

Block

3

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

In this Block, you will read some remarkable short stories written by women from round the world. The stories focus not only on the physical aspects of their lives but also their mental state, and factors in psychological aspects that govern the behaviour of the characters. The stories deal with the more or less ordinary lives that the characters lead but they are presented from a fresh perspective.



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UNIT 1 ‘A CUP OF TEA’ BY KATHERINE MANSFIELD

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

If you read this Unit carefully you will be able to:

- outline the plot of ‘A Cup of Tea’;
- draw character - sketches;
- describe the atmosphere;
- point out the main features of the prose style.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the present Unit, we shall discuss the short story ‘A Cup of Tea’ by Katherine Mansfield (1886-1923), a British writer. Katherine Beauchamp Mansfield was born in Wellington, New Zealand. She moved to England in 1911 and married John Middleton Murry, the literary critic in 1913. She died fairly young, at the age of 35 in 1928. Her works include : *In a German Pension* (1911), *Bliss and Other Stories* (1920), *The Garden Party* (1922) and *The Dove’s Nest* (1923).

After you have read the story, we shall discuss the plot and characters. We shall also analyse how Katherine Mansfield has created the atmosphere in the story and the style that has contributed to it.

1.2 ‘A CUP OF TEA’

Let us now read the story. For difficult words, turn to the glossary given at the end of the story. Words in **bold** are explained in the Glossary

1.2.1 Text

Rosemary Fell was not exactly beautiful. No, you couldn't have called her beautiful. Pretty? Well, **if you took her to pieces...** But why be so cruel as to take anyone to pieces? She was young, brilliant, extremely modern, exquisitely well dressed, amazingly well read in the newest of the new books, and her parties were the most delicious mixture of the really important people and...artists - **quaint** creatures, discoveries of hers, **some of them too terrifying for words**, but others quite presentable and amusing.

Rosemary had been married two years. She had a **duck** of a boy. No, not Peter - Michael. And her husband absolutely adored her. They were rich, really rich, not just comfortably well off, which is odious and stuffy and **sounds like one's grandparents**. But if Rosemary wanted to shop she would go to **Paris** as you and I would go to **Bond Street**. If she wanted to buy flowers, the car pulled up at that perfect shop in Regent Street, and Rosemary inside the shop just gazed in her dazzled, rather exotic way, and said; 'I want those and those and those. Give me four bunches of those. And that jar of roses. Yes, I'll have all the roses in the jar. No, no lilac. I hate lilac. It's got no shape.' The attendant bowed and put the lilac out of sight, as though this was only too true; lilac was dreadfully shapeless. 'Give me those **stumpy** little tulips. Those red and white ones.' And she was followed to the car by a thin shop-girl **staggering** under an immense white paper armful that looked like a baby in long clothes...

One winter afternoon she had been buying something in a little **antique shop** in Curzon Street. It was a shop she liked. For one thing, one usually had it to oneself. And then the man who kept it was ridiculously fond of serving her. He beamed whenever she came in. He clasped his hands; he was so gratified he could scarcely speak. Flattery, of course. All the same, there was something...

'You see, madam,' he would explain in his low respectful tones, 'I love my things. I would rather not part with them than sell them to someone who does not appreciate them, who has not that fine feeling which is so rare...' And, breathing deeply, he unrolled a tiny square of blue velvet and pressed it on the glass counter with his pale finger-tips.

Today it was a little box. He had been keeping it for her. He had shown it to nobody as yet. An exquisite little enamel box with a glaze so fine it looked as though it had been baked in cream. On the lid a minute creature stood under a flowery tree, and a more minute creature still had her arms round his neck. Her hat, really no bigger than a geranium petal, hung from a branch; it had green ribbons. And there was a pink cloud like a watchful **cherub** floating above their heads. Rosemary took her hands out of her long gloves. She always took off her gloves to examine such things. Yes, she liked it very much. She loved it; it was a great duck. She must have it. And, turning the creamy box, opening and shutting it, she couldn't help noticing how charming her hands were against the blue velvet. The shopman, **in some dim cavern of his mind**, may have dared to think so, too. For he took a pencil, leant over the counter, and his pale bloodless fingers crept timidly towards those rosy, flashing ones, as he murmured gently: 'If I may venture to point out to madam, the flowers on the little lady's bodice.'

