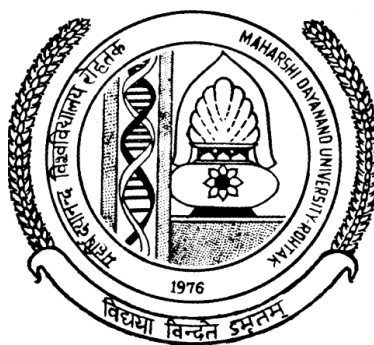


Bachelor of Arts (DDE)

Semester – III

Paper Code – BA3001-III

ENGLISH – III



DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

MAHARSHI DAYANAND UNIVERSITY, ROHTAK

(A State University established under Haryana Act No. XXV of 1975)

NAAC 'A+' Grade Accredited University

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(English Compulsory)
Paper Code BA3001-III

Scheme of Examination:

Prescribed Book: Literature & Language-III

Maximum Marks: 80

Time: 3 Hours

Instructions to the Paper Setters and Students:

- Question 1.** Explanation with reference to the context: Students will be required to attempt any two out of the given three passages **5x2=10**
- Question 2.** Short answer type questions: Students will be required to answer any five out of the given eight in about 50 words each. **5x3=15**
- Question 3.** Essay type questions: Students will be required to answer two questions in about 150-200 words each. There will be internal choice in both the questions. **7 ½x2=15**
- Question 4.** Student will be required to write short notes on any four of the given six poetic forms devices **10**
- Question 5.** Grammar: Clauses- Noun, Adverbial and Conditional; This will be a “Do as Directed” type question. Students will be required to attempt any twenty out of the given thirty items. **20**
- Question 6** Translation of a short passage from English to Hindi **5**
- Question 7** Dialogue Writing: Students will be required to compose dialogues on one of the given three topics (in about 150 words) **5**

Prescribed Book:

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Distance Education Notes : Literature & Language-III

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UNIT – 1

THE ENVOY

Structure

- 1.0 Introducing the Author
- 1.1 Unit Objectives
- 1.2 The Play
- 1.3 Summary
- 1.4 Key Terms
- 1.5 Answers to check your progress
- 1.6 Questions and Exercises: Short and Long Answer Questions
- 1.7 Language Practice

1.0 Introducing the Author

Mahakavi Bhasa, is one of the earliest and most celebrated Indian playwrights in Sanskrit who is said to have lived around 3rd Century A.D. He is believed to have lived two or three centuries ahead of Kalidasa. Not much is known about the life history of Bhasa. An Indian scholar, Mahamahopadhyaya Ganapati Sastrigal, rediscovered thirteen of his plays in the year 1912. There are no written records of his life nor is there a biography of Bhasa. It is said that the great poet Kalidasa was inspired by Bhasa and adopted most of his techniques. Only 13 plays were restored in Kerala in the beginning of the 12th century. Out of these 13 stories, 6 are based on the epic of Mahabharata, which shows Bhasa's flare for dramatic stories and plays. Bhasa belonged to the times when the society was politically, economically, socially and culturally dynamic.

Perhaps the most noted play of Bhasa is Svapnavasavadatta (Vision of Vasavadatta). The story revolves around King Udayana who is pressurized by his state minister to marry the daughter of a very powerful ruler in order to gain power to protect his kingdom from foreign invasions. The play is so well written that it won the hearts of the sternest critics. A lot of emphasis was given on theatre and fine arts. Bhasa has always been counted as the most influential playwrights of his time by Indologists, Indian commentators and anthologists. His style of writing was different than the other contemporary playwrights of his time. He made Sanskrit language very accessible and easy to understand for the general people. He did not use too flashy and superfluous Sanskrit. He did not use any open benediction in his plays, rather opened his plays directly with the stage directions. His stories used to have unconventional twists and turns to it. In fact he broke a very important convention by killing the hero of his story in the end of one of his plays, which was a big thing in those times as people were only used to the happy endings. This play is called Urubhangam. Most of Bhasa's plays were lost over the years. He did not follow the rules led by Natya Shastra and used physical violence in his plays, on the drama stage. The Unbhangam is considered as one of the two most tragic plays of the Sanskrit language. In Unbhangam, Duryodhana is considered to be an actual hero instead of been considered as a villain according to the great epic of Mahabharta, who is shown repenting in the play for all the treachery and lies.

Duta vakya of Bhasa is a one-act play. The meaning of the title is the 'Message of the Ambassador'. It is mainly a verbal altercation between Krishna and Duryodhana. It opens in Hastinapur; Krishna goes to Hastinapur as an ambassador of the Pandavas to the Kauravas for an agreement/treaty to prevent the disastrous war. The entire play is constructed around the sentences uttered by the ambassador Krishna. In this drama, Duryodhana and Krishna are the main characters. Yudhishthira is described as the one who speaks softly like a woman. In the opening of the play, Duryodhana is shown at his best, he is polite to his guest, enquires about the Pandavas. He is also clever and well-versed in social and political etiquettes. In short he is portrayed as a man with a sweet reasonableness. Krishna tries a peaceful approach and upon failing he provokes Duryodhana.

1.1 Unit Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

1. Know about one of the earliest and most celebrated dramatist of ancient India in classical Sanskrit literature.
2. Understand the significance of an important moment in the Mahabharata epic related to the battle between Kauravas and Pandavas at Kurukshetra.
3. Appreciate the implications of peace and war in a historical Indian setting.
4. Understand the imagery and figures of speech associated with the warring factions.

1.2 The Play : Envoy

(Duta-Vakya in the Sanskrit original)

Characters

Duryodhan

Shrikrishna

Dhritrashtra

Sudarshana

Chamberlain

ACT I

1.2.1 [Enter a Chamberlain]

CHAMBERLAIN: Attention! Attention, you guards. King Duryodhana has commanded that all the princes be summoned as he wishes to consult with them today. But, oh, there is King Duryodhana himself coming this way. There is King Duryodhana himself coming this way. There, with the royal parasol and flywhisk. He wears a white silk mantle on his dark, youthful body, perfumed and gleaming with jewels. He is splendid, like the full moon among the stars.

[Enter Duryodhana, as described]

DURYODHANA: The anger in my heart has suddenly given way to joy at the thought that the festival of war is at hand. Now my only wish is to tear out the tusks of the finest elephants in the Pandava army.

CHAMBERLAIN: Victory to the great king. All the princes have been assembled as commanded by Your Majesty.

DURYODHANA: Well done. You may go inside.

CHAMBERLAIN: As Your Majesty commands. (*exit*)

DURYODHANA: My lord Vaikarna and Varshadeva, I have a force of eleven armies. Tell me, who is fit to be its commander-in-chief?

What did you say? It is an important matter. It should be decided after consultations. Quite so. Then come, let us go into the council chamber.

Greetings, preceptor. Please come into the council chamber, sir. Greetings, grandfather, please come into the council chamber. Uncle, greetings. Please enter the council chamber. Enter, lords Vaikarna and Varshadeva. Enter freely, all you warriors. Comrade Karna, let us go in. (*Entering*) Preceptor, here is the tortoise throne, please be seated. Grandfather, please take your seat on the lion throne. Uncle, this is the leather throne. Please take a seat. Lords Vaikarna and Varshadeva, please take a seat, please be seated all you warriors. What? The king is not seated? What devotion! Well, I will sit down. Friend Karna, please sit also. (*Sitting down*) Lords Vaikarna and Varshadeva, I have a force of eleven armies. Tell me, who should be its commander-in-chief? What did you say? Let the prince of Gandhara speak. Very well. Let my uncle speak. What did uncle say? Who else can be the Commander-in-chief when the son of Ganga is there? That is also our wish. Let the hearts of their leaders sink even as the son of Ganga is anointed to the roars of acclaim of our army.

[*Enter the Chamberlain*]

CHAMBERLAIN: Victory to your Majesty. Krishna, the best of men, has come from the Pandava camp as an envoy.

DURYODHANA: Don't speak like that, Badarayana! Is that servant of Kansa your best of men? Is that herder of cows your best of men? Is that your best of men who was deprived by Jarasandha of his lands and reputation? Is this the way the king's servant should behave? With such insolent words? You . . .

CHAMBERLAIN: Have mercy, great king. I forgot the proper conduct in my confusion. (*Falls at his feet*)

DURYODHANA: Confusion? Ah well, people do get confused. You may get up.

CHAMBERLAIN: Oh, thank you, Your Majesty.

DURYODHANA: It is all right. Now, who is this envoy who has arrived?

Explanation

King Duryodhan convenes the meeting of all the princes into the council chamber in order to consult with them about the war with Pandava army. All warriors including lords Vaikarna and Varshadeva and Comrade Karna also enter and take seat. Duryodhan informs them that he has a force of eleven armies but would like to know as to who should be its commander-in-chief. And with the advice and consent of all those present there, son of Ganga is appointed as the chief. Chamberlain enters to announce that

Krishna, the best of men, has come from the Pandava camp as an envoy to make last efforts for peace. Duryodhan gets angry at Chamberlain for addressing Krishna, that “herder of cows” with such respect and warns him that king's servant should not behave in such a manner. Chamberlain apologizes for forgetting the proper conduct in his confusion and pleads for mercy.

Check Your Progress

1. Why does King Duryodhan summon all the princes into the council chamber?

2. Why does Duryodhan get angry at Chamberlain?

1.2.2 CHAMBERLAIN: The envoy who has come is one Keshava.

DURYODHANA: Keshava! That's better. That's the proper conduct.

O you princes, what will be proper for this Keshava who has come as an envoy? What did you say? He should be received with honours? That doesn't appeal to me. I see merit in arresting him. If Keshava is arrested the Pandavas would have lost their eyes, and, with the Pandavas deprived of direction and advice, the whole earth will be mine, without a rival.

Moreover, if anyone gets up to receive Keshava, he will be fined twelve gold coins by me. So, don't forget that, gentlemen. Now, what should be the reason for my not getting up? Ah, that's it, Badarayana! Bring me that painting which shows Draupadi being dragged by her hair and her garments. (*Aside*) I will look at it and not get up for Keshava.

CHAMBERLAIN: As Your Majesty commands. (*Exits and re-enters*) Victory to the great king. Here is that painting.

DURYODHANA: Spread it out before me.

CHAMBERLAIN: As your majesty commands. (*Spreads it out*)

DURYODHANA: This is a picture worth seeing. Here is Duhshasana, holding Draupadi by the hair. Here is Draupadi, seized by Duhshasana and wide-eyed with terror, she looks like a digit of the moon in eclipse.

And here is that wretched Bhima, sizing up the pillars of the hall as he angrily watches Draupadi being humiliated before all the princes. Here is Yudhishtira, quietening Bhima with sidelong looks. Here is the righteous and truthful one, stupefied by the game of dice.

And here now is Arjuna, eyes filled with rage, lips trembling. He has such contempt for his enemies. He slowly draws the string of his bow, as if he would destroy them all, but Yudhishtira stops him.

And here are Nakula and Sahadeva, faces flushed, swords in hand, ready to fight. Recklessly they attack my brother, like two calves against a tiger. But Yudhishtira restrains them. And here is the prince of Gandhara, laughing and casting the dice, as he gazes at the weeping Draupadi from his couch. And Grandfather and the preceptor stand here, covering their heads with their mantles, ashamed to see her. What rich colours! What fine expressions! How perfect a composition! This picture is really well done. I like it. Who is there?

CHAMBERLAIN: Victory to the great king.

DURYODHANA: Well, Karna my friend. The crafty Krishna has come here on a mission, like a - servant of the Pandavas. Let us get ready to hear the soft feminine words of Yudhishtira. [*Enter Krishna with the chamberlain*] KRISHNA: It is not fitting to come as an envoy to the proud Suyodhana who grasps at even the unsaid word. But I am here today at the request of Yudhishtira and out of true friendship for Arjuna. The Kuru clan is going to be destroyed in the fire of Bhima's anger, fanned by Arjuna's arrows and the disgrace of Draupadi.

Well, here is Suyodhana's camp. The royal quarters look like paradise: the arsenals are full of weapons; the horses neigh and the elephants trumpet. But none of this opulence can survive war among kinsmen. This villain Suyodhana has no feelings for his kin. He speaks ill, dislikes virtues and is not going to do what he should, even on seeing me.

Well, Badarayana, should one go in?

CHAMBERLAIN: Of course, of course. Please enter, Krishna.

KRISHNA: (*Entering*) What is this? All the warriors seem confused on seeing me. Sit at ease, gentlemen. There is no need for any agitation.

Explanation

Duryodhana decides to insult Krishna and orders the chamberlain to bring him in as an ambassador only. Duryodhana also orders his ministers not to show any respect to Krishna or else they would be fined twelve gold coins. He himself sits looking at the picture of Draupadi being dragged by her hair and clothes by Dushassan. Now Krishna enters and informs that he has come at the request of Yudhishtira and out of true friendship for Arjuna. He also declares that Kuru clan is going to be destroyed in the fire of Bhima's anger, fanned by Arjuna's arrows and the disgrace of Draupadi. As Krishna enters the hall, all the warriors seem to be in confusion, but Krishna asks them to sit at ease and not be agitated.

Check Your Progress

1. How does Duryodhana plan to insult Krishna?

2. What does Krishna declare about Kuru clan?

1.2.3 DURYODHANA: What is this? All the warriors seem confused on seeing Krishna. Enough of this. Please remember the fine which has been ordained. I give the orders here.

KRISHNA: Suyodhana, how are you?

DURYODHANA: (*Falling down from his seat, aside*) It is clear that Krishna has arrived. I had made up my mind to keep sitting, but his power moved me from my seat. This envoy is a cunning magician. (*Aloud*) Here is a seat, ambassador, please be seated.

KRISHNA: Preceptor, take a seat. Bhishma and the princes, please sit as you wish. We will also sit. (*Sits down*) Oh, what a nice painting. But no! It depicts Draupadi being dragged by the hair! This childish Suyodhana thinks it brave to humiliate his kinsmen. Otherwise, who in this world would display his own faults in an assembly. O take away this painting.

DURYODHANA: Badarayana! Take that picture away.

CHAMBERLAIN: As Your Majesty commands. (*Removes picture*)

DURYODHANA: Well, ambassador, how are my brothers, the son of Dharma, Bhima the son of the wind god, Arjuna the son of the king of gods and the modest sons of the twin gods. Are they and their people well?

KRISHNA: Worthily spoken. O son of Gandhari, indeed they are all well. And they have also enquired about your welfare and that of your kingdom. Yudhishtira and his brothers also want to inform you that they have suffered many sorrows. The time has now come. So let the inheritance be divided, and the due share given to them.

DURYODHANA: What inheritance? My uncle committed a crime while hunting in the forest. The sage cursed him and he became impotent with his wives. He had no progeny. How can a patrimony go to the sons of others?

KRISHNA: Since you know history, sir, let me also ask you. Vichitravirya was addicted to pleasures and died of the wasting sickness. Your father Dhritarashtra was born to Ambika from Vyasa. Then how did he succeed to the kingdom? No, no sir. By this way of mutual confrontation the Kuru clan may soon become just a name. It is better to give up anger and accept what Yudhishtira and the others have lovingly requested.

DURYODHANA: Mister ambassador, you do not understand the ways of kings. One does not beg for a kingdom, nor give it as charity. Kingdoms are won by princes with stout hearts who defeat their enemies. If the Pandavas desire dominion let them act boldly. Otherwise let them enter a hermitage and live there with peace-minded monks.

KRISHNA: O that is enough of harsh words for your kinsmen, Suyodhana. Sovereignty is attained by the accumulated merit of past good deeds. All is lost by cheating relatives and well-wishers.

DURYODHANA: You had no pity for King Kansa, the brother-in-law of your own father. Why should we have it for those who have always harmed us?

KRISHNA: That was not my fault. He invited death by imprisoning his old father and making my mother suffer the loss of successive sons.

Explanation

As Krishna enters the hall, Duryodhana himself falls from his seat when Krishna begins to address him. Duryodhana thinks that Krishna had played some magic on him. The picture is removed away from the wall upon the suggestion from Krishna. Krishna now delivers the message of Yudhishtir claiming their share in the kingdom, Duryodhana criticizes them and questions the right of inheritance of the Pandavas and remarks that kingdoms are not obtained by begging and also they are not given in charity. Krishna requests Duryodhana to show pity on his kinsmen but Duryodhana flatly refuses, reminding Krishna that he himself had no pity for King Kansa.

