

# LITERATURE AND THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

English Language Core Course for UG Programmes



Self  
Learning  
Material  
**B21EG02LC**



**SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY**

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala



# SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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*To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.*

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To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

## Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

# **Literature and the Contemporary World**

Course Code: B21EG02LC  
Semester -III

**Language Core (English)  
for All UG Programmes  
Self Learning Material**



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OPEN UNIVERSITY

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**Literature**  
**and the Contemporary World**  
**Semester -III**



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OPEN UNIVERSITY

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# MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear

I greet all of you with deep delight and great excitement. I welcome you to the Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University was established in September 2020 as a state initiative for fostering higher education in open and distance mode. We shaped our dreams through a pathway defined by a dictum 'access and quality define equity'. It provides all reasons to us for the celebration of quality in the process of education. I am overwhelmed to let you know that we have resolved not to become ourselves a reason or cause a reason for the dissemination of inferior education. It sets the pace as well as the destination. The name of the University centres around the aura of Sreenarayanaguru, the great renaissance thinker of modern India. His name is a reminder for us to ensure quality in the delivery of all academic endeavours.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University rests on the practical framework of the popularly known "blended format". Learner on distance mode obviously has limitations in getting exposed to the full potential of classroom learning experience. Our pedagogical basket has three entities viz Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling and Virtual modes. This combination is expected to provide high voltage in learning as well as teaching experiences. Care has been taken to ensure quality endeavours across all the entities.

The University is committed to provide you stimulating learning experience. The UG programmes in all the disciplines are designed at par with that of the quality academic programme of the state universities in the country. This course offers a reflective contemplation of the literary world on the contemporary issues, aligning with topics such as environmental issues, the human-technology bond, gender inequalities, cultural and ethical dealings, etc. We assure you that the university student support services will closely stay with you for the redressal of your grievances during your studentship.

Feel free to write to us about anything that you feel relevant regarding the academic programme.

Wish you the best.



Regards,  
Dr. P.M. Mubarak Pasha

01.08.2023

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# BLOCK - 01

## Climate Change

# Unit 1

## The Moment

- Margaret Atwood

### Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ familiarise themselves with the poem's structure, language, and poetic devices
- ▶ acquire details regarding the major themes of the poem
- ▶ get an insight on Margaret Atwood as an ecofeminist
- ▶ get acquainted with the anthropocentric approach of human beings

### Prerequisites

Margaret Atwood is a well known Canadian writer famous for her fiction and feminist outlook. She was born in 1939 in Ottawa and grew up in Ontario, Quebec, and Toronto. She started writing when she was only five years old. Atwood published her first collection of poetry, *The Circle Game*, in 1966. She published her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, in 1969.

Her critical work, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, published in 1972, had a great influence on the way Canadians understood their literary traditions. Atwood's work encompasses a multitude of themes such as gender and identity, environmental issues, power dynamics, religion and myth, and human conditions. Her writing includes elements of science fiction, speculative fiction, and social commentary. Atwood's most important works are *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Cat's Eye* (1988), *The Blind Assassin* (2000), *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *MaddAddam* (2013).

The poem "The Moment" is part of Atwood's anthology *The Circle Game*, written in 1964. It won the Governor General's Award in 1966. "The Moment" discusses the importance of ecological interconnectedness and the transience of human nature. It also questions the notion of ownership. The concept of ecological interconnectedness lies at the centre of preserving and conserving nature. It is important to maintain the delicate balance between various species and nature itself. Each species plays a unique role in the ecosystem, contributing to its survival. However, human beings' untoward actions jeopardise biodiversity. Human beings' desire to own the Earth has led to catastrophic consequences. Atwood brings this to our attention through her poetic form.

Atwood has effectively used her position as an author to advocate the need for environmental conservation and sustainability. Her concerns for the impact of climate change are reflected in her works. Her acclaimed dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) portrays a future world destroyed by environmental disasters.



## Key Themes

Ecology, Nature, Environment, Love, Time, Fleeting nature of life

## Discussion

The poem "The Moment" examines how people view their control over the natural world. People believe that they are in control of nature and the Earth and are its true owners. Atwood contests the idea that human beings possess and rule nature.

centric mindset of dominating nature for personal gain. This perspective echoes historical and ongoing practices of human exploitation of natural resources without considering the ecological consequences.

The second stanza presents a dramatic change. The exact moment humans gravitate towards the notion of ownership, nature begins to re-

Margaret Atwood's acclaimed novel *The Handmaid's Tale* was dedicated to Mary Webster, one of the first women accused of witchcraft in New England in the 17th century.

The human mentioned in the first stanza considers himself 'successful' and confidently asserts that he owns everything. In his opinion, after many years of hard work and struggles, he has earned the right to own not just a room but a house, a half-acre, a square mile, an island, and also a country. He has worked hard to own a half-acre of land on this square mile, where they have built a house that includes the room in which he stands. He legally owns everything, including the room, house, and land, and in one way, he owns this island and country since he is a citizen of that country. Whether it is a room or a country, he believes that he occupies the centre position. The notion that humans occupy the centre position of nature and that nature itself stands for humans is a fallacy. The first stanza reveals the moment of pride, where someone has achieved success after a long period of struggle. The successive progression from a room to a country is indicative of the progress made by the individual, and the word 'own' is indicative of their desire to dominate and possess. The poem delves into the human desire for ownership and control over land and resources. The protagonist claims possession of their surroundings, reflecting a common anthropo-

coil from the humans. The withdrawal highlights the erstwhile attachment between humans and the environment. The moment humans claim ownership of their surroundings, the trees loosen their soft arms that protectively hold the humans. The birds take back their language, the cliffs fissure and collapse themselves, and the air itself moves back like a wave, suffocating the humans. The personification of natural elements such as trees and cliffs exhibit their agency and autonomy and their ability to respond to human actions. The second stanza discusses the inherent human folly behind the notion of ownership.

In the final stanza, the environment is heard denying the humans' claim of ownership in firm, authoritative sentences. Nature says, "No! You own nothing!" Nature reminds humans that they were mere visitors who took the liberty of proclaiming ownership. Human accomplishments such as climbing a mountain and planting flags are irrelevant compared to the grand scheme of nature. The poet refers to the transient nature of human life in comparison with the timelessness of the natural world. Regardless of the battles fought and won, humans have never possessed nature. Nature



never belonged to mankind. The humans never owned it. The poem reveals that, contrary to beliefs, it is nature that owns humans. It is impossible for humans to own and control nature. By personifying natural elements and questioning human entitlement, the poem encourages humility, recognition of ecological interconnectedness, and a deeper appreciation for the environment. It urges readers to reevaluate their relationship with nature, promoting a more sustainable and respectful approach to the natural world.

“The Moment” is a poem featuring a lot of literary devices but lacks a clear rhyme scheme. Literary devices are employed to enhance the text's depth and aid readers in deciphering its hidden meanings.

### 1.1.1 Poetic devices in the poem

Poetic devices are literary devices used in the poetry.

#### a) **Imagery**

Imagery is the use of descriptive words or language to create a mental image. Atwood uses vivid and evocative imagery to create mental images. The lines, “you stand in the centre of your room,/ house, half-acre, square-mile, island, country”, “when the trees unloose their

soft arms from around you” and “the cliffs fissure and collapse” are examples of powerful visual imagery in the poem.

#### b) **Personification**

The poem personifies elements of nature, giving them human-like qualities. For example, the trees “unloose their soft arms,” the birds “take back their language,” and the cliffs “fissure and collapse.” This personification adds depth and emotion to the natural elements, making them feel alive and responsive.

#### c) **Alliteration**

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line of a poem. For example, the sound /f/ in “cliffs fissure”

#### d) **Symbolism**

The idea of the man standing at the centre of various spaces such as a room, house, half acre, country and an island symbolises man’s desire for greater things.

#### e) **Simile:**

A Simile is a figure of speech that compares two different things or ideas using the words “like” or “as”. For example, “the air moves back from you like a wave.”

Atwood’s literary office is called O.W.Toad, which is an anagram of Atwood.

She is the co-inventor of the LongPen, a device that allows authors to remotely sign books and connect with readers through the internet, making virtual book signings possible.



## Recap

- ▶ Atwood is an acclaimed Canadian writer
- ▶ The poem “The Moment” explores a significant point of realisation in the life of the central character
- ▶ The poet uses a second person narrative to create a more personal connection with the reader
- ▶ The narrator describes a moment when you feel you have achieved everything in your life, a moment of profound achievement and fulfilment
- ▶ The successive progression from a room to a country is indicative of the progress made by the individual
- ▶ However, in this moment of triumph, the natural world around you seems to react in an unexpected manner
- ▶ The trees loosen their soft arms that held them, the birds take back their language, the cliffs crumble and the air withdraws like a wave, making it difficult for you to breathe
- ▶ At that moment, the environment seems to whisper that you have never owned it
- ▶ It was the environment that embraced you, not the other way round
- ▶ The poem emphasises the fleeting nature of human existence in comparison with the enduring presence of nature
- ▶ The poem points to the transient nature of human life and human achievements

## Objective Questions

1. Who wrote the poem “The Moment”?
2. What was the realisation that came over the man?
3. “...you stand in the centre of your room, house, half-acre, square-mile, island, country knowing at last how you got there.” What does this line suggest?
4. What did the trees do when man assumed ownership over nature?
5. What did the bird do when man assumed ownership over nature?
6. What did the air do when man assumed ownership over nature?
7. What are the main themes of the poem?
8. How does the poem emphasise the enduring presence of nature?



## Answers

1. Margaret Atwood
2. He owns nothing in the world
3. It suggests the hard work the man put in and the material achievements he made
4. The trees loosened their soft arms from around him
5. The birds claimed their language back
6. The air withdrew like a wave in the sea
7. The transient nature of human existence and the interconnectedness of humans and nature
8. By juxtaposing it with the transient nature of human existence

## Assignments

1. How does the poem "The Moment" encourage the readers to reflect on the actions and their lives?
2. Identify literary works that deal with climate change.
3. Discuss the importance of conservation of nature and environment.
4. Write an essay on a significant moment in your life when you felt a sense of achievement or ownership.
5. Prepare an appreciation of the poem "The Moment."
6. Explore the role of Margaret Atwood in activities related to environmentalism.

## Suggested Reading

1. Dopp, Jamie. *Words for a Small Planet: Ecocritical Views of Atwood's Fiction*, Lexington Books, 2012.
2. Howells, Coral Ann. *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
3. Ingersoll, Earl. *Margaret Atwood: Conversations*, Ontario Review Press, 1991.
4. Nischik, Reingard M. *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*. Camden House, 2002.
5. Solnit, Rebecca. *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*. Haymarket Books, 2016.



## Unit 2

# “Almost Everything is Black and White”

(Speech at Parliament Square, London, 31 October, 2018)

- Greta Thunberg

### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ get an insight on Greta Thunberg as an environmental activist
- ▶ get an idea about the theme of the essay “Almost Everything is Black and White”
- ▶ acquire an awareness of the impact of climate change
- ▶ acquire themselves with the need for sustainable development

### Prerequisites

Greta Tintin Eleonora Ernman Thunberg is a Swedish environmental activist renowned for exhorting world leaders to take action to solve the climate change crisis. Greta Thunberg was born in 2003 in Stockholm, Sweden. Greta began her strike against the climate change crisis in August 2018, when she was 15 years old. She held her ‘School Strike for Climate’ outside the Swedish Parliament. She demanded that the Swedish government take stronger measures to combat climate change. Soon, other students also organised similar protests in their own communities. Greta, together with the fellow students, organised a school climate strike movement under the name ‘Fridays for Future.’ Her speech delivered at the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit, in which she exclaimed, "How dare you?" ensured her rise to world fame. She received numerous awards and honours, including nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. Greta has become a prominent figure in the youth climate movement, inspiring millions of young people across the globe to join the fight against climate change.

### Keywords

Greta Thunberg, The Impact of Climate Change, Paris Agreement, Kyoto Protocol



## Discussion

Greta Thunberg delivered the speech, “Almost Everything is Black and White” on October 31, 2018, at Parliament Square in London. In her speech, she reflects on her understanding

of climate change and the need to take measures to prevent it. This essay is published as part of the book, *No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference*, co-authored by Greta Thunberg.

Greta Thunberg begins by recalling how she came across the words climate change and

Greta Thunberg was named Time Magazine’s Person of the Year in 2019.

global warming when she was eight years old. She found it strange that human beings, who are just one among the millions of species on Earth, are responsible for this phenomenon. She wondered why there are no strict regulations set to prevent it when it is such a risk. To her, the issue is very clear- either we move towards the catastrophe without qualms or fight against it.

Thunberg highlights the need for immediate action to reduce greenhouse gas emission. She states that countries like the UK and Sweden should reduce emissions by at least 15 percent every year to stay below a 2° C warming target. But no one discusses these issues. No one discusses the greenhouse gases locked in the system or the increased rate of air pollution. She emphasises the importance of addressing the aspect of equity and climate justice to make global agreements like the Paris Agreement and Kyoto Protocol effective. She argues that wealthier nations like the UK and Sweden must take significant responsibility in reducing emissions to help poorer countries like India and Nigeria develop sustainable infrastructure.

Greta is frustrated over the fact that no one takes climate change as an emergency. Even those who acknowledge the severity of the situation do nothing to slow it down. The climate is something she and her children have to confront. If she is to live long enough to be

100 years old, what we do now will affect her entire life. Realising this, she decided to organise a strike outside the Swedish Parliament. She insists that she does not see the point of going to school and studying for a future that might not exist if urgent action is not taken.

Greta Thunberg calls for civil disobedience and rebellion, emphasising that playing by the current rules won’t save the planet. She believes that collective action is necessary to bring about the changes required to combat climate change effectively.

Climate change is a reality which we haven’t properly addressed yet. Though discussions are conducted and policies are written, no strict regulations are implemented to prevent it. In such a context, Thunberg’s speech acts as a wake-up call to the world about the urgency of the climate crisis. It highlights the need to take urgent and decisive action to address the impacts of climate change on the environment. Thunberg’s activism has ensured the participation of the younger generation in this movement. Her actions have made it clear that young individuals can play a crucial role in tackling the environmental crisis.

Thunberg’s exhortation for rich nations to take more responsibility for reducing greenhouse gas emissions so that poorer countries can develop sustainable infrastructure highlights the need for an inclusive approach to

environmentalism. Greta has immense faith in scientific approaches and policies like the Paris Agreement and Kyoto Protocol, and she demands immediate actions based on these policies. Greta Thunberg's speech is significant in the context of the present climate crisis as it calls for immediate actions and ensures the participation of the younger generation.

Greta Thunberg's determination and passion

have made her a prominent figure in environmental activism. Her actions signify the role younger generations can play in activities related to the conservation of nature. Policies and agreements like the Paris Agreement and Kyoto Protocol are formulated at specific intervals. However, as Greta points out no regulations are made to ensure its implementation. Greta's protests have called for immediate action in the context of the climate crisis.

Greta Thunberg has Asperger's Syndrome, which is a developmental disorder characterised by difficulties in social interaction and nonverbal communication. She considers her condition as a superpower, rather than a hindrance, stating that it helps her see the world in "black and white."

## Recap

- ▶ The essay "Almost Everything is Black and White" is published as part of the book, *No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference*, co-authored by Greta Thunberg
- ▶ Greta Thunberg delivered this speech in Parliament Square in London
- ▶ Greta came across the word climate change for the first time when she was only eight years old. She was puzzled by how human beings could be causing such a grave issue
- ▶ She finds it difficult to understand why the people around her acknowledge the crisis, but fail to take adequate measures to put an end to it
- ▶ She wonders why there are no strict rules and regulations on activities which contribute to climate change
- ▶ She demands that countries like Sweden and the UK should reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 15% annually to stay below a 2°C warming target. However, she adds that currently we should aim at a 1.5°C target
- ▶ Climate change is not properly addressed by world leaders or governments
- ▶ Greta Thunberg emphasises the importance of equity in addressing climate change and she demands that wealthier nations like Sweden and the UK must reduce greenhouse gas emissions to provide opportunities for poorer countries like India to develop sustainably
- ▶ Greta highlights the importance of the Paris Agreement and Kyoto Protocol and the need for their implementation
- ▶ She demands civil disobedience to arrive at a solution



## Objective Questions

1. Where was the speech “Almost Everything is Black and White” delivered?
2. When did Greta Thunberg first hear about climate change?
3. According to Thunberg, what is the black and white approach to tackling climate change?
4. According to Thunberg, what percent of annual greenhouse gas emission reduction must be achieved by wealthier countries like the UK and Sweden?
5. What motivated Greta Thunberg to start her school strike for the climate?
6. What is the name of the movement inspired by her protests?
7. How does Greta Thunberg describe her way of thinking?
8. What is the name of the book Greta Thunberg co-authored?

## Answers

1. Parliament Square, London
2. When she was about eight years old
3. Either we go on as a civilisation or we don't
4. At Least by 15% every year
5. Her belief that it is illogical to study for a nonexistent future if no one takes action to save it
6. Fridays for Future
7. Black and white
8. *No One is Too Small to Make a Difference*

## Assignments

1. Comment your views in detail on the importance of ensuring climate justice.
2. What is your take on the importance of having a sustainable development?
3. Compare the impact of the speeches made by Severn Suzuki and Greta Thunberg.
4. Write a detailed account of the impacts of climate change.
5. Explore how Greta Thunberg's activism influence public discourse on climate change?



6. Discuss Thunberg's thoughts on the point of education in the face of a looming climate crisis.
7. Why does Thunberg emphasise the need for wealthier nations to take more responsibility in reducing greenhouse gas emissions? Examine.
8. Explore how Greta Thunberg's view of her Asperger's Syndrome as an advantage in understanding the urgency of climate conservation activities?
9. Analyse Greta Thunberg's call for climate justice and equity in the context of the Paris Agreement.
10. How does Greta Thunberg's emphasis on civil disobedience challenge conventional approaches to addressing climate change?

## Suggested Reading

1. Carson, Rachel. *The Silent Spring*. Mariner Books Classics, 2022.
2. Friederici, Peter and Kathleen Dean Moore. *Beyond Climate Breakdown: Envisioning New Stories of Radical Hope*, The MIT Press, 2023.
3. Marcovitz, Hal. *Greta Thunberg: Climate Activist*, Reference Point Pr Inc, 2020.
4. Thunberg, Greta. *The Climate Book*. Allen Lane, 2023.

# BLOCK - 02

## **Technology and Human Life**

# Unit 1

## Artificial Intelligence

- Gareth Southwell

### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ differentiate between machine thinking and consciousness in AI
- ▶ get an insight into Turing Test's history and relevance in AI assessment
- ▶ get an idea about AI's capabilities and limitations, including surpassing human intelligence
- ▶ obtain some of the ethical aspects of weak and strong AI in relation to human consciousness

### Prerequisites

Gareth Southwell is a British writer, illustrator, and philosopher who currently resides in South Wales, UK. With his background in Philosophy, Southwell has contributed several books to this discipline. Some of them are *Instant Philosophy: Key Thinkers, Theories, Discoveries and Concepts* (2021), *50 Philosophy of Science Ideas You Really Need to Know* (2013), *Descartes's Dog: Animals, Machines, and the Problem of Other Minds* (2020), *What Would Marx Do: How the Greatest Political Theorists Would Solve your Everyday Problems* (2018), etc. The excerpt selected for this unit is taken from his book, *50 Philosophy of Science Ideas You Really Need to Know*.

Southwell is vocal about the relevance of technology and its fast-paced evolution in our contemporary lives. He prepares his readers to equip themselves to the changing expectations of a technology-driven world.