'Charming.' Rosemary admired the flowers. But what was the price? For a moment the shopman did not seem to hear. Then a murmur reached her. 'Twenty-eight guineas, madam.'

‘Twenty-eight guineas.’ Rosemary gave no sign. She laid the little box down; she buttoned her gloves again. Twenty-eight guineas. Even if one is rich... She looked vague. She stared at a plump tea-kettle like a plump hen above the shopman’s head, and her voice was dreamy as she answered; ‘Well, keep it for me-will you? I’ll ...’ But the shopman had already bowed as though keeping it for her was all any human being could ask. He would be willing, of course, to keep it for her for ever.

The discreet door shut with a click. She was outside on the step, gazing at the winter afternoon. Rain was falling and with the rain it seemed the dark came too, spinning down like ashes. There was a cold bitter taste in the air, and the new-lighted lamps looked sad. Sad were the lights in the houses opposite. Dimly they burned as if regretting something. And people hurried by, hidden under their hateful umbrellas. Rosemary felt a strange pang. She pressed her **muff** against her breast; she wished she had the little box, too, to cling to. Of course, the car was there. She’d only to cross the pavement. But still she waited. There are moments, horrible moments in life, when one emerges from shelter and looks out, and it’s awful. One oughtn’t to give way to them. One ought to go home and have an extra-special tea. But at the very instant of thinking that, a young girl, thin, dark shadowy - where had she come from? - was standing at Rosemary’s elbow and a voice like a sigh, almost like a sob, breathed: ‘Madam, may I speak to you a moment?’

‘Speak to me?’ Rosemary turned. She saw a little **battered** creature with enormous eyes, some-one quite young, no older than herself, who clutched at her coat collar with reddened hands, and shivered as though she had just come out of the water.

‘M-madam,’ stammered the voice. ‘Would you let me have the price of a cup of tea?’

‘A cup of tea?’ There was something simple, sincere in that voice; it wasn’t in the least the voice of a beggar.

‘Then have you no money at all?’ asked Rosemary.

‘None, madam,’ came the answer.

‘How extraordinary!’ Rosemary peered through the dusk, and the girl gazed back at her. How more than extraordinary! And suddenly it seemed to Rosemary such an adventure. It was like something out of a novel by **Dostoevsky**, this meeting in the dusk. Supposing she took the girl home? Supposing she did do one of those things she was always reading about or seeing on the stage, what would happen? It would be thrilling. And she heard herself saying afterwards to the amazement of her friends, ‘I simply took her home with me’, as she stepped forward and said to that dim person beside her, ‘Come home to tea with me.’

The girl drew back startled. She even stopped shivering for a moment. Rosemary put out a hand and touched her arm. ‘I mean it,’ she said, smiling. And she felt how simple and kind her smile was. ‘Why won’t you? Do. Come home with me now in my car and have tea.’

‘You-you don’t mean it, madam,’ said the girl, and there was pain in her voice.

‘But I do,’ cried Rosemary, ‘I want you to. To please me. Come along.’

The girl put her fingers to her lips and her eyes **devoured** Rosemary. 'You're-you're not taking me to the police station?' she stammered.

'The police station!' Rosemary laughed out. 'Why should I be so cruel? No, I only want to make you warm and to hear -anything you care to tell me.' Hungry people are easily led. The footman held the door of the car open, and a moment later they were **skimming** through the dusk.

'There!' said Rosemary. She had a feeling of triumph as she slipped her hand through the velvet strap. She could have said, 'Now I've got you,' as she gazed at the little captive she had netted. But of course she meant it kindly. Oh, more than kindly. She was going to prove to this girl that - wonderful things did happen in life, that - **fairy godmothers** were real, that - rich people had hearts, and that women were sisters.

She turned impulsively, saying, 'Don't be frightened. After all, why should not you come back with me? We're both women. If I'm the more fortunate. You ought to expect... '

But happily at that moment, for she didn't know how the sentence was going to end, the car stopped. The bell was rung, the door opened, and with a charming, protecting, almost embracing movement, Rosemary drew the other into the hall.

