragging her by the hair to the WC....(shudders) I can't even recount the fearful scenes I've witnessed in this house! If any outsider had seen all this, he would have wondered why they hadn't ...

The Fourth Man: What you're saying is not new to me. Mahendranath told me about it. (27)

Savitri treats her children in such a despicable manner as to remind one of the old days of slavery. The elder son, Ashok, is needy and always expects a number of things from his mother. Sometimes, he looks very sad and frustrated. For instance in discussion with Singhanian, he expresses very different manner:

The Boy: I mean exactly what I said. Whoever you've invited up to now...Why did you do so?

The Woman: Why do you think?

The Boy: For the glamour of it all. An intellectual. A man with a salary of five thousand. A Chief Commissioner. Whenever you've invited anyone, it hasn't been for the person himself but...because of his name, his salary, his position.

There is another character in this family that is Binni who has married Manoj. She sometimes comes to meet her mother and father. But her marriage is also distressed. She has come without any baggage. Binni's married life is completely disappointed. Binni gets married and goes away but becomes discontented in her married life. It is very remarkable that she has married the erstwhile lover of her mother, Manoj. Manoj points out that she has brought an infection from her parental home which spoils their marriage. Thus, this marriage has been devoid of love and sacrifice and then there is no limit to the suffering, predicament and the plight of family members. *Halfway House* reflects the miserable condition of married life. It projects how Binni is exploited by the husband. Binni expresses the fear and problems of married life:

The Older Girl: What reason? A cup of tea spilt from his hand or a short delay when he returns from work? These little things are not really reasons; they become reasons. A strange sort of feeling mounts up within me and spreads like poison through my whole

being. Everything I touch or see or hear becomes distorted and I stand helpless and fearful under the spell of a destructive fate.

Binni wonders at the series of unending mishappening. She is simply witness to all automatic happening, a series of misfortunes. In such conflicting moments, Binni's state is like a fish out of water. She leads a luckless life facing and sustaining various jolts of disapproval, restlessness and humiliation. Binni has to leave her husband, Manoj, for he thought she has brought an infection from her parental home which spoils their marriage.

The younger daughter, Kinni, always becomes the reason of one of the disorders in the home. Because she is ignored by her mother and father even her difficulties are not solved. For this condition, Savitri seems accountable because she is unable to keep calm nature in house.

In the marriage ceremony traditionally husband and wife take oath to be loyal to each other in their future life. However in the case of marriage between Savitri and Mahendranath, Savitri could not keep pious relationship in married life. Therefore the essential bond of love vanished from their lives bringing about an unhealthy environment in the family. Mahendranath loves Savitri intensely. Savitri also must have been in love with him at one time, but after marriage, she has begun to feel disillusioned with Mahendranath because while she has high expectations from life, he is without work and has no source of income. Savitri has turned bitter because, on the one hand, she bears the burden of running the household, on the other; she bears the sharp pang of not being able to achieve anything in life. Her children do not provide any solace to her. She wants to spend the rest of her life with a complete and successful man. But this aspiration of hers is responsible for the disintegration of family and her married life. The tension between Savitri and her children is the outcome of Savitri's own behaviour. Her decisions such as calling her boss at house, establishing telephonic contact with her previous lover, Jagmohan and wishing to live with him and so on are not at all healthy for family. She forgets that now

she is the mother of three children who need parental affection, love and grooming.

Despite her desperation, and the abuse she suffers from her husband, she continues to labour hard to keep the family from drowning in penury. It is a sacrifice that she makes without having a choice, and she is clearly unhappy about it. Unfortunately, all her attempts to change her life don't go anywhere. The play ends with both Savitri and Mahendranath returning home, perhaps realizing that they don't have anyone else but each other. In the end, Savitri is shown as feeling disillusioned with the futility of those relationships and a point of no escape that contains her in this claustrophobic space, in a sense making her responsible for her own hell. The hell within the family then is not a creation of outsiders, but of the inmates of the house who have become unresponsive to each other's concerns, often harsh and cold in their indifference for what ails the other. A relevant point is raised towards the end of the play by Savitri, in her own defence, when she tells the Fourth man:

Juneja: [...] All of you...every one of you...all alike! Exactly the same. Different masks, but the face...? The same wretched face...every single one of you!

The tragic destiny of the members of the family is heightened by the fact that there is no escaping, only a returning back to the doomed house, as Mahendranath enters in the last scene aided by his son Ashok, who helps his staggering father come inside the house. The music gradually becomes louder and the light fades out as the play closes.

### **13.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (CYP)**

Dear learner, now that you are familiar with the summary of the *Halfway House*, you can now take a break from reading and try to solve the practice exercise given below. Just in case if you encounter any difficulty, you can re-read the sections or check out the answer key.

1. *Halfway House* is originally titled \_\_\_\_\_
2. *Halfway House* was translated into English by \_\_\_\_\_
3. The protagonist of *Halfway House* is \_\_\_\_\_
4. Mahendranath, Savitri's husband is a failed entrepreneur \_\_\_\_\_ (True/False)
5. Savitri is a housewife \_\_\_\_\_ (True/False)
6. Savitri and Mahendranath have two children \_\_\_\_\_ (True/False)
7. The play ends with Savitri and Mahendranath coming back to each other \_\_\_\_\_ (True/False)
8. *Halfway House* begins with a Prologue by a \_\_\_\_\_

### **13.7 HALFWAY HOUSE : AN EXISTENTIAL PLAY**

The theory of existentialism owes its origin to the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard (1813-55). It was popularised by Sartre and Albert Camus in the contemporary world. The emerging society of today shows a significant shift in a man's approach to life. With the industrialization and mechanisation of the world, the traditional social life and joint family system gave way to individualist life. Existentialists advocate that man is a unique and isolated individual in an indifferent or hostile world; and he himself is responsible for his own actions and is free to decide his own life.

We should examine the pattern of existentialism in *Halfway House*. Is there any philosophical basis of existential individualism in the play? Or is it a psycho-sociological probing into the transition in urban middle class family life in modern India? If it is a philosophical play, the protagonist or the playwright should consciously pursue an individual life. But that is not the case here. Things are not clearly defined and no body in the play knows what he or she should do.

Vision of life is hazy and uncertain. One may ask if it is existentialist why do Mahendranath and Savitri return to the same fold, why don't they restart their lives alone? Why do they bank upon others? Towards the end when Mahendranath takes his own decision against the insistence of Juneja not to return to his house, he tends to reaffirm the status quo. Should we draw the conclusion that it is not so. The symptoms point rather a conformist point to existentialism. But it is neither philosophic nor written with a view to propagating existentialism or individualism.

There is no point in drawing philosophy out of it. It is to certain extent, existential in nature in the sense that every character is confined to his or her own private winter. A unit of individuals that is Mahendranath- Savitri family seems to have little interaction with relatives, neighbours and their surroundings. They are too engrossed in themselves to look beyond. Even within the family everyone is playing his own flute and avoids interaction among themselves. They turn a deaf ear to what goes around them. The Older Girl and the Woman for example refuse to comply with Kinni's insistence to accompany her to Surekha's mother who abuses Kinni. There is no collective approach to move out of the mire. We do not get at any sustainable reason for discord in the family. The character of the husband is explained more by the remarks of others than by the husband himself. He is one such character who lacks individuality. But was he so right from the beginning or the misfortune in his life makes him so? It is not clear.

Savitri gained some individuality with the shift of economic power in her hand. She is ambitious, assertive in house with a practical outlook. She could have been the true leader but things are just the other way round. She goes after other men to avail of something that Mahendranath does not possess. Juneja exposes the hollowness of her mannerism:

It was obvious even then that you didn't consider Mahendra to be the man with whom you could spend your life, 'respect ... Not because you thought



I was better than Mahendra but only because.... I was not Mahendra ! Every few years, there is the attempt to detach herself from Mahendra and find some way out Shevjeet after Juneja – ‘his university degree, his trips abroad, or whatever, then Jagmohan,’ his excellent contacts, his smart way of life, his generosity, ‘but the feeling that each one of them lacked something, ‘The point is that, if anyone of these men had been a part of your life instead of Mahendra, you would still have felt that you had married the wrong man.’(Pp 111-112)

Sanjay Kumar observes “...the deeper influence that places both technique and theme in impasse is of the Existence/Absurd plays of writers like Sartre and Camus,” Like an existence play *Halfway House* ends in nothingness. Neither Savitri nor Mahendranath gains anything when they decide to return to their house. They seem to affirm the existential philosophy that they are cast in an alien world, as an isolated being with none to cooperate, interact and understand. In a way it questions the meaning of existence, and human values.

The existence of the characters in that world is full of anguish and absurdity. We may well quote Camus who wrote in the *The Myth of Sisyphus*: “In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light man feels a stranger. He is an irremediable exile.... This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitute the feeling of Absurdity.”

Mahendranath’s and Savitri’s exile is equally irremediable as shown in the play. They pursue a meaningless life. They are cut out as creatures devoid of the warmth of life. Therein lies the absurdity of the play. Such symptoms have prompted critics particularly with their background of English literature to peruse *Halfway House* with modern western theatrical and philosophical perspectives. The influences of the “Theatre of the Absurd,” “Theatre of idea” and of existentialism are very much discernible in the play . But to me they are more situational coincidences than any ideological pursuance of the existential philosophy. The play is more in the Indian tradition with innovations and experiments than in any western tradition.

### **13.8 HALFWAY HOUSE : SEXUALITY AND TEXTUALITY – A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE**

From a feminist point of view Rakesh portrays the character of a modern woman in transition looking for alternative ways to quench her thirst and all through fighting against the patriarchal hegemony in the family and made dominance in outside world.

Savitri is the central figure in the play *Highway House* and around her all actions and dialogues revolve. She began as a housewife of a typical Indian type and was subjected to husband's scolding and beating. Yet she resisted his repression and did not yield to his whimsical wishes dictated more often by his friends. However the play does not begin with this rather all this is referred to as a past incidence by Savitri herself and her daughter Binni towards the end of the play. Binni recalls such incident to Juneja:

Daddy's rages when he tore Mamma's clothes to shreds ... when gagged her and beat her up behind closed doors.. dragging her hair to the WC ... (Shudders) I cant't even recount the fearful scenes I've witnessed in this house!"(P.62)

A feminist critic would view it as make bias of the author otherwise the play should have been depicted in the present and not referred to.

A psychoanalysis of the character of Savitri points a probable genesis of the text. There runs a continuous tension and conflict between wife and the husband, friends particularly Juneja, Binni and Manoj and Ashok and Kinni throughout the play. Apparently there 'hardly seems to be any convincing reason for Mahendranath's indifference or Savitri's irritation and quest for scape route. However, we can trace their genesis in wife's unfulfilled sexual desire:

THE WOMAN: Let me tell you about the reality I know, Why does not get married? In order to fulfil a need... and inner void, if you like, to be self – sufficient ... complete . But that's not why Mahendra's got married ! The object of his existences is .. as if .. he were there only to fill in the gaps in the

lives of others ... whatever other people expect of him... or in whichever way they think they can use him ..(P.69)

They fail to develop any love for each other. We do not find any physical intimacy between the husband and the wife. Whenever they meet, they quarrel and nag about for nothing . She is still bound to the socio-cultural norms of the land . That's why she fails to express what she craves, This inner dilemma, this helplessness to communicate generates bitterness and anger in her.