### Keywords

Artificial intelligence, Universal Turing Machine, Deep Blue



## Discussion

The given excerpt is an investigation of the relevance of artificial intelligence in our contemporary world. According to Britannica encyclopaedia, AI can be defined as the ability of computer technologies to function and behave in a way that is similar to humans. This is primarily about how computer assisted technologies can reason, emote and think like an intelligent being. Whether AI is here to assist humans or to replace humans is a debatable topic. The author cites case studies from varying contexts to discuss the pros and cons of artificial intelligence. Southwell begins the essay by posing two pertinent questions which are:

- Can a computer think?
- Can a machine be conscious?

Very often, we are misguided by the analogy that machines can think, and hence we tend to compare machines with humans. Here lies the crux of this excerpt by Southwell: the distinction between thinking and consciousness. On the first side of this argument, the author reminds the readers that the abilities performed by the computer software are only an extension of the human brain behind them. Whether it is a single code, a set of computers, or an AI, what it shows is how it has been programmed by the human brain behind it. In its materiality, the computer, as well as AI, is only an object with wires and other metallic extensions. The system itself is not thinking. It only performs the act of thinking based on the codes and programmes written by the human brain behind it. Therefore, one can argue that the intelligence of the computer system is an embodiment of human intellect. This, by extension, will also mean that the errors committed by the computer system are errors made by the human calculation which has gone into the development of a programme.

However, one cannot rule out the significance of AI in the contemporary world and how it is questioning and accessing the notion of being human. This is because each new generation of AI is trying to appropriate itself and become more like a human. There are several examples of how AI has outperformed human abilities. That does not mean that AI can replace humans because there are several facts that only humans can comprehend.

Alan Turing was a British mathematician, computer scientist and a philosopher who is very often called as the father of artificial intelligence. He died in 1954 at the age of 41 due to cyanide poisoning. His interest in cryptanalysis led him to the formulation of several code breaking strategies, cipher machines, secure speech devices, etc and he worked for the British and US governments until convicted for homosexuality. The Turing test is one among the earliest thought experiments that were conducted to propose a machine's ability to respond intelligently. According to this test, a conversation is conducted between two unseen individuals over the internet. We imagine that on one side, it is a computer and not a human. If, under any circumstances, we cannot make out the difference between the machine and human, then, according to Turing, the machine is capable of intelligent thought. There were several challenges to this test, and several layers of remodelling had to be done on this thought experiment to finally reach a stage where scientists have kept that option open, that is, a machine can be intelligent. However, it still raises the question of consciousness, which is the second part of the argument presented in this excerpt.

Before we move onto the second part of the argument, it will help us to survey some of the other modifications made to the first Turing Test. Alan Turing also developed the Universal Turing Machine (UTM). Universal Turing



Machine (UTM) is a machine which functioned as a model to modern day computers. The basic principle is that one Turing machine can be coded to perform a specific mathematical algorithm and if multiple such machines are simulated and connected to each other, the new machine, which he named as UTM, can perform any computable sequence. Although this idea has been challenged functionally, theoretically he claimed that the project is possible. In other words, it was envisaged as an interconnected Turing machine. It was not programmed to do just one type of calculation, but by being interconnected through several machines, it could theoretically perform all kinds of calculating tasks conceivable to humankind.

Therefore, Southwell argues that, in a certain sense, thinking machines, or AI, are a reality. AI can think of everything humans have ever thought of, and those thoughts are stored in its memory or information database. But the question that begs pause is whether AI will use this information database to manipulate our future or not. In the earlier models, AI only used the information fed into its database. But modified versions will offer suggestions to humans in deciding. Simple suggestions like a playlist or directions on a map. Will there be

a time when AI blocks every other option for the human brain to think and make a decision by itself? Instead, it forces us to follow the AI, and humans are bereft of a choice.

To cite an example here, Deep Blue, a super-computer which was created to play chess, developed by IBM. It was the first computer to win a match against humans, which made humans the second best in chess. World chess champion Garry Kasparov was defeated by Deeper Blue in 1997. In its first generation, the human brain could defeat the computer. However, in its modified version, the computer could defeat the human brain because, by then (that is, in 1997), the system was loaded with every chess game and every move made by humans. One could argue that the computer is only using the combined intelligence of several chess experts. But this questions the capability of a machine as opposed to the intelligence of a single human. This has made an interesting proposition, which is that if the machine can outperform humans and ‘think’ with the help of the thought processes of humans, then can we suggest that the machine is also thinking, communicating, and reacting like humans? In other words, can they truly replace humans in specific areas where automation is a possibility?

**Garry Kasparov:** He was a Russian chess champion, writer, and political activist. He received the Chess Oscar eleven times. He defeated the IBM supercomputer in playing chess in 1996. However, in 1997, the computer defeated him.

Clearly, the speed and effective productivity of a machine are unbeatable. It can complete tasks in record time, which is unfathomable to a human brain. In this context, we will have to define intelligence within the context of decision-making. Do we define intelligence as the ability to make decisions based on patterns and algorithms? By this definition, machines

are intelligent because they function through the algorithms, patterns, and codes fed into their systems.

On the other side of the argument, there are also scholars who argue that the fact that a computer can outperform human intelligence is no more significant than saying that a spade



can outperform the human hand. In this equation, human intelligence is located on a high pedestal as the supreme intelligent being. Scientists argue that there will always be mathematical calculations that a computer will not understand, but a human will. This probability is where the primacy of human intelligence is placed. Hence, such scholars have reservations about saying that a computer can think. Here, scholars draw the distinction between weak and strong AI. Weak AIs imitate human intelligence based on the data they can process. Strong AIs are machines that are explored for the idea of having a consciousness like humans.

This is where Southwell is locating the second part of his argument on consciousness. According to him, intelligence is not consciousness. Even when machines can be tuned to be intelligent and perform intelligent functionalities, he argues that the concept of understanding and consciousness is not merely rule-following. Following rules may not make the machine conscious, but it may allow the machine to comprehend a situation like a human brain. It is also possible that humans themselves are not fully aware of the concept of consciousness. It has a philosophical angle to it and even a spiritual angle. Therefore, it is safe to propose that the machine cannot be conscious.

*The Matrix series, Blade runner, Her, Ex-machina, etc are some of the all-time sci-fi favourites. Sci-fi features envision a society that is most likely to happen in our nearest future. They are not to be neglected as a work of fiction or fantasy. Rather, it only cautions that our world is ready or is preparing itself for newer horizons.*

## Recap

- ▶ Turing test
- ▶ Universal Turing Machine
- ▶ Speed and performance of AI
- ▶ Strong and weak AI
- ▶ Deep Blue
- ▶ Concepts like thinking, decision making and consciousness within the context of AI
- ▶ Philosophy, Science and Spirituality in connection with consciousness

## Objective Questions

1. What are the two questions asked by the author at the beginning of the extract?
2. Who is the English mathematician Southwell refers to?
3. What was 'The Universal Turing Machine' envisaged to simulate?

4. What does the excerpt say about the statement "Artificial intelligence is a fact"? Is it true or false?
5. What does computer's intelligence reflect?
6. What was the machine developed by Alan Turing designed to break?
7. Who was the chess champion defeated by a supercomputer in a game of chess in 1997?
8. What is UTM ?

## Answers

1. Can a computer think? Can a machine be conscious?
2. Alan Turing
3. Turing machine
4. True
5. Ingenuity
6. German Enigma machine
7. Garry Kasparov
8. Universal Turing Machine

## Assignments

1. What were the reasons for the 2010 stock market crash?
2. How does the machine outperform human subjects and in which realms?
3. Are computers intelligent? Respond with the help of the excerpt.
4. Briefly comment on the role of Deep Blue project in the development of AI.
5. Compare and contrast Weak and Strong AI.
6. Write a short note on John Searle's case against strong AI.
7. What are the main precursors to the development of modern computers?

## Suggested Reading

1. Bloomfield, Brian P. "The culture of artificial intelligence." *The Question of Artificial Intelligence*. Routledge, 2018. 59-105.
2. Kulikov, Sergey B., and Anastasiya V. Shirokova. "Artificial intelligence, culture and education." *AI & SOCIETY* 36 (2021), 305-318.
3. Bunz, Mercedes. "The calculation of meaning: on the misunderstanding of new artificial intelligence as culture." *Culture, Theory and Critique* 60.3-4 (2019): 264-278.

## Unit 2

# Moxon's Master

- Ambrose Bierce

### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ get an idea about the genre of science fiction
- ▶ connections between technology, society and literature
- ▶ develop the skills required for critical thinking and analysis of texts
- ▶ get an insight into the boundaries between human and machine intelligence

### Prerequisites

Ambrose Bierce (1842-1913) was an American short story writer, journalist and poet. His short story, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" is one among the earliest examples of the technique of stream of consciousness. It is a war narrative which was adapted as a movie as well. Bierce was last seen in 1913 before departing to take part in the Mexican revolution. Ever since his whereabouts were unknown and is currently known as one among the traumatic disappearances in literary history.

The short story "Moxon's Master" ponders the origins of knowledge and existence. In the story, Bierce talks about an automaton that kills its maker while playing chess. It was one of the first robot descriptions in English-language literature, appearing in the *San Francisco Examiner* on April 16, 1899, long before the term "robot" was used. *Can Such Things Be?* is a collection of short stories, published the story in its 1910 version.

Even though it is a short story, it meets the description of science fiction. It is a genre of speculative fiction that explores imaginative and futuristic concepts, often incorporating scientific and technological advancements beyond the present reality. It involves storytelling set in worlds or universes that may differ from our own due to scientific, technological, or fantastical elements. Science often involves complex theories and technical language that might be challenging for the general public to understand fully. Literature can play a role in humanizing science by presenting scientific concepts and discoveries in more accessible and relatable ways, making them understandable and relevant to a broader audience.





Chess and automation have an interesting relationship, especially with the advancement of artificial intelligence and computer technology. As computers and technology evolved, researchers and programmers began developing computer programs capable of playing chess. In 1997, IBM's supercomputer Deep Blue defeated world chess champion Garry Kasparov in a highly publicized chess match. Deep Blue's victory showcased the power of automation and artificial intelligence in mastering complex tasks and defeating human experts. Chess has become a testing ground for advancements in artificial intelligence and machine learning. Programmes like Stockfish, Alpha Zero, and Leela Chess Zero have revolutionized computer chess by using sophisticated algorithms and neural networks to achieve superhuman playing strength.

Did you know?

Bierce wrote *The Devil's Dictionary*, which is a satirical dictionary.

Here is an example: Air: (n.) A nutritious substance supplied by a bountiful providence for the fattening of the poor.

## Keywords

Automation, The Turk, Artificial Intelligence, Deception, Human cognitive abilities

## Discussion

In the short story, "Moxon's Master", Moxon creates a chess playing automaton of which Moxon is overly confident and boastful about. An automaton refers to the use of technology, machinery, or computer systems to perform tasks and processes without the need for direct human intervention. The goal of automation is to streamline and optimise workflows, increase efficiency, reduce errors, and save time and resources.

Moxon claims that although it is a machine without brains, it can think like a human and hence it has to be treated with dignity. The short story begins with a line similar to the question raised by Southwell in the previous unit: "Are you serious? -- do you really be-

lieve that a machine thinks?" Through a well-planned out discussion he elaborates on how machines can think and function intelligently. He cites the example of plants and how they think when it grows out through crevices even to acquire sunlight. This, according to Moxon, is the consciousness of the plant.

"Moxon's Master" is a compelling and haunting tale that delves into the complexities of artificial intelligence, human nature, and the consequences of our actions. It prompts readers to contemplate the potential risks and ethical implications of creating intelligent machines and reflects on the timeless fascination and unease surrounding the unknown. It raises questions about the boundaries between human and machine intelligence. It challenges the notion of what it means to be alive and

conscious. Moxon's automaton blurs these lines, leading the reader to question whether a machine can possess intelligence, emotions, and even a sense of self.

As the story progresses, Moxon relays to the narrator that his machine had lost its temper. It was confusing to the narrator as he didn't believe in a thinking machine and he exited the house of Moxon. Later that evening, due to a thunderstorm, the narrator goes to the house of Moxon again where he encounters the automaton for the very first time which turns out to be a chess playing super system. Although the narrator could only see the machine from behind, he gives a vivid description to its appearance: "he was apparently not more than five feet in height, with proportions suggesting those of a gorilla -- a tremendous breadth of shoulders, thick, short neck and broad, squat head, which had a tangled growth of black hair and was topped with a crimson fez. A tunic of the same colour, belted tightly to the waist, reached the seat -- apparently a box -- upon which he sat; his legs and feet were not seen. His left forearm appeared to rest in his lap; he moved his pieces with his right hand, which seemed disproportionately long."

The setting and functionality of this machine is a chilling reminder of the several other chess-playing supercomputers in the world like the story of "The Turk" known as "The Turk's Chess Automaton" or simply "The Turk," it was a famous mechanical chess-playing automaton created in the late 18th century. It was constructed by Wolfgang von Kempelen, a Hungarian inventor, and engineer. The Turk was designed to play chess against human opponents, and it garnered significant attention and admiration from people across Europe. The automaton was made to resemble a life-sized figure of a turbaned Turkish man sitting behind a large cabinet with a chessboard on top. The cabinet had doors on the

front and back, and inside, a complex set of gears and levers controlled the movements of the automaton's arm and chess pieces. However, the Turk's true secret was that it was not fully automated. The machine was operated by a human chess master concealed within the cabinet, controlling its movements and making the actual chess moves. The deception was so convincing that many people were unable to discover the hidden operator, and the Turk's creator maintained the illusion of a mechanical marvel.

Without doubt, technology has revolutionised the game of chess. The story takes a different turn when Moxon wins the game of chess with the automaton. The narrator witnesses that the automaton could not control its anger and it kills Moxon. Human emotions are superimposed on the automaton here and the agitated machine reacts: "Suddenly it sprang to its feet and with a movement almost too quick for the eye to follow shot forward across table and chair, with both arms thrust forth to their full length -- the posture and lunge of a diver. Moxon tried to throw himself backward out of reach, but he was too late: I saw the horrible thing's hand close upon his throat, his own clutch, its wrists. Then the table was overturned, and candles were thrown to the floor and extinguished, and all was black dark."

As the title of the story says, the machine turns out to be Moxon's master. The story explores themes of deception, the blurred line between man and machine, and the consequences of tampering with the unknown. It explores the idea of artificial intelligence (AI) becoming self-aware, achieving sentience, and potentially outgrowing or outperforming its human creators. This refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think, learn, and perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. AI involves the development of computer systems and algo-



rhythms that can process information, reason, and make decisions, often mimicking human cognitive abilities.

This theme of the story raises philosophical questions about the nature of consciousness, the boundaries of technology, and the relationship between humans and their creations. As in the story, the automaton killed Moxon

when the human defeated the machine in a game of chess. The house is burned down by lightning and the unconscious narrator was saved by Haley, the sole companion of Moxon in his workshop. This short story can serve as a cautionary tale, warning of the ethical and societal implications of creating intelligent beings without proper consideration of their rights and autonomy.

## Recap

- ▶ Technology and automation
- ▶ Supercomputers that can think and act like humans
- ▶ Chess and computers
- ▶ Role of the creator and machine
- ▶ Machine language and human vocabulary
- ▶ Emotions, humans and machines

## Objective Questions

1. How does Moxon define life?
2. Where does Moxon create the automaton?
3. What is the creature of rhythm, according to Moxon?
4. Why did the narrator go to the machine shop?
5. Who saved the narrator at the end of the story?
6. What happened to Moxon at the end of the story?

## Answers

- |   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Life is a definite combination of heterogeneous changes, both simultaneous and successive, in correspondence with external coexistences and sequences. | 3. consciousness                  |
| 2. At the machine shop  | 4. due to the rains               |
|   | 5. Haley                          |
|   | 6. He was killed by the automaton |

## Assignments

1. Write an essay on the relationship between the creation and the creator in the short story “Moxon’s Master”.
2. Critically analyse the relevance of technology in the contemporary world.
3. Write a short note on the character, Haley.
4. Comment on the line, “consciousness is the creature of rhythm”

## Suggested Reading

1. Rottensteiner, Franz. "Who Was Really Moxon's Master?." *Science Fiction Studies* 15.1 (1988), 107-112.
2. Welch, Rob. "The emotional birth of AI in “Moxon’s Master.”." *Futures of the past. An anthology of science fiction stories from the 19th and 20th centuries, with critical essays*. McFarland & Company (2020).
3. Canty, Daniel. "The Meaning of" Moxon's Master". *Science Fiction Studies* 23.3 (1996), 538-541.



# BLOCK - 03

## Gender



# Unit 1

## Still I Rise

- Maya Angelou

### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ identify the major themes in the poem
- ▶ acquire familiarity with the unique challenges faced by individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups
- ▶ inculcate the importance of resilience and the ability to persevere in the face of adversity
- ▶ gain insight into the poet's use of vivid and evocative language in the poem

### Prerequisites

Women's roles are no longer hidden behind closed doors or relegated to the kitchen. Despite modernisation and globalisation, women continue to face constraints and restraints. Many women experience emotional confinement because they lack a safe place to make decisions and act. Gender inequality has long plagued the fabric of our society. We talk a lot about gender equality while taking pride in having a polished view of women. The irony is that the majority of the preaching is never put into practice. Women's status in our culture is debatable. History provides examples of female leaders who were competent and talented enough to determine the fates of their countries. Women fight intellectually with men as well. Women have demonstrated that they are capable of overcoming their own limits and undertaking a wide range of tasks, from running a family to leading a nation. Women and men collaborate to offer financial security to the family. Several organisations around the world have a greater number of women than men on their payroll. Many of these triumphs and accomplishments highlight the positive aspects of women's existence. They are considered as subservient to men on the opposite side, which is depressing and distressing. Women's marginalisation remains a persistent issue.





*Fig 3.1.1 Gender equality in education*

African American gender marginalisation has been a recurrent issue throughout the history of the United States. For generations, African American women have suffered intersecting types of discrimination, frequently encountering both racial and gender hostility. Historically, their views and experiences have been ignored or disregarded, continuing a cycle of invisibility and disadvantage. From the early civil rights struggles to the current challenges of systemic racism and sexism, African American women have faced a unique set of challenges, making it critical for society to address these intersecting forms of marginalisation in order to achieve true equality and social justice. Out of the ashes of such gender discrimination, like a phoenix bird, rises this poem.

## Key Themes

**Resilience and Strength:** The poem emphasises the idea that no matter what challenges or injustices one faces, they have the inner strength to rise above them.

**Defiance and Empowerment:** The poet refuses to be diminished by racism, discrimination, or adversity.

**Universality of Experience:** While rooted in the African American experience, the poem speaks of the human experience of facing obstacles, discrimination, and adversity, making it relatable to people from diverse backgrounds.

**Hope and Transformation:** The possibility of transformation and a brighter future, even in the face of ongoing challenges.

## Discussion



Fig 3.1.2 Maya Angelou

The poem "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou is one of her most well-known and acclaimed poems. It is an inspiring and potent poem that highlights the fortitude, resiliency, and strength of all marginalised and downtrodden people in general as well as African Americans specifically. In 1978, the poem appeared in Maya Angelou's third collection of poetry, *And Still I Rise*.

Maya Angelou is a well-known African American writer, poet, and civil rights activist. She was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on April 4, 1928, and her early years were characterised by a number of difficulties, including dealing with racism and child sexual abuse as well as the difficulties of being a single mother. Despite these challenges, Angelou turned to literature for solace and started writing at an early age.

"Still I Rise" is a poetic representation of Angelou's own spirit of resiliency and tenacity. It illustrates African Americans' resiliency in the face of injustice, prejudice, and tyranny throughout many years. The poem's title and

refrain, "Still I Rise," highlight the theme of overcoming hardship, getting through prejudice, and asserting one's individuality and value.

### 3.1.1 Summary

#### Lines 1-4

*You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.*

The speaker knows that others might try to record her life and experiences, raising the danger that her account would be misconstrued or misunderstood. Speaking to anyone who would disseminate untrue information about her, the speaker calls these fabrications "bitter" and "twisted." The metaphor of having been trampled over is used by the speaker to illustrate how other people would attempt to minimise and denigrate her. The speaker expresses her fortitude in spite of being mistreated by drawing an analogy between herself and dust that rises and cannot be suppressed.