Warmth, softness, light, a sweet scent, all those things so familiar to her she never even thought about them, she watched that other receive. It was fascinating. She was like the rich little girl in her nursery with all the cupboards to open, all the boxes to 'Come, come upstairs,' said Rosemary, longing to begin to be generous. 'Come up to my room ' And, besides, she wanted to spare this poor little thing from being stared at by the servants; she decided as they mounted the stairs she would not even ring for Jeanne, but take off her things by herself. The great thing was to be natural.

And 'There!' cried Rosemary again, as they reached her beautiful big bedroom with the curtains drawn, the fire leaping on her wonderful **lacquer** furniture, her gold cushions and the primrose and blue rugs.

The girl stood just inside the door; she seemed dazed. But Rosemary didn't mind that.

'Come and sit down,' she cried, dragging her big chair up to the fire, 'in this **comfy** chair. Come and get warm. You look so dreadfully cold.'

'I daren't, madam,' said girl, and she **edged backwards**.

'Oh, please,' - Rosemary ran forward - 'you mustn't be frightened, you mustn't really. Sit down, and when I've taken off my things we shall go into the next room and have tea and be cosy. Why are you afraid?' And gently she half pushed the thin figure into its deep cradle.

But there was no answer. The girl stayed just as she had been put, with her hands by her sides and her mouth slightly open. To be quite sincere, she looked rather stupid. But Rosemary wouldn't acknowledge it. She leant over her, saying, 'Won't you take off your hat? Your pretty hair is all wet. And one is so much more comfort able without a hat, isn't one?'

There was a whisper that sounded like ‘Very good, madam,’ and the crushed hat was taken off.

‘And let me help you off with your coat, too,’ said Rosemary.

The girl stood up. But she held on to the chair with one hand and let Rosemary pull.

It was quite an effort. The other scarcely helped her at all. She seemed to stagger like a child, and the thought came and went through Rosemary’s mind, that if people wanted helping they must respond a little, just a little, otherwise it became very difficult indeed.

And what was she to do with the coat now? She left it on the floor, and the hat, too.

She was just going to take a cigarette off the mantel-piece when the girl said quickly, but so lightly and strangely: ‘I’m very sorry, madam, but I’m going to faint. I shall go off, madam, if I don’t have something.’

‘Good heavens, how thoughtless I am!’ Rosemary rushed to the bell.

‘Tea! Tea at once! And some brandy immediately!’

The maid was gone again, but the girl almost cried out: ‘No, I don’t want no brandy. I never drink brandy. It’s cup of tea I want, madam.’ And she burst into tears.

It was a terrible and fascinating moment. Rosemary knelt beside her chair.

‘Don’t cry, poor little thing,’ she said. ‘Don’t cry.’ And she gave the other her lace handkerchief. She really was touched beyond words. She put her arm round those thin, bird-like shoulders.

Now at last the other forgot to be shy, forgot everything except that they were both women, and gasped out: ‘I can’t go on no longer like this. I can’t bear it. I can’t bear it. I shall do away with myself. I can’t bear no more.’

‘You shan’t have to. I’ll look after you. Don’t cry any more. Don’t you see what a good thing it was that you met me? We’ll have tea and you’ll tell me everything. And I shall arrange something. I promise. Do stop crying. It’s exhausting. Please!’

The other did stop just in time for Rosemary to get up before the tea came. She had the table placed between them. She plied the poor little creature with everything, all the sandwiches, all the bread and butter, and every time her cup was empty she filled it with tea, cream and sugar. People always said sugar was so nourishing. As for herself she didn’t eat; she smoked and looked away tactfully so that the other should not be shy.

And really the effect of the slight meal was marvellous. When the tea-table was carried away, a new being, a light, frail creature with tangled hair, dark lips, deep, lighted eyes, lay back in the big chair in a kind of **sweet languor**, looking at the blaze.

Rosemary lit a fresh cigarette; it was time to begin.

‘And when did you have your last meal?’ She asked softly.

But at the moment the door-handle turned.

