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CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND ONLINE EDUCATION

M. A. Part-II : English

Semester-III

Drama in English up to 19th Century

(In accordance with National Education Policy 2020)
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Preface

Dear students,

This book contains Self-Learning Materials on the core course Drama in English up to 19th Century. You are advised to read the syllabus prescribed for these papers carefully. The syllabus includes General Topics as well as different texts. As it is not possible to print entire texts in this book, each unit contains a very detailed summary of the text prescribed for your study. You are advised to read each text prescribed in the syllabus.

Each unit is interspersed with 'Check Your Progress' exercises, which are simple questions requiring answers in a word, a phrase or a sentence each. The purpose of these Self-check exercises is to make you go back to the main unit and to make you answer these questions on your own. The model answers are, of course, given at the end of each unit. But you should not look them up before you have tried to write your own answers.

Each unit gives you a list of reference books. You should find time to visit a college nearby to have a look at the prescribed plays as well as the reference books.

There are exercises given at the end of each unit, which contain broad-answer type questions. Try to write answers to these questions with the help of the material in the units. Write answers in your own English, and try to refer to the originals books.

We wish you best luck in your final examination.

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Drama in English up to 19th Century
M. A. Part-II English Sem. III

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Each Unit begins with the section objectives -

Objectives are directive and indicative of :

1. what has been presented in the unit and
2. what is expected from you
3. what you are expected to know pertaining to the specific unit, once you have completed working on the unit.

The self-check exercises with possible answers will help you understand the unit in the right perspective. Go through the possible answers only after you write your answers. These exercises are not to be submitted to us for evaluation. They have been provided to you as study tools to keep you on the right track as you study the unit.

Dear Students,

The SLM is simply a supporting material for the study of this paper. It is also advised to see the new syllabus 2024-25 and study the reference books & other related material for the detailed study of the paper.

Unit-1

General Topic : Sanskrit Drama

Text : Kalidasa's The Fatal Ring (Shakuntalam, tr. William Jones)

1.1 Introduction

In this unit we will study about history and development of Sanskrit drama. We will also study Kalidas's masterpiece Shakuntalam which is translated as The Fatal Ring by William Jones.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of this unit are as follows

1. To study the history of Sanskrit Literature.
2. To study the history and development of Sanskrit Drama.
3. To understand the basic principles and techniques of Sanskrit Drama
4. To know about the life and writings of Kalidas.
5. To understand the story and the moral of *Shakuntalam*.
6. To study the various aspects of the play

1.3 A brief history of Sanskrit Literature

Sanskrit literature is one of the world's oldest and richest literary traditions. Its history spans thousands of years and encompasses a vast variety of texts, including poetry, drama, philosophy, and scientific treatises. The development of Sanskrit literature is deeply intertwined with the cultural, religious, and intellectual history of India. The evolution of Sanskrit literature has greatly contributed to global knowledge.

Major phases in the evolution of Sanskrit literature are explained below.

1. The Vedic Period (1500–500 BCE)

The Vedic period marks the earliest phase of Sanskrit literature. It is characterized by the composition of the Vedas, the oldest sacred texts. The four Vedas—Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda—comprise hymns, chants, rituals, and philosophical discussions. The Rigveda, the oldest of the four, is

a collection of hymns praising various deities. The other Vedas include liturgical material.

The Upanishads, written during this period, provide explanations of Vedic rituals, meditative practices, and philosophical insights. The Upanishads, in particular, explore metaphysical concepts such as the nature of reality (Brahman) and the soul (Atman), laying the foundation for later Hindu philosophy.

2. The Epic Period (500 BCE–100 CE)

The epic period is dominated by two monumental works: the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. These epics are composed in Sanskrit. They have significantly influenced Indian culture, religion, and literature.

Mahabharat: Composed by the sage Vyasa, The Mahabharat is the longest epic poem in the world, consisting of about 100,000 shlokas (verses). It narrates the story of the Kurukshetra war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. It is interwoven with various subplots, philosophical discourses, and moral dilemmas. The Bhagavad Gita, a sacred text within the Mahabharat, is a philosophical dialogue between Prince Arjun and the god Krishna on duty, righteousness, and devotion.

Ramayan: Composed by the sage Valmiki, the Ramayan consists of about 24,000 verses. It recounts the life of Prince Rama, his exile, the abduction of his wife Sita by the demon king Ravana, and his eventual victory and return to Ayodhya. The Ramayan emphasizes ideals such as duty, honour, and devotion, and has inspired countless adaptations in various regional languages and art forms.

3. The Classical Period (c. 200–1200 CE)

The classical period of Sanskrit literature is marked by a flourishing of poetry, drama, and prose. The poets and playwrights were often patronized by royal courts and scholars.

Major genres of The Classical Period:

Kavya (Poetry):

This era saw the emergence of highly stylized and ornate poetry, known as Kavya. Notable poets include Kalidas, whose works such as "Meghaduta" (The Cloud Messenger) and "Raghuvamsa" (The Dynasty of Raghu) are known for their lyrical beauty and stylish use of metaphor.

Drama: Sanskrit drama reached its high point during this period, with playwrights like Kalidas, Bhavabhuti, and Shudraka producing lasting works. Kalidasa's "Shakuntala" is particularly well-known for its poetic elegance and emotional depth. The plays of this period often depicted themes of love, heroism, and moral dilemmas, and followed strict aesthetic principles outlined in texts like Bharata's "Natyashastra."

Prose and Fables:

Prose literature also flourished during this age. Prominent works of prose include "Panchatantra" by Vishnu Sharma, a collection of animal fables that impart moral lessons. The "Katha Sarit Sagara" (Ocean of Stories) by Somadeva is another significant prose work, compiling numerous folktales and legends.

4. The Scholarly Period (c. 500–1500 CE)

This period witnessed the composition of many scholarly and scientific treatises in Sanskrit, covering various fields such as grammar, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy. Panini's "Ashtadhyayi" is a significant text in the study of Sanskrit grammar and linguistics. It provides a comprehensive and systematic description of the language. Philosophy: Sanskrit literature saw the development of various philosophical schools, including Vedanta, Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, and Mimamsa. Important philosophical texts include the "Brahma Sutras," "Yoga Sutras" of Patanjali, and the works of Adi Shankaracharya.

Science and Mathematics:

Scholars like Aryabhata, Varahamihira, and Brahmagupta made significant contributions to astronomy and mathematics, with texts like "Aryabhatiya," "Brihat Samhita," and "Brahmasphutasiddhanta" containing advanced mathematical concepts and astronomical observations.

5. The Medieval and Modern Periods (c. 1200–present)

The medieval period saw a decline in Sanskrit literary production due to political upheavals and the rise of regional languages. However, Sanskrit continued to be used for religious and scholarly purposes.

In the modern period, there has been a revival of interest in Sanskrit, both in India and abroad. Efforts have been made to preserve and study ancient texts, and contemporary scholars and writers continue to produce works in Sanskrit.

The history of Sanskrit literature is proof of lasting legacy of this ancient language and its profound impact on Indian culture and intellectual traditions. From the sacred hymns of the Vedas to the philosophical discourses of the Upanishads, from the grand epics of the Mahabharata and Ramayana to the refined poetry and drama of the classical period, Sanskrit literature offers a rich and diverse body of work that continues to inspire and educate. Its contributions to fields as varied as grammar, philosophy, science, and literature underscore its significance as a cornerstone of global cultural heritage.

1.4 Sanskrit Drama and Theatre

Sanskrit drama is a significant and illustrious part of ancient Indian literature, reflecting the cultural, social, and religious life of its time. This genre is known for its unique blend of poetry, music, and dance. It evolved over several centuries, reaching its high point during the classical period. Let us explore the origins, development, major works, and key features of Sanskrit drama.

Origins and Early Development:

The roots of Sanskrit drama can be traced back to the early Vedic rituals and folk performances, which gradually evolved into more sophisticated forms of theatrical expression. The development of drama in Sanskrit is closely associated with religious ceremonies and the worship of gods, mainly those related to fertility and nature. The introductory text for understanding the origins and theory of Sanskrit drama is the "Natyashastra," composed by the sage Bharata Muni, composed between 200 BCE and 200 CE. This comprehensive treatise on dramaturgy and the performing arts provides detailed guidelines on all aspects of theatre, including stage design, makeup, costumes, gestures, and the emotional states (rasas) to be evoked in the audience. The "Natyashastra" is considered the Bible of Sanskrit dramaturgy and has had a profound influence on the development of Indian performing arts.

The Classical Period of Sanskrit Drama:

The classical period of Sanskrit drama spans from around the 3rd century CE to the 10th century CE. This period is regarded as the golden age of Sanskrit Drama. This period witnessed the creation of some of the most enduring and celebrated works in Sanskrit literature, composed by eminent playwrights.

Drama in Sanskrit is built around rituals and religious ceremonies. Music, dance and drama are woven in one fabric. Sanskrit poetic drama is a blend of all these three elements. There have been a number of dance forms popular in India like the Lilas, the kathas and the Yatras which were integral parts of folk literature in ancient India. Drama emerges as a reflection of life depicting the individual and the collective.

The inner experience in drama is known as 'rasa' and the physical form it takes, as 'bhava'. The experience of 'rasasvada' is an important objective in scheme of aesthetic experience. Another important factor in the aesthetic experience is the role of the reader or the audience. In western tradition there is no term to indicate the artistic quality both from the writers' angle and from the readers' angle.

Bharata's The Natyasastra is the ancient text on the theory of drama that is believed to have a divine origin. It is called the fifth Veda that instructs through pleasure. According to Bharata, the main aim of drama is "to "produce rasa, the aesthetic emotion, evoked by the appropriate mood built cumulatively through words, mime and gestures, music and dance, costume and jewellery. Rasa is not raw emotion but emotion depersonalized. According to the Natyasastra, the aim of drama is Rasotpati.

The Sanskrit play is addressed to a different type of perfection. Sanskrit drama has a number of tragic scenes but no Tragedy. There are examples like plays that show suffering and pain, as in Shakuntalam, Svapnavasavadatta and Uttarramcarita. But the end of the play is not tragic.

Significant Playwrights and their Works:

1. Kalidas (4th–5th century CE)

Shakuntalam (Abhijnanasakuntalam):

Perhaps the most famous of all Sanskrit dramas, "Shakuntala" tells the story of King Dushyanta and Shakuntala, whose love is tested by a series of misunderstandings and divine interventions. The play is renowned for its lyrical beauty, emotional depth, and vivid descriptions of nature.

Vikramorvasiyam:

This play narrates the love story between King Pururavas and the celestial nymph Urvashi, exploring themes of love, separation, and reunion.

Malavikagnimitram:

It is a romantic play centered on the love affair between King Agnimitra and the maid Malavika. It is filled with intrigues and court politics.

2. Bhavabhuti (8th century CE)

Malatimadhava:

The play is a romance between Malati and Madhava. It is set against the backdrop of political intrigue and adventure, displaying Bhavabhuti's mastery of dramatic technique and emotional expression.

Mahaviracharita:

It is a play based on the early life of lord Rama. The play depicts his heroic deeds and virtues.

Uttararamacharita:

This play focuses on the later life of Rama, particularly his separation from Sita, exploring themes of duty, sacrifice, and moral dilemmas.

3. Shudraka (date uncertain, possibly 3rd century CE)

Mrichchhakatika (The Little Clay Cart):

It is a ten-act play that stands out for its realism and depiction of everyday life. The play tells the story of the love between Charudatta, a poor but noble Brahmin, and Vasantasena, a courtesan. The play is set against a backdrop of political corruption and social issues.

4. Bhasa (date uncertain, possibly 3rd century CE)

Bhasa is attributed with a number of plays, including "Swapnavasavadatta" and "Pratijna-Yaugandharayana," known for their innovative plots and dramatic intensity.

5. Aśhvaghosha was an ancient Indian philosopher, poet, and playwright who lived around the 1st to 2nd century CE. He is considered one of the greatest Sanskrit writers and a pioneer of classical Indian drama. Aśhvaghosha is often recognized for his contributions to Buddhist literature and is one of the earliest Indian authors whose works have survived in complete form. His legacy continues to be celebrated in both literary and religious contexts, reflecting his enduring impact on Indian culture and literature.

His major works include

1. Buddhacharita (Acts of the Buddha): It narrates the life of Gautama Buddha from his birth to his enlightenment and subsequent teachings. It is highly regarded for its poetic style and deep spiritual insights.
2. Saundarananda (Handsome Nanda): It tells the story of Nanda, the Buddha's half-brother, and his journey from worldly pleasures to spiritual enlightenment under the guidance of the Buddha. It combines elements of romance and spiritual teaching, showcasing Ashvaghosha's versatility as a writer.

Characteristics of Sanskrit Drama

1. Structure and Style:

Sanskrit plays generally follow a five to ten act structure, adhering to strict rules of dramaturgy as prescribed in the "Natyashastra." The language is highly stylized, blending prose and poetry, with dialogues often combined with lyrical passages.

2. Rasa Theory:

The concept of rasa (emotional essence) is central to Sanskrit drama. Bharata's "Natyashastra" identifies eight primary rasas: love (shringara), humour (hasya), compassion (karuna), anger (raudra), heroism (vira), fear (bhayanaka), disgust (bibhatsa), and wonder (adbhuta). These emotions are evoked in the audience through the performance, aiming to create a profound aesthetic experience.

3. Characters:

Sanskrit plays often feature noble heroes, virtuous heroines, comic servants, and supernatural beings.

4. Significance of Sutradhar

In Sanskrit drama, the role of the Sutradhar (Sanskrit: सूत्रधार, transliterated as "string-holder" or "thread-bearer") is central. He serves as the narrator and master of ceremonies. This figure functions as a bridge between the audience and the unfolding narrative, ensuring a smooth and coherent presentation of the play. The Sutradhar's presence and duties are grounded in the detailed prescriptions found in Bharata Muni's "Natyashastra," the ancient treatise on Indian dramaturgy and performance arts. The term Sutradhar is derived from two Sanskrit words: "Sutra" meaning

"thread" and "Dhara" meaning "bearer" or "holder." This etymology signifies the role of the Sutradhar as the one who holds the threads of the story together, guiding the audience through the various scenes and acts of the drama.

The Sutradhar in Sanskrit drama performs several crucial functions. The Sutradhar begins the performance with a prologue, setting the scene and introducing the context of the play. This includes providing background information about the story, the main characters, and the setting. Throughout the play, the Sutradhar ensures smooth transitions between scenes and acts. By narrating events that occur off-stage or summarizing previous actions, the Sutradhar maintains the continuity of the storyline, preventing any gaps or confusion.

5. Themes:

Common themes of Sanskrit plays include love, duty, heroism, and the interplay of fate and free will. The plays frequently draw on mythology, history, and legend, blending human emotions with moral and philosophical undertones.

6. Stagecraft:

Detailed instructions in the "Natyashastra" cover various aspects of stagecraft, including the construction of the stage, types of theatre buildings, and the use of music and dance to enhance the narrative. Elaborate costumes, makeup, and symbolic gestures play a crucial role in conveying the story and emotions.

The Decline and Revival of Sanskrit Drama:

The medieval period witnessed a decline in the production of Sanskrit drama, due to the changing political landscape and the rise of regional languages and literatures. However, the tradition did not vanish entirely. It continued to be performed and preserved in temples and royal courts, although less prominently. The modern period has witnessed a revival of interest in Sanskrit drama, both in India and abroad. Scholars and practitioners have worked to preserve, translate, and perform these ancient plays. They recognize their literary and cultural significance. Institutions dedicated to classical studies and the performing arts have played a crucial role in this revival. They have ensured that the rich legacy of Sanskrit drama continues to inspire and educate future generations. Sanskrit drama, with its intricate blend of poetry, music, and dance, stands as a testament to the artistic and intellectual achievements of ancient India.

1.5 Life and works of Kalidas:

Kalidas, the greatest poet and playwright in classical Sanskrit literature, is a figure of great historical and cultural significance in India. Flourishing around the 4th to 5th century CE during the Gupta dynasty, his works are revered for their poetic elegance, profound philosophical insights, and masterful use of language. Kalidas's contributions have left permanent mark on Indian literature, and his legacy continues to influence writers and scholars to this day.

The precise details of Kalidasa's life are not known. Much of what is known is derived from legends and scholarly conjecture. It is generally believed that he lived during the reign of Chandragupta II, also known as Vikramaditya, under whose patronage he flourished. Various legends depict Kalidasa as a simple man who was transformed into a great scholar and poet by the grace of the goddess Kali. These stories highlight the reverence in which Kalidasa is held.

Major Works of Kalidasa:

Kalidasa's works span various genres, including drama, epic poetry, and lyric poetry. His works are full of lyrical beauty, vivid imagery, and profound emotional depth.

Plays:

1. **Shakuntala (Abhijnanasakuntalam):** The most famous of Kalidasa's works, "Shakuntala" is a play in seven acts that tells the story of the love between King Dushyanta and Shakuntala, the adopted daughter of the sage Kanva. This play is celebrated for its rich character development, poetic dialogues, and the interplay of human emotions and supernatural elements. It was one of the first works of Indian literature to be translated into English and played a crucial role in introducing Indian literature to the world.
2. **Malavikagnimitram:** This play tells the story of King Agnimitra's love for Malavika, a maid in the royal palace, and the challenges they face before their eventual union. This play is noted for its humour, wit, and depiction of court life.
3. **Vikramorvasiyam:** This play explores the romance between the mortal king Pururavas and the celestial nymph Urvashi. It blends mythology with human emotions, showcasing Kalidasa's skill in dramatizing legendary tales.

Epic Poems:

1. Raghuvamsha (The Dynasty of Raghu): It is an epic poem that traces the lineage of the legendary king Raghu, including stories of prominent descendants like King Rama. The poem is admired for its descriptions, and portrayal of ideal kingship.
2. Kumarasambhava (The Birth of Kumara) This epic poem describes the birth of Kartikeya (Kumara), the god of war, born to Shiva and Parvati. This poem is rich in imagery and explores themes of love, asceticism, and divine intervention.

Lyric Poetry:

1. Meghaduta (The Cloud Messenger): It is a moving lyrical poem in which a Yaksha (a demigod) sends a message to his distant wife through a cloud. The poem is celebrated for its evocative descriptions of nature, the journey of the cloud, and the deep emotions of longing and separation.
2. Ritusamhara (The Garland of Seasons): This poem vividly describes the six seasons of the Indian subcontinent. Each canto of this poem is dedicated to a different season, capturing the essence and beauty of nature's cyclical transformations.

Kalidasa's works are distinguished by their stylish use of language, masterful employment of metaphors, and a deep understanding of human emotions. His descriptions of nature are renowned, often serving as a backdrop to the emotional states of his characters. Kalidasa's ability to blend the human and the divine, the mundane and the supernatural, creates a unique and timeless quality in his writings. Kalidasa's works have been translated into numerous languages of the world.

1.6 Check your progress 1

Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence

1. What is the meaning of the name Kalidasa?
2. Name the four Vedas.
3. Which is the oldest Veda?
4. Which is the longest epic in Sanskrit?
5. Who composed Mahabharata?

6. Which sacred text within the Mahabharata is a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and the god Krishna?
7. Which period of Sanskrit literature is marked by a flourishing of poetry, drama and prose?
8. Who is the author of Natyashastra?
9. Who is the author of Panchatantra?
10. Who is the author of Katha Sarit Sagara?
11. Which is a significant text in the study of Sanskrit grammar and linguistics?
12. Which text is considered the Bible of Sanskrit dramaturgy?
13. Name three plays of Kalidasa.
14. Who is the author of Malatimadhava?
15. Who is the protagonist of Mrichchhakatika?
16. How many primary rasas does Natyashastra identify?
17. Name any three primary rasas identified in Natyashastra.
18. What are the common themes of Sanskrit plays?
19. Name two epic poems composed by Kalidas.
20. Name two lyric poems composed by Kalidas.

1.7 Shakuntalam: An introduction

"Shakuntalam," also known as "Abhijnanasakuntalam" or "The Recognition of Shakuntala," is a classical Sanskrit play by Kalidasa. This play is considered one of the greatest works of Indian literature and is a significant contribution to the classical canon.

"Shakuntalam" is a seven-act play that narrates the story of Shakuntala, a young woman of extraordinary beauty and virtue, and her romantic saga with King Dushyanta. The play explores the themes of love, longing, and the pain of separation. It highlights the emotional and psychological nuances of romantic relationships. The narrative incorporates elements of divine intervention and fate, reflecting the belief in the supernatural and the power of destiny. Kalidasa's evocative descriptions of nature and the natural world serve as a backdrop to the human emotions and drama,

enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the play. Kalidasa's mastery of Sanskrit poetry is evident in the lyrical dialogues, vivid imagery, and elegant metaphors that permeate the play. "Shakuntalam" has had a profound influence on Indian art, literature, and culture. It has been translated into numerous languages and adapted into various forms, including dance, music, and film. "Shakuntalam" is a timeless classic. It is celebrated for its poetic brilliance, emotional depth, and cultural significance. It continues to be studied, performed, and cherished as an ideal work of classical Indian literature.

1.7.1 The translation of Shakuntalam:

The translation of Shakuntalam into English has played a crucial role in introducing this masterpiece to a global audience. The first translation was done by Sir William Jones, a British philologist and scholar of ancient India, in 1789. Through his translation, first time a Sanskrit play was made accessible to the Western world. Jones' translation opened up Indian classical literature to Western readers and scholars, fostering greater interest in Sanskrit studies and Indian culture. The translation influenced Romantic poets and writers in Europe, including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who praised the play's poetic beauty. It spurred further scholarly research into Indian literature, leading to subsequent translations and studies of Sanskrit texts. Over the years, there have been many translations of "Shakuntalam" by various scholars, each bringing their unique interpretation and style. Prominent translators include Monier Monier-Williams, Arthur W. Ryder, and Michael Coulson. These translations have enabled cultural exchange and understanding, allowing the themes, aesthetics, and philosophical insights of Kalidasa's work to resonate with international audience. Through these translations, "Shakuntalam" has transcended linguistic and cultural boundaries, reinforcing its status as a universal classic and showcasing the richness of Indian literary heritage.

1.7.2 Shakuntala in Mahabharata:

The story of Dushyanta and Shakuntala is narrated in the Book of the Beginnings (Adi Parva) of the Mahabharata from chapter sixty seven to chapter seventy four. In the epic, the narrative is devoid of any erotic overtones. Kalidasa has used dramatic devices to enhance the poetic and dramatic appeal of the narrative. The same narrative is found in Padam Purana. Kalidasa has made some changes in the

story in the Mahabharata. The episode of the signet ring is an important addition by Kalidasa.

In the 'Adi Parva' of Mahabharata, sage Vyasa narrates the story of Shakuntala. Dushyanta, a king from lunar dynasty (Chandra Vanshi) entered a forest for hunting. After sometime, he arrived at the ashram of sage Kanva. He entered the ashram alone leaving his soldiers behind. The sage was not present in the ashram. Other inhabitants welcomed the king. A beautiful girl welcomed him leaving the king mesmerized by her celestial beauty. She was Shakuntala, the foster-child of Kanva. The king was pleased to know that Shakuntala was the daughter of sage Vishwamitra and Menaka. He proposed marriage to Shakuntala and she agreed on one condition that her son would be the only heir to his kingdom. The king agreed and the ceremony of 'gandharva' marriage was performed.

After spending few days with Shakuntala, Dushyanta returned to his capital. He promised to send his ministers to fetch her. But the king was afraid of the sage, because he had not taken the permission of sage Kanva for marriage. So he did not send his men to the ashram and waited for a message from the Ashram. When Kanva returned, he came to know about everything by his divine powers. He told Shakuntala that he was happy with this marriage. He predicted that her son would be a great warrior and a king. Six years passed and the son of Shakuntala grew into a strong boy. Sage Kanva named him Sarvadaman.

Sage Kanva decided to send Shakuntala with her son to the court of Dushyanta. When she appeared before the king, he refused to recognize her. She tried to convince the king that the boy was his son but king did not listen. Just then a prophecy was heard from the heavens declaring the boy as his successor and legitimate son. Dushyanta felt sorry and accepted Shakuntala as his wife and the boy as his son. This boy was named Bharata who became a great ruler.

1.8 Act wise summary of Shakuntalam:

Act 1. The first Act of Shakuntala begins with the description of the summer season by the Sutradhar. After describing the beauty of the season, he introduces king Dushyanta. Dushyanta chasing a deer, enters the ashram of sage Kanva in his Chariot. The king aims at the deer but a monk stops him and tells him not to hunt in the premises of sage Kanva. The monk invites the king to the ashram and Dushyanta visits the ashram. The monk informs the king that sage Kanva is out for some days.

Shakuntala accompanied by her companions Priyamvada and Anusuya welcomes the king. He is surprised to see the beauty of Shakuntala. A wasp has been hovering around Shakuntala for some time. She is afraid of it and she runs towards Dushyanta for safety. He talks to Shakuntala and her companions. He comes to know that Shakuntala is the daughter of Menaka and Vishwamitra. The king is informed that Shakuntala is the foster-child of sage Kanva. While the king is talking to Shakuntala, an agitated elephant enters the ashram and Dushyanta orders his soldiers to take control of the animal. Shakuntala has fallen in love with the king and she has been suffering from the pangs of love. Cupid has done his work. Shakuntala leaves the place with her companions burning with a desire for Dushyanta.

ACT 2. Dushyanta is also love-sick. He enters the stage with the Vidushaka. The Vidushaka is fed up with the business of hunting in the forest and wants to return to the palace. The king forbids his soldiers to kill any animal and instructs them not to disturb the holy men. He tells the Vidushaka that he cannot live without Shakuntala. He asks the Vidushaka to manage his stay in the ashram for some more time. Two ascetics arrive and request the king to protect their sacred fire-place (Yajna Shala) from the demons. The king happily agrees. The messengers from the kingdom inform the king about his mother's instructions to bring the king. Dushyanta sends his army back to the kingdom and stays back. He also forbids the Vidushaka not to reveal this secret to his other queens in the palace. He decides to make Shakuntala his patrani, the queen of queens.