#### Lines 5-8

*Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.*

The speaker wonders if those who want to oppress or control her are bothered or disturbed by her strong and self-assured demeanour. She wants to know why people are so hostile and negative towards her. She illustrates her self-assurance by comparing her confidence to that person who is the owner of valuable oil wells. This last line serves to emphasise the speaker's confidence by creating the impres-

sion that she emits affluence and abundance just by being there.

### Lines 9-12

*Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.*

The speaker makes comparisons between herself and heavenly bodies like the moon and sun to highlight her radiance and strength. Similar to the statement before, she suggests her everlasting power by comparing herself to the regular and predictable nature of ocean tides. Her optimism is compared to hopes that rise and soar despite hardship. The final line, which serves as the poem's main theme, reiterates the speaker's will to face and conquer obstacles.

### Lines 13-16

*Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?*

The speaker wonders if people want to see her broken and defeated. She wonders if people anticipate her giving in and projecting a defeated demeanour while lowering her gaze. She depicts her physical demeanour as one of defeat, implying that she is carrying a tremendous load. She confesses that despite going through hardship and emotional upheaval, her vitality has not been affected.

### Lines 17-20

*Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines*

*Diggin' in my own backyard.*

The speaker wonders if people who want to undermine her find her confidence and self-worth disturbing. She cautions against being offended by her confidence, suggesting that it is an outcome of her confidence. She emphasises her sense of inner wealth and richness by equating her laughter with the profusion of gold mines. This statement emphasises the speaker's determination and autonomy even more, making it seem as though she is independent and resourceful.

### Lines 21-24

*You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.*

The speaker accepts that she can be the target of criticisms and nasty remarks from outsiders. She acknowledges the influence of a critical look while implying that she will not be impacted by it. She admits the potential for extremely hostile treatment, but she also suggests that this animosity will not crush her determination. She utilises the metaphor of air rising to represent her tenacity and fortitude in the face of antagonism and hatred.

### Lines 25-28

*Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?*

The speaker wonders if others feel frightened or uneasy because of her confidence in her sexuality. She speculates if individuals who assume her to be submissive are surprised by her capability to project confidence. She com-



compares her poised and assured gestures to the beauty and brilliance of diamonds. She makes light of her appearance and implies that she takes pride in each element of herself.

#### **Lines 29-34**

*Out of the huts of history's shame*

*I rise*

*Up from a past that's rooted in pain*

*I rise*

*I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,*

*Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.*

The speaker makes reference to the historical tyranny her ancestors endured, implying a common departure from a deplorable past. A straightforward assertion of her fortitude and success that emphasises how she has overcome a history of degrading treatment. She discusses the difficult past her group has had while also implying that they are overcoming it. She insists once more on her commitment and determination to overcome past sorrow. In order to convey her strength and limitless potential, she compares herself to a wide, active ocean. She is compared to a dynamic force that rises and falls like the tides of the ocean.

#### **Lines 35-43**

*Leaving behind nights of terror and fear*

*I rise*

*Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear*

*I rise*

*Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,*

*I am the dream and the hope of the slave.*

*I rise*

*I rise*

*I rise.*

The speaker concedes that there has been a history of horror and anxiety, implying that those gloomy times are now behind mankind. She affirms her triumph over hardships once more. The future that she sees is one of clarity, hope, and constructive change. She keeps up with her message of tenacity and resolve. She appreciates the wisdom and important accomplishments that her predecessors have left behind. She claims that she embodies the goals and ambitions of individuals who were formerly held as slaves. She concludes with an affirmation of her successful rise above hardship. With its impactful repetition, the poem draws attention to its main message of resiliency, fortitude, and the steadfast spirit to conquer obstacles.

### **3.1.2 Analysis**

The powerful poem "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou tackles themes of resiliency, identity, and the persevering human spirit in the face of tyranny. Angelou communicates a message of empowerment and strength using strong metaphors, rich images, and her expressive voice.

The speaker's unwavering tenacity and resolve to overcome obstacles are the poem's key themes. The phrase Still I Rise is uttered repeatedly to emphasise the theme of perseverance in the face of adversity. This mantra of empowerment, which is repeated, declares that the speaker will triumph no matter what occurs.

The poem talks about different types of prejudice, such as racism, sexism, and cultural expectations. Angelou emphasises how the speaker defies societal standards and expectations with her delight in her attractiveness, attitude, and confidence.

In the poem, the metaphors of dust and air serve as potent emblems. Dust is a metaphor



for the attempts to minimise the speaker's value and background, but like dust, she overcomes them. As air is constantly there, so too is the speaker's resiliency, which is fundamental in nature.

The poem is filled with the speaker's defiance. She refuses to let other people's unfavourable opinions or nasty deeds break her. She exhibits her inner power and drive in the confidence she emits in her posture, laughter, and movements.

The speaker acknowledges her ancestors' difficult past, especially their time spent as slaves. She does stress that their sacrifices opened the door for her perseverance and strength, though. She sees herself as carrying on their heritage and fulfilling their aspirations.

The poem's repeated use of the word "rising" alludes to an ongoing cycle of evolution and regeneration. The speaker shows that, despite obstacles, people can develop and adapt by coming out stronger and more determined each time.

The poem's theme of perseverance, while grounded in the African American experience, cuts across racial and cultural barriers. The speaker's victory becomes a universal representation of empowerment for anyone dealing

with prejudice, repression, or other difficulties in their lives.

The words used by Angelou are thoughtful and powerful. She challenges the status quo and declares the speaker's strength by employing direct and forceful language. The poem's themes are reinforced by the rhythmic, chant-like character that is created by the repetition of "I rise" at the end of numerous stanzas.

The poetry honours all facets of the speaker's identity. Without hiding, she accepts her history, sexuality, and physical characteristics. This self-celebration questions social norms and encourages the reader to value their own individuality.

The poem ends with the notion of moving past a past marked by grief and anxiety towards an uncertain but hopeful future. The speaker imagines a dawn that is "wondrously clear," implying that there is room for improvement and transformation.

In "Still I Rise," Maya Angelou expertly portrays the essence of fortitude in the face of difficulty. The poem is a hymn of empowerment and a steadfast monument to the resilience of the human soul because of its strong language, rich imagery, and unyielding spirit.

## Recap

- ▶ Resilience and Triumph
- ▶ Confronting Discrimination
- ▶ Symbolism of Dust and Air
- ▶ Defiance and Confidence
- ▶ Ancestral Legacy
- ▶ Transformation and Renewal
- ▶ Universality of Experience
- ▶ Empowerment through Language
- ▶ Celebration of Identity
- ▶ Hope and Transformation



## Objective Questions

1. What is the central theme of Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise"?
2. Which literary device is prominently used in the poem when the speaker says, "You may trod me in the very dirt, but still, like dust, I'll rise"?
3. In the poem, what does the speaker mean when she says, "I am the dream and the hope of the slave"?
4. What is the significance of the recurring phrase "I rise" in the poem?
5. What is the tone of the poem "Still I Rise"?
6. What is the meaning behind the line, "Does my sassiness upset you"?
7. In the poem, what do the speaker's confidence and self-assuredness symbolise?
8. Which of the following best describes the message of "Still I Rise"?

## Answers

1. Resilience and overcoming adversity
2. Metaphor
3. She is the embodiment of the dreams and hopes of oppressed people
4. It symbolises the speaker's determination to overcome obstacles
5. Defiant and confident
6. The speaker is asking if her confidence bothers others
7. The resilience and strength of marginalised people
8. A declaration of strength and resilience in the face of adversity

## Assignments

1. Discuss the central theme of resilience and empowerment in Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise."
2. Analyse the use of figurative language and literary devices in "Still I Rise."
3. Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise" addresses issues of race, identity, and oppression. Explore how the speaker's words reflect the African American experience and the broader struggle for civil rights.
4. In the poem, the speaker asks, "Does my sassiness upset you?" What is the signif-



icance of this question, and how does it relate to the overall message of the poem?

5. Maya Angelou often wrote about the strength of the human spirit. How does "Still I Rise" exemplify her belief in the indomitable nature of the human soul?
6. Explore the historical context in which Maya Angelou wrote "Still I Rise." How does the poem resonate with the social and political climate of its time, and how does it continue to be relevant today?
7. The poem celebrates the ideas of self-love and self-acceptance. Discuss how the speaker's self-assuredness and confidence contribute to the poem's theme of empowerment.
8. Maya Angelou was not only a poet but also a civil rights activist. How does her activism and personal experiences influence the themes and messages conveyed in "Still I Rise"?
9. Examine the role of repetition in the poem. How does the repetition of the phrase "I rise" emphasise the speaker's determination and resilience?
10. Consider the title of the poem, "Still I Rise." What does it signify, and how does it encapsulate the spirit of the poem? Discuss the importance of the title in understanding the poem's message.

## Suggested Reading

1. Cocks, Dorothy F. *Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion*. Greenwood, 1998.
2. Davis, Sarah. Ed. *African American Poetry: An Anthology*. Random, 2008.
3. Egan, Jill. *Maya Angelou; A Creative and Courageous Voice*. Gareth, 2009.
4. Smith, John. "Maya Angelou." *The Encyclopedia of African American Literature*. ABC, 2005.
5. Turner, Susan. Ed. *Modern American Poetry: An Online Anthology*. University of Illinois, 2020.

## Unit 2

# The Masculine of Virgin

- Sarah Joseph

### Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ critically analyse the underlying meanings in the story
- ▶ acquaint themselves with feminist and cultural issues prevalent in society
- ▶ evaluate multiple perspectives by analysing the story's ambiguous ending
- ▶ identify the writing style used by the writer

### Prerequisites

Now that we've acquired insights into gender inequality and its ramifications within the African American community, let's explore this matter through the perspectives of our own writers. By tackling and exploring gender issues in their writings, Indian women writers have made major contributions to literature. From pioneering authors like Ismat Chughtai and Kamala Das to current voices like Arundhati Roy, Sarah Joseph, and Arundhati Subramaniam, Indian women writers have bravely addressed issues like gender inequity, male dominance, the rights of women, and the complexity of female identity. Their works of fiction provide a nuanced perspective on the struggles and accomplishments faced by women in India, and they have a global audience. These writers' strong narratives and creative expressions have played an important part in shaping gender conversations, promoting social change, and championing the voices of women who have too often been marginalised or ignored.

### Key Themes

*Virginity:* The concept of virginity and the societal expectations and consequences associated with it.

*Gender Roles:* The narrative explores traditional roles and expectations assigned to individuals based on their gender.



*Societal Expectations:* The story presents the pressures and norms imposed by society, particularly in relation to purity and morality.

*Family Dynamics:* The interplay of relationships and responsibilities within the family is a key aspect of the narrative.

## Discussion



Fig 3.2.1 Sarah Joseph

The corpus of Sarah Joseph's works sheds light on the unspoken miseries of women who are deemed disadvantaged simply because they were born as women and constitute a component of a patriarchal culture. The twenty-one short stories in her collection *The Masculine of Virgin*, written over almost forty years, illustrate Sarah Joseph's artistic development and breakthrough as one of India's outstanding feminist writers. The stories, informed by a strong sense of understanding, demonstrate her hostility to all systems and institutions that formalise power. This is accomplished through fascinating female personalities and sexual explorations, all while participating in a thorough revolt against conventional male dominance. These stories are centred on

strong-willed women who oppose all kinds of injustices, from maternal figures who are marginalised and who fight hard against a ruthlessly abusive male dominated society to precise representations of patriarchy's past that are based not on evidence from history but on assertive new interpretations of myths. J. Devika's translation retains the subtleties, emotions, and mood of the original stories' rich, interwoven narrative and symbolic meanings.

### 3.2.1 Summary

The story opens with a foreshadowing of the impending disaster. The story is set in a conventional Christian family in Kerala. The father is portrayed as "a good man, a trader," who provides for his family. The mother is a devout Christian. They have two children: a "Virginal Daughter" and a "Sagacious Son." Unlike the birds of the sky, the parents had saved for their daughter's wedding and amassed wealth for future generations descending from their son. The father and mother appear to be the ordinary kind of parents we see around us.

It is the night before Father's mother arrives to spend ten days with the family. Mother and grandmother are seen praying just before supper. The father is calculating his trades while his son is doing his homework. Son looks up from his book and asks his father, "What is the masculine of 'virgin'?"

The daughter is taken aback when she hears this. Grandmother gives her a frown. Son brings up the subject once more. A passing mother observes her daughter, who is pale and perspiring, and she rushes over to help

her. When Son asks for the answer again, Father nonchalantly responds, "Maybe it has no masculine form, eda." However, Son does not appear to accept it because everything else appears to have masculines.

The daughter is escorted to her room by her mother. She notes that her daughter has become thinner, that her glow has faded, that she is anaemic, and that black circles have formed around her eyes. As the daughter's mother, she realises what is causing her daughter's sickness.

The Father, who has been waiting for his supper, hurries to his daughter's room. He notices his mother's look and becomes concerned about what has happened to his daughter. Mother explains that the daughter is frail and harbours secrets in her heart. She also explains, with some resentment, that their daughter has lost her virginity.

At night, the mother, who is sleep-deprived, slowly walks upstairs with a lit candle to her daughter's room. She finds the door bolted from inside and, hence, peeps through the keyhole. What she discovers there astounds her. Inside the room, she notices an eerie blue radiance. She notices her daughter sitting on a seat in the middle of the room, her nightgown crushed beneath her feet. Many white doves were observed flying around her, one of which had a tongue of flame and "hovered around her head, flitted from her shoulder to her breasts and lap." She was holding grain to feed the doves.

The mother screamed and collapsed on the ground, paralysed. When the family hears the scream, they rush upstairs. But before they can help the mother, they notice her daughter's body hanging from the ceiling.

The story closes with mother shown as being bedridden, her right side paralysed, the fa-

ther is seen submerged in his account-book; the son is doing homework, and he is perpetually searching for the masculine of 'virgin'. A post-mortem report descends from the sky, revealing that, although she was just fifteen years old, the daughter was pregnant with a son. Grandmother continues to pray to the Holy Spirit.

A subplot in the novel involves a 110-year-old woman who appears in the narrator's vision at critical points. She is characterised as a "white woman, reaching out in the dark." Her shrivelled hands reveal yellowed bones beneath the wrinkled pale skin.

### 3.2.2 Analysis

Sarah Joseph's short story, "The Masculine of 'Virgin,'" provides a captivating exploration of gender, religion, family dynamics, secrets, and the impact of cultural expectations. Set in the cultural milieu of Kerala, India, the narrative revolves around a traditional Christian family consisting of a father, a devout mother, their daughter and son, and the father's mother. This tale unfolds against the backdrop of entrenched religious and cultural traditions, offering an in-depth examination of the people and their challenges within a culture steeped in faith and morality.

At its core, the story explores the complexities of gender roles and societal expectations both within the family unit and in broader society. The son's persistent inquiries regarding the masculine form of "virgin" serve as a symbolic exploration of traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. Characters grapple with cultural standards of purity and morality, leading to internal conflicts and misunderstandings. The story also shines a spotlight on the societal pressures placed on women to preserve their virginity until marriage. The daughter's "Virginal" label hints at the weight





of these expectations, and her departure from this ideal introduces tension and sorrow.

Central to the narrative are the intricate family relationships within the household. The father's role as a provider and trader, the mother's unwavering faith, and the contrasting personalities of the daughter and son interweave to create a web of complex interactions. These dynamics grow increasingly intricate as the story progresses, ultimately culminating in a tragic conclusion that underscores the profound influence of societal and religious demands on familial bonds.

A prominent thematic thread in the story is the concept of secrecy and its far-reaching consequences. The daughter's concealed truth – her loss of virginity – acts as a catalyst for the family's disintegration. The inability to openly discuss this secret leads to escalating tension, ultimately resulting in the story's devastating denouement. The daughter's loss of virginity remains concealed within the family, intensifying the guilt and stigma associated with her actions. The inability to openly address the issue exacerbates the mounting tension,

corporation of these elements elevates "The Masculine of 'Virgin,'" infusing it with an otherworldly and extraordinary quality. These elements enable the narrative to transcend the bounds of mere realism, permitting a deeper exploration of themes related to spirituality, transformation, and the blurred boundary between the mundane and the mystical. They bestow upon the story a unique and thought-provoking ambiance, inviting readers to engage with the events and symbolism on multiple levels.

Sarah Joseph adopts a narrative style that deftly fuses elements of realism with interludes of magical realism, a blend that effectively communicates the story's thematic concerns and explores the inner landscapes of its characters. The story predominantly employs a third-person perspective, allowing readers intimate access to the thoughts and emotions of specific characters, particularly the daughter, the mother, and the son. Dialogues and interior monologues serve as gateways into the characters' perspectives, unveiling their internal conflicts and emotional states, particularly in moments of tension and revelation.

### **Magical Realism**

A genre of writing that takes elements of magic, and adds them to an otherwise realistic setting/story

ultimately leading to a catastrophic climax. The narrative serves as a poignant reminder of how societal constraints can compel individuals to hide their actions, even from their own families.

Throughout the story, several instances of magical realism, such as the enigmatic blue radiance, the presence of white doves, the subplot involving the mysterious old woman, and the ethereal post-mortem report from the heavens, enhance the narrative's richness and contribute to its thematic complexity. The in-

"The Masculine of 'Virgin'" concludes with a sense of ambiguity, leaving key details open to interpretation. This narrative choice encourages readers to engage critically with the story's themes and arrive at their own conclusions, fostering a deeper connection with the narrative and its underlying messages.

In "The Masculine of 'Virgin,'" Sarah Joseph masterfully crafts a captivating narrative that navigates the intricate web of religion, gender, familial dynamics, secrecy, and cultural influences. Through well-drawn characters



and rich symbolism, Joseph offers readers a profound glimpse into the complexities of human existence and the weighty repercussions of concealing truths. The story stands as a poignant reminder of the paramount importance

of open communication and empathy within familial and societal frameworks, particularly in the presence of deeply entrenched traditions and ideologies.

## Recap

- ▶ Set in a traditional Christian family in Kerala
- ▶ Characters - Father, Mother, Daughter, Son
- ▶ The father's mother comes to stay with the family
- ▶ Father and mother save everything for their children
- ▶ The son asks for the masculine of 'virgin'
- ▶ The daughter is stunned, pale, perspiring
- ▶ Her mother escorts the daughter to her room
- ▶ Understands the reason behind her fragility
- ▶ The mother reveals to the father
- ▶ The mother sees visions
- ▶ The mother is paralysed
- ▶ The daughter hangs herself
- ▶ Subplot - of an old woman

## Objective Questions

1. What does the story foreshadow?
2. Where does the story take place?
3. What does the father do for a living?
4. Who comes to live with the family for ten days?
5. Who is the most pious person in the story?
6. How many children do the parents have?
7. Who asks the question about the masculine of 'virgin'?
8. Who is seen as a frail character in the story?
9. Who sees the blue radiance in the daughter's room?



10. What does the postmortem report reveal?
11. Is there a masculine word for 'virgin', according to Father?
12. Who stands stunned and pale at the Son's question?
13. Who is the character in the novel with the shrivelled hand?
14. How old is the old woman?
15. What happens to the mother after she peeps through the keyhole of the daughter's room?

## Answers

1. Impending disaster
2. In a Christian family in Kerala
3. Trade
4. Father's mother
5. Mother
6. Two, a daughter and a son
7. Son
8. Daughter
9. Mother
10. The pregnancy of the daughter
11. No
12. Daughter
13. The old woman
14. 110 years
15. Becomes paralysed

## Assignments

1. Analyse the significance of the title "The Masculine of 'Virgin'" in the context of the story.
2. Explore the role of religion and faith in the story, particularly how Christian be-

liefs and values influence the characters' actions and decisions.