‘Rosemary, may I come in?’ It was Philip.

‘Of course.’

He came in. ‘Oh, I’m so sorry,’ he said, and stopped and stared.

‘It’s quite all right,’ said Rosemary, smiling, ‘This is my friend, Miss—’

‘Smith, madam,’ said the languid figure, who was strangely still and unafraid.

‘Smith,’ said Rosemary. ‘We are going to have a little talk.’

‘Oh yes,’ said Philip. ‘Quite,’ and his eye caught sight of the coat and hat on the floor. He came over to the fire and turned his back to it. ‘It’s a beastly afternoon,’ he said curiously, still looking at that listless figure, looking at its hands and boots, and then at Rosemary again.

‘Yes, isn’t it?’ said Rosemary enthusiastically. ‘**Vile.**’

Philip smiled his charming smile. ‘As a matter of fact,’ said he, ‘I wanted you to come into the library for a moment. Would you? Will Miss Smith excuse us?’

The big eyes were raised to him, but Rosemary answered for her: ‘Of course she will.’ And they went out of the room together.

‘I say,’ said Philip, when they were alone. ‘Explain. Who is she? What does it all mean?’

Rosemary, laughing, leaned against the door and said: ‘I picked her up in Curzon Street. Really. She’s a **real pick-up**. She asked me for the price of a cup of tea, and I brought her home with me.’

‘But what on earth are you going to do with her?’ cried Philip.

‘Be nice to her,’ said Rosemary quickly. ‘Be frightfully nice to her. Look after her. I don’t know how. We haven’t talked yet. But show her-treat- her-make her feel-’

‘My darling girl,’ said Philip, ‘you’re quite mad, you know. It simply can’t be done.’

‘I knew you’d say that,’ retorted Rosemary. ‘Why not? I want to. Isn’t that a reason? And besides, one’s always reading about these things. I decided-’

‘But,’ said Philip slowly, and he cut the end of a cigar, ‘she’s so astonishingly pretty.’

‘Pretty?’ Rosemary was so surprised that she blushed. ‘Do you think so? I-I hadn’t thought about it.’

‘Good Lord!’ Philip struck a match. ‘She’s absolutely lovely. Look again, my child. I was **bowled over** when I came into your room just now. However... I think you’re making a ghastly mistake. Sorry, darling, if I’m crude and all that. But let me know if Miss Smith is going to dine with us in time for me to look up the **Milliner’s Gazette.**’

‘You absurd creature!’ said Rosemary, and she went out of the library, but not back to her bedroom. She went to her writing-room and sat down at her desk. Pretty! Absolutely lovely! Bowled over! Her heart beat like a heavy bell. Pretty! Lovely! She drew her cheque-book towards her. But no, cheques would be no use, of course. She opened a drawer and took out five pound notes, looked at them, put two back, and holding the three squeezed in her hand, she went back to her bedroom.

Half an hour later Philip was still in the library, when Rosemary came in.

‘I only wanted to tell you,’ said she, and she leaned against the door again and looked at him with her dazzled exotic gaze, ‘Miss Smith won’t dine with us tonight.’

Philip put down the paper. ‘Oh, what’s happened? Previous engagement?’

Rosemary came over and sat down on his knee. ‘She insisted on going,’ said she; ‘so I gave the poor little thing a present of money. I couldn’t keep her against her will, could I?’ she added softly.

Rosemary had just done her hair, darkened her eyes a little, and put on her pearls. She put up her hands and touched Philip’s cheeks.

‘Do you like me?’ said she, and her tone, sweet, husky, troubled him.

‘I like you awfully,’ he said, and he held her tighter. ‘Kiss me.’

There was a pause.

Then Rosemary said dreamily: ‘I saw a fascinating little box today. It costs twenty-eight guineas. May I have it?’

Philip jumped her on his knee. ‘You may, little wasteful one,’ said he.

But that was not really what Rosemary wanted to say.

‘Philip,’ she whispered, and she pressed his head against her bosom, ‘am I pretty?’

