

Block

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POETRY

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

As the title of the Block suggests, this Block features some interesting poems by five women, four of whom are Indian poets. I am sure you will be able to relate to the ideas expressed in these poems and understand why the poets have said certain things. You will also appreciate the manner in which these ideas have been expressed, look at the symbols and other figures of speech that the poets have used in order to make their descriptions more vivid and immediate.



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UNIT 1 EMILY DICKINSON

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to study some of the significant poems of Emily Dickinson and understand her philosophy of life and poetic style.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Emily Dickinson did not provide titles to her poems. We do not find any reasons behind it but then, we consider the title as either the first line of the poem or the numbers allotted to them in Thomas H. Johnson's standard edition of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Emily Dickinson was born in the year 1830 at Amherst, in the Connecticut Valley, Massachusetts. She was devoted to her home and from her late twenties showed the trait of seclusion and hardly met any visitors. Because of this tendency, people in Amherst considered her an eccentric.

She was a perceptive, critical, hard working person who knew how to balance between a busy family and writing. She regularly kept writing poems and neatly arranged them in chronological order. Many of them are included in her letters. Except the six pieces none of her poems were published until after her death in 1886. It is a matter of doubt why she didn't publish her poems. Later, her younger sister, Lavinia took charge of getting the poems published.

Her poetic oeuvre was a markedly individual style that uses skilful imagery. It includes the imagery of death, desire, despair, immortality, nature and hope. The distinctive features of her poems are: they lack titles, often use slant rhymes (half-rhyme), punctuation, and unconventional capitalization, hyphens, pauses. At a young age, she had faced the troubles of losing her close ones. Her poems

thus reflect the deepening menace of death. For instance, “I never lost as much but twice/twice have I stood a beggar/before the door of God/Burglar, Banker-Father!” (49). How much her religious faith was shaken can be read in one of her poems that was written after she stopped visiting the church, in about 1852. She writes, “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church/ I keep it, staying at Home/I, just wear my Wings /So instead of getting to Heaven, at last/I’m going, all along” (324).

1.2 PRECEPTORS OF DICKINSON

Dickinson had five important male preceptors who guided her throughout her literary writings: Benjamin Franklin Newton, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Edward Everett Hale, Reverend Charles Wadsworth and Samuel Bowles. Let us discuss their roles in shaping Dickinson’s literary career.

Dickinson’s earliest preceptor was Benjamin Franklin Newton. He was a twenty-six years old young law student who studied under her father, Edward Dickinson. He was a learned and artistically sensitive man and used to exchange long literary conversations with Dickinson. In one of her letters to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, she laments over Newton’s death and writes, “My earliest friend wrote me the week before he died. If I live, I will go to Amherst – if I die, I certainly will” (L457). Higginson was one of the important male preceptors in Dickinson’s life. He worked as a Unitarian minister, ardently supported in movements related to women’s rights and Abolition. He was also a literary editor and writer.

Higginson edited the *Atlantic Monthly* (1862), a magazine that was read by Dickinson. He published an article, “Letter to a Young Contributor” to guide the budding young writers. Dickinson read the article and immediately wrote a letter to Higginson. She was curious about her writings and asks Higginson, “Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?” (L403). She sent four of her poems, “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,” “The nearest Dream recedes unrealized,” “We play at Paste,” and “I’ll tell you how the Sun rose,” seeking critical comments and also guidance from Higginson. In one of her letters to the editor, Dickinson asked, “But, will you be my Preceptor, Mr Higginson?” (L 409, no. 265). Higginson remained one of her guides and friend and continued their correspondence that lasted till her death (Martin 14).

Dickinson also wrote a letter to Edward Everett Hale after Newton’s death that describes his influence upon her: “Mr Newton became to me a gentle, yet grave Preceptor, teaching me what to read, what authors to admire, what was most grand or beautiful in nature, and that sublimer lesson, a faith in things unseen. . . it was an elder brother, loved indeed very much, and mourned, and remembered” (L153).

Newton died of tuberculosis on March 24, 1853. Emily got shocked to know about Newton’s death and continued expressing her grief in the following poems. In 1861, Elizabeth Barrett Browning had died and then her husband, Robert Browning wrote another collection of poems dedicated to his wife. In responding to this, she wrote to her cousin, she was “astonished- till I remembered that I, myself, in a smaller way, sang off charnel steps” (qtd. in Mamunes 77). In a

tribute to Newton, she wrote “TO know just how he suffered would be dear/To know if any human eyes were near/To whom he could intrust his wavering gaze/Until it settled firm on Paradise” (622). She was a sensitive poet who felt anxious about the loss of her close ones and wondered about mortality and immortality. She grieves over death but tries consoling herself by believing in the afterlife or soul in paradise.

At the time of one of her trips with her father to Philadelphia, she visited Arch Street Presbyterian church and there she heard the speech of Reverend Charles Wadsworth. Impressed by his lectures, she wrote to him seeking for guidance and thus she got her another preceptor. Another preceptor was Samuel Bowles, the owner and an editor of the *Springfield Republican*.

1.3 RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

“Emily Dickinson acted out historical and cultural movements in a personal way... Dissent, revivals, and the formations of new Churches created an era of religious multiplicity” (Martin 24). Scholars believe that she was a religious rebel, who denied conversion, liberated herself from church and adopted a personal type of religion. Reading her poems, we find that unlike accepting the fixed guidelines of the religion, she had created her faith that could suit her relationship with friends, family and her own self. She writes, “‘Faith’ is a fine invention/For Gentlemen who see!” (185) Often during inner turmoil and emotional outburst, she questions the acts of God also, “Of Course – I prayed/And did God care? /He cared as much as on the Air/A Bird – had stamped her foot /And cried ‘Give Me’” (376).

1.4 SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The literary writing period of Emily Dickinson was 1855-1865. The scholars consider this period to be a significant one in American nineteenth-century history. The major events that Dickinson saw in her lifetime include the Mexican–American War (1846-1848), the California Gold Rush (1848-1855), the first American women’s rights convention (July 19, 1848), Seneca Falls Convention, Harriet Tubman’s escape on the Underground Railroad (Harriet Tubman was an escaped enslaved woman. She worked as a “conductor” on the Underground Railroad. She led and worked for the freedom of other enslaved people. She was also a nurse, a Union spy and a women’s suffrage supporter), the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852, an abolitionist novel), the Civil War (1861-65), and the shootings of American President Abraham Lincoln, in 1865.

Also, we find that some of the scientific inventions were going on such as steam-powered locomotives, gas lamps, revolvers, the telegraphs, bicycles, anaesthesia, and dynamites. “In addition to political and technological advances, a religious and spiritual revolution was also gaining momentum” (Martin 24). As America struggled for its existence, expansion, the rights of its citizens, Dickinson also struggled to establish her identity as a successful writer.

“Congress passed the Indian Removal Act in 1830, which allowed President Jackson to negotiate treaties with Native Americans to exchange land in the

Eastern states for land west of the Mississippi River. One of these treaties led to the expulsion of Cherokee Indians from their lands in North Carolina and Georgia. Their 1838 exile to Indian Territory became known as the “Trail of Tears” (Martin 28). The US was working on its expansion and seeking new opportunities. Many of Dickinson’s friend’s departed to new places, leaving her bereft and alone. Along with religious and abolitionist movements, the Second Great Awakening was also evolving. The Northern people believed that slavery needed to be prohibited, while Southerners argued that it was not mentioned in the Bible anywhere that slavery was a sin. It had an integral role in the economy and social belief.

Apart from the abolitionist movement, debates on individual rights and personhood were also going on. At the same time, women also argued for their rights. These events had some impressions on her mind and she started contemplating about women education, their societal status, freedom, their solidarity and sisterhood. “Later in life, Dickinson befriended Samuel Bowles, Helen Hunt Jackson, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, three people who supported women’s writing and shared liberal views about women’s rights” (Martin 31).

1.5 TRANSCENDENTALISM

Transcendentalism was flourishing in mid-nineteenth-century America as an idealist philosophy. It was influenced by Christian Unitarianism of 1830s. The important writers of this movement were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman. Other writers were Nathaniel Hawthorn, Herman Melville. The members of the transcendental club included Amos Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller and William Ellery Channing. They adhered to Kant’s philosophy of intuitive knowledge and celebrated individualism and self-reliance. It is believed that an individual could attain sublimity by studying nature and becoming the mortal embodiment of God. They believed the notion that individuals could have direct relationship with God without having any religious masters as mediators. Dickinson enquired about the Puritans, who believed in original sin, a hostile world, and a predestined universe. To her, Unitarianism was a way out that believed the world was good and that people could attain salvation through good works. Like Dickinson, the Transcendentalists believed that the country’s materialistic views were rejecting to acknowledge the value of an individual’s craftsmanship and alienating them from their own society. In simple terms, Transcendentalists sought to restore the vital connection between the nature, people and God.

Though not a transcendental writer, the worldview Dickinson constructs in her poetry reflects the influences of a transcendental legacy. Like Emerson’s poetry, Dickinson’s writings show the resistance to organized religion, the fixed conventions, set of rules and doctrines. Her poetry attempts to seek eternal truth in the natural world with the power of human consciousness and not through God or blindly following a set religious doctrines. The same attitude of experimentation could be seen in her style of writing where she abandoned the use of standard meter and rhyme. She also twisted traditional grammar to suit her needs and in a way compelled her readers to try understanding the meaning of her works.

Now, let us discuss how her poetic style differs from her contemporaries. One of the key differences we find in her poetry is the use of “circumference.” In one of her letters to Higginson in 1862, she declares, “My Business is Circumference” (L 412). The Circumference is derived from Latin which means ‘to carry’ or ‘to go around’. It gives the sense of encompassing. It is a double metaphor signifying extension as well as limit. Here Dickinson uses it in the sense of spirit in action where the consciousness negotiates between ‘me’ and ‘not me’. In a way, it draws a thin line or perimeter between man and God. She uses it for sublimity, mixing awe and fear with aesthetics. Circumference helps to embrace the idea of life within its most complete and comprehensive manner. It’s not the traditional notion of religion but gives a way to connect to God and evolve as a divine-human being.

Another key feature of Dickinson’s letters is the use of personas. . The names she used for herself include “Emilie,” “Judah,” “Phaeton,” “Brooks of Sheffield,” “Cole,” “Samuel Nash,” “Antony,” and “Uncle Emily.”

1.6 DICKINSON AS A WOMAN POET

Dickinson was a dynamic poet in her fast-changing era. At that time where women were expected to put their ambitions at stake and serve their domestic life, Emily succeeded in balancing between the two. She was a prolific writer, writing to express her true perceptions and philosophies of life along with taking care of all her domestic responsibilities. She didn’t just write for writing sake, rather she poignantly raises the question about God, church, politics and society in general. We could imagine her helplessness while manipulating some of her excerpts according to societal norms in order to get them published.

She went to Amherst Academy in her childhood and the academy had just begun to admit women. She built a good circle of friends there. Dickinson wrote about her school, “We really have some most charming young women in school this term. I shan’t call them anything but women, for women they are in every sense of the word” (L 14). Just look at her emphasis on choosing the word ‘women’ and admiring the very essence of womanhood. Some of her cherished friends were Abiah Root, Helen Fiske and Helen Hunt. She wrote to Abiah “I keep your lock of hair as precious as gold,”, further she adds, “I often look at it when I go to my little lot of treasures, and wish the owner of that glossy lock were here” (L 9). Her friendship with Abiah Root ended in 1854 after Abiah’s marriage. The critics are uncertain about the reason behind it but the most accepted notion is that the marital duties of Abiah kept her so occupied or the bond with her husband grew so strong that it replaced a decade long friendship.

Apart from her friend, when one of Emily’s most beloved teachers got married and left the Academy, Dickinson tried to pacify herself by telling herself that she shall be happy for her teacher’s future. In 1847 she wrote a letter expressing how much she loved her and felt alone in her absence: “Life Yet, much as we love her, it seems lonely and strange without our dear Miss Adams. I suppose you know she has left Amherst, not again to return as a teacher. It is indeed true, that she is to be married . . . She seemed to be very happy in anticipation of her future prospects and I hope she will realize all her fond hopes. I cannot bear to think that she will never more wield the sceptre, and sit upon the throne

in our venerable schoolhouse, and yet I am glad she is going to have a home of her own and a kind companion to take life's journey with her" (L 45–6). The words like 'sceptre' and 'throne' suggest her sense of respect and admiration for her teacher.