ACT 3. In the beginning of act three, Shakuntala is seen lying on the bed of flowers, thinking of Dushyanta. Shakuntala has so far spent her life amid the quiet, natural surroundings of the ashram but now her contact with a handsome young king has made her love-sick. She reveals her condition to her companions. Meanwhile Dushyanta is hiding in a grove listening to her confessions. Shakuntala confesses that only Dushyanta can be her mate in this world, and that she will not live without him. The king enters and declares his love for Shakuntala. Shakuntala's companions leave and the two lovers have an opportunity to know each other. The king proposes the 'gandharva' marriage. But Shakuntala is reluctant the king leaves the place to protect the ashram from the wrath of the demons.

ACT 4. In the fourth Act, the ceremony of 'Gandharva' marriage of Shakuntala and Dushyanta is solemnized. After spending few days with Shakuntala Dushyanta leaves the ashram. He promises Shakuntala that he would send his men to bring her

to his capital. Since that day, Shakuntala has been feeling lonely and love sick. One day, she is sitting at the entrance of her hut. Durvasa, known for his anger, arrives and asks for alms but Shakuntala is lost in thoughts of Dushyanta. She does not hear the rishi. The enraged rishi, curses Shakuntala that her husband would forget her. Her companion Priyamvada apologises to the sage and asks him to forgive Shakuntala. The sage tells her that Dushyanta will remember everything if he is shown any ornament given by him. Priyamvada and Anusuya know about this curse and Shakuntala is unaware of the curse and its remedy. They know that the signet ring of Dushyanta is with Shakuntala. They assume that the signet ring will neutralize the impact of the curse. So they do not tell anyone about the curse of Durvasa.

When sage Kanva returns to ashram from his pilgrimage, he hears a prophecy from the heavens about the marriage of Shakuntala with king Dushyanta. He also learns that Shakuntala is pregnant. He comes to know the future with his spiritual powers and sees the bright and illustrious career of Shakuntala's son. He approves of Shakuntala's marriage to Dushyanta. The curse of Durvasa shows its effect. The king forgets about his relationship with Shakuntala and no one comes to take Shakuntala. Shakuntala is pregnant and the sage makes necessary arrangements to send her to her husband. Kalidas provides a moving description of the departure of Shakuntala when she bids farewell to her friends. The deer, pets and even trees and sage Kanva are deeply pained to see this. He gives fatherly advice to Shakuntala. Shakuntala arrives in the kingdom of Dushyanta Along with a woman Gautami and two ascetics.

ACT 5. Shakuntala, accompanied by two young ascetics Sharangrav, and Sharadvat, and a woman Gautami appears before the king. Sharangrav tells the king about the previous development, and that Shakuntala is his wedded wife. The ascetics tell the king that sage Kanva has also approved of their 'gandharva' marriage, and he has sent them to the king. But Dushyanta is under the spell of the curse of Durvasa, so he does not recognize Shakuntala. Gautami shows him the face of Shakuntala but he does not recognize her. Shakuntala remembers about the signet ring of Dushyanta but it is missing. On the way, the ring slips from her finger and fell into a river. The ascetics try their best to persuade the king but they cannot. The ascetics and Gautami leave Shakuntala in the palace and return to the ashram. Shakuntala weeps and mourns. Then a heavenly nymph Menaka (Shakuntala's mother) comes from heavens and takes Shakuntala away. The king is shocked to see this.

ACT 6. One day a fisherman finds a gold ring in the belly of a fish. He comes to the market to sell it. It is the same signet ring of Dushyanta which he had given to Shakuntala. The soldiers think him to be a thief and bring him to the royal court. When Dushyanta sees the ring, the curse loses its effect. He at once remembers his marriage with Shakuntala. But her mother Menaka has taken her away and the king is now grief-stricken. One nymph (apsara) visits the palace to see the condition of Dushyanta. She is invisible and finds the king pining for Shakuntala. Dushyanta's guard brings a letter from his minister that informs him about the death of a merchant. The merchant died without an heir. So his property would go to the royal treasury. The king realizes if he dies without a son, then his wealth will also go to others. The charioteer (Sarathi) of lord Indra, Matali arrives from heaven. Dushyanta has been requested by Indra, the king of heaven, to fight in a battle with the demons. Dushyanta at once leaves for heaven to assist gods.

ACT 7. Dushyanta defeats the demons and helps the gods to preserve supremacy in the three worlds. Lord Indra honours the brave king and bids him farewell. On his way back to the earth, Dushyanta is attracted by the beauty of Hemkoot Mountain where sage Mareech meditates in his ashram. Dushyanta comes down from the chariot to pay his regards to the sage. In the ashram, Dushyanta sees a healthy boy playing with a lion's cub. He is trying to count the teeth of the lion. The king is astonished to see this brave boy. The boy resembles the king and Dushyanta develops a liking for the boy. Dushyanta is informed that the boy's mother's name is Shakuntala and the boy belongs to Puru family. Dushyanta at once realizes that he is the father of this boy. Shakuntala appears on the scene and falls at his feet. The king apologises for everything that has happened with Shakuntala. The king visits the sage Mareech to pay his regards. The sage tells the king that due to the curse, the king could not remember anything about his marriage with Shakuntala. So the king proves his innocence. The sage blesses both of them and sends them back to their kingdom. Shakuntala and Dushyanta's son was named Bharat who became a great king and a warrior. The play ends on a happy note.

1.9 Characters in Shakuntalam:

Kalidasa's craftsmanship comes into play in the field of characterization. In his plays he includes earthly as well as celestial characters. His characters both earthly and celestial are portrayed realistically. An illusion is created by Kalidasa to make the incidents real and convincing. Kālidāsa's "Shakuntalā" is a masterful exploration

of human emotions and moral dilemmas, brought to life through its vivid and multifaceted characters. The interplay between innocence and experience, love and duty, and memory and identity forms the crux of the characterization in the play. In *Shakuntalam* there are earthly characters like Dushyanta, Shakuntala, sage Kanva, sage Maricha and the companions of Shakuntala. Among celestial characters are Lord Indra, Matali, 'apsara' Menaka and the celestial voice. The Indian readers readily accept the existence of these celestial characters in the play as their imagination is basically mythic. Among all these characters, the focus remains on two central characters—Dushyanta and Shakuntala.

1. Shakuntala

Shakuntala is one of the most richly drawn characters in Kalidasa's play "*Abhijnanashakuntalam*". Her character embodies a blend of beauty, innocence, grace, and strength, making her an iconic figure in classical Sanskrit literature.

Shakuntala is the daughter of the sage Vishwamitra and the celestial nymph Menaka. She was abandoned by her mother at birth and was discovered and raised by Sage Kanva in his hermitage. Her upbringing in this serene and spiritual environment shapes her gentle and tranquil disposition.

Shakuntala is renowned for her incomparable beauty. Kalidasa describes her with delicate features, radiant charm, and an ethereal presence that captivates all who look at her. Her beauty is compared to the splendour of nature, embodying the purity and grace of the natural world. Raised in the forest ashram, Shakuntala is untouched by the complexities and corruptions of the outside world. Her innocence is a central aspect of her character, reflected in her modest nature and her genuine emotions. This purity makes her both vulnerable and endearing, capturing the heart of King Dushyanta.

Shakuntala's love for King Dushyanta is intense and sincere. When she first meets him, she is struck by his noble behaviour and falls deeply in love. Her devotion to him is unwavering, even when faced with challenges and misunderstandings. Her love is pure and selfless, embodying the ideals of romantic love in classical Sanskrit literature.

In spite of her gentle nature, Shakuntala exhibits great strength and resilience. She is cursed by Sage Durvasa, which causes Dushyanta to forget her. She endures

the pain and rejection with remarkable dignity. Her inner strength is evident as she faces her trials with determination and unwavering faith.

Shakuntala's bond with nature is profound which symbolizes her purity and simplicity. She is depicted surrounded by animals and plants, which respond to her kindness and gentle spirit. This connection shows her harmony with the natural world, enhancing her portrayal as a character of ideal beauty and virtue.

Shakuntala is imbued with spiritual and moral virtues. She respects the customs and traditions of the hermitage and demonstrates piety and reverence for the sages. Her moral integrity is unwavering, and she embodies the virtues of honesty, loyalty, and compassion.

In the course of the play, Shakuntala undergoes significant transformation. Initially a naive and innocent maiden, she matures through her experiences of love, rejection, and motherhood. Her journey culminates in the eventual recognition and reunion with Dushyanta, where her true worth and identity are acknowledged.

Shakuntala's role as a mother to Bharata is an important aspect of her character. Her nurturing nature is highlighted in her relationship with her son, who grew up to become a legendary emperor. This maternal aspect adds depth to her character, depicting her as both a devoted lover and a compassionate mother.

Shakuntala's character holds symbolic significance in Indian literature and culture. She symbolizes the ideal woman, embodying beauty, virtue, and resilience. Her story is also a metaphor for the trials of love and the eventual triumph of truth and virtue.

Shakuntala is a multi-faceted character who exemplifies a balance of innocence, strength, beauty, and virtue. Her journey in "Abhijnanashakuntalam" is a testament to her lasting appeal and the timeless qualities that make her one of Kalidasa's most memorable creations.

2. King Dushyanta

Dushyanta is the king of Hastinapur. He belongs to the dynasty of Pururavas, the kings from lunar origin. He is the central character in Kalidasa's "Abhijnanashakuntalam". He is a complex character whose actions and character undergo significant development in the play.

Dushyanta is depicted with a noble and commanding presence. He embodies the ideals of kingship, displaying qualities of valor, justice, and leadership. His regal demeanor and sense of responsibility towards his kingdom are evident from his interactions with his subjects.

Dushyanta is portrayed as a handsome and charismatic. Kalidasa describes him with features befitting a king—tall, strong, and dignified. His appearance commands respect and admiration, reflecting his status and authority. He is distinguished for his valour and prowess as a warrior. His skills in archery and his bravery in battle are well-recognized. He has reputation as a formidable and just ruler. His heroism is a key aspect of his character. He is a protector of his kingdom and its people.

Dushyanta's interaction with Shakuntala reveals a deeply romantic and passionate side to his character. He is immediately struck by her beauty and grace. His love for her is intense and genuine. His courtship of Shakuntala is marked by sincere expressions of affection and a desire to win her heart.

In the play, Dushyanta displays compassion and generosity. He shows kindness to those in need and respects the sages and hermits. His benevolent nature is revealed in his interactions with the residents of the ashram and his willingness to assist them.

In spite of his noble qualities, Dushyanta is not without flaws. His failure to recognize Shakuntala when she appears before him at his court, due to Sage Durvasa's curse, reveals his susceptibility to human weaknesses such as forgetfulness. This moment of failure adds depth to his character, making him relatable and human.

Dushyanta's sense of duty and responsibility is a major aspect of his character. As a king, he prioritizes the well-being of his subjects. Even when he doubts Shakuntala's identity, his actions are guided by a sense of justice.

When Dushyanta eventually regains his memory and realizes the truth about Shakuntala, he is filled with remorse for his earlier actions. His repentance and desire to be reunited with Shakuntala demonstrate his capacity for self-reflection and growth. His journey towards redemption is a crucial aspect of his character development.

Dushyanta's reunion with Shakuntala and their son, Bharata, highlights his deep sense of devotion to his family. His joy and pride in recognizing Bharata as his son

highlight his paternal instincts and his commitment to his family. This aspect of his character reinforces his role as a responsible and loving father.

Dushyanta's character also has symbolic significance in the play. He represents the ideal king, embodying qualities of courage, justice, and compassion. His relationship with Shakuntala and their eventual reunion symbolize the triumph of love, truth, and virtue over misunderstanding and adversity.

King Dushyanta is a multifaceted character who embodies the virtues and responsibilities of kingship while also displaying human flaws and the capacity for growth. His journey underlines the complexities of love, duty, and self-awareness, making him an unforgettable and enduring figure.

3. The Vidushak (jester)

The Vidushak has been an important character in ancient Greek, Sanskrit and Elizabethan drama. He is the person who accompanies the king in all situations and keeps his spirits high. The character of the Vidushak (jester) serves as a significant comedic element and a foil to the main characters. In *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, Madhavya plays the role of the vidushak. He is not only a source of humour but also plays a critical role in the development of the narrative.

The Vidushak serves as a companion and confidant to King Dushyanta. His primary role is to provide comic relief, lighten the mood, and offer a satirical perspective on the events and characters in the play.

The Vidushak generally has a distinctive and exaggerated appearance designed to elicit laughter. This includes a comical costume, exaggerated facial features, or humorous accessories. His physical appearance is often meant to contrast sharply with the more serious and noble characters in the play, emphasizing his role as a humorous figure.

The Vidushak has sharp wit and often indulges in clever wordplay. His jokes often focus on puns, double entendres, and playful banter.

In spite of his humorous demeanor, the Vidushak is deeply loyal to King Dushyanta. He provides honest but comical counsel and supports the king in various situations.

He is clever and Insightful. Although he often appears foolish, the Vidushak is quite perceptive and insightful. He has a profound understanding of human nature and often uses his humour to reveal deeper truths.

He is also mischievous and Playful. The Vidushak enjoys causing harmless trouble and teasing other characters. His playful nature frequently leads to amusing situations and misunderstandings.

The primary function of Vidushak is to provide comic relief in the play. His antics and jokes lighten the mood, especially during tense or dramatic scenes. He often acts as a mediator between characters, using his humour to diffuse conflicts and bring about reconciliation. Through his amusing commentary, the Vidushak offers a satirical critique of societal norms, human behavior, and the actions of other characters. His observations regularly provide a deeper understanding of the themes and messages of the play.

The Vidushak shares a close and affectionate relationship with King Dushyanta. Their interactions are marked by mutual respect and camaraderie. The Vidushak often uses humour to advise and support the king.

The Vidushak interacts with various other characters in the play. He often uses his humour to tease and entertain them. His interactions highlight his role as a social commentator.

The Vidushak's presence in the play serves multiple purposes. He not only provides entertainment but also offers a unique perspective on the events of the play. His humour allows the audience to reflect on the deeper themes of love, duty, and human nature presented in the play. The Vidushak's character also emphasises the importance of balance in life. His ability to find humour in even the most serious situations reminds the audience of the value of laughter and joy.

The Vidushak in Kālidāsa's "Abhijñānaśākuntalam" is a multifaceted character who plays an important role in the play. His humour, loyalty, and insight make him a vital part of the narrative, enriching the story with his wit and wisdom.

4. Sage Kanva

Sage Kanva is the foster-father of Shakuntala. He lives in a hermitage in a deep forest. He is a fatherly figure and even king Dushyanta pays respect to him. In his

hermitage his disciples, both male and female, are engaged in austerities and 'tapasya. He represents 'Shanta-rasa.

5. Sage Durvasa

Sage Durvasa is one of the popular figures in Hindu mythology. He is known for his curses followed by amendments. Sage Durvasa is prone to anger, an incarnation of 'raudra-rasa. In Kalidasa's *Shakuntalam* he curses Shakuntala that her husband would forget her because she is lost in thoughts of Dushyanta and fails to notice Durvasa's arrival. Later when Priyamvada apologizes, he provides a cure for his curse. His curse is a crucial element in the plot of Kalidasa's play.

6. Anusuya and Priyamvada

Anusuya and Priyamvada are the companions and friends of Shakuntala. Shakuntala shares her social and private life with them. When Shakuntala falls in love, these two friends become the sharer of her secrets. They also accompany Shakuntala to Hastinapur to the royal court only to witness the repudiation of Shakuntala.

1.10 Themes in Shakuntalam

Shakuntalam delves into various themes that explore human emotions, societal norms, and the metaphysical aspects of life. The major themes in "*Shakuntalam*" include love and romance, the power of destiny and fate, the conflict between duty and desire, the sanctity of nature, and the idea of recognition and memory. Each of these themes is intricately woven into the narrative, contributing to the richness and depth of the play.

1. Love

The central theme of "*Shakuntalam*" is the profound love between Shakuntala and Dushyanta. Their romance is portrayed with great sensitivity and poetic beauty. Kalidas depicts love as almost divine experience that transcends the ordinary. The love between Shakuntala and Dushyanta is marked by idealism and purity, symbolizing the union of two souls. Their initial meeting in the hermitage is charged with an ethereal charm. Their subsequent separation and reunion highlight the endurance and resilience of true love.

2. Destiny and Fate

The destiny and fate play a crucial role in the narrative. The characters' lives are profoundly influenced by the cosmic order and divine interventions. Shakuntala's curse by Sage Durvasa, which causes Dushyanta to forget her, highlights the power of fate in altering human lives. In spite of the trials and tribulations, Shakuntala and Dushyanta eventually find their rightful place, suggesting that destiny ultimately leads to justice and fulfilment. This theme echoes the ancient belief in the inevitable force of destiny that governs human existence.

3. Tension between Duty and Desire

The play also explores the tension between duty (dharma) and personal desire (kama). King Dushyanta, as a ruler, is bound by his duties towards his subjects. However, his love for Shakuntala compels him to follow his heart. This leads to a conflict between his responsibilities and his emotions. Similarly, Shakuntala, a hermit's daughter, faces the dilemma of balancing her love for Dushyanta with her duty to her father and the hermitage. The resolution of these conflicts underscores the importance of adhering to one's duty while acknowledging human emotions.

4. Nature and the Environment

Shakuntalam is replete with vivid descriptions of nature, which plays an integral role in the story. The hermitage where Shakuntala is raised is shown as an idyllic retreat, embodying the harmony and sanctity of the natural world. The environment serves as a backdrop for the blossoming romance between Shakuntala and Dushyanta. Nature in the play symbolizes purity, innocence, and divine beauty. Kalidasa's poetic depiction of nature reflects the close relationship between human emotions and the natural world. In the play, nature is a source of inspiration and solace.

5. Recognition and Memory

The theme of recognition (abhijnana) and memory are central to the play's plot. The story focuses on the loss and eventual restoration of Dushyanta's memory of Shakuntala. The motif of the lost ring, which triggers Dushyanta's recollection of Shakuntala, symbolizes the delicate nature of human memory and the importance of recognition in validating relationships. This theme highlights the idea that true love and connections are not easily forgotten and will resurface despite obstacles.

6. Spirituality and the Supernatural

"Shakuntalam" includes elements of spirituality and the supernatural. It reflects the ancient Indian worldview. The characters frequently interact with divine beings and sages. Their destinies are influenced by divine will. The curse of Sage Durvasa, the involvement of the gods, and the eventual reunion of Shakuntala and Dushyanta are all depicted as part of a larger cosmic plan. This theme underscores the interplay between the mortal and the divine, suggesting that human lives are guided by higher spiritual forces.

1.11 Symbols and Motifs in Shakuntalam

Shakuntalam is rich with symbols and motifs that enhance its themes and narrative. Some significant symbols and motifs are discussed below.

1. The Ring

The ring given by King Dushyanta to Shakuntala is the central symbol in the play. It serves as a symbol of their love and commitment. It also plays an important role in the plot. Its loss leads to Dushyanta's forgetfulness of Shakuntala due to Durvasa's curse. Its recovery brings about the eventual recognition and reunion.

2. Nature and the Forest

The hermitage in the forest where Shakuntala grows up symbolizes purity, innocence, and the natural order. It contrasts with the courtly world of King Dushyanta, representing the dichotomy between nature and civilization. The lush and serene environment of the hermitage mirrors Shakuntala's character and the perfect notion of a life in harmony with nature.

3. The Curse of Durvasa

The curse by sage Durvasa, which causes Dushyanta to forget Shakuntala, symbolizes the instability of human memory and the influence of fate. It highlights the theme of suffering and redemption, central to the narrative.

4. Sacred Animals in the hermitage

Animals in the hermitage, especially the deer, are symbolic in "Shakuntalam." The deer that Shakuntala cares for symbolizes her own innocence and gentleness. The hunt for the deer by Dushyanta also sets the stage for their initial meeting, representing the intersection of their different worlds.

5. The hermitage and the ascetic lifestyle

The hermitage and the ascetic lifestyle practiced by Shakuntala and her foster father, Sage Kanva, symbolize spiritual purity and devotion. This motif contrasts with the royal court's indulgence and materialism, highlighting different ways of life and values.

6. Flowers and Plants

Flowers and plants in the hermitage, especially the Madhavi creeper that Shakuntala tends to, are symbols of growth, beauty, and femininity. They also represent the transient nature of life and beauty, reflecting the themes of love and loss in the play.

7. Water

Water, particularly rivers and the act of crossing them, symbolizes purification, transition, and the passage from one stage of life to another. Shakuntala's journey to the royal palace involves crossing a river. It marks her transition from maidenhood to a life of royalty and eventual motherhood.

8. Divine Intervention

The divine intervention is a recurring motif in the play, highlighting the theme of destiny. Divine characters and their actions influence the plot, suggesting that human lives are intertwined with a higher cosmic order.

1.12 Setting of the play Shakuntalam

The setting of Shakuntalam plays an important role in enhancing its thematic depth and emotional resonance. The environment, both natural and royal, serve as more than a mere backdrop; it is an active participant in the narrative, depicting the inner states of the characters and the cultural context of the time.

The Hermitage of sage Kanva

The play opens in the peaceful and idyllic hermitage of Sage Kanva, where Shakuntala, the play's heroine, is raised. The hermitage of Kanva is a place of peace, spirituality, and natural beauty. It is described with lush greenery, blooming flowers, and tranquil streams that create an atmosphere of harmony between humans and nature. The hermitage symbolizes a world untouched by the complexities of court life and human ambition. The hermitage also embodies simplicity and purity.

In this setting, Shakuntala lives with the values of dharma (righteousness) and tapas (austerity). The natural environment of the hermitage symbolizes her innocence and purity. The flora and fauna of the hermitage are not mere elements of the scenery but active characters that respond to Shakuntala's emotions. For example, the deer she tends to and the trees she speaks to symbolize her bond with nature and her gentle disposition.

The Royal Court of King Dushyanta

In contrast to the hermitage, the court of King Dushyanta stands for the world of power, duty, and societal obligations. The splendour of the court is depicted through its majestic architecture, luxurious decor, and the presence of courtiers and ministers. The royal court highlights the structured and hierarchical nature of society, where the king's actions are governed by royal duties and responsibilities.

King Dushyanta is noble and just, but he is also a product of this world. His encounter with Shakuntala in the hermitage brings a touch of romance and spontaneity to his life. It contrasts with the formality and protocol of the court. However, it is also the court's machinations and the king's responsibilities that lead to their separation and the eventual loss of memory of the king.

Significance of the nature in the play

Nature in the play serves as a reflective medium for the characters' emotions and the themes of the play. The changing seasons mirror the transitions in Shakuntala's life. The blooming of flowers and the singing of birds during her initial romance with Dushyanta suggest joy and love. In contrast, the withering of nature during her time of separation and suffering reflects her sorrow and despair. The curse of Durvasa, which leads to Dushyanta's forgetfulness, also has a natural aspect. The curse of Durvasa can be seen as an unnatural disturbance in the otherwise harmonious natural world of the hermitage of sage Kanva. Shakuntala's journey from hermitage to the royal court and back to nature at the end of the play signifies a full circle.

Heavenly Realms

Near the climax of the play, the setting shifts to the celestial realms. Here divine intervention resolves the earthly conflicts. The entrance of celestial beings and the depiction of heavenly abodes introduce a supernatural dimension that highlights the play's spiritual dimensions. The divine intervention reunites Shakuntala and

Dushyanta. It reinforces the idea that human lives are influenced by higher powers and that destiny plays a crucial role in shaping their paths.

The settings in "Shakuntalam" are vital to its narrative and thematic richness. The contrasting worlds of the hermitage and the regal court, the reflective quality of nature, and the eventual divine intervention enhances the emotional depth and spiritual significance of the play. Through these settings, the playwright highlights themes of love, duty, memory, and destiny.

1.13 Structure of Shakuntalam

The structure of "Shakuntalam" can be studied through its plot, characters, themes, and stylistic elements. All of these contribute to its enduring legacy.

Plot Structure

The plot of "Shakuntalam" is based on an episode from the Mahabharata. Kalidasa has expanded and embellished the story, adding his unique poetic touch. The play is divided into seven acts. Each act contributes to the development of the narrative and the characters.

The play opens with King Dushyanta on a hunting expedition. He meets Shakuntala, the beautiful daughter of the sage Vishwamitra and the celestial nymph Menaka. Shakuntala is living in the hermitage of Sage Kanva. Dushyanta is struck by her beauty and grace. He falls in love with her. The mutual attraction leads to their union. They marry according to the Gandharva rites (a form of marriage by mutual consent).

The Curse

- After spending few days with Shakuntala, Dushyanta has to return to his kingdom. He gives Shakuntala a signet ring as a token of his love. The sage Durvasa visits the hermitage, and due to Shakuntala's distracted state, she fails to greet him. Angered, Durvasa curses her that Dushyanta would forget her. He later mitigates the curse, declaring that the king will remember her when he sees the ring.

The Departure

- Shakuntala becomes pregnant and Kanva decides to send her to Dushyanta's palace to be with her husband. On her way, she loses the ring while bathing in a river. However, she is unaware of the implications this loss will have.

The Rejection

- When Shakuntala arrives at Dushyanta's court, the king, under the influence of the curse of Durvasa does not recognize her. Shakuntala is heartbroken and humiliated. She leaves the palace at once. She is taken away by her mother Menika.

The discovery of Ring

- A fisherman finds the lost ring in the belly of a fish and brings it to Dushyanta. Upon seeing the ring, Dushyanta's memories of Shakuntala return. He is filled with remorse.