Check Your Progress

1. What is the message of Yudhishtir that Krishna has come to deliver?
2. How does Duryodhana respond to Krishna's message?

1.2.4 DURYODHANA: Kansa was wholly betrayed by you. There is no need for self-praise. It was not a brave deed. And where was your bravery when you fled, terrified, from the king of Magadhawho was enraged at his son-in-law's murder?

KRISHNA: Suyodhana, the wise man's bravery accords with the time, the place and the situation. But, leave aside this mutual pleasantry and come to my business. Have love for your brothers, forget their faults. Good relations with kinsmen have merit in both this and the next world.

DURYODHANA: How can there be kinship between mortal men and the sons of gods? You repeat the same old tale. It is enough. Put an end to it.

KRISHNA: (*Aside*) He does not chance his attitude by conciliation. Well, I must try him with strong words. (*Aloud*) Suyodhana, don't you know the might and power of Arjuna?

DURYODHANA: I don't.

KRISHNA: Listen. He gave satisfaction in battle to Lord Shiva disguised as a hunter. With his arrow he held off the downpour of rain over the burning Khandava forests. He destroyed the armoured demons as if in sport. He defeated Bhishma and the rest singlehanded at the city of king Virata. Another thing you yourself witnessed. On your visit to the cattle farm, when Chitrasena carried you off screaming in the sky, Arjuna released you. In short, son of Dhritarashtra, kindly give half the kingdom as I have suggested. Otherwise the Pandavas will seize it right up to the sea.

DURYODHANA: What did you say? The Pandavas will seize it? Let the wind-god in the shape of Bhima attack us in battle. Let the king of gods himself strike us in the person of Arjuna. Not a blade of grass will I give of this kingdom, held and protected by my forefathers. Not for all your harsh words, ambassador.

KRISHNA: You worthless blot on the house of Kuru! Are we discussing blades of grass!

DURYODHANA: Cowherd! Grass is indeed the thing for you, sir. Having killed an innocent woman, and horses and bulls and wrestlers, you shamelessly want to speak with respectable people!

KRISHNA: Suyodhana, are you chiding me?

DURYODHANA: You are not worthy of being spoken with. I bear the royal white umbrella. My head is anointed with water from the hands of high priests. You are no better than a follower of my vassal kings. I do not speak with the likes of you. I tell them.

KRISHNA: Indeed, Suyodhana does not speak with me. You villain! You evil-eyed crow! You snake! The Kuru clan will soon be destroyed because of you. I leave now, O you princes.

DURYODHANA: How can Krishna leave? He has transgressed the proper conduct of envoys. Duhshasana! Durmarshana! Durmukha! Durbuddhi! Dushteshvara! Arrest him! What? You cannot? Duh-shasana! You are not able? This Krishna has no strength or power. He is at fault by his own mouth in front of princes. He should be arrested immediately. But you cannot! Uncle, arrest Krishna! What? He turns his face and falls! Very well, I will arrest him myself. (*Advances*)

KRISHNA: Suyodhana wants to arrest me! Very well. Let me see if he can. (*Assumes the Universal Form*)

Explanation

Krishna again appeals to Duryodhana to forget the past and show love for his brothers but he is not willing to do so. Krishna then tries to warn him of the might and power of Arjuna, reminding him how Arjuna destroyed the armoured demons and defeated Bhishma and the rest singlehanded. He once again makes a plea to Duryodhana to give half the kingdom to Pandavas otherwise they will seize whole of it through war. This enrages Duryodhana beyond limits and he orders his brothers and his uncle Shakuni to arrest Krishna but nobody dares to arrest him.

Check Your Progress

1. How does Krishna try to convince Duryodhana to give half the kingdom to Pandavas?

2. How does Duryodhan express his anger towards Krishna?

1.2.5 DURYODHANA: Envoy, today you are going to be arrested by me in front of all these princes. Despite your pride. Even though you make magic black or white. Even though you use difficult divine weapons. Just wait. But how has Krishna disappeared? Ah, here he is. How small he seems. Just wait. How has he disappeared once more? Here he is. But there are Krishnas everywhere in the council chamber. What should I do now? Very well. O you princess, each one of you arrest one Krishna. What? The princes are falling down, bound with their own cords. Well done, magician, well done! The Pandavas shall see you with sighs and tearful eyes, when you are carried to their camp, with your limbs pieced b y my arrows. (*Exit*)

KRISHNA: Very well. I will myself complete this work for the Pandavas. Come here, O Sudarshana!

[*Enter Sudarshana, the divine discus*]

SUDARSHANA: Here I am. Hearing the lord's voice, and with his grace, I have sped here through the clouds. At whom is the lotus-eyed lord angered? On whose head should I appear today?

But where is the Lord Narayana, the protector of the world, the destroyer of enemies, the splendid of many forms, the first, the un-manifest and immeasurable soul? (*Looking around*) Ah, there is the lord; in the role of an envoy at the gate of Hastinaputa. Water! Where is the ritual water? Some water, O lady Ganga of the sky! Ah, it flows. (*Performs ablution, and approaches*) Victory to Lord Narayana! (*Makes salutation*).

KRISHNA: Sudarshana! Be matchless in power.

SUDARSHANA: I thank you.

KRISHNA: Fortunately, you have arrived just in time, sir.

SUDARSHANA: Just in time? Command me, lord, command me. Shall I overrun the mountains? Shall I convulse the sea? Shall I pluck out the stars? O God, by your grace there is nothing impossible for me.

KRISHNA: Come here, Sudarshana. And you, rash Suyodhana, whether you flee to mountain caves, or to the salty sea, or to the windswept, star-crossed sky, today my swift-propelled discus will be the discus of your death.

SUDARSHANA: Suyodhana, you wretch! (*Thinking further*) Mercy! Mercy, Lord Narayana. You have

come upon this earth to ease its burdens. In this way, the effort would be wasted, O God!

KRISHNA: Sudarshana! The proper conduct was overlooked by me in anger. Return to your abode.

SUDARSHANA: As the Lord Narayana commands. How can he be called a cowherd? He who transcended the three worlds in three strides? All should seek refuge in him. I go , . I will return to my dear recess in Mount Meru.

KRISHNA: I too will leave for the camp of the Pandavas.

[*Voice off stage*]

VOICE: No, no, he must not leave.

KRISHNA: That sounds like the old king. I am here, O king.

DHRITARASHTRA: Where is the Lord Narayana? Where is the Pandava's benefactor, the beloved of the virtuous, the delight of Devaki? O Ruler of the three worlds, my son offended you. Now my head is placed at your feet.

KRISHNA: Oh dear! Your Majesty prostrates! Arise, arise.

DHRITARASHTRA: I thank you, lord. Please accept this ritual water of welcome.

KRISHNA: I accept it all. What can I offer you in return?

DHRITARASHTRA: If the lord is pleased, what else can I wish for?

KRISHNA: Go, sir, till we meet again.

DHRITARASHTRA: As the Lord Narayana commands. (*Exit*)

Epilogue

May the Lion King
lead us on this land adorned
by the Himalayas and the Vindhyas,
and stretched from sea to sea
in single sovereignty.

Translated from the original Sanskrit by A.N.D. Haksar

Explanation

When no one dares to arrest Krishna, Duryodhana himself tries to bind him by a noose, but Krishna grows larger and larger and then suddenly he becomes shorter and disappears. Duryodhana goes to bring out his bows to fight with Krishna. Krishna calls for his Sudarshana chakra, his divine energy (weapon) to kill Duryodhana. Sudarshana reminds Krishna that if Duryodhana is killed now, other wicked men may escape. Krishna controls his anger and sends back Sudarshana. Meanwhile all his other missiles Sarang (his bow), Kaumodaki (his mace), Panchajay (his conchshell) and Nandka (his sword), also appear on the stage in the form of human beings and are told by Sudarshana to return to their respective

places, as Krishna is no longer wrathful and there is no necessity for the manifestation of their valour. His vehicle Garuda also comes there but is sent back by Sudarshana. Krishna then prepares to leave for the camp of the Pandavas when Dhritrashtra comes and falls at his feet to atone for his son's offence, Krishna lifts him up and he asks for Krishna's favour by accepting the ritual water of welcome. Krishna accepts it all and the play ends here with Krishna promising to meet again.

Check Your Progress

1. How does Krishna escape his arrest?
2. Who comes to atone for Duryodhana's offence at the end of the play?

1.3 Summary

The story of Krishna going to Duryodhana as an ambassador of the Pandavas with a view to making a eleventh hour attempt to prevent a calamitous war is elaborately told in Mahabharath- udyogaparva (महाभारत-उद्योगपर्व) Chapters 72 to 150. The plot of Dutvakya is drawn from about ten chapters in that section of the Mahabharath (महाभारत) known as Bhagwanparva (भगवानपर्व). Bhasa has introduced some important changes in the plot to suit his dramatic purpose. These changes make the plot highly interesting and contribute for the effective delineation of the hero's character in such a short play. After reciting the Mangal-Shloka in praise of Upendra, the stage manager is disturbed by a noise from behind the curtain, made by the chamberlain in proclaiming that his majesty, Emperor Duryodhana, wanted to consult the princes in the Council Chamber. Duryodhana decides not to give even an inch of space to the Pandavas and prepares for the inevitable war. He consults, with all his chief and allies regarding the appointment of a commander-in-chief. Just then the chamberlain enters with the message that 'Purshottama' has arrived, but Duryodhana decides to insult Krishna and orders the chamberlain to bring him in as an ambassador only. Duryodhana also orders his ministers not to show any respect to Krishna and he himself sits looking at the picture of Draupadi being dragged by her hair and clothes by Dushassan. Now Krishna enters the hall, all the assembly rise to honour him in confusion, but Duryodhana himself falls from his seat when Krishna addresses him. Duryodhana thinks that Krishna had played some magic on him. The picture is removed away from the wall upon the suggestion from Krishna. Krishna now delivers the message of Yudhisthir claiming their share in the kingdom, Duryodhana criticizes them and questions the right of inheritance of the Pandavas and remarks that kingdoms are not obtained by begging and also they are not given in charity. Krishna requests Duryodhana to show pity on his kinsmen but Duryodhana flatly refuses. Krishna again appeals to him to forget the past but he is not willing to do so. Duryodhana orders his brothers and his uncle Shakuni to arrest Krishna but nobody dares to arrest him. So Duryodhana himself tries to bind Krishna by a noose, but Krishna grows larger and larger and then suddenly he becomes shorter and disappears. Duryodhana goes to bring out his bows to fight with Krishna. Krishna calls for his Sudarshana chakra, his divine energy (weapon) to kill Duryodhana. Sudarshana reminds Krishna that if Duryodhana is killed now, other wicked men may escape. Krishna controls his anger and sends back Sudarshana. Meanwhile all his other missiles Sarang (his bow), Kaumodaki (his mace), Panchajay (his conchshell) and Nandka (his sword), also appear on the stage in the form of human beings and are told by Sudarshana to return to their respective places, as Krishna is no longer wrathful and there is no necessity for the manifestation of

their valour. His vehicle Garuda also comes there but is sent back by Sudarshana. Krishna then starts to the camp of the Pandavas when Dhritrashtra comes and falls at his feet to atone for his son's offence, Krishna lifts him up and he asks for Krishna's favour. And the play ends here.

1.4 Key Terms

Parasol: An ornate umbrella

Mantle: A long garment worn as an overcoat

Preceptor: teacher or instructor

Anoint: to confer divine or legal office ceremonially by smearing or rubbing with oil/ water

Envoy: a messenger or representative, particularly on a diplomatic mission

Herder: a person who grazes animals

Insolent: rudely and arrogantly disrespectful

Stupefied: astonished and shocked

Arsenal: a collection of weapons and military resources

Progeny: children

Ordain: to make someone a priest or minister

Transgress: To go beyond the limits of what is acceptable

Prostrate: lying on the ground and facing downwards as a token of utter devotion

Vassal: a holder of land by feudal tenure on conditions of homage and allegiance

Epilogue: a section or speech at the end of the play that serves as a comment on or a conclusion to what has happened.

1.5 Answers to Check Your Progress

1. King Duryodhan convenes the meeting of all the princes into the council chamber to consult with them about the war with Pandava army.
2. Duryodhan gets angry at Chamberlain for addressing Krishna, that "herder of cows" with such respect as the "best of men."
3. Duryodhana tries to insult Krishna by ordering his ministers not to show any respect to him or else they would be fined twelve gold coins. He himself sits looking at the picture of Draupadi so as to avoid Krishna's entry.
4. Krishna declares that Kuru clan is going to be destroyed in the fire of Bhima's anger, fanned by Arjuna's arrows and the disgrace of Draupadi.
5. Krishna has come to deliver the message that time has come to divide the inheritance and give Yudhisthira and his brothers their due share.
6. Duryodhan questions the right of inheritance of the Pandavas and remarks that kingdoms are

not obtained by begging and also they are not given in charity.

7. Krishna escapes his arrest by growing larger and larger and then suddenly he becomes shorter and disappears.
8. As Krishna prepares to leave for the camp of the Pandavas, Duryodhan's father- Dhritrashtra comes and falls at his feet to atone for his son's offence. Krishna lifts him up and forgives his son by accepting the ritual water of welcome.

1.6 Questions and Exercises: Short and Long Answer Questions

Short answer questions:

Q1. Explain the meaning of the title of the play.

Ans: The title means 'the words of an Ambassador' and by transference of epithet, the play is also called दूतवाक्यं. The advice of Vaasudeva as an Ambassador is the Central theme of the play and hence the title is Dutvakyam. The play is named 'Dutvakyam' as it deals with the advice (Vakya) of Krishna to Duryodhana as an emissary (Duta) of peace from the Pandavas.

Q2. Who is the envoy and what is the purpose of his visit?

Ans: Krishna is the envoy and the purpose of his visit is to warn Duryodhan against the war and make a last bid for peace

Q3. How is Duryodhan presented in the play?

Ans: He is presented in this play as a boastful king with a firm resolve, never yielding to threats. He is not disheartened when he fails to put the noose on Krishna and considers it as a display of Krishna's magical prowess. He reveals the true spirit of a Kshatriya when he says that kingdoms are acquired by conquering enemies and not by begging.

Q4. Write a short note on Sudarshana's role in the play.

Ans: In this play, Sudarshana arrives on the stage in the form of a human being and a powerful person to whom Duryodhana is rather an insignificant man. He is very thoughtful in his actions. Though Krishna orders the killing of Duryodhana, he reminds Krishna the purpose of his avatar (अवतार) and tells him how that purpose would be defeated by killing Duryodhana just then.

Q5. What is the main sentiment in the play?

Ans: Sentiments are the important factor in Rupak. In this drama वीर (the heroic) is the main sentiment, and the appearance of the divine weapons towards the end of the play, borders on the adbut अद्भुत (the wonderful). The style is Arabhati (violent).

Long answer questions:

Q1. Classify and explain what type of play is Envoy?

Ans: In classifying the plays of Bhasa we should remember that Bharats' definitions and rules cannot

be fully and strictly applied to them because Bhasa has his writing style. There is confusion in scholars whether Dutvakyam is vyayog or vithi (व्यायोग or वीथी). Dr. G. Shastri states that the play is either a Vyayog or Vithi. According to Dhananjaya, Vyayog must have a renowned plot; the fighting must not have been caused by woman. According to Bharata, Vyayog is a one-act play depicting the actions of one day. The plot is drawn from an epic and the hero is a well known king and not a divine person. Few female characters are introduced and many men are engaged in the struggle. Attacks, fights and insults are described in such a way as to cause excitement. The sentiment is Vira or Raudra and the style is most suited to that. In Dutvakyam, the plot is taken from the Epic, Mahabharatam. Duryodhana, is a well known hero as well as a king. Many men are supposed to have been engaged in the struggle to bind Krishna with ropes. Krishna's anger and the arrival of Sudarshana cause great excitement. The incidents described take place on a single day and the sentiment developed is Vira, thus the definition of Vyayog fits well with this work.

Q2. Discuss in your own words the main features of the play

Ans: Bhasa adopts a new technique in making Duryodhana introduce all his dignitaries one by one so that the audience also knows who are present in the court. In this play, dramatic effect is achieved when Duryodhana calls Krishna's name in order to refute kankuchakiya's epithet for Krishna, Purshottama, ie the best among men. Verses in this play are complex, rhetorical and full of resonance. Description is effective all through. The language is lucid and elegant, is particularly effective in debunking Duryodhana. Bhasa's power of describing the various moods of the Pandavas and Draupadi is seen in the effective delineation of restrained passion.