Her knowledge of botany is also reflected in her letters and poems. Although she refers to common names of plants and flowers in her poems, she had a sound knowledge of the scientific names and classifications of many plants and flowers. The herbarium prepared by her for one of the school projects is an object of keen interest for Dickinson scholars as something that shows Dickinson's love of nature and her scientific precision. We could draw an analogy to the way she cared for the plants and flowers of her garden and nurtured words in her poetry. Outside the humdrum of domestic chores and visiting guests, she found a sense of contentment in writing and visiting her garden.

After the Amherst Academy, Dickinson joined the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley in 1847. The founder of the Seminary was Mary Lyon who sought to implant religious values in students and prepare them to become suitable wives and mothers. Dickinson was sixteen-years-old and the strict discipline of the Seminary was choking her. Thus she wanted to escape to her home. She wrote on 6 November 1847 "It has been nearly six weeks since I left home and that is a longer time, than I was ever away from home before now. I was very homesick for a few days and it seemed to me I could not live here" (L 53, no. 18). Feeling that she is cut off from the outside world and curious about current events taking place out there she wrote letters to her brother: "Won't you please to tell me when you answer my letter who the candidate for President is? I have been trying to find out ever since I came here and have not yet succeeded. I don't know anything more about affairs in the world, than if I was in a trance . . . Has the Mexican war terminated yet and how? Are we beat? Do you know of any nation about to besiege South Hadley?" (L 49, no. 16). We notice here that though in Seminary, she was learning the values suited to women but she could bear to remain ignorant of the current socio-political situation of the outside world.

In one of her letters, she writes about her strict father or patriarch of the family and we get to know about gender binaries of those days: "[Father] buys me many Books – but begs me not to read them – because he fears they joggle the Mind," (L 404, no. 261). She decorated her room with a few pictures of her favourite authors such as Thomas Carlyle, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot. In 1849, Dickinson read Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte had used her pen name 'Currer Bell'. After its publication, people were clueless about the real writer behind this mysterious name. Critics often even complained that *Jane Eyre's* heroine was too self-reliant and common to be a moral model for women. Ten years later, in August of 1859, the Republican revealed another such type of writer, George Eliot. Dickinson greatly admired Eliot's fiction *Adam Bede* and the pseudonym used for this book was Marian Evans. In her twenties, Dickinson got to know the real names of her favourite authors and it left a deep impression on her mind. Perhaps she hesitated to publish her poems because she understood that women writings wouldn't be valued or they needed to be published anonymously or perhaps she was afraid her father would know if she published anonymously and wouldn't allow her to write.

In 1855, the family returned to The Homestead. But this was not a favourable time for her. Dickinson's mother got sick and the primary household responsibilities were completely shifted on Dickinson sisters. She grew responsible and mature at an early age. She was twenty-four years old when she started nursing her ailing mother, taking responsibility of housekeeping and taking care of her father's visitors. Her father remained busy with his speeches and travels. The sisters though got admitted to higher education were mainly expected to take care of household chores and then eventually marry. But both the girls remained unmarried throughout their lives and dedicated their lives to the household. When she was fifteen-years old, Dickinson wrote to her friend, Abiah Root, about how the stacks of mending had occupied her to the extent that she really had to stretch herself to write: "I found a quantity of sewing waiting with open arms to embrace me, or rather for me to embrace it, and I could hardly give myself up to 'Nature's sweet restorer,' for the ghosts of out-of-order garments crying for vengeance upon my defenceless head. However, I am happy to inform you, my dear friend, that I have nearly finished my sewing for winter, and will answer all the letters which you shall deem worthy to send so naughty a girl as myself" (L 40).

The influence of the kitchen, hearth and fire can be seen in many of Dickinson's poems. She imagines "Hope" as a 'soft songbird', a 'thing with feathers'. Dickinson shows that even the smallest portion of oneself, a single "crumb," can provide an entire meal for hope. "Hope is the thing with feathers/That perches in the soul/ And sings the tune without the words/And never stops – at all" (254). In another poem about a common woman cleaning her kitchen she writes, "She sweeps with many-colored Brooms/And leaves the Shreds behind/Oh Housewife in the Evening West/Come back, and dust the Pond!" (219). Dickinson gives her housewife authority "an active participant through striking, active verbs. The housewife's near-mythic power, combined with the closeness of 'Brooms', 'fly', and 'stars' may also suggest another powerful female image, particularly for a woman writing in Massachusetts: the witch" (Martin 57).

Dickinson meanwhile developed friendship with Sue. She writes, "One Sister have I in our house, And one, a hedge away. There's only one recorded, But both belong to me" (14). Here we get to know her sense of sisterhood. She says history will record only sister of hers, Lavinia but sisterhood does not need biological relation and thus Sue is also my sister. They maintained this friendship till Dickinson's death. In 1861, Austin and Susan had their first child, Edward Dickinson (named after his grandfather). Dickinson's excitement in becoming an aunt can be seen in the note she sent to Susan: "Is it true, dear Sue? Are there two? I should'nt like to come For fear of joggling Him!" (L373). Dickinson took care of all three children of Austin and Susan's as her own: Edward (Ned), Martha (Mattie) and Thomas Gilbert (Gib).

Once Higginson got injured in a battle: "Dear friend, Are you in danger – I did not know that you were hurt. Will you tell me more? . . . I am surprised and anxious" (L 431, no. 290). She grew sensitive towards human sacrifices in war where only victorious ones are glorified and the one who lose are treated as condemned, weak, lazy, ignorant and failures. This winning and losing dichotomy she deals with in one her most celebrated poems: "Success is counted sweetest/ By those who ne'er succeed/To comprehend a nectar/Requires sorest need/Not

one of all the purple/Host Who took the Flag today/Can tell the definition/So clear of Victory” (p.35, no.67). According to Dickinson, the one who loses, gets a comprehensive understanding of mixed emotions of pain, dejection, despair, imagining the true taste of victory, the urge of winning while the winner knows only the feeling of victory.

Dickinson’s poems were unparalleled. She has written on almost all the subjects, be it war or the kitchen. The American Civil War was a macrocosm of the war inside Dickinson herself. She uses the images of violence, war, battle, weapons, and death in her poems. She wrote in a poem, “My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun/In Corners – till a Day/The Owner passed – identified/And carried Me away” (754).

In the nineteenth century, women were actually encouraged to learn letter writing. Dickinson stretched herself to twist the traditional styles of letter writing: “I have written you a great many letters since you left me – not the kind of letters that go in post-offices – and ride in mail-bags – but queer – little silent ones – very full of affection – and full of confidence – but wanting in proof to you – therefore, not valid – somehow you will not answer them – and you would paper, and ink letters – I will try one of those – tho’ not half so precious as the other kind. I have written those at night – when the rest of the world were at sleep – when only God came between us – and no one else might hear” (L81, no.30).

One of the innovative ways of her letter writing is that besides writing condolence letters, she took it as a responsibility to console the grieving family of the dead through her words. In the mid nineteenth century, poets like Walt Whitman and Henry James had become experts at framing the condolence letters obviously because they got so many to write. For Dickinson, condolence letter writing was a chance to heal someone’s wounds with her words.

How she could do such a difficult task of consoling the mourning family can be understood by digging into her life. Dickinson herself had suffered the loss of her relatives as well as many close friends: Samuel Bowles (died in 1878), followed by Reverend Wadsworth (1879), and her mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson (1882). At the age of fifty-one years, Dickinson had lost both her parents. In the following years, she again grieved for the loss of her friend Helen Hunt Jackson. The most tragic or toughest death to bear for Dickinson was the loss of her nephew Gib, who died of typhoid fever on 5 October 1883. Some of her biographers claim that Gib’s death was the beginning of Dickinson’s own decline. 15 May 1886, Dickinson took her last breath at the Homestead due to Bright’s disease.

Dickinson’s first major biographer, Ralph W. Franklin analysed, in the summer of 1858, she began collecting all of her poems, copied them and stitched the pages together by hand, and destroyed the original drafts of her poems. The period from 1861 to 1865 is called as the “flood” years of Dickinson’s poetic production by the editor Thomas H. Johnson. These “flood” years coincidentally coincided with the American Civil War. In around 1869, when she was thirty-eight years old, she was seen completely in recluse and hardly any visitor had seen her even in her home. She never left the grounds of The Homestead and The Evergreens. “I do not cross my Father’s ground to any House or town,” she explained to Thomas Wentworth Higginson (L 460).

What caused Dickinson to seclude herself from the society? She was a learned lady, an intellectual, an artist, a poet and responsible daughter and aunt, a woman who constantly evolved in writings, had her preceptors and suitors, and also a vast knowledge of current events of the world. This question still persists amongst Dickinson scholars. One could argue that Dickinson took up the confinement ritual as pregnant women practiced in the nineteenth century, in order to give birth to her writings. The man who is supposed to be her love was Otis Phillips Lord. He was a judge in the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court and was closer to Dickinson's father's age. Although Judge Lord and Dickinson were close, her father's disapproval and her own reservations about marriage and unwillingness to leave her family would have prevented this marriage.

Dickinson's decision to remain aloof from the society is reflected in the following poem, "The Soul selects her own Society/Then – shuts the Door/To her divine Majority/ Present no more" (303). In addition to her own physical troubles (assumed that she also suffered tuberculosis), she had endured many other hardships in her personal life. In 1874, soon after delivering a speech, her father, Edward Dickinson collapsed and passed away. She was forty three years old. She wrote to Higginson, the morning her father left for his trip, she "woke him for the train – and saw him no more" (L 528).

Thus we find that there could be many possible reasons of her seclusion such as perhaps her own willingness to spend her spare time in reading and writing poems, or family responsibilities occupied her, or patriarchy or the tragic deaths of her closed ones or simply her introvert and shy behaviour. But we, the readers are fortunate enough to be introduced to one of the major woman poets of America. Had her sister Lavinia not dared to get her poems published, Dickinson would have remained unheard and unsung. Rather than a recluse or a victim of the Victorian society, Dickinson is "a pioneer who chose the domestic as her frontier because it provided the freedom to write" (Martin 52).

1.7 DICKINSON'S LOVE FOR THE COLOUR WHITE

The garden was a space or refuge for Dickinson. The garden was a place where Dickinson got her space. "I have lately come to the conclusion that I am Eve, alias Mrs. Adam," she joked in a letter to Abiah Root (L 24, no. 9). One of her favorite flowers was the 'white saprophytic Indian pipe'. The same flower was printed on the title page of her first edition of published poems on 12 November 1890.

In fact, she had an obsession for the color white. She was often spotted wearing only white cotton dresses. But it had nothing to do with the symbols of purity, chastity, soul, ghost or divinity. Rather this 'white' was a symbol of her passion and her emotional intensity. In one of her poems "Dare you see a Soul at the White Heat?" Dickinson confronts the readers, are they daring enough to get her emotional intensity. A self-described "Woman – white – to be," (271).

Dickinson's body was kept in a white casket, wrapped in a white flannel robe. Higginson read one of Dickinson's favorite poems that was written by Emily Bronte, "No Coward Soul is Mine." This poem was Bronte's last poem, written

on 2 January 1846. On Dickinson's headstone, the initials "EED" were carved. Later, Sue's daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, chose a new tombstone that read, "Called Back." This phrase was taken from Dickinson's last known letter that she wrote to her cousins, Louise and Frances Norcross. The letter read, "Little Cousins, Called back. Emily" (L 906, no. 1046). Dickinson had read Hugh Conway's popular novella *Called Back* (1883).