The Search

- Dushyanta's search for Shakuntala leads him to various places. We see his inner turmoil and repentance. This act is marked by his reflections and encounters that highlight his longing and regret.

The Reunion

- The play closes with a divine intervention. Dushyanta meets Shakuntala in the Hemkund Mountains, where she has been living with her son Bharata. The family is reunited. Dushyanta accepts his son, insuring the continuation of his lineage.

Contribution of characterization in the structure

The characters in "Shakuntalam" are well-developed and play important roles in advancing the plot and themes of the play. Dushyanta is the noble and valorous king whose initial impulsiveness leads to a series of events that cause pain and separation but finally culminate in reunion and realization. Shakuntala is the epitome of grace, devotion, and purity. Shakuntala's journey from innocence to suffering and finally to recognition reveals her resilience and inner strength. Kanva is the sage who acts as Shakuntala's father figure and provides wisdom and guidance in the play. Durvasa is the short-tempered sage whose curse sets the main conflict into motion. Bharata The son of Dushyanta and Shakuntala symbolizes the future and continuity of the royal lineage. Supporting Characters like attendants, hermits, and celestial beings add depth to the narrative and assist in the unfolding of the plot.

The themes and stylistic elements also play a crucial role in imparting structural unity to the play. "Shakuntalam" includes themes that explore the complexities of love, memory, fate, and the interplay between human actions and divine

interventions. The central theme of love is depicted through the intense emotions and experiences of Dushyanta and Shakuntala. Their separation and eventual reunion emphasize the lasting power of love. The motif of memory, as seen in the curse and its resolution, emphasizes the importance of recognition and remembrance in human relationships. The role of fate and divine intervention is significant in the story of Dushyanta and Shakuntala. The tranquil setting of the hermitage, with its natural beauty, contrasts with the political and emotional turmoil of the court. It emphasizes the harmony between humans and nature.

Kalidasa's use of figurative language and poetic devices enhances the aesthetic appeal of the play. His depiction of nature, emotions, and inner thoughts are marked by lyrical beauty and vivid imagery. The dialogues are crafted to convey deep emotional truths. Throughout the play Kalidasa maintains the elegance and sophistication of classical Sanskrit literature.

The structure of "Shakuntalam" is an evidence of Kalidasa's genius as a playwright and poet. The play offers a timeless exploration of love, loss, and redemption through its well-crafted plot, nuanced characters, and profound themes. The intricate narrative and poetic brilliance of the play have ensured its place as a masterpiece of world literature.

1.14 Check your progress 2.

Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence

1. Who is the biological father of Shakuntala?
2. Who is the foster father of Shakuntala?
3. Where does Dushyanta meet Shakuntala for the first time?
4. What is the name of Vidushaka in the play?
5. Who introduces the play Shakuntalam to the audience?
6. Who finds the lost ring?
7. Who curses Shakuntala?
8. What is the remedy against the curse?
9. Who persuades Durvasa to mitigate his curse?
10. Who did the first translation of Shakuntalam in English?

11. Who is the son of Shakuntala and Dushyanta?
12. What is the meaning of Abhijnanasakuntalam?
13. Where do we find the original narrative of Shakuntala?
14. What is the English title of Shakuntalam translated by William Jones?
15. To which dynasty does Dushyanta belong?
16. Who accompanies Shakuntala to the palace of Dushyanta?
17. Who brings Indre's message for Dushyanta?
18. Which kingdom does Dushyanta rule?
19. Who serves as a companion and confidant to King Dushyanta?
20. Who are the companions and friends of Shakuntala?

1.15 Answers to check your progress

Check your progress 1.

1. Servant of goddess Kali
2. Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda
3. Rigveda
4. Mahabharata
5. sage Vyasa
6. The Bhagavad Gita
7. The classical period.
8. Bharat Muni
9. Vishnu Sharma
10. Somadeva
11. Ashtadhyayi
12. Natyashastra
13. Shakuntalam, Vikramorvasiyam and Malavikagnimitram
14. Bhavabhuti

15. Charudatta
16. Eight.
17. shringara, hasya and karuna.
18. Love, duty, heroism, and the interplay of fate and free will.
19. Raghuvamsha 2. Kumarasambhava
20. Meghaduta and Ritusamhara

Answers to check your progress 2.

1. Sage Vishvamitra
2. Sage Kanva
3. In the hermitage of sage Kanva
4. Madhavya
5. The Sutradhar
6. Fisherman
7. Sage Durvasa
8. Signet ring of Dushyanta given to Shakuntala
9. Priyamvada
10. William Jones
11. Bharat
12. Recognition of Shakuntala
13. In Adiparva of Mahabharat
14. Fatal Ring
15. Lunar dynasty or Chandravanshi
16. Sharangrav, Sharadvat and Gautami
17. Matali
18. Hastinapur
19. Vidushak Madhavya

20. Anusuya and Priyamvada

1.16 Questions for exercise

A) Answer the following questions in about 600 words.

1. What is the story of Shakuntala in Mahabharat?
2. What changes has Kalidasa made in the story of Shakuntala as given in Mahabharat?
3. How is character of Shakuntala different in Kalidasa's play from the character of Shakuntala in Mahabharat?
4. Discuss the theory of Rasa in Sanskrit drama. Explain with example of Shakuntalam.
5. Discuss the setting of the play Shakuntalam
6. Discuss the conflict between desire and duty in Shakuntalam.
7. Discuss supernatural elements in Shakuntalam.
8. Discuss some Characteristics of Sanskrit Drama.
9. Discuss the significance of Ramayan and Mahabharat in Indian culture and religion.
10. Discuss Kalidasa's contribution to Sanskrit poetry.
11. Discuss important symbols in Shakuntalam.
12. How does divine intervention influence the plot of Shakuntalam?

B) Write short notes on the following topics in about 200 words.

1. Significance of Sutradhar in Sanskrit drama.
2. Role of Sutradhar in Shakuntalam.
3. Role of Vidushak in Shakuntalam.
4. Curse of Durvasa.
5. Signet ring of Dushyanta.
6. Role of Anusuya and Priyamvada in Shakuntalam
7. Symbolic significance of deer in Shakuntalam.

8. Bharata's the Natyasastra.
9. Significance of the title 'Fatal Ring'.
10. Scene of Shakuntala's departure from hermitage in Shakuntalam.

1.17 Books for further reading

Keith, A.B. *The Sanskrit Drama its Origin, Development, Theory and Practice*. London: OUP, 1959.

Mirashi, Vasudev Vishnu. *Kalidasa: Date, Life and Works*. Bombay: Popular, 1969.

Varadpande, Manohar Laxman. *History of Indian Theatre: Classical Theatre*. Volume 3 of History of Indian Theatre, Abhinav Publications, 1987.



Unit-2
General Topic : Greek Drama
Text : Euripides's Electra

2.1 Introduction

In this unit we will study about history and development of Greek drama. We will also study Euripides's masterpiece *Electra* which is translated in to English.

2.2 Objectives

The objectives of this unit are as follows

1. To study the history of Greek Literature.
2. To study the history and development of Greek Drama.
3. To understand the basic principles and techniques of Greek Drama
4. To know about the life and writings of Euripides.
5. To understand the story and the moral of *Electra*.
6. To study the various aspects of the play

2.3 A brief history of Greek Literature

Greek literature is one of the foundations of Western civilization. Spanning from the ancient period through the Hellenistic era and into the Roman Empire. Greek literature has greatly influenced language, philosophy, art, and culture of western countries.

The Ancient Period (circa 800-500 BCE)

Epic Poetry

Greek literature begins with epic poetry, chiefly represented by Homer's "Iliad" and "Odyssey". These epics were composed around the 8th century BCE. These epics are foundational texts in Western literature. They tell the stories of the Trojan War and Odysseus's journey home. They blend myth, history, and heroism. Both epics are characterized by their grand scale and exploration of human experience and the divine.

A contemporary of Homer, Hesiod is another significant figure of the ancient period. His works, such as "Theogony" and "Works and Days," combine mythological and didactic elements. They offer insights into the origins of the gods and practical advice on farming and living a just life. His works provide a counterpoint to Homer's heroic narratives. They focus on the everyday struggles and moral duties of ordinary people.

The Classical Period (circa 500-323 BCE)

The classical period witnessed the rise of lyric poetry. It was more personal and emotional than the epic tradition. Poets like Sappho, Alcaeus, and Pindar composed poetry that explored the themes of love, friendship, politics, and the human condition. Sappho, in particular, is renowned for her passionate and intimate poetry. But her poetry survives only in fragments.

Greek drama thrived in the 5th century BCE, primarily in Athens. There are two main genres: tragedy and comedy. The three great Greek tragedians are Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. They crafted plays that delved into complex human emotions and ethical dilemmas. Aeschylus's "Oresteia" trilogy, Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex," and Euripides's "Medea" are classic works. These plays explore themes of fate, justice, and the human condition.

Aristophanes is the most famous comic playwright of ancient Greece. His plays, such as "Lysistrata" and "The Clouds," are known for their political satire, sharp wit and social commentary. He used humor to criticize contemporary Athenian society and politics.

The classical period also saw the rise of philosophical and historical prose. Scholars like Herodotus and Thucydides pioneered historical writing. Herodotus is called the "Father of History". He wrote "Histories," an account of the Greco-Persian Wars that combines historical narrative with ethnographic details. Thucydides, wrote the "History of the Peloponnesian War". In his writing he offered a more analytical and critical approach, emphasizing cause and effect in human affairs.

Philosophical prose was composed by Plato and Aristotle. Plato wrote dialogues such as "The Republic" and "Phaedrus." He explored profound questions about reality, knowledge, and ethics through Socratic dialogues. Aristotle's works include "Poetics," "Nicomachean Ethics," and "Politics." He laid the foundation for various fields of knowledge, from literary criticism to political theory.

The Hellenistic Period (323-31 BCE)

After the death of Alexander the Great, Greek culture and literature spread across the Mediterranean and Near East, leading to the Hellenistic period. Literature from this period reflects the diversity and cosmopolitan nature of the Hellenistic world.

Hellenistic poetry is characterized by its refinement and wisdom. Callimachus and Theocritus are notable poets of this age. Callimachus's elegies and epigrams display a learned and sophisticated style. Theocritus is credited with creating the genre of bucolic (pastoral) poetry. He depicts the idyllic lives of shepherds and rustic life.

The Hellenistic period also saw progress in prose and scholarship. Apollonius of Rhodes wrote the epic "Argonautica." In this epic he tells the story of Jason and the Argonauts with a Hellenistic twist. He emphasizes psychological depth and romantic elements. The Library of Alexandria became a centre of learning and scholarship. Scholars like Eratosthenes and Aristarchus of Samothrace made significant contributions to science, literature, and textual criticism.

The Roman Period (31 BCE - 3rd Century CE)

Greek literature continued to flourish under Roman rule. Many Greek works were translated into Latin. Roman authors were heavily influenced by Greek literature. During this period, there was a revival of interest in Greek drama. Playwrights like Menander influenced Roman comedy, especially the works of Plautus and Terence. Menander's comedies focused on everyday life and social situations. They were adapted by Roman playwrights for their own audiences.

Philosophical and rhetorical prose also flourished. Plutarch's "Parallel Lives" and Lucian's satirical works are prominent examples. Plutarch's biographies of famous Greeks and Romans offered moral insights and historical anecdotes. Lucian's satirical dialogues critiqued contemporary society and intellectual pretensions.

The history of Greek literature reveals the richness and diversity of Greek culture. From the epics of Homer to the philosophical treatises of Plato and the poetic experiments of the Hellenistic poets, Greek literature has left a permanent mark on the world. The themes, styles, and genres of Greek literature continue to resonate,

shaping the literary traditions of countless cultures and languages throughout the world.

2.4 Greek Drama

Greek drama is one of the most influential forms of art in the history of Western civilization. Its development and impact on culture and literature of western countries are subjects of extensive study. Its roots can be traced from religious rituals to the sophisticated theatrical forms that have captivated audiences.

The origin of Greek drama is deeply rooted in religious rituals associated with the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine, fertility, and revelry. These rituals were known as Dionysian festivals. They were characterized by jubilant celebrations and performances. The most significant of these festivals was the City Dionysia in Athens. This festival was held annually in March. During these festivals, people practiced a form of choral singing called the dithyramb. It was a hymn sung in honor of Dionysus. The dithyramb was performed by a chorus of fifty men who sang and danced around a sacrificial altar. This ritualistic performance is considered a precursor to Greek drama. It involved elements of storytelling, music, and dance. It gradually evolved into structured drama.

The evolution from religious ritual to structured drama is ascribed to a series of innovations and the contributions of key figures. One of the most important moments in this evolution was the introduction of the actor or hypokrites. Traditionally, this innovation is credited to Thespis in the 6th century BCE. Thespis is said to have stepped out of the chorus to take on an individual role, thus creating the first distinction between actor and chorus. This marked the beginning of dialogue and the dramatic performance which was distinct from the choral ode.

The addition of the actor allowed for a new way of storytelling in which interactions between characters could be dramatized. This advancement paved the way for the development of tragedy and comedy. Tragedy flourished during the 5th century BCE, with playwrights such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. They elevated the form to new heights.

The chorus continued to be an integral part of the performance, serving as both participants in and commentators on the action. The themes of Greek tragedies often include fate, divine intervention, and the human condition, exploring profound ethical and philosophical questions.

2.4.1 The structure of Greek Drama

Greek drama, especially tragedy, followed a highly structured format. A typical Greek tragedy consisted of following components:

1. Prologue:

The prologue is a monologue or dialogue preceding the entry of the chorus. It sets the stage for the ensuing action.

2. Parodos:

Parodos is the entrance song of the chorus, which provides background information and sets the tone of the following scenes.

3. Episodes:

The episodes are akin to modern acts or scenes in which the main action and dialogue takes place.

4. Stasimon:

Stasimon are the choral odes that reflect on the action and themes, providing commentary and emotional resonance.

5. Exodus:

Exodus is the concluding part of the drama in which the resolution of the plot occurs.

2.4.2 The Greek Theatre

Greek drama was performed in open-air structures known as amphitheatres. These amphitheatres were designed to accommodate large audiences, sometimes numbering up to 15 thousand spectators. The most famous of these was Theatre of Dionysus in Athens. These theatres were especially designed to enhance the auditory and visual experience.

The Greek theatre was divided into three main parts:

1. Theatron: It was the seating area, usually a semi-circular arrangement of tiered rows. It provided a clear view of the performance space. The theatron was generally built into a hillside to utilize the natural slope for better visibility and acoustics.

2. Orchestra: It was the circular performance space at the centre of the theatre where the chorus sang and danced. The space of orchestra was also used for the performance of choral odes and the occasional appearance of actors.

3. Skene: It was a building behind the orchestra that served as a backdrop for the action. It also provided space for costume changes and entrances/exits. The skene could be decorated to represent various settings.

Greek theatre has greatly contributed to the development of theatrical conventions, such as the use of masks, costumes, and stagecraft. Masks allowed actors to play multiple roles and convey different emotions. Elaborate costumes helped to distinguish characters and enhance the visual spectacle of the performance.

The Greek theatre was not merely a place of entertainment; it was a communal space where Greek citizens gathered to engage with important social, political issues. The performances of the plays were generally funded by wealthy patrons, reflecting the civic importance of drama in Greek society.

2.4.3 The Greek Tragedy

Greek tragedy is one of the most influential forms of literature in Western culture. It originated in ancient Greece around the 5th century BCE. The Greek tragedy reached its peak in Athens and has left an indelible mark on the history of theater and literature. Greek tragedies were more than just plays; they were a significant part of religious festivals. They were imbued with profound philosophical, ethical, and social commentary.

Greek tragedies generally dealt with serious and somber themes such as the complexities of human nature, fate, and the divine. Some common themes include:

1. Fate and Free Will:

Greek tragedies often examined the tension between human free will and the inevitable forces of fate. Characters in Greek tragedies often struggled against their destinies, only to find themselves unable to escape their predetermined outcomes.

2. Hubris:

Undue pride or arrogance, known as hubris, was a common tragic flaw in many protagonists of Greek tragedies. Hubris often led to the character's downfall, serving as a moral lesson on the dangers of overrating one's power or importance.

3. The Role of the Gods:

The gods played a crucial role in Greek tragedies. They often intervened in human affairs. The relationship between humans and the divine highlighted the limitations of mortal understanding and control.

4. Suffering and Catharsis:

The concept of catharsis is central to Greek tragedy. Catharsis is the emotional purging experienced by the audience. Through the characters' suffering and eventual downfall, the audience underwent a process of emotional release and purification.

2.4.5 Notable Greek Playwrights and Their Works

Three playwrights are particularly celebrated for their contributions to Greek tragedy: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

1. Aeschylus

Aeschylus is considered the father of Greek tragedy. He introduced the second actor in Greek drama, allowing for more complex interactions and dialogue. His most celebrated work is the Oresteia trilogy, which includes "Agamemnon," "The Libation Bearers," and "The Eumenides." This trilogy deals with themes of justice, revenge, and the transformation of societal order from personal vendetta to a system of legal justice.

2. Sophocles

Sophocles added the third actor in Greek drama, further increasing the complexity of the drama. His most renowned works include "Oedipus Rex" and "Antigone." "Oedipus Rex" is a typical example of tragic irony and the interplay of fate and free will. "Antigone" deals with the theme of conflict between individual conscience and state law, raising questions about moral duty and civil disobedience.

3. Euripides

Euripides is renowned for his psychological depth and often controversial themes. His works focused on the plight of women and the marginalized. "Medea" is one of his most famous plays. It depicts the intense emotions and revenge of a woman scorned by her husband. "The Bacchae" explores the duality of human nature and the consequences of denying one's primal instincts.

The influence of Greek tragedy on Western culture and literature cannot be overstated. These plays laid the foundation for the development of Western theatre. It has influenced playwrights from Shakespeare to modern dramatists. The themes explored in Greek tragedies continue to resonate. They address fundamental aspects of the human condition. Greek tragedy has also contributed to the development of literary criticism and theory. Aristotle's "Poetics" is a seminal work in the study of drama. "Poetics deals with the elements of tragedy and articulating concepts such as mimesis (imitation) and catharsis.

2.4.6 Greek Comedy

Greek comedy is a vital component of ancient Greek theatre. It evolved over centuries and significantly influenced Western literature and drama. This genre of Greek drama is divided into three periods: Old Comedy, Middle Comedy, and New Comedy. Each period reflects distinct characteristics and societal influences. They offer a window into the cultural, political, and social life of ancient Greece.

1. Old Comedy

Old Comedy is primarily associated with the playwright Aristophanes. It thrived in Athens during the 5th century BCE. This period is remarkable for its bold political satire, extravagant plots, and a mix of coarse humor and serious commentary.

Old Comedy often targeted political figures and events. It used humor to criticize and comment on contemporary issues. Aristophanes' plays, such as 'The Clouds' and 'Lysistrata', openly mocked influential leaders like Socrates and Cleon. Plots of these plays were often fantastical and exaggerated. For example, in 'The Birds', two Athenians establish a utopian city in the sky.

2. Middle Comedy

Middle Comedy spanned from the late 5th century to the early 4th century BCE. It represents a transitional phase with fewer surviving examples. It marks a shift away from the obvious political satire of Old Comedy to generalized social satire and humor. With the decline of Athens' political dominance, Middle Comedy moved away from direct political satire. It focused on social themes and everyday life. This period is known for the development of stock characters, such as the braggart soldier, the cunning slave, and the miserly old man.

3. New Comedy

New Comedy in Greece emerged in the late 4th century BCE. It is best represented by Menander. It marks a departure from the political and fantastical elements of Old Comedy. It focuses instead on domestic situations and character-driven plots. These plots cantered on household affairs, romantic entanglements, and social relationships. Menander's 'Dyskolos' (The Grouch) exemplifies these themes. It portrays everyday life and love affairs. In place of the exaggerated scenarios of Old Comedy, New Comedy employed more realistic plots and subtle humor. It derived from misunderstandings, mistaken identities, and clever dialogues. New Comedy established the use of stock characters and familiar situations. These conventions influenced Roman comedy and later European theatrical traditions. The use of chorus in New Comedy was further minimized.

Greek comedy, particularly New Comedy, had a profound impact on Roman theatre and Western literature and drama. Roman playwrights like Plautus and Terence adapted and imitated Greek New Comedy. The influence of Greek comedy is also seen in the works of later European dramatists like Shakespeare and Molière. They incorporated elements of mistaken identity, romantic intrigue, and stock characters into their plays. The techniques and character archetypes developed by ancient Greek playwrights continue to reflect in modern theatre, film, and television.

The history of Greek drama is an evidence of the profound interconnectedness of religion, culture, and art in ancient Greece. After emerging from the Dionysian rituals, Greek drama evolved into a sophisticated form of storytelling. The Greek drama has left a permanent influence on Western literature and theatre. The works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes continue to be performed and studied.

2.5 Life and works of Euripides

Euripides was one of the great tragedians of ancient Greece. He left an indelible mark on the world of drama. His life is not well-documented as some of his contemporaries. However, his life can be pieced together through his works and the historical context in which he lived. Euripides was born around 484 BCE on the island of Salamis and died in 406 BCE in Macedonia. His life covers a period of crucial political and cultural change in Athens which was a city that was the center of Greek intellectual and artistic life.

Euripides was a contemporary of Aeschylus and Sophocles. He differed from them in his approach to drama. He often focused more on the psychological depth and individual motivations of his characters rather than the themes of fate and the gods. This human-centered approach has led some scholars to call him the most modern of the ancient Greek tragedians.

Early Life and Career

Not much is known about Euripides' early life. He was probably educated in Athens and was influenced by the intellectual currents of the time. These included the sophists and the philosophers Anaxagoras and Socrates. He began writing plays in his early twenties. His first play, "Peliades," was performed in 455 BCE. His career spanned several decades. He is believed to have written around 90 plays but only 18 or 19 have survived in complete form.

Euripides' works are known for their strong women characters and their exploration of complex moral and social issues. Euripides delved into the inner lives of his characters, exploring their motivations, fears, and desires. The psychological realism made his characters more relatable and his plays more accessible to audiences.

Euripides' most notable contributions to drama is his use of *deus ex machina* which is a plot device where a god or other supernatural entity intervenes to resolve the plot. Although this technique has been criticized for being a sign of weak plotting, in Euripides' hands, it serves to highlight the limitations of human understanding and the capriciousness of fate.

Major Works of Euripides

1. Medea: The most famous work of Euripides, "Medea" tells the story of Medea's revenge against her unfaithful husband, Jason. Medea's intense emotions and the moral ambiguity of her actions have fascinated audiences for centuries.

2. The Bacchae: This play deals with the conflict between the rational and the irrational, embodied in the struggle between King Pentheus and the god Dionysus. It is a commentary on the dangers of denying one's own nature and the inevitable triumph of primal forces.

3. Hippolytus: This tragedy focuses on the themes of chastity, desire, and the destructive power of false accusations. It deals with the conflict between the young hero Hippolytus and his stepmother, Phaedra, who falls in love with him.

4. Electra: Euripides' treatment of the well-known myth of Electra, who conspires with her brother Orestes to avenge their father's murder, offers a more human and less heroic portrayal of characters compared to the versions composed by Aeschylus and Sophocles.

5. The Trojan Women: This is an anti-war play which presents the aftermath of the Trojan War from the perspective of the women of Troy. It is a poignant commentary on the horrors of war and the suffering of the innocent.

Euripides was not always appreciated in his own time. His plays won fewer awards than those of his contemporaries. However, his influence grew in the centuries following his death. His focus on human psychology, complex female characters, and his willingness to question traditional values and religious beliefs resonated with later generations.

Euripides became one of the most popular and widely performed playwrights in the Hellenistic period and beyond. His plays influenced Roman dramatists such as Seneca and have continued to inspire writers throughout the ages. Modern adaptations of his plays emphasize their timeless exploration of human nature and social issues. Euripides is a perpetual presence in the world of drama.

2.6 Check your progress 1.

Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence each.

1. Name two epics composed by Homer.
2. Which epic of Homer tells the story of the Trojan War?
3. Which epic of Homer is about Odysseus's journey?
4. Name the three great Greek tragedians.
5. Who is the author of "Oresteia" trilogy?
6. Who is the author of "Oedipus Rex"?
7. Who is the author of "Medea"?
8. Who is the author of "Lysistrata" and "The Clouds"?

9. Name three plays of Euripides.
10. Who is the author of biographies of famous Greeks and Romans?

2.7 Electra: Legendary Background

Agamemnon was the king of Mycenae. He was also the leader of the Greek expedition against city of Troy. Greek warriors led by Agamemnon's sailed to Troy and carried on a siege of Troy for ten years. During Agamemnon's absence from Mycenae, his cousin Aegisthus ruled as regent. Aegisthus hated Agamemnon because of an old dispute between their families and plotted to capture the throne.

At the same time Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra was resentful against her husband because he had sacrificed their eldest daughter Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis to ensure a safe journey to Troy for his ships. Clytemnestra was a jealous woman and she became angry when she learned that he had taken a mistress Cassandra, the daughter of the Trojan king.

In the absence of Agamemnon, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra became lovers. They planned to murder Agamemnon when he returned home. They killed Agamemnon and Aegisthus became the new king of Mycenae. He had also planned to kill Orestes, the son and heir of Agamemnon, but a faithful servant of Agamemnon rescued the boy and took him to the kingdom of Phocis. In the meantime Aegisthus and Clytemnestra increased their power. They ruled and lived together as husband and wife.

Electra, the younger daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, was permitted to live in the palace. However, Aegisthus began to fear that Electra would marry some influential prince who would challenge his place on the throne or help her to get revenge for the death of her father. To avoid this Aegisthus compelled Electra to marry a humble peasant. He was sure that Electra's husband would be unable to challenge his position and that any child of Electra would have no claim on the throne of kingdom. The play by Euripides begins shortly after Electra's marriage.