Feminists in India commonly attribute economic dependence of women on men as the cause of their miserable condition. But this is not the case with Savitri's predicament. She takes up a job when Mahendranath is rendered jobless but the economic freedom does not lead to freedom from her inherent trauma and anguish. In this way Rakesh shows that economic independence is not a panacea for a woman's problem. Biologically and emotionally she is dependent upon man. Infact the human society works on the feminist perspective. It is important to note how Savitri exposes patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices to her own peril. Millett wrote that " the essence of politics is power," and that the most fundamental and pervasive concept of power in our society is male dominance, that comes out in its shrewd form in the long speech of Juneja. And it is Savitri who challenges it and breaks male dominance in her house though she achieves nothing that she wants. Thus the play, in a way, shows the failure of economic means in the hands of woman.

The feminist reading that follows can also be based upon Ashok's loathing of his mother's liaison with several men. Infact she has been trying one after another man. She tried first Juneja, then Shevjeet, Jagmohan and Manoj but the result was the same. She craves for something that one doesn't have and others seem to have that. Thus the illusive quest goes on until her hopes and expectations are shattered by Jagmohan's refusal to begin afresh with her. However, her desire for a man "I want a man" reaffirms D.H. Lawrence's philosophy of a man's urge in a woman. In the play mother-son conflicts as

well as in its depiction of a clash between genders and women in the play presents various dualities.

Sex is not loathed in the play but certainly no one approves of post marital relationship. Ashok and Kinni both are beaten by the sex bug. Ashok's affair with a girl is referred to and Kinni's reading of pornographic book is also pointed out. But they are accepted as natural with some hesitation and shyness on their part. However, the revelation of the fact that Savitri was the ex-beloved of her son-in-law makes Binni feel ashamed of her mother.

Mohan Rakesh has come under attack for unsympathetic portrayal of Savitri, though he refuses it because the play is open ended and Savitri is projected as a more powerful character than Mahendranath who needs a proxy to explain himself.

The author makes it clear in the prologue:

If the woman of the family was replaced by another, she would put up with me in a different way ... or, she would assume my role and I, assuming hers, would have to put up with her. The play would remain equally undefined and it would be just as difficult to decide who has the determining role... I, the woman, the circumstances that surround us or the questions that arise out of our interaction with each other.

The author doesn't hold any one responsible for the tragedy rather leaves it open for the readers to arrive at their own conclusions. Some critics feel that the onus of tragedy lies with the woman. But one may ask what has Mahendranath done for the family? Why has he been indifferent to his wife and children? If Savitri has failed to understand Mahendranath has he understood her inner urge?

Savitri's relationships with other men are inferred and not depicted. We can't say precisely the extent of her relationships with other men. This kind of indifference is not appreciated by the feminist writer. However, it needs to be seen in the cultural context of the society and also in the pattern of text in

which even the violence of Savitri against her daughter is the manifestation of her unfulfilled sexuality. She slaps Kinni when she insists to accompany her to Surekha's mother who has abused her. Such neglect has psychological implications on the development of children. As a result of which her children are spoilt. Ashok is unemployed. Binni's relation with her husband is on the verge of breaking and Kinni's arrogance bears ample proof of her parentage and faulty bringing up.

The feminist conclusion it arrives at is that "All of you... everyone of you .. all alike ? Exactly the same. Different masks, but the fact ... ? The same wretched face..." Savitri's feminist assertion is that all men are exploiter of women and they are the same as far as their approach to women is concerned.

### **13.9 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)**

1. Who was the husband of Savitri? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Jagmohan
  - b. Juneja
  - c. Singhania
  - d. Mahendranath
2. Who was the First Man in the play *Halfway House*? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Manoj
  - b. Jagmohan
  - c. Mahendranath
  - d. Juneja
3. Who was the Second Man in the play *Halfway House*? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Singhania

- b. Mahendranath
  - c. Juneja
  - d. Jagmohan
4. Who was the Third Man in the play *Halfway House*?\_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Jagmohan
  - b. Singhanian
  - c. Juneja
  - d. Mahendranath
5. Who was the Fourth Man in the play *Halfway House*?\_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Mahendranath
  - b. Juneja
  - c. Jagmohan
  - d. Singhanian
6. Who was the breadwinner in the play *Halfway House*?\_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Kinni
  - b. Binni
  - c. Mahendranath
  - d. Savitri

### 13.10 ANSWER KEY (CYP) & (MCQs)

#### (CYP)

- |                       |                |            |                      |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------|----------------------|
| 1. <i>Adhe Adhure</i> | 2. Bindu Batra | 3. Savitri | 4. True              |
| 5. False              | 6. False       | 7. True    | 8. Man in Black Suit |

**(MCQs)**

1.) d      2.) c      3.) a      4.) a      5.) b      6.) d

**13.11 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Comment on the title of the play *Halfway House*.
- Q2. Discuss the significance of the Prologue in the play *Halfway House*.
- Q3. Discuss the marital life of Mahendranath and Savitri.
- Q4. *Halfway House* projects a minute depiction of relations in family life. Comment.
- Q5. Give the symbolic significance of the Man in a Black Suit.

**13.12 LET US SUM UP**

This lesson acquaints the learners with the detailed summary of the play *Halfway House* written by Mohan Rakesh. The story is driven by conflicts and ambiguities and deals extensively with the questions of meaning in life. In this lesson, the story has been analysed from different perspectives.

**13.13 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Rakesh, Mohan. *Adhe-Adhure: A Play in Two Acts*. Rupa & Co.: 1993. Print.
- ◆ Khatri, Chhote Lal. Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House: A Critique*. Prakash Book Depot: 2003. Print.
- ◆ Noel, Katharine. *Halfway House*. Atlantic Monthly Press: 2006. Print.

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## **CHARACTERS**

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 14.3 Characters in the play *Halfway House*
- 14.4 Check Your Progress (CYP)
- 14.5 Themes in the play *Halfway House*
  - 14.5.1 A Critique on Love, Marriage, Sex, and Violence
  - 14.5.2 The Quest of Completeness
  - 14.5.3 Articulation of Silence and Violence
  - 14.5.4 Exploration of Identity
- 14.6 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 14.7 Answer Key (CYP) & (MCQs)
- 14.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 14.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.10 Suggested Reading

### **14.1 INTRODCUTION**

*Halfway House* is a play written by Mohan Rakesh. In this play the major concern of the writer is to depict the lack of meaning and identity in modern



man's life. The characters are so drawn that they are in harmony with this concern of the writer. The writer depicts this through the characters of Mahendranath, Savitri, etc. The major themes such as : the quest for completeness, exploration of identity etc., highlight this lack of meaning in modern man's life. Man-Women relationship is another important focus of the writer.

## 14.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

Dear Learner, the objective in this lesson is to acquaint you with the characters in the play *Halfway House*. Further, the lesson aims to familiarize the learner with the important themes in the play.

After going through this lesson, you will

- be able to list the characters in the play *Halfway House* and analyse the role played by these characters
- be able to identify the major thematic concerns in the play and offer a critique of love, marriage, violence, identity, etc.

## 14.3 CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY *HALFWAY HOUSE*

**Mahendranath-** Savitri's husband, a failed entrepreneur and a middle-aged father. The "desire to look for" is depicted through Mahendranath's character, Savitri's husband and the unwanted member of the family who struggles to prove his existence in the midst of an economic and emotional crisis but fails every time. Mahendranath possesses the traits of a man of the patriarchal society as he wants to be manly and refuses to take up housework. But he does not try honestly to find job neither for himself nor for other man in his family. Mahendranath could neither play his masculine role successfully nor break himself free from problems. Being husband, Mahendranath fails to understand the feelings of his wife. He does not understand wife's need for love and recognize her sentiments. Blindly he blames her for his downfall. Mahendranath is unable to think and in order to avoid ugly scenes he slips out of the house and finds some relief with his friend, Juneja. Even her husband seems helpless in dealing with his wife's extra-marital relationship. He only

dislikes his wife's lovers. He does not have the courage to oppose them openly nor the generosity to ignore them. On the contrary, he talks only ironically about them and raises self-pity. Similarly he has neither the patience to stay with the family nor does he try to go away from there. When Mahendranath goes away from the house in a fit of anger and stays with Juneja, he comes back again to his house because he says that he loves his wife in spite of temperamental clashes.

**Savitri-** a single breadwinner who is desperately seeking a better life. Savitri is more forward than her husband. Savitri has more powerful controlling faculty than her husband. By presenting Savitri as the breadwinner, Mohan Rakesh breaks the stereotyped image of an Indian homemaker who is supposed to be chaste, loving and devoted towards her husband. Savitri plays not only the masculine role of earning the bread for the family but also the feminine role of keeping the house in well condition. It is noteworthy that Savitri seems to enjoy more freedom than a traditional wife. Savitri personifies the concept of 'New Woman' by re-annotating womanhood. She is not the Savitri from Indian mythology. She is a strong woman who steps out everyday into this patriarchal society to earn and has forced her husband to accept that he is good for nothing. Savitri accepts the patriarchal norm of a manly man and very much wants her husband to be masculine. When Juneja tries to explain to Savitri how she is responsible for Mahendranath's downfall, she refuses to see reasons. As Savitri's husband fails to fit her image of a masculine man, she runs after several men but fails to realize her dreams. She blames her husband for her failures and frustrations without realizing her part in it. Savitri is unlike the traditional Indian woman who continues to bear with the existing situation.

She is a modern woman who holds her head high to explore all the avenues to improve the conditions of her family. In many ways she represents the new emerging woman who does not hesitate to exercise and use all her potentials to improve their economically, emotionally and psychologically rotten conditions. In many ways Savitri is in sharp contrast to the traditional home-loving and home-tied woman having all ingredients and traits of stoicism.

However, Savitri too suffers, but her sufferings are the result of her own choice, her inner compulsions and her psychic needs. Her frustration is caused by her failure to fill the psychological desire within her. Being a modern woman, Savitri is highly ambitious, aggressive, has an attractive figure and it is her dream of a glorious life which strays her into wrong directions. Instead of sharing the difficulties with her husband and trying to find some way out, she discards the man to whom she was socially tied. Savitri represents ambition of a modern woman. She is very ambitious woman who wants her husband to be a strong man in mind and body, successful in his business, earn a lot of money for the family and be a glamorous person. Therefore, she complains that Mahendranath has no personality or strength of character or self-confidence. Consequently, she continues in search of complete man to fill in the gaps and her desires. She tries to seek a complete man in her lovers. But even there, she has not been able to have a lasting relationship because of the uncertainties and responsibilities of middle class life. She has a bit of the Lady Macbeth's ambition in her and she goes on searching for perfect matrimonial happiness, but gets frustrated at every step. She is not able to solve the problem of her life by accepting the adjustment with modern life with a sense of logic. Another feature of Savitri's personality is that she is not willing to accept her failure to keep extra-marital affairs.