Q3. Critically analyse the play pointing to some of the deviations from the original play.

Ans: Most of the bad traits of Duryodhana's character which are elaborately brought out in the Mahabharata are effectively hinted here also. But there is one difference. In the original story, the reference to a man of wicked deeds is attributed to Shakuni, Karna and Dushasan while here it rests with Duryodhana only.

In Urubhanga and Pancharatra, Bhasa has portrayed Duryodhana in better colours than the original, but here he has not done so. This fact is a strong point in favour of taking Krishna as the hero of the play.

There is no heroine in this play, nor any female character, nor is any Prakrit used.

In Mahabharat Dhritrashtra was the emperor whereas in this play, Duryodhana is depicted as the real emperor. The picture-scroll and the appearance of the divine weapons are invented by the poet for stage effect.

Duryodhana's order to the councilors not to honour Krishna and his looking at the picture of Draupadi's outrage and admiring it, speak volumes about his wicked nature.

Krishna and Duryodhana in the epic engage in long, monotonous dialogues whereas in the play, they are more personal.

In Mahabharat, Dhritrashtra and Gandhari advise Duryodhana to act according to the advice of Krishna, but he turns a deaf ear to their words. Bhasa, by not introducing them in the council, saves Duryodhana from showing disregard to his parents.

In the play, there is no one in the assembly besides the Kauravas, and Bhishma and Drona are mere figureheads therein; the epic, however, speaks of many persons attending the assembly.

These are the main innovations of Bhasa which invest the plot with thrill and excitement and reveal certain traits in the character of the hero.

Q4. Write a note on the character of Krishna.

Ans: Bhasa has portrayed Krishna as a magnanimous man possessing all the essential qualities of a first rate ambassador. The title *Dutvakyam* suggests the importance of Krishna's role in the play. In Mahabharata too, this part of the story is in *Bhagavadyanparva*. Krishna comes to the camp of Duryodhana at a critical moment. He is aware of Duryodhana's wickedness and obstinacy, and also the probable result of his mission, and yet he undertakes the job of an ambassador due to his love for the Pandavas and desire to bring peace and happiness to the world. He has got a commanding personality which makes all the councilors rise when he enters the hall even though they were ordered by Duryodhana not to show any respect. He changes his tone and attitude when he realizes that Duryodhana, cannot be converted by soft words. One thing that Krishna cannot tolerate is *adharma-अधर्म*. When *Sudarshan (सुदर्शन)* reminds him of his mission on earth, he withdraws his orders to kill Duryodhana. When Dhritrashtra requests him to stay for a while and receive his adoration, he agrees. This shows his gentle nature.

1.7 Language Practice

Use the following phrases in sentences of your own.

- i. **Sit at ease:** The teacher asked the students not to worry about the exams and sit at ease.
- ii. **Like the full moon among the stars:** Her beauty always shone like the full moon among the stars
- iii. **Calves against a tiger:** Your friends are trying to attack me like calves against a tiger.
- iv. **Put an end:** It is high time to put an end to all the differences and hostilities and arrive at a peaceful solution.
- v. **Faces flushed:** The prisoners of war underwent all the torture with faces flushed and embarrassed.

UNIT – 2

THE SWAN SONG

Anton Chekhov

Structure

- 2.0 Introducing the Author
- 2.1 Unit Objectives
- 2.2 The Play The Swan Song
- 2.3 Summary
- 2.4 Key Terms
- 2.5 Answers to check your progress
- 2.6 Questions and Exercises: Short and Long Answer Questions
- 2.7 Language Practice

2.0 Introducing the Author

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904) was a prolific writer from Russia who is recognized as a master of the modern short story and a leading playwright of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Chekhov, who wrote many of his greatest works from the 1890s through the last few years of his life, revealed a profound understanding of human nature and the ways in which ordinary events can carry deeper meaning. In his plays of these years, Chekhov concentrated primarily on mood and characters, showing that they could be more important than the plots. Not much seems to happen to his lonely, often desperate characters, but their inner conflicts take on great significance. Their stories are very specific, painting a picture of pre-revolutionary Russian society, yet timeless. His plays are still staged worldwide, and his overall body of work influenced important writers of an array of genres, including James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Tennessee Williams and Henry Miller.

This one act play of Chekhov “The Swansong” is a swan-song for the central character- Svetlovidov and represents his last performance on the stage. Following a benefit evening in his honor, unbeknownst to everyone, the comic actor Svetlovidov falls asleep in a drunken blur. When he awakens, the theater is dark and empty. He falls quickly into saddened monologue on his past achievements and present failures as an actor where no one really loves him.

It depicts his loneliness and despair in spite of having achieved lot of success in his long acting career.

2.1 Unit Objective

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the nuances of one act play.
- Appreciate the keen observations of human vanities and weaknesses.
- Understand the world of art and theatre and the loneliness involved with it.

2.2 The Play

THE SWAN SONG

CHARACTERS

VASILY SVIETLOVIDOFF, a comedian, 68 years old

NIKITA IVANITCH, a prompter, an old man

2.2.1 *The scene is laid on the stage of a country theatre, at night, after the play. To the right a row of rough, unpainted doors leading into the dressing-rooms. To the left and in the background the stage is encumbered with all sorts of rubbish. In the middle of the stage is an overturned stool.*

SVIETLOVIDOFF. *(With a candle in his hand, comes out of a dressing-room and laughs)* Well, well, this is funny! Here's a good joke! I fell asleep in my dressing-room when the play was over, and there I was calmly snoring after everybody else had left the theatre. Ah! I'm a foolish old man, a poor old dodderer! I have been drinking again, and so I fell asleep in there, sitting up. That was clever! Good for you, old boy! *(Calls)* Yegorka! Petrushka! Where the devil are you? Petrushka! The scoundrels must be asleep, and an earthquake wouldn't wake them now! Yegorka! *(Picks up the stool, sits down, and puts the candle on the Floor)* Not a sound! Only echos answer me. I gave Yegorka and Petrushka each a tip to-day, and now they have disappeared without leaving a trace behind them. The rascals have gone off and have probably locked up the theatre. *(Turns his head about)* I'm drunk! Ugh! The play to-night was for my benefit, and it is disgusting to think how much beer and wine I have poured down my throat in honour of the occasion. Gracious! My body is burning all over, and I feel as if I had twenty tongues in my mouth. It is horrid! Idiotic! This poor old sinner is drunk again, and doesn't even know what he has been celebrating! Ugh! My head is splitting, I am shivering all over, and I feel as dark and cold inside as a cellar! Even if I don't mind ruining my health, I ought at least to remember my age, old idiot that I am! Yes, my old age! It's no use! I can play the fool, and brag, and pretend to be young, but my life is really over now, I kiss my hand to the sixty-eight years that have gone by; I'll never see them again! I have drained the bottle, only a few little drops are left at the bottom, nothing but the dregs. Yes, yes, that's the case, Vasili, old boy. The time has come for you to rehearse the part of a mummy, whether you like it or not. Death is on its way to you. *(Stares ahead of him)* It is strange, though, that I have been on the stage now for forty-five years, and this is the first time I have seen a theatre at night, after the lights have been put out. The first time. *(Walks up to the foot-lights)* How dark it is! I can't see a thing. Oh, yes, I can just make out the prompter's box, and his desk; the rest is in pitch darkness, a black, bottomless pit, like a grave, in which death itself might be hiding.... Brr.... How cold it is! The wind blows out of the empty theatre as though out of a stone flue. What a place for ghosts! The shivers are running up and down my back. *(Calls)* Yegorka! Petrushka! Where are you both? What on earth makes me think of such gruesome things here? I must give up drinking; I'm an old man, I shan't live much longer. At sixty-eight people go to church and prepare for death, but here I am--heavens! A profane old drunkard in this fool's dress--I'm simply not fit to look at. I must go and change it at once.... This is a dreadful place, I should die of fright sitting here all night. *(Goes toward his dressing-room; at the same time NIKITA IVANITCH in a long white coat comes out of the dressing-room at the farthest end of the stage. SVIETLOVIDOFF sees IVANITCH--shrieks with terror and steps back)* Who are you? What? What do you want? *(Stamps*

his foot) Who are you?

Explanation:

Svetlovidov, an old stage actor drunkenly enters the stage of a darkened and deserted theatre. For the first time, he has drunk heavily and fallen asleep in the dressing room of the theatre. His body is burning all over and he feels as if his life is over now. He has drunk to forget the emptiness, meaninglessness and bitter experiences of life, forgetting that being 68 years old, he can no longer afford to drink so much with such feeble health. The audience and the other artists have already left the stage and gone home. Svetlovidov comes upstage, for the first time during night in his 45 years long career as a stage artist, and begins to lament over his past and present miserable condition. His life at present is like a “bottomless pit” and like a grave where death awaits him. Nikita, a prompter, comes out of the dressing room at the farthest end of the stage and the old man shrieks with horror, taking him to be a ghost like thing, and hence steps back.

Check Your Progress

1. **Who is Svetlovidov and why is he on the stage?**
2. **What is Svetlovidov’s condition of mind and health?**

2.2.2 IVANITCH. It is I, sir.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. Who are you?

IVANITCH. (*Comes slowly toward him*) It is I, sir, the prompter, Nikita Ivanitch. It is I, master, it is I!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. (*Sinks helplessly onto the stool, breathes heavily and trembles violently*) Heavens! Who are you? It is you . . . you Nikitushka? What . . . what are you doing here?

IVANITCH. I spend my nights here in the dressing-rooms. Only please be good enough not to tell Alexi Fomitch, sir. I have nowhere else to spend the night; indeed, I haven’t.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. Ah! It is you, Nikitushka, is it? Just think, the audience called me out sixteen times; they brought me three wreathes and lots of other things, too; they were all wild with enthusiasm, and yet not a soul came when it was all over to wake the poor, drunken old man and take him home. And I am an old man, Nikitushka! I am sixty-eight years old, and I am ill. I haven’t the heart left to go on. (*Falls on IVANITCH’S neck and weeps*) Don’t go away, Nikitushka; I am old and helpless, and I feel it is time for me to die. Oh, it is dreadful, dreadful!

IVANITCH. (*Tenderly and respectfully*) Dear master! it is time for you to go home, sir!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. I won’t go home; I have no home--none! none!--none!

IVANITCH. Oh, dear! Have you forgotten where you live?

SVIETLOVIDOFF. I won’t go there. I won’t! I am all alone there. I have nobody, Nikitushka! No wife--no children. I am like the wind blowing across the lonely fields. I shall die, and no one will remember me. It is awful to be alone--no one to cheer me, no one to caress me, no one to help me to bed when I am drunk. Whom do I belong to? Who needs me? Who loves me? Not a soul, Nikitushka.

IVANITCH. (*Weeping*) Your audience loves you, master.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. My audience has gone home. They are all asleep, and have forgotten their old clown. No, nobody needs me, nobody loves me; I have no wife, no children.

IVANITCH. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Don't be so unhappy about it.

Explanation:

Svetlovidov feels he is an old man now and is helpless and unwanted. He also feels that death is gradually approaching him now and may snatch his life any moment. Nikita, the prompter, shows deep sympathy and respect to the old man. Such a great artist, who is deeply admired by the public during his performances, tragically has no home, family, relatives and not a soul on earth to take care of him. He has given more than 45 years of his life to the stage performing so well all through but life has nothing meaningful to return to him at the fag end of his journey where he is left all alone. His remarks that "I am old and helpless" represent his frustration, emptiness, despair and failure in life. Svetlovidov is now in the swan song stage of his life and art, which frightens him to the core. He feels that his audience have forgotten him when he needed them most and nobody loves him or cares for him.

Check Your Progress

1. **What is Nikita's attitude towards Svetlovidov?**
2. **What does Svetlovidov's remark "I am old and helpless"- indicate?**

2.2.3 SVIETLOVIDOFF. But I am a man, I am still alive. Warm, red blood is tingling in my veins, the blood of noble ancestors. I am an aristocrat, Nikitushka; I served in the army, in the artillery, before I fell as low as this, and what a fine young chap I was! Handsome, daring, eager! Where has it all gone? What has become of those old days? There's the pit that has swallowed them all! I remember it all now. Forty-five years of my life lie buried there, and what a life, Nikitushka! I can see it as clearly as I see your face: the ecstasy of youth, faith, passion, the love of women--women, Nikitushka!

IVANITCH. It is time you went to sleep, sir.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. When I first went on the stage, in the first glow of passionate youth, I remember a woman loved me for my acting. She was beautiful, graceful as a poplar, young, innocent, pure, and radiant as a summer dawn. Her smile could charm away the darkest night. I remember, I stood before her once, as I am now standing before you. She had never seemed so lovely to me as she did then, and she spoke to me so with her eyes--such a look! I shall never forget it, no, not even in the grave; so tender, so soft, so deep, so bright and young! Enraptured, intoxicated, I fell on my knees before her, I begged for my happiness, and she said: "Give up the stage!" Give up the stage! Do you understand? She could love an actor, but marry him--never! I was acting that day, I remember--I had a foolish, clown's part, and as I acted, I felt my eyes being opened; I saw that the worship of the art I had held so sacred was a delusion and an empty dream; that I was a slave, a fool, the plaything of the idleness of strangers. I understood my audience at last, and since that day I have not believed in their applause, or in their wreathes, or in their enthusiasm. Yes, Nikitushka! The people applaud me, they buy my photograph, but I am a stranger to them. They don't know me, I am as the dirt beneath their feet. They are willing enough to meet me . . . but allow a daughter or a sister to marry me, an outcast, never! I have no faith in them, [sinks onto the stool] no faith in them.

IVANITCH. Oh, sir! you look dreadfully pale, you frighten me to death! Come, go home, have mercy on me!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. I saw through it all that day, and the knowledge was dearly bought. Nikitushka! After that . . . when that girl . . . well, I began to wander aimlessly about, living from day to day without looking ahead. I took the parts of buffoons and low comedians, letting my mind go to wreck. Ah! but I was a great artist once, till little by little I threw away my talents, played the motley fool, lost my looks, lost the power of expressing myself, and became in the end a Merry Andrew instead of a man. I have been swallowed up in that great black pit. I never felt it before, but to-night, when I woke up, I looked back, and there behind me lay sixty-eight years. I have just found out what it is to be old! It is all over . . . (sobs) . . . all over.

IVANITCH. There, there, dear master! Be quiet . . . gracious! (*Calls*)

Petrushka! Yegorka!

Explanation:

Svetlovidov recalls with pride the fact of his belonging to an aristocratic family, the good old days when served in the army as a young, handsome, daring man. He recalls a marriage proposal he once made to a beautiful woman who though loved him with her heart, yet was not ready to marry him unless he gave up his acting career. She could love an actor, but not marry him and that was something that opened his eyes. His art that he had held so sacred was merely ‘a delusion and an empty dream.’ That his audience could applaud and appreciate him but could not take him as one of their own; that he was ‘a stranger’ to them. From then on, he did not have any faith in his audience and has been moving on aimlessly. He laments the direction his life has taken and feels that he has been swallowed up ‘in that great black pit’ of ruin and disaster.

Check Your Progress

1. **What do you know about Svetlovidov’s past life?**
2. **What is it that Svetlovidov so deeply regrets now and why?**

2.2.4 SVIETLOVIDOFF. But what a genius I was! You cannot imagine what power I had, what eloquence; how graceful I was, how tender; how many strings (*beats his breast*) quivered in this breast! It chokes me to think of it! Listen now, wait, let me catch my breath, there; now listen to this:

“The shade of bloody Ivan now returning
 Fans through my lips rebellion to a flame,
 I am the dead Dimitri! In the burning
 Boris shall perish on the throne I claim.
 Enough! The heir of Czars shall not be seen
 Kneeling to yonder haughty Polish Queen!”*

*From “Boris Godunoff,” by Pushkin. (*translator’s note*) Is that bad, eh? (*Quickly*) Wait, now, here’s something from King Lear. The sky is black, see? Rain is pouring down, thunder roars, lightning--zzz

zzz zzz--splits the whole sky, and then, listen:

“Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!

You cataracts and hurricanoes spout

Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!

You sulphurous thought-executing fires

Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts

Singe my white head! And thou, all shaking thunder,

Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world!