3. Discuss the portrayal of gender roles and expectations in the story, with a focus on how the characters perceive and define masculinity and femininity.
4. Analyse the mother's character and her complex emotional response to her daughter's situation.
5. Explore the role of supernatural elements, such as the eerie blue radiance and the 110-year-old woman, in shaping the story's atmosphere and themes.
6. Discuss the symbolism of the white doves in the story and their connection to the daughter's experience.
7. Reflect on the story's ending and its implications for the characters and their future. How does it leave the reader with lingering questions and a sense of closure or ambiguity?
8. Examine the family dynamics within the household and how they contribute to the story's unfolding tragedy.

## Suggested Reading

1. Joseph, Sarah. *The Masculine of 'Virgin'*. Trans. J. Devika. Oxford UP, 2012.
2. Pande, Miti. *Feminism in Contemporary British and Indian English Fiction*. Sarup, 2003.
3. Shukla, B.A. *Feminism: From Mary Wollstonecraft to Betty Friedan*. Sarup, 2007.
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## Unit 3

# A Daughter is Born

- Malala Yousafzai

### Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ become aware of the cultural context of Malala Yousafzai's life
- ▶ trace the significance of Malala's family in shaping her values and beliefs
- ▶ gain insight into the political changes in Pakistan, particularly in the Swat Valley, and their impact on the lives of ordinary people
- ▶ reflect on the concept of gender equality and its importance in society

### Prerequisites

India's history of girls' education is extensive and dynamic, reflecting the social, political, and cultural trends of the nation. In terms of females' education, India has achieved significant advancements over the years. The percentage of women who are literate has increased, and more girls are enrolling in schools and pursuing higher education. Politics, science, the arts, and business are just a few of the domains in which women have achieved success.

What about Pakistan if this is the situation with India? Yes, Pakistan has made significant strides towards increasing the number of girls enrolled in schools, particularly in metropolitan areas. Girls' education has been promoted through government programmes, including the Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Youth Development Programme. Higher enrollment has also been aided by the introduction of free textbooks and grants for female students in select areas.

Despite progress, there are still gender differences in schooling. Due to cultural, social, and economic hindrances, women's access to school is still restricted in rural and remote places. Girls' attendance at school may be hindered by issues like early marriage, child labour, and long commutes. Traditional beliefs and practises might sometimes be obstacles to girls' education. Conservative attitudes may limit girls' mobility and educational opportunities, and some families place a higher value on boys' education than on girls'. The issue of early and forced marriages is still present.

A persistent difficulty is ensuring that females receive high-quality education. Schools frequently lack adequate infrastructure, experienced faculty members, and instructional

supplies. This may cause both boys and girls to have poor learning experiences.

The Pakistani government has introduced a number of initiatives to support the education of girls, including the Pakistan Girls' Education Initiative and the Prime Minister's Girls' Education Programme. These initiatives seek to reduce gender inequities and increase the access of girls to high-quality education. In Pakistan, numerous NGOs put in a lot of effort to enhance women's education. In order to encourage girls' education, organisations like The Citizens Foundation and the Malala Fund have built schools, given scholarships, and pushed for legislative changes.

The importance of girls' education in Pakistan and around the world has been brought to light by Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani crusader for education. Malala's advocacy work has raised awareness of the difficulties girls face and sparked support for their right to an education.

We will, here, discuss Chapter 1 ("A Daughter Is Born") of Malala Yousafzai's autobiography, *I Am Malala*: the girl who advocated for girls' education in Pakistan. You won't just be reading a biography. By reading this book, you will have access to a doorway to the transformational power of education, the tenacity of the human spirit, and the significance of fighting for justice and equality. Her experience teaches us to be critical thinkers, compassionate empathisers, and changemakers in our respective communities and in society as a whole.

## Keywords

Gender bias, Swat, Education, Identity, Courage

## Discussion



Fig 3.3.1 Malala Yousafzai

Malala Yousafzai was born in the Pakistani town of Mingora to Ziauddin Yousafzai and his renowned yet well-to-do Muslim family. Her father inspired Malala to study literature and rhetoric as she grew up and to speak her mind. Malala first became aware of the subordinate position of women in her community when she was just a young child. She was particularly aware of the disparity between her mother, Tor Pekai, who had no formal schooling, and her father, who had received extensive education in poetry, oratory, and writing. Thanks to connections her father had made, Malala started blogging for the BBC at the age of 11. She additionally appeared in a *New York Times* programme about Taliban-era Pakistan. Malala's involvement in the media increased

after these two initiatives, despite her youth. In interviews, she voiced her criticism of the Taliban, a violent religious extremist group that has grown in influence in her nation.

Malala suffered a gunshot injury from a Taliban soldier in the autumn of 2012. She received treatment in military healthcare facilities in Pakistan before being transferred, as a result of her widespread fame, to Birmingham, England's world-class hospitals. Malala recovered fully from her gunshot wounds and kept up her vigorous advocacy for female empowerment and education. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014, becoming the youngest winner in the award's 114-year tradition.

*I Am Malala* makes numerous historical allusions, starting with the account of Pakistan's foundation in 1947. The British Empire, which at the time ruled over the region that eventually evolved into India and Pakistan, was opposed by the famous Indian statesman Mahatma Gandhi throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Gandhi spearheaded this nonviolent struggle. After the conclusion of World War II, the British Empire gave up control of its imperial possessions in Asia in the 1940s.

India and Pakistan eventually split into two independent nations, with Pakistan housing a greater proportion of Muslims and India housing a greater number of Hindus, despite Gandhi's proposal for a one-state alternative to British rule. The nation's alleged "Golden Age" in the 1950s and 1960s saw great economic growth in Pakistan.

When Pakistan fell under the rule of General Zia, a brutal dictator who commanded a general radicalisation of the Pakistani populace, this explosive growth unexpectedly came to a halt in the 1980s. Zia skillfully forged a partnership with America by pledging to sup-

port it in its wars against the Soviet Union. As a response, the United States started providing Pakistan with a great deal of foreign aid and military training. Osama Bin Laden visited Pakistan during Zia's rule to assist in the country's struggle with the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

General Pervez Musharraf took office as Pakistan's new leader in 2001, at the outset of the American-led "War on Terror." Musharraf pledged to support the US in its war against terrorists like Osama Bin Laden. However, during the early 2000s, Pakistan became more extreme. Many of its residents held the view that the United States posed an imminent danger to the global community and that Jews were mostly to blame for its financial exploitation.

Malala Yousafzai presents herself to the reader in Chapter 1 ("A Daughter Is Born") of *I Am Malala* and provides basic details about her past and present.

### 3.3.1 Summary

Malala recounts that even though she was born early, which is considered lucky in her tribe, many villagers nevertheless felt bad for her parents since Malala was a female baby. According to her, women in her nation are viewed as second-class people who are only good for preparing food and giving birth to children.

Jehan Sher Khan Yousafzai, the cousin of Malala's father, was among the few who attended the baby's birth celebration. He presented Malala with a "handsome gift of money." He also produced a sizable family tree that displayed the fathers and sons in Malala's family. Ziauddin, Malala's father, reacted in an uncommon way when his cousin did this. He fetched a pen and, despite the fact that Mala-



la was a girl child, drew a line to denote her birth rather than embracing it as a gift. Malala's birth was commemorated by Ziauddin with gifts typically given to male children—coins and fruit—because he believed she was unique.

Malala was named after the Afghan heroine Malalai. The Pashtun ethnic population, which includes Malala, is split between Afghanistan and Pakistan's neighbour. The Pashtuns are bound to regard everyone with dignity and reverence by a rigid moral code of honour. The Pashtuns are confident and aggressive people. Because she led the Pashtuns in a victorious rebellion against the British in the 1880s, Malalai is revered by these individuals as a heroine. Malalai abandoned her marriage when she was still a teenager in order to train as a commander and a warrior. She was murdered by British soldiers, but her army ultimately overcame the British. Afghanistan continues to honour Malalai with monuments, and she represents the country's fight against foreign occupation.

Malala goes on to describe her culture. She

resides in the picturesque Swat Valley, which is home to fruit trees, rivers, and forests. The locals go skiing in the surrounding highlands during the winter. At present, Swat is annexed to Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Swat was once a sovereign state, but after India gained its independence in 1947, it was incorporated into Pakistan as a separate entity. Swat residents use rupees, the national currency of Pakistan, but they also enjoy an extremely high degree of social and political independence from that country. Despite the fact that Islamabad, the Pakistani capital, is only 100 miles away, the majority of the Swat population has never ventured outside their valley.

The main town in Swat is Mingora, where Malala and her family reside. Since the eleventh century, Swat has been home to an Islamic community. But before this, it had been a Buddhist state, therefore Swat continues to possess Buddhist temple remnants. Malala has spent her entire life enclosed by wildlife, taking in the majesty of the Hindu Kush mountains and the valley she lives in.



*Fig 3.3.2 Malala at Swat Valley in Pakistan*

Malala's family was extremely underprivileged. Malala's father and his family reside in a slum despite opening their first school for females in Mingora. However, Malala's family hosts guests often, preparing dishes for them and enjoying themselves with them. Malala emphasises that a significant aspect of her ethnicity is hospitality. Khushal, Malala's brother, was given the name after his father's school that he attends. Atal, the youngest of her brothers, is seven years younger than Malala. By Swati standards, her family is quite small. In contrast to almost all Swati males, Malala's father seldom strikes his wife, Tor Pekai. Malala observes that members of her culture strive to have skin that is lighter. For instance, Malala's father suffered from childhood embarrassment due to his dark skin. He was unable to get over his embarrassment until he married Tor Pekai. Due to the fact that Tor Pekai and Ziauddin wed for love rather than out of social responsibilities, their union was exceptional. Malala observes that this is quite uncommon in Pakistan.

Malala keeps talking about her family. Tor Pekai is a devout Muslim who consistently offers prayers five times a day as a routine habit. When Malala was a child, her father was barely around because Ziauddin was immersed in creating poetry, founding literary organisations, and undertaking action to protect the valley's ecosystem. Ziauddin applied his brains and diligence to succeed despite coming from a poor village. Malala learned to understand the power of language from her father as she was growing up.

Malala's ancestors hail from the illustrious Pashtun tribe of the Yousafzai, which valued both poetry and battle. Despite the ongoing disputes among the Yousafzai, one of their warriors was able to establish order in the Swati Valley in 1917. Jehanzeb, his son, earned the Valley immense wealth and pros-

perity. Malala's father was born in 1969, the year the valley formally unified with Pakistan. Malala primarily identifies as Swati, then Pashtun, and finally Pakistani.

Malala became aware as a little girl that she was unable to go as she pleased due to the fact that she was a woman. Malala, however, made the decision at a young age that she would not let gender bias in her community continue to limit her. Her father urged her to live a life "free as a bird."

### 3.3.2 Analysis

Malala's description of her upbringing and the cultural traditions of her community shed light on the deeply established gender inequality and Pashtun cultural heritage in the Swat Valley. The widespread gender discrimination in her country is highlighted by Malala's account of her birth and the response it provoked from her community. Women are valued largely for their capacity to carry children and take care of home duties, making them second-class citizens. The gender bias in society is highlighted by the fact that Malala's father welcomed her birth with gifts usually given to male children.

The Afghan heroine Malalai is the source of Malala's name, which has historical and cultural importance. The Pashtun people's respect for Malalai demonstrates their deeply ingrained sense of honour and resistance to foreign occupation. Knowing the cultural setting helps in understanding the beliefs and guiding ideas that formed Malala's upbringing.

Malala's account of the Swat Valley and its historical significance gives readers a clear impression of her native country. The account gains depth as a result of the valley's transformation from an autonomous state to a component of Pakistan following India's indepen-

dence, underscoring the diversity of regional identities in Pakistan.

Malala's family's limited financial situation, in spite of their dedication to education and their society, illustrates the difficulties experienced by Pakistan's marginalised populations. Despite their financial difficulties, the family's emphasis on hospitality as a fundamental component of their culture reveals their fortitude and feeling of cohesion.

Malala's father, Ziauddin, becomes one of the most important people in her life. His commitment to poetry, education, and environmental protection is an example of the strength of the individual in a society restricted by conventional norms. Ziauddin's exhortation to Malala to live "free as a bird" reveals his liberal beliefs and his will to rebel against societal restraints.

Malala's early will to question social norms and her maturing knowledge of gender bias demonstrate her tenacity and dedication to education and equality. Her complicated identity, which includes Swati, Pashtun, and Pakistani components, emphasises how difficult it is to define oneself in a country as diverse as Pakistan.

Malala's narrative offers a gripping picture of her early years and the social, cultural, and historical factors that influenced her perspective. Her quest for social justice and gender equality in Pakistan is reflected in her account, which is more than simply her own. It emphasises the value of knowledge and personal initiative in questioning deeply ingrained norms and working towards a more just society.

## Recap

- ▶ Birth of Malala, the girl child
- ▶ The family tree gift
- ▶ Malala was named after Malalai, a heroine from Afghanistan
- ▶ The culture of Swat Valley
- ▶ Malala was born into a poor family
- ▶ Tor Pekai and Ziauddin - Malala's parents
- ▶ The Valley was firmly united with Pakistan in 1969
- ▶ Malala was restricted from travelling where she pleased
- ▶ She grew up as a rebellious woman
- ▶ She had a sense of freedom and natural morality

## Objective Questions

1. Who celebrated Malala's birth with a handsome gift of money?
2. How did Malala's father, Ziauddin, react when his cousin brought the family tree?
3. Who was Malala named after?
4. What is the ethnic group to which Malala belongs?
5. Where did Malala live?
6. What do villagers in Swat do in the winter?
7. What province is Swat currently a part of?
8. What was Swat before it became part of Pakistan?
9. Which currency do the people of Swat use?
10. In which village do Malala and her family live?
11. What was the predominant religion in Swat before the 11th century?
12. What is considered a crucial part of Malala's culture?
13. What was Malala's father ashamed of as a child?
14. Who influenced Malala to respect the power of language?
15. What did the Yousafzai tribe celebrate besides poetry?
16. Which tribe did Malala's family descend from?

## Answers

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. Jehan Sher Khan Yousafzai                 | 9. The rupee      |
| 2. He drew a line to indicate Malala's birth | 10. Mingora       |
| 3. Malalai, a heroine of Afghanistan         | 11. Buddhism      |
| 4. Pashtuns                                  | 12. Hospitality   |
| 5. Swat Valley                               | 13. His dark skin |
| 6. Ski in nearby mountains                   | 14. Her father    |
| 7. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa                        | 15. Combat        |
| 8. An independent state                      | 16. Yousafzai     |

## Assignments

1. How did the gender bias Malala experienced at birth shape her views on gender equality and her determination to challenge traditional gender roles in her community?
2. Discuss the role of Malala's father, Ziauddin, in her upbringing and development.
3. Explore the significance of Malalai, the Afghan heroine, as a symbol in Malala's cultural background.
4. Describe the cultural richness of the Swat Valley as portrayed in the chapter.
5. Examine how Malala's family defies certain cultural norms and expectations.
6. Analyse Malala's evolving sense of identity, from Swati to Pashtun to Pakistani.
7. Trace Malala's journey from a young girl who became aware of gender limitations to a determined advocate for girls' education and women's rights.

## Suggested Reading

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# BLOCK - 04

## Human Rights



# Unit 1

## Injuries

- Vijayarajamallika

### Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ Analyse literary devices in the poem
- ▶ Explain the significance of the chosen names
- ▶ Discuss gender inequality in Indian culture
- ▶ Identify visions for progressive reform
- ▶ Recognise the capacity for harm and healing

### Prerequisites

Vijayarajamallika, also known as Daivathinte Makal, is an influential transgender poet writing in Malayalam. She has been a pioneering voice in articulating the struggles and resilience of marginalised communities in India.

Her poem "Injuries", from the collection *A Word to Mother, Realisation of Reading in Between Lines* offers a powerful perspective on the psychological trauma caused by discriminatory attitudes and abusive language aimed at those who fall outside dominant societal norms. Through evocative metaphors and references to Indian mythological epics, Vijayarajamallika underscores the deep roots of gender inequality and the need for transformative social change aligned with constitutional ideals of equality. As an affecting critique of persisting prejudice, the poem compels reflection on the power dynamics encoded in culture and language, while envisioning the possibility of rising above injustice through human virtue. Exploring this poem provides illuminating insight into both historic wrongs and hopes for progressive reform in India.

### Key Themes

Trauma, Personification, Defiance, Constitution, Inequality, Virtue



## Discussion

### 4.1.1 About the Author

Vijayarajamallika is a renowned transgender poet, writer, teacher, social worker, inspirational speaker, and activist in Malayalam literature. She was born as Manu J Krishnan in 1985 in Muthuvara, Thrissur district, Kerala to Kaniyamkonatth Veettil Y. Krishnan and Jaya Krishnan. She completed her primary education at Kendriya Vidyalaya, Puranattukara and earned a BA in English Literature and History from St. Thomas College, Thrissur, ranking second in her university. In 2009, she completed her Master of Social Work from Rajagiri College of Social Sciences.

Her first poetry collection, *Daivathinte Makal (Daughter of God)*, is included in the syllabus at Madras University's Department of Malayalam. Her autobiography *Mallikavasantham* was the first transgender autobiography in Malayalam literature and won her the Swami Vivekanadhan Yuva Prathibha Award for literature in 2019. She also penned "Aanalla Pennalla Kanmani nee," reportedly the first intersex lullaby in world literature. Vijayarajamallika founded Sahaj International, India's first transgender alternative learning center, and has won numerous honors for her literary achievements and advocacy for the LGB-TIAQ+ community. She continues to write, teach, and inspire change through her bold voice in Malayalam literature.

### 4.1.2 Summary of the Poem "Injuries"

The speaker in this poem seems to be addressing society and its rigid gender roles. In the first stanza, the speaker declares they will name their children Brihandala and Shikand-

ini, which are names from Hindu mythology that cross traditional gender boundaries. The speaker wants their children to heal the "deadly wounds" inflicted by limiting language and rigid gender categories. Rather than confining their children to "boxes" of male and female, the speaker hopes they will simply be good human beings not restricted by gender.

In the second stanza, the speaker envisions their children reading the Indian Constitution, which upholds equal rights for all. They hope their children will read this foundational document during the rainy season of karkadaka, implying this will nourish their growth. Overall, the poem advocates for more fluid gender identities and roles, envisioning children who can grow beyond society's rigid male/female binary to become virtuous human beings. The Indian Constitution represents a source of hope for this more egalitarian future.

### 4.1.3 Critical Appreciation of the Poem

Vijayarajamallika's evocative poem "Injuries" gives voice to the deep psychological wounds inflicted by abusive language and restrictive societal conditioning. Through vivid imagery and sensitive exploration of trauma, the poet highlights the capacity of words to damage our core humanity. As a clarion call for reform and defiance against injustice, "Injuries" offers a powerful critique of persisting gender inequality and prejudice in India.

The poem immediately establishes the animate, tortured nature of these injuries that "scream out." By personifying the concept of emotional/verbal abuse, the poet conveys a visceral sense of the trauma imprinted upon the human psyche. The vivid image of personified injuries aimlessly "walking the streets" evokes the lasting imprint of wounds that per-

sist to haunt and torment victims even if they appear outwardly healed. Through this central conceit, the poet emphasises how hate speech and judgement become rooted in deep trauma.

Juxtaposed against this imagery of screaming, sentient injuries, the poem presents a hopeful vision of virtue and freedom from discrimination. The act of naming her imagined children unique, non-conformist names (Brihandala and Shikandini) becomes an act of defiance against the societal conditioning that gives rise to prejudice. As the additional analysis explains, these names hold symbolic resonance:

"Brihandala is the eunuch form that Arjuna took during the exile period in Mahabharata. Shikandini is a character in *Mahabharata*, daughter of Drupada, the King of Panchala who later becomes a biological male in the epic. As characters that do not fall under the category of male or female, their names have often been misused and used as words of derision against people, especially transgenders."