1.2.2 Glossary

if you took her to pieces: if you examined her closely.

quaint: strange

some of them too terrifying for words: some of them were so odd or frightening that words cannot describe them

duck: term of affection

sounds like one’s grandparents: sounds old-fashioned

Paris: famous for its fashionable shops

Bond street: fashionable shopping street in London

stumpy: short and thick

staggering: walking unsteadily

antique shop: shop that sells old, artistic things of great value

cherub: a small child or angel, sweet and innocent, with wings

in some dim cavern of his mind: deep in his mind

muff: covering used by a woman to keep the hands warm

battered creature: person who looked as if she has had a rough time

Dostoevsky (1821-81): A Russian novelist of the 19th century. He wrote *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-80)

devoured: took in greedily (here, with ears or eyes)

skimming: moving lightly without appearing to touch the surface

fairy godmothers: In fairy tales, fairies act as mothers to children in distress

lacquer: varnish used to give hard, bright coating to wood or metal

comfy: comfortable

edged backwards: withdraw hesitatingly

sweet languor: very pleasant feeling of laziness

vile: terrible

pick-up: person whose acquaintance is made casually

bowled over: greatly surprised or impressed

The Milliner's Gazette: Rosemary's husband makes fun of his wife who has brought the beggar girl home. He tells her that he would like to consult a cheap magazine popular among working-class women, so that he could learn to talk to Rosemary's friend Miss Smith.

1.3 PLOT

The story starts with the following description of the protagonist; "Rosemary Fell was not exactly beautiful. No, you couldn't have called her beautiful. Pretty? Well, if you took her to pieces... She was young, brilliant, extremely modern, exquisitely well-dressed..." Instead of saying in simple words that Rosemary was young, rich, and happily married, the author gives us this ironic description. The irony will be clearer to you if you contrast this description with the events in the latter part of the story.

Let us go back to the story now. When Rosemary is standing on the step of an antique shop one winter afternoon, she is approached by a poor young girl requesting her to give her money to buy a cup of tea. Rosemary cannot believe her ears because she had never thought anyone could be so poor as not to be able to afford a cup of tea. She is fascinated at the prospect of turning the ordinary incident into an exciting adventure - one of those wonderful things which she read only in books. (Note: Rosemary's encounter with the poor girl throws light on the former's character). When Rosemary offers to take her home, the girl looks frightened and unconvinced, but Rosemary assures her

that she meant it kindly. Rosemary thinks that she would prove to the girl that wonderful things do happen in life, that rich people have hearts, and that all women are sisters.

After reaching home, Rosemary helps the girl - Miss Smith - to take off her hat and coat - without bothering to give her tea which she badly needed as she was starving. After being reminded by Miss Smith that she would faint if she didn't get tea, Rosemary serves bread, butter, tea, cream and sugar. When her husband, Philip comes in, Rosemary tells him that the poor girl had been picked up off the street and that she had decided to treat the girl well. When Philip asks her to be practical, she becomes more firm in her resolution. Then Philip tactlessly remarks that Miss Smith was astonishingly pretty and that he had been bowled over when he had come into Rosemary's room.

Here the story reaches a climax - a point of maximum emotional intensity or revelation. Ruminating over the husband's words: 'Pretty'. 'Absolutely lovely.' 'Bowled over', Rosemary goes to her writing-room. Instead of joining Miss Smith, she decided to send the girl away (as she is now jealous at the thought that Philip found the girl pretty). For a moment, she thinks of writing a cheque for the girl; on second thoughts, she takes out five pound notes from a drawer. Then something in her nature makes her put two notes back. She gives the remaining three notes to Miss Smith and sends her away.

Half an hour later when Rosemary comes in, Philip is still in the library. She has done her hair, darkened her eyes, and put on her pearls. She tells Philip that she had sent the girl away with some money and that it was according to the girl's wish. She then tells him that she had seen a beautiful little box which she would like to buy. Later, pressing head against her bosom, she asks him: 'Am I pretty?'

When you read the story, you must have noticed that the narration is smooth and flowing. The author is the narrator and there is some authorial intervention now and then (For example: When the poor girl was led by Rosemary to go to her home, the author says: "Hungry people are easily led.")