Crack nature's moulds, all germons spill at once

That make ungrateful man!”

(Impatiently) Now, the part of the fool. *(Stamps his foot)* Come take the fool's part! Be quick, I can't wait!

IVANITCH. *(Takes the part of the fool)*

“O, Nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o' door. Good Nuncle, in; ask thy daughter's blessing: here's a night pities neither wise men nor fools.”

SVIETLOVIDOFF.

“Rumble thy bellyful! spit, fire! spout, rain!

Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters;

I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;

I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children.”

Ah! there is strength, there is talent for you! I'm a great artist! Now, then, here's something else of the same kind, to bring back my youth to me. For instance, take this, from Hamlet, I'll begin . . . Let me see, how does it go? Oh, yes, this is it. *(Takes the part of Hamlet)*

“O! the recorders, let me see one.--To withdraw with you. Why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil?”

Explanation: He recalls the time when he was a genius and enjoyed tremendous powers. It chokes him to think of those good old days when his heart used to beat for beloved's love and care. In his drunken state, he recalls lines from various plays by Pushkin and Shakespeare which indicate his forlorn, pitiable and depressive state of mind. But the youth and charm, once passed, can't be regained. The realization comes a bit too late when he is too old and helpless to reverse the sorry state of affairs. Like Shakespeare's 'Fool', he is wise enough to recognize which way the wind blows and admits that though he had been a great artist, he, presently, is too tired and lonely.

Check Your Progress:

1. **What is it that chokes Svetlovidov?**
2. **Why does Svetlovidov recall from Shakespeare's play 'Hamlet' and 'King Lear'?**

2.2.5 IVANITCH. "O, my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "I do not well understand that. Will you play upon this pipe?"

IVANITCH. "My lord, I cannot."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "I pray you."

IVANITCH. "Believe me, I cannot."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "I do beseech you."

IVANITCH. "I know no touch of it, my lord."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "'Tis as easy as lying: govern these vantages with your finger and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops."

IVANITCH. "But these I cannot command to any utterance of harmony: I have not the skill."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "Why, look you, how unworthy a thing you make of me. You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. S'blood! Do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me!" (*laughs and clasps*) Bravo! Encore! Bravo! Where the devil is there any old age in that? I'm not old, that is all nonsense, a torrent of strength rushes over me; this is life, freshness, youth! Old age and genius can't exist together. You seem to be struck dumb, Nikitushka. Wait a second, let me come to my senses again. Oh! Good Lord! Now then, listen! Did you ever hear such tenderness, such music? Sh! Softly;

"The moon had set. There was not any light,
Save of the lonely legion'd watch-stars pale
In outer air, and what by fits made bright
Hot oleanders in a rosy vale
Searched by the lamping fly, whose little spark
Went in and out, like passion's bashful hope."

(*The noise of opening doors is heard*) What's that?

IVANITCH. There are Petrushka and Yegorka coming back. Yes, you have genius, genius, my master.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. (*Calls, turning toward the noise*) Come here to me, boys! (*To IVANITCH*) Let us go and get dressed. I'm not old! All that is foolishness, nonsense! (*laughs gaily*) What are you crying for? You poor old granny, you, what's the matter now? This won't do! There, there, this won't do at all! Come, come, old man, don't stare so! What makes you stare like that? There, there! (*Embraces him in*

tears) Don't cry! Where there is art and genius there can never be such things as old age or loneliness or sickness . . . and death itself is half . . . (*Weeps*) No, no, Nikitushka! It is all over for us now! What sort of a genius am I? I'm like a squeezed lemon, a cracked bottle, and you--you are the old rat of the theatre . . . a prompter! Come on! (*They go*) I'm no genius, I'm only fit to be in the suite of Fortinbras, and even for that I am too old.... Yes.... Do you remember those lines from Othello, Nikitushka?

“Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!

Farewell the plumed troops and the big wars

That make ambition virtue! O farewell!

Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,

The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,

The royal banner, and all quality,

Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war!”

IVANITCH. Oh! You're a genius, a genius!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. And again this:

“Away! the moor is dark beneath the moon,

Rapid clouds have drunk the last pale beam of even:

Away! the gathering winds will call the darkness soon,

And profoundest midnight shroud the serene lights of heaven.”

They go out together, the curtain falls slowly.

Explanation:

Svetlovidov asks Nikita to play some musical notes on pipe so as to soothe his trampled soul, which Nikita, is unable to do since he lacks musical skills. Svetlovidov is pained to realize that his life has been reduced to a mere playboy who could provide enjoyment to a large audience but could not gain their love and trust. In a last minute attempt to defy old age and devaluation of his art, he iterates that art and genius can never be wiped away by old age or any other factor, including death itself. As compared to transitory life, art is something more permanent in nature. The play ends with Svetlovidov recalling a few lines from Othello bidding farewell to all pride, glory, ambition, pomp and show. The lines denote his complete surrender to old age and all that it brings along in its lap. He realizes the absurdity of life and the world and consoles himself by talking about the universal strength and death-defying power of art. His triumph over his grief is an indication of the triumph of art over personal sorrows. In the end, Nikita cries bitterly though at the empty claim of Svetlovidov for victory of art over life because he understands the absurdity of life.

Check Your Progress:

1. Why does Svetlovidov ask Nikita to play on pipe?
2. What does the ending of the play indicate?

2.3 Summary

The swan song is the last thing produced or performed by an artist for the public. This one act play of Chekhov is a swan-song for the central character- Svetlovidov. The play is a powerful character study of a stage actor, Svetlovidov, who has been in the theatre for more than thirty years. This play represents his last performance on the stage. He has achieved a lot of success in his long acting career and has mastered great skills but is still leading a lonely, unmarried and pitiable life. His words "I am helpless" best represent his despair and failure.

A wonderful, charming and rich woman falls in love with Svetlovidov when he is at the peak of his career. Svetlovidov also loves her and wants to marry her so as to enjoy a happy well settled life. However, she is ready to marry him only if he decides to quit the stage. She could love an actor but would not prefer to be an actor's wife because acting, in her circle, is regarded as a profession of low social prestige. Her response represents the attitude of upper and middle class society of the then Russia, when stage actors were taken as nothing more than mere entertainers. They could be appreciated for their skillful performances but were not considered respectable enough for establishing intimate relationships.

In this one act play, Chekhov creates the enduring pictures of the absurdities of life and speech in the masterful portrayal of Svetlovidov. His appearance on the stage with empty theatre represents the final performance of his acting career. He says that society looks upon him as "plaything for other people's pastime." He realizes the absurdity of the world and consoles himself by talking about the universal strength and death-defying power of art and acting. He overcomes his grief which shows that art finally triumphs over personal tragedy. In the end of the play, Nikita cries bitterly at the empty and heart-felt claim of Svetlovidov because Nikita understands the absurdity both in his speech as well as in his life. Svetlovidov, being in the swan-song stage of his life and art, sorrowfully reflects upon his unremarkable career and doubts his talent and the choices he made. He remembers his past triumphs, his service in the army, his amazing youth and feels lonely, unloved and unappreciated. He laments the direction his life has taken and his declining health and talent. Finally, Svetlovidov admits that he is too old, tired, unhealthy and insignificant. He is like a melting icicle whose "song is sung." The play ends with such a great actor's acceptance of his old age, decline and absurdity of life.

2.4 Key Terms

Swansong: final gesture or performance given just before retirement or death

encumbered: restricted someone or something in such a way that their actions were hindered

dregs: remnants of a liquid left in a container

gruesome: causing repulsion or horror, extremely unpleasant and shocking

clown: joker, comedian, buffoon, jester

artillery: weapons like large guns for discharging missiles, the troops or the branch of an army concerned with the use and service of such weapons

ecstasy: a state of extreme happiness or delight

vantage: a place or position affording a good view of something

enraptured : Filled with great joy or delight

intoxicated: (of alcoholic drink or a drug) cause someone to lose control of their faculties or behavior

delusion: a belief in something that is not true, a false idea or belief held despite strong evidence against it

buffoons: a ridiculous but amusing person, a clown

wreck: destroy or severely damage

motley: the multicoloured costume of a jester , having elements of great variety or incongruity

eloquence: fluent or persuasive speaking or writing

rotundity: roundness of a three dimensional object

rumble: to make a series of long low sounds

beseech: request someone fervently or urgently to do something, beg

torrent: pouring or flowing fast, violently or heavily

fife: a small shrill flute used in military bands

2.5 Answers to Check Your Progress

1. Svetlovidov is an old stage actor who drunkenly enters the stage of a darkened and deserted theatre.
2. Svetlovidov is in a terrible condition with his body burning all over and his head splitting. At the age of 68 and having experienced so much pain and loss in his life, Svetlovidov is in utter despair and loneliness.
3. Nikita has deep sympathy and respect for the old man and his theatre skills.
4. His remarks represent his utter helplessness, frustration, emptiness, despair and failure in life. He regrets the fact that nobody needs him at this stage of life when he is so old and feeble.
5. Svetlovidov belonged to an aristocratic family and had served in the army as a young dashing courageous man.
6. Svetlovidov regrets his choice of being an actor because though people appreciate acting, they do not have respect for an actor and fail to consider him as one of their own. Nobody is willing to give one's daughter to an actor in marriage and he has to spend a lonely life.
7. Svetlovidov feels choked when he thinks of those good old days when his heart used to beat for a woman's love and care.
8. Svetlovidov recalls from Shakespeare's play in a drunken state of mind as to bring out close association of the ironies of his life with other great characters in literature like the heroes of Shakespeare's play who had to experience similar downfall in their lives.
9. Svetlovidov requests Nikita to play some musical notes on pipe so that his impatient soul could somehow be comforted.

10. The ending of the play indicates complete acceptance of the ways of life by Svetlovidov. He has no complaints against old age now, nor against the choices that he made in his life.

2.6 Questions and Exercises: Short and Long Answer Questions

Short answer questions:

Q1. What is a swan song?

Ans: A swan song is the last thing produced or performed by an artist for the public.

Q2. How long has Svetlovidov been working on the stage?

Ans: Svetlovidov has been working in the theatre for the past 45 years.

Q3. Why could not Svetlovidov marry the girl of his choice?

Ans: Svetlovidov could not marry her because she wanted him to give up theatre which he could not do.

Q4. What is Svetlovidov's relationship with Nikita?

Ans: Svetlovidov is very friendly and intimate with Nikita, the prompter and it is Nikita who takes care of Svetlovidov when he is left all alone towards the end of the play.

Q5. How does Nikita console Svetlovidov at the end of the play?

Ans. Nikita tries to console Svetlovidov by reminding him of his genius in acting.

Long answer questions:

Q1. How does Svetlovidov feel as an old man and why does he feel so?

Ans. Svetlovidov, as an old man now, feels helpless and unwanted. He also feels that death is gradually approaching him now and may snatch his life any moment. Nikita, the prompter, shows deep sympathy and respect to the old man. Such a great artist, who is deeply admired by the public during his performances, tragically has no home, family, relatives and not a soul on earth to take care of him. He has given more than 45 years of his life to the stage performing so well all through but life has nothing meaningful to return to him at the fag end of his journey where he is left all alone. His remarks that "I am old and helpless" represent his frustration, emptiness, despair and failure in life. Svetlovidov is now in the swan song stage of his life which frightens him to the core. He feels that his audience have forgotten him when he needed them most and nobody loves him or cares for him.

Q2. Write a note on Svetlovidov's past life and his regrets in the present.

Ans. Svetlovidov recalls with pride the fact of his belonging to an aristocratic family, the good old days when served in the army as a young, handsome, daring man. He recalls a marriage proposal he once made to a beautiful woman who though loved him with her heart, yet was not ready to marry him unless he gave up his acting career. She could love an actor, but not marry him and that was something that opened his eyes. His art that he had held so sacred was merely 'a delusion and an empty dream.' That his audience could applaud and appreciate him but could

not take him as one of their own; that he was ‘a stranger’ to them. From then on, he did not have any faith in his audience and has been moving on aimlessly. He laments the direction his life has taken and feels that he has been swallowed up ‘in that great black pit’ of ruin and disaster.

Q3. Describe Svetlovidov’s last minute attempt to defy old age and attain victory over his grief.

Ans. Svetlovidov, towards the end of the play, asks Nikita to play some musical notes on pipe so as to soothe his trampled soul, which Nikita, is unable to do since he lacks musical skills. Svetlovidov is pained to realize that his life has been reduced to a mere playboy who could provide enjoyment to a large audience but could not gain their love and trust. In a last minute attempt to defy old age and devaluation of his art, he iterates that art and genius can never be wiped away by old age or any other factor, including death itself. As compared to transitory life, art is something more permanent in nature. The play ends with Svetlovidov recalling a few lines from Othello bidding farewell to all pride, glory, ambition, pomp and show. The lines denote his complete surrender to old age and all that it brings along in its lap. He realizes the absurdity of life and the world and consoles himself by talking about the universal strength and death-defying power of art. His triumph over his grief is an indication of the triumph of art over personal sorrows. In the end, Nikita cries bitterly though at the empty claim of Svetlovidov for victory of art over life because he understands the absurdity of life.

2.7 Language Practice

a. Write down synonyms of the following words.

Stranger : unacquainted

Haughty: arrogant

Radiant: glowing

Ecstatic: elated, delighted

Brag: boast of

b. Write down antonyms of the following words.

Bold: timid, coward

Dawn: dusk

Eloquent: inarticulate

Glorious: inglorious

Genius: idiot, imbecile

c. Change the following words into adverbs

i. **Anger** : Angrily

ii. **Terrible**: terribly

iii. **Quick** : quickly

iv. **Strike** : strikingly

v. **Strange**: strangely

UNIT – 3

THE MONKEY’S PAW

3.0 Introduction

“The Monkey’s Paw” is a supernatural short story by the British author W. W. Jacobs. It was first published in England as a part of Jacobs’s short-story collection *The Lady of the Barge* (1902). William Wymark "W. W." Jacobs was an English author of short stories and novels. Although much of his work was humorous, he is most famous for his horror story "The Monkey's Paw". In the story, three wishes are granted to the owner of the monkey's hand, but the wishes come with an enormous price for interfering with fate. The short story involves Mr. and Mrs. White and their adult son, Herbert. Sergeant-Major Morris, a friend who served with the British Army in India, introduces them to a mummified monkey's paw. An old fakir placed a spell on the paw, that it would grant three wishes to three separate men. The wishes are granted but always with hellish consequences, as punishment for tampering with fate.

3.1 Unit Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the constituents of a supernatural story.
- Appreciate the language full of suspense and premonition.
- Understand the art of characterization of W.W.Jacobs.

About the Author

W. W. (William Wymark) Jacobs was born in 1863 in London, England, in a poor family. He had a difficult childhood. His father, William Jacobs, managed a wharf in South Devon. His mother, Sophia, died when Jacobs was a young boy. He received his degree from Birkbeck College. In the early 1890s the satirical magazines *the Idler* and *Today* published some of his stories. Jacobs’s first short-story collection, *Many Cargoes* (1896), won popular acclaim, prompting him to quit working as a clerk which he had been doing till then and adopt writing as a full-time career . In 1900, Jacobs wed Agnes Eleanor, a prominent suffragette(a woman seeking the right to vote through organized protest) . They had five children together.

The success of Jacobs’s fiction enabled him to escape his hard, frugal and dull life as a civil servant. However his early experiences benefited him greatly. He had spent a lot of time hanging around the wharves in London, and many of his short stories and novels are based on seamen’s lives and adventures. Jacobs’s works include a novel *The Skipper’s Wooing*(1897) and anthologies *Sea Urchins* (1898), *Light Freights* (1901), *Captains’ All* (1902), *Sailors’ Knots* (1909), and *Night Watches* (1914). Jacobs published thirteen collections of short stories, five novels, and a novella, many of which sold tens of thousands of copies. He also wrote a number of one-act plays and many of his short stories were also-adapted as plays. His short stories got wider publicity and remuneration when the popular *Strand* magazine began publishing Jacobs’s short stories in 1898 and continued to do so throughout much of his

life. Jacobs died in 1943.