As Dickinson asked Lavinia to destroy her notes and other correspondence after her death, Lavinia collected them to be burned. However, as she opened desk drawers and boxes, she was amazed and shocked to stumble across a cache of over 1,700 poems. She and her brother were also writers and thus she knew perfectly how precious and important those writings were for readers. She saved the letters and poems, making a vow to get them published. Dickinson's niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi (a celebrated author), also took charge of getting the poems published which were earlier kept preserved with her mother Sue. Bianchi altered the punctuation and capitalization of the poems to make them more agreeable to the reading public. She published *The Single Hound* (1914), *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson* (1924), *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1924), and *Further Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1929).

1.8 'I MEASURE EVERY GRIEF I MEET' (561)

I measure every Grief I meet
With narrow, probing, eyes –
I wonder if It weighs like Mine –
Or has an Easier size.

I wonder if They bore it long –
Or did it just begin –
I could not tell the Date of Mine –
It feels so old a pain –

I wonder if it hurts to live –
And if They have to try –
And whether – could They choose between –
It would not be – to die –

I note that Some – gone patient long –
At length, renew their smile –
An imitation of a Light
That has so little Oil –

I wonder if when Years have piled –
Some Thousands – on the Harm –
That hurt them early – such a lapse
Could give them any Balm –



Or would they go on aching still
 Through Centuries of Nerve –
 Enlightened to a larger Pain –
 In Contrast with the Love –

The Grieved – are many – I am told –
 There is the various Cause –
 Death – is but one – and comes but once –
 And only nails the eyes –

There's Grief of Want – and grief of Cold –
 A sort they call "Despair" –
 There's Banishment from native Eyes –
 In sight of Native Air –

And though I may not guess the kind –
 Correctly – yet to me
 A piercing Comfort it affords
 In passing Calvary –

To note the fashions – of the Cross –
 And how they're mostly worn –
 Still fascinated to presume
 That Some – are like my own –

The poem opens with first person pronoun 'I'. The speaker states that whenever she comes across grieving people, she closely looks and measures their grief with hers to know whether their grief is more bearable than hers. She feels as if she is bearing this pain for so long and wonders whether other grieving people feel it in the same way.

She further thinks, whether the thought of death or suicide ever came to their mind while they were into this death-in-life situation. She has seen some deceased people who try to renew their smile, but then, this smile is not convincing enough for her. This is a metaphorical stanza. Here, the smile seems like an imitation of a light that is coming from a lamp (patient) that has so little oil (life).

She wonders can time really heal the pain. Or the pain remains aching for centuries till it turns to an enlightened larger pain in contrast with love. She says that there are many causes of grief and amongst all, death is the only grief that comes once and only nails the eyes. The other grieves are worse than death. Speaker mentions grief of 'want' or desires, lacks in life, despair and exile.

Although the speaker is uncertain about the kind of grief but she realizes that knowing the grief of others comforts us in terms of cavalry. In the last stanza, the speaker refers to grief as a fashion and it fascinates the speaker to presume if some people deal with grief in the same way she does.

The poem has 10 ballad stanzas. The alternate odd stanzas follow the rhyme scheme abcb. The hyphens set the mood of the poem. The capital letters in the

words like Grief, Mine, Harm, Date, Despair, Death, Pain, Love, Cold, Cross etc. emphasize upon the idea of the poem. The words like 'Measure', 'Meet', 'Wonder', 'Weighs' shows internal rhyme.

1.9 'I HEARD A FLY BUZZ - WHEN I DIED' - (465)

I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air -
Between the Heaves of Storm -

The Eyes around - had wrung them dry -
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset - when the King
Be witnessed - in the Room -

I willed my Keepsakes - Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable - and then it was
There interposed a Fly -

With Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz -
Between the light - and me -
And then the Windows failed - and then
I could not see to see -



While we read this poem, we could feel the sensations of a dying person. As a noun and as a verb, a fly is closely associated with death. It portrays some contrasting images of inertness of the dead with the movement of the Fly. The first stanza sets the scene of the poem where the mourners are silent, the air is still as the upheaval of storm or dying has already started.

In the second stanza, the speaker talks about the mourners. Their eyes have gone dry and breaths are firm. It suggests that now, they have stopped crying and controlling themselves for witnessing the final moment. 'last onset' is an oxymoron. While last is the end, onset is the beginning. So here, she is expecting an afterlife, her journey from this world to that world. Why does she expect it's a new beginning? Because the King appears in the room. The King is going to lead the speaker to heaven. We could see here, the stillness of the surrounding is intensified with the inner calmness of the corpse.

In the third stanza, while the speaker is signing her will, the fly comes as an intruder again as we had seen in the first stanza.

In the last stanza, the speaker is seen to be struggling between a life-in-death and a death-in-life situation. In line thirteen, 'Blue' is the blue light of a candle that symbolizes an omen of death or presence of the Devil. The blue, uncertain, stumbling, buzzing fly is symbolic of death. This Fly intervenes and comes in between light and the dying person, blocking the physical sight and also obscuring the radiance of immortality. Gradually the eyesight fades and the speaker succumbs to death.

The poem uses imageries such as auditory and visual imageries. Hyphens are used to set the mood of the poem through pauses. It has four ballad stanzas, with ballad meter in alternate iambic trimeter and iambic tetrameter. The poem is composed in quatrains and only the last stanza follows the rhyme scheme, abcb, to emphasize upon the true essence of the whole poem.

1.10 LET US SUM UP

Though Dickinson preferred a secluded life, she was well versed in the field of literature, public activities through her father and brother and current affairs through newspapers. We have seen how naturally she talks about topics like grief and death. Instead of ignoring these facts of life, Dickinson suggests the ways to face them.

1.11 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the themes of Dickinson's poems with illustration.
2. Write a note on the poetic technique of Emily Dickinson with special reference to diction, metre, imagery and metaphor.

1.12 GLOSSARY

1. Calvary-hill outside Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified
2. King- God of death

1.13 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 KAMALA DAS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Kamala Das
- 2.3 ‘An Introduction’ – the Poem
 - 2.3.1 The Text of the Poem
 - 2.3.2 Glossary
 - 2.3.3 Analysis
- 2.4 ‘A Hot Noon in Malabar’ – The Poem
 - 2.4.1 The Text of the Poem
 - 2.4.2 Glossary
 - 2.4.3 Analysis
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Kamala Das was one of the foremost women poets of India, writing in English. She was a revolutionary poet who started the trend towards frankness and candour in the treatment of a subject which was almost taboo and which women hesitated to deal with. Her poems are about adulterous love, loneliness and quest for fulfillment in love. In this unit we are going to read two of her poems. After reading this unit you shall be able to:

- write about the life and work of Kamala Das
- discuss Kamala Das’s poems (i) ‘An Introduction’ (ii) ‘A Hot Noon in Malabar’.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Kamala Das’s poetry is different from those of the other Indian women poets not merely by the choice of her themes but also by her bold treatment of those themes. She used English in her poems without undue concern for correctness and precision. She is an excellent poet with an excellent feeling for sound, rhythm, imagery, symbol, word-play and drama. Like Nissim Ezekiel, her poetry too gradually became freer and looser in sense of form and versification. She is among the few women writers who have handled many literary genres with success in two distinct languages - English and Malayalam.

2.2 KAMALADAS (MARCH 31, 1934 – MAY 30, 2009)

Kamala Das (Madhavikuti) was born in Malabar in 1934. She was educated privately at home and at schools in Bengal and Kerala and belonged to a writers’

family. Her mother Padma Bhushan Nalapat Balamani Amma was an outstanding Malayalam poet and winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Saraswati Samman and her father was the editor and Managing Director of Mathrabhumi, a leading Malayalam language newspaper. She was only fifteen when she was married to K. Madhava Das, who rose to become an R.B.I. Officer.

Kamala Das began writing poetry at the age of six. She was only fourteen when P.E.N. India, edited by Sophia Wadia, published her first poem. But her poetry got recognition when she was awarded the Asian Poetry Prize instituted by P.E.N. Philippines in 1963. From 1971 to '72 and again from 1978 to '79, she was the poetry editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. Her poems were published in *Opinion, New Writing in India* (Penguin Books, 1974), and *Young Commonwealth Poets* (Heinemann, 1965).

Kamala Das was a writer of versatile genius. She handled essays, fictions, short stories, criticism and journalistic features very successfully in both the languages, Malayalam and English. Her writing in English is as varied as in Malayalam.

She published seven volumes of poetry, two novels, *Manas* (1975) and *The Indian English Poets Alphabet of Lust* (1976), a collection of short fiction (*A Doll for the Child Prostitute*) and an autobiography called *My Story*. Her well-known books included *Summer in Calcutta* (1965) and *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Stories* (1973). When the first volume of her *Collected Poems* was published in 1984, it won her the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1985. Her other collection *The Soul Knows How to Sing: Selections From Kamala Das* was published in 1997.

Kamala Das ventured into new territory in Indian English poetry. She succeeded in exploring those labyrinths which inhibit many brave poets even today. In her poetry she refers to certain matters so bluntly and openly that readers frequently feel scandalized and shocked. It is apparent that Kamala Das allowed the poetic impulse to flow into poetry before the social conventions come to arrest the flow. Rajeev S. Patke remarks: "It would be a mistake to suppose that Das is obsessed with sex and marriage and social roles. What she is intent on is honesty of impulse and a sense of direction to the flow of her wants and feelings".

Talking about her contribution C.D. Narasimhaiah once remarked: "Kamala Das is perhaps the only Indian poet who owes little to Yeats or Eliot and trusted her own resources and culture". She not only believed that her own personal experiences and her personality were valid resources for her poetry, what is creditworthy is that she very successfully transformed those personal experiences into poetic art. Often she describes women's plight in a society dominated by men. Her poetry, like most confessional poetry by Nissim Ezekiel, Anne Sexton or Sylvia Plath, has a therapeutic and cathartic effect on the poet as well as on the readers.

The poet is noted also for her direct public commitments. She involved herself in a number of public responsibilities. She was not only a great votary of vegetarianism but she also initiated the Bodhiyatra Movement for environmental protection. She played active roles as Chairman of the Forestry Board of Kerala and President of the Film Society of Kerala besides entering politics in order to help the poor and teach speech and hearing-impaired children in a school.

Suffering from pneumonia on 30th May, 2009, she breathed her last at Jahangir Hospital, Pune.

Now find out yourself how well you have read the biographical note on Kamala Das with the help of some exercises. If you are unable to answer the simple questions, do read the whole text carefully once more.

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Who were Kamala Das's parents? What did they do?
- 2) How did Kamala Das's poetic career begin?
- 3) Mention some of the important books Kamala Das wrote.
- 4) On what grounds is her poetry compared with those of other poets?
- 5) Mention some of the public responsibilities Kamala Das assumed in her life.

2.3 'AN INTRODUCTION' (1965) - THE POEM

'An Introduction' is obviously an autobiographical poem written by Kamala Das which first appeared in her *Summer in Calcutta* (1965). The poem is a brilliant example of her confessionalism wherein she unfolds her entire self with extreme frankness and candour. In this poem, the poet describes her experiences which were strictly private and personal. The poem is a revolt against conventionalism and the restraints imposed on Indian women. In this poem the question whether or not Indians should write in English is put to rest. The poem is also remarkable for its daring innovativeness.

The poem you are going to read is written in free verse in a colloquial style which appropriately allows the free flow of writer's thoughts and feelings. The poem is highly revealing of the poet, her political knowledge, her linguistic abilities, her physical growth, the sad experience of her marriage and her quest for fulfilling love. What M.K. Naik says of her poetry in general also applies for this poem: "Kamala Das's persona is no nymphomaniac; she is simply every woman who seeks love and she is the beloved and betrayed; expressing her female hunger".

2.3.1 The Text of the Poem

I don't know politics but I know the names
Of those in power, and can repeat them like
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with
Nehru. I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in

Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
Incoherent muttering of the blazing
Funeral pyre. I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. When
I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank
Pitifully. Then...I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
On wall or peep in through our lace-draped windows,
Be Amy, or be Kamla, or better
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.
Don't play at schizophrenia or be a
Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when
Jilted in love... I met a man, loved him. Call
Him not by any name, he is every man,
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love. In him...the hungry haste

Of river in me... the oceans' tireless
 Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,
 The answer is; it is I. Anywhere and
 Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself
 If in this world, he is tightly-packed like the
 Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely
 Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of stranger towns,
 It is I who laugh; it is I who make love
 And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
 With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,
 I am saint. I am the beloved and the
 Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
 Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

2.3.2 Glossary

Know the three languages: Malayalam, Kannada and English.