The plot is cyclical. The story starts when Rosemary first entertains and then drops the idea of buying an enamel box (with minute creatures engraved on it), picks up a half-starved young girl, Miss Smith and takes her home. But, at the end of the story, after sending off Miss Smith, Rosemary thinks again of buying the enamel box.

Now we shall analyse the character of Rosemary Fell as the plot revolves around her.

1.4 CHARACTERS

In the present short story, the emphasis is on situation rather than character. We shall however, delineate the character of Rosemary Fell. We want you to write brief character sketches of Philip and Miss Smith - the remaining two characters in the story.

1.4.1 Rosemary Fell

Rosemary Fell is affluent, well-read, and modern. She has been married for two years and her husband adores her. Any discerning reader will say that a combination of affluence, education, and happy married life, should have made Rosemary a level-headed and secure person. On the contrary, Rosemary lives in a world of fantasy. She imagines that it would be thrilling to take a poor girl home, give her some tea, and show her to friends, saying: 'I simply took her home with me.' She imagines herself in the role of a fairy godmother who is kindly and generous to those who are not as well off as her. The reason she takes the girl home is to bask in this imaginative image of herself as a benevolent person. She naively thinks that everyone would compliment her for helping a poor girl but, the end of the story is quite different from Rosemary's fantasy.

Moreover, being a very affluent person, she does not know the needs of the poor. She is surprised when the poor girl asks her for money for buying a cup of tea. After taking the girl home Rosemary insists on taking off her coat and hat without offering a cup of tea-which the poor girl badly needed.

From the world of fantasy, she comes down to the world of reality, when her husband, Philip carelessly remarks that he is struck by Miss Smith's looks. This comment arouses her jealousy and she decides to send the girl away after giving her some money. The change of heart is so strong that instead of giving the hapless girl at least a five-pound note, Rosemary gives three pounds and sends her off. This act reveals Rosemary's shallow nature and jealousy - as her initial generosity limits itself to three pounds only.

Rosemary's impulsive thought "women were sisters" proves to be mere rhetoric. It is also a comment on the suspicion with which women regard other members of their own sex. Sisterhood apparently, can only be sustained as long as there is no man on the scene! Philip's comment on the girl's enchanting looks effectively demolishes Rosemary's noble, if somewhat superficial impulses, and her insecurity surfaces in her need for reassurance.

To recapitulate: Rosemary is affluent and modern, well-read and well-dressed. But she is unrealistic, shallow, and jealous.

A close look at the delineation of Rosemary's character reveals Katherine Mansfield's ability to make a character come alive and reveal her psyche - all in the space of a few pages.

Check Your Progress I

A.) Answer the following questions in not more than 75 words each. :

- i) Describe Rosemary Fell and her manner of living.
- ii) Why did Rosemary take Miss Smith home? What plans did she have for her?
- iii) What made Rosemary change her mind about Miss Smith? Why did she send her away?

B) Match the items in column A with their meanings in column B.

A	B
1) enormous	feeling of laziness
2) exotic	big
3) odious	prisoner
4) captive	exciting
5) thrilling	hateful
6) acknowledge	strange
7) languor	admit the truth to

C) Turn the following conversation into indirect speech:

‘I say’, said Philip, ‘explain. Who is she? What does it all mean?’ Rosemary said laughing. ‘I picked her up in Curzon Street. Really. ‘She is real pick-up. She asked me for the price of a cup of tea, and I brought her home with me’. ‘But what on earth are you going to do with her?’ cried Philip. ‘Be nice to her,’ said Rosemary quickly. ‘Be frightfully nice to her. Look after her. I don’t know how. We haven’t talked yet’.

1.5 BACKGROUND

Atmosphere creates the mood as well as the psychological and the physical effects appropriate to the theme of the story. In the present story, a poor girl approaches an affluent lady for money to buy a cup of tea on a winter afternoon. Very appropriate to the situation, the author vividly describes the winter afternoon as follows:

“Rain was falling and with the rain it seemed the dark came too, spinning down like ashes. There was a cold bitter taste in the air, and the new-lighted lamps looked sad... dimly they burned as if regretting something.”