While modern readers relate Jacobs primarily with his exciting and frequently quoted short story “The Monkey’s Paw” and with another short story “The Toll House,” he was better recognized as a comic writer. Like many comic writers of the day, Jacobs explored the lives of the lower and middle classes and published many of his stories in magazines directed at this audience. The novellas *At Sunwich Port* (1902) and *Dialstone Lane* (1904) exemplify his ability to create humorous scenarios with vivid characters. Jerome K. Jerome, a popular comic novelist of the day, was an ardent admirer of Jacobs’s and praised his diligent and incisive approach. He said that Jacobs would often rewrite just one sentence for hours at a stretch. Many celebrated names of literature have complimented Jacob’s work, including G. K. Chesterton, Henry James, Evelyn Waugh, P. G. Wodehouse, and Mark Twain.

“The Monkey’s Paw” was published in Jacobs’s short-story collection *The Lady of the Barge* (1902), and the story’s popularity has been extraordinarily long-lasting. The story has been included in approximately seventy collections, from horror and gothic anthologies to the *New York Review of Books’* collection of classic fiction. The story has also been turned into a play and made into eight separate movies. Stephen King wrote about “The Monkey’s Paw” in *The Dead Zone* (1979) and *Apt Pupil* (1982) and based his novel *Pet Sematary*(1983) on its themes. The spare but realistic characterization of the White family, their fascination with wishes and wishing gone wrong, and the blending of humor and terror have made “The Monkey’s Paw” popular with generations of readers. With this short story, Jacobs established himself as a significant name in the genre.

3.2 The Story

3.2.1 Outside, the night was cold and wet, but in the small living room the curtains were closed and the fire burned brightly. Father and son were playing chess; the father, whose ideas about the game involved some very unusual moves, putting his king into such sharp and unnecessary danger that it even brought comment from the white-haired old lady knitting quietly by the fire. “Listen to the wind,” said Mr. White who, having seen a mistake that could cost him the game after it was too late, was trying to stop his son from seeing it. “I’m listening,” said the son, seriously studying the board as he stretched out his hand. “Check.” “I should hardly think that he’ll come tonight,” said his father, with his hand held in the air over the board. “Mate,” replied the son. “That’s the worst of living so far out,” cried Mr. White with sudden and unexpected violence; “Of all the awful out of the way places to live in, this is the worst. Can’t walk on the footpath without getting stuck in the mud, and the road’s a river. I don’t know what the people are thinking about. I suppose they think it doesn’t matter because only two houses in the road have people in them.” “Never mind, dear,” said his wife calmly; “perhaps you’ll win the next one.” Mr. White looked up sharply, just in time to see a knowing look between mother and son. The words died away on his lips, and he hid a guilty smile in his thin grey beard. “There he is,” said Herbert White as the gate banged shut loudly and heavy footsteps came toward the door.

Explanation: These are the opening lines of the short story. Old Mr. White is busy playing chess with his young son named Herbert. Both play in a jovial mood though the father is irritated at his loss in the game. The father makes unusual choices in the game and most of his moves do not pay him well. In order to divert attention of his son, he makes various excuses. He talks about the wind blowing outside, the muddy surroundings of their house, his friend’s anticipated arrival and so on. Mrs. White realizes

his frustration at the loss in the game but encourages him anyhow. She assures him that he would win the next game. Mr. White realizes that the family can see through his tricks and gives a guilty smile. At that point of time the visitor bangs at the door and his arrival is announced.

3.2.2. "Sergeant-Major Morris," he said, introducing him to his wife and his son, Herbert. The Sergeant-Major shook hands and, taking the offered seat by the fire, watched with satisfaction as Mr. White got out whiskey and glasses. After the third glass his eyes got brighter and he began to talk. The little family circle listened with growing interest to this visitor from distant parts, as he squared his broad shoulders in the chair and spoke of wild scenes and brave acts; of wars and strange peoples. "Twenty-one years of it," said Mr. White, looking at his wife and son. "When he went away he was a thin young man. Now look at him." "He doesn't look to have taken much harm," said Mrs. White politely. "I'd like to go to India myself," said the old man, just to look around a bit, you know." "Better where you are," said the Sergeant-Major, shaking his head. He put down the empty glass and sighing softly, shook it again. "I should like to see those old temples and fakirs and the street entertainers," said the old man.

"What was that that you started telling me the other day about a monkey's paw or something, Morris?" "Nothing," said the soldier quickly. "At least, nothing worth hearing." "Monkey's paw?" said Mrs. White curiously. "Well, it's just a bit of what you might call magic, perhaps," said the Sergeant-Major, without first stopping to think. His three listeners leaned forward excitedly. Deep in thought, the visitor put his empty glass to his lips and then set it down again. Mr. White filled it for him again. "To look at it," said the Sergeant-Major, feeling about in his pocket, "it's just an ordinary little paw, dried to a mummy."

Explanation: The visitor is the awaited guest and friend of old Mr. White. He is Sergeant-Major Morris. Mr. White recalls that his friend had been healthy and energetic 21 years back. He was a man of the outdoor world who had enjoyed many adventures and travels. He had also served in the army and was posted in India. Mr. White wishes that he too could have had a chance of visiting the land of fakirs and magic. But Morris thinks otherwise. The Sergeant-Major shares his experiences with the hosts. He talks about the magical experience he had with old temples, street entertainers etc. The old man reminds him of a dried up paw of a monkey about which Morris had told him. On the other hand Morris is reluctant to share this story and dismisses it as an incident of a worn out old, monkey paw.

3.2.3. "It had a spell put on it by an old fakir," said the Sergeant-Major, "a very holy man. He wanted to show that fate ruled people's lives, and that those who tried to change it would be sorry. He put a spell on it so that three different men could each have three wishes from it." The way he told the story showed that he truly believed it and his listeners became aware that their light laughter was out of place and had hurt him a little. "Well, why don't you have three, sir?" said Herbert, cleverly. The soldier looked at him the way that the middle aged usually look at disrespectful youth. "I have," he said quietly, and his face whitened. "And did you really have the three wishes granted?" asked Mrs. White. "I did," said the Sergeant-Major, and his glass tapped against his strong teeth. "And has anybody else wished?" continued the old lady. "The first man had his three wishes. Yes," was the reply, "I don't know what the first two were, but the third was for death. That's how I got the paw." His voice was so serious that the group fell quiet.

Explanation: The Sergeant-Major gives an introduction of the paw and its formidable features. The

paw belonged to a fakir (saint) who put special powers on it. It was done to prove that man is dictated by destiny. If one tries to defy this fact then divine nemesis (punishment) would befall. It was ordained by the fakir that three people could ask for three wishes which would come true. But they would have to pay a heavy price for that. Previously people had availed this opportunity including the Sergeant-Major. Thereafter the person who asked for three wishes had wished for death as his third wish and that was how the paw came to the Sergeant-Major's possession. The account given by the guest evoked different response from the listeners. Whereas earlier they laughed mockingly but gradually their expression grew pensive and hushed.

3.2.4. “If you don't want it Morris,” said the other, “give it to me.” “I won't.” said his friend with stubborn determination. “I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don't hold me responsible for what happens. Throw it on the fire like a sensible man.” The other shook his head and examined his possession closely. “How do you do it?” he asked. “Hold it up in your right hand, and state your wish out loud so that you can be heard,” said the Sergeant-Major, “But I warn you of what might happen.” “Sounds like the ‘Arabian Nights’”, said Mrs. White, as she rose and began to set the dinner. “Don't you think you might wish for four pairs of hands for me.” Her husband drew the talisman from his pocket, and all three laughed loudly as the Sergeant-Major, with a look of alarm on his face, caught him by the arm. “If you must wish,” he demanded, “Wish for something sensible.” Mr. White dropped it back in his pocket, and placing chairs, motioned his friend to the table. In the business of dinner the talisman was partly forgotten, and afterward the three sat fascinated as they listened to more of the soldier's adventures in India.

Explanation: Sergeant Morris seems disinclined to keep the paw so Mr. White suggests that he pass over the paw to him. The guest refuses to give it to the old man and asks him to throw it in fire as he (the Sergeant) had done a little while ago. The old man insists on keeping the paw with him and asks how a wish is to be asked for. The Sergeant tells him to hold it in his right hand and state his wish loudly so that it can be heard. But he again warns about the inherent danger. Mr. White is tempted to ask for a wish but his friend counsels him to be wise in this venture. Mrs. White thinks that the entire thing was a fantasy like the ‘Arabian Nights.’ After a while Mr. White drops the paw back in his pocket and they had dinner. Even during dinner, they talked about many adventures in India.

3.2.5. Mr. White took the paw from his pocket and eyed it doubtfully. “I don't know what to wish for, and that's a fact,” he said slowly. “It seems to me I've got all I want.” “If you only paid off the house, you'd be quite happy, wouldn't you!” said Herbert, with his hand on his shoulder. “Well, wish for two hundred pounds, then; that'll just do it.” His father, smiling and with an embarrassed look for his foolishness in believing the soldier's story, held up the talisman. Herbert, with a serious face, spoiled only by a quick smile to his mother, sat down at the piano and struck a few grand chords. “I wish for two hundred pounds,” said the old man clearly. A fine crash from the piano greeted his words, broken by a frightened cry from the old man. His wife and son ran toward him. “It moved,” he cried, with a look of horror at the object as it lay on the floor. “As I wished, it twisted in my hand like a snake.” “Well, I don't see the money,” said his son, as he picked it up and placed it on the table, “and I bet I never shall.” “It must have been your imagination, father,” said his wife, regarding him worriedly. He shook his head. “Never mind, though; there's no harm done, but it gave me a shock all the same.” They sat down by the

fire again while the two men finished their pipes. Outside, the wind was higher than ever, and the old man jumped nervously at the sound of a door banging upstairs. An unusual and depressing silence settled on all three, which lasted until the old couple got up to go to bed. "I expect you'll find the cash tied up in a big bag in the middle of your bed," said Herbert, as he wished them goodnight, "and something horrible sitting on top of your wardrobe watching you as you pocket your ill-gotten money. Herbert, who normally had a playful nature and didn't like to take things too seriously, sat alone in the darkness looking into the dying fire. He saw faces in it; the last so horrible and so monkey-like that he stared at it in amazement. It became so clear that, with a nervous laugh, he felt on the table for a glass containing some water to throw over it. His hand found the monkey's paw, and with a little shake of his body he wiped his hand on his coat and went up to bed.

Explanation: The old man does not know what wish to ask for as he feels he has everything. Herbert, his son reminds him that he had to pay off some amount for the house so he should ask for that. The father feels embarrassed in going by what his friend had told about the paw. Finally he says aloud, "I wish for two hundred pounds." At that very moment, a sudden shriek is heard from his mouth and the piano being played by Herbert produces a crashing sound. The old man declares that just as he made his wish, the paw moved in his hand. The family is unwilling to accept it and consider it as the old man's imagination. When they sit down near the fire, the wind produces a howling noise outside and a door upstairs bangs loudly. The atmosphere grows tense. While the Whites decide to retire to bed, Herbert comments lightly that they would find money on their bed. When his parents were gone, Herbert who was a light hearted youth, looks intently in the fire burning near him and feels that he saw the face of a monkey in it. When he tries to douse the fire his hand mistakenly touches the paw and he washes his hand to get rid of a strange feeling.

3.2.6. In the brightness of the wintry sun next morning as it streamed over the breakfast table he laughed at his fears. The room felt as it always had and there was an air of health and happiness which was not there the previous night. The dirty, dried-up little paw was thrown on the cabinet with a carelessness which indicated no great belief in what good it could do. "I suppose all old soldiers are the same," said Mrs. White. "The idea of our listening to such nonsense! How could wishes be granted in these days? And if they could, how could two hundred pounds hurt you, father?" "Might drop on his head from the sky," said Herbert. "Morris said the things happened so naturally," said his father, "that you might if you so wished not see the relationship." "Well don't break into the money before I come back," said Herbert as he rose from the table to go to work. "I'm afraid it'll turn you into a mean, greedy old man, and we shall have to tell everyone that we don't know you." His mother laughed, and following him to the door, watched him go down the road, and returning to the breakfast table, she felt very happy at the expense of her husband's readiness to believe such stories. All of which did not prevent her from hurrying to the door at the postman's knock nor, when she found that the post brought only a bill, talking about how Sergeant-Majors can develop bad drinking habits after they leave the army.

Explanation: The next morning was a pleasant winter day and the room had a happy and healthy air. The darkness of the previous night was gone. The paw was lying abandoned on the cabinet with no one showing any concern towards it. The old lady joked about what the visitor had told them yesterday and if it was a soldier's imagination. She wondered how wishes could be fulfilled this way and how getting

money could hurt anyone. The father reminded them that all happened so naturally that one could overlook the connection. Herbert was about to leave for work comments jokingly that they should not find the money before he returned home. The mother sees him off to work and comes back in the house thinking about her husband's credulous nature, the bill just delivered by the postman and drinking habits of retired soldiers.

3.2.7. His wife made no reply. She was watching the mysterious movements of a man outside, who, looking in an undecided fashion at the house, appeared to be trying to make up his mind to enter. In mental connection with the two hundred pounds, she noticed that the stranger was well dressed, and wore a silk hat of shiny newness. Three times he stopped briefly at the gate, and then walked on again. The fourth time he stood with his hand upon it, and then with sudden firmness of mind pushed it open and walked up the path. Mrs White at the same moment placed her hands behind her, hurriedly untied the strings of her apron, and put it under the cushion of her chair. She brought the stranger, who seemed a little uncomfortable, into the room. He looked at her in a way that said there was something about his purpose that he wanted to keep secret, and seemed to be thinking of something else as the old lady said she was sorry for the appearance of the room and her husband's coat, which he usually wore in the garden. She then waited as patiently as her sex would permit for him to state his business, but he was at first strangely silent.

Explanation: The mother observes the presence of a well-dressed man outside the house .He looked at the house in an undetermined way as if unsure about coming in. After hesitating for a while he decided to come in. The mother guessed that he might have brought the promised money as wished by the old man from the monkey's paw. She regretted that they were not formally dressed when the man came. The man was strangely silent.

3.2.8. "I – was asked to call," he said at last, and bent down and picked a piece of cotton from his trousers. "I come from 'Maw and Meggins.'" The old lady jumped suddenly, as in alarm. "Is anything the matter?" she asked breathlessly. "Has anything happened to Herbert? What is it? What is it?" Her husband spoke before he could answer. "There there mother," he said hurriedly. "Sit down, and don't jump to a conclusion. You've not brought bad news, I'm sure sir," and eyed the other, expecting that it was bad news but hoping he was wrong. "I'm sorry – " began the visitor. "Is he hurt?" demanded the mother wildly. The visitor lowered and raised his head once in agreement. "Badly hurt," he said quietly, "but he is not in any pain." "Oh thank God!" said the old woman, pressing her hands together tightly. "Thank God for that! Thank – " She broke off as the tragic meaning of the part about him not being in pain came to her. The man had turned his head slightly so as not to look directly at her, but she saw the awful truth in his face. She caught her breath, and turning to her husband, who did not yet understand the man's meaning, laid her shaking hand on his. There was a long silence. "He was caught in the machinery," said the visitor at length in a low voice. "Caught in the machinery," repeated Mr. White, too shocked to think clearly, "yes." He sat staring out the window, and taking his wife's hand between his own, pressed it as he used to do when he was trying to win her love in the time before they were married, nearly forty years before. "He was the only one left to us," he said, turning gently to the visitor. "It is hard." The other coughed, and rising, walked slowly to the window. "The firm wishes me to pass on their great sadness about your loss," he said, without looking round. "I ask that you please understand

that I am only their servant and simply doing what they told me to do.” There was no reply; the old woman’s face was white, her eyes staring, and her breath unheard; on the husband’s face was a look such as his friend the Sergeant-Major might have carried into his first battle. “I was to say that Maw and Meggins accept no responsibility,” continued the other. “But, although they don’t believe that they have a legal requirement to make a payment to you for your loss, in view of your son’s services they wish to present you with a certain sum.” Mr. White dropped his wife’s hand, and rising to his feet, stared with a look of horror at his visitor. His dry lips shaped the words, “How much?” “Two hundred pounds,” was the answer. Without hearing his wife’s scream, the old man smiled weakly, put out his hands like a blind man, and fell, a senseless mass, to the floor.

Explanation: The nervous old couple enquires from the man as to who he is . He tells them that he had come from a firm named Maw and Meggins. Unfortunately he had come with a bad news about their son. He was caught in the machine and passed away. The company had no legal liability but keeping in mind their loss and the boy’s services they had decided to compensate with two hundred pounds. The old couple is stunned and at a loss for words. The old man falls down in an unconscious state and the old woman is left lamenting.