**The Man in Black Suit-** The Man in Black Suit is actually the writer himself. It is shown in the Prologue that the Man in Black suit is a Sutradhar (A commentator) who expresses the perspective of the dramatist. This man also plays all roles of -Man one, Man two, Man three, and Man four as Mahendranath, Singhanian, Jagmohan and Juneja respectively.

**Ashok-** son of Savitri and Mahendranath. He is unemployed. The Boy, Ashok wastes his time in cutting out coloured pictures of film actresses from magazines, waits for his chance to get away.

**Binni-** elder daughter of Savitri and Mahendranath. She elopes to marry Manoj but has returned seemingly forever. The older girl, Binni escapes the moment she finds the opportunity of running away with a sympathetic Manoj.

**Kinni-** a rebellious teenager. The Younger Girl, Kinni, does not feel

attached either to the parents or her brother and sister. She is very disappointed as her small needs remain unattended. She feels neglected.

**Singhania-** He is chief in workplace where Savitri works. He is a triumphant man. He is really praised by Savitri. He is disdainful, and full of narcissism. He starts his discussion with rudeness. He is connected with humorous and self-important personality. Mohan Rakesh highlights the character of boss through Singhania who uses his status to exploit his women employees for immoral purposes. Singhania is full of self-importance and every bit of conversation is twisted to show that he has travelled all over the world. Self-praise is the key-word with him.

**Jagmohan-** He is the Third Man. He is dressed in a sports shirt and trousers, carries a cigarette tin in his hand and makes chain-smoke. Jagmohan arrives to meet Savitri. He addresses her as 'Cuckoo.' This is how Jagmohan greets her and during their conversation Savitri calls him Jog, which shows their intimacy. He is only interested in playing with a woman and Savitri's seriousness has no meaning for him. He is very casual to chat. He shows his careless nature towards Savitri. Infact, she is hoping much from him and her voice is choking with tears. But his interest shifts from mother to daughter and then to a book. It also shows meaninglessness of relationship in the modern age. Jagmohan is very polished man and now that he has matured enough, he has drastically changed. Now he is extremely conscious of his status, his position in society and is wary of reviving an affair with a mother of three children after a long gap of eighteen to nineteen years. He rejected Savitri's proposal.

**Juneja-** Juneja is a very practical man. Mahendranath always meets him whenever he has problems. The purpose of Juneja's revelations is to make Savitri aware and recognize her responsibility in the familial life.

#### **14.4 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (CYP)**

Dear learner, stop here! Make an assessment of your acquaintance with the characters of *Halfway House* by going through the CYP exercise given below:

1. Savitri's husband is named \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Mahendranath blames \_\_\_\_\_ for his downfall.
3. Mahendranath's friend \_\_\_\_\_ offers him solace and relief.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ portrays the concept of 'New Woman' in *Halfway House*.
5. The character of \_\_\_\_\_ is actually the writer himself.
6. Ashok, Savitri and Mahendranath's son is unemployed \_\_\_\_\_.  
(True/False)
7. Binni is the rebellious teenage daughter of Savitri and Mahendranath \_\_\_\_\_.  
(True/False)
8. \_\_\_\_\_ is chief in the workplace where Savitri works.

#### **14.5 THEMES IN THE PLAY *HALFWAY HOUSE***

##### **14.5.1 A Critique on Love, Marriage, Sex and Violence**

Regarding marriage, the play *Halfway House* projects two types of views through the character of Mahendranath and Savitri: traditional view of marriage expecting male dominance and marriage as a companionship and as a means for self-fulfillment.

Mahendranath is the upholder of patriarchal order where man is the head of the family and woman is subordinate to him; he is the "Absolute" "One" and she is the "Other." Being the master of the family, he expects Savitri to take care of his whims and fancies. When the play opens, Savitri is seen as a very dominating lady. But the account of their past life, that is revealed through their conversation shows that in the earlier years of their marriage, Savitri has been the victim and Mahendranath the victimizer. There has been nobody to play the role of a rescuer (Juneja may be seen so, but at the far end of the play). Binni's remarks throw

light on the horrifying situation. During the time of quarrel, she tells Juneja:

It's not something you can easily rub out, uncle. When I was here, I sometimes thought that I was not in a home. Instead, I was caged up in a zoo where-you probably can't even imagine what has been happening here. Daddy would rip Mamma's clothes apart he would stop her mouth up with a bandage and beat her up in a locked room. He would then drag her to the bathroom and over the toilet-(trembling). I can't explain how many horrifying scenes I've witnessed in this house. (107)

Savitri's long speech towards the end of the play gives the fuller evidence of this violence in which Savitri explains to Juneja, Mahendranath's expectations as husband:

"A woman should walk like this, talk like that and smile like this. Why do you always lower my prestige in front of other people?" The same Mahendra who smiles nervously like a coward with his friends comes home and acts like a lion. No one knows who he's going to attack, who he's going to rip apart, or when. Today, if he is excited, he'll set his shirt on fire. Tomorrow, he'll knock Savitri down, sit on her chest and start banging her head on the ground. He shouts, 'Speak up, are you going to live your life the way I want? Won't you do what I say?..."

Mahendranath's violence arises from his orthodox, traditional ideas of man-woman relationship. He considers himself the lord of the family. Being the upholder of patriarchal order, he is of the view that the wife should try her best to fulfil the wishes of her husband. Therefore, he could resent any part of her conduct that went against what he considered proper in a wife. Whenever Savitri goes against his wish, he reacts violently. Physical torture becomes the part of their daily routine. Now and then he criticizes Savitri stating that he lost his capital in the business

to fulfill her expectations. He is typical- a type of husband who is never pleased with his wife. He does not realise how to behave with his well educated wife. Wife for him is not a life-partner but just a slave, a puppet without any thoughts or feelings. Being the educated woman, he expects, quite ironically, that she should have a better understanding of how to behave. That is why he used to say: “How can you refuse to go there?...you say you’re educated you don’t even know how to act properly.” He always remains conscious of his position among his friends and not of his duties as a husband and as a parent. In his severe beating of Savitri, one can easily notice the savage beast hidden within his personality. That is why Binni, from her childhood experiences, calls her parental house “a zoo.”

For Savitri, husband should be a loving companion and marriage a means of filling the hollowness, an inner void in each other’s lives. Every woman has the dream of home where all the members live happily, peacefully, sharing their pains and pleasures and fulfilling each other’s expectations. However, she receives the harsh treatment and physical torture from her husband.

This victim victimizer relationship is noticed not only in husband-wife relationship but also in Savitri’s relation with her friends and her son. Ashok always remains indifferent to her. Like his father, Ashok is opposed to Savitri’s inviting the influential persons as guests to her house though the covert object behind the gesture is to secure a job for him. Similarly, his beating of his younger thirteen year old sister reveals his patriarchal tendency. Juneja accuses Savitri that her quest for a perfect mate “a complete man” is futile. Her disillusionment is the cause of her restlessness. So, no matter, whom she has married, she would have experienced the same frustration with any person other than Mahendranath sooner or later. For her so called friends, she appears to be use-and-throw object.

Throughout the play, there are repeated hints of Savitri's extra-marital relationship with various men. This may raise the question of morality. However, one cannot call her adulteress. There are two reasons: (i) she badly needs a job for her son so that he may financially support her by being engaged in a job somewhere, and (ii) she often dreams of an ideal life-partner. She is in the search of a man "who would be rich like Juneja, learned like Shevjeet, high positioned like Singhanian, sweet-tongued and tiptop like Jagmohan and handsome and liberal like Manoj." She is not conscious of the fact that one person cannot alone possess all these qualities and there is nothing like a 'complete man' anywhere in the world.

The play also highlights the theme of lovelessness. All the family members are alienated from each other and leading a solitary life under the same roof. Individualism makes people materialistic and therefore loveless, perhaps. So, material things become more valuable to them than human beings. Everybody in the family needs and wants to have love but nobody is ready to offer it.

The man-woman relationship, depicted in the play is essentially irrational, illogical, not in consonance with its surrounding. Naturally, the result is the chronic state of uncertainty, anguish and depression. The cause of the absurdity lies in the temperamental incompatibility reflected in their denial for mutual trust and sacrifice. There is chaos and confusion that threaten not only the material life of Savitri and her husband but the very value system on which it is founded.

Since, woman is the chief source of income the power of the house is shifted from the father to the mother and she asserts herself in the routine matters of domestic life. Both of them are unwilling to perform the roles assigned to them by the circumstances. Contrary to the patriarchal cultural norms of sexist roles, Savitri has more powerful controlling faculty than her husband. Savitri feeds the family and Mahendranath



idles away without helping her in the housework. This upsets the cultural norms of patriarchy. Mahendranath wants to be manly and refuses to take up housework. But he does not try honestly to find some employment. Savitri resents playing the masculine role of earning the bread for the family and the feminine role of keeping the house, without being appreciated for dual burden. She seems to enjoy more freedom than a traditional wife but she cannot break the patriarchal fetters completely to realize her dreams. Mahendranath can neither play his masculine role successfully nor can break himself free from it. Both of them lack the faculty of spontaneity to have other options to come out of impasse and live happily. The economic realities and patriarchal norms have come into a direct conflict here. This creates a crisis in their family. The family members can neither adjust themselves with the situation nor can change it. There lies the tragedy of the family in its disintegration, particularly at material and psychic levels.