Electra lives in poverty with her husband. She is dominated by hatred for Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. She desires revenge for the murder of her father. Orestes accompanied by his friend Pylades returns home secretly. He reveals his identity to Electra and solicits her support. He also gets assistance from the old servant who rescued him many years ago. The same servant tells Orestes to kill

Aegisthus while he is conducting a sacrifice in a meadow. Orestes kills Aegisthus and takes revenge for his father's murder. At the same time, Electra lures Clytemnestra from the palace with the message that she has recently given birth to a child. When Clytemnestra arrives at Electra's house, Orestes and Electra kill her.

After taking revenge, Electra and Orestes are overcome by remorse for their actions. The twin gods Castor and Polydeuces appear and predict that Orestes and Electra will eventually find happiness. The gods give instructions for the burial of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and order that Electra marry Pylades and go with him to Phocis. The Gods explain that Orestes has to wander as a fugitive for one year, pursued by the Furies as a punishment for his crime of matricide. When he reaches Athens, he will be absolved of all guilt by goddess Athena and the court of Areopagus.

The legend of Electra forms the basis of many famous literary works such as *Electra* by Euripides and *Orestes* by the same author, *Electra* by Sophocles, and the *Oresteia* trilogy of Aeschylus.

2.8 Euripides's *Electra*: plot summary.

List of characters:

1. A Peasant, Electra's husband
2. Electra, the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra
3. Orestes, Electra's brother
4. Pylades, the friend of Orestes
5. Clytemnestra, the widow of Agamemnon, now wife of Aegisthus
6. An Old Man, formerly a servant of Agamemnon
7. A Messenger
8. The Dioscuri, Castor, and Polydeuces: the deified brothers of Clytemnestra
9. Chorus of Peasant Women

The action of the play takes place In front of the peasant's house, in the countryside on the borders of Argos.

Prologue:

The play opens with a farmer on the stage. He introduces himself as Electra's husband. The prologue provides the background information about the characters and opening action. The farmer is a kind and humble man and has married Electra out of pity and respect, not out of love and desire. He describes how Electra, the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, has been compelled to live in poverty and disgrace after her mother's deceitful act. Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus killed Agamemnon upon his return from the Trojan War.

Electra's Lament:

Electra enters and laments her fate. She expresses deep sorrow and anger over her father's murder and her mother's betrayal. She is obsessed with taking revenge for Agamemnon's murder, but feels powerless in her current situation. She performs daily household tasks and leads a life far removed from her royal upbringing.

Return of Orestes:

Orestes, Electra's brother, returns to Mycenae with his friend Pylades. He has been living in exile since childhood. Now he has come back to avenge his father's death, as commanded by Apollo. He is disguised as a messenger. He approaches Electra's house. Electra does not recognize him initially, but they discuss their mutual suffering and grievances.

Recognition:

Orestes ultimately reveals his true identity to Electra. The siblings share an emotional reunion and immediately begin plotting their revenge against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

The Plan for revenge:

Orestes and Pylades visit Aegisthus' palace under the pretext of bringing news of Orestes' death. Aegisthus is fooled by their story. He invites them in his palace. At the same time, Electra and her husband invite Clytemnestra to their home under the pretence of celebrating the birth of a child. They have planned to kill her when she arrives.

Aegisthus' Death:

Orestes kills Aegisthus in his palace, bringing the first part of their plan to fruition. He then goes to Electra's home to help her with the second part of their plan.

Clytemnestra reaches Electra's house, oblivious of the trap. She is initially suspicious but is comforted by Electra's apparently genuine demeanour. Once inside, Electra confronts her mother with accusations of murder of her father and betrayal. In spite of Clytemnestra's attempts to justify her actions, Electra remains resolute. Orestes arrives, and together, they kill Clytemnestra. This act of matricide satisfies their need for revenge but it leaves them both emotionally shattered. They grapple with the moral implications of their actions and the realization that they have killed their own mother.

The play concludes with the appearance of the Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux), the divine brothers of Clytemnestra. They bring a message from the gods. They order Orestes to go to Athens to stand trial for matricide. They predict his eventual acquittal. They also order Electra to marry Pylades and go away from Mycenae, where she can find peace and happiness. Orestes and Electra reluctantly accept their fates and set out to fulfil the gods' commands.

In "Electra," Euripides presents a complex depiction of revenge and justice. He emphasizes the personal and emotional costs of vengeance. The play highlights the themes of familial loyalty, the consequences of murder, and the struggles between duty and morality.

2.9 Euripides's Electra: characters.

1. Electra

Electra is a complex and multifaceted character. She embodies a range of emotions and traits that make her one of Greek tragedy's most compelling figures. Electra's character can be studied through her motivations, actions, relationships, and psychological state.

Electra is the daughter of Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae, and Clytemnestra. Her life is disturbed when her father is murdered by her mother, Clytemnestra and her mother's lover, Aegisthus. This disloyalty deeply scars Electra, shaping her motivations and actions throughout the play. Her primary motivation is to avenge her father's death. Her desire for revenge consumes her and defines her character.

In Euripides' play, Electra is depicted as living in abject poverty and degradation. Unlike the typical princess, she is married off to a humble farmer by her mother and Aegisthus to stop her from bearing a noble son who might seek revenge. Despite her dismal circumstances, Electra's noble spirit remains unbroken. Her outward appearance contrasts sharply with her inner nobility and strength.

Electra's emotional condition is marked by extreme grief, anger, and a sense of injustice. Her father's murder haunts her. She is tormented by the memory of his death. This emotional turmoil manifests in her relentless drive for revenge. She is characterized by a deep sense of isolation and loneliness because she is estranged from her mother and has lost her father.

Electra's relationship with her brother, Orestes, is vital to the play. She longs for his return. She sees him as the key to avenging their father. When Orestes eventually returns, their reunion is both emotional and strategic. Immediately they plot to kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Their bond is one of mutual support and shared purpose.

Electra's relationship with her mother is filled with hatred and bitterness. She hates Clytemnestra for murdering Agamemnon and for the following mistreatment she has suffered. This hatred drives Electra's actions and highlights the theme of familial conflict and revenge.

Electra's husband, a poor farmer, is a symbol of her fallen status. But he respects Electra's noble birth and treats her with kindness. Her relationship with her husband adds complexity to Electra's character. It shows her ability to inspire loyalty and respect even in her degraded state.

Electra's desire for revenge raises moral and ethical questions. Her resolve to kill her mother and Aegisthus can be seen as both a virtuous act of justice and a distressing descent into vengeance and violence. Euripides shows Electra's struggle with these ethical dilemmas which highlights the conflict between duty to family and moral integrity.

Electra's ultimate strength is her firm determination and courage. She is determined in her pursuit of justice and willing to undergo great hardship for the sake of her father's honor. However, this determination of Electra can be seen as a flaw in her character, as it leads her to embrace revenge to the point of obsession. Her

inability to overcome her grief and hatred ultimately raises questions about the cost of revenge and the possibility of redemption.

Electra's tragic circumstances elicit both sympathy and disquiet. Her journey is a moving exploration of grief, vengeance, and familial duty. Electra is a timeless figure in Greek tragedy. Through her, Euripides delves into the human psyche, exploring the destructive power of revenge and the enduring nature of love and loyalty.

2. Orestes

Orestes is a character of significant complexity. His character is defined by his quest for justice and his sense of duty. His character can be studied through his motivations, actions, relationships and the psychological and moral conflicts that shape his journey.

Orestes is the son of Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae, and Clytemnestra. After his father's murder by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, Orestes is sent away by an old servant to protect him from a similar fate. Growing up in exile, his most important motivation is to avenge his father's murder and reclaim his throne in Mycenae. His return to Mycenae is motivated by a deep sense of duty to his father and a desire to restore honor of his family.

Orestes returns to Mycenae in a state of anonymity. His physical appearance reflect his years in exile. In spite of his royal birth, he has to navigate his return cautiously. He is still at risk from his mother and Aegisthus. His social condition is precarious because he is both a rightful heir and a fugitive seeking justice.

Orestes is characterized by intense emotional and psychological conflict. He is motivated by a desire for revenge coupled with profound moral uncertainty. The act of killing his own mother, even for justice, weighs heavily on him and it creates a psychological turmoil. Orestes is also influenced by the expectations of the gods and society regarding filial duty and vengeance. These expectations add to his internal struggle.

Orestes's relationship with Electra is central to the play. Their bond is reinforced by their shared trauma and common goal of avenging their father's murder. Electra's steadfast support and encouragement are crucial for Orestes. She provides him with

both emotional support and practical assistance in their plot. Their reunion is a moment of deep emotional resonance.

Orestes's close friend and confidant Pylades plays a significant role in supporting him. Pylades embodies loyalty and friendship. He stands by Orestes throughout their quest. His presence offers Orestes a sense of moral support, reinforcing the theme of loyalty beyond familial bonds.

Orestes's relationship with his mother is very complex aspect of his character. Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon creates an insurmountable rift between them. Orestes's resolve to kill her is motivated by his duty to avenge his father. But it is fraught with psychological and moral conflict. The matricide is a crucial moment that defines Orestes's character. It highlights the tension between justice and familial love.

Orestes's character represents the ethical dilemmas central to Greek tragedy. His desire for revenge raises questions regarding justice, duty, and the consequences of violence. The act of matricide, which is seen as a necessary act of retribution, also brings guilt. Orestes's struggle with these issues echoes the broader themes of the play like the interplay between divine will, personal responsibility, and societal expectations.

The most important strength of Orestes is his sense of duty and determination. He is firm on avenging his father and restoring his family honor. However, this determination also exposes his primary flaw: the moral blindness that accompanies single-minded pursuit of vengeance. His actions may be justified within the context of the play. However, they lead to significant psychological and ethical consequences, questioning the true cost of his revenge.

Orestes is a character of profound depth, representing the complexities of duty, revenge, and moral conflict. His journey is an emotional exploration of the human condition, underlining the enduring themes of justice, family loyalty, and the consequences of violence. Through the character of Orestes, Euripides probes into the psychological and ethical dimensions of revenge. Orestes is a timeless figure in Greek tragedy.

3. Pylades

Pylades serves as a crucial but understated character. He plays a supporting role, but his character is necessary for the unfolding of the plot. Pylades represents loyalty, friendship, and moral support. He provides a crucial counterbalance to the intense emotions and actions of Orestes and Electra.

Pylades is the son of King Strophius of Phocis. He is a close friend of Orestes. In many versions of the myth, Pylades grows up with Orestes in exile after the murder of Agamemnon. This common background creates a deep bond between the two. Pylades is more than just a friend—he is a confidant and a moral anchor for Orestes.

Pylades is characterized by his dedicated loyalty and unwavering support for Orestes. His personality is shaped by calmness, rationality, and a strong sense of duty. Unlike the emotionally turbulent Electra and the morally conflicted Orestes, Pylades remains composed and calm providing a sense of stability.

Pylades does not exhibit the same degree of emotional turmoil as Orestes or Electra. His psychological depth is evident through his actions and decisions. His loyalty to Orestes reveals a very strong emotional commitment. His willingness to support the matricide plot reflects his own internalization of duty and justice. His emotional state is also marked by an implicit understanding of the gravity of their mission and the moral implications of their actions.

The relationship between Pylades and Orestes is crucial to understanding Pylades's character. Their relation is remarkable for their deep friendship and mutual respect. Pylades supports Orestes unconditionally. He accompanies him on his quest for vengeance and offering counsel and assistance. Their relationship highlights Pylades's loyalty.

Pylades's relationship with Electra is also significant. He respects Electra and acknowledges her suffering and her role in their plan. Pylades's support for Electra highlights his role as an enabler of her quest for justice. In some versions of the myth, Pylades and Electra are later married, showing a deeper bond and mutual respect.

The character of Pylades embodies the ethical complexities of loyalty and duty. His support for Orestes, even in the face of morally questionable actions like

matricide, raises questions about the nature of loyalty and the ethical boundaries of friendship. Pylades's actions suggest his firm belief in the righteousness of their cause, yet his calm actions contrasts with the passionate drive for revenge seen in Orestes and Electra. This contrast highlights the moral tension between personal loyalty and broader moral considerations.

Pylades's foremost strength is his unwavering loyalty and steadfastness. He provides emotional and practical support to Orestes, enabling the successful execution of their plan. His rationality and calmness serve as a counterbalance to the volatile emotions of Electra and Orestes. However, this same loyalty of Pylades to Orestes can be seen as a flaw in his character, as it leads him to participate in morally dubious actions without significant personal conflict or hesitation. This unconditional support raises questions about the potential consequences of suppression of personal moral judgment in favor of friendship.

Pylades's role in "Electra" is very significant. He is a catalyst for the action. He helps to advance the plot and support Orestes and Electra's quest for vengeance. He also acts as a moral and emotional anchor for Orestes. Pylades's character represents the themes of loyalty, duty, and the complexities of ethical action within the play.

4. Clytemnestra

Clytemnestra is a complex character, embodying a range of emotions, motivations, and moral ambiguities. She is the wife of Agamemnon and mother of Electra and Orestes. She plays a central role in the tragic events that unfold. Her character can be studied through her actions, relationships, emotional state and the ethical dilemmas she faces.

Clytemnestra is the queen of Mycenae and the wife of Agamemnon. Her life is characterized by turmoil and tragedy. The most defining event in her life is the sacrifice of her daughter, Iphigenia, by Agamemnon. It deeply wounds her and sets the stage for her subsequent actions. Clytemnestra's motivation for murdering Agamemnon is driven by a desire for revenge and justice for Iphigenia. Her relation with Aegisthus, Agamemnon's cousin and her lover, also influences her actions. They conspire together to seize power.

Clytemnestra holds a powerful and authoritative position in Mycenaean society. Her physical appearance is often depicted as regal and commanding. Despite her royal status, her actions and their subsequent consequences cast a shadow over her

reign. It also affects her social standing and relationships with her children and subjects.

Clytemnestra's psychological state is marked by a combination of grief, anger, guilt, and defiance. The sacrifice of her daughter leaves her heartbroken and fuels her desire for vengeance. Her ensuing murder of Agamemnon and her relationship with Aegisthus expose her capacity for both deep emotional pain and ruthless action. Psychologically, she is complex, as she struggles with the guilt of her actions while justifying them as essential for justice. Her defiance is apparent in her interactions with Electra and Orestes. She maintains a sense of righteousness about her decisions.

Clytemnestra's relationship with her daughter Electra is marked by tension and animosity. Electra hates her mother for murdering Agamemnon and for her role in their family's downfall. This hatred is mutual, as Clytemnestra sees Electra as a threat to her power and a constant reminder of her guilt. Their interactions are fraught with bitterness and confrontation.

Clytemnestra's relationship with her son Orestes is more complex. She fears him as a potential avenger of Agamemnon, but she also harbours maternal feelings towards him. This duality adds depth to her character. She is torn between her role as a mother and her actions as a murderer. Orestes's return and the subsequent matricide force Clytemnestra to face the consequences of her actions.

Clytemnestra's relationship with Aegisthus is based on common ambition and shared guilt. They conspire together to murder Agamemnon and rule Mycenae. This relationship is both a source of strength and a complication in Clytemnestra's moral and emotional world. Aegisthus is both a partner in crime and a co-conspirator in their quest for power.

Clytemnestra's character is a study in moral ambiguity. On one hand, her desire for revenge against Agamemnon for the sacrifice of Iphigenia can be seen as a justified response to a grievous wrong. On the other hand, her actions in murdering Agamemnon and taking Aegisthus as her lover are seen as transgressions against the moral and social order. Euripides explores these ethical dimensions, highlighting the complexity of justice, revenge, and the consequences of violence. Clytemnestra's justification for her actions and her subsequent guilt and defiance underscore the moral ambiguity that defines her character.

Clytemnestra's utmost strength is her resolute determination and ability to take decisive action. She is a powerful and intelligent woman. She is capable of orchestrating a successful coup and maintaining her position. These strengths are also her greatest flaws. Her determination turns into ruthless ambition. Her ability to take decisive action results in murder and moral transgression. Her complexity lies in her being both a grieving mother and a vengeful murderer.

Clytemnestra serves as a catalyst for the play's fundamental conflict. Her actions set the stage for the tragic events that unfold, forcing Electra and Orestes to seek revenge. She symbolizes the consequences of unchecked ambition and the destructive power of vengeance. Through the character of Clytemnestra, Euripides depicts themes of justice, power, and the moral complexities of human action.

Clytemnestra in Euripides's play "Electra" is a character of profound complexity. She embodies the tragic interplay of grief, revenge, power, and moral ambiguity. Her actions drive the play's central conflict. Her relationships with Electra, Orestes, and Aegisthus show the intricate web of emotions and ethical dilemmas that define her character. Through Clytemnestra, Euripides explores the darker aspects of human nature. Clytemnestra is a timeless and compelling figure in Greek tragedy.

5. Aegisthus

Aegisthus, in Euripides's play "Electra," represents ambition, manipulation, and the consequences of political power struggles. His role is not as prominent as that of Electra or Orestes, but his actions and motivations are crucial to the plot of the play. The character of Aegisthus can be examined through his background, personality traits, relationships, motivations, and his impact on the play.

Aegisthus is cousin of Agamemnon. His background is spoiled by a history of family feuds and a desire for revenge. The primary motivation of Aegisthus is to gain power and take revenge on Agamemnon for past wrongs against his family. His ambition leads him to become the lover of Clytemnestra and a partner in the murder of Agamemnon. He becomes the ruler of Mycenae.

Aegisthus is primarily characterized by his cunning, ambition, and ruthlessness. He is a master manipulator. He is capable of influencing Clytemnestra and orchestrating the murder of Agamemnon to achieve his goals. His ambition drives him to commit heinous acts without apparent remorse. Aegisthus is also portrayed as

a cowardly figure. He relies on deceit and manipulation rather than direct confrontation.

Aegisthus is driven by a combination of personal vendetta and political ambition. His emotional state is marked by grievance and a desire for retribution. In spite of his outward confidence and assertiveness, there is an underlying fear of losing power. His fear is evident in his actions to suppress any potential threats. He is responsible for exiling of Orestes and the marriage arrangement for Electra. His desire to maintain control over his fragile power base shows a deep-seated insecurity.

Aegisthus's relationship with Clytemnestra is of mutual benefit and common ambition. They plot and execute the murder of Agamemnon. Their relationship is built on shared goals and it reveals the manipulative and transactional nature of Aegisthus's character. He considers Clytemnestra as a means to an end. Their partnership is rooted in political expediency rather than genuine affection.

Aegisthus's relationship with Electra is hostile and fraught with tension. He views her as a threat to his power and tries to suppress her. By marrying her off to a peasant, he tries to diminish her influence. This prevents her from producing a son who could challenge his rule. Electra's hatred for Aegisthus is obvious and his treatment of her reveals his ruthlessness and fear of losing power.

Aegisthus's relationship with Orestes is characterized by fear and enmity. Aegisthus knows that Orestes has a legitimate claim to the throne and a motive for revenge. Aegisthus sees him as the greatest threat to his rule. His attempts to have Orestes killed show his desperation to secure his position. The return of Orestes and subsequent actions validate Aegisthus's fears.

The character of Aegisthus embodies the darker aspects of political ambition and moral corruption. His readiness to commit murder and manipulate those around him for personal gain highlights the ethical compromises he makes in his quest for power. Euripides uses Aegisthus to explore themes of justice, revenge, and the moral consequences of unchecked ambition. Aegisthus's actions serve as a counterpoint to the more complex moral dilemmas faced by characters like Electra and Orestes, emphasizing the destructive nature of his ambition.

The primary strength of Aegisthus lies in his cunning and ability to manipulate others to achieve his goals. His strategic mind and political shrewdness allow him to seize power and maintain control over Mycenae. But these strengths are also his

greatest flaws. His dependence on deceit and manipulation makes him unstable and vulnerable to retribution. His failure to inspire genuine loyalty or respect among those he rules ultimately leads to his downfall. His cowardice and fear of losing power drive him to commit further atrocities.

Aegisthus is a catalyst for the play's central conflict. He represents the corrupting influence of power. His actions set the stage for Orestes and Electra's revenge. His presence in the narrative underscores the themes of justice, retribution, and the moral complexities of vengeance. Through the character of Aegisthus, Euripides explores the results of political ambition and the ethical dilemmas faced by those who seek power at all cost.

Aegisthus in Euripides's play "Electra" is defined by ambition, manipulation, and moral corruption. His actions drive the central conflict of the play. His relationships with Clytemnestra, Electra, and Orestes reveal the complexities of power and revenge. Through the character of Aegisthus, Euripides explores the darker aspects of human nature. Aegisthus is a critical figure in the exploration of justice and the consequences of unchecked ambition.

2.10 Euripides's Electra: Themes

Euripides's play "Electra" is a multifaceted tragedy that delves into various themes related to human experience, ethics, and societal norms. The major themes of the play are explained below.

Revenge and Justice

The plot of "Electra" revolves around the theme of revenge. Electra and her brother Orestes are determined to avenge the murder of their father who was killed by their mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. Their desire for revenge raises questions about justice and morality. Is their revenge justified, or does it continue a cycle of violence? Euripides presents this moral ambiguity, asking the audience to consider the consequences and ethics of revenge.

Family and Filial Duty

Family relationships are central in "Electra." The play explores the bonds between parents and children, as well as the loyalties inherent in these relationships. Electra's devotion to her father and her determination to avenging his death highlight her sense of filial duty. However, her relationship with her mother, Clytemnestra, is

fraught with hatred and betrayal. The play explores how familial bonds can be both a source of strength and a source of conflict.

Suffering and Endurance

Electra's character is marked by intense suffering and endurance. She lives in a state of constant grief and lamentation for her father. She experiences hardship and humiliation. The theme of suffering is not limited to Electra. It extends to other characters, including Orestes, who is tormented by the task he must undertake. Euripides in *Electra* uses these characters to explore the nature of human suffering as well as the capacity for endurance in the face of overwhelming adversity.

Gender Roles and Power Dynamics

Euripides in his play critiques traditional gender roles and power dynamics in Greek society. Electra, despite being a woman, shows remarkable strength, determination, and influence over the events that unfold. Her character challenges the typical portrayal of women as passive or submissive. The play also highlights the power struggles within the family and the broader societal implications of these dynamics.

Fate and Free Will

Like many Greek tragedies, Euripides's play "*Electra*" grapples with the themes of fate and free will. The characters' actions are governed by prophecies and the will of the gods. It raises questions about the extent to which they control their own destinies. Orestes, in particular, is driven by a sense of duty imposed by divine will. But he also exercises personal will in carrying out his revenge. The interplay between fate and free will is a central theme of the play.

The influence of the Gods

The influence of the gods is pervasive in *Electra*. The characters frequently invoke divine will and guidance. The gods' presence looms over the plot. The play explores the relationship between humans and the divine. The play deals with themes of piety, divine justice, and the limits of human understanding. The gods' involvement in human affairs highlights the theme of fate and the tension between divine authority and human agency.

Ethical Dilemmas

Euripides is renowned for his complex and morally ambiguous characters. His play "Electra" is no exception. The ethical dilemmas faced by Electra and Orestes are central to the plot of the play. Their quest for revenge compels the audience to confront questions about morality, justice, and the nature of right and wrong. Euripides does not provide clear answers which leaves the audience to grapple with the complexities of the characters' actions and motivations.

Alienation and Isolation

Electra's isolation and alienation from her family are poignant themes in the play. She is estranged from her mother. She is also alienated from her former life of privilege. She is often left to lament in solitude. Electra's isolation is both physical and emotional, reflecting her deep sense of loss and disconnection. The theme of alienation extends to Orestes as well. He is separated from his family in early childhood and haunted by his impending task of avenging his father.

Appearance vs. Reality

Throughout the play, there is a recurrent theme of appearance versus reality. Characters often disguise their true intentions. The nature of truth is often called into question. This theme is evident in the plotting and deception that takes place as Electra and Orestes plan their revenge. The difference between outward appearances and inner realities highlights the play's exploration of truth, deception, and the complexities of human behavior.

Euripides's "Electra" is a multifaceted tragedy that explores themes of revenge, justice, family relations, suffering and endurance, gender roles, fate and divine influence, ethical ambiguity, isolation, and the nature of truth. Through its complex characters and intricate plot, the play compels the audience to think about these enduring human concerns.

2.11 Euripides's Electra: Symbols and Motifs.

Euripides in his play "Electra" employs a variety of symbols and motifs to enhance its themes and enrich the audience's understanding of the characters. The key symbols and motifs in the play are discussed below.

1. Symbols

Electra's Robe and shabby appearance

Electra's shabby appearance and her soiled and tattered clothing symbolizes her suffering, degradation, and the loss of her former royal status. Her disheveled appearance is a visual representation of her inner turmoil. It also reveals her unwavering mourning for her father and her determination to avenge his death.

The Lock of Hair

The lock of hair that Orestes leaves at Agamemnon's grave is a symbol of family ties and recognition. When Electra finds the lock, she suspects it belongs to Orestes. It indicates their shared lineage and the bond between brother and sister. It also foretells Orestes' return and the imminent act of vengeance.

Agamemnon's Grave

The grave of Agamemnon is a significant symbol in the play. It represents the past wrongs that drive the plot. It also serves as a constant reminder of the injustice and the duty Electra and Orestes feel to avenge their father's murder. The grave is also a place of supplication and connection to the divine. Electra and Orestes seek guidance and support from their deceased father and the gods at the grave.

The palace of Clytemnestra

The palace where Clytemnestra and Aegisthus live symbolizes corruption and betrayal. It is in stark contrast to the humble dwelling place of Electra. It also highlights the moral and ethical decay that has taken root since Agamemnon's murder. The palace is also the setting for the climactic act of revenge, symbolizing the culmination of Electra and Orestes' quest for justice.