3.2.9. “THE PAW!” she cried wildly. “THE MONKEY’S PAW!”

He started up in alarm. “Where? Where is it? What’s the matter?”

She almost fell as she came hurried across the room toward him. “I want it,” she said quietly.

“You’ve not destroyed it?”

“It’s in the living room, on the shelf above the fireplace,” he replied. “Why?”

She cried and laughed together, and bending over, kissed his cheek.

“I only just thought of it,” she said. “Why didn’t I think of it before? Why didn’t you think of it?”

“Think of what?” he questioned.

“The other two wishes,” she replied quickly. “We’ve only had one.”

“Was not that enough?” he demanded angrily.

“No,” she cried excitedly; “We’ll have one more. Go down and get it quickly, and wish our boy alive again.”

The man sat up in bed and threw the blankets from his shaking legs. “Good God, you are mad!” he cried, struck with horror.

“Get it,” she said, breathing quickly; “get it quickly, and wish – Oh my boy, my boy!”

Her husband struck a match and lit the candle. “Get back to bed he said,” his voice shaking. “You don’t know what you are saying.”

“We had the first wish granted,” said the old woman, desperately; “why not the second?”

“A c-c-coincidence,” said the old man.

“Go get it and wish,” cried his wife, shaking with excitement.

Explanation: The old woman is suddenly reminded of the monkey’s paw and becomes excited to use it again. In a frenzied way she asks the husband if the paw was still there with him. He cannot understand her excitement after the horrible loss due to the paw and restrains her. She insists that the husband ask for another wish to be granted so that if the son died because of the first wish, he can be brought alive with the second wish. The husband tries to convince her that it was a coincidence and it should not be tried again. The wife insists on the wish to be asked for so that the paw is used again.

3.2.10. The old man turned and looked at her, and his voice shook. “He has been dead ten days, and besides he – I would not tell you before, but – I could only recognize him by his clothing. If he was too terrible for you to see then, how now?”

“Bring him back,” cried the old woman, and pulled him towards the door. “Do you think I fear the child I have nursed?”

He went down in the darkness, and felt his way to the living room, and then to the fireplace. The talisman was in its place on the shelf, and then a horrible fear came over him that the unspoken wish might bring the broken body of his son before him before he could escape from the room. He caught his breath as he found that he had lost the direction of the door. His forehead cold with sweat, he felt his way round the table and along the walls until he found himself at the bottom of the stairs with the evil thing in his hand.

Even his wife’s face seemed changed as he entered the room. It was white and expectant, and to his fears seemed to have an unnatural look upon it. He was afraid of her.

“WISH!” she cried in a strong voice.

“It is foolish and wicked,” he said weakly.

“WISH!” repeated his wife.

He raised his hand. “I wish my son alive again.”

Explanation: The old man was aware of the danger if the second wish came true. The boy had been dead for ten days . When he met with the accident at his work-place, the body got so distorted that the father had to identify it with the help of the clothes. The mother lacked the will to see it at that time so how could she cope with it now. The old man went downstairs to bring the paw but he was very nervous and cold. When he came upstairs, his expression was still distorted whereas the wife seemed white and expectant .Despite the husband’s reluctance, she insisted on the second wish. The old man wished that the son be alive again.

3.2.11. Neither spoke, but lay silently listening to the ticking of the clock. They heard nothing else other than the normal night sounds. The darkness was depressing, and after lying for some time building up his courage, the husband took the box of matches, and lighting one, went downstairs for another candle. At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he stopped to light another; and at the same moment a knock sounded on the front door. It was so quiet that it could only be heard downstairs, as if the one knocking wanted to keep their coming a secret. The matches fell from his hand. He stood motionless,

not even breathing, until the knock was repeated. Then he turned and ran quickly back to his room, and closed the door behind him. A third knock sounded through the house.

“WHAT’S THAT?” cried the old woman, sitting up quickly.

“A rat,” said the old man shakily – “a rat. It passed me on the stairs.”

His wife sat up in bed listening. A loud knock echoed through the house.

“It’s Herbert!” she screamed. “It’s Herbert!”

She ran to the door, but her husband was there before her, and catching her by the arm, held her tightly.

“What are you going to do?” he asked in a low, scared voice.

“It’s my boy; it’s Herbert!” she cried, struggling automatically. “I forgot it was two miles away.

What are you holding me for? Let go. I must open the door.”

“For God’s sake don’t let it in,” cried the old man, shaking with fear.

“You’re afraid of your own son,” she cried struggling. “Let me go. I’m coming, Herbert; I’m coming.”

There was another knock, and another. The old woman with a sudden pull broke free and ran from the room. Her husband followed to the top of the stairs, and called after her as she hurried down. He heard the chain pulled back and the bottom lock open. Then the old woman’s voice, desperate and breathing heavily.

“The top lock,” she cried loudly. “Come down. I can’t reach it.”

But her husband was on his hands and knees feeling around wildly on the floor in search of the paw. If only he could find it before the thing outside got in. The knocks came very quickly now echoing through the house, and he heard the noise of his wife moving a chair and putting it down against the door. He heard the movement of the lock as she began to open it, and at the same moment he found the monkey’s paw, and frantically breathed his third and last wish. The knocking stopped suddenly, although the echoes of it were still in the house. He heard the chair pulled back, and the door opened. A cold wind blew up the staircase, and a long loud cry of disappointment and pain from his wife gave him the courage to run down to her side, and then to the gate. The streetlight opposite shone on a quiet and deserted road.

Explanation: The old man made the second wish at the insistence of his wife. However nothing happened for a while. Then he went downstairs to bring another candle. At that moment he heard a faint knocking outside. The old man feels so terrified that he runs back upstairs. Then the knocking became louder and the old lady wanted to know who it was. The husband tried to dissuade her that it was only a rat on the stairs. The old woman realizes that it could be her dead son who had come alive due to the second wish and was now knocking at the door outside. She ran downstairs to open the door but could not open the upper lock. She cries for the husband to open it so that the dead son could enter in. She sees no reason to be scared of their own son although he was dead now. The knocking grows louder and more insistent. The old woman tries to open the upper lock by placing a chair near the door. As she is about to open the door, the old man gets hold of the paw and makes the third wish. Immediately the knocking stops and the old woman shrieks with disappointment. The old man rushes downstairs to

comfort her. The entire place is deserted and quiet.

Check Your Progress

1. What kind of a story is “The Monkey’s Paw”?
2. What does the paw symbolize?
3. What is the meaning of foreshadowing? How does it work in the story?
4. Give an assessment of Sergeant-Major Morris?
5. What are the three wishes made by the Whites?
6. Comment on the ending of the story.

3.4 Summary

“The Monkey's Paw" is a suspenseful and amazing story with supernatural theme. It has an underlying message for the reader. Human nature is greedy and acquisitive wanting more than what one has. But fate wills otherwise so that if one gets what one desires through the wrong method, a heavy price has to be paid. In the story, the monkey's paw is a magical artifact. Anyone who owns it gets three wishes granted. The wishes come true—but never precisely as wished. So one gets what one wants but at a great cost to oneself. The Whites get the paw from Sergeant-Major Morris. When they wish for wealth, they get money in a bizarre manner. It comes as a compensation from the company where their son worked because he is “caught in the machine” and killed in an accident. As a second wish, Mrs. White asks for their son to be brought back to life. The parents hear the knocking at the door announcing his coming back from the dead. The father makes the third wish sending the son back to the peace of the grave for good.

3.5 Key Terms

- Living room: a room in a house for general everyday use.
- Violence: physical force
- Associated: connected with something or someone
- Visitor: guest or caller
- Curiously: showing eagerness
- Fakir: a monk who possesses to material goods.
- Paw: an animal’s claws or hoofs
- Spell: here used as a noun meaning magic
- Fate: destiny
- Fancy: desire
- Stubborn: obstinate
- Determination: resolve
- Talisman: an object that is thought to have magic powers and to bring good luck.
- Fascinated: to captivate
- Chords: a group of notes sounded together
- Twisted: to move with force or jerk
- Amazement: surprise

- Cabinet: a cupboard with drawers
- Indicated: specified
- Mass: lump
- Requirement: need
- Cemetery: graveyard
- Tenderly: lovingly
- Coincidence: co-occurrence, by chance
- Secret: something hidden
- Desperate: craving
- Echoing: reverberation of sound
- Frantically: in a disorganizes way
- Still: quiet

3.6 Answers to check your progress

1. "The Monkey's Paw" is a supernatural short story by author W. W. Jacobs first published in England in 1902. It has a background of suspense, thrill and premonition. In the story, three wishes are granted to the owner of the monkey's hand, but the wishes come with an enormous price for interfering with fate.
2. The monkey's paw is a symbol of desire and greed. Its owner could wish for three things , having unrestricted ability to make things come true. This power makes the paw alluring, even to those who desire nothing and have everything they need.
3. Foreshadowing is a technique in which the writer hints at the events to come. Sometimes, the writer depicts events early in a story that give clues of the plot soon to be unfolded. At other times, the writer creates this effect by developing an atmosphere that projects the tone of what is about to happen. Jacobs uses both types of foreshadowing techniques in "The Monkey's Paw". For instance in the beginning the father is seen playing chess in a reckless manner as if inviting defeat. He repeats this action when he makes the first wish without giving it due thought leading to a grave loss. Then an atmosphere of isolation and horror is created when there is knocking at the door at the end of the story. These are some examples of premonition.
4. Sergeant-Major Morris is the main character, in fact the stimulant for the story. He brings the monkey's paw to the Whites' household. He is "a tall, heavily built man who is fond of drinking. Once he is drunk, he becomes more friendly and talkative. Morris and Mr. White began their lives in approximately the same way. Mr. White remembers his friend as a slim framed man who had grown fat with years of experience, adventure and soldiering. Morris has seen the world and has brought back tales of bravery, war, disease and strange people. Morris also carries with him the monkey's paw, which changes all the lives of the Whites forever.
5. The Whites are not fully convinced about what Morris tells them about the paw nor are they sure what they should ask as a wish. In a light hearted manner they decide to test the paw. As the first wish, the father asks for two hundred pounds to pay back the amount due for their house. At the insistence of the wife, as the second wish, the father asks that their dead son come home alive. The third wish is a sequel to the second one and he wishes that their dead son go back to the grave and rest in peace.

6. The ending of the story is very powerful yet convincing. It ends like a true suspense thriller. The father asks that their dead son comes back home from the grave. The wish comes true and there is knocking at the door. The mother is desperate to have the son back, so she runs downstairs to open the door. At that moment the father asks for the third wish that the son may rest in peace. So the ending is truly the climax point of the story.

3.7 Important characters

Herbert White - He is the young and fun-loving son of Mr. and Mrs. White. Herbert is an affectionate, loyal and carefree young man and the only surviving child of the Whites. He is employed with a company which makes heavy machinery. The name of the company is Maws and Meggins. Herbert does not give much credence to the story of Morris and even jokes about it. He knows that his family needs money so he suggests that they wish from the paw a sum of two hundred pounds to meet their expenses for the house. Though he is dismissive about the paw he grows serious when he listens to his father's reaction to the twisting of the paw in his (father's) hand. He even has hallucinations about some figures in the fire burning in the heath. He has to pay with his life in order to earn two hundred pounds.

Mrs. White- She is Herbert's mother and Mr. White's wife. Mrs. White is a devoted lady who has a closely knit family. She is tolerant towards her husband's silly habits and is indulgent for her son. She is not fully convinced about the story of the paw and considers it as a hangover effect of Morris who had many drinks. But she aligns with the husband to ask for a wish which results in the loss of her only son. She is distraught after that and asks for the son to be revived as a second wish from the paw. We see her transformation from a loving house wife to a hysterical mother who wants her dead son back at every cost.

Mr. White— He is Herbert's father and Mrs. White's husband. Mr. White is a loving old man who has great attachment for his family. He is a good host also. The arrival of his friend reminds him of the many adventurous opportunities that he had missed in life. Although he has his doubts about the paw, he feels inclined to use it for his family. So all the three wishes are made by him at the behest of his family. As far as his own ambition is concerned, he has no wish to ask for as he thinks he has everything already. Mr. White is a noble and simple person dedicated to his family. He provides strength to his distraught wife and saves her from further trauma by asking for the third wish.

Sergeant-Major Morris – He is a friend of the Whites. He is a heavily built person who likes to drink and share tales of adventure. He tells the family about many of his exploits abroad. He does not want the Whites to use the monkey's paw and throws it in the fire. Morris has been a Sergeant Major in the army and traveled a lot but feels that staying back home is better. He is a symbolic figure who comes from the unknown and brings the message of greed, loss and death for a happy, gullible family. He introduces avarice in a peace loving and contented house hold and their lives are changed forever.

3.8 Questions and Exercises

Short Answer Questions

Q1. Explain the title of the story.

Ans: The title of the short story is "The Monkey's Paw". The entire plot moves around the cursed paw which wrecks havoc on their lives.

Q2. What attitude do the different characters display towards the paw?

Ans: The White family is reluctant to believe the story of the paw. However they decide to try out its real worth which creates havoc in the family. Sergeant Major Morris is convinced about its attributes and warns the Whites not to use the paw.

Q3. What kind of life do the Whites lead?

Ans: The Whites are a close-knit, loving and contented family. They share a lot of mutual affection and invite guests to their home. They are simple and credulous people.

Q4. How does the tone of the story change?

Ans: The story starts on a jovial note when the father and the son are seen enjoying the game of chess. Gradually the tone changes with the asking of the wish from the monkey's paw. It results in death, appearance of the son's ghost and return of the ghost to the grave.

Q5. What message does the story give?

Ans: The story suggests that fate is all-powerful. Humans should not tamper in the ways of God. It could cause serious consequences.

Long-Answer Questions**Q1. Analyze the structure of the story?**

Ans: "The Monkey's Paw" is a horror story dealing with elements of the supernatural in an atmosphere of suspense and thrill. The plot is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the building of the hypothesis. The White family is introduced to the reader as a well-knit, loving and caring lot who are satisfied with what they have. The family friend, Sergeant-Major Morris comes to spend an evening with them. He shares many of his experiences as a soldier to India and other parts of the world. He tells about the story of a monkey's paw which had a curse upon it put by a fakir. The paw grants three wishes to three people in a natural manner but it created catastrophe in their lives so that whosoever used the paw regretted later. The first part tells about how father wished two hundred pounds from the paw. The second part tells about the coming true of the first wish in the death of the son. They receive the said amount as compensation for his death. The third part pertains to the second and third wishes. They are a sequel to the first. The father wishes for the dead son to be revived and then to rest in peace. Thus the structure of the story is tightly woven and it keeps the reader engrossed. The element of suspense is maintained till the end.

Q1. Discuss the plot of "The Monkey's Paw"?

Ans: The plot of the story is filled with suspense, tension and horror. It centers on a monkey's paw which has supernatural powers. It gives to its owner three wishes. The monkey's paw is given to a family of the Whites- father, mother and son. They wish for some money, and the next day an employee of the company where the son is working arrives at the family's house and tells the parents that their son has died in an accident and they will receive a monetary compensation. The amount is exactly two hundred pounds which they had wished from the paw. About a week later, the mother compels the father who makes the second wish that their son would return home

alive. When knocking is heard at the door, the father realizes what has happened and before the mother can open the door, the father uses the last wish. The knocking stops and when the door is opened, no one is there. Thus the plot is engaging, organic and well-knit.

Q2. Which are the major themes discussed in the story?

Ans: This is basically a horror story which deals with themes such as superstition, greed, fate, desire to be immortal and so on. The story never explicitly states that the paw was the reason for Herbert's death, nor does it reveal whether the mysterious knocker at the White's home at the end of the story is in fact the dead Herbert. So there is superstition guiding many facets of the story. Secondly, the Whites are a content, happy family. They want nothing more in life. Mr. White does not know what to ask for as his first wish. He wishes out of greed, not out of necessity. So greed is another salient theme. Fate is all powerful and one should not interfere in the ways of God. Asking for things about which one is not sure or asking for things which humans can not grant leads to ruin. All these themes have been discussed in the story.

Essay type questions

Q1. What are the elements of horror, mystery and the supernatural in "The Monkey's Paw"?