By reclaiming these names and bestowing them proudly upon her children, the poet resists the injurious use of language to marginalise those outside the gender binary. The emphasis on letting children grow up as human beings of virtue beyond the male/female binary powerfully conveys the poem's humanistic values of equality and inclusion.

On a broader level, "Injuries" uses vivid poetic language to highlight the deep roots of gender inequality and prejudice that persist within Indian society. The reference to the "deadly wounds inflicted by language" evokes historic wrongs against women rooted in regressive attitudes that diminish and trap them. Even in present times, abusive language and toxic messaging normalise the denial of women's full human rights and dignity. By situating the injurious impact of such language within an

Indian cultural context, the poem highlights the unique challenges for gender justice and societal reform in India. As the additional analysis states:

"Although gender and sex are not pertinent in every aspect of human life, it has become an obsession and the most important identity of a person. Instead of being humans, gender has become another way of dividing people into fragments. It is also a parameter to discriminate against those people who do not fall into the simplistic division of man and woman." The rigid societal expectations surrounding gender have given rise to much of the "deadly wounds" decried by the poet.

The poem's concluding lines envision a future where children can grow up embracing the progressive, egalitarian principles enshrined in the Indian constitution, unmarred by the bigotry and injustice stemming from ingrained prejudice. Vijayarajamallika pointedly references the month of "karkadaka" in the Malayalam calendar, which represents a time of natural destruction but also the power of prayer. As the additional analysis notes, this imagery underscores how deeply entrenched attitudes can wreak havoc, but also contain the seeds of transformation through social awareness.

On a stylistic level, the free verse form allows the poet to shape fluid, emotionally expressive lines that capture the rawness and vulnerability of bearing these soul-deep "injuries." Her use of emotive language and sensitive exploration of trauma makes palpable the psychological anguish caused by verbal diminishment and judgement. When conveying how "injuries" can be "hidden by my clothing," the poem highlights how wounds concealable on the outside still cause internal turmoil and angst. Through such skillful metaphorical language, the poem gives voice to powerful emotions under the surface.



In giving tangible, animate form to the indirect injuries imparted through language, biases and conditioning, the poet compellingly conveys their capacity to damage our core humanity. The personified injuries have an agency and torment that conveys how words can systematically attack and wound the psyche. At the same time, the visionary ending suggests that speech and writing also have the power to heal and redeem when aligned with virtues of equality, empathy and respect.

Ultimately, Vijayarajamallika's layered exploration of injury, virtue and freedom makes this a poignant testament to the human capacity for both harm and rehabilitation. By articulating the rawness of wounds shaped by discriminatory systems, while envisioning the possibility of rising above injustice, "Injuries" conveys both the harmful imprint and the hopes for transcending gender inequality in Indian society. With affecting vulnerability and lyricism, the poem crystallises an experience of marginalisation into a crystalline call for progressive social change.

In giving voice to the psychological trauma stemming from regressive attitudes and conditioning around gender roles, the poem highlights an issue with deep roots and profound consequences for Indian society. Gender-based discrimination remains an obstacle to human rights and dignity that touches upon many aspects of life. From the poem's imagery of screaming personified injuries, to its references to historic epics, to its final vision of an India where the constitutional promise of equality is realised, "Injuries" powerfully

demonstrates how social progress requires examining and transforming our collective psyche beyond restrictive binaries.

Vijayarajamallika's poignant expressions of pain arising from regressive norms, coupled with her dream of redemption through human virtue, conveys that our words and attitudes have profound power – both to damage and to heal. The rich layers of meaning and emotion in "Injuries" emphasise that promoting equality requires give full expression to marginalised voices and experiences. Only by acknowledging the unjust injuries embedded in our social fabric can India progress towards a more just and inclusive future. The poet gives a clarion call for Indians to recognise the full diversity of human experience, beyond reductive labels, in order to cultivate both wisdom and compassion.

Ultimately, "Injuries" stands as a complex, multifaceted exploration of the roots and remedies for gender inequality from an important marginalised perspective. Through nuanced lyricism and skillful use of literary devices, Vijayarajamallika transforms acute personal trauma into a resonant statement on India's continuing journey towards social justice and human rights for all citizens. The poem compels readers to reflect on the power dynamics encoded in language and culture which subtly perpetuate prejudice in ways that dehumanise us all. However, the poet's redemptive vision points to the possibility of rising above injustice through courage, understanding and embrace of our shared humanity beyond gender.

## Recap

- ▶ Vijayarajamallika is a pioneering transgender poet writing in Malayalam
- ▶ "Injuries" critiques psychological trauma caused by discriminatory language
- ▶ The poem uses vivid metaphors and personification to convey emotional wounds
- ▶ It challenges gender binaries through the poet's choice of defiant names
- ▶ Historic roots of gender inequality in India are referenced
- ▶ The poem advocates for social change aligned with the Indian Constitution
- ▶ Imagery underscores society's capacity for both harm and reform
- ▶ The redemptive vision points to rising above injustice through human virtue

## Objective Questions

1. What is the gender identity of the poet Vijayarajamallika?
2. Which language does Vijayarajamallika predominantly write in?
3. What is the name of Vijayarajamallika's first poetry collection?
4. What does the poet defiantly name her imaginary children in the poem?
5. What important Indian text does the poet envision children reading?
6. In which calendar month does the poem envision children reading the Constitution?
7. What key theme does the poem critique regarding historic gender roles in India?
8. How does the poem envision overcoming injustice in Indian society?

## Answers

- |                             |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Transgender              | 5. Constitution |
| 2. Malayalam                | 6. Karkadaka    |
| 3. <i>Daivathinte Makal</i> | 7. Inequality   |
| 4. Brihandala, Shikandini   | 8. Virtue       |



## Assignments

1. Analyse the use of literary devices like metaphor and personification in the poem. How do they help convey the key themes and emotions ?
2. Discuss the significance of the poet's choice to name her imaginary children Brihandala and Shikandini. How does this tie into her critique of gender binaries and societal conditioning?
3. Explain how the poem situates gender inequality and the roots of discrimination within an Indian cultural context. Provide examples from the text.
4. What is the vision of the future presented at the end of the poem? How does the reference to the Indian Constitution and month of Karkadaka relate to this vision?
5. In what ways does the poem highlight both the capacity for harm stemming from regressive attitudes as well as the possibility for positive social change?

## Suggested Reading

1. Vijayarajamallika. *A Word to Mother: Realisation of Reading in between Lines*. Authorspress, 2020.
2. Robbins, Ruth. "Gender and Genre in the Short Story." *The Edinburgh Companion to the Short Story in English*, edited by Paul Delaney and Adrian Hunter, Edinburgh University Press, 2019, pp. 293–312. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv8jnzvj.23>.
3. Satchidanandan, K. "Looking for a Place." *Indian Cultural Forum*. 29 August 2022. <https://indianculturalforum.in/2022/08/29/looking-for-a-place/>
4. AJ, Arya. "Prioritise gender justice, not gender equality: Transgender poet Vijayarajamallika." MBIFL 2023, Mathrubhumi.com, <https://english.mathrubhumi.com/special-pages/mbifl-2023/prioritize-gender-justice-not-gender-equality-vijayarajamallika-1.8277342>



# Unit 2

## Blackout

- Roger Mais

### Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ become aware of both innocence and injustice
- ▶ enhance their understanding of society's tension revealed in the story "Blackout"
- ▶ get acquainted with the nuances of darkness and morality
- ▶ explore the techniques and language uses of story writing

### Prerequisites

In 1940s Jamaica, few White people had power and money. Many Black people were poor with little chance. This unfairness caused anger and strikes. Poor workers found comfort in folk religion and Christian meetings. These problems finally exploded one hot night in Maypen. When lights went out, the town was covered in darkness. Known places became strange. With no rules, people did illegal things. Two teen boys, Bam-Bam and Boy Blue, explored. Walking dark streets, they saw hidden injustice and fights. Their playful night became an awakening. The dark night over Maypen was both real event and central metaphor. Thrown into murky shadows, familiar spaces became surreal. Free of rules, people celebrated, misbehaved and did wrong. The two teenage boys used the chaotic night for adventure. As they wandered the dark streets, they glimpsed for the first time unfairness and conflicts under their orderly town's surface. Their youthful wonder became an awakening.

### Key Themes

Racial and social injustice, Colonialism, Poverty, Resistance, Alienation



## Discussion

### 4.2.1 Summary of the Story

The story is set in Jamaica and centers around a young boy named Bam-Bam. On a hot, humid night, Bam-Bam is sitting on his verandah chatting with his friend Boy Blue. They notice that the lights have gone out all over the nearby town of Maypen. Realising it is a blackout, the two boys get excited and decide to head into town to see what mischief they can get into under the cover of darkness.

As they walk through the dark streets, they come across a bar where people are drinking, talking loudly, and dancing enthusiastically despite the blackout. Boy Blue convinces Bam-Bam to steal some guineps from a vendor's cart, and they munch on the fruit as they continue their adventure.

The boys stumble upon a spiritual revival meeting led by Sister Caroline. The crowd is worked up into a frenzy as Sister Caroline speaks in tongues and promises miracles. Bam-Bam and Boy Blue mock the proceedings until an old man confronts them and accuses them of being non-believers. Intimidated, the boys slip away.

As Bam-Bam and Boy Blue approach the wharf, they hear violent shouts and see police officers beating a crowd of strikers and protestors who are unhappy with their working conditions. The boys watch, fascinated and disturbed, as the chaotic scene unfolds.

Ultimately, the blackout comes to an end as the lights flick back on across Maypen. Bam-Bam and Boy Blue decide they have had enough excitement for one night and head home, chatting lightly about their adventures. The story ends with the boys back on the verandah where they started, a little more mature and

worldly after their illuminating experiences under cover of darkness.

In summary, "Blackout" provides a vivid snapshot of the tensions, spirituality, and struggles in Jamaican society through the lens of two adolescent boys exploring their town on a hot, memorable night. Their journey takes them from mischief to morality and back again.

### 4.2.2 The Blackout Setting as a Metaphor and Motif

In Roger Mais's short story "Blackout," the literal town-wide blackout that catalyses the action also operates as a central metaphor and motif. On a literal level, the blackout provides cover for the young protagonists, Bam-Bam and Boy Blue, to venture out into the streets of Maypen unsupervised, free from adult authority and the social order maintained by routine, rules, and visibility. Devoid of electricity, the infrastructure of law and civilisation breaks down, suspending norms. The two boys exploit this freedom to wander and get into mischief as they explore their familiar hometown rendered suddenly strange and unknown under the cloak of darkness. The blackout grants them permission to enter unfamiliar territory both physically and symbolically, encountering new sights and experiences that would normally be off-limits to their young eyes.

Figuratively, the pervasive blackout symbolises a descent into moral ambiguity. Light and illumination are frequently associated with truth, knowledge, transparency, reason, and ethical action, whereas darkness suggests mystery, obscurity, deceit, irrationality, and immorality. By bathing Maypen in shadow, the setting reflects blurred boundaries between right and wrong, order and chaos. Deprived of clear lines of sight and illuminated paths to follow, the boys lose their moral bear-

ings. Regular social hierarchies and divides between rich and poor, believers and skeptics, law enforcement and civilians all dissolve in the blackout, highlighting class and power dynamics usually hidden. Without the guiding “spotlight” of truth and order that electricity provides, the citizens of Maypen stray into decadence and mischief or else misdirect their simmering frustrations.

On a sensory level, Mais’s lyrical descriptions of the Jamaican night transport readers into the darkened atmosphere. Similes like “dry as a sun-bleached bone” and “soft and velvet-like” convey textures and temperatures that make the night palpable. The “hot, sticky night seemed to stick to the skin like a sweat-soaked shirt,” immersing the reader in the sultry heat. Repeated emphasis on the darkness being “soft,” “velvet-like,” and “gentle” connects the loss of light with physical touch and intimacy. Mais expertly uses descriptive language to vivify the blacked-out setting, making it feel enveloping.

Without illumination, the familiar town of Maypen morphs into an alien, phantasmagoric landscape experienced anew through the boys’ eyes. Devoid of artificial light sources, signposts, or electricity to anchor space, the urban geography transforms into a disorienting dreamscape. As the boys move through dark streets, they inhabit a surreal world where perceptions cannot be trusted. The altered nighttime reality echoes the symbolic dissolution of social rules – in the shadowy liminal space, anything seems possible.

Structurally, the absence of light drives the episodic sequence of key scenes that form the narrative. Deprived of electricity, the boys’ journey unfolds as a series of disjointed encounters or “vignettes” spotlighted in the darkness, from the lively bar patronised by unseen crowds to the intense spiritual fren-

zy of the revival meeting to the violent confrontation with protestors at the wharf. Their impressions arrive in flashes, heightening suspense. The blackout obscures peripheral details, forcing heightened attention to the sequence of centrally illuminated tableaux—a formal manifestation of the story’s themes of obscured truth and limited awareness. The boys can only experience successive bursts of illumination that punctuate the darkness, just as coming of age entails exposure to disorienting realities outside childhood’s sheltered realm of light and order.

On a metaphysical level, lighting forms patterns of seeing and blindness that shape the narrative and thematic content. The boys’ journey traces an arc from innocent certainty in the well-lit familiar to unsettling glimpses of society’s repressed conflicts in the darkness. Their impressionistic understanding increases through interactions enabled by the blackout while reducible moral clarity decreases. Light patterns structure their trajectory from naivety to knowledge, safety to danger, order to anarchy.

These interdependent literal, symbolic, sensory, and structural manifestations of darkness in “Blackout” highlight Mais’ sophisticated use of setting. The blackout acts as atmosphere, metaphor, morality motif, organising principle, and reflection of human psychology surrounding youthful curiosity and social taboos. Plunging Maypen into shadow, Mais crafts an evocative backdrop that heightens the narrative’s emotional impact and thematic resonance. Through masterful environmental description, the darkness feels palpable, disorienting, and psychologically insightful all at once.

Few fictional settings so thoroughly permeate or multiply a text’s meanings across literal, symbolic, formal, and sensory dimensions.



The blackout forms the core of this deceptively simple yet complex coming-of-age story. While on the surface a means to unleash the adventure, the calculated manipulation of light and dark proves integral to “Blackout” on every level. Mais’ creative vision spotlights youthful awakening to life’s harshest realities by first dimming the lights on the known world.

### 4.2.3 Themes

Central Themes - Morality, Justice, and Human Duality.

On a symbolic level, the blackout in Roger Mais’ short story “Blackout” represents the young protagonists’ fall from innocence into mature awareness of life’s harsher realities. Literal darkness has long signified the unknown, chaos, mystery, and peril in literature and folklore. By leaving the safely lit, ordered space of home, Bam-Bam and Boy Blue confront unfamiliar, unsettling facets of society usually obscured from their innocent childhood vantage point. The blackout becomes their catalyst for revelation.

Tempted by mischief and petty theft, allured by the carnivalesque frenzy of the crowds, yet also disturbed by glimpses of violence and suffering, the boys oscillate between youthful recklessness and more somber burgeoning social consciousness. Their encounters with moral ambiguity, exploitation, and conflict in the darkness parallel the metaphoric “loss of innocence” as they awaken to injustice and human complexity.

Relatedly, Mais explores themes of entrenched inequality, civil unrest, and systemic oppression in colonial 1940s Jamaica through the events unveiled during the blackout. The spiritual fervor at the revival meeting underscores class divisions, as the preacher Sister

Caroline stirs the crowd of impoverished laborers into a frenzy with promises of salvation and miracles. Poverty and lack of opportunity fuel their religious zeal.

Meanwhile, the violent confrontation on the dock between protesters and police highlights racial, economic, and labor tensions that were simmering right below the surface before erupting into nationwide strikes and unrest. Through these glimpses of desperation, state-sanctioned brutality, and social fragmentation, Mais paints a portrait of a society riven by turmoil and on the brink of upheaval. On an individual level, the blackout blurs moral reasoning, as petty theft is excused in the name of mischief and youthful non-conformity goes unpunished due to shared social alienation. Devoid of the clear guidelines provided by light, right and wrong grow ambiguous in the shadows.

Finally, the chaotic scenes evoke the Jungian concept of the “shadow self”—the repressed, animalistic, immoral urges that society normally condemns and forbids. Freed from rules and daylight consequences, the people of Maypen give into their impulses and shadows on both euphoric and violent fronts. Their uninhibited behavior under cover of darkness reveals humanity’s dual capacity for community and joy but also savagery and cruelty when unchecked by moral scaffolding. Their actions seem both emancipating and disturbing through the boys’ adolescent eyes.

By removing the veneer of order and daylight, the blackout reveals the stark economic and racial divides, political tensions, moral variability, and primal human instincts lurking beneath the surface of colonised Jamaican society. The absence of light becomes Mais’ vehicle for social commentary and philosophical exploration of human duality. While anchored in a specific time and place, the narrative’s

central themes remain universally resonant. Societal injustice, exploitation of the vulnerable, class and race inequities, mob mentality, youthful disillusionment, moral relativism — these dynamics still plague much of civilisation today. Any reader can relate to the protagonists' shock at seeing beyond society's façade of order and propriety.

The boys function as proxy characters through which we as readers can experience moral awakening anew to the individual and collective shadows within every culture. Their impressions mirror our own dawning recognition of life's complex grays between childhood's black and white divides. By following their journey through the dimly lit streets of Maypen from innocence to experience, we re-encounter truths about human nature buried but never fully extinguished.

Through lyrical, metaphorical darkness, Mais exposes lingering systemic oppression and humanity's innate duality in colonial Jamaica. Yet these revelations shed light on our wider world as well. The blackout proves merely a localised embodiment of the moral and judicial blindness that blights societies globally. When the lights come up, responsibility rests with all who have seen the shadows to keep steadily illuminating the paths forward.

#### 4.2.4 Characterisation

As protagonists, Bam-Bam and Boy Blue embody youthful duality. Their initial eagerness for adventure and mischief represents child-like innocence and temptation. However, as witnesses to exploitation, brutality, and suffering, they exhibit early stirrings of social awareness and mature, and cynical perspectives. Both credulous and questioning, the boys contain multitudes, balancing wide-eyed wonder with a growing comprehension of injustice.

Mais also depicts the two friends as foils. Timid Bam-Bam is more apprehensive, worrying they will get caught stealing guineps and uncomfortable with the revival meeting's frenzy. Boy Blue exhibits greater daring, pushing boundaries with casual entitlement and authority-testing. He mocks the old man's religious threats confidently. Their different reactions add nuance, showing adolescence contains a spectrum of attitudes both conformist and rebellious.

#### 4.2.5 Language

The language usage in “Blackout” is vividly expressive and exhilarating. Dialogue reveals colloquial syntax and rhythms of Jamaican speech through phrasing, tone, and diction. The musical quality transports readers into the aural landscape. Distinct idioms and speech patterns emerge for each character, avoiding monolithic portrayals.

Descriptive language bathes the reader in sensations. The humid atmosphere feels tangible through visceral similes and metaphors like “the hot, sticky night seemed to stick to the skin like a sweat-soaked shirt.” Texture, temperature, and physicality come alive. During the frenzied revival meeting, the incantatory language, repetition, and snippets of actual song lyrics mimic the mystical delirium of religious trances. The chanting vocabulary diverges sharply from the boys' relaxed patois, highlighting dimensions beyond their experience. The layered languages and voices add cultural texture.

#### 4.2.6 Narrative Style

As a limited third person narrator, Mais adheres closely to Bam-Bam's vantage point and impressions, granting insights into his perspective, fears, motivations, and attitude more





so than secondary characters. However, Mais does occasionally pivot to an omniscient, "zoomed out" point of view. By moving flexibly between Bam-Bam's personal experience and an all-seeing eye, Mais enables richer storytelling than a single restricted narrator could provide. For example, omniscient insights contextualise events like the widespread blackout beyond Bam-Bam's knowledge. Mais also relays atmospheric details and sensory information in passages aligned with an external narrator. The blended narrative styles allow intimacy and scope.