2. Motifs

Lamentation and Mourning

Lamentation and mourning are pervasive motifs throughout the play. Electra's incessant mourning for her father symbolizes her unwavering commitment to his memory and her search for justice. This motif also reflects the broader themes of suffering and loss, highlighting the personal and familial grief experienced by the characters.

Deception and Disguise

Deception and disguise play a significant role in the play. Orestes disguises his identity to enter the palace and carry out the revenge. This motif highlights the theme of appearance versus reality, revealing the treachery of characters and the complexity of human intentions. It also underscores the strategic and cunning aspects of plan of Electra and Orestes.

The vicious Cycle of Violence

The cycle of violence is a recurring motif in the play. It reflects the themes of revenge and justice. The murder of Agamemnon sets off a chain reaction of violent acts. Ultimately it culminates in the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. This motif demonstrates the destructive nature of vengeance and raises questions about the perpetuation of violence in societies.

Animal Imagery

Animal imagery is used throughout the play to express various character traits and themes. For example, Electra is often compared to a lioness, highlighting her fierce determination and protective instincts. Clytemnestra is likened to a snake, symbolizing treachery and danger. These comparisons with animals enhance the characterization and thematic depth of the play.

Blood and Sacrifice

The motifs of sacrifice and blood are important to the play's exploration of justice and retribution. The murder of Agamemnon is portrayed as a sacrificial act. The subsequent killings of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are portrayed as acts of atonement. Blood imagery is prevalent throughout the play, symbolizing both the physical reality of violence and the metaphysical concept of guilt and purification.

Light and Darkness

Light and darkness motifs are used to illustrate the moral and emotional states of the characters. Darkness generally represents ignorance, evil, and despair. Light symbolizes knowledge, purity, and hope. The interplay of light and darkness in the play reveals the characters' internal struggles and the broader themes of truth and justice.

The use of symbols and motifs in Euripides's "Electra" helps to deepen the audience's engagement with the play's themes and characters. Through symbols like Electra's robe, Agamemnon's grave, the lock of hair, as well as motifs like lamentation, deception, and the cycle of violence, Euripides enriches the plot of Electra and provides a nuanced exploration of human experience and ethical dilemmas. All these elements work together to create a richly textured and thematically resonant tragedy.

2.12 Euripides's Electra: Structure

Euripides's play "Electra" follows the traditional structure of a Greek tragedy. But unique approach of Euripides adds complexity to this framework. The structure can be analyzed into several key components: prologue, parodos, episodes, stasimon, and exodus. A detailed examination of each part of the play is discussed below.

Prologue

The prologue to Electra serves as the introductory section of the play. The prologue sets the stage for the action and provides background information essential for the audience to understand the context. The prologue generally involves a dialogue between characters or a monologue.

The prologue to Electra features a peasant, who is Electra's husband, discussing the current state of affairs. He tells about Electra's degraded position and her enduring grief for her father, Agamemnon. This introductory monologue gives the audience insight into Electra's plight and the setting in which the action of the play unfolds. It establishes the main conflict and introduces the central characters. It also sets the tone for the ensuing drama.

Parodos

The parodos is the entry song of the chorus in Greek tragedy. It plays a crucial role in providing commentary and reacting to the events of the play.

The role of Chorus:

In "Electra," the chorus consists of women from Mycenae. They enter and sing about the past events. They are mourning the death of Agamemnon and expressing their sympathy for Electra. The parodos helps to build the emotional atmosphere. It connects the audience with the moral and emotional world of the characters.

Episodes

The episodes are the main action scenes in which the plot unfolds through dialogues and interactions between characters. Euripides's play "Electra" is divided into several episodes that advance the story, including: The arrival of Orestes and his friend Pylades, who come in disguise. The reunion of Electra and Orestes. They recognize each other and plot their revenge. Encounters with other characters, such as the old servant who helped Orestes escape as a child. The confrontation with Clytemnestra and the eventual murder of both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. These scenes are crucial for character development and for moving the plot towards its climax.

Stasimon

The stasimon in Greek drama refers to the choral odes sung between episodes. These odes reflect on the events that have occurred and provide philosophical or thematic commentary. In "Electra," the chorus sings about various themes, such as the nature of justice, the consequences of revenge, and the suffering of Electra. The stasimon give the audience a moment to reflect on the dramatic action. They also offer insights and enhancing the emotional impact of the episodes.

Exodus

The exodus is the final section of the play, following the last stasimon, where the resolution of the plot occurs, and the story concludes. In "Electra," the exodus involves the aftermath of the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Orestes and Electra face the consequences of their actions. Orestes is tormented by the Furies, indicating the psychological and moral results of matricide. The play ends on a note of ambiguity. While Electra and Orestes have avenged their father, the cost of their revenge and the cycle of violence remain troubling. The moral and ethical questions posed by their revenge remain unanswered. They provide a sombre and reflective conclusion.

Structural Techniques and Innovations

Euripides's play "Electra" is known for its realistic portrayal of characters and situations. Unlike the stylized and heroic depictions in other tragedies, Euripides emphasizes on the human and emotional aspects of the plot. The dialogue and interactions are more naturalistic. The characters' psychological complexities are

explored in depth. Euripides delves into the inner lives of characters. The structure of the play allows for moments of introspection and emotional expression. It provides a nuanced portrayal of their motivations and struggles. This psychological depth adds layers to the narrative. It also engages the audience on a more intimate level.

The chorus in Greek tragedy generally serves as a commentator on the action. In "Electra," the chorus also acts as a sympathetic observer of Electra's suffering. Their odes not only reflect on the themes but also emphasize the social impact of the events. They connect the personal tragedy of Electra and Orestes to the broader social and moral order.

The structure of Euripides's "Electra" follows the traditional rules of Greek tragedy but it is distinguished by Euripides's innovative approaches. The prologue sets the stage for a personal and psychological exploration of revenge and justice. The episodes drive forward the plot with intense character interactions and dramatic developments. The stasimon provides thematic reflections that enrich the play. The exodus concludes the story with an emotional and ambiguous resolution, leaving the audience to contemplate the moral complexities of the characters' actions. Through its structure, Euripides offers a powerful and enduring examination of human suffering, familial bonds, and the consequences of vengeance.

2.13 Check your progress 2.

Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence.

1. Which kingdom did Agamemnon rule?
2. Who was the leader of the Greek expedition against city of Troy?
3. Why did Agamemnon sacrifice Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis?
4. Who killed Agamemnon?
5. Who ruled city of Mycenae in absence of Agamemnon?
6. What is the term for final section of the Greek tragedy?
7. Who is the friend of Orestes?
8. Who speaks the prologue in Euripides's Electra?
9. Who kills Aegisthus?
10. Who kills Clytemnestra?

2.14 Answers to check your progress.

Answers to check your progress 1.

1. Iliad and Odyssey
2. Iliad
3. Odyssey
4. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides
5. Aeschylus
6. Sophocles
7. Euripides
8. Aristophanes
9. Medea, Electra and Trojan Women.
10. Plutarch

Answers to check your progress 2.

1. Mycenae.
2. Agamemnon
3. To ensure a safe journey to Troy for his ships.
4. Clytemnestra and Agisthus
5. Agisthus
6. Exodus
7. Pylades
8. Electra's husband
9. Orestes
10. Orestes and Electra

2.15 Questions for exercise

Answer the following questions in about 600 words.

1. Explain the legendary background of Electra in Greek mythology.
2. Discuss the setting of play Electra by Euripides.
3. Discuss the role of chorus in Euripides's Electra.
4. Discuss the plot structure of play Electra.
5. Discuss some characteristics of Greek Tragedy.
6. Discuss characteristics of Greek Comedy.
7. Discuss important symbols in Euripides's Electra.
8. How does divine intervention influence the plot of Euripides's Electra?
9. Discuss the themes of revenge and justice in the play Electra.
10. Explain the ethical dilemma faced by Orestes and Electra.
11. Discuss the ending of the play Electra.

Write short notes on the following topics in about 200 words.

1. The significance of Homer's "Iliad" and "Odyssey" in Greek literature.
2. Contribution of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides to the development of Greek drama.
3. Significance of Plato and Aristotle in Greek literature.
4. The origin of Greek drama.
5. Significance of Prologue in Greek drama.
6. Common themes in Greek tragedy.
7. The influence of Greek tragedy on Western culture and literature.
8. Deus Ex Machina in Greek drama.
9. Pylades.
10. Gender Roles and Power Dynamics in Euripides's Electra.

2.16 Books for further reading.

Boulton, Marjorie. *The Anatomy of Drama*. Ludhiana: Kalyani Publishers, 1979.

Fyfe, Hamilton W., *Aristotle's Art of Poetry: A Greek View of Poetry and Drama*. London, OUP, 1957.

Kitto, H.D. *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study*. London: University Paperbacks, 1950.

Rai, R.N. *Theory of Drama*. Classical Publication, Delhi. 1990.



Unit-3
General Topic: Elizabethan Theatre
Text: William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

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3.6 Summary

3.7 Check your progress

3.8 Answers to check your progress

3.9 Exercises

3.10 References

3.11 Books for Further Study

3.0 Objectives:

After studying this unit, you will be able to understand:

1. The nature and characteristics of the Elizabethan Theatre
2. The life and literary contribution of Shakespeare
3. The plot, structure, themes, characters in the play *Hamlet*
4. The way Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been interpreted by critics from 18th Century to the 20th century including the psychoanalysts and the feminists

3.1 Introduction:

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, usually referred to in short as *Hamlet*, has remained a very significant text in English literature. It has influenced many creative writers and continues to do so even now. It has been widely translated into many languages of the world and inspired people to rewrite and revisit it in their own ways because of which we have numerous novels, films, and dramas that are in some way related to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In addition, *Hamlet* has inspired thousands of critical works and studies because of which there is a huge body of critical scholarship that has accumulated over all these centuries.

The present Unit seeks to give you an understanding of the play and help you use different lenses to study the play. However, it is also essential to first know some key details such as the social and political conditions of the time in which the play was written, the kind of plays and theatre that existed at that time, Shakespeare's

audience and his contemporaries, the sources believed to have been used by Shakespeare to write the play, the different versions of the text and the most authentic and reliable version of these, and so on. Hence, we shall look at the Elizabethan theatre, Shakespeare's life and times and then turn to the text and its different aspects and ways of interpretation.

3.2 General Topic: Elizabethan Theatre

Elizabethan theatre refers to the theatre of England between 1558 and 1642. Elizabeth I was a powerful ruler. She made England a Protestant nation again. She also dealt with internal disputes successfully to unify the nation. Elizabeth I supported the arts and theatre. After her death in 1603, James I ruled till 1625 and this period is called Jacobean period. King James I was himself a scholar and a writer. Theatre and other arts kept on flourishing into the Jacobean Age. The literature of this period is darker and more pessimistic, however. It includes Shakespeare's tragedies, tragi-comedies, and sonnets; Webster's tragedies; Jonson's dramas and verse. Many negative things happened together as the Jacobean Age came to an end - an economic depression, the death of King James I, and the outbreak of the bubonic plague in London that killed over 30,000 people in 1625.

3.2.1 English Renaissance Theatre

Elizabethan theatre is also called English Renaissance theatre and is often called the golden period of English drama. Technically, the period from 1558 to 1603 can be referred to as 'Elizabethan' as this is the period of Queen Elizabeth's reign. When we use the term English Renaissance theatre, we are referring to the period between 1562 and 1642. This is because in 1562 the play *Gorboduc*, which was the first English play using blank verse, was performed. In 1642 and the ban on theatrical plays enacted by the English Parliament marking a very significant change and an end of an era. English Renaissance theatre actually incorporates Elizabethan theatre (1562 to 1603), Jacobean theatre (1603 to 1625), and Caroline theatre (1625 to 1642).

The Elizabethan drama can be divided into three phases- Pre-Elizabethan Drama, The Elizabethan Drama and The Post Elizabethan Drama. The first phase deals with the contributions of Shakespeare's predecessors who prepared the ground for the wonderful flowering of the English theatre in the next phase. In the second

phase we have Shakespeare's plays. The plays of Shakespeare's successors mark the third phase.

Elizabethan play underwent major changes and development as the focus shifted from religious morality plays to secular themes. Elizabethan plays were most often based on previous sources such as Greek tragedy, Seneca's plays, Attic drama, English miracle plays, morality plays, and interludes. Elizabethan tragedy focused on heroic themes. It usually had a great personality as the central figure who is destroyed by his own passion and ambition. The comedies satirized the dandies and gallants of society. Shakespearean tragedies often depicted the tragic flaw of the protagonist leading to their downfall, while comedies explored love, identity, and social order. The plays dealt with human nature, emotions, societal issues and provide us glimpses of the political and social life of the time. Other common themes were revenge, fate, ambition, and power. The plots were intricate and often mixed tragedy and comedy. They had complex characters and dialogue was in verse, especially, iambic pentameter. The drama was not expected to create an illusion of reality and so, realistic sets were not used. Plays contained little to no scenery as the scenery was described by the actors or indicated by costume through the course of the play. Use of a few objects was enough to suggest the setting, for example, a few utensils hinted a kitchen. The words from the drama provided the other details. Costumes had much importance as they used to make up for the lack of scenery, set, and props on stage. They provided the main visual appeal on stage and so had to be bright and visually captivating. Colours also helped the audience to understand the social hierarchy. Even if there were women in the audience, women didn't act. The female roles were given to young male actors in the company. Most actors "doubled", that is played more than one role in a play.

During this period, various genres were popular:

1. 'History play' (for example, Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Henry V*, Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, George Peele's *Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First*),
2. 'tragedy' (Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*),
3. revenge tragedy (Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*),

4. comedies - (Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*, *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*),
5. the city comedy (Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*) which deals satirically with life in London,
6. pastoral (Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess*),
7. the morality play (Fletcher's *Four Plays in One*),
8. masques,
9. plays on biblical themes (Peele's *David and Bethsabe*),
10. the tragicomedy (Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess*, Philip Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, *The City Madam*).

The audience came from all strata of the society – royalty, nobles, powerful people, merchants, educated people like lawyers and scholars as well as workers, apprentices, common men and women, pickpockets, prostitutes etc. There were elements in the play that would be liked by people from each of these strata such as clowns making terrible puns and wisecracks, supernatural elements, ghosts and witches, opportunities for the actors to dance and sing the popular songs of the time, fencing matches, fight scenes, emotional speeches and wonderful verse. These plays had lively dialogue, chiming wordplay, rhythmic lines, rhyming couplets. This made it easier for the actors as well as the spectators to remember the lines. Elizabethan Theatre marked a significant turning point in English literature and theatre. It focused on Humanism, on creating complex characters, and on using poetic language. An impact of this theatre can be seen even today in contemporary theatre. However, there were people, like the Puritans (an English fundamentalist movement), who felt drama had a bad impact on the society. They warned the people of the evil and immoral influence of the theatre. They wrote pamphlets and treatises to oppose theatre and finally succeeded in shutting the theatres down in 1642.

3.2.2 Playhouse structure:

As theatre flourished in the Elizabethan times, many public theatres were built on the outskirts of London. Theatre was popular amongst people of all walks of life. Performances took place in open-air amphitheatres which were round or octagonal. The stage was surrounded on three sides by "pits," or "yards," in which the audience

stood. For nobles and more well-to-do people, sitting arrangements were available in three tiers of galleries that skirted the pit. These multi-storied galleries offered varied perspectives. In the Globe Theatre, nobles could opt to sit directly by the side on the stage. Many of Shakespeare's plays were performed in the 'Globe Theatre' which was the most famous of these theatres. The stage jutted into the open centre. Thus, the stage was a platform surrounded on three sides by the audience. The rear side was only for the actors for their entrances and exits as well as for the musicians to sit. The upper level behind the stage could be used as a balcony in the play as it is done in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

When the 'Blackfriars Theatre' opened in 1599, a new structure of the playhouse was introduced – a small, roofed or enclosed theatre – that is more similar to the modern theatre than the earlier theatres. By 1630s, there were six theatres in London —three large open-air public theatres (the 'Globe', the 'Fortune', and the 'Red Bull') and three smaller enclosed private theatres (the 'Blackfriars', the 'Cockpit', and the 'Salisbury Court'). In the public theatres, the plays were performed in the afternoon in natural light but artificial lighting was used when the sunlight started to fade in the course of a play. The enclosed private theatres used artificial lighting throughout the performance.

3.2.3 Important playwrights of the Elizabethan Era:

Some of the most important British playwrights belong to the Elizabethan era. Research indicates that about 3,000 plays were written for the Elizabethan stage, of which about 543 survive. These plays were written by mostly common people. A few of these playwrights were men educated at either Oxford or Cambridge. Many writers collaborated with other writers to form teams of two, three, four, and even five to write plays. The majority of plays written in this era were collaborations. Writers like Jonson and Shakespeare, who mostly worked alone, were the exceptions to the rule. The most renowned playwright of this era was, undoubtedly, William Shakespeare. His works, such as '*Hamlet*', '*Macbeth*', '*King Lear*', '*Romeo and Juliet*', and '*A Midsummer Night's Dream*' continue to be performed and appreciated for their themes and characterization. Let's look at some other significant writers of the time.

1. George Chapman (1559-1634)

Chapman attended Oxford in 1574. Chapman's earliest drama, *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, was produced in 1596, and Chapman soon came to be seen as talented playwright. Between 1596 and 1613, he wrote about twenty-one plays. He also devoted many years to translate the poetry of Homer. Chapman most famous tragedies are *Bussy D'Ambois* (1604) and two plays on Byron (1608).

2. Thomas Dekker (c. 1572–1632)

Dekker wrote eight plays for the Lord Admiral's Men and collaborated on twenty-four others between 1598 and 1600. His most famous play was *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, which is appreciated for its realistic depiction of the 17th Century everyday life and the use of romantic fantasy in his depiction of characters. The play was extremely popular with London audiences. Dekker also wrote pamphlets and is remembered for 'The Seven Deadly Sins of London' (1606) and 'The Gull's Hornbook' (1609).

3. Thomas Heywood (c. 1573–1641)

Thomas Heywood is believed to have studied at Cambridge University. However, he did not complete his degree. His most famous play is *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and is known for his depiction of contemporary English life.

4. Ben Jonson (1572–1637)

Ben Jonson's first play *The Isle of Dogs* was co-written with Thomas Nashe. This play landed him in jail. His first successful play was *Every Man in His Humour*, which inaugurated a new comic form that came to be known as "the comedy of humours". Jonson became a favourite of King James I and wrote over thirty masques for court performance. In 1616, King James I made him poet laureate, the official poet of the Court. His satirical comedies *Volpone, or The Fox*, *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair* were also popular.

5. Thomas Kyd (1558–1594)

Kyd's greatest theatrical success was *The Spanish Tragedy*, which established a new genre of Elizabethan Drama known as "blood tragedy" or "revenge tragedy". The story – a father's desire to avenge his son's death – was not new however, the style of telling it was different. Kyd moved the violence to the stage instead of reporting it indirectly. The play uses skilful rhetoric to sustain the tension.

6. John Lyly (c. 1553–1606)

John Lyly attended Magdalen College at Oxford University. He was an immediate success with the publication of a novel in two parts, *Euphanes, or the Anatomy of Wit* and *Euphanes and His England*. Through these works Lyly introduced the euphemism, or indirect expression, to the English language. Lyly wrote prose comedies which were also very popular. These plays included *Campaspe*, *Endymion*, *the Man in the Moon* and *Midas*. They came to be considered the first prose comedies. *The Woman in the Moon* is his only play in verse.

7. Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593)

Marlowe attended Cambridge University, where he was acknowledged as a brilliant student. During his stay at Cambridge, he worked for Queen Elizabeth's secret service and was involved in many secret missions. On completing his education, he went to London and became an actor and dramatist. He got success immediately with the two parts of *Tamburlaine the Great*. The play was highly imitated which indicates his huge popularity. He was appreciated for the use of blank verse, and this became the standard for the era. His plays featured overreaching protagonists. *The Jew of Malta* was another play that was also very successful. Marlowe lived a reckless life and had several court related problems. Marlowe's life ended at the age of twenty-nine when he was stabbed in the head. His death was earlier considered to have happened in a violent bar-room fight, but there are conjectures that it might have been related to his secret espionage work too.

Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is based upon the career of the Mongolian conqueror Timur the Lame. Even if the play was much appreciated for its story by the Elizabethan audience, the real strength of the play was its eloquent and sophisticated speech which contrasts with the halting and didactic speech used in the previous drama. Marlowe's language and style had high impact on the later Elizabethan Drama.

The Jew of Malta, is a dark, satirical comedy. The play recounts how Barabas, a rich Jew, is deprived of his wealth by Farnese, the Christian governor of Malta to recover a long-overdue tribute money. Barabas is given the choice of becoming a Christian and retaining half his wealth or remaining a Jew and losing it all. Barabas chooses the latter. Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is influenced by this play.

8. William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564. He is often called the "Bard of Avon" or "the Bard". His surviving works, including collaborations, consist of some 39 plays. His plays have been translated into every major language of the world and are performed more often than those of any other playwright. Shakespeare's talent as a playwright was widely recognized in his lifetime too. He was one of the wealthiest dramatists of his day and lived a comfortable life. He retired to Stratford in 1610 and died on April 23, 1616.

Shakespeare's early plays were primarily comedies and histories and are considered as some of the best examples of these genres. Later he wrote mainly tragedies until 1608 including *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. In the last phase of his life, he wrote romances or tragicomedies such as *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.

9. John Webster (c. 1580–c. 1634)

Webster is best remembered for his two tragedies, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. Both are based on sources from Italian stories. Webster's work is Gothic in nature and comes almost hundred years before the Gothic movement started. Scholars feel that *The Duchess of Malfi* was an unusually dark and intellectual piece for Elizabethan audiences. In contemporary times Webster's tragedies appear quite modern and remain popular with actors and audiences.

3.2.4 Important Themes in Elizabethan Drama

1. Revenge

Revenge is one of the most prevalent themes in Elizabethan drama. Often a ghost recounts the story of his murder to the central character who becomes the avenger. In Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, the Ghost of Don Andrea even sits onstage to watch his enemies being punished. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet vows to avenge his father's murder by killing his uncle who is the murderer.

2. Humours

In Elizabethan era, a proper balance of the four bodily humours—blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile – was considered essential for proper physical and mental health. A particular emotion or mood was associated with each, and it was

believed that if a person had too much of one humour in his body, that particular emotion would be emphasized. Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, a new kind of comedy that revolved around the interplay of the four humours came into being. It came to be called the "comedy of humours."

3. The Supernatural

In Elizabethan times, belief in the supernatural was prevalent. Supernatural elements such as fairies, ghosts, sprites, and witches are found in many Elizabethan plays and they play important part in the action. In many of the tragedies, it is the Ghosts that started the revenge cycle. Even in comedies such Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, sprites and fairies have important parts to play.

4. Anti-Semitism

Hatred of Jews prevailed in Elizabethan society and is evident in the anti-Semitic plays of the time such as Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*, is presented a cruel, egotistic, and greedy man and Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* as a greedy, vindictive man. Shakespeare tempers his character, however, with a bit more humanity than is found in Barabas. These plays became even more popular when Queen Elizabeth's Jewish doctor was executed on the charge of trying to poison her.

5. Disguise

Disguise is a frequently used device in Elizabethan plays to gain information. In Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Rosalind disguises as a boy and discovers that Orlando really loves her. Disguising female characters in male garb must have been convenient for men and boys who were playing the female roles.

3.2.5 Some Dramatic Conventions and Styles Used in Elizabethan Drama:

1. Scenery and Settings

Most Elizabethan plays were performed on a bare stage with no scenery and no sets. The plays used the opening lines of scenes to establish place and time. The opening line of Act IV, Scene I of Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is "Yonder's the shop, and there my fair love sits." Sometimes placards were used to tell the audience in what town or village the action was taking place.

2. Blank Verse and Iambic Pentameter

Iambic pentameter is relatively close to spoken English. Each line of Iambic pentameter consists of five two-syllable units/feet – an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Elizabethan playwrights mainly used Blank verse which is unrhymed iambic pentameter with prose and other forms of poetry. Serious characters of high stature and nobility often speak in blank verse, especially when discussing important issues, while comic and lower-class characters may not use blank verse.

4. Wordplay

Elizabethans were fond of wordplay, and they especially appreciated puns. Shakespeare was very accomplished in the use of puns and wordplay. In *Romeo and Juliet*, as Mercutio lies dying from a sword wound, he says to his friend, Romeo, "Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man."

5. Soliloquy

A soliloquy is a speech that reveals the thoughts of a character. It is as if the character is thinking aloud. The soliloquy helps the audience understand what is going on in a character's mind. The most famous soliloquy so far is the "To be or not to be" speech from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. Here Hamlet deliberates upon whether to kill himself and considers the consequences of living and dying.

6. Asides

Asides are brief remarks spoken secretly to another character or straight to the audience. They are not heard or noticed by the rest of the characters onstage. This technique is used often by Elizabethan dramatists as a device to let the audience know the character's thoughts.

7. Boys' Companies

Boys' companies were performing troupes that were made up entirely of young boys. In the 16th Century, the boys' companies were very popular but following many scandals, their popularity started waning by the end of the century. The female roles in the plays were performed by adolescent boys in the troupes.

8. Violence

In most Elizabethan plays, the violent acts occur offstage following the Greek tradition. These acts are then reported onstage by one character to other characters, and thus the audience come to know about these acts. Wars, battles and horrific actions were possible to be included into the play due to this device of reporting. The audience could use their imagination to visualize the bloodshed. This tradition was changed by the 'revenge tragedy', by showing acts of violence onstage, in full view of the audience. Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Webster's *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, have graphic violence onstage.

3.2.6 Check your progress

Q1. Answer the following questions in one word/phrase or sentence each.