#### **14.5.2 The Quest of Completeness**

Mohan Rakesh's *Aadhe Adhure (Halfway House)* is primarily focused on urban life and propagates for a social change from traditional to modern and simultaneously projects the hollowness of modern urban culture. The play presents the microscopic picture of a middle class family in metropolis and reflects on the transition of values in the changing society in India. Although the play seeks to construct the search for identity within the unfulfilling, incomplete nature of bourgeois existence as a universal experience along existential lines as its primary concern, it eventually deals with many questions on a broader socio-economic context on realist lines. The play is city based, city oriented tale of a middle class man wrapped up entirely in his own private problems. Personal happiness and sorrow, the forged identity, the new parameters of man and woman relationship, the desire of personal freedom which when too powerful takes the shape of licence—questions the existential

quest of modern man. The play does not stand comfortably on any univocal guiding perception of meaning and direction though it deals explicitly on women empowerment, that includes women's sense of self-worth; their right to have the power to control lives; both within and outside home; their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order. The play analyses deeply the problems and the psyche of the individual; highlighting the feeling, desires and frustrations of the city bred middle class man. Although all the characters in this play are frustrated, dissatisfied and vexed, we find that Savitri, the central character of this play searches for the wholeness in her life, in her home and specially in others. The portrayal of Savitri, challenges the image of Indian women. She is depicted as a restless, dissatisfied middle-aged mother of three grown up children. She manages to get hold of house when she becomes the breadwinner, reducing her unemployed husband, Mahendranath as useless. The economic predicament plays a major role in making her a leader of house and there by contesting the traditional gender roles in the family. Her repeated complains conveys the message that her husband is the curse of her life. Savitri's quest for completeness is the archetypical pursuit of Everyman's for completeness. Since her husband fails to fulfill this inner emptiness, Savitri seeks martial happiness beyond conjugal relations in men who possess the qualities she had always aspired for in Mahendranath. In search of an ideal husband who would be complete in all respect, she switches from one person to another. She is in search of a person who would be rich like Juneja, learned like Shevjeet, high-positioned like Singhanian, sweet-tongued and suave like Jagmohan and handsome and liberal like Manoj. Her insatiated quest remains unfulfilled till the end as she moves out of many relationships without any satisfaction. Although Savitri's relations with men seem problematic in itself, the play tries to trick us into the generalisation that this is nothing but an existentialist quest for meaning in life.

The quest of completeness is visible not only in Savitri but in all the characters and they all look for their completeness in different ways. Savitri's husband Mahendranath is shown to search for a new identity and reason behind his existence through his relationship with Juneja. The economic crisis and his losing the identity of being the bread-earner of the family had altered his position in the house into a non-entity and affected his mind and heart adversely. He greatly resents his loss of control and influence in the family and is immensely unhappy to be regarded only as a stamp of respectability to be used only when the need arises. Under such circumstances of changed power equations, Mahendranath searches for meaning in new relations build on a sense of understanding and mutual respect, as is the case with Juneja. From Savitri's perpetual insults and accusations and its subsequent repercussions in giving him an inferiority complex, Juneja's friendship offered Mahendranath the alternate sanctuary of solace and comfort in the midst of an emotional and economic crisis within the family. He began to define himself in terms of his non-utility and unsuccessfulness, and thereby sought solace in temporary acts of rebellion involving leaving the house and seeking meaning and mental peace in his companionship with Juneja. Moreover due to his own lack of conviction and inability to take independent decisions, Mahendranath looked for identity assertion through psychological dependence on others and in the early years of his marriage through a patriarchal control and restriction of Savitri's autonomy. The fact that Mahendranath finally returns in the end using his own judgement, abandoning Juneja's advice, establishes the futility of his search and once again, reiterates the Absurdist stance the play tries to partially incorporate.

No matter how modern we become still the gender constructs belittle our identity if we challenge them. Savitri's son Ashok and younger daughter Kinni explore the dynamics of identity on their own in their own world so as to escape from the fearful existence of their wrangling

parents. Ashok searches for his identity in an amorphous world, detached from reality and need, in the realm of idleness, impulsivity and romance. For no apparent reason at all, he quits his job at Air Freeze and instead spends his time either in lazing around uselessly or in courting a girl working in the Udyog Centre. The everyday animosity between his parents distorts his sense of home and thereby he looks for meaning and identity in an alternate world free of the pressure of shouldering family responsibility and of the tensions within the family. Even the talk he has with Binni about the 'air' in the house echoes these sentiments about the search for meaning.

The youngest character Kinni searches for an identity through her emerging adolescent sexuality and awareness of this sexuality, in the absence of a secure support mechanism at home, both economically and emotionally. Given the emotional instability in her house and the complete negligence with which she was treated, she sought to define herself in terms of her rebelliousness, growing sexual knowledge, stubbornness, ill-mannerisms and arrogance. Savitri's elder daughter Binni too is shown to be in a relentless and shifting quest for a sanctuary, an identity. She elopes with Manoj not in an impulse of love and romantic urge but in search of an abode away from home where she presumed she would find peace and protection. However, when she experiences her husband's strict conservatism and fails to find any meaning in Manoj's restrictive control within their conjugal relation, she looks for answers in a sense of defiance: "He likes my hair long, so I want to cut it. He doesn't like me to work, so I want a job" (*Halfway House* 19). But this again proves futile as she realises she is unable to execute her rebellious tendencies against the subordination by her husband. Ultimately, she just returns to her maternal home in search for that "mysterious something in their house that is the cause of all her trouble and that which refuses to desert her." However, Binni is never shown to exactly unravel this mystery cause

thereby manifesting the absurdity of the entire process of finding meaning in life. Mohan Rakesh's *Aadhe Adhure* is the play about the sense of incompleteness at various levels of an urban inmate. It can be read on the personal, familial and social levels and deals extensively with the question of identity and meaning in life, to situate it solely in an existentialist and absurdist dimensions and reflects on the final predicament of an urban inmate.

### **14.5.3 Articulation of Silence and Violence**

Rakesh Mohan through the women characters in his play *Halfway House* has shown the hegemony of traditional power structures in society. He presents it on a domestic level. Silence and violence are enough to portray the women characters in *Halfway House*. The women characters in the play mirror the actual state of women who are living in a society which is dominated by males. The truth that emerges from the play, both in reading and in performance, is that the onus of tragedy lies with the women. Therefore, the play is considered as anti-woman by critics. In *Halfway House*, there is a class where all human bonds of love and concern for one another have been replaced by very mundane and materialistic compulsions.

In *Halfway House*, the women characters are active in their role as well as characters. Mohan Rakesh has presented women as rebels, independent, active and modern. On the other hand, he has presented men as passive, dull and male-chauvinists. There are three women characters in the play- Savitri, Binni, Kinni who play a very active role in the play, and resist the male dominance. The women characters refuse to be silent, and are ready to resist the violence. Savitri, Binni and Kinni are such characters who cannot be silenced as they are new women of the post independent era, whose foundation is based on the principle of egalitarianism. It is the refusal of male dominance that creates wedge in relationships, and mirrors the problems of domestic household. In the

play it is seen that Savitri is the sole-provider of the family, and this fact makes her arrogant and aggressive towards her husband Mahendranath. Both Mahendranath and Savitri drive over each other in order to dominate the family; but both subsequently end up fighting which affected the mind of their children. It is because of the domestic-violence that Binni, their elder daughter, had run away from the house and got married to Manoj, which later proved to be an unsuccessful marriage. The conflict between Mahendranath and Savitri also affected Ashok as he became a loiterer doing nothing useful but passing time here and there, and not helping the family economically. As for Kinni, she became a spoilt brat due to lack of parental control and supervision. In the tug-of-war for authority and power, the family gets fragmented, disintegrated, devoid of love and affection. Mohan Rakesh has created a woman who is ahead of her time, a woman who is a rebel, a voice of those women who have been the victims of the domestic violence and in turn have been silenced. Savitri represents the predicament of this rising new woman. Savitri is a modern woman who is not dependent on her husband for her living. By asserting her individuality, Savitri also asserts that a woman is not merely a wife, mother and daughter but also a free human being who has her own dreams, ambitions, aspirations and goals in life.

There are two Savitris in the play. One the traditional, homebound, family bound woman and the new woman, who is conscious of what she has been doing for the family, who has seen the glitter of material world with opportunities and better life and who has come to believe that her self-fulfillment lies in walking out of the family and fulfilling her desires. This is the new Savitri. She is beset by problems because she is also driven by desire for personal fulfillment by her enormous appetite for life which does not accord well with postulates of a patriarchal society. She is a woman more sinned against than sinning. She is as helpless as Mahendranath when it comes to leaving the family. She cannot leave the

family because there is a tradition-bound 'self' which will not allow her to do so, however she may fret, fume or beat her head in frustration.

The women characters in *Halfway House* show the genesis of complexities in the man-woman relationship which arises out the emergence of a new economically independent woman and the changed equation of power between the sexes within marriage. Mohan Rakesh has shown a kind of role-reversal and subverted the traditional power structures in his play. Savitri, as well as her husband, Mahendranath, absorbs the patriarchal culture and observe it. It makes them think that man is a bread-earner and that woman is a housekeeper. Though the patriarchal culture is common to all, individual differ in their perception and absorption of it. In this context, Savitri is more assertive than her husband. This is, contrary to the patriarchal cultural norms of sexist role, Savitri has more controlling power than her husband. So, Mahendranath meekly yields to the demands of his wife and purchases furniture by withdrawing his share of capital from the business. Savitri takes up a job and feeds the family, which Mahendranath idles away without helping her with her house work. This upsets the cultural norms of the patriarchy. Mahendranath wants to be manly and refuses to take up house work; but he does not try to find some employment or other. Savitri play a masculine role of earning the bread for the family and the feminine role of keeping the house, without being appreciated for dual burden. She seems to enjoy more freedom than a traditional wife, but she cannot break the patriarchal fetters completely to realize her dreams. Mahendranath can neither play his masculine role successfully nor break himself free from it. Both of them lack the faculty of spontaneity to have to come into a direct conflict which has created a crisis in their family.

Women are denied their individual identity and existence in a male dominated society. Savitri manages to convey the impression that her

life is a curse, and that her husband, Mahendranath is the curse of her life. Savitri exemplifies the needs of women – to marry a man who can help her to go up the ladder of social-economic hierarchy. Mohan Rakesh has depicted marriage as a social prison where the condemned live with no exit. Mohan Rakesh depicts the deformity in the personalities of man and woman caused by gender distinction of the patriarchal culture in *Halfway House*.

The woman characters in *Halfway House* act as the voice of freedom and argument in oppression to the social and legal inequalities commonly imposed upon women by the patriarchal culture. It is the questioning of male authority and the shift of power from male to female. The assertion of women and their quest to attain freedom is shown inside the four walls of the house. Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* is one of the significant dramas that powerfully echoes this modern malady, transcends time and space and symbolizes eternal human predicament. Each of the characters experience a sense of isolation, loneliness, alienation, the absence of communication, loss of identity and loss of values.

#### **14.5.4 Exploration of Identity**

Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* can be viewed as an exploration of meaning and identity in the turmoil of changing social and familial structures. The play seeks to construct the search for identity within the unfulfilling, incomplete nature of bourgeois existence. In the Prologue itself, the theme of exploration of identity is introduced, when the Man in a Black Suit exclaims, "Who am I?" Immediately the declaration takes an Existential tangent as the fruitlessness of such a search for meaning is asserted with the speaker claiming, "This is a question I have given up trying to face." He establishes the absurdity of identity by calling himself "amorphous" and "undefined," as someone who like all of us puts on a new mask and gives a new meaning to himself for different occasions – "The fact is that there is something of me in each one of



you and that is why, whether on or off stage, I have no separate identity.” He then asserts that no matter what the circumstance, what the situation and the gender, man’s search for identity and meaning in life would always remain an absurd, indescribable, undefined and irrational oddity.