The present tense creates an urgent, immediate feel, as if events are unfolding in real time before the reader's eyes. Short punchy sentences like "Darkness everywhere" convey drama and suspense. Thematically, the breathless present tense parallels the boys' thrill-seeking mindset and youthful energy as they race through the shadowy streets.

### 4.2.7 Contemporary Relevance

While set specifically in 1940s Jamaica, "Blackout" still resonates broadly with contemporary audiences. At its core, this remains a timeless coming-of-age narrative. Two friends navigating between youthful innocence, temptation by vice and crime, direct encounters with injustice, and growing social awareness mirror universal adolescent journeys toward maturity. These in-between themes remain relevant across generations and cultures.

Additionally, Mais' themes of poverty, inequality, disenfranchisement, police brutality, religious exploitation, and civil unrest still find echoes today both in developing nations and disadvantaged communities worldwide. Social and systemic ills that simmered below the surface in the 1940s await solutions globally. Blanket "darkness" conceals suffering

from those unaffected or oblivious. Mais' social consciousness proves ahead of its time. The symbolic blackout also relates to modern phenomena like internet privacy, misinformation, propaganda, and cognitive biases obscuring truth and morality from the populace. When facts are uncertain, individuals often lose ethical bearings. Darkness breeds polarisation. Mais' narrative warns of what shadowy forces can conceal.

Overall, while firmly rooted in a specific era and locale, "Blackout" transcends its context through rich language, universal coming-of-age themes, and exploration of human motivations surrounding morality and social justice. Darkness serves as an apt metaphor for the blurring of truth.

### 4.2.8 Critical Appreciation

"Blackout" displays Roger Mais' remarkable gifts as a storyteller. The third person narrative voice reads as both poetically evocative and true to life. Rhythmic prose coupled with authentic dialogue and local details create an immersive atmosphere. Readers inhabit the tale as observers and participants simultaneously.

For a concise short story, "Blackout" tackles substantial themes related to morality, spirituality, politics, social inequality, and civil rights without growing didactic. Mais embeds cultural commentary organically through well-chosen scenes. Adept characterisation and vivid drama take precedence over pedantry. The episodic narrative structure mirrors the boys' journey through sensations and impressions rather than strict linear plot. Each vignette operates as a self-contained story within the mosaic. The overall effect is kaleidoscopic and dynamic.

While set in 1940s Jamaica, core elements feel



enduringly resonant. Mais delivers a universal coming-of-age story couched in specifics of time and place. The matter transcends the setting. Any society obscured by metaphorical “darkness” stands to learn from Mais’s luminous prose. "Blackout" packs in electric

language, cultural immersion, youthful spirit, and insight into the human condition under literal and figurative shadow in only a few pages. The story manages to entertain, educate, and enlighten all at once.

## Recap

- ▶ Literal blackout provides cover for boys' misadventures and glimpse of hidden societal tensions
- ▶ Darkness acts as metaphor for moral ambiguity and blurring of social rules
- ▶ Vivid sensory details transport reader into blacked-out setting
- ▶ Episodic narrative structure mirrors disorienting landscape
- ▶ Themes explore inequality, unrest, human duality in colonial Jamaica
- ▶ Coming-of-age story remains universal across cultures
- ▶ Narrative style blends intimacy of limited third-person with omniscient scope
- ▶ Story resonates today through timeless themes and its warning about society's obscured ills
- ▶ Masterful language, drama, characterisation, and thematic resonance despite concise length
- ▶ Evocative setting multiplication (literal, symbolic, sensory, structural) exemplifies sophisticated craft
- ▶ Overall entertaining yet insightful take on youthful awakening and human nature

## Objective Questions

1. What causes the blackout in Maypen?
2. What genre is “Blackout”?
3. Who are the two main characters?
4. What country is the setting?
5. What time period is depicted?
6. What does the blackout metaphorically represent?
7. What religion features prominently?
8. Who violently confronts protestors?



9. What initiates Bam-Bam and Boy Blue's adventure?
10. What literary technique describes the episodic narrative?

## Answers

- |                      |                    |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Electricity       | 6. Moral ambiguity |
| 2. Fiction           | 7. Christianity    |
| 3. Bam-Bam, Boy Blue | 8. Police          |
| 4. Jamaica           | 9. Blackout        |
| 5. 1940s             | 10. Vignettes      |

## Assignments

1. How does the blackout setting work in “Blackout”?
2. Pick a character in “Blackout.” Analyse how they show personality through words, actions, and reactions.
3. Discuss the narrative style in “Blackout.” How do language, dialogue, viewpoint, etc., develop the setting, atmosphere and characters?
4. How does “Blackout” blend 1940s Jamaica details and universal coming-of-age themes?
5. Analyse the morality theme in “Blackout.” How does the blackout blur moral lines?

## Suggested Reading

1. Marland, Michael. *Caribbean Stories: Fifteen Short Stories by Writers from the Caribbean*. Longman, 1978.
2. Page, Malcolm. “West Indian Writers.” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1970, pp. 167–72. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1345298>.
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## Unit 3

# A Tryst with Destiny

- Jawaharlal Nehru

### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand the context and significance of Nehru's "A Tryst with Destiny" speech
- ▶ analyse the speech's content, structure and rhetoric
- ▶ appreciate how the speech framed independence as a civilisational quest
- ▶ evaluate the speech's call for inclusive nation-building

### Prerequisites

Jawaharlal Nehru's "A Tryst with Destiny" speech is one of the most iconic speeches in Indian history. Delivered on the eve of India's long-awaited independence from British rule, the speech marked a pivotal transition for the nation. After nearly two centuries of colonial subjugation, India was taking its first steps as a newly liberated country.

The speech was broadcast across India and the world on the midnight of August 14-15, 1947. As the first Prime Minister of independent India, Nehru's voice embodied the spirit of the nation at that historic hour. In poetic language, Nehru paid tribute to the freedom struggle and articulated his vision for building a democratic, egalitarian India. The speech inspired Indians to see independence not just as an end, but as a new beginning - a tryst with destiny that set the course for India's future development as a sovereign nation. Even today, the speech remains deeply evocative of the meaning of freedom and the responsibilities it entails.

### Key Themes

Speech, Dream, India, Freedom, Colonial rule



## Discussion

### 4.3.1 About the Author

Jawaharlal Nehru was the first Prime Minister of India. He played a leading role in the Indian freedom struggle. He went to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1907 and graduated in natural science. He also studied politics, economics, history and literature during this period. Jawaharlal Nehru was trained in the law in the Inner Temple. He authored many books and penned letters which are widely read and is known for its poetic prose.

### 4.3.2 Summary of the Speech

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's speech "A Tryst with Destiny" was delivered to the Constituent Assembly on 14 August 1947, a day before India attained independence. The speech was delivered in English and Jawaharlal Nehru listed out the objectives India as a country must achieve after it attained its freedom from the British. He reminds every Indian that at the stroke of the midnight hour India shall awake to life and freedom. Jawaharlal Nehru describes the moment of freedom as a time when the old gives way to the new, when an age ends and the soul of a nation that had been muted and suppressed for a long time finally finds its voice.

Jawaharlal Nehru reminds the members of the Assembly that they have great responsibility towards the people of India. It is only fitting that they take a pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people, never really forgetting that they shall serve a larger cause, and that is, the service of humanity. He reminds the nation that India had a long history of success and failures and on the eve of independence, an entire era of ill fortune ends.

Freedom is also the beginning of new challenges. Jawaharlal Nehru reminds the assembly that freedom and power bring new responsibilities. The responsibility of the assembly is to look at a new future and the new future has to be created by continuous hard work. To serve India would mean to serve millions who suffer. There are great challenges like the ending of poverty, ignorance, disease, and inequality of opportunity. Until such suffering is put to an end, no one can claim that their work is over.

Any dream of development for India is also a dream of development for the world because the world cannot be split into isolated fragments. As for the members of the assembly, they need to stick together with a larger goal in mind. There is no time for petty and destructive criticism and definitely no time for blaming others.

Jawaharlal Nehru likens the new India that has to be built into a noble mansion where all of India's children shall dwell happily. Independence was a dream and that dream had been achieved. During the struggle for independence, many promises were made. Jawaharlal Nehru reminds the assembly that now the time has come to fulfil those pledges. A free country has the opportunity to rise up and be a light to other nations as well. Jawaharlal Nehru calls India a new star - a star of freedom of the East and he hopes that the star may never set.

He then goes on to remember the great architect of freedom, the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi. He was the one who held aloft the torch of freedom and lighted up the darkness that surrounded the Indians. Jawaharlal Nehru calls ordinary people his unworthy followers, remembering how often they had strayed from Gandhi's message of peace and nonviolence. Mahatma Gandhi's message is something that

even succeeding generations will not forget and will carry in their hearts forever. He then remembers the nameless and unknown volunteers and soldiers who died for freedom, who won neither praise nor recognition but whose sacrifice gave India her independence.

During this time, Jawaharlal Nehru does not forget the people of Pakistan, people who had been cut off from India by political boundaries. Jawaharlal Nehru reminds the people of India and people of Pakistan that although the people of Pakistan have been separated from India, they shall always be connected to each other.

He then lists out the objectives free India should achieve. Freedom and opportunity must be provided to the common man, to the peasants and workers of India. People should fight to end poverty, ignorance and disease, and the aim should be to build a prosperous, democratic and progressive nation. Apart from this there should be the creation of social, economic and political institutions that will ensure justice and fullness of life to every man and woman.

In short, the work ahead promises that there will be no rest for free India. He reminds the Indians that now they are citizens of a great country on the verge of a bold advance and therefore they should live up to that standard. He reminds the people that they should keep communalism and narrow mindedness at bay because no great nation can be great whose people are narrow in thought or in action. He revers India calling her the ancient, the eternal and the ever-new land. And to this motherland he bids everyone to renew their services.

### 4.3.3 Critical Appreciation of the Speech

Jawaharlal Nehru's iconic "A Tryst with Des-

tiny" speech, delivered on the eve of India's independence from British rule, is widely regarded as one of the most significant political speeches of the 20th century. Marking the transition of India from colonial subjecthood to sovereign nationhood, the speech captures both the enormity of the moment as well as outlines Nehru's vision for the newly liberated nation.

#### 4.3.3.1 Context and Background

To fully appreciate the speech, it is important to understand the historical context in which it was delivered. After nearly 200 years of British colonial rule, India was finally realizing the long-cherished dream of political freedom. The freedom movement, led by the Indian National Congress under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, had engaged in decades of mass agitations and civil disobedience to mobilize public opinion and destabilize British imperial power. By 1947, with the Second World War having drained British resources and eroded its global authority, it became clear that the days of the Raj were numbered. As British prepared to transfer power, the prospect of independence brought both excitement and anxiety, as old certainties gave way to an uncertain future.

It was in this turbulent context that Nehru delivered his iconic speech to the Constituent Assembly on the stroke of the midnight hour on August 14-15, as India transitioned from colonial servitude to liberty. Nehru was a pivotal leader of the freedom struggle, having served long years in British prisons and risen to become Gandhi's political heir and Congress President. His speech therefore carried tremendous significance as the voice of free India's first Prime Minister. The speech was broadcast live across the world by All India Radio, allowing both Indian and international audiences to share in the historic moment.



### 4.3.3.2 Structure and Content

Nehru begins the speech by directly invoking the iconic phrase "A Tryst with Destiny," situating Indian independence as the long-awaited fruition of India's age-old quest for self-realization. This poetic opening immediately frames the speech as more than just a political transition, but as the culmination of India's eternal "striving" for freedom.

Nehru expresses awareness that the hard-won freedom is still partial and constrained by various obstacles. Gandhi's memorable injunction that India's independence must bring freedom to the poorest of the poor remained unfulfilled. Yet Nehru insists that destiny has willed this moment, and the time has come for India to finally redeem the pledge of freedom made long ago, dismantle the structures of imperial domination, and determine her own future.

After this eloquent opening, Nehru provides a sweeping historical perspective, situating the present as part of India's long and grand civilisational journey. He speaks of the "trackless centuries filled with her striving and grandeur," presenting Indian history as an epic quest spanning millennia, with the present moment as a new chapter in this timeless saga. This framing gives the speech a mythic quality, with India's destiny intimately tied to its sense of civilisational identity.

Pivoting from historical idealism to concrete political reality, Nehru acknowledges that the freedom at hand is both hard-won yet constrained and incomplete. He reminds the audience of the "pain of labor" endured in the long freedom struggle, tacitly acknowledging Gandhi and other leaders. At the same time, Nehru insists that lamenting past sorrows must give way to the urgent demands and opportunities of the present. This demonstrates

Nehru's constructive, future-oriented vision.

The core part of the speech outlines Nehru's broad priorities and goals for the newly free nation. He declares that national reconstruction must aim to uplift the common masses of peasants and workers from poverty, malnutrition and socioeconomic inequality. Nehru voices the inclusive, democratic socialist vision of the Congress, insisting that political freedom must translate to genuine socioeconomic freedom. He also identifies ending communalism and divisive politics as a prime national priority. Throughout, Nehru articulates a vision of an independent India taking charge of its own destiny and shaping its future through democratic choice and purposeful action.

In the concluding sections, Nehru returns to lofty rhetoric, invoking Gandhi's memory and universalist ideals. He calls on Indians to redeem the promises of independence through hard work and discipline, avoiding petty criticism. Appropriately for this ceremonial moment, the speech ends on a utopian note, expressing hope and optimism in India's destiny and pledging to build a prosperous and just nation.

### 4.3.3.3 Rhetoric and Linguistic Artistry

Beyond its momentous content, Nehru's speech is striking for its highly evocative, poetic language. Nehru casts political ideals in emotionally charged, vivid metaphors – the longest night giving way to the dawn of freedom, the soul of nation finding utterance, the star of freedom rising in the East. The speech exhibits Nehru's sophisticated command of English rhetoric honed during his education in the West.

Nehru also effectively employs repetition, parallelism and variation to amplify key themes.



The pledges and promises of independence are invoked repeatedly, accentuating the solemnity of the moment. Nehru also uses parallelism effectively in key phrases like “peace is indivisible, so is freedom, so is prosperity.” Rhetorical questioning, hypothetical imaging, metaphor and personification give the speech an inspirational, visionary quality that resonated with Indian and international audiences alike.

#### 4.3.3.4 Relevance and Impact

“A Tryst with Destiny” remains relevant decades after its original delivery for its effective articulation of the meaning of national independence and the responsibilities it entails. At a broader level, it expresses the enthusiasm, uncertainty and promise that accompany historical transitions and the need to purposefully build forward-looking visions.

For the Indian public, the speech summarized the meaning of their hard-won independence and the sacrifices of generations. It inspired newly liberated Indians to view freedom not just as an end in itself but as inaugurating an era of national reconstruction. Nehru's inclusive, progressive vision and appeal for national discipline provided a guiding framework for India's post-independence development as a pluralistic democracy.

Internationally, the speech announced the arrival of post-colonial India as a leader of the developing world. It signaled a new assertiveness among Asian and African countries long stifled under imperial dominance. Nehru's articulation of democracy, secularism and equitable development as national goals aligned with the global progressive consensus of a post-war world order. The phrase “tryst with destiny” became internationally emblematic of the decolonization movement.

Historically, the speech marked a definitive break from India's colonial past and a transition to take charge of its own future as a sovereign democracy. Nehru declared the beginning of a new history shaped by India's own choices and agency. In pledging to build an inclusive, egalitarian India, Nehru defined the challenges of translating political freedom to positive change that continue to inspire democratic reform efforts.

Ultimately, while some of Nehru's goals remain unfulfilled, his speech retains significance as a clarion call for national rejuvenation rooted in universal values and future-oriented idealism. Its vision continues to represent the unfulfilled promise and enduring potential of democratic change in India and beyond. As Nehru memorably stated, the appointed tryst with destiny has arrived, and “history begins anew for us.”

## Recap

- ▶ Nehru's iconic speech delivered at midnight on the eve of independence
- ▶ Marked the transition from British colonial rule to sovereign nationhood
- ▶ Articulated vision and goals for newly liberated India
- ▶ Framed independence as the culmination of a civilisational quest
- ▶ Inspired inclusive, democratic nation-building



- ▶ Evocative rhetoric and poetic language
- ▶ Relevant in defining the meaning of freedom and the responsibilities it entails
- ▶ Continues to represent the promise of democratic change in India

## Objective Questions

1. Who delivered the speech "A Tryst with Destiny"?
2. When was the speech delivered?
3. Where was the speech delivered?
4. What day was India going to gain independence?
5. Who led the Indian freedom struggle?
6. What did Nehru say India should end?
7. What feelings did Nehru express about the future?
8. What did Nehru call on Indians to build?
9. What form of government was ending in India?
10. What did Nehru say freedom requires?

## Answers

- |              |                    |
|--------------|--------------------|
| 1. Nehru     | 6. Poverty         |
| 2. Midnight  | 7. Optimism        |
| 3. Assembly  | 8. Democracy       |
| 4. Fifteenth | 9. Colonial        |
| 5. Gandhi    | 10. Responsibility |

## Assignments

1. Discuss the historical context and freedom struggle background for Nehru's "A Tryst with Destiny" speech.
2. Analyze Nehru's combination of historical idealism and political pragmatism in

the speech structure and content.

3. Provide examples of literary devices like metaphors, repetition etc., used by Nehru to amplify his message.
4. Outline Nehru's key goals and priorities for independent India articulated in the speech.
5. Discuss the significance of the speech in India's independence history and its relevance today.

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# BLOCK - 05

## Ethics and Culture

OU - SLM - Literature and the Contemporary World



# Unit 1

## Imagine

- John Lennon

### Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ identify the key themes in "Imagine" and their connection to unity and peace
- ▶ analyse the use of imagery and symbolism, particularly related to heaven, countries, and possessions
- ▶ examine the song's reflection of the socio-political context of the early 1970s and its role in promoting peace
- ▶ get an idea about the inspiration and recording process behind "Imagine," including its connection to Yoko Ono's poems

### Prerequisites

John Lennon was an iconic English musician, born in 1940 and tragically passing away in 1980. His early life was marked by being born in Liverpool during World War II to parents Julia and Alfred Lennon, the latter of whom was a seaman. However, Lennon spent much of his childhood under the care of his aunt and uncle, Mimi and George Smith, as his parents separated.

Lennon's musical journey began at a young age, and at the age of twelve, he had a vision that inspired the name "The Beatles" for his future band. This vision was of a man on a flaming pie who declared them "Beatles with an 'A'". The Beatles gained fame after being discovered by Brian Epstein in 1961 at the Cavern Club, which led to a record contract with EMI, the addition of Ringo Starr as their drummer, and George Martin as their producer.

Lennon was known for his rebellious and witty approach in his music, writing, and drawings. He became controversial through his involvement in political and peace activism, which was reflected in his music, films, and interviews. In 1971, Lennon relocated to New York City, where he continued to advocate for peace and speak out against the Vietnam War. His activism led to a prolonged effort by the Nixon administration to deport him from the United States.



Despite his untimely death, John Lennon's artistic legacy lives on, with his songs continuing to serve as anthems for various social and political movements around the world. His work remains influential and relevant to this day.

In this unit, the point of discussion is about John Lennon's quest for peace in his lyric entitled "Imagine," which was made for peace. John Lennon had the ambition to stop the war, making peace, and helping one another for a better place for living. He exploited his fame by using the media and used his lyric so the world could hear like "Imagine". "Imagine" was made as a response to the class system, class differences, and people's ego. John Lennon created "Imagine" for the world to hear and live in peace.