1. Which play used the blank verse in English for the first time?
2. When was the ban on theatrical plays enacted by the English Parliament?
3. Which play started a new comic form that came to be known as "the comedy of humours"?
4. What are brief remarks spoken secretly to another character or straight to the audience but not supposedly noticed by the other characters called?
5. State if the following statement is true or false –
"An Iambic pentametric line consists of five feet with three syllables in each foot."

Q2. Match the items in the Column A with the right options given in the Column B.

A	B
1. Caroline theatre	a. 1603 to 1625
2. Jacobean theatre	b. 1562 to 1603
3. Elizabethan theatre	c. 1625 to 1642
4. Chapman	d. open-air public theatre
5 The Globe	e. translated the poetry of Homer
6. The 'Blackfriars'	f. introduced the euphemism to the English language
7. Lyly	g. enclosed private theatres
8. Webster	h. Rosalind

9. <i>As You Like It</i>	i. realistic depiction of the 17 th Century everyday life
10. <i>The Shoemaker's Holiday</i>	j. work is Gothic in nature

3.2.7 Answers to check your progress

- Q1. 1. *Gorboduc* 2. In 1642 3. *Every Man in His Humour*
 4. Asides 5. False
- Q2. 1 – c 2 – a 3 – b 4 – e 5 - d
 6 – g 7 – f 8 – j 9 – h 10- i

3.3 Shakespeare's Life and Times

William Shakespeare was born in a town on the Avon River called Stratford in 1564. His family seems to have been a prosperous family in his childhood and most probably attended the King's New School. Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway in 1582, and they had three children: Susanna and twins Hamnet and Judith. Shortly after the birth of his twins, Shakespeare moved to London where he began his career in theatre. In London, Shakespeare became a managing partner in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a popular acting company. Shakespeare retired to Stratford around 1613, where he lived until his death in 1616.

Shakespeare is also referred to as the Bard. His plays were performed at the Globe Theatre and at other places. His plays were liked by the common people and the courtly people alike. His works were also printed and sold as popular literature at the time.

Shakespeare lived during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. This was a time when England went through many cultural and social changes which had a significant influence on Shakespeare's works. This period was the time of Renaissance. It saw the spread of humanism, the invention of the printing press, and the Reformation.

3.4 William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, is Shakespeare's longest play and is one of the most influential plays in English. The play is about Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. The ghost of the King of Denmark tells his son Hamlet to avenge his

murder by killing the new king, Claudius, who is Hamlet's uncle. Hamlet, however, thinks he needs evidence before killing his uncle. To gather evidence, he pretends to be mentally ill and keeps on investigating. Engrossed in thinking about life and death, he kills Polonius by mistake. Polonius's daughter Ophelia loses sanity and gets drowned. Claudius is afraid that Hamlet might kill him and plots to have him killed. Laertes, the son of Polonius, to avenge the deaths of his father and sister, fights with Hamlet. The play ends with a duel, during which the King, Queen, Laertes and Hamlet himself are all killed.

3.4.1 Date of Composition, Sources and Texts of *Hamlet*

Hamlet is probably written between 1599 and 1601. An entry in The Stationers' Register which recorded works authorized for publication mentions a book called the Revenge of Hamlet Prince of Denmark acted by Lord Chamberlin's men in July 1602. This has led by some Shakespearean scholars to accept the year 1602 as the date of composition. However, many others are of the opinion that it had been composed earlier. One of Shakespeare's contemporaries - Gabriel Harvey - in a note which he wrote in his copy of Speght's Chaucer referred to Hamlet in 1598. And so, some scholars think the play might have been written in 1598. However, *Hamlet* is not mentioned in the plays listed by Francis Meres in *Palladis Tamia*, which also was published in 1598, and so generally, late 1600 or early 1601 is accepted by most of the Shakespearean scholars as the date of publication.

It is essential to understand the sources available to Shakespeare when he started to write this play. There is a story of 'Amleth' in Scandinavian legend in Old Norse which means 'not sane'. In fact, many cultures have 'hero-as-fool' stories. The Scandinavian tale was written down by Saxo Grammaticus' *Historia Danica* (c. 1200). Shakespeare may have used this for his writing. However, similar stories where the hero pretends to be insane are also found in the Icelandic Saga of Hrolf Kraki and the Roman legend of Lucius Junius Brutus. Saxo's story was translated into French in 1570 by François de Belleforest in his *Histoires Tragiques*. Belleforest added much to Saxo's text - adultery, fratricide, revenge, and the hero's melancholy which are present in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* too. However, there are many big differences too. There was also an earlier Hamlet play written and performed in England before Shakespeare's, and this is referred to as the 'Ur-Hamlet'. There is no surviving manuscript or print of it, however. The Ur-Hamlet dates before 1589, for in that year

Thomas Nashe made a reference to it. One of the speculations made is that this earlier Hamlet was written by Thomas Kyd. The revenge tragedy popularised by Kyd had perfected plot construction, addressing motivation and suspense before bringing in the catastrophe. However, Shakespeare's Hamlet is unique in providing intellectual probing, the complexity of character portrayal, and far better poetry. Transcending the melodramatic, Shakespeare added a new significance and interest while retaining the thrill of the action.

Three early editions of the *Hamlet* text – First Quarto (Q1), Second Quarto (Q2) and First Folio. In addition, there are Q3, Q4 and Q5 which are regarded as reprints of Q2 with some alterations. Q1 and Q2 have some parts missing. Each version is different, making attempts to establish a single "authentic" text problematic. Editors of Shakespeare's works, like Nicholas Rowe (1709) and Lewis Theobald (1733), combined material from Q2 and F1 in an effort to create one "inclusive" text. These attempts aim to bring back an imagined "ideal" of Shakespeare's original. Theobald's version remained standard for a long time. However, contemporary Shakespeare scholars disregard this approach. Hattaway (1987) feels having an authentic Hamlet is "an unrealisable ideal" and that "there are texts of this play but no text".

3.4.2 *Hamlet*: Characters in the Play

Hamlet: The Prince of Denmark, and the protagonist of the play. Hamlet is the son of the late King Hamlet and Queen Gertrude, and nephew to the current King, Claudius. Hamlet is a contemplative and philosophical character, often brooding on questions of life, death, and morality. His quest for revenge against his uncle for his father's murder forms the main plot of the play.

King Claudius: The antagonist of the play, Claudius is Hamlet's uncle and the current King of Denmark. He ascended to the throne by murdering his brother, King Hamlet, and marrying his brother's widow, Queen Gertrude. Claudius is a cunning and manipulative character, adept at deception and political manoeuvring.

Queen Gertrude: The Queen of Denmark and Hamlet's mother. Gertrude is a somewhat ambiguous character, and her motivations and feelings are a subject of much debate. She is seen as loving towards Hamlet, but her decision to marry Claudius so soon after King Hamlet's death is a source of conflict.

Ophelia: The daughter of Polonius, and Hamlet's love interest. Ophelia is a sweet and innocent character who is obedient to her father and brother. Her relationship with Hamlet and her father's death drives her to madness and eventually to her death.

Polonius: The Lord Chamberlain of Claudius's court, and the father of Ophelia and Laertes. Polonius is a pompous and verbose character, known for his long-winded speeches. He is killed by Hamlet mistaking him to be Claudius. This sets off a chain of tragic events.

Laertes: The son of Polonius, and brother to Ophelia. Laertes is a passionate and impulsive character, contrasting with the more introspective Hamlet. After his father's death and sister's madness, he seeks revenge against Hamlet.

Ghost of King Hamlet: The ghost of Hamlet's father who reveals to Hamlet that he was murdered by Claudius, and demands that Hamlet avenge his death. The ghost serves as a catalyst for the action in the play.

Horatio: Hamlet's loyal friend from university. Horatio is a contrast to Hamlet in his pragmatism and level-headedness. He is the only main character to survive the play, and he promises to tell Hamlet's story. He is a contrast to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern too who do not seem to be loyal to their friend Hamlet.

3.4.3 *Hamlet: The Plot*

Hamlet, prince of Denmark, when in Wittenberg University, Germany, learns that his father, King Hamlet has died. He comes home to Elsinore Castle to see his mother; Queen Gertrude has married his uncle Claudius. Claudius is now the king. Guards inform Hamlet through his friend Horatio that a ghost resembling his father has been seen on the fortifications. Hamlet goes with them to see the ghost, which speaks to him, saying that Claudius has murdered the king by pouring poison in his ear. The ghost wants Hamlet to avenge his father's murder. Hamlet swears to do this, however, of philosophical bend, he is very disturbed and waits for evidence before killing his uncle.

There are three related series of events related to the Danish court that need to be understood. First, the nations of Denmark, Poland and Norway have had some border disputes with each other for some time now. In one of the battles, the former King Hamlet won over Norway. Now Fortinbras, son of the late king of Norway, and

nephew of the present, ailing king, wants Claudius' permission to march his army through Danish territory on the way to fight with Poland. Second, Claudius' chief adviser, the old Polonius, is troubled by the behaviour of his both children – Laertes, his son who is very hot-headed, and his daughter, Ophelia who is getting too attached to Hamlet. He is sending Laertes off to Paris to acquire polish and courtly manners. Both Polonius and Laertes doubt that the heir to the throne would marry someone like Ophelia who is below his royal position and so caution Ophelia to be careful. Third, Claudius and Gertrude are concerned over Hamlet's behaviour. Hamlet has always been moody but since his return he is more distressed. They send for two of his friends from Wittenberg – Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – to try to discover the source of his distress. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern try to cheer Hamlet with news of a traveling company of actors on their way to Elsinore. The news gives Hamlet an idea to determine whether the ghost is really his father's spirit and is telling the truth. Hamlet wants the actors to perform a play about a courtier who poisons a king and seduces the queen. Hamlet hopes that Claudius' reaction to the play will reveal the truth.

In the meantime, Ophelia tells her father about her meeting with Hamlet, who was behaving strangely. Polonius concludes that Hamlet's frustrated love for her has made him go mad. He wants Claudius to know this and so arranges his daughter to confront Hamlet in a corridor while he and the king spy on them. Hamlet comes in, musing on death and whether or not he has the right to take a man's life. When Ophelia interrupts him, he becomes emotionally aggressive. He denies he ever loved Ophelia and urges her to go into a nunnery. Nunnery literally meant a place where nuns lived, and is also a slang word for a brothel. So, "get thee to a nunnery" is ambiguous – is Hamlet urging Ophelia to protect herself by becoming a nun, or is he accusing her of being promiscuous and ordering her to go away from him? Claudius is greatly upset by Hamlet's behaviour as he is afraid that Hamlet has found out the truth about his father's death.

During the performance of the play, Claudius' fear turns into conviction. Hamlet makes double-edged remarks during the pantomime prologue even before the actors speak anything. Claudius, angry and ashamed, leaves and Gertrude is also very angry with her son. Hamlet tells Horatio he is now totally convinced the ghost was telling the truth. Gertrude, asks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to tell Hamlet she wants to see him in private, in her chambers. On the way there Hamlet sees Claudius praying.

This is chance to kill him, but holds back himself, believing that a man killed while praying would go to heaven.

Hamlet is harsh and bitter with his mother, despite having promised himself (and earlier the ghost) to treat her gently. He accuses her of murder and incest – her new husband is her brother-in-law. His attack is so forceful that Polonius, who has hidden behind a tapestry in case Gertrude needs assistance, cries for help. Hamlet thinks it must be Claudius and stabs him. He is disappointed to see he has killed Polonius and not Claudius. Over the dead body, he tries to convince Gertrude to give up her second marriage. He is interrupted by the ghost, who reminds him that he has sworn to kill Claudius and that he will be gentle with his mother. Gertrude can't see the ghost and is all the more convinced that her son has gone insane.

Claudius has worked out a plan in the meantime to send Hamlet with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on a diplomatic mission to England, carrying a sealed letter that asks the English king to arrest the troublesome heir and put him to death. On the way to England on Sea, they pass Fortinbras' army marching to Poland. The sight makes Hamlet reflect on his failure to avenge his father, while Fortinbras is bringing honour to his. As Hamlet soon discovers the treachery in Claudius' letter, he replaces it with one requesting instead the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The ship is attacked by pirates, who take him prisoner but let the others continue. In return for the promise of ransom, Hamlet is released by the pirates on the Danish coast. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern however, sail to England - to certain death.

Meanwhile, Ophelia learns of her father's death and goes insane. Laertes returns from Paris, swearing vengeance on his father's murderer. The sight of his mad sister makes him sad. Claudius convinces him that her madness is all Hamlet's fault. Horatio learns that an unexpected stroke of luck has saved Hamlet's life and the pirates have released him on Danish coast. Claudius on learning of Hamlet's return, persuades Laertes to take his revenge in a formal duelin which Laertes will wound Hamlet with a poisoned sword. Before the duel takes place, Ophelia drowns herself. Hamlet, who did not know of her death, is shocked into anger when he sees Laertes leaping emotionally into the grave. The two have a brawl over her coffin.

Laertes gives a formal challenge to hamlet. Hamlet apologizes to him graciously before the assembled court and then begins the duel. As Laertes and Hamlet are

evenly matched, Claudius is afraid of the outcome. He offers Hamlet a cup of poisoned wine, which, however, Queen Gertrude drinks. Laertes manages to wound Hamlet with the poisoned sword, but in the scuffle that follows they switch weapons and Laertes is wounded with it, too. Due to the poisoned wine, Gertrude collapses, and the court understands what Claudius has been up to. Hamlet at last achieves his revenge by stabbing Claudius with the poisoned weapon. Laertes, dying, confesses and begs Hamlet's forgiveness. Hamlet has just enough strength left to stop Horatio from drinking the remains of the poisoned wine, and dies in his friend's arms, begging him to tell the world the true story. Fortinbras, whom Hamlet names as his successor, arrives in time to claim the throne and lament the horrible events.

Act I

The setting of the opening act of the play is the fortification walls of Elsinore, the Danish royal castle. It is a cold night and the guards - Bernardo and Marcellus - are discussing the sighting of a ghost resembling the late King Hamlet. Hamlet's close friend Horatio arrives and the three see the ghost. They decide to tell Hamlet about it. In the court the next day King Claudius and Queen Gertrude discuss affairs of state with Polonius. Claudius grants permission for Polonius's son Laertes to return to school in France. Claudius also questions Hamlet regarding his continuing to grieve for his father, and prohibits him from returning to his university in Wittenberg. After the court exits, Hamlet expresses his anguish on his father's death and his mother's hasty remarriage. Horatio tells him about the ghost. Hamlet decides to see it himself. In a later scene, Polonius offers advice to Laertes who is leaving for France. His daughter Ophelia admits her interest in Hamlet and her father and brother advise her against seeing him again.

That very night, Hamlet sees his father's ghost. The ghost tells him that he was murdered by Claudius, and he wants Hamlet to avenge his murder by killing Claudius. However, he doesn't want Hamlet to harm Gertrude in any way. When Hamlet agrees to avenge his death, the ghost vanishes. Hamlet tells Horatio of his plan to act insane and his plan to avenge the murder. He makes the guards and Horatio to keep this a secret. However, he remains uncertain of the ghost's reliability.

Act II

According to his plan, Hamlet begins to act insane. He behaves very rudely with Ophelia, while Claudius and Polonius spy on him to find the reason for his sudden

change in behaviour. Claudius summons Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, old friends of Hamlet to find out the reason. Their arrival coincides with a group of travelling actors. During rehearsal, Hamlet and the actors plan to present a play which has a king who has murdered his brother and married his brother's wife.

Act III

At the performance, Hamlet watches Claudius closely to see how he reacts. Claudius is not happy and he walks out in anger. He immediately resolves to send Hamlet away. Hamlet is summoned by his distressed mother, Gertrude, and on the way, he sees Claudius kneeling and attempting to pray. Hamlet rationalizes that to kill the King while praying would send his soul to heaven rather than hell. Hamlet decides to spare his life for the time being.

Polonius hides in Gertrude's room when Hamlet visits her as he feels she needs protection from Hamlet. Hamlet is rude to his mother and scolds her for the marriage. He hears Polonius moving behind the tapestry. Thinking it must be Claudius, he stabs the tapestry and, thus, kills Polonius. The ghost of Hamlet's father reappears and warns his son not to delay revenge and to be kind with his mother.

Act IV

Hamlet is sent to England. During his journey, Hamlet discovers Claudius has a plan to have him killed once he arrives. He returns to Denmark alone, sending his companions Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths in his place.

Rejected by Hamlet, Ophelia is now broken hearted at the loss of her father. She goes mad and drowns herself.

Act V

On the way back, Hamlet meets Horatio and a gravedigger in the graveyard. They talk of the chances of life and death. Ophelia's funeral procession arrives at the graveyard. Hamlet is shocked to learn about Ophelia's death. He confronts Laertes, Ophelia's brother.

A duel is arranged between Hamlet and Laertes. During the match, Claudius conspires with Laertes to kill Hamlet. They plan that Hamlet will die either due to a poisoned sword blade or with poisoned wine. The plans go awry when Gertrude accidentally drinks from the poisoned cup and dies. Then both Laertes and Hamlet are wounded by the poisoned blade, and Laertes dies.

Hamlet, about to die, kills Claudius. Hamlet's friend Horatio is given the task to tell the truth to the new king, Fortinbras, who arrives soon on the scene from the Polish wars.

3.4.4 *Hamlet*: Important Themes

The following key themes stand out in the play:

1. Revenge and Justice:

The theme of avenging Hamlet's father's murder is central to the play. This theme is crucial not just to Hamlet and the main plot but is also important in the subplots involving Laertes and Fortinbras as Laertes and Fortinbras also need to have responsibilities to fulfil towards their murdered fathers. Hamlet is troubled by some ethical and philosophical questions related to sin and revenge - Is revenge a worthy act? Is Claudius truly guilty? If he is, is it his (Hamlet's) responsibility to punish him? There are other questions in the play which reflect an impact of the social and political milieu of the time – whether justice is state's responsibility or individual's responsibility, whether it is really possible to identify the sinner in a deceitful world – and so on.

2. The Play-Life Metaphor:

Theatricality and reflections over play-life link forms a major focus of the play *Hamlet*. There are numerous references to acting, plays within plays, advice to actors (Hamlet's animated discussion with the Player when the group of players arrives, the success of the boy players described by Rosencrantz's in Act 2 scene 2, Hamlet's advice to the Players in Act 3 scene 2, 'The Mousetrap' or the play-within-the-play in Act 3 scene 2). At one place Hamlet reminds the audience that they are watching a play. Infact, there are many words in the play which get theatrical associations: "play," "perform," "act,"

As pointed out by Rose (1971), the play is about limitations imposed on life and the will to have freedom. Mark Rose points out that Hamlet is not just bound by his birth, circumstances, etc., but also bound by the ghost to revenge. He has to play a part – a part of the conventional revenger - and he feels revolted at the prospect of playing a ranting revenger like Laertes. Hamlet is of the opinion that this version is based on bestial unreason and Hamlet reacts against this version by presenting an avenger given to philosophical musings. His avenger reasons and contemplates

questions related to life, death, justice, morality and the act of revenge gets procrastinated. However, by the end of the play he stops struggling to have complete freedom in this regard. He does not insist that he alone must be the artist who shapes his life and then finally says - "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,/ Rough-hew them how we will" (Act 5, scene 1).

The questions that Hamlet keeps on pondering on - Is there a point to life at all? Is there a divine purpose? Do we suffer in this cruel world for a purpose? - are linked to the theme of revenge and theatricality.

2. Mortality:

The inevitability and finality of death is a recurring subject in the play *Hamlet*. Hamlet keeps on reflecting on it throughout the play. He also muses over the nature of life, death, and the afterlife. A famous example of this is the "To be or not to be" soliloquy (Act 3, Scene 1) which is thirty-five lines long:

“To be, or not to be, that is the question,
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make

With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.—Soft you now!
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remember'd.”

The speech has been interpreted to refer to Hamlet's desire to kill Claudius or himself. Is Hamlet expressing his fear that by killing his uncle Claudius, he will be committing a grievous sin or is he considering suicide? The soliloquy has layered meanings bringing out the complexity of Hamlet's mind. It also underscores Shakespeare's extraordinary power of characterization.

3. Madness and Sanity:

Hamlet's sanity is discussed throughout the play. There is another example of madness in the play in Ophelia. He may be pretending to be mad for others, but the fact that he is undergoing an extremely stressful time makes others in the play and the audience worry about his mental state. The reason of his madness has been discussed by Shakespeare scholars and the common audience alike for centuries. Is the reason of his madness his confused feelings about his mother, or is it his reluctance to take revenge, or is he just pretending to be mad?

4. Deception vs Reality:

Many characters in the play hide their reality, their true natures and their intentions behind a deceiving mask. Claudius acting innocent, manipulative behaviour of Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's friendship and Hamlet's insincere madness are all examples of this.

5. Inaction and Action:

The play revolves around Hamlet's brooding behaviour and his inability to take firm decisions and to act swiftly. Shakespeare links this problem of inaction/action with the moral and existential dilemmas faced by that Hamlet. In face of such dilemmas, the concept of action becomes problematic.

6. Corruption:

The theme of moral and political corruption is one of the important central concerns of the play. The moral corruption of Claudius and Gertrude has resulted into a corrupt state of the whole of Denmark. Shakespeare employs poetic imagery revolving around rot, disease, and poison (for example, "something is rotten in Denmark").

3.4.5 *Hamlet*: The Setting, Form and Structure

The play is set in various locations within the royal palace in Elsinore, Denmark - the ramparts of Elsinore castle, the royal court, Gertrude's chamber, and Ophelia's room among others. Some scenes also take place in a graveyard near the castle.

The play is structured as a tragedy, adhering to the classic five-act structure that was common during the Elizabethan era. This structure includes:

1. **Exposition:** The first act introduces the main characters, sets the stage, and presents the initial conflict. The ghost of King Hamlet appears and reveals that he was murdered by Claudius, setting Hamlet on his path of revenge. The exposition reveals the rotten state of Denmark.
2. **Rising Action:** The second and third acts develop the conflict and build tension. Hamlet's feigned madness, his confrontations with Gertrude and Ophelia, and his planning and procrastination of his revenge – in short – Hamlet attempts at finding the truth about the ghost's accusations are part of the rising action.
3. **Climax:** The fourth act features the turning point of the story. Hamlet through his traps discovers that Claudius is guilty is the climax. Hamlet who has been brooding about action so far finally takes action and kills Polonius, leading to a series of tragic events.
4. **Falling Action:** The fifth act sees the consequences of the climax and leads towards the resolution. Ophelia's death, Laertes' vow of revenge, and the

plotting between Claudius and Laertes are a part of the falling action. Here Claudius is taking charge of the events instead of Hamlet.

5. **Denouement:** The final scenes resolve the story and tie up loose ends. In the final scene all the main characters, including Hamlet, die. Everyone achieves vengeance in the denouement. Only Horatio is left alive to tell the story.

Hamlet uses the five-act structure. It also has a main plot (Hamlet discovers Claudius is guilty) and subplot (Hamlet kills Polonius by mistake). Both are both enclosed by the story of Fortinbras who avenges his father.

The Elizabethan theatre used little or no scenery. A sense of the place is created through entries and exits of the characters. Where essential, Shakespeare indicates the time and place of the scene through a line of dialogue. For example, the first scene makes the time clear through the line: "This now struck twelve." Reproducing a historical period with realistic accuracy on the stage became the pattern much later – almost two hundred years later. Even if expensive costumes were used, they belonged to Elizabethan times, not Hamlet's time. In Hamlet, an image of Denmark and Dens is mainly communicated to the audience by the cliché that the Danes were heavy drinkers. Most probably, the audience had little idea of where Denmark was on the world map. As it was just beginning of the drawing of maps, Shakespeare too had the mistaken idea that Denmark shared a common border with Poland. The world within the play was to be created through mind's eye.

3.4.6 *Hamlet*: Style and language

Shakespeare's language and style are characterized by his use of iambic pentameter, a metrical pattern that lends a rhythmic structure to his lines. This pattern consists of five pairs of unstressed and stressed syllables, creating a total of ten syllables per line.

Shakespeare also makes extensive use of soliloquies, a device that allows characters, especially Hamlet, to express their innermost thoughts and conflicts directly to the audience. This provides deep insights into their personalities and motivations. These soliloquies contribute significantly to the development of themes and the exploration of philosophical questions throughout the play.

The language used in the play is not just highly poetic but also helps Shakespeare explore philosophical questions related to life, death, reality and

appearance. It contributes heavily in characterisation too. It is rich and complex, and employs vivid imagery. The abundant metaphors and similes increase the complexity of the layers of meaning of the dialogue.

Shakespeare also injects humour by using puns and wordplay to create double meanings, and highlight the play's themes. For example, when Hamlet's uses the word "suits" it refers both to courtiers and to court lawsuits.

Shakespeare's language in this juxtaposes the appearance with reality which is also a major theme in the play. The deceptive language used by Claudius and Polonius, Hamlet's feigned madness, Ophelia's insanity are remarkable in this sense.

Frank Kermode's important book *Shakespeare's Language* throws light on how Shakespeare's language started to undergo a transformation around 1600.

3.5 Critical Literature:

Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (1603) is one of the most analysed plays in literary history. It has been analysed from political, religious, philosophical, feminist, postcolonial, and many other perspectives. Let us look first at what different scholars from the 18th, 19th and 20th century have said about the play and especially the character of Hamlet and then we shall look in a greater detail at the psychoanalytical and feminist reading of the play *Hamlet*.