Write in two: Malayalam and English.

Dream in one: Malayalam. It is the mother-tongue in which one usually dreams.

Why not leave me alone: a glimpse of the poet's spirit instinctively rebelling against all forms of restraints.

It is as human as I am human: just as a human is liable to make mistakes, so Kamala's language is not without errors.

The speech of the mind: language through which feelings such as Joys, desires, aspirations etc. of man's mind is expressed.

Here and not there: to the point and not irrelevant.

Incoherent Mutterings: speech in a low voice not meant to be heard by others.

Blazing: burning strongly.

Asked for love: expresses the bewilderment of the innocent young girl who sought love but experienced raw lust which left her feeling assaulted and defiled.

A quarreler with servants: People advised Kamala to be a typical housewife, to quarrel with servants as otherwise the latter would get the upper hand.

Belong: to feel comfortable and happy with the situation one is placed in.

Categorisers: the people with traditional thinking who consider men and women as a distinct category, having specific dress and roles.

Schizophrenia: a mental illness in which a person becomes unable to link thought, emotion and behaviour, leading to withdrawal from reality and relationships.

Nympho: a woman with a mental disorder marked by compulsive sexual behaviour.

Jilted in Love: abandoned by a lover.

The hungry haste of rivers: an image through which lover's strong sexual passion is reflected. As a river rushes towards the ocean for union, so the lover moves towards the beloved for the fulfillment of his sexual desires.

The Ocean's tireless waiting: an image through which the beloved's infinite patience for a fulfilling sexual union with her lover is expressed. Ocean here is an objective correlative for the beloved's psychic state.

I am sinner... I too...: the poet sums up her introduction by identifying herself with countless others around, all of whom represent a bundle of contrary features.

2.3.3 Analysis

'An Introduction' is a self-portrait and the anatomy of Kamala Das's mind. The poem recounts the major incidents of her life which have affected her experience.

The poem is remarkable for its structure even though it encompasses a diversity of facts and circumstances. The rules of punctuation have been fully observed. The lines are almost of the same length. The words used and the use of phraseology show Das's talent of choosing the right words and putting them in the most effective order. The poem contains many felicities of word and phrase.

Written in free verse, the poem has neither any rhyming scheme nor any metrical arrangement. The natural speech rhythm, pauses and punctuation make the poem conversational in style.

When you read the poem, the first thing that may strike your mind is the title 'An Introduction'. Whose introduction does it talk about? A little further, it is revealed the poem is an introduction of the poet herself. But deeper analysis tells us that it is an introduction of 'every woman'. The opening line of the poem 'I don't know politics but I know the names of those in power beginning with Nehru' makes it obvious that she does not want to assume any political identity. She would rather prefer a national identity. Mark the following line: 'I am Indian, very brown in colour, born in Malabar' - here the poet uses words which are identity markers - 'Indian', 'brown in colour' and 'born in Malabar'. The narrator boasts of her linguistic proficiency: "I speak three languages, write in two, dream in one", to prove that she is a capable writer and fully aware of her role and responsibilities as one. Her Indian identity and linguistic ability is emphasized to reinforce her claim of writing in English. The following illustrations advance her claim further:

'...The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness,
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see?'

The narrator asserts that the language with all its distortions of grammar, structure or pronunciation belongs to the users, no matter what nationality they may belong to. The narrator explains that the language is 'as human' (liable to error) as the narrator is human. She makes her case to use English very strong by claiming

that 'it is useful to her as cawing/Is to crows or roaring to the lions'. English comes so naturally to her that in it she can voice her 'joys', her longings' and her 'hopes'. The narrator is so vexed with the suggestions regarding her use of language that she further illustrates her point with a series of images to clarify what the writing in English is not like. She says that English ...not the deaf, blind speech/ Of trees in storms or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the/ Incoherent muttering of the blazing/ Funeral pyre...'

The poem shifts to another topic when the narrator begins to speak about her early marriage and her consequent psychological hurt:

'...he drew a youth of sixteen into the/ Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me/ But my sad woman-body felt so beaten./The weight of my breast and womb crushed me. I shrank/ Pitifully...'. The above lines are remarkable in their candour and clarity. The whole picture of the distasteful experience of sex that a young, innocent girl has, becomes vivid and the last two lines create the true picture of its consequence. As a mark of protest, the poet resorts to donning western male attire:

'...Then... I wore a shirt and my/Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored/ My womanliness...'

This open revolt creates strong resentment amongst her relatives and well-wishers. Their sharpness of reactions is reflected very effectively through the number of instructions that the poet describes as having been flung at her:

'...Fit in, Oh
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
On walls or peep through our lace-draped window.
Be Amy or Kamla, or better
Still, be Madhavikutti. It is time to
Choose a name, a role...'

You can see that 'Fit in' and 'belong' are simple but their arrangement in the poetic scheme makes them expressive and profound. Similarly the words 'cry' and 'categorisers' too are equally simple but very suggestive in meaning. For example, the word 'cry' carries with it a sense of anxiety and force and categorizer refers to people with traditional, possibly outmoded ways of thinking who understand things in terms of category and class only. The later suggestion that the narrator must never pretend to be a split-personality suffering from a psychological disorder or act as a nympho shows further griping and more commands for her. This is not all; the narrator is further instructed:

'...Don't cry embarrassingly loud when/jilted in love...'

The poem now moves on to Kamala Das's ideal of the man-woman relationship:

'...he is everyman/'Who wants a woman, Just as I am every/ Woman who seeks love. In him... the hungry haste/Of river in me...the ocean's tireless/Waiting...'

Here the words 'want' and 'seek' is notable. 'Want' refers to every man who needs a woman for his service as a subordinate. 'Seek' means every woman who badly misses love, and keeps looking for what they want their whole life. The

last two lines, through the use of beautiful images very successfully explain the sexual behaviour of men and women. The hungry haste of rivers and the ocean's tireless waiting represent the psychological states of men and women respectively. You may note here that the word 'I' is repeated at a number of times to emphasize the women's quest for identity. Explaining the nature and position of women, the narrator says '...I am sinner,/I am saint. I am the beloved and the/ Betrayed...' The point she is trying to make is that be it man or woman, none is wholly a sinner or wholly a saint. We are all a balance of both. In that case there is no point in viewing the women as the other. Finally, Kamala Das's idea of fulfilling love is neatly presented in '...I have no joys which are not yours, no/ Aches which are not yours...'

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) What could be implied meaning of the opening lines of the poem: I don't know politics but I know the names/Of those in power,...beginning with/ Nehru'?
- 2) Talking about the English language the narrator says, '...it is useful to me as cawing/is to crows or roaring to the lions...' What is the literary device used in this line?
- 3) What do the images of 'rivers' and 'oceans' imply?
- 4) "In Kamala Das the poet is the poetry". Comment in about 50 words.
- 5) ...I have no joys which are not yours, no/Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

Who represents 'I'? What is special about the statement "I too call myself I"?

2.4 'A HOT NOON IN MALABAR' – THE POEM

In this poem the poet reminisces about the landscape, the climate and the vendors of Malabar in the summer season. In this intensely personal and emotional poem, Kamala Das traces her childhood memories which still remain so deeply etched in her heart and bring her joy. The poet chooses words carefully to create and pour out the same feelings which had made those days memorable. 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' celebrates and longs for the hot noon in Malabar because the poet associates it with wild men, 'wild thoughts and wild love'. The theme of this poem is different from the other poem you just read. Unlike that one, the theme of this poem is the happy memory of childhood and adolescence which refreshes all human beings especially in moments of crisis. Autobiographical in tone, the poem is full of realistic imagery and marked by verbal felicities.

2.4.1 The Text of the Poem

This is a noon for beggars with whining
Voices, a noon for men who come from hills
With parrots in a cage and fortune-cards,
All stained with time, for kurava girls

With old eyes, who read palm in light singsong
 Voices, for bangle-sellers who spread
 On the cool black floor those red and green and blue
 Bangles, all covered with dust of roads,
 For all of them, whose feet devouring rough,
 Miles, grow cracks on the heels, so that when they
 Clambered up our porch, the noise was grating,
 Strange. This is a noon for strangers who part
 The window-drapes and peer in, their hot eyes
 Brimming with the sun, not seeing a thing in
 Shadowy rooms and turn away and look
 So yearningly at the brick-ledged well. This
 Is a noon for strangers with mistrust in
 Their eyes, dark, silent ones who rarely speak
 At all, so that when they speak, their voices
 Run wild, like jungle voices. Yes, this is
 A noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love. To
 Be here, far away, is torture. Wild feet
 Stirring up the dust; this hot noon, at my
 Home in Malabar, and I so far away...

2.4.2 Glossary

whining: complaining, long drawn-out grumbling.

stained with time: turned yellow with dust and frequent use.

Kuruva: a tribe of bird-catchers, basket-makers and fortune tellers.

singsong: rising and falling, monotonous.

clambered: climbed with difficulty.

grating: harsh, jarring.

window-drapes: curtains on the windows.

peer: peep

brimming with the sun: filled with sunlight

yearningly: with great desire, longing.

2.4.3 Analysis

'A Hot Noon in Malabar' is an autobiographical poem in which Kamala Das recalls some of her experiences in her home in Malabar. This is a nostalgic poem. Kamala Das seems to be fascinated by time 'at noon' which the poem clearly reveals. For the poet, the sun and its heat represent the glow and burning of

passion and thus the external nature is brought in close association with her inner nature marked by a consuming carnal desire.

The title is not just about what happens to the people, animals, plants and inanimate things during a hot summer noon in Malabar. Its meaning becomes clear only when we understand it in terms of the background of the poet's past memories.

Do note that the word 'noon' is repeated six times in the poem to create the atmosphere of that time of day. We can also say that noon is the dominant rhythm of the poem. The memory tags associated with noon are 'noon for the beggars', 'a noon for men carrying parrots in cage and fortune-cards', 'a noon for strangers who part the window-drapes and peer in', 'a noon for strangers who speak in wild jungle-voice' and above all, it was 'a noon for wild men, wild thought and wild love'. The last use of noon is prefixed with hot and the poet regrets its loss:

"...this hot noon, at my home in Malabar and I so far away..." You can see here that the phrase "jungle-voices" adequately conveys the poet's emotion, enacts a real drama and imparts to the poem its peculiar tone. Every epithet used in the poem is effective and grows with emotion. There is a perfect fusion of sound and sense. We can further illustrate this point when we observe in the poem, the speech patterns of the various characters. The use of the words 'whining voice', 'singsong', 'grating noise' and 'jungle-voices' creates beautiful sound imagery.

You may also note that 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' is not about a temporary experience of an hour or a day. It refers to the whole summer season recurring year after year. The scene created of the past is realistic. The mood of the poem is sad and the tone is somber. The theme of the poem is the loss of the poet's sweet experiences at her Malabar home. The dominant rhythm of the poem meanders around noon.

Kamala Das successfully creates the atmosphere of her Malabar home through the imagery depicting the men and women who passed her home in the summer afternoons. Those men and women included men from the hills with parrots in a cage and fortune cards, kuruva girls who read palms in a light singsong, bangle-sellers with red and green and blue bangles and strangers who parted the window drapes and peered in for shelter and other things. It can be observed that because the imagery is realistic, it imparts authenticity to the poem. The realism of the imagery is enhanced by such details as the bangle-sellers' feet covered with the dust of roads and the appearance of cracks on the heels; strangers dazzled by the brightness of the sun and, unable to see a thing in shadowy rooms, turning away.