"Imagine" is a lyric which mostly tells about a world with new perspectives, like living with no heaven, no countries and no possession. The lyric encourages the readers to live in peace, to take care of each other and convinces them to stop useless wars. It is a literary work that was made during wars among countries. This poem is based on the feeling of hope. The poet hopes that one day people will have the same beliefs, there will be no conflict and the world will be a peaceful place. In the poem "Imagine" by John Lennon the poet imagines a peaceful world. He hopes that people should live peacefully without conflict. It tells that if we imagine that there are no countries then we will have nothing to kill or die for. If people were nicer to one another then, there would be no war. Instead of having boundaries that divide us the poet believes we should live as one and share the world. But the poet does call himself a dreamer which is why this poem is based on hope. In conclusion, the poet wants people to follow his dream so that the world will be a peaceful place.

## Keywords

Peace, Unity, Imagination, Anti materialism, Anti religion

## Discussion

There are three things which John Lennon states in the lyric "Imagine". The three things divide people in to religions, countries, and possessions. He wants his readers to imagine if those three things did not exist in his life. "Imagine" is a literary work that has a deep meaning for ambition, even though the ambition seems impossible to reach. The lyric "Imagine" is a part of the movement which Lennon made for people to listen to the beauty of hope and peace. Throughout the lyric, the readers find no anger or force, but patience,

hope and concern for a big movement.

In the first verse, John expresses "Heaven", the place where people who do good things in life to reach after life. Because there is nothing greater than heaven, John sees that "It is easy if you try" to imagine it anyway.

The word "Imagine" in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary means that "To form a mental image of something" (1995-592). This means, Lennon is trying to deliver an image that he forms, so the readers have the chance to have an interest in Lennon's point of view during the era. In the lyric, there are



three images that Lennon was trying to deliver literally: heaven, country and possession.

Since the lyric is called “Imagine”, which urges the readers to create an image of the author’s point of view, it is obvious that there is an imagery. “Imagine there’s no Heaven, It’s easy if you try”; the word “Heaven” is an organic imagery which shows a place where everyone wants to be. “No hell below us, Above us only sky”, as the word “Hell” is also an organic imagery that shows a bad place. “Imagine all the people, Living for today”, the word “Living” is a kinesthetic imagery which shows if people do not have the pressure about their life, how will daily things will be. The author also uses the words “Above” and “Below” which refers to heaven and hell, they also give the clues about the class system as the symbol on the first stanza.

Countries are much lesser than Heaven, but they are much harder to get rid of, to imagine. In the second verse, John writes about much lesser than “Heaven” which is “Countries”. Technically, the concept of “Heaven” is made by God, and then the concept, “Country” is made by humans. Yet, it still means “It isn’t hard to do”. Living in different countries means living in different style, and living in different countries may concern theories about religion which make people live in different ways of life.

In the second stanza, Lennon writes the words “Countries” and “religion” which symbolise “border” “races”, and “culture”. This stanza is possibly related to the differences. This border between countries made people’s ability to share, help, and get along with each other limitless. Religion is also a system of how people worship their God, and there are many ways of doing it. In some cases, these things have also become reasons for war. Therefore, the author mentioned it on line nine, “Noth-

ing to kill or die for” as the symbol of war, of all those things divided that made people apart, made it occur.

In the refrain part, “You may say that I’m a dreamer, But I’m not the only one”, John Lennon seems to make an expecting tone, but he persuades the people to believe that imagining peace is not only his idea. He acknowledges that some of them might not yet consider the difference. “I hope someday you’ll join us, and the world will live as one.” John Lennon uses the word ‘hope’, which means he does not force people to do as he wants; he only gives a perspective on how it should be.

From all three stanzas, it is noticeable that Lennon has three main issues: religion, countries, and possessions. It seems that he has made it synchronised with the general peer until it gets personal. He indicates that systems are made by the roots, which refer to personal possessions, and come up to peer and become general. Though readers cannot deny it, John Lennon would like readers to try to imagine the systems.

In the fourth stanza, the word “Possessiveness” symbolises people’s ego, the desire to want something for themselves without thinking of others, which is more commonly known as possession. Possession is “the state of having, owning, or controlling”. Every human must have the thought to own something, to authorise, or to take over. The line nineteen, which has the words “greed” and “hunger,” is a symbol of the cause and effect of possessions. That is why people need to share with one another because they live in the same world. [The author used the word “World” on the last line of the stanza, where the denotation is “a place where human beings live in the galaxy” and the connotation is “everything”.] It is related to the things that people, as human beings living in the same place, need to share. everything.



The fifth stanza has almost the same meaning as the third stanza, but it only has a different ending. The third stanza's ending is line 16 "And the world will be as one" while the fifth stanza's ending is "And the world will live as one". The difference in here is between "be" and "live". The word "be" is a "strong form with an adjective or a prepositional phrase indicating position in space or time". It is quite different if those two words are used in other sentences, like "I want to be" and "I want to live". The first one says it wants a position, status, or something in the future, while the second meaning is more about surviving in life. It has a quite unique difference between the two words that the author expresses.

In the third and fifth stanzas, the last line provides the words "world" and "one". The word "world" is a symbol of people—every human in the entire world. The denotation of "world" is a place where humans live in the galaxy" and the connotation in this line is "every human in the world". The last word on the line is "one," which is "a numerical number." The connotation of the word as part of the line is

"getting along with; together; merge". Just as the author mentioned in the other stanza, the main message of the third and fifth stanzas is to become one.

The lyric "Imagine" was written in 1971. It is, in many respects, one of his least inventive songs. As he would admit, it sprang from the 'instructional poems' Yoko had been writing since the early sixties. So basically, the structure of the lyric was inspired by the poem that Yoko wrote. First, the song was recorded at Lennon's home studio in Tittenhurst Park, England, and it was overdubbed at the Record Plant in New York City. That year was the year when war and politics were totally on the agenda. "By 1971, the Vietnam issue had divided America more bitterly than any since its traumatic Civil War a century earlier." The writer believes that the issues during the year may affect many aspects of the lyric. Besides that, there were many movements that Lennon was involved with in order to be a part of the political issues aspects, not only involved in but also starting the movements.

## Recap

- ▶ The social aspects in the lyric of "Imagine" are historically read very often in every stanza
- ▶ The first stanza, which mentions 'heaven' and 'hell,' symbolises "the hereafter world"
- ▶ In the second stanza, Lennon writes about "countries" which symbolise "border," "races," and "culture"
- ▶ The writer figures out the same symbols in the fourth stanza, imagine no possessions, to throw out their ego to share the world
- ▶ In the third and fifth stanzas, which almost have the main message of the lyric to unite the people as one society in the one world they live in

- ▶ All the experiences of Lennon get painted in the lyric, giving a picture of the current era
- ▶ The lyric "Imagine" was made for peace as John Lennon's quest
- ▶ Lennon imaginatively mixes the situation with the issues of society
- ▶ It is readable that "Imagine" had a relationship with the peace movement in the 'Flower Power' era and played a role in his lyric to give a picture of society

## Objective Questions

1. What are the three things that the lyricist wants people to imagine?
2. Why does the poet want a world without countries?
3. What does the poet call himself?
4. Why is "Imagine all people" repeated three times?
5. What is the poet's vision of peace?
6. What does "Country" symbolise in the poem?
7. The song has been divided into how many stanzas?
8. The fifth stanza is a repetition of which stanza?
9. "Imagine all the people sharing all the" what?
10. What are the central ideas of the poem "Imagine"?

## Answers

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Religion, Country, and Possession             | 6. A border  |
| 2. Then we would have nothing to kill or die for | 7. Five Stanzas  |
| 3. A dreamer                                     | 8. Third Stanza  |
| 4. To emphasise his invitation to the listener   | 9. World   |
| 5. A world without violence                      | 10. The peace of the world without the divisions of religion |



## Assignments

1. Write a critical appreciation of the poem "Imagine."
2. Evaluate the third and its repetition in the fifth stanza as a kind of chorus.
3. In describing various kinds of worlds, why does the poet use the word "imagine?"
4. Describe the poet's view of materialism through this poem.
5. Explain the theme of the poem "Imagine."
6. Explain the three things that the poet wants people to imagine.
7. Explain the use of the technique of repetition used in the poem "Imagine."

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## Unit 2

# Housewife

- Rabindranath Tagore

### Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ familiarise themselves with Tagore's concept of natural growth in natural circumstances
- ▶ get an idea about gender roles and gender inequality
- ▶ get acquainted with the basic principles of Tagore's philosophy of education.
- ▶ acquire details regarding Tagore's life and beliefs

### Prerequisites

Rabindranath Tagore (Bengali Rabindranath Thakur) (born May 7, 1861, Calcutta [now Kolkata], India; died August 7, 1941) was a multifaceted genius, Bengali poet, short-story writer, song composer, playwright, essayist, and painter. He introduced new prose and verse forms and the use of colloquial language into Bengali literature, thereby freeing it from traditional models based on classical Sanskrit. He was highly influential in introducing Indian culture to the West and vice versa, and he is generally regarded as the outstanding creative artist of early 20th-century India. In 1913, he became the first non-European to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Tagore, received his early education at home and later had a brief period of formal schooling in England, which he did not complete. In his adult years, alongside his literary pursuits, Tagore managed his family estates, which brought him closer to common people and deepened his interest in social reforms. He established an experimental school in Shantiniketan, where he implemented his Upanishadic ideals of education. Tagore was also involved in the Indian nationalist movement in his unique, non-sentimental, and visionary manner. He shared a close friendship with Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India's struggle for independence.

In 1915, Tagore was knighted by the British government, but he later renounced this honour as a protest against British policies in India. Tagore initially achieved success as a writer in his native Bengal, and his translations of his works made him well-known



in the West. His fame transcended borders, leading to international lecture tours and friendships. He became a global ambassador of India's spiritual heritage and a revered institution, particularly in Bengal, where he left an enduring legacy.

## Key Themes

Gender roles and identity, Repression and suppression, Social expectation

## Discussion

A careful reading of the story reveals that, apart from the known attributes of Rabin-dranath Tagore, he was also a defiant educational psychologist. In this, he has drawn a correlation between psychology and education and brought about two important aspects: the role of the teacher and the process of class management.

Shibnath Pandit was the teacher-in-charge for the primary section of the school. He had a typical look, with a bald head, a clean-shaven face, and a tiki adorning his head like a crown. He used to create a constant mental agony among the pupils, and the torture was such that the teacher was compared to a stinging bee. The author cited that in the animal kingdom, most creatures possess only a single offensive mechanism to protect themselves from danger, but this teacher, who is the sole authority in the class, possessed several traits of exercising fear and verbal insult to torment his students. He often rechristened specific students, which really humiliated them. Indeed, this was a punishment which had a tremendous bearing on their tender minds.

Ashu was a little boy of an introverted nature, and he shied away from real-world maturity. He felt uncomfortable when his everyday lunch was sent from home with a grand manifestation. He felt embarrassed by the majes-

tic nurturing of his family. He never felt that his identity needed to be highlighted. He was a diligent student and had no such striking shortcomings. Ashu would often arrive late for class, and therefore Shibnathbabu was annoyed at his frequent late arrivals, and as a consequence he was often on his knees, kneeling down outside the class. At those dire moments, Ashu often prayed for the earth to diverge away so that he could disappear inside. On a specific occasion, Shibnathbabu named him Ginni (the housewife or homemaker) and humiliated him in front of his classmates. Naturally, it holds a significant circumstantial story.

On a particular rainy day, Ashu was absent for school. He and his sister were playing with dolls decorated for marriage. But the heavy shower spoiled much of their play preparations, and above all, the priest did not arrive to solemnise the doll marriage. So in that heavy shower, Ashu, with great concern and being a part of the doll play, hurriedly approached Shibnathbabu mistakenly, to confer the marriage. But that seemed like a great blunder committed by him for this specific utterance to Shibnathbabu which left him in awe. Ashu hastily took refuge under his bed for the rest of the day. It seemed that playing such games of household chores as "rannabati" (cooking) by accompanying his little sister seemed to be a great insult and shattering to his boyhood identity. Eventually, in this case, Shibnathba-



bu who called him 'Ginni', dealt him a blow in which his gender identity was at stake.

This incident was transformative for Ashu, as Shibnathbabu's "Ginni" remark challenged his gender identity and wounded his self-esteem. The teacher turns out to be opportunistic in exhibiting his weakness while simultaneously intending to make him disciplined and keep him traumatised in the classroom. In fact, this was the eventual motto of the teacher's attempt to control his classroom.

### 5.2.1 Analysis

The classroom management in this case has been performed simply with terror and a shrewd weapon of personal insult. Usually, this sort of practice is still in vogue. Often, teachers resort to such practices to coax the class and compel the learners to remain in utter silence. With the weapon of fear psychosis, they regulate and discipline the class. This psychosis is simply a form of mental disturbance which is so severe that it makes the person incapable of adjusting to his particular social environment. In later life, they themselves undergo extreme mental disorders that affect their nearest neighbours. This sort of regulatory mechanism resorted to by the teacher is obviously damaging for managing the class of children (6–8 years of age).

Here, the teacher is well aware of the individual differences between the students, but he uses them very cynically. Classroom management is probably the single biggest issue that can be the demise of any teacher, no matter what their intentions may be. If a teacher is unable to control his or her students, he will not be able to teach them effectively, will never incorporate simple procedures and expectations, and will constantly threaten them with his power. This extra-punitive, aggressive trait dominates in the person who, to gain

something, hurts and attacks others. It is simply a matter of the projection of dissatisfaction, stress, frustration, and pent-up feelings let out by the concerned person through his behavioural procedures while managing his class.

He is even cautious about using crowd psychology to irritate and agonise over the child's mental set-up. The use of negative reinforcement by the teacher creates a negative feeling and an adverse attitude towards teachers from the very beginning. The teacher can be disastrous for the mental growth and development of a child. The entire process of assimilation and accommodation through cognitive development, according to J. Piaget's schema concept, gets ruined, and the person becomes adjusted to society.

According to Erikson, the said age is in transition between initiative versus guilt and industry versus inferiority. In the story, the teacher wants the child to feel the joy of playing with his little sister and simultaneously develop an inferiority complex in him, suppressing his psycho-social development. Contrary to this, both Freud and Erik stressed the importance of the social environment in childhood for the fullest development of the personality.

Rabindranath Tagore believed in a healthy relationship between the teacher and the student. He emphasised that the teacher should not be a dictator or disciplinarian in the class. He was against any sort of punishment or mental suffering for a student, the use of inappropriate language in the classroom, or poor judgement by the learners. There are some teachers who simply lack motivation. There is no creativity or simple innovativeness in their teaching. He commented that those teachers who pride themselves on being disciplinarians are really born tyrants, and they give outlet to their inherent lust for tyranny by making use of these



helpless children and imposing on them their own rigid code of behaviour.

In an autocratic atmosphere, the classroom is bound to be stuffy and inert. Students will be unable to interact with each other, and there will be no social development. Unfortunately, herein, the teacher is unable to master the subject or the content knowledge well enough to teach it. This is an area that could be evaded through lesson preparation; otherwise, the teacher would lose credibility or efficient interaction with the students. Moreover, they lack professionalism, which encompasses many different areas of teaching.

He opines that education in a "miniature society" modifies and regulates behavioural changes in a child. Tagore also stressed the aspects which a teacher should be apprised of to become a successful disseminator of knowledge. He affirmed that the teacher must have knowledge of fundamental principles of

human behaviour to tackle the problems of his students and should possess fine mental health to support and equip them. Moreover, he should be acquainted with self-introspection and self-evaluation. He must be emotionally stable, possess a positive outlook, develop a noble philosophy of life among his students so that they get inspiration and motivation in their lives, and be able to cultivate self-confidence. Besides this, the school atmosphere should be like an open house wherein the teachers and the students belong to a single unit sharing a common aspiration for the delights of culture.

He expressed the importance of reflective thought processes and stressed the development of self-regulatory practices that foster mental well-being and enhance specific capacities in these little children. Ultimately, this may lead to increased self-actualisation, emotional maturity, and a sense of eudemonic basis of happiness in them.

## Recap

- ▶ "Housewife" (Ginni in Bangla) is a story that revolves around an unlucky boy, Ashu, who became the victim of an insensitive teacher, Shibnath.
- ▶ The protagonist of the story, Ashu, is his newest victim.
- ▶ He is a shy, reticent fellow, introverted enough to shun his classmates, private enough to conceal his familial matters, and sensitive enough to be hurt by the slightest insult; in short.
- ▶ He is a perfect target for bullies.
- ▶ One day, Shibnath gives him the name "Ginni, literally daughter-in-law or housewife to Ashu.
- ▶ Though the teacher thinks nothing of calling him by a feminine salutation, it is deeply humiliating for a teenage boy who is marked for life with a sissy image.
- ▶ Docile Ashu is exposed in front of all his classmates as the teacher laughingly teases him by this name, all because he has seen the boy helping his younger sister in doll marriage!

## Objective Questions

1. What is the original title of the short story "Housewife"?
2. Who is the central character?
3. What does the story revolve around?
4. Who is the insensitive teacher in the story?
5. What does the teacher do?
6. Why does the teacher twist the students' names?
7. What name did Shibnath give to Ashu?
8. What is the literal meaning of "Ginni"?
9. Why does the teacher laughingly tease him by this name?
10. What does the boy feel when the teacher calls him "Ginni"?
11. What type of image is created by calling him "Ginni"?

## Answers

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Ginni   | 7. The name of "Ginni"  |
| 2. Ashu, an unlucky boy                                  | 8. Literally, daughter-in-law or housewife  |
| 3. Ashu, who became the victim of an insensitive teacher | 9. Because he has seen the boy helping his younger sister in the marriage of her doll |
| 4. Shibnath  | 10. Deeply humiliating  |
| 5. He often twists their names in a nonsavoury manner    | 11. Marked for life with an effeminate image  |
| 6. Entertaining himself and his fellow mates             |   |

## Assignments

1. What are the fundamental principles that define Tagore's philosophy of education?
2. How does Tagore's incorporation of both Western and Eastern ideas manifest in his short stories, emphasising unity?



3. In Tagore's short stories, how does his deep connection with nature play a significant role in shaping the narratives and themes?
4. How did this specific short story contribute to the realisation of Tagore's vision for Shantiniketan and Vishva Bharathi, his dream projects?
5. What were Tagore's perspectives on classroom management, and how did he approach the organisation and discipline within a classroom setting?

## Suggested Reading

1. Chaudhari, Sukanta (ed.). *Selected Short Stories: Rabindranath Tagore*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.
2. Dasarathi Bhuyan and R.L. Panigrahy. *Women Empowerment*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2006.
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6. Pandey, Dr. Vinita. *Internal Security and Community Policing*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2018.
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# BLOCK - 06

## Globalised Society

# Unit 1

## The United Fruit Company

- Pablo Neruda

### Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ get an insight into Pablo Neruda and his works
- ▶ describe the deeper political and social commentary in the poem
- ▶ familiarise themselves with the poet's critique of corporate exploitation and imperialism in the poem
- ▶ get acquainted with the poem's use of vivid imagery and metaphors

### Prerequisites

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) was a well-known Chilean poet, diplomat, and politician. His father, Jose del Carmen, was a railway employee, and his mother, Rosa Basoalto, died within a month of her childbirth. He started writing when he was only 10-year-old. His father, being pragmatic, discouraged his writing, and it is believed that this forced him to publish under the pseudonym Pablo Neruda. He legally adopted his pseudonym in 1946, relinquishing his birth name, Neftali Ricardo Reyes Basoalto. Neruda's first book of poetry, *Crepusculario*, was published in 1923. These poems closely followed the tradition of symbolist poetry. His second book, *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* (1924), remains one of the most popular books even today. Neruda was appointed honorary consul to Rangoon in Burma, which initiated his career as a diplomat. From Rangoon, he moved to Colombo, Sri Lanka. His life in Rangoon and Colombo brought him closer to the common people of South Asian countries. These experiences resulted in the writing of *Residence on Earth*, which came out in three volumes in 1925, 1931 and 1933. He also served as consul in Bavaria (Jakarta), Buenos Aires (Argentina), and Barcelona (Spain).