3.5.1 Critical Literature from the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries

Samuel Johnson:

"Of the feigned madness of Hamlet there appears no adequate cause, for he does nothing which he might not have done with the reputation of sanity. He plays the madman most, when he treats Ophelia with so much rudeness, which seems to be useless and wanton cruelty." (from the notes to his Edition of Shakespeare's Dramatic Works, 1765)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe:

"Pleasing in figure, polished by nature, courteous from the heart, he was to be the model of youth and the delight of the world.... A beautiful, pure, noble and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which makes a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it can neither bear nor throw off...." (from *Wilhelm Meister*, Book V, 1795)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

“In Hamlet [Shakespeare] seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance--between our attention to the objects of our sense and our meditation on the working of our minds--an equilibrium between the real and the imaginary worlds. In Hamlet this balance is disturbed; his thoughts and the images of his fancy are far more vivid than his actual perceptions....Hence, we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it.... This character Shakespeare places in circumstances under which he is obliged to act on the spur of the moment: Hamlet is brave and careless of death; but he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve.... He mistakes the seeing of his chains for the breaking of them, delays action till action is of no use, and dies the victim of mere circumstance and accident.” (from Notes and Lectures on Shakespeare, 1808)

August Wilhelm Schlegel:

“[Hamlet] is not solely impelled by necessity to artifice and dissimulation; he has a natural inclination to go crooked ways; he is a hypocrite towards himself, his far-fetched scruples are often mere pretexts to cover his lack of resolution... he is too much overwhelmed with his own sorrow to have any compassion to spare for others. (from Lectures on Art and Dramatic Literature, 1809)

William Hazlitt:

“Hamlet is a name: His speeches and sayings but the idle coinage of the poet's brain... [He] is not a character marked by strength of will, or even of passion, but by refinement of thought and sentiment.... He is the prince of philosophical speculators, and because he cannot have his revenge perfect, according to the most refined idea his wish can form, he misses it altogether.... His ruling passion is to think, not to act; and any vague pretence that flatters this propensity instantly diverts him from his previous purposes.... The character of Hamlet is made up of undulating lines; it has the yielding flexibility of 'a wave o' th' sea.’” (from Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, 1812)

Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine:

“[Hamlet] is not master of his acts; occasion dictates them; he cannot plan a murder, but must improvise it. A too-lively imagination exhausts energy by the

accumulation of images, and by the fury of intentness which absorbs it. You recognize in him a poet's soul, made not to act but to dream, which is lost in contemplating the phantoms of its own creation, which sees the imaginary world too clearly to play a part in the real world; an artist whom evil chance has made a prince, whom worse chance has made an avenger of crime, and who, destined by nature for genius, is condemned by fortune to madness and unhappiness.” (from *History of English Literature*, 1866)

A. C. Bradley:

“One would judge that by temperament [Hamlet] was inclined to nervous instability, to rapid and perhaps extreme changes of feeling or mood.... This temperament the Elizabethans would have called melancholic.... Next, we cannot be mistaken in attributing to [him] an exquisite sensibility to which we may give the name "moral."... To the very end, his soul, however sick and tortured it may be, answers instantaneously when good and evil are presented to it, loving the one and hating the other.... Now, in Hamlet's moral sensibility there undoubtedly lay a danger. Any great shock that life might inflict on it would be felt with extreme intensity. Such a shock might even produce tragic results....” (from *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Lecture 3, 1904)

T. S. Eliot:

“So far from being Shakespeare's masterpiece, the play is most certainly an artistic failure. In several ways [it] is puzzling and disquieting as is none of the others.... Probably more people have thought Hamlet a work of art because they found it interesting, than have found it interesting because it is a work of art. It is the "Mona Lisa" of literature.... Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear.... Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action. None of the possible actions can satisfy it; and nothing that Shakespeare can do with the plot can express Hamlet for him.... We must simply admit that here Shakespeare tackled a problem that proved too much for him. Why he attempted it at all is an insoluble puzzle; under compulsion of what

experience he attempted to express the inexpressibly horrible, we cannot ever know.”
(from "Hamlet and His Problems," in *Selected Essays*, 1920)

3.5.2 Psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud, Ernest Jones, Frederic Wertham on *Hamlet*

Both Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones accepted the Romantic assumption that the major interest in the character of Hamlet is the reason for his seeming delay. For Freud, finding this reason became the principle focus of his analysis of *Hamlet*. Freud referred to the matter as the "Problem of Hamlet"; as if it were the only major critical question that mattered. Freud wanted to be remembered as the psychological detective who found the solution to "The Problem."

“The play is built up on Hamlet's hesitations over fulfilling the task of revenge that is assigned to him; but its text offers no reasons or motives for these hesitations and an immense variety of attempts at interpreting them have failed to produce a result. According to the view which was originated by Goethe and is still the prevailing one today, Hamlet represents the type of man whose power of direct action is paralyzed by an excessive development of his intellect.” (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*).

This focus was further sharpened by Ernest Jones:

“The central mystery in it -- namely the meaning of Hamlet's hesitancy in seeking to obtain revenge for his father's murder -- has been called the Sphinx of modern literature.” (Jones, 1976: 22).

According to Freud, Oedipal feelings are fundamental in all men. What distinguishes people is the way these feelings are handled by the individual and the way that handling is represented in everyday life.

“It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that that is so. King Oedipus, who slew his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta, merely shows us the fulfillment of our own childhood wishes...” (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*).

The innate desire to kill one's father and sleep with one's mother runs contrary to the very fabric of our society. For orthodox Freudian thinkers, the difference between this innate urge and the demands of our civilization is mediated by repression and

sublimation. Either the inappropriate urges are repressed (which risks manifesting itself in psychological illness) or they are transformed into some expression which is useful to society.

Of the two - killing one's father and having sex with one's mother - the latter produces the greatest feelings of guilt and repulsion according to the Freudian scholars.

Ernest Jones postulates that Hamlet's sexual repression leads to hostile, misogynist behavior regardless of whether the woman is perceived to be virtuous or lascivious.

"When sexual repression is highly pronounced, as with Hamlet, then both types of women are felt to be hostile: the pure one out of resentment at her repulses, the sensual one out of the temptation she offers to plunge into guiltiness. Misogyny, as in the play, is the inevitable result." (Jones. p. 86).

For the Freudian psychoanalysts, Claudius represents, in flesh and blood, the embodiment of Hamlet's Oedipal urges. He has actually killed Hamlet's father and is sleeping with his mother.

"Hamlet's second guilty wish had thus also been realized by his uncle, namely to procure the fulfillment of the first - the possession of the mother - by a personal deed, in fact by murder of the father." (Jones, p.83)

Hamlet's hesitation in killing Claudius, according to Freud, has to do with his deeper association with him. Claudius serves as a flesh and blood expression of his own repressed childhood fantasies, and to kill him would be to murder a part of his own inner self already associated with self-loathing.

"Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience, which remind him that he himself is literally no better than the sinner whom he is to punish. Here I have translated into conscious terms what was bound to remain unconscious in Hamlet's mind. The distaste for sexuality expressed by Hamlet in his conversation with Ophelia fits in very well with this." (Freud, 1965. p.299).

The long-awaited event can only take place when Gertrude has died. Hamlet is then free to act because the cause of his repressed guilt has been eliminated, and he kills Claudius immediately.

“In reality his uncle incorporates the deepest and most buried part of his own personality, so that he cannot kill him without also killing himself. This solution, one closely akin to what Freud has shown to be the motive of suicide in melancholia, is actually the one that Hamlet finally adopts... Only when he has made the final sacrifice and brought himself to the door of death is he free to fulfil his duty, to avenge his father, and to slay his other self -- his uncle.” (Jones, 1976. p.88).

Even if Freudian reading of hamlet was very popular, there was opposition to Freudian analysis from within the group of psychoanalysts.

Frederic Wertham, a psychoanalyst himself, led the attack on Freud's interpretation.

“Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience, which remind him that he himself is literally no better than the sinner whom he is to punish. Here I have translated into conscious terms what was bound to remain unconscious in Hamlet's mind...”(Wertham, 1970. p.114).

Wertham recounts the case history of a patient whose circumstances were similar to Hamlet's in that after his father's death, his mother had an affair with his uncle. The patient "did not restrain himself -- as Hamlet did" and stabbed his mother to death. Wertham, therefore, suggests that the "Orestes complex" provides a more appropriate model for the action in Hamlet. Here's how Wertham describes the "Orestes complex."

This variety of parent complex which centers on the mother, and more specifically on hostility toward her, can be designated as the Orestes complex.

“Orestes killed his mother Clytemnestra and her lover, his father's kinsman, Aegisthus. The legend of Orestes, which historically marks a turning point in the social position of the mother, has far more similarity to the story of Hamlet than has the story of Oedipus.” (Wertham, 1970. p.120)

3.5.3 Feminists on *Hamlet*

A groundbreaking feminist work on Hamlet was Carolyn Heilbrun's (1957) essay ‘The Character of Hamlet's Mother’ in which she shows that the play never hints that Gertrude knew of Claudius poisoning King Hamlet and yet readers and critics for decades have taken it for granted that she is at fault. Defending Gertrude, Heilbrun says that “men have for centuries completely misinterpreted Gertrude,

believing what Hamlet said about her rather than the actual text of the play. By this account, no clear evidence suggests that Gertrude is an adulteress: she is merely adapting to the circumstances of her husband's death for the good of the kingdom.”

Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, 1975, was an inspirational study that brought the feminist concerns of the nineteenth century into a new political context.

Lisa Jardine's *Still Harping on Daughters* (1983) uncovers that patriarchal interference in the lives of young women. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his *The Elementary Structures of Criticism* (1949) gave new ways of looking at Shakespeare's play through his discussion of family relationships and how often daughters are used as resources to be pawned and traded in commercial and political negotiations among men. Feminist scholars like Coppélia Kahn, Lynda Boose, Marjorie Garber through an analysis of Ophelia and Gertrude unmasked the gender, political and financial intersections.

Traditionally Ophelia was seen living under the shadow of three men in her life – her father, her brother and her lover Hamlet. When all three are suddenly gone, there was no one to make decisions for her and that is the reason that she goes insane. Feminist theorists, on the other hand, argue that it is guilt that leads her to insanity. It is her fantasy to have Hamlet kill her father so that they can be together and this sexual desire makes her feel guilty after Polonius is killed. Showalter points out that Ophelia has become the symbol of the distraught and hysterical woman in modern culture. Showalter (1985) defends Ophelia and brings out how to this day Ophelia has been used both to reproduce and to contest our changing ideas about female psychology and sexuality. Feminist reading saw Ophelia's madness as a protest and rebellion. Ophelia is seen as a rebel against gender stereotypes and the social order.

Ania Loomba reinterpreted the play from the perspective of third world experience. Margaret Litvin from her investigation of Arab adaptations of Hamlet in the postcolonial era points out how Hamlet's problem has been used to mirror a problem facing the Arab world: “to exist or dissolve, to awaken politically or to slumber while history passes by.” She underlines how “To be or not to be” is often translated as “Shall we be or not be?” as Arabic lacks the infinitive.

3.6 Summary

In this unit, we had a detailed look at the Elizabethan theatre first and then at the play *Hamlet* by Shakespeare.

We discussed how Elizabethan Theatre, underwent a significant evolution during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, from 1558 to 1603. This period is seen as the period of renaissance in English literature and theatre. We have also discussed the major dramatists of the period, the major themes handled on the stage in this period, and some of the dramatic conventions of the time.

In the next section of the unit, we had a look at the life and times of William Shakespeare, the most renowned playwright of this era. The characters, the plot structure and the major themes were discussed and then we looked at the way the interpretations of the play and especially of the major character – Hamlet- have been changing in the last few centuries.

3.7 Check your progress

Q1. Identify who said the following famous things regarding Hamlet or the play *Hamlet*.

1. Hamlet has to play a part – a part of the conventional revenger.
2. Of the feigned madness of Hamlet there appears no adequate cause.
3. In Hamlet's moral sensibility there undoubtedly lay a danger.
4. The play is most certainly an artistic failure.

Q 2. Say whether the following statements are true or false.

1. The Elizabethan theatre used little or no scenery.
2. Hamlet uses the four-act structure.
3. Gertrude sees the ghost talking to Hamlet.
4. Hamlet and Laertes fight inside the grave itself during Ophelia's funeral.
5. Claudius is the last character to die in the play.

Q 3. Choose the correct alternative.

1. Who is Fortinbras?

- a. King of Denmark b. Prince of Denmark
 - c. Prince of Wittenberg d. King of England
2. Where did the Ghost appear in the play?
- a. In Gertrude's chamber b. On the castle ramparts
 - c. Only (b) d. Both (a) and (b)
3. In which act and scene are the following lines said?
- "I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers could not with all their quantity of love make up my sum."
- a. Act 5, scene 3 b. Act 5, scene 2
 - c. Act 5, scene 1 d. Act 4, scene 4
4. Who says the following?
- Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
- a. Hamlet b. Claudius c. Horatio d. Polonius
5. Who says the following?
- "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark."
- a. Marcellus b. Laertes c. Polonius d. Horatio

3.8 Answers to check your progress

- Q.1 1. Mark Rose 2. Samuel Johnson 3. A. C. Bradley
4. T. S. Eliot

Q.2 Say whether the following statements are true or false.

1. True 2. False 3. False 4. True 5. False

Q.3 Choose the correct alternative.

- 1. b. Prince of Denmark 2. d. Both (a) and (b)
- 3. c. Act 5, scene 1 4. d. Polonius
- 5. a. Marcellus

3.9 Exercises:

Q.1 Write broad answers to the following:

1. Discuss the plot structure of the play *Hamlet*.
2. Elaborate how the character of Hamlet has been variedly interpreted by Shakespearean scholars.
3. Write a critical note on the female characters in play Hamlet.
4. Attempt a detailed note on Elizabethan theatre.
5. Discuss with examples the themes handled by Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

Q.2 Write short notes on the following:

1. Stage and setting in *Hamlet*
2. Ophelia's madness
3. Hamlet and Oedipus Complex
4. The character of Polonius
5. Rosencranz and Guildenstern

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Unit-4
General Topic: Realism in Drama
Prescribed Text: Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*

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 - 4.3.9 Check Your Progress
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- 4.4 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 4.5 References

4.0 Objectives

The present unit is divided into two sections. The first section is an elaboration of the survey topic, Realism in Drama and the second section is the prescribed drama- *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov.

After studying this unit the students will be able to:

1. Understand the phenomenon of Realism in drama.
2. Identify the features and the development of Realistic Drama.
3. Study the prescribed drama and analyse the element of realism in it.
4. Appreciate Anton Chekhov's contribution to the modern drama, especially to the Drama of Realism.

4.1 Introduction

The use of the term 'Realism' ranges from a set of practices in literature in terms of content and expression to a vague assertion that a particular approach to literature is more or less 'realist'. However, the present unit shall use the term 'realism' in the earlier way. Realism in drama is a 19th century movement which bears influence on the theatre even today. We shall discuss Anton Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) as an epitome of the 20th century realist drama. It is the final play written by one of the greatest playwrights of the world, Anton Chekhov. The play deals with everyday trivialities and day to day events which provide credible representation of human life and human nature. It drifts between tragedy and comedy. It exhibits the key features of Chekhovian drama – value of simplicity and the mundane, the mixture of tragic and comic elements and emotions of the characters. This play captures the essence of the early 20th century Russia.

4.2 Realism in Drama

Realistic drama began in the 19th century as a reaction to the earlier romantic plays and melodramas. It coincided with the economic, social and political reforms in the 18th century. This drama aimed at giving a believable, convincing and authentic representation of real life. It created a set of dramatic conventions in terms of writing and performance. The most defining feature of realistic drama is verisimilitude.

4.2.1 Emergence of Realism in Drama

There are many elements responsible for the advent of realistic drama. Social determinism in August Comte's discussions on Positivism encouraged the dialogue regarding cause of effect nature of things. Charles Darwin's phenomenal book *Origin of Species* (1859) brought into light natural or environmental determinism explaining that the factors determining human behaviour are hereditary and out of man's control. Karl Marx underlined the economic determinism that human decisions are governed by contemporary economic conditions. These events shook the foundations of the early 18th century sentimental dramatic practices and a new drama emerged to present the aforementioned new realizations.

4.2.2 Major Features of Realistic Drama

Presenting a slice of life to the readers or viewers is the major concern of a realist drama. Other features have been given below.

Realistic plot: Problems that man faces in day to day life became the subject of the play. These plays deal with stories that common people can relate to. This is the defining feature of a realistic drama. The plot consists of the events that could happen in the viewers' or readers' life. They do not include any fantastical or supernatural happenings.

Believable Characters: The characters are reliable and everyday types. The people that can be seen around are found in these plays. They are not fantastical or extravagant ones and do not cross the boundaries of reality. The emergence of working middle class is parallel to the advent of realistic drama and consequently the characters belong to the same class of people.

Simple Dialogues: As drama is a representation of real life, it excludes lofty and poetic dialogues. Instead, the characters speak like the way people actually speak in real life. Colloquial language of contemporary period is preferred to achieve verisimilitude. Different techniques are used to represent natural behaviour of people including their dialogues.

Setting: The plays were performed using the techniques of fourth wall realism. The stage is set like a box comprising of three walls and the invisible fourth wall facing the audience. The play follows the unity of place - it happens mostly at a single place.

4.2.3 Prominent Playwrights of the theatre of Realism

Henrik Ibsen (1828- 1906)

This Norwegian playwright is one of the most influential figures of the 19th century drama. He is considered the ‘father of modern realist drama’ or ‘the father of realism’. He started the convention of creating thought provoking dramas that dealt with the contemporary controversial issues. He practices a new form of realism that prevailed the earlier romantic conventions. His major plays are *Brand* (1865) *Peer Gynt* (1867), *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *The Enemy of the People* (1882), *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Rosmersholm* (1886), *Hedda Gabler* (1890). Most of Ibsen’s plays are based in Norway and majorly portray contemporary bourgeois society there. Ibsen himself directed his plays in Norway. The dramatic practices inaugurated by Ibsen are followed even today. *A Doll's House* is the world’s most performed play.

Anton Chekhov (1860 to 1904)

This Russian playwright and short story writer is considered one of the champions of modern realist drama. He has the ability to peep into the minds of his characters and put their inner world bare open with all their complexities. His plays and short stories reflect the contemporary Russian society in the best way possible. His plays are beautiful for their simple plots that present the subtlest and most complex human conditions. They are said to create a haunting and lyrical atmosphere. His best plays are *The Seagull* (1896), *Uncle Vanya* (1897), *Three Sisters* (1901) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904)

Tennessee Williams (1911- 1983)

American playwright and screenwriter Tennessee Williams is considered one of the eminent playwrights of the 20th century. His major plays include *American Blues* (1939), *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), *The Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), and *Cat on the Hot Teen Roof* (1955). The relation between illusion and reality has been the crucial theme of his plays. His plays represent human life that is driven by psychological element. Most of his notable plays have been adopted to cinema.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

This Irish playwright wrote more than sixty plays which consist of satires and historical allegories. He won Nobel Prize for literature in 1925. Shaw is said to be the

leading dramatist of his generation. He was strongly influenced by Henrik Ibsen and introduced a new realism in English drama through his plays. His plays exhibited his religious, political and social ideas. His major plays include *Man and Superman* (1905), *Arms and Men* (1900), *Major Barbara* (1905), *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), and *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901).

4.2.4 Check Your Progress

Q. Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct alternative.

1. Realism is the century movement in literature.
a) 18th b) 19th c) 20th d) 21st
2. is one of the major elements responsible for the advent of realism in literature.
a) Essay on the Principle of Population of Thomas Malthus
b) Origin of Species by Charles Darwin
c) Charles Lyell's version of Geology
d) Uniformitarianism of James Hutton
3. Verisimilitude which means is considered one of the vital features of realistic dramas.
a) similarity to the truth b) the absolute truth
c) illusion d) None of the above
4. The realistic drama excludes
a) common people's conversations
b) simple stage setting
c) poetic and lofty dialogues
d) everyday types of characters
5. is the world's most performed play.
a) Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*
b) Henrik Ibsen's *The Doll's House*

- c) Tennessee William's *The Cat on the Hot Tin Roof*
 - d) G. B. Shaw's *Man and Superman*
6. Plays of represent characters driven by psychological element.
- a) Anton Chekhov
 - b) G. B. Shaw
 - c) Henrik Ibsen
 - d) Tennessee Williams

4.3 The Prescribed Text: Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*

4.3.1 Anton Chekhov

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, one of the foremost Russian playwrights, is considered an outstanding representative of the late 19th century Russian Realistic School. He was born on 29th January, 1860 at Taganrog in Russia. His father Pavel Yegorovich Chekhov was a struggling grocer and an orthodox Christian. His mother Yevgeniya Chekhovna was a kind person. She was an excellent storyteller who entertained her six children by telling stories of her travels with her merchant father. Chekhov's childhood under the strict parenting of his father was a painful memory for him.

He attended a local school for Greek boys and later joined a high school in the town named Gimnaziya where he stayed for ten years. He supported his education by taking tuitions of younger boys. Meanwhile, his father went bankrupt and moved to Moscow for a fresh start. After completing his schooling Chekhov joined his family in Moscow. There too he became the bread winner of the family. He was earning money by working as a journalist and writer of comic sketches. He graduated in Medicine from the Moscow University and started practicing as a doctor. Till the end Chekhov did not stop his practice. He used to say, "Medicine is my wife and literature is my mistress".

Chekhov initially started writing short stories. He bought a country house in the village of Melikhovo in 1892 and lived there for six years with his aging parents and sister Mariya. During his stay there he wrote phenomenal short stories like 'The Butterfly' (1892), 'Neighbours' (1892), 'The Black Monk' (1894), 'Murderer' (1895), 'Peasants' (1897), 'A Woman's Kingdom' (1894), 'Three Years' (1895). etc. He also wrote a play during this period entitled, *The Seagull*. The first performance

of this play was received so badly that Chekhov decided never to write for stage performances.

Chekhov started suffering from tuberculosis by 1897. So, he sold his estate in Melikhovo and built a villa in Yalta. He fell in love with a young actress named Olga Knipper who performed major female characters in his plays. They got married in 1901. During this period, he wrote a few short stories and focused his time and energy on writing plays. He wrote his most famous plays during this time including *Uncle Vanya* (1897), *Three Sisters* (1901) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). These plays were produced by Moscow Art Theatre but Chekhov was not satisfied with the performances. He wrote them as mature comedies but they were being performed as tragedies. After living a life of a successful writer and a dedicated doctor, Chekhov died in 1904 of Tuberculosis.

4.3.2 Major Plays of Anton Chekhov

Anton Chekhov was a master storyteller. He is counted among the greatest short story writers in the world. However, his contribution to Realistic school of Drama is phenomenal. His plays lack complex plots and neat solutions but they create a kind of atmosphere that is haunting and lyrical. He presented the Russia of his time using a deceptively simple technique. The following four-act plays are considered his masterpieces.

1. The Seagull (1996)

It is considered a prototype of Chekhov's realistic dramas. It is the first of Chekhov's four major plays. It portrays the conflict among four major characters including Boris Trigorin, Nina, Irina Arkadina and Constantin Treplev. All four of them are artists and are badly dissatisfied with their lives. The characters are diverse and fully developed. Boris Trigorin is considered one of the greatest male characters in plays. The play is considered the best example of Chekhov's mood plays where characters win over the plot. However, the first performance of this play was a failure. Chekhov even got out of the audience and attended the last two acts of the play backstage. He decided not to write plays for performances again.

2. Uncle Vanya (1997)

This four-act play is a study of aimlessness and hopelessness. It portrays the contrast between the country life and city life. It depicts what happens when a

professor and his young wife visit their country estate. It subtly presents the conflict between the working class and the landlords. It is a revised version of his less successful play *The Wood Demon*. The play was first performed in 1896 in St. Petersburg. It was very badly received. Chekhov was gravely disappointed. It was one of the traumatic experiences of his life. The play was reproduced by the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898. It was successful and established Chekhov as a dramatist.

3. *Three Sisters* (1901)

The play was written in 1900 and first performed in 1901 by the Moscow Art Theatre. It represents the transition period in the Russian history – the period of the abolition of serfdom. Set during the last years before the revolution, it depicts the conflict between the landlords and the working class in contemporary Russia. It portrays the life and dreams of three Prozorov sisters, Olga, Masha and Irina. They pine for a better future in Moscow but fail to find a way to achieve it. The reception of the play was mixed. Chekhov was not happy with the lack of subtleties in the performance.

4. *The Cherry Orchard* (1904)

This last play written by Chekhov was first performed in 1904 at the Moscow Art Theatre. Chekhov wrote it as a comedy but Stanislavsky, the director, treated it as a tragedy. The play moves around a family of landowners. It again depicts the transition of power dynamics in contemporary Russia, the rise of working class and the fall of unindustrious landlords. The play mocks the extremes of both the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.

4.3.3 Check Your Progress

Q. Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct alternative

1. Besides being a writer, Chekhov was also
a) a lawyer b) a professor c) a doctor d) a farmer
2. Chekhov owes his storytelling skills to his
a) father b) mother c) sister d) brother
3. Chekhov graduated in Medicine from the
a) Cambridge University b) Moscow University

financial crisis of their neighbour Pishtchik, the isolation and loneliness of Charlotte, etc. The central conflict of the play is the inability of Ranyevskaya and her brother to find a feasible and practical solution to their financial crisis. Lopakhin suggests a solution to them of converting their cherry orchards into cottages and renting them to middle class people ('villa residents'). That would have helped them to pay the mortgage and save their estate. However, both Ranyevskaya and Gayev are so emotionally attached to the orchards that they do not want to cut the trees and build cottages. They think they will find a way out somehow. Gayev thinks that his affluent aunt may help them with some money.

Time passes but they fail to pay their mortgages. The romance between Dunyasha and Yasha and Anya and Trofimov continues into the second act. However, nothing develops between Lopakhin and Varya. The health conditions of Firs, their aged servant, are declining. Madame Ranyevskaya keeps receiving letters from her lover in Paris begging her forgiveness and asking her to return. Gayev receives an offer of job at a bank. Pishtchik takes some more loans from Ranyevskaya whose own finances are worsening. Consequently, Madame Ranyevskaya's estate is to be auctioned.