Some of the phrases including a couple of similes show the verbal felicities which Kamala Das is capable of devising in her poetry. The bangle-sellers' feet 'devouring rough miles', the hot eyes of the bangle-sellers 'brimming with the sun' and the strangers who rarely spoke so that when they did speak, their voice ran 'wild like jungle-voices' are among the verbal felicities. You may note the phrase 'devouring rough miles'. The word 'devour' has been used metaphorically to convey the idea of the travellers covering miles and miles of dusty roads. 'Brimming with the sun' is another expressive phrase which denotes filled with sun light. In the hot sun, the eyes of the travellers seem to have been filled to the brim with the light of the sun. Similarly, the poet uses the most appropriate simile like 'jungle-voices' which means like the sounds which are heard in the jungle.

Through this imagery, the poet creates quite a realistic scene and contrasts it with her present personal loneliness which gives rise to thoughts of wild men and wild love experienced during the summer season in Malabar. The feeling of home-sickness has effectively been expressed in the words; 'to be here, far away, is torture'. The effect is further enhanced by the lines which follow:

'...Wild feet

Stirring up the dust this hot noon, at my

Home in Malabar, and I so far away...'

Kamala Das's poetry does not have much music or any melodic quality. This poem resembles prose more than it resembles poetry. Unlike other poems, this poem, through proper use of comma and semi-colon, adds the quality of clarity and lucidity. The language used in the poem is condensed. The poem is also marked for its maximum possible economy in the use of words.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) Why do you think the poet repeats the word 'noon' as many as six times in the poem?
- 2) Name the words or phrases used in the poem which create the scene of a hot summer.
- 3) Give examples of verbal felicities in the poem.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you first read about Kamala Das - her life and works, and then two poems in detail. You will note that unlike some other poets you may have read, she is modernist in her approach and her poems formed part of the trend in experiments in Indian English poetry after 1960.

'An Introduction' is a kind of self-portrait while 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' could be read as reminiscences of childhood. Both poems have been handled differently but are intensely personal and autobiographical.

2.6 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) See paragraph 1 of 2.2.
- 2) See paragraph 2 of 2.2.
- 3) See paragraph 3 of 2.2.
- 4) See paragraph 5 of 2.2.
- 5) See paragraph 6 of 2.2.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) See paragraph 4 of 2.3.3.
- 2) The literary device used in this line is a simile.

- 3) These two images act as objective correlatives for the psychological states of men and women respectively. In sexual desires men are in haste like rivers while women are patient like the ocean.
- 4) Most of Kamala Das's poems are autobiographical in tone. Since she shares much of her private experience with readers by way of her poetry, she is also called a confessional poet. She drew the subjects of her poetry mostly from her own life, it is justified to say that in Kamala Das, the poet is the poetry.
- 5) The poet sums up her introduction by identifying herself with countless others around and finally presents her idea of fulfilling love.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) The poet repeats the word 'noon' in the poem to create the atmosphere of the summer noon in Malabar.
- 2) The words or phrases used to create the scene of hot summer are 'hot', 'so hot', 'fiery gulmohar', and 'strangers' hot eyes brimming with the sun'.
- 3) See paragraph 7 of 2.4.3.



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UNIT 3 LAKSHMI KANNAN AND INDIRA SANT

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Lakshmi Kannan and Rasha Sundari Debi
- 3.3 The Text - 'Don't Wash'
- 3.4 Understanding the Poem
- 3.5 Indira Sant
- 3.6 The Text – 'Her Dream'
- 3.7 Understanding the Poem
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.9 Glossary
- 3.10 Aids to Activities
- 3.11 Unit End Questions
- 3.12 References and Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

On completing this unit, you will understand the challenges in the life of India's first woman autobiographer, Rasha Sundari Devi whose courage and patience is the subject of Lakshmi Kannan's poem, 'Don't Wash'. You will also be able to see, through Indira Sant's poem 'Her Dream', how a widow in India feels unwanted because she does not have a husband to 'complete' her, and society thinks that she is therefore inferior and inauspicious. At the end of this unit you will see how society favours men and tries to keep women under control by denying them education and an equal status to men without whom they are made to feel like lesser beings.

Words in **bold** are explained in the Glossary

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The patriarchal system ensures that women are not allowed to participate fully in life activities and are forcibly circumscribed by the four walls of their home – and even more so, of the kitchen. In one of her interviews, Kannan tells us that she has 'always celebrated the struggle of the so-called ordinary' women (and men)... as truly heroic in the way they strive to triumph over their endless struggles in life.' It is sad that even today across India, girls are not allowed to develop their talents and skills; they are only taught what is required to be deft homemakers.

3.2 LAKSHMI KANNAN AND RASHA SUNDARI DEBI

Lakshmi Kannan is a well-established Indian writer who writes on themes centred round women issues. Her subjects are mostly middle class women who rebel against limits imposed on them by society. Born in Mysore on 13 August 1947, Kannan is among the pioneering Indian feminists writing from first-hand observation and experience. She began writing in Tamil, and later in English as well. She has also done her own translations of her Tamil writings into English. Kannan writes under her Tamil pseudonym, Kaaveri something which reflects her fondness for the river, Kaaveri with which she has a strong spiritual connection. Her poems too reflect a lot of water and river images. She is a founding member, and member of the governing body of the Poetry Society of India and has had the distinction of being a jury-member for the Commonwealth Writers Prize, Eurasia.

Let us now talk a little about Rasha Sundari Devi – the person to whom Kannan has dedicated her poem, “Don’t Wash”. Let me tell you that the nineteenth century India in which Rasha Sundari was born was a very exciting age where traditions were probed, questioned and re-written. This age is known as the age of the Bengal Renaissance and Reformism – a time when women’s right to education was campaigned for, and resistance to child marriage grew. During the 1800s, women were largely deprived of education as it was widely believed that if a girl became literate, her husband would die. This attitude towards women prevailed everywhere – among the rich households as well as the poor ones.

Rasha Sundari was born in 1810 in the remote village of Pabna in East Bengal. She had no memories of her father, Padmalochan Roy, who died when she was a small child. There was a pathshala in her father’s house which was managed by a missionary woman. Only boys were allowed to study here. Though she was not allowed to attend this school, Rasha Sundari somehow learnt some Bangla and Persian by being around in the school’s vicinity and overhearing what was being taught. Her childhood came to an abrupt end when she was married off at the tender age of twelve to a wealthy landlord, Nilmani Roy. You can only begin to imagine her childhood trauma of leaving the security of her parental home to live with strangers where she was expected to manage household chores!

Rasha Sundari Devi was a privileged high caste Hindu who was not expected to do anything other than look after her family’s interest and serve them. Her family after marriage was not ready to accept or accommodate her aspiration to education and Rasha Sundari’s life is motivational because she dared to educate herself in the face of overwhelming odds. Her life became extraordinary because of her courage to dream and realise it in the face of stiff opposition. She had hardly any leisure time but she managed to practise reading and writing even while working in the kitchen. She learnt with practically nothing – two sheets of written paper and charcoal. She later recorded her life’s incredible story in her much-celebrated autobiography, *Amar Jiban* – India’s first autobiography written by a woman.

Rasha Sundari’s husband and in-laws were religious-minded. Well, Rasha Sundari too had a religious bent of mind. It was her strong desire to read devotional works first hand that fuelled her resolution to become self-taught and, at the age

of twenty five, she started teaching herself to read the alphabets. Learning a language is not easy, and learning it all by yourself when no one supports you and you are pressed for time is even more tough. It was by accident that her husband left a copy of the *Chaitanya Bhagvata* in the kitchen. She quickly tore a page out of this book, and, armed with this page and a palm leaf which her son used for writing, she practised writing and taught herself the Bengali script. She also scribbled on kitchen walls with charcoal stubs used for lighting the fire, to improve her writing skills. She became a widow at the age of fifty nine, and subsequently started working on her autobiography, *Amar Jiban*, which has been praised for its simple and clear prose. *Amar Jiban* gives us an account of the contemporary village life and the position of women. It also makes us familiar with the writer's views on various subjects, and motivates us to understand how important it is to follow your dream and to take a stand in your life. Rasha Sundari Debi died when she was around eighty eight years old, leaving behind a legacy of inspiration and emancipation.

3.3 THE TEXT – ‘DON’T WASH’

(For Rasha Sundari Debi)

No, don't.

Don't ever clean with water

the dark, **sooty** walls

of your kitchen, Rasha Sundari.

For the akshara you **scratched**

on the walls so **furtively**,

the akshara you tried to match

with the sounds you heard

They've **quickened** now, with life.

Even as you wash rice, fish, vegetables

even as you peel, cut, bake, stir and cook

the **thieving** letters on the wall will **take wings**.

They fly down to the palm leaf

you once stole from your son.

See how the letters move

in the eyes of the mind,

then leap over, back to the wall

from the page of Chaitanya Bhagavata

you tore from the book

when no one was looking.

You need no book, Rasha Sundari

no paper or pen either
you have the black, **smudgy** kitchen wall
for your magical **scribbles**
lines, **ellipses**, curves
all of them your secret codes for
a whole new world.

3.4 UNDERSTANDING THE POEM

The poem, ‘Don’t Wash’ is written by Lakshmi Kannan to honour and pay tribute to Rasha Sundari Debi’s extraordinary spirit and grit: a woman who even risked her reputation in her determination not to take anything lying down. Rasha Sundari lived in a society where educated women were considered a bad omen. ‘Don’t Wash’ helps us appreciate the intelligence, determination and daring with which Rasha Sundari embraced what was socially unacceptable and even sinful, to fulfil her dreams and live life on her own terms.

Kannan uses the image of wash as the poem’s central metaphor. ‘Wash’ symbolizes customs which are considered sacred and are not to be questioned. Water has an important significance in Hinduism where washing the place of worship, altar and statues of gods and goddesses is an integral part of religious ceremonies. In itself, water cleans filth. However, in the poem the poet persuades Rasha Sundari Debi to leave the walls of her kitchen unwashed so that whatever she may have scribbled on the wall remains intact and unerased. The sooty writing on the walls underlines Rasha Sundari’s hopes and becomes a marker of her identity. Not washing the walls is like saying that you should not change yourself because society expects you to be different: your uniqueness should not be washed off because it is what will make the world a better place where everyone – man or woman – will have a fair chance to realise their worth. The kitchen walls in Rasha Sundari’s house, blackened with charcoal soot look dirty and the kitchen appears messy. But the poet insists that the walls are not to be washed as the akshara is written on them. If you think about it a little more, you’ll realise that the written word – akshara – is considered sacred in Hinduism. The poem argues that the akshara continues to remain sacred and is not defiled just because it is written by a woman.

Activity 1

Why were women not allowed to read and write?

There was a superstition that the written word – akshara – would lose its sacredness and power if a woman wrote it. We are told that this writing on the wall has been done “furtively” - it is an act of secrecy. This secret and furtive act is not an act of cowardice but an effort which required commitment, guts and planning. To wash off the traces of this action would have smothered Rasha Sundari’s inner self as it was this writing which had brought meaning to her mundane and routine life. The poet helps us appreciate the tremendous hard work and dedication that went into her learning as she did not neglect any work that she was expected to do.

Activity 2

Do you think what Rasha Sundari did was correct? Why?

Rasha Sundari painstakingly completed all her household chores – “wash rice, fish, vegetables... peel, cut, bake, stir and cook” – and alongside worked doubly hard to memorise the letters she regularly scribbled on the walls. Despite her tough schedule, she persisted in her efforts which helped her imagination and intellect expand – “take wings.” With education, she could understand the complex world and express herself in different ways. She was like a bird with strong wings with which it could fly fearlessly.

Activity 3

Why did Rasha Sundari wish to get an education?

The poem has imaginative and complex descriptions written in a simple and clear language because of which we understand the poem with ease and engage with difficult issues. We are provoked into re-thinking issues that we take for granted and to question religious customs that we practise every day without giving a second thought to how these customs underwrite and promote discrimination against women. By understanding Rasha Sundari Debi’s defiance and her dedication, planning and perseverance, we realise that social change and progress is only possible with belief in oneself, one’s cause and an unrelenting commitment to it. A combination of intelligence and determination helped Rasha Sundari’s fight against impossible odds. She had been able to tear merely a page from her husband’s book, *Chaitanya Bhagwat*, and secretly keep with her only one of her son’s palm leaves on which he practised writing. She constantly imagined and re-imagined words to re-create them. Even though she had a bare minimum, she taught herself to read and write - to eventually become an acclaimed writer whose life inspired many a woman to rise against social injustice. We unreservedly admire her daring to remain unwashed and unclean – blackened by the ‘unholy’ deed of learning to read and write.