Even the characters of the play are seen to engage in a constant search of meaning and identity in life. The search for identity and meaning in *Halfway House* is best articulated through the character of Savitri who seeks fulfillment and reason in marital bliss – “Why does one get married? In order to fulfill a need....an inner....void, if you like; to be self-sufficient....complete.” Since her own husband fails to fulfil this inner emptiness, Savitri seeks marital happiness beyond conjugal relations in men who possess the qualities she had always aspired for in Mahendranath. Although the concept of Savitri seeking meaning in life being defined in terms of her relations with men seems problematic in itself, the play tries to trick us into the generalisation that this is nothing but an existentialist quest for meaning in life. She is reported to be overwhelmed by Juneja’s power, affluence and sense of reason. Shevjeet’s intellectual prowess, his university degree and numerous trips abroad enamoured her. Jagmohan’s understanding nature, sense of humour, modernism, elite lifestyle and masculine pride held immense appeal for her. She was supposed to be attracted to her now son-in-law, Manoj too, as his influential status had charmed her sufficiently. Savitri moves from one man to another in search of the perfect partner. The play tries to portray this search as an illusion, an Absurdist attempt by denying Savitri the happiness she is looking for and making her realise that all men are the same.

Mahendranath is shown to search for a new identity and reason behind his existence through his relationship with Juneja. The economic crisis and his losing the identity of being the bread-earner of the family had altered his position in the house into a non-entity and affected his mind

and heart adversely “.....silent acceptance, perpetual snubs, constant insults, is all that I deserve after so many years.” He greatly resents his loss of control and influence in the family and is immensely unhappy to be regarded “only as a stamp of respectability to be used only when the need arises.” Under such circumstances of changed power equations, Mahendranath searches for meaning in new relations build on a sense of understanding and mutual respect, as is the case with Juneja. From Savitri’s perpetual insults and accusations and its subsequent repercussions in giving him an inferiority complex, Juneja’s friendship offered Mahendranath the alternate sanctuary of solace and comfort in the midst of an emotional and economic crisis within the family. He began to define himself in terms of his non-utility and unsuccessfulness, and thereby sought solace in temporary acts of rebellion involving leaving the house and seeking meaning and mental peace in his companionship with Juneja. Moreover due to his own lack of conviction and inability to take independent decisions, Mahendranath looked for identity assertion through psychological dependence on others and in the early years of his marriage through a patriarchal control and restriction of Savitri’s autonomy. The fact that Mahendranath finally returns in the end using his own judgement, abandoning Juneja’s advice, establishes the futility of his search and once again, reiterates the Absurdist stance the play tries to partially incorporate.

Ashok and Kinni explore the dynamics of identity on their own in their own world so as to escape from the fearful existence of their wrangling parents. Ashok searches for his identity in an amorphous world, detached from reality and need, in the realm of idleness, impulsivity and romance. For no apparent reason at all, he quits his job at Air Freeze and instead spends his time either in lazying around uselessly or in courting a girl working in the Udyog Centre. The everyday animosity between his parents distorts his sense of ‘home’ and thereby he looks for meaning and identity in an alternate world free of the pressure of shouldering

family responsibility and of the tensions within the family. Even the talk he has with Binni about the '*air*' in the house echoes these sentiments about the search for meaning. The youngest character Kinni on the other hand, searches for an identity through her emerging adolescent sexuality and awareness of this sexuality, in the absence of a secure support mechanism at home, both economically and emotionally. Given the emotional instability in her house and the complete negligence with which she was treated, Kinni sought to define herself in terms of her rebelliousness, growing sexual knowledge, stubbornness, ill-mannerisms and arrogance. In the last scene, Kinni trying to get out when the door is locked from inside and others trying to get in when she locks it from inside is again symbolic of a futile quest for identity and meaning in life, for even her defiance and obstinacy fails to make things any different for the little girl.

Binni too is shown to be in a relentless and shifting quest for a sanctuary, an identity. She elopes with Manoj not in an impulse of love and romantic urge but in search of an abode away from home where she presumed she would find peace and protection. But however, when she experiences her husband's strict conservatism and fails to find any meaning in Manoj's restrictive control within their conjugal relation, she looks for answers in a sense of defiance – "He likes my hair long, so I want to cut it. He doesn't like me to work, so I want a job." But this again proves futile as she realises she is unable to execute her rebellious tendencies against the sub-ordination by her husband. Ultimately, she just returns to her maternal home in search for that mysterious "something" in their house that is the "cause of all her trouble" and that which refuses to desert her. However, Binni is never shown to exactly unravel this mystery 'cause' thereby manifesting the absurdity of the entire process of finding meaning in life.

However, when their search for meaning in life and the subsequent despair

and suffering is regarded only along existential lines, it thus forecloses the possibility of ever addressing the cause of the dilemma. All the characters' quest for an identity beyond the home, the search for an alternate sanctuary besides being analysed as a technique of Absurdist Theatre can also be seen in terms of the alienation that comes with urbanization, the breakdown of joint family and the new emerging power-plays and conflicts within the nuclear family with no viable support system outside.

The fact that Savitri never explores the arena of identity as an independent individual woman, a single working woman; but instead always defines herself in terms of fulfilment in her various relations with different men raises important questions about the status of women as an autonomous individual in society.

Moreover, Mahendranath and Savitri not finding meaning in their relationship can also be seen as the virtual breakdown of marriage as an institution. In our fast-changing society and in the face of belated individualism of its members, the values and regards on which family and marriage have so far rested are fast losing their meaning and significance. Assertion of personal rights and freedoms within a group-unit (family) which necessarily involves inter-personal adjustments produces a situation of crisis because there are no principles to guide these adjustments, which, in present context cannot be thought of in terms of surrender of one or the other party. All relations in the family need to be redefined with new structures of familial division of labour and the rise of the working women. The fact that Manoj blames '*something*' in Binni's maternal house as the cause of all trouble and then prevents her from working establishes that the '*something*' is in reference to her mother's promiscuity which leads him to infer that letting women out of the house would always come with the threat of her infidelity. Moreover, Mohan Rakesh's juxtaposition of a monogamous

husband with a woman whose defining feature is her promiscuity ironically at a time when the 'Hindu Marriage Act (1955)' came into force outlawing polygamy to protect the rights of Hindu women reflects the extent of male anxiety generated by women's emancipation, whose right to work meant the dissolution of the public-private dichotomy necessary for the maintenance of the family as a private sphere. This anxiety is further elaborated in terms of portraying Kinni as an uncared neglected kid, who returns to a home without the mother and feels lonely and alienated.

Mahendranath's despair too needs to be identified not just in terms of the emotional crisis that he faces with the breakdown of familial relations and absence of mutual respect, but also the economic crisis which ultimately appears as the root of all problems. Mahendranath loses his position in family, when the roles of provider and receiver are changed, when economic equations of earner and acceptor are altered and redefined in terms of sex and gender. Their current poverty seems to be the result of typical-middle class lifestyle of living beyond one's means, and the search for identities only arises when existing identities run into conflict with changing economic denominations of labour division within the family itself. Thus, Mahendranath's yearning for meaning in life has new economic arrangements within the familial space and sheer inability to solve the economic crisis, triggering it.

Even Ashok's arrogance and refusal to submit to influential people, Dilip Kumar Basu feels can be analysed in the backdrop of "1969 youth revolts in Paris, and things happening in our country." The young man's indifference to work is thus to be constructed as a larger question of youth rebellion and mobilisation, than just mere laziness and irresponsibility or a mere existentialist search for identity.

Hence, Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* deals extensively with the question of identity and meaning in life, to situate it solely in an

Existentialist dimension and accord it the distinction of being the primary concern of the play, would unfairly downplay many other socio-economic themes that the play encompasses.

#### 14.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* is about \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Rural middle class family
  - b. Urban upper class family
  - c. Urban middle class family
  - d. Poor family of a village
2. In the Prologue of Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House*, we meet \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. The man in a blue suit
  - b. The man in a white suit
  - c. The man in a black suit
  - d. None of these
3. Who was the boss of Savitri? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Jagmohan
  - b. Juneja
  - c. Mahendranath
  - d. Singhania
4. Why has Savitri invited Singhania to her house? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. For the job of her daughter Binni

- b. For the job of her husband Mahendranath
  - c. For the job of her son Ashok
  - d. None of these
5. Which character in the play *Halfway House* has been shown with a newspaper in his hand? \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Juneja
  - b. Mahendranath
  - c. Ashok
  - d. Jagmohan

#### 14.7 ANSWER KEY (CYP) & (MCQs)

##### (CYP)

- |                 |                          |           |
|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Mahendranath | 2. Savitri               | 3. Juneja |
| 4. Savitri      | 5. The Man in Black Suit | 6. True   |
| 7. False        | 8. Singhanian            |           |

##### (MCQs)

- 1.) c    2.) c    3.) d    4.) c    5.) b

#### 14.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. Write a short note on the character of Savitri.
- Q2. Discuss the marital life of Savitri and Mahendranath in *Halfway House*.
- Q3. How do the women characters of the play *Halfway House* portray the silence and violence within the domestic sphere ?

Q4. Describe how *Halfway House* highlights the quest of completeness.

Q5. Discuss the character of Mahendranath.

#### **14.9 LET US SUM UP**

The present lesson discusses the different characters and themes in the play *Halfway House*. All the characters in the play search for meaning in life and quest for an identity beyond the home.

#### **14.10 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ *Halfway House*, a translation by Bindu Batra. Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2006. Print.
- ◆ S. Chandra, Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House: Critical Perspectives*. New Delhi: Asia book club, 2001. Print.
- ◆ Naikar, Basvaraj. "Disintegration of the Family in *Halfway House*." Subhash Chandra. Ed. Op. cit.157.
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## **LIFE AND WORKS**

### **GULZAR**

- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 15.3 Gulzar : His Life
- 15.4 Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs)
- 15.5 His Work
- 15.6 Gulzar as a short story writer
- 15.7 Check Your Progress (CYP)
- 15.8 Answer Key (SAQs) & (CYP)
- 15.9 Examination Oriented Questions
- 15.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.11 Suggested Reading

#### **15.1 INTRODUCTION**

Gulzar, a multitalented individual, poet, storyteller, director, scriptwriter, and lyricist, is a towering figure of contemporary Indian literature and cinema. There is a certain childlike restlessness in Gulzar's personality that undergirds his writing. Though Gulzar is known among the non-Hindi readers more for his blank verse poetry for films, he has always been a litterateur at heart. In the last

15 years alone, at least 10 of his poetry and prose collections have been published. However, it is his love for Bengali in general and Tagore in particular that inspired him to read the relatively less circulated works of the Nobel Laureate and adapt them for non-Bengali readers.

Through biographies and his own poetry, we get a glimpse of not just his early life in Dina, Delhi and Bombay, when he was known as Sampooran Singh and not Gulzar, but also his love for progressive literature. He never tires of recalling that when he was in Delhi in his pre-teen years, an Urdu translation of Tagore's *The Gardener* triggered what would be a life-long love of Bengali literature.