Ans. There are many different aspects of the short story that bring out the element of mystery, horror and the supernatural. W. W. Jacobs, in this story, gives us a horrific retelling of the traditional "three wishes" tale that can be found in literature all over the world. The difference between this tale and its many variations is the way that it incorporates terror and suspense in its narration. One key element that makes this story terrifying is the description of the monkey's paw and the way it gets a life of its own. The paw comes to life after Mr. White makes his wish for money. There is a crashing sound from the piano and the old man gives a shuddering cry. His wife and son ran toward him. The old Mr. White claims that the paw twisted in his hand. The sound of the piano is used to foreshadow the disaster that is going to befall the White family. The crash is emotionally jarring, suggesting that something sinister would follow. The crash is highly suggestive. It indicates that the money will be provided but in a way which nobody can foresee. The way the monkey's paw twisted "like a snake" in the hand of the old man reminds that snakes are creatures that we associate with evil. So horror is made vivid through this comparison. The tale is full of mysterious happenings. The death of the son, the gloominess of the atmosphere in and outside the house, the candles and matchsticks going out, the unexplained knocking at the door after the second wish has been made and the cessation of knocking after the third wish – all these incidents to give the story a gripping form. The idea of the supernatural colours the entire story. The paw is an extraordinary and bizarre object and seems to be a living entity. It reminds of the furies in classical literature which punish humans for follies and frailties. The old couple is destined to get money but through a grotesque twist of fate. The horrible consequences of the first wish do not restrain the couple from asking for the remaining two wishes. The arrival of the dead son and then his departure to the grave are all supernatural happenings. All these features make it a horror story with premonition inherent within.

3.9 Further Reading:

Alfred Hitchcock's "Knife"

Ernest Hemingway's "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber"

UNIT – 4

BEFORE BREAKFAST

4.0 Introduction

Before Breakfast is a short and gloomy play by Eugene O'Neill. O'Neill was the first American dramatist to treat the stage as a literary medium and the only American playwright ever to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. *Before Breakfast* is set in the Greenwich Village area of New York City, in a small one room flat on Christopher Street. The flat consists of a kitchen and dining space. There are only two characters in this play. The married couple, Mrs. Roland who is the only speaking character and her husband Alfred who is silent all through are the two characters. It is just once that Alfred's hand is seen in the play, not much else. This is symbolic of an absentee husband or a non-existent marriage. Although, Alfred is not seen, he seems to provoke a great deal of conflict. With only Mrs. Rowland on stage, O'Neill allows the plot to revolve around her. The play is a kind of monologue ending in the supposed death of the husband.

4.1 Unit Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand how a short play in a single Act is performed.
- Appreciate the terms related to play as a genre such as stage setting, characterization, dialogues, monologues, etc.
- Understand the important concerns in the earlier American drama.

4.2 About the Playwright

Eugene O'Neill was born into the theatre. His father, James O'Neill, was a successful touring actor in the last quarter of the 19th century and his mother, Ella, accompanied her husband across the country. Eugene, who was born in a hotel and even spent his early childhood in hotel rooms, on trains, and backstage. He later condemned the unpleasant and insecure early years of his life and blamed his father for the difficult life the family led. Eugene had the theatre in his blood. He was experienced the twin influences of his parents' ideology as a child. He was steeped in the peasant Irish Catholicism of his father and the more genteel, mystical piety of his mother. These two divergent strains were recreated as dramatic conflict in many of his works leading to themes such as the high sense of drama and struggle with God and religion.

The following is a list of all the published and produced plays of O'Neill with the year in which they were written:

Bound East for Cardiff (1914), Before Breakfast (1916), The Long Voyage Home (1917), In the Zone (1917), The Moon of the Carabbees (1917), Ile (1917), The Rope (1918), Beyond the Horizon (1918), The Dreamy Kid (1918), Where the Cross is Made (1918), The Straw (1919), Gold (1920), Anna

Christie (1920}, The Emperor Jones (1920), Different (1920), The First Man (1921), The Fountain (1921-22), The Hairy Ape (1921), Welded (1922), All God's Chillun Got Wings (1923), Desire Under the Elms (1924), Marco Millions (1923-25), The Great God Brown (1925), Lazarus Laughed (1926), Strange Interlude (1926-27), Dynamo (1928), Mourning Becomes Electra (1929-31) , Ah, Wilderness (1932), Days Without End (1932-33).

Eugene O'Neill has often been censured for his choice of characters, for their deviant psychologies, and for their excessive emotionalism. Certainly his plays dealt with emotions, but he did so because he believed that emotions were a better guide than thoughts to probe truth. The struggles of his characters frequently take place, therefore, within themselves, so that there is little external action performed on the stage. Victories and defeats are in the mind. The message is driven home through a bitter sense of self-realization and even self-pity.

The popularity of O'Neill's work, however, has grown over time. His plays have been performed throughout the world and transformed into film and opera. Through his efforts, the American theatre in the 1920s, developed into a cultural medium which earlier consisted largely of contrived melodrama and farce (apart from musicals and an occasional European import of quality). O'Neill saw the theatre as a valid forum for the presentation of serious ideas. Imbued with the tragic sense of life, he aimed for a contemporary drama that had its roots in the most powerful of ancient Greek tragedies--a drama that could rise to the emotional heights of Shakespeare. For more than twenty years, with such masterpieces as *Desire Under the Elms*, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and *The Iceman Cometh* and by his inspiration to other serious dramatists, O'Neill set the pace for the flourishing of the Broadway theatre.

4.3 The Play

4.3.1. MRS. ROWLAND—(In a low voice) Alfred! Alfred! (There is no answer from the next room and she continues suspiciously in a louder tone) You needn't pretend you're asleep. (There is no reply to this from the bedroom, and, reassured, she gets up from her chair and tiptoes cautiously to the dish closet. She slowly opens one door, taking great care to make no noise, and slides out, from their hiding place behind the dishes, a bottle of Gordon gin and a glass. In doing so she disturbs the top dish, which rattles a little. It this sound she starts guiltily and looks with sulky defiance at the doorway to the next room.) (Her voice trembling) Alfred! After a pause, during which she listens for any sound, she takes the glass and pours out a large drink and gulps it down; then hastily returns the bottle and glass to their hiding place. She closes the closet door with the same care as she had opened it, and, heaving a great sigh of relief, sinks down into her chair again. The large dose of alcohol she has taken has an almost immediate effect. Her features become more animated, she seems to gather energy, and she looks at the bedroom door with a hard, vindictive smile on her lips. Her eyes glance quickly about the room and are fixed on a man's coat and vest which hang from a hook at right. She moves stealthily over to the open doorway and stands there, out of sight of anyone inside, listening for any movement.)

(Calling in a half-whisper) Alfred! (Again there if no reply. With a swift movement she takes the coat and vest from the hook and returns with them to her chair. She sits down and takes the various articles out of each pocket but quickly puts them back again. At last, in the inside pocket of the vest, she finds a letter.)

(Looking at the handwriting—slowly to herself) Hmm! I knew it.

Explanation: These are the initial dialogues of the play. The married couple led a dissatisfied and unhappy life together although the response of the husband is not shared with the reader. Mrs. Rowland is not afresh and happy in the morning and calls for the husband to get up. The husband is named Alfred. She tip toes in order to avoid any noise. She gets a drink ready for herself and feels uneasy at the noise she is making. She feels rejuvenated and animated and starts searching the pockets of the husband's coat which is hanging on the peg. She finds something inside the pocket which makes her perky and alert.

4.3.2 (In a loud, shrill voice) Alfred! (Still louder) Alfred! (There is a muffled, yawning groan from the next room) Don't you think it's about time you got up? Do you want to stay in bed all day? (Turning around and coming back to her chair) Not that I've got any doubts about your being lazy enough to stay in bed forever. (She sits down and looks out of the window, irritably) Goodness knows what time it is. We haven't even got any way of telling the time since you pawned your watch like a fool. The last valuable thing we had, and you knew it. It's been nothing but pawn, pawn, pawn, with you—anything to put off getting a job, anything to get out of going to work like a man. (She taps the floor with her foot nervously, biting her lips.)

Explanation: The wife is irritated that the husband refuses to leave bed although it is rather late in the day. She also shows her annoyance that the husband has pawned away his watch which was costly and now she cannot tell the time. She is equally disturbed as the man refuses to take up any responsibility nor does he have a steady job. The whole extract records the woman's complaints and anger in the given situation.

4.3.3 (After a short pause) Alfred! Get up, do you hear me? I want to make that bed before I go out. I'm sick of having this place in a continual mess on your account. (With a certain vindictive satisfaction) Not that we'll be here long unless you manage to get some money some place. Heaven knows I do my part—and more—going out to sew every day while you play the gentleman and loaf around barrooms with that good-for-nothing lot of artists from the Square. (A short pause during which she plays nervously with a cup and saucer on the table.) And where are you going to get money, I'd like to know? The rent's due this week and you know what the landlord is. He won't let us stay a minute over our time. You say you can't get a job. That's a lie and you know it. You never even look for one. All you do is moon around all day writing silly poetry and stories that no one will buy—and no wonder they won't. I notice I can always get a position, such as it is; and it's only that which keeps us from starving to death.

Explanation: Mrs. Rowland continues her tirade against the husband. She reminds him that unless he finds a proper job, they might have to starve. She also rants about how she has to do odd sewing jobs to make the both ends meet. She accuses the man of lazing around and indulging in pass time hobby of writing poetry. It is unproductive to roam around with people who call themselves artists and earn nothing, the wife feels. She reminds him of the pending dues, especially the house rent as the landlord would not give them any more time. Thus the ranting of the wife continues with little response from the husband.

4.3.4 (Suddenly with great anger) What on earth are you doing all this time? (She goes over to the door and looks in) Well, You're almost dressed at any rate. I expected to find you back in bed. That'd be

just like you. How awful you look this morning! For heaven's sake, shave! You're disgusting! You look like a tramp. No wonder no one will give you a job. I don't blame them—when you don't even look half-way decent. (She goes to the stove) There's plenty of hot water right here. You've got no excuse. (Gets a bowl and pours some of the water from the coffee pot into it) Here.

(He reaches his hand into the room for it. It is a sensitive hand with slender fingers. It trembles and some of the water spills on the floor.)

(Tauntingly) Look at your hand tremble. You'd better give up drinking. You can't stand it. It's just your kind that get the D.T.'s. That would be the last straw! (Looking down at the floor) Look at the mess you've made of this floor—cigarette butts and ashes all over the place. Why can't you put them on a plate? No, you wouldn't be considerate enough to do that. You never think of me. You don't have to sweep the room and that's all you care about. (Takes the broom and commences to sweep viciously, raising a cloud of dust. From the inner room comes the sound of a razor being stropped.)

(Sweeping) Hurry up! It must be nearly time for me to go. If I'm late I'm liable to lose my position, and then I couldn't support you any longer. (As an afterthought she adds sarcastically) And then you'd have to go to work or something dreadful like that. (Sweeping under the table) What I want to know is whether you're going to look for a job today or not. You know your family won't help us anymore. They've had enough of you, too. (After a moment's silent sweeping) I'm about sick of all this life. I've a good notion to go home, if I wasn't too proud to let them know what a failure you've been—you, the millionaire Rowland's only son, the Harvard graduate, the poet, the catch of the town—Huh! (With bitterness) There wouldn't be many of them now envy my catch if they knew the truth. What has our marriage been, I'd like to know? Even before your millionaire father died owing everyone in the world money, you certainly never wasted any of your time on your wife. I suppose you thought I'd ought to be glad you were honorable enough to marry after getting me into trouble. You were ashamed of me with your fine friends because my father's only a grocer, that's what you were. At least he's honest, which is more than anyone could say about yours. (She is sweeping steadily toward the door. Leans on her broom for a moment.)

Explanation: Mrs. Rowland persists with her angry outburst against the husband but is rather surprised to see him all dressed up. She finds him untidy and unshaved and asks him to groom himself in a better way so that people take him seriously. She offers him coffee and he extends his hand for the cup. In fact this is the only encounter with the character of Alfred that the reader has in the entire play. She finds his hand trembling and asks him to drink less. She is more angry as she has to clean the cigarette stubs lying around which tells he cares neither for her nor for the house. She seems to be getting late for the job and blames the man for any future trouble. She reminds him that he was the son of a millionaire who died deeply in debt. Alfred was considered to be a great catch by her friends as he had refined tastes and studied at Harvard. However all this came to nothing. On the other hand she was the daughter of a grocer, an object of ridicule for the genteel husband and his friends. Now she feels that at least her father was an honest man and she was more reliable partner than the husband.

4.3.5 I knew all the time you were running around with someone. Your lame excuses about spending the time at the library didn't fool me. Who is this Helen, anyway? One of those artists? Or does she write poetry, too? Her letter sounds that way. I'll bet she told you your things were the best ever, and you

believed her, like a fool. Is she young and pretty? I was young and pretty, too, when you fooled me with your fine, poetic talk; but life with you would soon wear anyone down. What I've been through!

Explanation: The wife has also come to know about the escapades of the man . She had an idea that he was having an affair with a girl named Helen . He had been pretending all the while that he was busy in the library. She is sure that the young girl must have been duped by him with his poetic expression just as she had been some time back. But as he was a good for nothing fellow, living with him could tire anyone.

4.3.6 I'm sorry for this Helen, whoever she is. Haven't you got any feelings for other people? What will her family say? I see she mentions them in her letter. What is she going to do—have the child—or go to one of those doctors? That's a nice thing, I must say. Where can she get the money? Is she rich? (She waits for some answer to this volley of questions.) Hmm! You won't tell me anything about her, will you? Much I care. Come to think of it, I'm not so sorry for her after all. She knew what she was doing. She isn't any schoolgirl, like I was, from the looks of her letter. Does she know you're married? Of course, she must. All your friends know about your unhappy marriage. I know they pity you, but they don't know my side of it. They'd talk different if they did.

Explanation; The wife is sorry for the stranger named Helen although being an adult she must know what she is doing. She asks the husband in a sarcastic way whether the girl will have his child or go for an abortion . The wife also feels bad for her parents who have been mentioned by the girl in the letter seized by the wife from his coat. He had been talking about their unhappy marriage but the fact was that the wife was the only victim whereas the man enjoyed his life at her expense.

4.3.7 Did you cut yourself again? Serves you right. (Gets up and takes off her apron) Well, I've got to run along. (Peevishly) This is a fine life for me to be leading! I won't stand for your loafing any longer. (Something catches her ear and she pauses and listens intently) There! You've overturned the water all over everything. Don't say you haven't. I can hear it dripping on the floor. (A vague expression of fear comes over her face) Alfred! Why don't you answer me?

(She moves slowly toward the room. There is the noise of a chair being overturned and something crashes heavily to the floor. She stands, trembling with fright.) Alfred! Alfred! Answer me! What is it you knocked over? Are you still drunk? (Unable to stand the tension a second longer she rushes to the door of the bedroom.)

Alfred!

(She stands in the doorway looking down at the floor of the inner room, transfixed with horror. Then she shrieks wildly and runs to the other door, unlocks it and frenziedly pulls it open, and runs shrieking madly into the outer hallway.)

Explanation: All this while, the wife had been hurling accusations, queries and sarcastic comments at the man .Suddenly she listens to the noise of water falling all over and then the crashing noise of someone falling down. The playwright does not tell as to what happened to Alfred but when the wife peeps in she is shocked and terrified at what she sees. She runs out in fear and confusion. With this action the play concludes.

Check Your Progress

1. Why is Mrs. Rowland so disturbed?
2. What is the name of the husband?
3. What is his reaction to the wife's charges?
4. Who is Helen?
5. What is the difference between the family background of both the partners?
6. Why is the wife shocked at the end of the play?