Isn’t the description poetic? At the same time, it contrasts with the opulent atmosphere of Rosemary’s house which is described as follows:

“Rosemary drew the other into the hall. Warmth, softness, light, a sweet scent all those things so familiar to her she never even thought about them, she watched that other receive. It was fascinating”.

Further, the aforementioned description of opulence is in contrast with descriptions of the obvious poverty of the young girl - “thin, dark, shadowy” to indicate that there is no meeting point between the affluent and the poor.

Now let us discuss the author’s prose style in the following section.

1.6 PROSE STYLE

Katherine Mansfield uses an appropriate style to create the required atmosphere. Take a look at the following conversation:

‘I mean it,’ she said, smiling. And she felt how simple and kind her smile was. ‘Why won’t you? Do come home with me now in my car and have tea’.

And this one:

‘But I do’, cried Rosemary, ‘I want you to. To please me. Come along’.

A colloquial style is used in the above examples to present the conversation between Rosemary and the poor girl. We are sure that you didn’t face any difficulty in understanding these exchanges.

Now, even a cursory glance at the following passage will enable you to see how adeptly Katherine Mansfield describes an enamel box with all the minute details:

“An exquisite little enamel box with a glaze so fine it looked as though it had been baked in cream. On the lid a minute creature stood under a flowery tree, and a more minute creature still had her arms around his neck. Her hat, really no bigger than a geranium petal, hung from a branch; it had green ribbons”.

The cultural background of the author is reflected in the choice of words and expressions. In the present short story, Katherine Mansfield used the following colloquial expressions:

“duck of a boy”

“it was a great duck”

“spinning like ashes”.

A “transferred epithet” is a device in which an adjective which should be attached to one word is instead attached to another. Do you think that this device of a ‘transferred epithet’ is used in the following? Or is it “personification”?

“the new-lighted lamps looked sad”

“hidden under their hateful umbrellas”

We want you to look for other literary devices used in the present story.

Check Your Progress II

- i) Write about Katherine Mansfield’s prose style as reflected in ‘A Cup of Tea’ in around 100 words.
- ii) Pick out from the story one word that expresses the meaning of each of the following:
 - a) small beautiful child-angel with wings c.....
 - b) feel sorry r.....
 - c) walk unsteadily s.....
 - d) confused and unable to think clearly d.....
 - e) warm and comfortable: c.....
 - f) food that is good for physical health: n.....

1.7 LET US SUM UP

'A Cup of Tea'
By Katherine Mansfield

In 'A Cup of Tea' Katherine Mansfield tells the story of Rosemary Fell who brings home to tea, a beggar girl. When she realizes that her husband may be attracted to the young girl, she suddenly changes her mind and sends her away, abandoning her earlier plans of helping the girl. The narration of the story is smooth and flowing and the emphasis is on situation rather than character.

1.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

- A) i) Rosemary was affluent and modern well dressed and well read.
ii) She took her home to give her a cup of tea and look after her.
iii) Because she got jealous of her husband calling Miss Smith pretty.

1) enormous big

B) A B

1) enormous big

2) exotic strange

3) odious hateful

4) captive prisoner

5) thrilling exciting

6) acknowledge admit the truth of

7) languor feeling of laziness

- C) Philip asked her to explain who she was and what it all meant. Rosemary replied in a lighter vein that she had picked her up in Curzon Street. She added that the poor girl had asked her for the price of a cup of tea and that she had brought her home with her. Philip wondered what Rosemary was going to do with the poor girl. Rosemary replied quickly that she wanted to be nice to her and look after her. She added that she and the girl hadn't discussed it until then.

Check Your Progress II

- i) Refer to Section 1.6
ii) a) cherub
b) repent
c) stagger
d) dazed
e) comfy
f) nutritious

UNIT 2 ‘THE LEGACY’ BY VIRGINIA WOOLF

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 ‘The Legacy’
 - 2.2.1 Text
 - 2.2.2 Glossary
- 2.3 Discussion
- 2.4 Characters
 - 2.4.1 Gilbert Clandon
- 2.5 Style and Technique
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit carefully, you should be able to:

- delineate the plot;
- describe the background;
- draw character sketches; and
- describe the main features of Virginia Woolf’s style and technique.