Activity 4

How does Rasha Sundari practise reading and writing?

The last four lines of the poem draw a subtle inference that the written script is mysterious, full of “magical scribbles” that seem like a complex maze of geometrical shapes – “lines, ellipses, curves” – to the illiterate. Only by not washing off this mysterious writing can women gain entry into the world of knowledge – “a whole new world.” The poem rises above the specific life of Rasha Sundari to encourage women universally to take social criticism headlong by not being afraid of what society can/will say. Only by risking their security can women live on equal terms where they too have access to reading and writing – “secret codes” to empowerment. ‘Don’t Wash’ is a poem that asks us to look into social taboos and assess their worth – whatever is forbidden is perhaps forbidden not because it is unclean or evil but because it gives muscle to the masters who do not allow and do not want certain sections of society, like women, to gain power or a status that challenges their monopoly.

‘Don’t Wash’ is a powerful poem which asks women to say no to social customs that expect women to wash themselves of their dreams and their individual identities. The poem pays tribute to Rasha Sundari Debi’s extraordinary courage to listen to her heart and educate herself. When she practised writing on walls which became black and sooty, she took a huge risk because she could have been caught studying and punished severely for it. Lakshmi Kannan finds it very disturbing that society takes whatever it finds serviceable from the women – their ability to do hard work, and utility as homemakers and breadwinners, but does not acknowledge or encourage their individuality and dreams. A woman’s personal traits, talent, inclination or acquisition is considered useless unless it provides material comfort to the family members. She believes that it is important for women to get a chance at social participation and decision making and stresses the need to question and engage with the idea of what is acceptable and who decides what is correct. To help women rise, you have to challenge patriarchy and draw attention to injustices against women. People have to be persuaded to understand that women should have equal rights and privileges as men. We need to sponsor transgression, i.e. a breaking down of the boundaries of social correctness. In her works, Kannan insists that in India women and ‘dalits’ have been bracketed together and denied basic rights, like the right to recite the Gayatri Mantra. To live their lives to the fullest, women have to rebel and create their space where they can achieve their full potential.

While women in the West undertook to define feminist thinking and fight social prejudices against women, Asian women have had a tough time trying to rationalise and weed out traditional beliefs and practices that target and constrict women to roles that are pre-defined for them. Indian society is suspicious of change and the idea modern itself. Any activity that challenges tradition or provides an alternative to tradition is labelled offensive and shamelessly modern.

Kannan’s works stoke women’s passion to re-discover themselves and assert their identities as individuals, not just gendered beings – beings who are only limited to their biological identities and gender, woman, nothing else. Through her poems, Kannan gives us examples of women who refused to be restricted by their gender. Like Rasha Sundari Devi, they followed their dream. Such women inspire us to have faith in ourselves and the courage to risk our reputation and comfort zone so that our tomorrow as well as the future of the coming generation of women is more just and happy.

3.5 INDIRA SANT

Indira Sant is an acclaimed Marathi poet who has written on diverse issues that concern women. She was born into a progressive Maharashtrian family as Indira Dikshit on January 4, 1914 in the small town, Tavandi in Belgaum District, Karnataka. Her childhood was spent in the rural areas of Southern Maharashtra, which provided her with a typical Indian sensibility that colours her various works. She attended Rajaram College in Kolhapur and Fergusson College in Pune. It was at the latter college that she met Narayan Sant, whom she married in 1936. Together, they published a collection of their poems, *Sahwas* in 1940.

However, their married life was short-lived as Narayan Sant died within ten years of their marriage. Indira was grief-stricken and the poignancy of her tragic

loss echoes throughout her works. Her determination and optimism saw her reach heights in her professional and creative life. A professor, she later became the principal of a teachers' training college in Belgaum and wrote twenty-five books during her lifetime. In 1984, she was honoured with the Sahitya Academy Award for her collection of poems, *Garbhareshmi* as well as many other prestigious awards like the Janasthan Award and the Maharashtra State Award. In 1975, the acclaimed poet Nissim Ezekiel translated her poems into English and published them as *Snake-Skin And Other Poems Of Indira Sant*. She passed away on 13 July, 2000.

3.6 'HER DREAM'

Her dream, like the dream of a dozen other women.

A **full plate**, deliciously full.

Places to go, things to do, morning and evening.

Neatly ironed clothes. A nicely **furnished** home.

Sometimes a play, sometimes a concert – with the best seats.

All the happiness in the world on a **meagre** income.

Laughter and teasing. Talk and **chatter**.

Her dream, like the dreams of a dozen other women.

But she woke up before the dream began.

And then she never fell asleep again.

3.7 UNDERSTANDING THE POEM

'Her Dream' is a moving poem in which the poet gives us a realistic picture of an Indian widow. You must have noticed how widows are often treated cruelly by society and even by other married women. Even if widows are not openly insulted, they are expected to wear dull colours, be humble – even self-effacing – not enjoy life or eat lavish food and have personal desires and dreams. At this point, it is a good idea to discuss whether it is possible to be alive and not have dreams. We are humans; dreaming, planning and hoping come naturally to us. We may face tragedies but that does not make us stop looking forward to good times.

Don't you agree that in your darkest moments you wish someone could comfort you and make you smile again? Yes, no one wants to be alone or to receive shabby treatment. Why are widows deliberately made to feel their pain over and over again? Yes, some pain is unavoidable because of the absence of a husband and his companionship. But to force it down a woman's throat and to victimize her because she is a widow is shameful and unforgivable. If you look around, you will see how widows are not invited to festivals and ceremonies like marriages – their presence is considered inauspicious. It is as if they are responsible for their husband's death. As a result, widows become disillusioned and stop dreaming.

'Her Dream' begins on a poignant note. It tells us that every woman has dreams and dreaming is not limited to married women alone. The unnamed woman in

the poem represents a typical Indian widow whose identity is lost because her life and existence depends on her husband: without a husband, she loses her social status and is unable to partake of the simple joys of married life. The poet lists the widow's everyday dreams which move us because of their simplicity, and the eventual realisation that these humdrum activities are no longer for her. Even before she could have started relaxing and daydreaming leisurely after her wedding, her happiness was smashed and her dreams came to nought. Unable to dream, she became restive and sleep lost its pleasure. Her life became a stretch of hopelessness where there was no rest or serenity. She became agitated and felt utter despair when she lost her husband whom she loved tremendously and who pampered her.

The woman's desires were simple. She had always hoped for a married life where she would be on her toes, busy running everyday errands, and also be spoilt by her husband's affection. The joys that she had always looked forward to are listed in the poem. Her first desire had always been to have a "full plate." The phrase "full plate" suggests not only sufficient food to eat, but a life full of responsibilities, doing chores so that there is hardly any leisure time. The woman had always looked forward to this hectic married life because it would have made her immensely happy, just like a plate filled with delicious and mouth-watering delicacies pleases the taste buds. The poem tugs at our heart with the realisation that this woman no longer finds happiness because these responsibilities are no longer special for her after her husband's death. She feels unwanted and vulnerable. Her pain intensifies when she sees a "dozen women" around her busy with their daily errands, running around happily – their plates "deliciously full." The lives of these women are a flurry of activity – they accompany their families on various trips and are ever alert, seeing to it that everything functions smoothly. They have no time to spare. Mornings and evenings alike keep them engaged with an endless list of "things to do." The poet tells us that women are central to their families. It is a woman who sees to it that every family member is well turned-out with neatly ironed clothes. This involvement with the family makes a woman's life meaningful. However, without a husband, a woman feels incomplete and gets no happiness in doing household chores for she does not have a husband who will appreciate her and make her feel special.

Activity 5

Why does the speaker wish for a "full plate"?

Married women keep their home spick and span, and the family members happy. A woman's home is "nicely furnished" because she takes complete care of everything while her husband contributes to her well-being. A woman's marital life is full of responsibilities that have their own pleasurable and light-hearted moments. The widow in the poem is no different from other women. She had always looked forward to spending quality time with her husband and enjoying his company and like any other young girl, had fancied the idea that her husband would escort her to some or the other event – "a play" or "a concert." She had pictured these moments of togetherness where her husband would go all out to make her feel special by booking the best seats for them so that they could relax and unwind, and enjoy the finest view possible. She had fantasised that life would be a beautiful journey of shared happiness and companionable moments. She

had always anticipated a life where she would be indispensable to her man who would need her to take care of his day to day needs while he would make an effort to make her feel special by giving her comfort and a break from her routine. She believed that their togetherness would fill their lives with laughter and cheer and their happiness in being together would make problems like shortage of money, insignificant. The widow was convinced that she and her husband would tide through bad times because of their patience with each other and their shared love.

The reality of her life pains the widow as her life is strikingly different from her cherished daydreams. Hers is a cold and lonely world where she has no companion to share her troubles with or to make her feel treasured. She had visualised a husband who would love her dearly and see to it that she had everything she needed, and a lifestyle that would make her feel the significance she held for him. She had never imagined a life without her husband where mindless chatter and shared laughter would be missing. With her husband's death, she is left with shattered dreams and wistful longing. There is only desolation and nostalgia for her. Her marital life was short-lived and now seems like an impossible beautiful dream. With her husband's death, she was jolted into a harsh reality where she realised that the dreams she had shared with "a dozen other women" would never come true. Her life was now so steeped in sorrow that "she never fell asleep again" and forgot her troubles: her dreams were ruined and relaxation became impossible.

The poem moves us with its simplicity and honesty of emotions. We feel for the woman whose dreams are like every other woman's, but who now faces a life where her dreams remain sheer dreams, without a shred of possibility of their ever coming true. All the promising, beautiful moments that could have been possible with a husband now remain beyond her. She knows that now her life will be lonely where she will have to survive on a "meagre income" without a companion who would have seen to it that she always had a plush life with a "nicely furnished home" and regular visits to performances to relax and unwind. Her life appears quite meaningless to her because she feels left out in the cold without a husband needing her to complement his life and make it smooth by taking care of his routine needs. The poem expresses a widowed woman's deep anguish at a life where responsibilities would continue unabated but love and companionship would be absent – a life of utter loneliness and hard work where shared laughter and talk would always be missing.

3.8 LET US SUM UP

The two poems read in this unit highlight two different aspects of women's lives in India in the not so distant past – illiteracy and widowhood. 'Don't Wash' is a powerful poem which asks women to say no to social customs that expect women to wash themselves of their dreams and their individual identities. The poem pays tribute to Rasha Sundari Debi's extraordinary courage to listen to her heart and educate herself. Rasha Sundari practised writing on walls which became black and sooty. She took a huge risk by not washing the walls because she could have been caught studying and punished severely for it.

The speaker in the poem, 'Her Dream' is a widow who had always had simple dreams of being happy with her husband, looking after him and getting spoilt by

him. There was nothing extraordinary about her dreams, except that when she lost her husband these dreams became impossible to realise and filled her life with immense grief. She had always looked forward to a happily busy life where she would have had to iron clothes, tidy the house and plan visits to plays and concerts. She had dreamt that her life would be full of caring for her family and loving her husband who in turn would also make her feel special by laughing with her and teasing her. It would be a beautiful life where relationships would matter and money would be secondary.

3.9 GLOSSARY

chatter: gossip, small talk

ellipses: three dots “...” in a sentence which show (plural of ellipsis) continuation of thought and mystery

full plate: a busy schedule

furnished: equipped with furniture

furtively: secretly

meagre: not enough

scratched: written hurriedly

scribbles: untidy writing

smudgy: dirty

sooty: greyish black

take wings: fly/ be free from confinement

thieving: stolen

quicken: became meaningful/ came alive

3.10 AIDS TO ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 : Women were not allowed to read and write because it was believed that if a woman was educated, she would bring bad luck and death to her family.