Neruda returned to Chile in 1937 and became part of the country's political life. However, he was again appointed as special consul in Paris which was followed by his post as Chile's Consul General in Mexico. He continued writing poetry through these times. Neruda returned to Chile in 1943 and was elected as a Senator in 1945. Later, he joined the Communist Party. However, he was disillusioned when leftist President Gabriel Gonzalez Videla turned to the right wing. Neruda was forced to go into exile, and he visited the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, and Mexico. In 1952, Neruda returned once



again to Chile when the political situation changed. By this time, he was a popular poet. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1971. He died on September 23, 1973.

"The United Fruit Company" is a narrative poem published in 1950. It was originally written in Spanish under the title "La United Fruit Co" and got translated into English. The poem is a critique of imperialism as well as capitalism. It is a reflection on the socio-economic conditions in the first half of the 20th century.

## Key Themes

Corruption, Imperialism, The quest for wealth

## Discussion

The poem "The United Fruit Company" describes how the arrival of the United Fruit Company, a multinational corporation, changes the socio-economic fabric of Latin America. Neruda satirically portrays the multinationals who invaded the countries instead of doing what they were there for. They exploited the system and bribed the governments, making the lives of the common people difficult. The arrival of multinational corporations in Latin America initiated a wave of imperialism. These included the Coca-Cola Company, the Anaconda Mining Company, Ford Motors, and the United Fruit Company. These companies had such a huge influence on the governments that the dictators of those nations suppressed the working class in favour of these companies. The Banana Massacres, which resulted in the deaths of 2000 striking workers, is an example of this.

The poem uses a mock-biblical tone to communicate this concept. The poet uses the term "Jehovah" metaphorically to represent a higher power or authority that distributes the Earth's resources. Instead of a just and equal distribution, the resources are being distributed among powerful multinational corpo-

rations like Coca-Cola, Anaconda, and Ford Motors. Of these, The Fruit Company, Inc. has occupied the most fertile and valuable land, the central coastal region of the poet's homeland, which is referred to as the "delicate waist of America." The acquisition of the Fruit Company has made these lands "Banana Republics." The Banana Republic is a small country which is politically unstable, whose economy is dominated by foreign companies, and depends on one main export item, such as bananas. The term Banana Republic was coined by O. Henry who used it to refer to a fictional country modelled on Honduras. U.S. owned fruit companies introduced bananas to Americans, thus exploiting the economies of small tropical nations to cash in on the newly popular fruit. These companies controlled countries like Honduras politically, rendering them Banana Republics.

Pablo Neruda argues that these multinational corporations made the Latin American countries overrule the works of historical leaders who fought for the liberty of these nations. Here, the poet refers to the nationalist leaders who fought for the liberty, greatness, and independence of their countries. Now they are ignored because of the corporate takeover. The actions of these corporations are depicted as farcical as they abolish the freedom of these



territories, impose authority ("crowns of Caesar"), incite jealousy and rivalry, and end up in a metaphorical dictatorship by 'flies' (dictators). The poem lists various dictators, each known for their cruelty and abuse of power. The poem gives an insight into the influence of dictators such as Tacho, Martinez, Trujillo, and Ubico. The imagery of "flies" highlights their insignificance and irritating behaviour, despite the suffering they cause.

The Fruit Company is launched onto this land, which is already oppressed by the blood-sucking dictators, and exploits a group of people who are already being exploited. The company loots their treasure as if it were given to them on their plates. Meanwhile, the native population continues to suffer in the face of colonisation and exploitation. They continue to fall into the alluring traps set by imperialist corporations. The 'sugared chasm' refers to the enticing traps set by the foreign corporations. The imagery of the native population "wrapped for burials in the mist of the dawn" refers to a sense of helplessness.

The indigenous people are exploited by these corporations, and for them, the native people are nameless entities and mere symbols. The reference to the native people as 'dead fruit' highlights their treatment as expendable commodities. The final stanza underscores the tragedy of the native population—their loss of identity and their exploitation as expendable commodities. In short, the poem is a commentary on the dehumanising consequences of colonisation.

"The United Fruit Company" is a poem with no visible rhyme scheme but with abundant literary devices. Literary devices are used to bring richness to the text and to help the readers understand the hidden meanings. Literary devices in the poems are known as poetic devices.

### 6.1.1 Poetic Devices

Some of the poetic devices in the poem are mentioned below:

#### a) Imagery

Imagery is the use of descriptive words or language to create a mental image. Neruda uses vivid and evocative imagery to create mental images. The lines, "the delicate waist of America", "drunken flies that buzz over the tombs of the people" and "a corpse rolls" are examples of powerful visual imagery in the poem.

#### b) Assonance

Assonance is a figure of speech in which repetition of similar vowel sounds take place in proximity to each other in a line of a poem. For example, the sound /a/ in the line,

"that has no name, a fallen cipher" and the sound /i/ in "It rechristened its territories".

#### c) Consonance

Consonance is a figure of speech in which repetition of similar or identical consonant sounds take place in neighbouring words, whose vowels are different. For example, the sound /d/ in "modest blood and marmalade" and the sound /z/ in "circus flies, wise flies".

#### d) Allusion

Allusion is a reference to a person, an event or a literary work outside the poem. Neruda has used Greek imagery in the poem. He has used instances such as "Trujillo flies, tacho flies/ Carias flies" and "Jehovah parcelled out the earth" from Greek mythology.

#### e) Metaphor

Metaphor is a figure of speech that states that one thing is another thing or an expression that draws comparison between two unrelated ob-

jects. Neruda has used an extended metaphor when he used the example of the plight of Indians to refer to the condition of the working class across Latin America. For example, “Meanwhile the Indians fall/ into the sugared depths of the/ harbors and are buried in the morning mists.”

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the celebrated Colombian novelist called Pablo Neruda, “the greatest poet of the 20th century in any language.”

Pablo Neruda is often regarded as the national poet of Chile.

## Recap

- ▶ Pablo Neruda is an acclaimed Chilean writer
- ▶ Neruda satirically portrays the impact of multinational corporations on Latin America's socio-economic fabric
- ▶ The arrival of multinational corporations like The United Fruit Company, Anaconda Mining Company and Ford Motors led to the exploitation of the working class
- ▶ Influenced by the multinational corporations, the dictators of these nations favoured them and suppressed the protests organised by the citizens
- ▶ The Banana Massacres exemplify the consequences of corporate dominance
- ▶ The poem uses a mock-biblical tone, metaphorically referring to the corporations having a higher power on earth
- ▶ Multinational corporations undermined the revolts organised by historical leaders
- ▶ The poem portrays tyrant dictators like Tacho, Marinez, Trujillo, and Ubico as insignificant flies
- ▶ Indigenous people are exploited by multinational corporations, treated as expendable commodities, lose their identity, and face the consequences of colonisation
- ▶ The poem employs various literary devices to convey its meaning

## Objective Questions

1. Who wrote the poem "The United Fruit Company"?
2. What was the birthname of Pablo Neruda?
3. When did the poem "The United Fruit Company" get published?



4. What happened when the trumpet was sounded?
5. Which company reserved for it the central coast of Latin America?
6. Which region of Latin America is termed “the delicate waist of America” by the poet?
7. What were the countries affected by imperialism called?
8. Who are the dictators mentioned in the poem?
9. What did the United Fruit Company do with the resources of the countries?
10. How does the poem depict the fate of the indigenous people?
11. Who do the bloodthirsty flies represent in the poem?

## Answers

1. Pablo Neruda
2. Neftali Ricardo Reyes Basoalto
3. 1950
4. Jehovah gave the world to multinational corporations such as Ford Motors, Anaconda Mining Company and The United Fruit Company
5. The United Fruit Company
6. The Central coast region
7. Banana Republics
8. Tacho, Marinez, Trujillo and Ubico
9. The company amassed coffee and fruit from these countries and sailed away with it
10. The indigenous people are described as falling into the harbours and being buried like discarded numbers, rotting fruit, and nameless entities on the garbage heap
11. Dictators

## Assignments

1. How does imperialism affect third world countries?
2. Discuss the influence of multinational corporations on the lives of the working class.

3. Explore the concept of power and exploitation in the poem “The United Fruit Company”.
4. Explain the dehumanisation of indigenous people and loss of identity discussed in the poem.
5. Pablo Neruda’s “The United Fruit Company” addresses socio-political and historical complexities. Discuss.

## Suggested Reading

1. Eisner, Mark. *Neruda: The Biography of a Poet*. HarperCollins, 2019.
2. Feinstein, Adam. *Pablo Neruda: A Passion for Life*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008.
3. Santí, Enrico Mario. *Pablo Neruda, the Poetics of Prophecy*. Cornell University Press, 1982.

## Unit 2

# Globalisation and the Human Imagination

- Shashi Tharoor

### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ get introduced to Shashi Tharoor and his works
- ▶ describe the theme of "Globalisation and the Human Imagination"
- ▶ acquire details regarding the impact of globalisation
- ▶ familiarise themselves with the concept of global imagination

### Prerequisites

Shashi Tharoor is an Indian bureaucrat, former International civil servant, politician, and writer who currently serves as a Member of Parliament for Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, since 2009. He was born in 1956 in London and raised in India. His parents were Chandran Tharoor and Sulekha Menon. Tharoor graduated in History from St. Stephen's College, Delhi, in 1975, and he completed his studies in 1978 with a doctorate in International Relations and Affairs from Tufts University. He was a career official at the United Nations from 1978 to 2007. He rose to the rank of Under Secretary General for Communications and Public Information in 2001. He announced his retirement after unsuccessfully running for the post of Secretary-General in 2006. Shashi Tharoor formally became part of Indian Politics when he contested the General Elections as a candidate for the Congress Party in Thiruvananthapuram in 2009 and won the elections by a margin of 99989. He was sworn in as Minister of State for External Affairs.

### Key Themes

Globalisation, Global imagination, Vulnerability, Digital divide, Cultural diversity, Pluralism

### Discussion

"Globalisation and the Human Imagination" was delivered by Shashi Tharoor as the opening speech of the Third International Litera-

ture Festival held in Berlin on September 10, 2003. The topic suggested by the organisers was something that reconciled the two worlds of Shashi Tharoor- the UN and literature. While preparing the speech, he went through



major issues which dominated his life at the UN- the forces of globalisation, the nature of international mass media, and the impact of 9/11 on our imagination. He wonders whether there is a thing called global imagination in the post-9/11 world. He wonders whether Mickey Mouse, Nintendo, Osama Bin Laden, and "Chemical Ali" were known to the whole world as a result of globalisation. With the advent of TV and the Internet, everything that happens around the world can reach us at our breakfast table. Tharoor exemplifies this by mentioning a Tibetan monk who approached him during a conference held in St. Petersburg, claiming that he had seen him on the BBC. Tharoor claims that all the major stories around the world reek of globalisation. He uses the example of the news of the death of Princess Diana to substantiate his argument.

The 9/11 attacks posed a different challenge to the idea of global imagination. The speaker suggests that the attack on the World Trade Centre not only targeted the institutions of global capitalism but also undermined the self-confidence of the societies that believed that they had the solution to all the problems. The attack exposed the vulnerability of a nation that has never been attacked. 9/11 is emblematic of the new century we are in. The defining features of this century are the relentless forces of globalisation, the ease of communication and travel, the shrinking of boundaries, and the transnational migration of people. In this age, the same tools such as mobile phones, computers, and aeroplanes which ensure progress and prosperity are also used by terrorists as tools of destruction. With the onset of the 21st century, the United States of America became a dominant force in the economic, political, and military spheres. Even though the military capacities of the U.S. have been unsurpassable, they have been curiously ambivalent about exercising that dominance until 9/11. The attack on the World Trade

Centre made it clear that it is impossible for the U.S. to retreat into isolationism anymore. With 9/11, America truly became part of the global village with the realisation that it was not insulated.

Tharoor states that the 21st century is the century of 'one world' with a consciousness that the tragedies of our times are all global in origin and reach. Interdependence has become the watchword of this century. Though the speaker says that interdependence in theory is a debatable concept, he highlights the importance of international cooperation in tackling global challenges. The text also explores terrorism as a multilateral threat that demands a united response. As the terrorists are not based in one country, the victims are also not found in one country alone. So the response to terrorism must also involve all countries. Terrorism emerges from fear, rage, and incomprehension towards the 'other'. To combat terrorism, these factors must be addressed by dispelling fear, promoting understanding, and recognising and dealing with hatred's causes. Here he highlights the fact that one's understanding is closely linked to his assumptions with the help of a humorous anecdote.

At this point, Tharoor brings up the second part of his argument. He argues that, in one sense, the attackers of 9/11 were opposing the perceived globalisation of the dominant Western culture. The text highlights how oppression, exclusion, and marginalisation can fuel extremism. When around 2600 people died in the attack on the World Trade Centre, around 26000 people around the world died because of poverty and starvation. It is not impossible to exclude these people from the human imagination. A nation that cannot provide basic education to its children cannot develop citizens with global imagination. Tharoor discusses the importance of addressing poverty and providing basic education to coun-



teract radicalisation. The text raises concerns about whether human imagination can truly be global when the global media is dominated by economic power structures. What passes for international culture is usually the culture of economically developed countries. Though an occasional third-world voice is heard, it also uses the language employed by the first world. He wonders whether those who speak for the third world are the true representatives of them. He also points out the limitations of the internet in erasing the digital divide and mentions the exclusion of those who have no access to the internet and technology. If these concerns can be addressed, the 21st century can still be a time of mutual understanding.

Tharoor focuses on how propaganda and misinformation have fuelled conflicts, as we have seen in the cases of Bosnia and Rwanda. He highlights the importance of education and truthful information to prevent such incidents. The speech discusses the positive aspects of globalisation, such as the exchange of arts, music, and movies. He points out the popularity of local television programming over American shows in various countries. The text highlights the role of literature and culture in reasserting cultural identity and combating the consequences of colonisation and globalisation.

Globalisation is not just about economic figures; it is also about people's lives and development. Development is possible only by boosting creativity and freedom through literature, music, and songs. Cultural diversity is essential in a shrinking world. Without a heterogeneous human imagination, the myriad manifestations of the human condition cannot be understood, and the universality of human aims and aspirations cannot be appreciated. Tharoor argues that the specificities of literature are the best antidote to the globalisation of the imagination.

Only a world shaped by literature can understand the world and respond to its needs. However, literature presupposes learning. The speaker points out that we have to dispel ignorance and embrace education to avoid tyranny, conflict, and fundamentalism. Tharoor discusses the clash between religious fundamentalism and secular consumerist capitalism.

Every one of us has many identities. It is important to promote pluralism and preserve cultural diversity in the context of rising religious fanaticism. It highlights Tharoor's personal experience of growing up in India, where secularism did not mean irreligiousness but rather the coexistence of multiple religions. Pluralism can only be protected by supporting the development of democracy at the local, national, and international levels. It is important to respect others and ensure inclusiveness rather than marginalisation. Tharoor acknowledges that global challenges such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, degradation of the environment, starvation, illiteracy, massive displacement, etc. persist even after countering terrorism. These shared issues demand collaborative solutions that transcend national boundaries. The text highlights the interconnectedness of the world. The shared problems of the world affect everyone equally, regardless of origin. It emphasises that solutions to these problems must be sought collectively, as global issues demand international cooperation.

Tharoor demands that cultural and imaginative freedom be preserved, individual voices be given expression, and all ideas and forms of art have a place on earth. Our goal must be to make the world safe for diversity and democracy. Tharoor recites an anecdote of a young warrior who goes in search of truth, discovering it in the form of an old hag. It emphasises that the truth is not always obvi-

ous. The narrative highlights the importance of recognising humanity in others, contrasting it with the dehumanising actions of terrorists. Our answer to the terrorists is to assert our humanity and to proclaim that all of us have the right to live, to love, to hope, to dream, and

to aspire regardless of our creed, status, faith, and nationality. Tharoor winds up his speech by mentioning an Indian tale of a sage asking his disciples about the end of the night and the beginning of dawn, illustrating the theme of perceiving deeper meanings. . .

Shashi Tharoor was the youngest Ph.D recipient from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at the age of 22.

Tharoor was nominated for the post of UN-Secretary General in 2007 and finished second trailing Ban Ki Moon.

Shashi Tharoor was the founder-editor of the Fletcher Forum of International Affairs, an academic journal of international affairs.

## Recap

- ▶ Shashi Tharoor's speech was delivered at the Third International Literature Festival in Berlin in 2003, aiming to reconcile his dual worlds of the UN and literature while discussing the impact of globalisation, international media, and 9/11 on the global imagination
- ▶ The impact of globalisation is conveyed with the example of a Tibetan monk recognising Tharoor after having seen him on the BBC
- ▶ The aftermath of 9/11 reshaped the concept of global imagination.
- ▶ The attack on the World Trade Centre exposed the US's vulnerability and put an end to its isolationism
- ▶ The 21st century is marked by a consciousness of interconnectedness and shared tragedies originating from global sources.
- ▶ While the concept of interdependence is subject to debate, the importance of international cooperation to tackle global challenges is emphasised
- ▶ Terrorism emerges as a multilateral threat demanding a united response due to its global nature.
- ▶ Addressing terrorism requires dispelling fear, fostering understanding, etc
- ▶ The attackers of 9/11 can be seen as opposing the perceived cultural globalisation represented by Western culture



- ▶ Extremism can often be a result of oppression, marginalisation, and exclusion
- ▶ Propaganda and misinformation have led to conflicts.
- ▶ Education and truthful information are crucial to preventing such incidents
- ▶ Globalisation is not solely about economic figures but also includes personal lives and development
- ▶ Literature has the power to reshape the world
- ▶ The importance of pluralism and the need to preserve cultural diversity are discussed

## Objective Questions

1. Where was the speech “Globalisation and Human Imagination” delivered?
2. What was the topic suggested to Tharoor for his speech at Third International Literature Festival held in Berlin?
3. How did Tharoor exemplify the influence of globalisation?
4. What did the 9/11 reveal to the US?
5. Who famously called the 20th century the “American Century”?
6. What is the watchword of the 21st century?
7. Which are the three factors that contributed to the blind hatred of the ‘Other’?
8. What are the handmaidens of propaganda?
9. How can terrorism be countered?
10. What does Tharoor emphasise as vital for countering conflicts?
11. What is the clash that Tharoor highlights in the global context?

## Answers

1. Third International Literature festival in Berlin
2. Something that reconciled both his world- the UN and Literature
3. Mentioning the Tibetan monk recognising him from the BBC due to mass media
4. Its vulnerability and inability to retreat to isolationism
5. Henry Luce
6. Interdependence

7. Fear, rage and incomprehension.
8. Ignorance and Prejudice.
9. By dispelling fear, promoting understanding and addressing hatred's causes.
10. Education and access to truthful information.
11. Religious fundamentalism versus Secular consumerist capitalism.

## Assignments

1. Discuss the relevance of cultural pluralism and cultural diversity.
2. Discuss the importance of cultural diversity.
3. Read and discuss the impact of terrorism on societies in general.
4. How does Tharoor highlight the limitations of the internet in addressing the digital divide?
5. How does Tharoor emphasise the importance of education and truthful information in combating conflicts?
6. How does Tharoor link development to the enhancement of creativity and freedom through literature?
7. How does Tharoor approach the concepts of globalisation, international media and the aftermath of 9/11 in his speech?
8. How did the 9/11 attacks affect the perception of global imagination and self confidence in various societies?
9. What transformation did the United States undergo in the aftermath of 9/11?

## Suggested Reading

1. Tharoor, Shashi. *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*. Aleph, 2016.
2. -----, *Pax Indica: India and the World in the Twenty-first Century*. Penguin Books India, 2012.
3. -----, *The Struggle for India's Soul: Nationalism and the Fate of Democracy*. Hurst, 2021.



## സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യായാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം  
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം  
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം  
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുരിശുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ  
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം  
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം  
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പാറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം  
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം  
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ  
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

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# Literature and the Contemporary World

COURSE CODE: B21EG02LC



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