4.4 Summary

The play suggests that life cannot be sustained with poetic lines and that aspirations and dreams are dashed down by hardships in life. "Before Breakfast" is a one act play written by Eugene O'Neill. What makes this short drama unique is the fact that it consists mainly of the female lead, Mrs. Rowland, talking to and rebuking her husband. All through the play, not once does her husband appear on the stage (other than a brief glimpse the audience get of his hand) nor does he make any clear and coherent statement. The play might be termed as "a one character play". Yet despite the presence of the single character, the drama manages to convey all the necessary elements of the usual drama, such as the setting, the plot, and the conflicts—even if we only see it from Mrs. Rowland's point of view. From the first few dialogues, it is apparent that Mrs. Rowland is dissatisfied with the life that she leads right now, and wishes everything would change, especially her husband. She blames all of their misfortune on her husband, and in her verbal onslaughts she seems to think of herself as a martyr—because despite all of her husband's flaws, she still sticks by him, providing him breakfast, instead of just leaving him to fend for himself. The playwright does not indicate as to why she clings on to him despite her extreme annoyance and frustration. The reader is told that the man was a graduate from Harvard and a rich and sought after lad. He had wooed her with lines of poetry and genteel manners which had ultimately yielded nothing. On the contrary, the woman was from a decrepit family.. Possibly she marries him only for his wealth, since she is only a grocer's daughter. But then the reader is told that he read out poetry to woo her. Later on he seems to be involved in an illicit relationship and could also be the biological father of the unborn child. The wife discovers the truth when she lays hands on a letter in the man's pocket of a coat. She is sure he would not take responsibility of this new relationship as well. The most surprising of all is perhaps the ending, where it seems to be implied that the husband has committed suicide as the painful grunts emerging from the room and Mrs. Rowland's own hysterical reaction at the end is any indication. As to why he does that, the playwright does not disclose. Perhaps being a worthless oaf all his life, he opts for the easy way out even in his death leaving behind all the problems unresolved.

4.5 KEY WORDS

- **Reassured:** at ease
- **Defiance:** unyielding
- **Sulky:** complaining
- **Vest:** undershirt
- **Animated:** alert

- **Muffled:** not clear
- **Pawned:** something given as security for a loan
- **Vindictive:** revengeful
- **Loaf around:** move around aimlessly
- **Tramp:** aimless person
- **Sarcastically:** mockingly
- **Grocer:** one who sells food and other items
- **Peevishly:** showing irritation
- **Transfixed:** numb with shock

4.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Mrs. Roland is so disturbed because her husband shows no interest in household and she is left to fend for herself as well as him.
2. The husband's name is Alfred.
3. He seems to pay little heed and answers in grunts.
4. Helen is allegedly the love interest of the husband.
5. The husband belongs to a well-off family and has been educated at Harvard. He has the trappings of the upper strata. The wife has a humble lineage and her father is a grocer.
6. She is shocked because she supposedly looks at the dead husband in the room.

4.7 IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

- **Mrs. Rowland:** She is the only woman character in the play. In fact all the dialogues are spoken by her addressed to the husband who hardly responds. Throughout the play she keeps on complaining and regretting her alliance with the man. She seems to be under a lot of pressure as she is the only bread earner of the family. She is suspicious of the husband and her fears regarding his affair with another woman come true when she comes across a letter in the pocket of his coat. She belongs to an ordinary family and was lured onto marriage by the man who wooed her by reciting poetry.
- **Albert:** He is the husband in absentia. He never comes before the reader nor does he utter any dialogue. He seems to be a philanderer and a carefree debonair. His sole appearance is when his hand emerges from the room to fetch a cup of coffee. He appears to commit suicide at the end because the wife shrieks when she looks at him inside the room.

4.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

Q1. Justify the title?

Ans : The title of the short play is *Before Breakfast*. The entire play takes place before the first meal

of the day is served. The atmosphere of early morning languor and lethargy is present. Hence the title is justified.

Q3. What is the narrative technique used in the play?

Ans: It is in the form of a dramatic monologue. There is primarily only one speaker, the wife, who keeps on talking to a shadowy husband. He responds in grunts and monosyllables.

Q4. What is the nature of inter personal relations in the play?

Ans: There is hardly much contact between the two protagonists on the play. Although they are married, they share no bond of mutual faith and love. The marriage is non-existent.

Q5. How convincing is the conclusion of the play?

Ans: It is very convincing because the kind of turbulence and rancor which the two partners show, it is possible that the man could have committed suicide. That is what the wife looks at when she peeps in the room and shrieks loudly.

Q6. What is the tone of the play?

Ans: The tone is depressing and pessimistic. The wife gets up in the morning only to start the blame game against the husband. She is unhappy and dissatisfied. The man seems least interested in the home and lacks enterprise and initiative. So the tone is rather despondent.

LONG-ANSWER QUESTIONS

Q1. How does O'Neill bring out the tragic element in the play?

Ans: The play is a tragedy of life in a small household. Both the partners face a reality that is ugly, unromantic and stark. It is a world which gives no value to aesthetic and delicate tastes such as poetry. It is a bitter battle for survival. Ultimately the one who cannot be realistic has to succumb. The husband, Alfred, is intentionally kept off stage because Eugene O'Neill wanted the plot, action, and conflict in "Before Breakfast" to revolve around Mrs. Rowland. The plot is not intended to show the life story of the Rowlands. Instead, the plot brings out powerful and pointed opposition and conflict which Mrs. Rowland is faced with. O'Neill wants to bring about disturbing emotions of pity and horror. We experience pity for Mrs. Rowland when the author writes "What is she going to do-have the child-or go to one of those doctors?" And the horror is at the end when the author writes "Did you cut yourself again? ... Alfred! Alfred! Answer me! What is it you knocked over? Are you still drunk? ... Alfred!" In the end, without seeing Alfred the reader knows that he has cut his throat. This changes the scene from one of violence and blood to one of horror and despair.

We all know from our own experiences that there is always and perpetually two sides to every story. The audience learns of Alfred from comments made by his wife. We never get to hear Alfred's side of the story. Alfred makes moaning and grunting sounds from the bedroom but never speaks a word in self defense. The audience can for them selves draw a conclusion that Mrs. Rowland's point of view is distorted to a detrimental degree. By only using Mrs. Rowland point of view O'Neill was able to focus the audience's feelings of pity and fear in the direction of Mrs. Rowland. With the focus on Mrs. Rowland O'Neill was able to bring a tragic plot in dramatic form a "tragedy" to stage.

Q2. Comment on the play as a social drama.

Ans: The play deals with a social theme with family as the basis of attention. It portrays the aspirations and dreams of a married couple and how they are dashed by hardships and cold reality. A couple entangled in a lengthy struggle seems destined to end in tragedy. The conflict begins long before we meet Mr. And Mrs. Rowland. The couple was married when Mrs. Rowland became pregnant at a young age. Alfred's father tried to buy the young mother off. Family and friends disapproved of the young girl, because of her social status. The child, the reason the couple married, was born dead. Alfred is unable to sell his poems and turns retrogressive and depressed. His depression contributes to a self- destructive lifestyle, tagging along his wife with him. It becomes obvious that the marriage would fail. The play revolves around a social theme and depicts social concerns through the life of the young couple.

Q3. Draw a character sketch of Mrs. Rowland?

Ans: Mrs. Rowland, the protagonist, is depicted as the stereotypical nagging wife. While a flat character, she is very realistic. Her language shows she lacks good education and fine tastes. She is also bitter towards her husband. Her bitterness is not unfounded. Alfred is of no help. He has been a huge disappointment as he earns nothing and is unprepared for family responsibilities. Added to it, he is an adulterous man who cannot find himself a vocation. Mrs. Rowland seems to be in love with her philandere husband, although she does not like the way he treats her. Her nagging could be a sign of her frustration as she is stuck in an unrewarding relationship.

ESSAY TYPE QUESTION**1. Would you consider *Before Breakfast* a realist play?**

Ans: The play is based on the tenets of Realism in all the facets. As a literary type, the realist movement has greatly influenced twentieth century theatre and cinema. Under the principles of Realism, characters are believable, even everyday types. Their attire is ordinary and props are often indoors and believable. The realist play drama is typically psychologically driven, where the plot is secondary. The primary focus is placed on the interior lives of characters, their motives, their psychological reactions to others etc. The realistic plays often depict the protagonist (main character) rise up against the odds to assert him/herself against an injustice of some kind as seen in the persona of Mrs. Rowland. Realistic dramas quickly gained popularity because the readers could identify with the situations and characters on stage. The Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (*A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler*) is considered the father of modern realism in the theatre. Realism was suitable for the depiction of many themes of the American playwrights so it became a popular style over there. *Before Breakfast* is a Realist play as its theme, characterization, plot and narrative pertain to a common theme of family, interpersonal relations, human dilemma, challenges of a commoner and so on. There is no idealizing or romanticizing of institutions of marriage, love, livelihood, femininity etc. The focus is less on external action than on internal turmoil. There is minimal conversation between the two characters and it is more of a monologue. The dramatist has used minimum props in stage setting and it is a sparsely constructed plot. The conclusion is equally realistic.

Q2. Give an assessment of Eugene O'Neill and his primal dramatic concerns.

Ans: Eugene O'Neill is called the father of American drama. He demonstrated to the world that the American theater could be serious, moving, artistic, and truthful. Many critics believe that the O'Neill canon towers above all other twentieth century dramatists. In both his personal relationships and his work, O'Neill embodies the flawed American character: alienated, isolated, guilty, and yet unable to sever ties from the family. Although he expresses concern with American vices such as greed, materialism, extravagance, and hypocrisy, he also probes deep into his own fixedness with family values. He introduced psychological and social realism to the American stage and was among the earliest to use American vernacular, and to focus on characters marginalized by society. Before O'Neill, American theatre consisted of melodrama and farce. He was the first American playwright to take drama seriously as an aesthetic and intellectual expression. O'Neill's plays seem like a Sisyphean endeavor, struggling up the mountain of human grief. There is a real heroism in his obstinate, perpetually strained thought, trying to come to terms with suffering. He once said that he hoped to "convey the quality of understanding that is born only of pain and rises to perception to reach the truths of human passion. For life to be felt as noble, it must be seen as tragic."

UNIT – 5

POETIC FORMS AND DEVICES

5.1 Irony

Irony is another most commonly used figure of speech/ literary device in which words are often used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words. It may also be a situation that may end up in quite a different way than what is generally expected. In simple words, it is a difference between the appearance and the reality.

There are three kinds of irony i.e. verbal irony, situational irony and dramatic irony.

A verbal irony involves what one does not mean. When in response to a corrupt man we state, “He is an honest man!” it is a verbal irony.

A situational irony occurs when, for instance, The fire station burns down while the firemen are out on a call.

Firemen, who are responsible for the safety of others during spreading of fire are unaware of the disaster that has struck their own house.

A Dramatic Irony occurs when the characters are oblivious of the situation but the audience is not. For example, in “Romeo and Juliet”, we know much before the characters that they are going to die.

S T Coleridge in his famous poem has used this device exceptionally.

In the lines ;

“Water water everywhere,

Nor any drop to drink”

Ironically, there is water everywhere but they do not have a single drop of water to drink.

5.2 Imagery

Imagery is used as a figurative language to signify objects, actions and ideas in such a way that it appeals to our physical senses.

For example

There was dark and dim in the cave.

Here, the words “dark” and “dim” are visual images.

The soldiers were screaming and shouting on the battle field.

Here, “Screaming” and “shouting” appeal to our sense of hearing or auditory sense.

Mamta whiffed the aroma of brewed coffee.

Here, “whiff” and “aroma” evoke our sense of smell or olfactory sense.

The salesman showed white soft satin fabric.

Here, The idea of “soft” in this example appeals to our sense of touch or tactile sense.

These fresh and juicy mangoes are really sweet.

Here, “juicy” and “sweet” when associated with mangoes have an effect on our sense of taste or gustatory sense.

Examples of Imagery used in Literature

Example 1

John Keats’ in his famous ode “To the Autumn” has employed nature and auditory imagery .

“ And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;

Hedge cricket sings; and now with treble soft

The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft,

And gathering swallows twitter in the skies

The poet has used these sounds as imagery that appeal to our sense of hearing and song of autumn.

5.3 Paradox

The term Paradox is taken from the Greek word “*paradoxon*” that means contrary to expectations, existing belief or perceived opinion. Paradox is the most common figure of speech/literary device used in form of a statement in literature. It is a self-contradictory statement but may include a hidden truth. It is also used to illustrate an opinion or statement in opposite to accepted traditional ideas. A paradox is often used to make a reader think over an idea in innovative way.

Examples

Bhanu’s enemy’s friend is my enemy.

The baba proved to be a wise fool.

In literature, paradox is often used not just as a humorous statement. It can also be used to summarize the major themes of the work they are used in.

For example

George Orwell in his famous novel *Animal Farm*, has given numerous paradoxical political statements which are otherwise true.

‘All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others’.

The government in this novel claims that everyone is equal but it does not treat everyone equally.

5.4 Symbolism

A symbol is a very significant means of communication. It is a mark, sign, or word that indicates, signifies, or is understood as representing an idea, object, or relationship. It is used in the form of words, sounds, gestures, ideas or visual images and is used to convey other ideas and beliefs. For example, a red

light on a traffic crossing may be a symbol for "STOP". On a map, a green patch might represent vegetation.

Symbolism is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense. Symbolism can take different forms. It is an object representing another to give it an entirely different meaning that is much deeper and more significant.

William Shakespeare in his play *As you Like It* states that

“All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players;”

In these lines, Shakespeare states that ‘world’ is here symbolised as a stage and ‘men and women’ are actors who in course of their life perform different roles.

5.5 -Satire

Satire is generally used by writers to expose and criticize stupidity and corruption of an individual , society by using humor, irony, exaggeration or ridicule. Its purpose is to improve humanity by condemning its follies and foibles. A writer in a satire uses fictional characters, which stand for real people, to expose and condemn their corruption. A satire can be directed toward a person, a country or even the entire world.

We all witness cartoons in everyday newspapers, magazines, on television and other social media that criticize some actions of political figures in a comical way.

Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* is one of the finest example of poetic satire in which Pope has satirized the upper middle class of eighteenth century England. This poem exposes the vanity of young fashionable ladies and gentlemen and the frivolity of their actions.

Satire intends to caution the community and to change their opinions about the widespread dishonesty rampant in society.

5.6 Personification

Personification is a figure of speech in which a thing, an idea or an animal is given human attributes. The non-human objects are portrayed in such a way that we feel they have the ability to act like human beings.

For example, when we say, “The sky weeps” we are giving the sky the ability to cry, which is a human quality. Thus, we can say that the sky has been personified in the given sentence.

Common Examples of Personification

Look at my car. She is a beauty, isn’t it so?

The flowers danced in the gentle breeze.

Time and tide waits for none.

The fire swallowed the entire forest.

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson employs personification in her poem “Have You Got A Brook In Your Little Heart”.

“Have you got a brook in your little heart,
Where bashful flowers blow,
And blushing birds go down to drink,
And shadows tremble so?”

The bashful flowers, blushing birds and trembling shadows are examples of personification.

5.7 Allusion

Allusion is a brief and indirect reference to a person, place, thing or idea of historical, cultural, literary or political significance. It does not describe in detail the person or thing to which it refers.

For example

Babli screamed, “Don’t act like a Romeo in front of me.” – Here, “Romeo” is a reference to Shakespeare’s Romeo, a passionate lover of Juliet, in “Romeo and Juliet”.

We find a number of allusions in Keats’s “Ode to the Grecian Urn”. For example:

“Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme”

Here “Sylvan” is a goat-like-man deity of Greek mythology.

5.8 -Hyperbole

Hyperbole points to an exaggeration of ideas for the sake of emphasis.

For example, Our friendship is as old as the hills.

Here friendship is equated with magnanimity of hills. Therefore, a hyperbole is an unreal exaggeration to emphasize the real situation.

Common Examples of Hyperbole

Wazir is as heavy as an elephant!

Tinku is dying of shame.

5.9 - Synecdoche

Synecdoche is a figure of speech/literary device in which a part of something represents the whole or it may use a whole to represent a part.

Synecdoche may also use larger groups to refer to smaller groups or vice versa. Synecdoche refers to the whole of a thing by the name of any one of its parts. For example, calling a car “wheels” is a synecdoche because a part of a car “wheels” stands for the whole car.

For example

“Teaching is my bread and butter.”

In this sentence, the word “bread” refers to food or money as in or “sole breadwinner”.

For example, In his poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” , S T Coleridge has used a synecdoche.

“ The Western wave was all a-flame.”

Here, ‘The Western wave’ is a synecdoche as it refers to the sea by the name of ‘wave’

5.10-Metonymy

It is a figure of speech that replaces the name of a thing with the name of something else with which it is closely associated.

Example

USA always keep a check on immigration.

Here, USA refers to the government.

The pen is mightier than the sword.

Here, Pen refers to written words and sword to physical force.

For example, In John Milton’s famous poem “Lycidas “

“But now my oar proceeds,

And listens to the herald of the sea”

The poet has used “oar” for a musical instrument made out of an oak-stalk. Thus, “oar” represents the song that the poet is composing next to the ocean.