Activity 2 : Rasha Sundari practises reading and writing furtively. It is correct because everyone has a right to education, which is denied to women because of baseless superstitions that educated women are a curse on their families.

Activity 3 : Rasha Sundari was a very imaginative and intelligent woman who was curious about the world. She could only “fly” with the wings of education to gain access to this knowledge which was barred to women.

Activity 4 : She tore out a page from her husband’s book, *Chaitanya Bhagwat* and took a palm leaf from her son’s book. She read and re-read the page from *Chaitanya Bhagwat* and imagined the words in different combinations. She practised writing on her son’s palm

leaf and the walls of the kitchen where she prepared food and washed utensils.

Activity 5 : The phrase “full plate” suggests a life which is full of activities that keep going on and on. The widow who feels she has no one to take care of or someone to make her feel special finds that everything is now meaningless.

3.11 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) What is it that Lakshmi Kannan does not want to be washed? Why?
- 2) Why are the kitchen walls sooty, black and smudgy?
- 3) Why are the letters described as “thieving” and “taking wings”?
- 4) What would you say is the central idea of the poem, ‘Don’t Wash’?
- 5) What is the dream in the poem ‘Her Dream’? What happens to it?
- 6) What does the speaker in ‘Her Dream’ want her deliciously full plate to contain?
- 7) In what ways does the woman in ‘Her Dream’ feel that her dreams are unfulfilled?
- 8) Explain the line, “she woke up before the dream began./ And then she never fell asleep again”.

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UNIT 4 NASEEM SHAFaIE

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Text: 'Neither a Shadow Nor a Reflection'
- 4.3 Critical Analysis
- 4.4 Text: 'Solitude - For the Girl Child'
- 4.5 Critical Analysis
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Glossary
- 4.8 Aids to Activities
- 4.9 Unit End Questions
- 4.10 References and Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will understand and analyse the poems 'Neither a Shadow nor a Reflection' and 'Solitude for the Girl Child' by Naseem Shafaie. By the end of the unit you will be able to relate to problems faced by girls and women in a male-centric society. You will also appreciate that resistance and dialogue, more than confrontation, can empower women. Some important issues and questions that will be discussed and resolved through this unit will relate to the position and treatment of women down the history, and in contemporary times. You will be able to answer questions related to the need for respect, appreciation and consideration toward girls and women who leave their home to go and live with strangers when they get married.

Words in **bold** are explained in the Glossary

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Written in simple and moving language, the poems appeal to their readers to let women be. The poems argue about the need to allow women and girl children to realise their potential and we are aware of a restrictive society where change can only come if we become aware of the pain our traditions cause. The poems make a strong statement that women are individuals in their own right who cannot be treated as puppets by their husbands. What makes a woman worthy of being celebrated is that she does not seek revenge and has the strength to walk out of a bad situation to create a more wholesome society where people are more kind and accommodating.

Naseem Shafaie (1952-) is a contemporary Kashmiri poet who writes, among other things, about Kashmir, women from Kashmir and their perspective. She has a Masters degree in Kashmiri language and literature. In 1984 she joined the higher education department of Jammu and Kashmir Government, and has taught undergrads at the University of Kashmir. In 2011, she was honoured with the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for her collection of poems, *Neither a Shadow nor a Reflection* (published in 2007). She is the first Kashmiri woman ever to have been bestowed this distinction. Her works have been translated into several languages including English, Italian, Korean, Urdu, Kannada, Tamil, Marathi and Telugu. According to a blog, Kashmir Forum, Shafaie's poetry is "an expression of a woman's inner passion for self-esteem, and self-admiration... termed as 'Sun Passion' by Kshemendra, the 10th century writer from Kashmir." You will be interested to know that in the 1970s, Shafaie was the only woman to attend and present at mushairas in Kashmir.

4.2 TEXT: 'NEITHER A SHADOW NOR A REFLECTION'

As always you once again came, standing
 at the door speechless. Only if I had been
 in possession of a few words would I decorate
 them on your lips and hear those **fiery** words you wish.
 unable to **decipher**, I feel the heat of your eyes.
 I knew for me you would certainly come,
 I felt the hope of your arrival and felt,
 that like a **gale** of spring, you would enter my heart, and
every particle of my life would get **rejuvenated**.
 But you stand still where the string was broken,
 You never guess how many forms you gave me,
 I, like Lalla, rose in the late hours of the night,
 and **lulled** you in my lap and woke you up.
 I, like Habba Khatoon, said you are the sky,
 I am your earth, you the **shelter** of my secrets,
 the garden belongs to you, come and enjoy it,
 what **rival** of mine **lured** you away?
Stay a while and **ponder**, didn't I sing:
 Ó love I shall **adorn** you under the cherry trees,
 Fasted I for you that you stay with me.
 My nights passed reciting holy verses for you.
 If like Krishna you wish and change your **guises**,
 If that Habba Khatoon decides and leaves you **midway**, what

if she too feels hate, she is not to be **slayed**.

Even if now you find some clue, come and stay a while,
realise your fault, I shall know you have come for me; you
come now, like a true Adam beside me.

I shall be **assured** that you realised:

I am neither a shadow, nor a reflection.

(Translated from Kashmiri by Prof Indu Kilam)

4.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

While reading the poem you must have realised this is a love poem which is very different from the ones we generally read. In this poem, you hear the voice of a woman who loves her man with all her heart. She tells us throughout the poem how she has devoted her entire life to caring for her husband in every possible way. Whenever he needed her, she was there and she always adjusted to his ways. However, the subject of this love poem is not only this woman's love and dedication to her man. It also tells us the other side of the story – the man's attitude towards his beloved and how he returns her commitment and affection.

You will agree with me that the poem shows us the politics of love in a man's world where women end up doing whatever is needed to make their man's life comfortable and happy, while men take their women for granted and gradually become indifferent towards them. The poet tells us in the opening words of the poem – "As always" – that this one-sidedness in a man-woman relationship is universal: it is to be found everywhere. The poem tries to make us understand that both - man and woman - can be equally happy if the man responds to a woman's love and care by being there for her when she needs him and by letting her be what she wishes to be, even helping her to express herself in ways she has never been allowed to by the male-centric society. I hope you can see for yourselves the significance of the poem's title – 'Neither a Shadow, Nor a Reflection'.

Have you ever thought of becoming your own shadow and reflection instead of remaining a shadow to others and someone else's reflection? Shadows and reflections have no independent existence. They are empty forms which merely follow and repeat the movements of the body. If you think about shadows and reflections, you will be able to see that shadows have no colour – they are black or grey, whereas reflections have colour. Yet, both – shadows and reflection – cannot do anything on their own. The surface where they appear remains blank till something or somebody comes on the scene. Shadows and reflections are lifeless and their actions are never theirs. What would you like to be? Surely not a shadow and a reflection!

My guess is that all of us would want to be independent people with a fair chance to live and act the way we want to. The poem's title, 'Neither a Shadow nor a Reflection' conveys a similar desire – the hope to be a person with an identity and not merely another's shadow with no identity, dreams or ambitions. The woman in this poem asserts that she is a woman, a living being, not a lifeless

reflection. And because she is animate, she is not to be shamed and treated with disrespect. This poem is an assertion of a woman's self-respect where she asks her man to be "beside" her. The woman reminds her man that she has been with him whenever he needed her, and that he should never ever abandon her even when the patriarchal society tries to silence her honest dreams and forbids her from talking about her pain and sorrow.

Activity 1

Write down your own thoughts on what you feel is the subject of the poem.

We have tried to understand the title of the poem. You must have realised by now that the title also indicates the theme, which is about a woman's protest at not getting a fair deal from her man despite her being there for him whenever and in whatsoever capacity required. The poem's subject is the subjugation of a woman by patriarchy, and the woman's courage to raise her voice against the injustices done to her. What makes this poem unique is that while relating her sufferings and asking for a just treatment, the woman stresses that men complement women and they should be with each other, not against each other. The poem suggests that women should stand up against men's cruelty and indifference, and help them understand where they have gone wrong. Naseem Shafaie "re-imagines the whole relationship of male and female based on mutual love, self-respect and dignity."

The poet makes references to various religious and mythological figures. Why do you think she does this? Well, if you read the poem closely, you will see that the poem does not focus on any particular community; it tries to make the readers realise that women experience abuse and neglect globally. And, because societies are largely patriarchal/ male-dominated, don't you think the poet is trying to tell us that patriarchy needs to be checked? Women are capable of bringing in social equality and justice by refusing to accept ill-treatment silently. "If that Habba Khatoon decides and leaves you midway... she is not to be slayed" is a powerful statement that supports women who, refusing to compromise on their self-respect, walk out of bitter relationships. Slaying suggests extreme violence and the poet insists that violence can never improve relationships. Men and women can live together only when a man supports and respects his woman "like a true Adam" – the first human created by God– who never left his woman and always stood by her even when she made a wrong decision. The poet tries to make her readers understand that if you love someone, you do not make them feel guilty, but help them get over their mistakes and lead wholesome lives.

Activity 2

Against whom does the speaker plan a protest? What is the strategy?

The poem has an intense tone. It begins with a rather exasperated and desperate woman who complains to her man that he keeps coming back to her but remains "speechless". We feel her sense of betrayal, for conversation happens only among friends who have common ground; by being incommunicative, she and her husband become near strangers. The woman tries to analyse her man's strange behaviour and concludes that he does not speak to her because he cannot understand her. She tells us that her vocabulary is limited and she does not "possess" the simplest of words through which she can make him understand

her feelings and share her passion. The woman says that if she could begin to even speak about her own desire, her man would grow closer to her and share his “fiery words” of pleasure, which would enrich their relationship. You can easily imagine how much better this would be from their present where the man “stands still” and “speechless” and his woman is “unable to decipher” his passion.

Activity 3

What is the woman “unable to decipher?” Why?

The poem celebrates and affirms a woman’s faith in her man. She longs for him to come to her as she feels incomplete without him: “I felt the hope of your arrival...every particle of my life would get rejuvenated.” With him she is filled with optimism and an enthusiasm for life. However, when he does not treat her as a companion, a sense of worthlessness overcomes her– she is reduced to a musical instrument with broken strings that has neither beauty nor melody. The poet goes on to use mythological legends to portray how women have stood by their men through bad and good times down the ages.

Why do you think the poet refers to mythology? Why do you think the woman’s dialogue with her man suddenly gets so complicated? What is the poet getting at? Well, you are right if you think she is trying to make the readers understand that a woman is emotional, passionate, dependable and strong, and that her belief in mankind has the power to inspire confidence in not only her man but in the entire society to treat their women folk with respect. All the women who are mentioned had the courage to move on when their husbands could not love them and treat them respectfully. We are made to think about complex issues like morality and society’s expectations. Are we dealing with something that is more than just the subject, love? Let us explore the poem a little further.

Well, shadows and reflections are inversions: they are not only lifeless but altered – left becomes right and right becomes left. The poem suggests that this is a natural phenomenon. However, the man-woman relationship is a social phenomenon created by tradition and patriarchy. We can bring positive change by becoming more aware of the consequences of our actions. The best way forward is to generate awareness of how gender imbalances make women feel insecure, vulnerable and threatened. It is but natural that men will feel guilt and seek forgiveness, which the female voice in the poem says must be forthcoming: “realise your fault... I shall be assured that you realised:/ I am neither a shadow, nor a reflection.” Revenge is not a solution for it cannot undo injustices. To be given her space, freedom and identity is a woman’s right. She should not let herself be reduced to a lifeless and drab reflection which follows her man’s instructions and is not allowed to have hopes and dreams of her own. Lalla, Habba Khatoon and Eve – the much celebrated women in the poem – were not only dedicated to their men but had strong identities of their own. They were with their men in different avatars – as a mother or seductress or as a devotee or guide. Their strong individuality and faith in the power of love is legendary.