Madame Ranyevskaya organizes a ball party on the night of auction. Everyone is dancing and waiting for Gayev and Lopakhin to return from the auction. Finally, they come and the news is broken that the estate has been sold to no one else but Lopakhin. Lopakhin is exhilarated as he is now the master of the estate where his father and grandfather worked as servants. Ranyevskaya is devastated and Varya is furious to learn this.

In the last act, the former residents of the estate, Ranyevskaya and her family, are getting ready to leave for Paris. Lopakhin and Trofimov share a tender farewell. Gayev has decided to take the job at a bank. Varya will be a housekeeper at Ragulins. Anya and Yasha will be joining Ranyevskaya in Paris. Ranyevskaya and Gayev become nostalgic while leaving the house. Everyone leaves while Firs is forgotten in the house. The play ends with the sound of axes chopping down cherry trees.

4.3.5 Act Wise Summary

Act I

The play opens at 2.00 a.m. on a frosty May morning. Lopakhin, the merchant in the town, is alone in a room called 'Nursery' in Madame Ranyevskaya's house. The cherry orchard is in full bloom. Dunyasha, the maid, informs Lopakhin about arrival of the train. He is waiting for Madame Ranyevskaya. Despite his being a peasant's son, she had been very kind to him so he is fond of her. Ephikhodov, the clerk of the estate, enters the nursery and hands over Dunyasha the bouquet for Ranyevskaya. There is a conversation between Ephikhodov and Lopakhin which annoys Lopakhin. Dunyasha tells Lopakhin that Ephikhodov has proposed to her but she is not certain about her decision. A hubbub is heard outside with the arrival of Madame Ranyevskaya and others.

Madame Ranyevskaya along with her daughters Anya, Varya and the governess named Charlotta enters the nursery. They are accompanied by Ranyevskaya's brother Gayev, Lopakhin, Dunyasha and their neighbour Pishchik. They are excited to be back from Paris. Varya, who was lady of the house in her mother's absence assures her mother, sister and uncle that the house is as good as it was when they left. Anya tells Varya how she suffered the annoying company of Charlotta and the financial plight of her mother. She adds that their mother is left with not even a penny. Varya informs Anya that the condition of the estate is no different. The interest on the mortgage of their house has not been paid. She also tells Anya that though everyone is hoping for the union of Varya and Lopakhin, he has yet not proposed to her.

Anya reflects on the bad times their family is going through. Their father died six years back and just a month later their younger brother, Grisha died by drowning. Their mother Lyuba Ranyevskaya ran away to Paris. Varya informs Anya that Grisha's tutor Trofimov has arrived. Other people enter the stage. Varya asks Lopakhin and Pishchik to leave as it is too late. But Ranyevskaya asks them to stay. Lopakhin suggests a solution to Madame Ranyevskaya to pay her debts and save the estate. Considering the location of the estate on the bank of the river, Lopakhin suggests to cut the orchard, build cottages there and rent them to the villa residents, the emerging middle class. But they do not listen and become nostalgic about the old days. Gayev starts talking about a 100 years old wooden cupboard. Ranyevskaya and

Gayev talk about their childhood. Trofimov enters the stage. Ranyevskaya, on seeing him, remembers Grisha and starts crying. Everyone leaves except Gayev and Varya. They both criticize Lyuba Ranyevskaya for being a spendthrift. Anya enters the stage. Gayev discusses three plans to save the estate: to take loan from the bank, to take a loan from Lopakhin and ask for help from his rich aunt at Yaroslav

Act II

The second act opens in the fields behind the house at the edge of the cherry orchard. The sun is about to set. Charlotte, Yasha, Dunyasha and Yepikhodov are sitting there on a bench. Charlotta tells the story of her life but no one is listening. Yepikhodov plays the guitar to impress Dunyasha but she is infatuated with Yasha. She even expresses her love for Yasha but he does not reciprocate. Ravensky, Gayev and Lopakhin enter the field. Lopakhin reminds them of the offer of converting their orchards to cottages and renting them. Lopakhin tells them that a businessman named Deriganov is willing to buy their property but they do not consider the suggestion seriously. Gayev tells them that his rich aunt may help them to save the estate. However, Lopakhin brings it to their notice that the amount given by her may not be sufficient. Ranyevskaya and Gayev find the idea of building cottages and renting them very vulgar. Lopakhin is so disappointed to see their lack of practicality and business sense, he is about to leave the stage but Ranyevskaya asks him to stay.

Ranyevskaya confesses her sin of adultery. She was having an affair with another man before her husband's death. However, that man forces her to sell her villa, robs her, deserts her and elopes with another woman. Now he writes her letters begging her forgiveness. Ranyevskaya asks Lopakhin why he is not proposing Varya for marriage but he does not give any clear answer. Gayev tells everyone that he has been offered a job in a bank. Ranyevskaya advises him not to accept the offer. There is light argument among Lopakhin, Gayev and Ranyevskaya. Lopakhin fails to understand their attachment to the orchards and they fail to understand the business attitude of Lopakhin.

Firs, Ranyevskaya's aged servant becomes nostalgic about the days during the serfdom. Lopakhin, being the son of a peasant himself, is hurt. Trofimov enters the stage and there is an argument between him and Lopakhin regarding the human plight and the necessity of engaging in hard work. A drunken man enters and Ranyevskaya drives him away by giving him gold coins. Annoyed by this encounter

everyone leaves except Trofimov and Anya. They discuss their relationship which Trofimov thinks is above love.

Act III

It is August 22, the day of auction. Everyone has gathered in Ranyevskaya's house for a party. Everyone is dancing except Lopakhin and Gayev who have gone to the city for the auction. They have not returned so Ranyevskaya is worried. Charlotta performs some magic tricks. Ranyevskaya asks Varya to marry Lopakhin. Varya confesses that she loves him but she thinks he would never propose to her and it would be improper if she proposes him for marriage. Instead, she expresses her wish to join convent. Varya leaves to deal with Yepikhodov. Meanwhile there is a conversation between Ranyevskaya and Trofimov. He asks her to accept her financial conditions and ignore her lover in Paris for he robbed and deserted her. However, Ranyevskaya gets angry and calls him ugly. She adds that he has no experience of love so he will never understand her love. Trofimov is outraged and leaves.

Firs enters and talks about the guests in the old times who had some social standards. He compares them with the guests in the present party who are mostly middle- and working-class people. He finds that the quality of guests has declined. Anya comes with a news that perhaps the cherry orchard has been sold. Ranyevskaya is restless and wants to know who bought the orchards. Charlotta continues entertaining everyone with her magic tricks.

After a small episode among Dunyasha, Ephikodov and Varya, Lopakhin and Gayev enter the stage. Lopakhin breaks the news that he has bought the orchards. He is ecstatic to be the master of the estate where his father and grandfather worked as slaves. Varya throws the keys of the house on the floor and Ranyevskaya starts weeping. Instead of consoling her, Lopakhin is reproachful and asks her why she did not take his advice of building and renting cottages. Anya consoles her mother that they will start life anew and plant the cherry trees again.

Act IV

It is October and the act opens in the same nursery where the play began. The residents of the cherry orchard estate are preparing to leave for Paris. The sound of chopping down cherry trees with axe can be heard. Lopakhin decides to accompany them to station. He also buys champagne for them. Lopakhin and Gayev meet some

peasants on the estate. Trofimov and Lopakhin say good bye to each other. Anya asks Lopakhin to stop cutting trees until they are gone as it is painful for Ranyevskaya and others. Anya asks if Firs who is sick has been taken to the hospital and is being treated but no one is able to confirm it.

Ranyevskaya and Anya are going to Paris and Yasha will accompany them. Gayev has accepted the job in the bank. Varya takes a housekeeping job at Ragulins. They all leave and the play ends with Firs entering. He is forgotten and left behind. He is dejected over his fate. He drops down on a sofa and lies motionless.

4.3.6 Check Your Progress

Q. Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct alternative.

1. The room in which the play opens is called the
a) Banquet Hall b) Nursery c) Drawing Hall d) Studio
2. is the tutor of Anya and Varya's brother Grisha.
a) Trofimov b) Lopakhin c) Yepikhodov d) Firs
3. Madame Ranyevskaya was living in for the last five years.
a) Rome b) London c) Paris b) Moscow
4. Lopakhin advises Madame Ranyevskaya in order to save her estate from being auctioned.
a) To marry her daughter to a rich man
b) to do farming on the land
c) To borrow money from him
d) to cut down the orchard and to build cottages to rent them to others
5. buys cherry orchard property in the auction.
a) Pischchik b) Trofimov c) Gayev d) Lopakhin
6. At the end of the play Gayev accepts the job at a bank and Varya.....
a) becomes a tutor at a school b) joins a convent
c) takes a housekeeping job d) goes to Paris with her mother

4.3.7 Characters

The characters in the play can be categorized into four groups. The first group is that of aristocrats or the landlords including Ranyevskaya, Gayev, Varya, Anya and Pishtchik. The second group is of working-class representatives. It includes all servants of Madame Ranevshky including Dunyasha, Yasha, Firs, and Yepikhodov. The third group is of Academicians including Grisha's tutor Trofimov and Anya's governess Charlotte. The last group is the businessmen who transformed their destiny by working hard. Lopakhin is the only representative of this class.

Madame Lubov Andreyevna Ranyevskaya

Madame Ranyevskaya is the lady of the estate (the cherry orchard). She has two daughters, Anya and Varya. Her husband and son are dead. Her unmarried and older brother Gayev also lives with her.

Ranyevskaya remains an impulsive character throughout the play. She runs away to Paris with her lover after death of her husband and son. She had an affair with him even before the death of her husband. She confesses the adultery to Lopakhin. Her abusive lover robs and deserts her and runs away with another woman. She returns back to Russia. At the end of the play when her estate is auctioned, she decides to return to Russia. Instead of accepting the reality and facing it, she prefers to run away from it.

She lives in past memories. She calls the drawing room of the house 'nursery'. She and Gayev do not accept the transition in Russia's socio-political situation nor do they realize the seriousness of their financial crisis. Despite being on the edge of bankruptcy, Ranyevskaya wants to keep the orchards. Lopakhin insists that they should cut the orchards, build cottages there and rent them on lease to the villa people, that is, to the emerging middle class. That might have saved their estate. However, she finds the idea vulgar and rejects it. She is a spendthrift. Despite their poor financial conditions, she keeps her purse and keeps rewarding servants with gold coins.

Ranyevskaya is a kind person. She saved Lopakhin from his drunkard father several times. She treated him kindly though he was son of a serf.

She was badly in debts but she is so attached to the cherry orchards that she rejects to chop it down. She finds the memories of her parents and childhood in the house invaluable.

Yermolay Alexeyevitch Lopakhin

Yermolay Lopakhin is a rich merchant and a neighbour of Madame Ranyevskaya. He was once a serf and used to live on the estate of Madame Ranyevskaya. With constant hard work he earned a lot of money and has become a man of consequence. Ranyevskaya used to save him from his drunkard father. He acknowledges her kindness even after becoming a rich person and adores her. He wants to repay her kindness so he tries very hard to convince Ranyevskaya and Gayev to turn the orchards into cottages that can be given on rent to save their estate. However, both of them find the idea vulgar and reject it. Lopakhin tries very hard to convince them but he fails.

Lopakhin is kind but not sentimental. Eventually he buys the estate and becomes the master of the house. He is ecstatic and excited that he has become the owner of the estate where his father and grandfather used to work as servants.

Lopakhin detests serfdom and people who still live under the impressions of the slavery even after getting liberated. He does not get along with Gayev due to this reason. He has mixed feelings for Ranyevskaya as well. He adores her for her kindness but he hates her too as she treats him as if he were still a peasant's son. Even after earning a good fortune and name in the society, Ranyevskaya shows her dislike towards his clothing style and his manners.

Lopakhin is one of the major characters in the play and he represents the emerging middle class in contemporary Russia.

Leonid Gayev

Leonid Gayev is the elder brother of Madame Ranyevskaya. Despite being fifty-one years old, he behaves like an infant - constantly popping sweets into his mouth. He is not an industrious person. In fact, he does not do anything. He lives with his sister. Just like his sister, Gayev lives in past memories.

Gayev is humorous but clumsy. He has some strange habits like playing imaginary billiards or delivering rhetorical speeches that no one is interested in. He delivers a speech in the second act on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of a

wooden cupboard thanking it for serving his family for such a long period. His nieces do not like this so they try to stop him whenever he behaves strange.

He values the childhood memories of his parents in the house so he genuinely wants to do something to save the estate from being sold. He, along with his sister, fails to see the changing power dynamics in Russia. He does not take the advice of Lopakhin of building cottages and renting them. Though he is not a spendthrift like Ranyevskaya, he does not do much to save the cherry orchards.

He is class conscious. He is friendly with the aristocratic landlords around him but looks down upon other characters in the play who are below his rank like Yasha, Lopakhin or Firs. He resents Lopakhin's success. He does not give him his due respect because he was once a serf. By the end of the play, it seems that he has accepted the reality of their financial condition. He does not accompany his sister to Paris. Instead, he accepts a job in a bank.

Peter Sergeyevitch Trofimov

Peter Trofimov is the tutor of Madame Ranyevskaya's dead son Grisha. He still studies in the university so everyone around calls him 'eternal student' sarcastically. Much of the ideological discussion in the play comes from Trofimov. He admits the importance of work and mourns for the poor condition that most of Russia lives in. In this regard he stands in contrast with Lopakhin who is practical and materialistic. He is outspoken and critical, however, he is tender and supportive of Anya.

He is constantly emphasizing the value of work as the only way to rescue Russia. He has probably spent time as an inmate in a labour camp for participating in subversive political activities. He convinces Anya that the whole of Russia is her orchard. He describes the trees in the orchard as souls. Soviet critics after the Russian Revolution of 1917 emphasised his character as a literary hero who exemplifies the ideals of Socialism.

He finds truth more fundamental than love. That makes him stand against Madame Ranyevskaya considering her passion for love and inability to see and accept the reality. He advises Ranyevskaya to accept her financial condition and forget about her abusive lover in Paris. However, she gets angry and questions his right to advise her regarding love as he himself is not experienced in love.

He is in relationship with Anya, the youngest daughter of Ranyevskaya. He says that their bond is above love. Everyone in the play loves the cherry orchard but he does not. He thinks they symbolize the tyrannic past history of Russia, the serfdom.

Varya Ranyevskaya

Varya is the eldest of the two daughters of Madame Ranyevskaya. However, she is not Ranyevskaya's biological daughter but an adopted one. She is twenty seven years old and unmarried. She is in a way the caretaker of the house . She carries the keys of the house with her. Somehow she manages to keep the house running despite the financial crisis that they are going through. She is the most practical person among the residents of the estate.

Her family and friends anticipate her marriage with Lopakhin but he never proposes her. She thinks that it will be improper for her to go and propose him. Her greatest wish is to join a convent.

She is disappointed to know that Lopakhin has bought the estate. She throws the keys on the floor in frustration. She is one of the very few characters in the play who accept the transition in the power dynamics after liberation. At the end of the play she decides to take the job of a house keeper at Ragulins.

Anya Ranyevskaya

Anya is Madame Ranyevskaya's youngest daughter. She is seventeen years old. She is a dreamer and has been living a sheltered life. She loves her mother very much and does not want to hear anything against her. So, when Gayev criticizes Ranyevskaya for spending money unwisely, she does not like it. At the end, when they leave their ancestral house, she gives her mother a hope that they will rebuild a new life and plant cherry trees again. She is the one along with her uncle who brings her mother back to Russia when she is deserted by her abusive lover in Paris. She seems less active and practical compared to her elder sister Varya. She loves Trofimov. She prefers to go to Paris along with her mother instead of staying back in Russia. Anya does not seem productive in terms of action and discussions.

Dunyasha

Dunyasha is a young maidservant of Madame Ranyevskaya. She seems a shallow and materialistic person. She enjoys the attention she gets from Yepikhodov, the clerk of the estate, but she is infatuated with Yasha, another servant of Raneskky.

She adds to the humour of the play. Despite being a maid, she fancies to be a lady and that creates many funny moments in the play.

Her character also serves the theme of hypocrisy. Her conversations with Lopakhin and Firs are important. They advise her not to forget her station or place in the power quo. It indicates the hypocrisy of these characters as they themselves were serfs once.

Firs Nikolayvitch

Firs is an elderly servant of Madame Ranyevskaya. He was born as a serf on her estate and he remains a servant at her estate even after the serfs were freed. He does not adapt to the changes in the power dynamics in Russia the way Lopakhin does. He even finds the days during serfdom better than those after liberation. He says that the quality of guests has decreased. Earlier only officers and landlords used to come for such parties but now working-class people also dance with the masters. He represents the old class system. Deterioration in his health indicates the end of aristocracy.

One of the most poignant remarks of the play come through Firs. When he is locked inside the estate and forgotten, he laments: “Life has slipped away as if I haven’t lived.”

Yasha

Yasha is Madame Ranyevskaya’s man servant. He is from the same village. He is young like Dunyasha and flirts with her. He is a pompous character. She expresses her love for him but he does not reciprocate. He is a cold character and is not emotionally attached to any other character in the play. He does not even go to visit his aged mother who lives in the same village. He is mean and snob and respects nobody. He is a corrupt person as well. He follows Ranyevskaya everywhere she goes in order to take benefit of her lack of control of her fortune.

Simeon Panteleyitch Yepikhodov

Yepikhodov is a young clerk at Madame Ranyevskaya’s estate. He is one of the comic characters in the play. His nickname is ‘Twenty Two Misfortunes’ because he cannot walk without committing an accident. He keeps on falling whenever he is on the stage.

He falls in love with Dunyasha and keeps on doing things like playing guitar etc., to impress her. However, she is interested in the pompous Yasha. Despite the disasters happening to him, he is always happy. He even has the ability to laugh at

himself. He serves the theme of loneliness. He always carries a revolver with him so that he can kill himself whenever he feels like dying.

Charlotta Ivanovna

Charlotta is Anya's governess. She serves the theme of isolation. She is an orphan and does not know who her parents were. She is popular for her magic tricks. Despite being lonely, she is not depressed but lively and energetic. She keeps on entertaining other characters with her magic tricks. She is a strange character. Most of her conversations and asides are pointed at her isolation and loneliness. At the end of the play all residents including the masters and servants of the estate leave the place and Charlotta becomes unemployed.

Simeonof Pishtchik

Pishtchik is another landlord and neighbour of Ranyevskaya. He is a great admirer of Charlotte's magic tricks and cuts successful jokes unlike Gayev. He keeps on taking debts from Madame Ranyevskaya though he pays back some of it at the end of the play. Despite knowing her bad financial conditions, he requests Madame Ranyevskaya for debts throughout the play. So he can be interpreted as a selfish person. However as he pays some of it back at the end of the play, he achieves a kind of redemption. His estate is miraculously saved at the end of the play.

4.3.8 Themes (Critical Readings of the play)

Social Transition (The 'real' in the play *The Cherry Orchard*)

The play was written during the early 1900s when Russia was on the threshold of revolution. The power of aristocrats was waning and the middle class was waking to power. This social transition is the central theme of the play. The central character Madame Ranyevskaya and her family belong to the aristocratic strata. They are on the verge of total bankruptcy. At the end of the play their ancestral house along with their most admired cherry orchard is auctioned. These cherry orchards represent the old social order of serfdom where the aristocrats and the landlords enjoyed supreme authority and powers. But the cherry trees are chopped down at the end. This indicates the end of serfdom and end of the era of aristocrats.

On the other hand, Ranyevskaya's estate is bought by Lopakhin who was once a serf. His father and grandfather worked as servants on the same estate and now he is the master of the house. This could become possible because of the new social order

where the one who works hard succeeds. Lopakhin represents this emerging middle class. This social transition is the main plot line of the play.

The Omnipresent Loss

Loss is another major theme of the play. The play begins with the discussion regarding how to save the cherry orchards and Ranyevskaya's estate from being sold. The whole play moves around this struggle. The loss of ancestral house is just symbolic. The loss of standing in the earlier social order of Russian society is omnipresent in the play. Ranyevskaya, her family and Pishchik are losing their privileged positions in the earlier social order. The working-class people like Firs, Dunyasha, Yasha, Yepikhodov too are liberated from slavery. However, they do not know what to do with the newly gained liberation. Only Lopakhin has succeeded in adapting to the sweeping changes and has gained wealth and prosperity.

Most of the characters suffer from some kind of loss. Madame Ranyevskaya has lost her husband and son. She and her brother Gayev are losing the abode of their childhood memories. Yepikhodov has lost the balance and falls every now and then. Varya loses the charge of the estate. They all lose the orchards at the end as they are being chopped to make place for cottages.

Isolation and alienation

Charlotta is the loneliest character in the play. She is an orphan and is unaware of who her parents are. She does not have any emotional connections with any other character in the play. She entertains others by playing magic tricks. Everyone is impressed by her talent. However, she is lonely and being an orphan, feels alienated. She becomes unemployed by the end of the play.

Lopakhin, cut off from the earlier social structure and having entered the newly emerged class of business men, is not rooted. He is under the spell of his material success. Varya feels so cut off from her family and friends that she wants to join a convent. Trofimov does not share the greed for material success of the middle class neither does he admire the lack of diligence of the aristocrats. In that sense, he is alienated and lonely. Yepikhodov carries a revolver so that he can kill himself whenever he feels like.

Love, an invisible glue that binds the characters together

Though class conflict is at the centre of the play, love and relationship are ubiquitous. The characters are either driven by love or they feel alienated. Different versions of love and affection can be observed. Madame Ranyevskaya's love is passionate and blind. At the end of the play she returns to her abusive lover who robbed and deserted her. Varya is in love with Lopakhin but it is not strong enough. Lopakhin likes Varya but is not sure about it and so he does not propose to her whereas Varya thinks it is improper for her to propose to him. Trofimov says that his relationship with Anya is ideological and it is above love. Yepikhodov is madly in love with Dunyasha but she detests him. Dunyasha's love for the pompous Yasha is shallow.

4.3.9 Check Your Progress

Q. Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct alternative.

1. Lopakhin adores Ranyevskaya because.....
 - a) she gave him money to start a business.
 - b) she saved him several times from his drunkard father.
 - c) she sold cherry orchards to him.
 - d) she is the mother of his beloved Varya.
2. At the end of the play Ranyevskaya.....
 - a) starts a new business
 - b) lives at cherry orchard estate with Lopakhin
 - c) becomes a school teacher
 - d) goes back to her lover in Paris
3. is the only character in the play who represents the middle class which rose to power after liberation.
 - a) Trofimov b) Firs c) Lopakhin d) Yepikhodov
4. is called "the eternal student" by other characters in the play.
 - a) Varya b) Firs c) Lopakhin d) Trofimov
5. Yepikhodov is called "twenty two misfortunes" by other characters in the play because.....

- a) he is a sick person b) he is an ultimate loser
 - c) he has accidents every now and then
 - d) No one loves him
6.represents the theme of loneliness.
- a) Varya b) Anya c) Charlotte d) Yasha
7. falls sick at the end of the play.
- a) Firs b) Lopakhin c) Trofimov d) Ranyevskaya
8. According to Ranyevskaya, Trofimov does not have any right to talk about love as.....
- a) he is too young to understand love
 - b) he is a flirt
 - c) he is inexperienced in love
 - d) he is a mean person and cannot love anyone truly
9. Cut off from her family Varya wanted to
- a) Join convent b) Run away to Moscow
 - c) Join secret services d) All of the above
10. thinks ideologically about love.
- a) Yasha b) Firs c) Trofimov d) Lopakhin

4.3.10 Exercises

I. Answer the following Questions.

- a. How does the play *The Cherry Orchard* depict the transition in Russia's socio-economic power structures?
- b. Discuss the major themes of the play *The Cherry Orchard*.
- c. Discuss the characterization in the play depicting class conflict in the contemporary Russian society.
- d. What is the significance of cherry orchard in the play *The Cherry Orchard*?
- e. Discuss *The Cherry Orchard* as an epitome of Realist Drama of the 20th century

II. Write short notes on the following

- a) Madame Ranyevskaya

- b) Lopakhin
- c) Lopakhin and Trofimov
- d) Cherry Orchard, a Symbol of Old Social Order in Russia
- e) The Aristocrats in the play *The Cherry Orchard*
- f) The serfs in the play *The Cherry Orchard*
- g) Depiction of Loss and Alienation in *The Cherry Orchard*
- h) Anya and Varya
- i) Ranyevskaya and Gayev as characters trapped in the past
- j) Significance of the character of Yepikhodov in *The Cherry Orchard*
- k) Significance of the character of Charlotta in *The Cherry Orchard*
- l) Lopakhin and Firs

4.4 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.2.3.

- 1) c) a doctor
- 2) b) *Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin
- 3) a) similarity of the truth
- 4) c) poetic and lofty dialogues
- 5) b) Henrik Ibsen's *The Doll's House*
- 6) d) Tennessee Williams

4.3.3.

- 1) a) a doctor
- 2) b) mother
- 3) b) Moscow University
- 4) d) 1904
- 5) b) *The Seagull*
- 6) a) *The Cherry Orchard*

4.3.6

- 1) b) Nursery
- 2) a) Trofimov

- 3) c) Paris
- 4) d) to cut down the orchard, build cottages and rent them to others
- 5) d) Lopakhin
- 6) c) takes a housekeeping job

4.3.9

- 1) b) she saved him several times from his drunkard father
- 2) d) goes back to her lover in Paris
- 3) c) Lopakhin
- 4) d) Trofimov
- 5) c) he has accidents every now and then
- 6) c) Charlotte
- 7) a) Firs
- 8) c) he is inexperienced in love
- 9) a) join convent
- 10) c) Trofimov

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