## **15.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME**

Dear Learner, the objective in this lesson is to acquaint you with the life and works of Gulzar so that you get a fairly good idea of the nuances of Gulzar's writings, both prose and poetry, to prepare well for your semester end examination.

Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will

- be acquainted with the life of Gulzar, a distinguished Indian poet and lyricist
- be able to name some of Gulzar's works and the thematic concerns in his work as well as analyse him as a writer of short story

## **15.3 GULZAR: HIS LIFE**

Gulzar was born on 18 August 1936 in a Kalra Sikh family, to Makhan Singh Kalra and Sujana Kaur, in Dina, Jhelum District now in Pakistan. During his younger days, Sampooran took up many small jobs in Mumbai, one of them was in a garage where he used to touch up accident cars by creating shades of paint, in his own words "I had a knack for colors." His father initially rebuked him for being a writer. He took the pen name Gulzar Deenvi and later simply Gulzar.

He started his career with music director S.D. Burman as a lyricist in the 1963 film *Bandini* and worked with many music directors including R. D. Burman, Salil Chowdhury, Vishal Bhardwaj and A. R. Rahman. He directed films such as *Aandhi* and *Mausam* and TV series *Mirza Ghalib* during the 1970s and 1980s.

Gulzar has written lyrics and dialogues for several Doordarshan TV serials including *Jungle Book*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Hello Zindagi*, *Guchche* and *Potli Baba Ki* with Vishal Bhardwaj. He has more recently written and narrated for the children's audiobook series *Karadi Tales*. Gulzar is also associated with Eklavya foundation, an NGO based in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh working in the field of education. He has written stories, poetry for the magazine *Chakmak*. In April 2013, Gulzar was appointed as the Chancellor of the Assam University. Gulzar is married to actress Raakhee. The couple has a daughter, Meghna Gulzar (Bosky). Meghna Gulzar grew up with her mother and father and, after completing her graduation in films from New York University, went on to direct films like *Filhaal*, *Just Married* and *Dus Kahaniyaan* and has also authored the biography of her father titled *Gulzar*, in 2004.

Gulzar primarily writes in Urdu and Punjabi; besides several dialects of Hindi such as Braj Bhasha, Khariboli, Haryanvi and Marwari. His poetry is in Triveni type of stanza. His poems are published in three compilations: *Chand Pukhraaj Ka*, *Raat Pashminey Ki* and *Pandrah Paanch Pachattar*. His short stories are published in *Raavi-paar* (also known as *Dustkhat* in Pakistan) and *Dhuan* (smoke). He has written ghazals for Ghazal Maestro Jagjit Singh's albums "Marasim"(1999) and "Koi Baat Chale"(2006).

Gulzar, is well known as an Indian poet, lyricist, dialogue, scriptwriter and film director. He was awarded Padma Bhushan, the third-highest civilian award in India in 2004, the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Dadasaheb Phalke Award — the highest award in Indian cinema in 2002 and 2013 respectively. He has won several Indian National Film Awards, 20 Filmfare Awards, one Academy Award and one Grammy Award.

#### 15.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS (SAQs)

Dear learner, before moving on to the next section, let us take a short break where you can try to answer the questions given below. This will also refresh your mind and you will be able to approach the next section with more attention.

1. Gulzar's birth place is now in which country?
2. "I had a knack for colours" said Gulzar during working in which profession?
3. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are movies directed by Gulzar
4. In 2013, Gulzar was appointed as the Vice Chancellor of which University?
5. Gulzar primarily writes in which languages?
6. Gulzar was awarded Padma Bhushan in the year \_\_\_\_\_.

#### 15.5 HIS WORKS

Gulzar's short stories are a picture gallery of diverse aspects of life, whose portrayal by him is driven everywhere by a vision that penetrates deep into the core reality of things. These include stories of ordinary relationships of common people that present some peculiar aspect, and also stories of the downtrodden and marginalised people that are suffused with human sympathy. Similarly, there are stories of kings and potentates, and also of Thakurs and Rajputs, and likewise of dacoits.

*Addha* and *Khairu* are very interesting short stories in which the characters delineated are not of the ordinary type. Another story *Mard* is based on the relationship of a mother and her son. *Sanjh* is the story of a Lala and his old wife. In *Zinda*, Raja Sahib's only son, who is a cripple, does not like people to take pity on him because he wants to live by the power of his will that "my limbs exist because of me, I do not exist because of my limbs." But when his

father gets him married, he loses his patience because earlier when people would take pity on him, he would summon the power of his will to exist; now when those very people start making fun of him, he can accept the fact of his being a cripple but not becoming the butt of ridicule. Both are existential situations, but while escape is possible from the first there is no escape from the second. Other interesting stories are *Bimal Da* and *Sunset Boulevard*.

*Vahima* is an example of pure fantasy. Gulzar himself was not sure of what name he should give to the story. First its title was *Vahima*, which was later changed to *Lekin*, perhaps because what occurs in it is supposed to be a reality. But it is not a reality; it is the commonly accepted conception of reality and non-reality. Through this story Gulzar has put a question mark before the common conception of reality, taking help of Krishnamurti's idea of reality and its difference from non-existence, which he calls a phenomenon of the human mind.

In the short story *Khauf*, he has depicted the kind of terror that paralyses the mind in an atmosphere of religious frenzy. *Raavi Paar* is another unique and intensely tragic story. The short story *Najum* (astrology) belongs to the genre that is called science fiction today. It talks of the sun, which is now extinct after burning for millions of years and is ten thousand light years away from us on the basis of the speed of light calculated at 1, 86,000 miles per second. Even now if a flash bursts forth, its flames touch a height of twenty to twenty-two miles and their light (after having travelled a distance of ten thousand light years) was seen on this earth once in 1841 and for the second time in 1854. These scientific events have been narrated, linking them with the letters of Mirza Ghalib's employees Kalu and Munir and knowledge of the stars with the beliefs of people of this age.

Like *Najum*, *Aag* and *Jangal Nama* are also enjoyable short stories, and one aspect of this joy is that young and old, high and low all can extract information/advice/ moral lesson from it.

Gulzar's own literary works comprise a rich corpus of children's literature: works like *Bosky Ka Panchtantra*, *Potli Baba Ki Kahaani*, and *Karadi Tales*, and the numerous poems, ditties and jingles he has composed for serials. *Nindiya Chor* reminds one of Gulzar's creations: the character of *Babla* from the poet's somewhat autobiographical movie *Kitaab*. The poems in this book, most of them in the form of conversations that a child has with his mother, read like the recitations of an innocuous *Babla*, one who expresses desire to be understood better in a world where no one seems to have empathy for him. The most poignant example of this in the book is the poem *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi*. Here the young child expresses his wish to enjoy the freedom of a bangle-seller, a gardener, a watchman — rather than manacle within his school uniform.

Many of his short stories centre or revolve around partition, religious passion, terrorism or fear. These stories are also as unique as some others are. Undoubtedly, thousands of stories must have been written on the subject of riots, but Gulzar's short stories stand apart and are unique.

There are stories in which there is the element of fantasy, or magic realism. Gulzar's galaxy of characters are all kinds of people — high and low, big and small, women, men, aged persons, children, youth — together with their actions, accomplishments and behaviour.

Gulzar has also written strong women characters for films like *Namkeen* and *Ijaazat*. Women occupy an authoritative position in some of his films. For example, Aarti Devi, in *Aandhi* sacrifices her home and married life to make her career in politics. At the end of the film, she succeeds in politics. In *Khushboo*, Kusum, the female protagonist wants to go to her mother-in-laws' house with dignity. She is portrayed as much stronger compared to her husband, Brindaban- the protagonist.

The feminist side of him is quite evident in *Baaghbaan*. Besides, Anandi Devi, in *Mere Apne*, sacrifices herself to put an end to the conflict between Shyam and Chainu. Ultimately, she becomes the symbol of peace. Death of Anandi Devi at the end of the film gives re-birth to Shyam and Chainu. Today,

women are playing different roles in the society and this is what some of Gulzar's films reflect. In *Kitaab*, Babla's sister is a working woman. In *Ijaazat*, Sudha is a schoolteacher who deserts her husband Mohinder because of his extra marital affair with Maya. She marries another man and makes Mohinder repent at the end of the film. In *Kinara*, Aarti Sanyal, the female protagonist is a classical dancer. In *Hu TuTu*, Malti Barve becomes the Chief Minister and her daughter Panna Barve fights against the system along with her boy friend, Aditya. Women are not property of their fathers' and husbands' in Gulzar's films. They have their own identity.

### **15.6 GULZAR AS A SHORT STORY WRITER**

Gulzar as story writer is not merely the creator of this wavelength or that wavelength. In his case a new aspect of life is unravelled in every story of his, a new level, a new angle, a new experience which reveals a mind or a consciousness not attached to this or that outlook, but to the truth of life in its entirety or that vast experience of life that does not create boundaries, does not raise enclosures, does not stop at any one level of relationship, hate, love, but looks right through realities and embraces all the varied facets of life and all dimensions of experience.

Most of Gulzar's short stories deal with the partition of India and Pakistan. Gulzar's family migrated to India at the partition time. Gulzar was thirteen years old when partition took place. In the Foreword to *Raavi Paar and Other Stories*, Gulzar writes: "I had witnessed the partition of India from very close quarters in 1947. It left me bruised and scarred. I cannot help but write about this excruciating period. I wrote the short stories with the background of the partition to try and get the painful experience out of my system."

His partition stories represent the agony of separation from native land and known people, and the travails of a common man interspersed with remarkable anecdotes of Gulzar's friends, the hassles of old age, the need for

companionship at that age and some stories deal with feelings of people and also surprisingly a bird. Gulzar's stories deal with loss - loss of land, loss of trust, loss of values, and lost individuals. The short stories represent many stages in a person's life and many incidents that one can identify with so as to reflect a complete circle of situations men can experience in life. Gulzar belongs to that section of creative writers who revolt against traditional storytelling, who experiment with the themes of their stories and assert that the technique of narration is also as important as the theme of the story.

### 15.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (CYP)

A. Answer the following questions:

1. Where was Gulzar born and in which year?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Write Gulzar's earlier pen name.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Write the name of Gulzar's father and mother.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Where did Gulzar work in the early days of his struggle in Bombay?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



5. Which poet inspired Gulzar most and why?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. What is the name of Gulzar's daughter?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Who is Gulzar's wife? What is she famous for?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What do Gulzar's partition stories reflect?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

B. Fill in the blanks:

1. Gulzar was born on .....in a Kalra Sikh family.
2. *The Gardener* is written by.....
3. *Raavi Paar* deals with .....stories.
4. Gulzar has won..... Awards.
5. Gulzar is famous for..... poetry.