Lalla and Habba Khatoon were from Kashmir. The two of them had much in common even though Lalla was from the fourteenth century and Habba Khatoon lived in the seventeenth century. Both were married when they were just twelve or thirteen. Their husbands and in-laws treated them badly because of which they walked out of their marriage. Lalla became an ascetic who raised her voice

against the wrongs committed by the ruling Brahmanical classes. Though she was a Kashmiri Pundit, she spread her revolutionary ideas by writing poetry in the Kashmiri language, not the elitist Sanskrit which was the symbol of the upper classes. Lalla challenged the authority of Sanskrit in the 1400s by composing Vakh in the local language. She inspired the peasants and the common man to such an extent that she has since been venerated by Muslims and Hindus alike.

Habba Khatoon was a beautiful and gifted child who composed sensitive poems and sang beautifully. Her original name was ‘Zoon,’ which is Kashmiri for moon. Her exceptional beauty attracted Yousuf Shah Chak who became her second husband and went on to be the last independent ruler of Kashmir during the Mughal era. It is believed that Zoon was his inspiration. She was widowed following a long tragic separation from him when he did not listen to her advice to not accept the Mughal emperor, Akbar’s invitation to visit Delhi. Akbar betrayed Yousuf’s trust and imprisoned him till he died. Habba Khatoon was so heartbroken that she left her home, wandering from place to place, composing and singing sad soulful songs. Habba Khatoon was the last Queen of Kashmir who gave excellent advice to the king. She was also an accomplished poet who composed Lol, the first ever Kashmiri lyrics. She stirred the Kashmiri imagination greatly – a hill named after her testifies to her legacy.

Lalla and Habba Khatoon were women whose love-life was not all smooth. Their greatness lies in their refusal to accept defeat. They were strong and creative individuals who composed outstanding poetry which helped the local Kashmiri language to evolve and made people aware of social ills and the necessity of a just attitude towards women. Lalla created a new form of devotional and philosophic poetry – Vakh, while Habba Khatoon created lyric poetry, Lol. Eve is a mytho-religious figure who took an independent but incorrect decision to eat the forbidden fruit of Paradise. Her disobedience resulted in her and Adam being expelled from Paradise where life was extremely comfortable, to Earth, where life was very tough. Eve was a companion to God’s first human creation, Adam.

She took a bold decision to eat the forbidden fruit of Paradise because of which she and Adam were thrown out of Paradise to Earth where they faced innumerable problems. However, despite her rashness, Eve is celebrated because she remained loyal to her husband and never left him.

Activity 4

What makes the women from the myths exemplary?

‘Neither a Shadow nor a Reflection’ is an assertion of every woman’s right to be like Krishna and behave as the situation requires for a woman is a thinking and feeling person, not just a lifeless image. The poet punctures the romantic image of an idealised beautiful woman by showing us women who are capable of anger and of overcoming it. All the three women are truly exemplary because they inspire other women to never accept defeat, to be courageous and to contribute to the betterment of society so that there is equality and justice. Their positive contribution to society is their hallmark.

‘Neither a Shadow nor a Reflection’ is a poem which describes the trauma faced by independent-minded women down the history and across religions. The poem tells us that a woman has enormous patience and courage because of which she

is able to take care of her husband and also fight for him in adversity. A woman's selflessness should not be abused and lead to her victimisation. The poem gives us examples of courageous and strong women who were taken for granted and exploited, but who refused to take this unjust treatment silently. These women not only rebelled against their partners but also contributed to making a more just society. They have become legends and are universally celebrated.

4.4 TEXT: 'SOLITUDE - FOR THE GIRL CHILD'

Gently **rouse** her, calling in tones soft,
Lest she should with loudness be **jarred**.
 Full asleep is she, her eyes half open,
 Such beauty in blameless purity makes me afraid,
Verily the snuggling case of my bosom is she
 And the honour of her father's **tilted cap**.
 A daughter she is, a **houri** of paradise;
 Once she leaves home, it will be for ever.
 When some day in distant parts she **dwells**
 Where what the people be like! I know not,
 Will they awaken her on gentle, **mellow** sounds?
 Or, will they, I **misgive**, snatch her sleep away?
 (Translated from Kashmiri by G.L.Labru)

4.5 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

'**Solitude** – for the Girl Child' is a touching lyric, musical and full of startling images. It is a mother's prayer for her daughter. The mother feels her heart ripping at the thought that her child will have to one day live with and among unfamiliar people who may not value her uniqueness. You know for sure that all parents treasure their children. Have you noticed how protective they are towards their girl child and wondered why it is so? Let's ask ourselves what makes parents, especially mothers worry over their girls. Don't you think it has to do with the way women are brought up and treated? Well, think again if you disagree! Mothers want their children to never have bad experiences. But a mother in traditional Indian society feels helpless when her daughter gets married as after her marriage, the daughter becomes part of her husband's family where her parents can only be visitors. The mother in the poem is agitated by the thought that her daughter may receive indifferent treatment in her marital home where lack of love and concern would make her restless and sleepless. The poem expresses a mother's overwhelming sorrow for her precious daughter's uncertain future where she could forever remain deprived of tender, loving care. The poem's title is her desperate desire to let her daughter be herself. The word solitude conveys a sense of comfort where a person is not disturbed but comfortable and happy with his/her identity. Girl-child suggests a pre-puberty girlhood, which is significant since once the child grows into a young girl, society will not leave her alone. The

mother wants her daughter to have a carefree childhood without any tension because she is afraid that her life could be chaotic in the future. The poem is composed as a prayer to all those who care to hear.

Do you see how beautifully the poem begins? “Gently rouse her” tells us that the girl-child is fast asleep. We are asked to gently awaken her. The poet deliberately uses the word rouse as it is not only a synonym for awaken, but suggests awareness. The poem uses the image of a sleeping girl-child to portray innocence but who will sooner than later be made aware of the real world where kindness and consideration for a young girl is much wanting. The mother knows that her girl-child is just a child: completely trusting. She sleeps without a care, “her eyes half open.” The “half open” eyes create a picture of a child who is full of energy and curiosity, and like every other child, wary of unfamiliar faces. The girl’s attractive looks and innocent nature worry the mother even though she knows that the girl has done nothing wrong – is pure and blameless. Why? The next stanza subtly leads us to the answer after we are made to understand the society in which the family lives and their social status/ standing. The mother confesses that their daughter is her husband’s pride just like a cap or turban or pagdi is the symbol of a clan’s honour. The entire clan is insulted if the pagdi is handled casually. Similarly, the father feels very strongly about his daughter’s dignity, and the slightest possibility that his daughter may be disrespected upsets him. The poet describes the mother’s heart as a box or a chest that has cracks. Like the stored objects in a cracked box are not completely safe, the mother’s emotions are vulnerable because her heart – her case – has cracks of concern that her daughter may be abused. Worry keeps “smuggling” into her heart – consciously or subconsciously she remains anxious about her daughter and what can happen to her.

Activity 5

Why does the mother say “Gently rouse her”?

The child is her father’s pride and a product of his upbringing – she is the one who will now be the upholder of his values. She has to live her life with consideration to the family’s traditions without breaking down the social structure.

The daughter is extremely attractive. She is described as an “hourī” – a girl so beautiful that she seems to be a gift of paradise on earth. This worries the mother because the girl would sooner or later have a string of admirers. The thought that she could leave home to live among unfamiliar people who may admire her makes her jittery. The mother becomes extremely anxious thinking of what will happen to her daughter who in her parental home has always slept undisturbed and only been spoken to softly. There is a strong possibility that the people she goes on to live with could have a lifestyle and attitudes very different from theirs – people who are loud and disrespectful to women. The poem ends on an agitated note with the mother voicing her greatest fear that her daughter may lose her peace of mind completely and never ever sleep again. The poem is a mother’s desperate hope that her child always has a calm and peaceful life – solitude – even when she lives away from her parents with her husband and his family. I think you can understand that each one of us has a personal space where we can do things we like and be the way we want to be. We are carefree at home. Once we leave home, we are expected to shoulder responsibilities which sometimes

break us. No one wants to be alone, but no one deserves to be taken for granted or ill-treated either. Married girls are usually expected to be uncomplaining even while doing backbreaking chores. You will agree with me that the poem ends on a note which is harsh and troubling, but realistic: a girl's innocence and attractiveness can get her a suitor but cannot guarantee her solitude and keep her safe from abuse.

In 'Solitude - for the Girl Child' we come across a mother's overwhelming concern for her daughter who is still to become a woman. The mother worries that her little girl who is at present full of life, spontaneity and happiness will soon be forced by society to follow suffocating customary practices. These customs will require the child to marry and become an obedient and unquestioning wife and daughter in law who will have no choice but to do what her in-laws ask her to do. The mother prays that her daughter will be looked after in her husband's home which will be in a strange land with unfamiliar customs. This poem grieves over the inescapable loss of the girl's spontaneity, freedom and carefree ways.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have read about a woman's courage to rise above her sad situation and contribute positively to society, which leads to her society celebrating her as a legend that continues to inspire people down the ages. She underscores her uniqueness by saying that no matter how comfortable and plush her life is and can be, she will never become a doormat because she is not a dark lifeless shadow or a colourful but emotionless image which has no self, and comes into existence only to replicate and duplicate someone. The woman says that she will not let anyone disrespect her or take her for granted because she is an individual with feelings and thought. She offers examples of much loved and devoted wives from earlier recorded times before her man so that he understands love, not persecution and revenge and thus help create a strong relationship.

You have also heard a mother's prayer for her daughter as she grows up in a traditional and orthodox society which does not allow freedom of expression and action to its women. The mother hopes that her daughter gets married into a family that accommodates her bubbly nature. These poems have helped you become aware of customary practices that are regressive with regard to women and need to be changed so that we can have a just society where women can express their individualities and be the person they want to be.

4.7 GLOSSARY

adorn	:	decorate
assured	:	become certain about/ not be doubtful of
decipher	:	make sense of
dwells	:	lives
fiery	:	full of energy and high-spirited
gale	:	strong breeze

guise	: appearance
hour	: a pure and extremely beautiful girl
jarred	: very much disturbed
midway	: middle of the journey
lest	: otherwise
lulled	: put to sleep
lured	: attracted by wrong means
mellow	: soft and subtle
misgave	: be afraid of
every particle	: smallest part
ponder	: think deeply
rejuvenated	: filled with life once again
rival	: enemy
rouse	: awaken
shelter	: a place where you are safe
slayed	: killed with violence by a sword or a sharp weapon
solitude	: to be peacefully all by yourself
stay a while	: stop for some more time
tilted cap	: a metaphor for someone who is different from others and is lovable
verily	: in truth

4.8 AIDS TO ACTIVITIES

- Activity 1** : The poem's subject is a woman's strong refusal to be reduced to a nobody by a male-centric, patriarchal society. The female voice in the poem symbolises every oppressed woman's protest.
- Activity 2** : The speaker in the poem is a woman who plans a protest against people, especially men in a patriarchal society, who treat their women with disrespect. Her strategy is to reform such men through persuasion and insistence, not revenge and violent retaliation.
- Activity 3** : The woman is "unable to decipher" why her man stands silently at the door with passion in his eyes. She does not understand his silence and his intense, "fiery" passion because she has neither been taught her man's language nor permitted to express her passion.

- Activity 4** : The women from the myths are exemplary because of their strong personalities who lived life on their terms, never compromising their dignity. They had the courage to listen to their heart, follow their dreams and create a fair and just society.
- Activity 5** : The mother wants her girl-child to be treated with gentleness and wants her daughter to be woken up tenderly as she is still a child and who might, all too soon be among strangers who will not treat her so considerately.

4.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Why does the speaker in the first poem want to be “in possession of a few words”? What does she want to decorate?
- 2) What does the speaker mean when she says, “every particle of my life would get rejuvenated”?
- 3) Who stands “still where the strings was broken”? Why?
- 4) Why “if she too feels hate, she is not to be slayed”?
- 5) How can women be empowered, according to the poet?
- 6) Why does the mother ask everyone to speak in “tones soft”?
- 7) Why is the girl-child special? What is needed for her?
- 8) Explain the line, “Such beauty in blameless purity makes me afraid”.
- 9) What can happen to the girl-child “When some day in distant parts she dwells”?

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