### 15.8 Answer Key (SAQs) & (CYP)

(SAQs)

- |                     |                              |                   |
|---------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Pakistan         | 2. Painting cars in a Garage | 3. Aandhi, Mausam |
| 4. Assam University | 5. Urdu and Punjabi          | 6. 2004           |

**(CYP)**

- B.
1. 18 August 1936
  2. Rabindrnath Tagore
  3. Partition
  4. Sahitya Akademi and Dadasaheb Phalke
  5. blank verse

**15.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Write a brief character sketch of Gulzar.
2. Throw light on the creative talents of Gulzar.
3. Give an overview of the thematic concerns in Gulzar's poetry.
4. Give a brief account of the awards won by Gulzar.
5. Discuss Gulzar as a partition writer.

**15.10 LET US SUM UP**

The hues of life displayed in his short stories, the vastness of the experience, the art of developing an incident into a story, the intricacies of human psychology, the problems of the down trodden and man and woman relationship they articulate, or the way spirits and humans, forests, cosmos or planets have appeared in life not only expose the nuances of Gulzar's story-writing but also give the reader a close brush of various aspects of life's experiences which Gulzar has taken up. His artistic, creative, aesthetic treatment of it is such that everywhere some point, some hint, some secret, some unique thing that Gulzar has presented has taken the form of an event or a character, or story. And this is Gulzar's unique creative quality.

There is life's symphony in his stories and every note is distinct from the other. No story is a copy or imitation of any other story. Gulzar's short stories are the book of life. The ground is luxuriant, the atmosphere bright

and there is also provision for hilarity and happiness in the thick of life and, if one has the eye for it, also for meaningfulness and understanding of subtleties.

### **15.11 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Gulzar. *Selected Poems*. Translated by Pawan K Varma. New Delhi: Penguin Books. 2012.
- ◆ Gulzar. *A Poem A Day* . Harper Collins. 2020.

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## **POEMS - GULZAR**

- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 16.3 Gulzar : Poems and Analysis
- 16.4 Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs)
- 16.5 Profile of Translator
- 16.6 Check your Progress (CYP)
- 16.7 Answer Key (SAQs) & (CYP)
- 16.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 16.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.10 Suggested Reading

### **16.1 INTRODUCTION**

Gulzar, an Indian poet and film lyricist, is a progressive poet in popular culture. The poetry of his literary anthologies and the poetry that he uses in his cinema, talk to each other, thereby complementing each other to establish the literary unity that Gulzar achieves thereby establishing a new poetic norm which gained popularity during the last half a century thus contributing to the multicultural milieu of Indian society. The poems have unusual usage of imagery

and the distinct use of language be it the borrowing of words from different languages or the use of strange and severe words and themes - love, social concern, nature etc.

Gulzar writes preferably in Hindustani language (a mix of Hindi and Urdu). While being interviewed by Saba Mahmood Bashir, Gulzar stated: “Maine koshish kee hai ki zubaan poori tarah se Hindustani rahe, jis me urdu or hindi ka mila-jula ganga jamuna mizaaj milta hai. Kahin kahin dono ki madad se aur kabhi kabhi angreze ke istemaal se bhi baat pahuncha dene ki kosis kee hai.” (I have tried to write entirely in Hindustani, which is a blend of Urdu and Hindi. At times, I have taken help from both, and sometimes I have used English to communicate the message.

## **16.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME**

Dear Learner, the objective in this lesson is to familiarize you with the poems of Gulzar so that you get a fairly good idea of the thematic concerns and writing style of his poetry to prepare well for your semester end examination.

Dear learner, after reading this lesson, you will

- be able to summarize Gulzar’s poems that are prescribed for your study
- be able to list some of the thematic concerns in his poems, as well as critically appreciate the poems by focusing on symbols, metaphors, imagery, etc.
- appreciate Gulzar as a poet by making an assessment of his writing style

## **16.3 GULZAR: POEMS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Amaltas**

Whenever the window at the back opened

I could see the Amaltas tree, a little away,  
Standing alone  
Its branches spread like a bird's wings  
Birds would seduce it every day  
With stories of their flight  
Putting their acrobatic skills on display  
They would touch the clouds  
Talk about the joys of the cool breeze  
Holding the storm by its hand  
Perhaps, it too tried to fly yesterday,  
See how it lies in the middle of the road, flat on its face.

### **Explanation**

The poet says that whenever at the back of room window opened, he saw that there was an Amaltas tree. It stood there all alone. Its branches were spread like the wings of a bird.

The poet says that birds would come to the Amaltas tree every day and would lure the tree to fly. They would tell it the stories of their flight and of touching the sky. They would show off their flying skills and how they reached the heights and touched the clouds. They would tell the tree about the joys they felt of flying in the cool breeze.

Hearing all this, the tree also developed a strong desire to fly and touch the clouds and reach the sky. And last night, the poet says, a storm struck the tree and in the strong winds, the tree also tried to fly. And now, the tree lies flat on its face in the middle of the road. The tree's ambition to fly like the birds failed and uprooted it lay flat on the road.

Amaltas, also known as the golden rain tree, is one of the most beautiful

of all the tropical trees. It is an ornamental tree with showy racemes, up to 2 inches long, with bright, yellow gold, fragrant flowers. These flowers are attractive to bees and butterflies. Its trunk consists of hard reddish wood, growing up to 40 feet tall. The wood is hard and heavy; it is used for cabinet, inlay work, etc. The fruits are dark-brown cylindrical pods. The sweet blackish pulp of the seedpod is used as a mild laxative.

### **Seasons**

When the snow melts in the mountains  
And the mist lifts from the valleys  
The seeds will waken languorously  
Open their heavy eyes  
Verdure will cascade down the hill side  
Look closely: in the midst of spring  
There will be traces of seasons gone by  
In the sorrowful eyes of opening buds  
Will be the moistness of tears not yet dry.

### **Explanation**

As the season changes and summer comes, the snow in the mountains starts to melt and the valley clears of fog. At this moment, the seeds sprout and they wake up opening their heavy eyes because of the burden of the harsh winter season. The seeds' sprouting gives birth to new life and new vegetation springs up along the hill sides.

However, the poet observes that a closer look at the scenario gives a different picture. Things are not as they appear. In the midst of the happiness of the new life, and the joys of the coming of the spring season, there always remain some signs of the sorrows of the past that is, of the seasons gone by.

The opening bud's mournful eyes have tears for the sorrow of the past and they haven't dried up yet.

A season is a division of the year marked by changes in weather, ecology and hours of daylight. Generally, the four season division, spring, summer, autumn, and winter is accepted. The four seasons can vary significantly in characteristics, and can prompt changes in the world around them.

In the spring, the weather is warmer and seeds take root and vegetation begins to grow. In the summer, temperatures increase to the hottest of the year. In the autumn, plants begin to grow dormant and the temperatures slowly begin to cool again. Winter often brings a chill. Some areas experience snow while others see only cold and rain.

### **The Heart Seeks**

The heart seeks again those moments of leisure  
When all day and night we just sat thinking of the beloved

Ghalib

The heart seeks again those moments of leisure  
Lying in the courtyard in the mellow winter sun  
The shade of your aanchal pulled over my eyes  
Face down, and sometimes on one's side  
Or, on summer nights, when the east wind blows  
To lie awake for long on cold white sheets  
Sprawled on the roof, gazing at the stars  
On some cold snowy night perhaps  
To sit again in the embrace of that mountain



And listen to the silence echoing in the valley  
The heart seeks again those moments of leisure  
When all day and night we just sat thinking of the beloved.

### **Explanation**

The poem begins with a couplet by Ghalib which sets the mood of the poem as it talks of the nostalgia the poet feels as he remembers the days and the nights he spent thinking of his beloved.

The poet says that his heart seeks those leisured moments when he used to relax in the courtyard in the soft winter sun, under the soothing shade of his beloved's *aanchal* that would cover his eyes. Sometimes he would lay down on his face and sometimes on one side.

The poet then remembers the long summer nights when he would lay awake for long hours on the cold white sheets spread out on the roof. Lying on the roof, he would gaze at the stars with the east wind blowing softly and somehow missing the treasured moments spent in the company of his beloved.

The poet then remembers the cold snowy night. He longs to relax in the lap of the mountains. He wishes to listen to the soothing silence echoing in the valley.

The poet concludes by saying that he desires some moments of leisure so that he can relax all through the day and night sitting in the quiet thinking only of his beloved.

The poem ends with the couplet by Ghalib with which it begins to highlight the poet's yearning for his beloved.

### **Distance**

The slight dip of your head on the pillow, is still there  
The sheets hold the moist scent of your body

My hands are fragrant with the smell your face  
On my forehead is the stamp of your lips  
You are so close that I cannot see you.  
Move away a little, so I can see your face.

### **Explanation**

The poet remembers the day he spent in the company of his beloved. The poet says that the depression caused on the pillow by his beloved's head is still there. He further says that the sheets are still charged with the moist fragrance of her body. The poet's hands are still filled with the aroma of having held her face. On the poet's forehead is the impression of her lips. Everywhere around him he can feel her fragrance.

The beloved is not there with the poet at the moment, yet he can feel her presence around him. Even after a long gap his beloved's presence is still fresh in his memory. In his memory the beloved is so close to the poet that he cannot even see her face and he urges her to move away a little so that he can see her face. Despite the physical distance between the poet and his beloved, the sweet memories make him feel her presence next to him.

### **Have you seen the soul ?**

Have you seen the soul, ever sensed it?  
Have you ever felt the mist, alive, alert,  
Soaked yourself in its breathing, milky whiteness?  
Or else, when ripples of water tinkle  
While on a boat on a lake on the onset of night  
Have you ever heard the sobbing wind wail?  
When a great many shadows run

To catch the full moon on a snow-white night  
Standing against the wall of a church on the shore  
Have you sensed your womb resounding?  
The body, burnt a hundred times, is still a clod of earth  
The soul, burnt but once, becomes gold  
Have you seen the soul, ever sensed it?

### **Explanation**

The poet starts the poem by asking the question that have you ever seen the soul i.e. your true inner self. He then asks whether you have ever sensed the presence of the soul within. He further asks whether you have felt the presence of mist, charged with life around you and have you ever immersed yourself in its milky whiteness that is, have you felt the pristine nature around you.

He further asks, have you ever heard the lament of the wind that is, the sadness when the ripples of water make a sound and when you are on a boat on a lake when night is approaching.

He then asks, while standing against the wall of a church on a full moon night, when the clouds run after the beautiful full moon, have you ever sensed your womb resonating that is, felt the vitality of your life.

The poet says that the body, no matter the trials it undergoes, is still a mass of earth that is earthly. However, the soul when it undergoes the trials and tribulations of life, if for once only, undergoes a transformation and becomes gold like.

The poet concludes by asking the same question, have you ever seen the soul/ sensed its presence.

In many religious, philosophical and mythological traditions, soul is the spiritual or immaterial part of a human being or animal, regarded

as immortal that is the incorporeal essence of a living being. Religions such as Hinduism hold that all biological organisms have souls. In Hinduism, the Sanskrit word most corresponding to soul is Aatma, which can mean soul or even God. When the Aatma becomes embodied it is called birth, when the Aatma leaves a body it is called death. The Aatma transmigrates from one body to another body based on karmic, that is, performed actions.

#### **16.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS (SAQs)**

Dear learner, let us stop for a minute. Now that you have read the poems, you can take a moment to go through the exercise given below.

1. Which poem begins with a couplet by Ghalib?
2. Amaltas is also known as the \_\_\_\_\_ tree.
3. In which poem does Gulzar talk about the seeds' sprouting and new vegetation springing up?
4. What does the poet's heart seek in the poem "The Heart Seeks"?
5. In which poem does the poet reminisce about the day he spent in the company of his beloved?
6. "The body, burnt a hundred times, is still a clod of earth/The soul, burnt but once, becomes gold". In which poem do these lines occur?

#### **16.5 PROFILE OF TRANSLATOR**

Pavan K. Varma, writer/diplomat, is a graduate in History from St. Stephen's College, after which he took a degree in Law from the University of Delhi. He joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1976. He has been Press Secretary to the President of India, the spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs, Joint Secretary for Africa, High Commissioner for India in Cyprus, Director of the Nehru Centre in London and Director General of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi.

A writer of depth and insight, he has written over a dozen books including the highly successful *Krishna: The Playful Divine* on India's most popular deity, the critically applauded biography of the Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib, *Ghalib: The Man, The Times, and the Havelis of Old Delhi*. His first book on a contemporary subject was the path breaking *The Great Indian Middle Class* (published also in French), followed by the astoundingly successful *Being Indian: The Truth About Why the 21st Century Will Be India's* (Viking/Penguin 2004). *Being Indian* was described by *The Economist* as "one of the most subtle recent attempts to analyze the continent-sized mosaic of India and simplify it for the general reader." It was published by Random House, in the United Kingdom, as *Being Indian: Inside the Real India* in March 2005. The Japanese, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Italian translations of this book were very well received. Another recent work is a witty adaptation of Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra*. This volume, *Kama Sutra: The Art of Making Love to a Woman*, was published early in 2007 by Roli Books and has been translated into French and German. Mr. Varma has also translated the poetry of Kaifi Azmi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and Gulzar, all published by Penguin.

His latest book titled: *Becoming Indian: The Unfinished Revolution of Culture and Identity* (Penguin-Allen Lane) was launched in February, 2010 and deals with the pivotal issues of culture and identity for postcolonial societies, particularly in an age of aggressive globalization where co-option is the sub-text in the field of culture. A Hindi translation has been published, and a French edition has also come out.

Mr. Varma was conferred an honorary doctoral degree for his contribution to the fields of diplomacy, literature, culture and aesthetics by the University of Indianapolis in 2005. A widely admired public speaker, Pavan K. Varma, is currently the Indian Ambassador to Bhutan.

## 16.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (CYP)

### Fill in the blanks:-

1. The tree's branches were spread like a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The birds would seduce the tree everyday with stories of their \_\_\_\_\_.
3. After seeing the birds fly, the tree tried to \_\_\_\_\_.
4. At the end, the tree lies in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the road.
5. Every day the poet is given a \_\_\_\_\_ to spend.
6. The poet has to repay the debt owned by the \_\_\_\_\_.

### Write whether the statement is true/false:-

- A. The poet says that he is not able to spend his day the way he wants to. \_\_\_\_\_.
- B. The poet wants to spend a full day with his companion. \_\_\_\_\_.

## 16.7 ANSWER KEY (SAQs) & (CYP)

### (SAQs)

1. "The Heart Seeks"
2. golden rain
3. "Seasons"
4. The moments of leisure
5. "Distance"
6. "Have you seen the soul"

### (CYP)

### Fill in the blanks:-

1. The tree's branches were spread like a bird's wings.
2. The birds would seduce the tree everyday with stories of their flight.
3. After seeing the birds fly, the tree tried to fly.

4. At the end, the tree lies in the middle of the road.
5. Every day the poet is given a full day to spend.
6. The poet has to repay the debt owned by the generations before.

**Write whether the statement is true/false:-**

- A. The poet says that he is not able to spend his day the way he wants to. **True**
- B. The poet wants to spend a full day with his companion. **True**

### **16.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. What did the poet see when the back window opened?
- Q2. What would the birds talk about?
- Q3. What did the tree try to do?
- Q4. What happened to the tree at the end of the poem?
- Q5. What happens to the seeds when the snow in the mountains melts?
- Q6. What would be there in the midst of the spring season?
- Q7. Why the eyes of the opening buds are sorrowful?
- Q8. Why have the tears not dried up in the eyes of the opening buds?
- Q9. What is it that the poet is given every day?
- Q10. What do the debt owners claim?
- Q11. What does the poet yearn to have?
- Q12. What is the true desire of the poet?
- Q13. What does the poet seek in the poem?

- Q14. Where is the poet lying in the mellow winter sun?
- Q15. What does the poet do on summer nights?
- Q16. What does the poet want to do on some cold snowy night?
- Q17. What does the poet mean by the alive, alert mist?
- Q18. How does the poet describe the wind?
- Q19. Why do the great shadows run?
- Q20. How does the soul become gold?
- Q21. What do the sheets hold?
- Q22. Why does the poet urge his beloved to move away a little?
- Q23. Why cannot the poet see his beloved?
- Q24. What is there on the pillow?
- Q25. Give a critical appraisal of the poem "Seasons."

**ANS 25:** Gulzar is a contemporary poet writing in free style. The symbolic and the imagistic language gives an access to the readers about the way the poet relates them and the direct presentation of things, his experiences and the exploration of tone is clearly visible in the poem and hence is imagistic.

Gulzar tends to image the situation into the reader's mind from the very title of the poem "Seasons." This refers to the peculiar characteristic of a particular season "spring." The direct expression of snow melting in the valleys with the coming of spring to the moistness of new buds is visible with the images in the first paragraph. The metaphors in his writing make visible the truth which is not possible if it is stated plainly. Gulzar accentuate the beauty with pain through his unstated comparison between the coming of spring in the first paragraph and the pain of buds in the next paragraph.



The metaphor of “season” is presented as an extended metaphor running throughout the poem to build the comparison. This is an example of metonymy which is a metaphor. In general, metonymy means when something being is compared or referred to by something closely associated with it. Gulzar intends to portray the onset of spring season after winter. Rise in temperature melts the snow and the seeds get covered under the layers of snow. There they get a chance to bloom. Blooming makes the valley turn green and appear lively that previously looked barren land in winter. Here the images of snow melting, budding of plants, greenery over the valley goes usual through the form of the links in a chain and forms an example of parallelism.

Through word choice, style and meaning in the first paragraph, Gulzar’s shows the sensitivity of seasonal change. He describes the characteristics of spring season after the winter. He is a native of Pakistan and India (north western side) and it incorporates his sensitivity of the colder places. He images the coolest mountains and greener part of it. The two countries witness a quick transition from winter to spring. Winters are generally intense when snow and fog covers the land and atmosphere. In the first two lines he gives his anxiety for the spring to come and make the valley green again. Spring is known as a season of new beginning and therefore, Gulzar writes the poem in future tense reflecting his hope and ideas of rebirth. At this time, fresh buds bloom as the weather favors them.

The poet tries to capture the blooming of buds in spring symbolizing the youthful vigor and the freshness. He attributes human qualities to the seeds which lends poetic truthful beauty to the poem. This phrase can also be inferred as the bud’s wait for spring to open up their leaves in order to become brighter flowers or plants.

Moving forward, the second paragraph speaks about the pain and

sorrow of the bud's unfortunate fate over the fortunate ones. This is being indicated in the second last line of the poem which refers to the buds that could not bloom in the new season as they could not survive the severe conditions of the winter: "In the sorrowful eyes of opening buds" highlight Gulzar's psychological and emotional force of figures.

**Fill in the blanks:-**

1. The seeds will open their \_\_\_\_\_ eyes.
2. In the midst of spring there will be traces of \_\_\_\_\_ gone by.
3. Verdure will cascade down the \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The seeds will \_\_\_\_\_ languorously.
5. On summer nights, the poet would gaze at the \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The poet wants to sit in the embrace of the \_\_\_\_\_.
7. The poet wants to listen to the \_\_\_\_\_ echoing in the valley.
8. In the poem, the poet seeks moments of \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The poet's hands are fragrant with the \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The poet urges his beloved to move \_\_\_\_\_.
11. The poet's forehead is stamped with \_\_\_\_\_.
12. The beloved is so \_\_\_\_\_, the poet cannot see her face.
13. The body, according to the poet, burnt a hundred times is still a \_\_\_\_\_.
14. The poet asks have you seen the \_\_\_\_\_.
15. The soul \_\_\_\_\_ but once, becomes gold.
16. The poet asks, have you sensed your \_\_\_\_\_ resounding?

## 16.9 LET US SUM UP

Gulzar has spent nearly 53 years writing poetry, short stories, lyrics and screenplays. His total output, as a poet and lyricist, comes to more than 600 songs and an equal number of poems. A considerable portion of the songs, 30-40 of them, are targeted at children.

Gulzar is the master of expressing subtle feelings through his poems. The philosophic and symbolic notes of the poems express an intellectual delight along with an experience of the feeling. Gulzar's poetical songs are the peak of his creativity. Today, Gulzar, in Bollywood is on the top in the field of song writing for films. His songs have become the 'unique selling point' of films made by others. The song from the film *Mausam*, *Lakdi ki kaathi* to the Oscar winning *Jai ho* have enthralled millions. Being a poet, Gulzar succeeds to reflect sensitively the inner feelings of the characters through the creative medium of poetry. His unique and much acclaimed contribution to the world of poetry continues to reflect our changing times, with fresh idiom and delicate turn of phrase. Gulzar reached the zenith of limelight after years of hard work and is a source of inspiration for all those who are struggling to establish their lives. He has written short stories which are full of the music of life with each story presenting a different aspect and different experience of life.

A native of Pakistan and India, Gulzar inherits the tradition of both the nations. His way of communication through images in his works reflects his diverse and heterogeneous ideas and radical thinking. Thus, the vigor of Gulzar's poetry set in free verse have made the activity of translation possible irrespective of the fact that the latter is a more difficult task than any other types of translation.

The task of a translator is to interpret a source poem's layer of meaning and translate it in target language. He has to be conscious of the linguistic and cultural adaptations to make it easy for the readers to understand the

translated text without much pain and efforts making the transcreation a purposeful endeavour. In this context, the English version of Gulzar's poem by Varma is faithful to the original spirit. It owes to the fundamental rules of translation as proposed by Eugene Nida i.e. "making sense; conveying the spirit and manner of the original; having a natural and easy form of expression and producing a similar response."

#### **16.10 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Bashir, Saba Mahmood. "Lamhon Par Baithe Nazmein ( A spectra of Language and Form)." *I Swallowed the Moon: The Poetry of Gulzar*. Noida: Harpercollins, 2013.

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