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

2.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the most talented and innovative novelists in English literature, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was born Virginia Stephen in London. Her father was the eminent critic Leslie Stephen, and though Woolf received little in the way of formal education, her mind was shaped by her avid reading from her father’s extensive book collection and from conversations with his friends, many of whom were prominent writers of the era. After her father’s death in 1904, Woolf moved with her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell, to a house in the Bloomsbury district of London and became a member of the “Bloomsbury Group,” which had many of England’s finest young artists and intellectuals – the economist John Maynard Keynes, the biographer Lytton Strachey, the art critics and painters Roger Fry and Clive Bell, the novelist E.M. Forster, among others. She married fellow Bloomsburian, Leonard Woolf, socialist, thinker and writer in 1912. Leonard and Virginia Woolf set up the Hogarth Press in 1917.

Woolf’s first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915) explored the tensions experienced by women who want marriage and a career. Woolf’s major works such as *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *The Waves* (1931) rejected the boundaries of traditional narrative form. She sought to develop a “stream of consciousness” narrative that could capture the essence of the sensibility, the experience itself in terms of time, memory, and consciousness. She is considered one of the founders of the Modernist movement.

Besides making her mark as a novelist of great renown, Woolf’s spirit of creative adventure led her to explore and experiment with the short story genre, in stories like ‘*A Haunted House*,’ ‘*Monday or Tuesday*,’ ‘*Kew Gardens*,’ ‘*The Mark on the Wall*,’ ‘*The New Dress*,’ ‘*The Lady in the Looking-Glass*,’ ‘*The Legacy*,’ etc. Woolf used her short fiction as a ‘testing ground’ for her novels; the stories reveal the evolution of Woolf’s experimental methods and the origin of some of the major themes in her novels.

Woolf has also written a large number of essays and book reviews collected in books like *Modern Fiction* (1919), *The Common Reader* (1925), *The Common Reader second series* (1932) and *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942). The majority of Woolf’s essays are devoted to literary matters. Her social and political concerns revolved chiefly around the rights of women and women writers. In *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) Woolf argues that “a woman must have money and a room of her own” if she is to write fiction of any merit.

Despite the material comforts enjoyed by her family, Woolf’s childhood was a traumatic one. She suffered sexual abuse by her half brothers after the death of her mother in 1895. She had to contend with frequent bouts of depression throughout her life. Sensing the onset of another breakdown, on 28 March, 1941 Woolf drowned herself. Before committing suicide she had left the following poignant note behind for her husband Leonard Woolf:

Dearest, I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can’t go through another of those terrible times. And I shan’t recover this time.

In October 1940, Virginia Woolf wrote the story called ‘*The Legacy*’ about a widower (a right-wing politician) who discovers from reading his wife’s diaries that she had fallen in love with a radical working man and committed suicide.

2.2 ‘THE LEGACY’

2.2.1 Text

‘For Sissy Miller.’ Gilbert Clandon, taking up the pearl brooch that lay among a litter of rings and brooches on a little table in his wife’s drawing-room, read the inscription: ‘For Sissy Miller, with my love.’

It was like Angela to have remembered even Sissy Miller, her secretary. Yet how strange it was, Gilbert Clandon thought once more, that she had left everything in such order – a little gift of some sort for every one of her friends. It was as if she had foreseen her death. Yet she had been in perfect health when she left the house that morning, six weeks ago; when she stepped off the kerb in Piccadilly and the car had killed her.

He was waiting for Sissy Miller. He had asked her to come; he owed her, he felt, after all the years she had been with them, this token of consideration. Yes, he went on, as he sat there waiting, it was strange that Angela had left everything in such order. Every friend had been left some little token of her affection. Every ring, every necklace, every little Chinese box – she had a passion for little boxes – had a name on it. And each had some memory for him. This he had given her; this – the enamel dolphin with the ruby eyes – she had **pounced upon** one day in a back street in Venice. He could remember her little cry of delight. To him, of course, she had left nothing in particular, unless it were her diary. Fifteen little volumes, bound in green leather, stood behind him on her writing table. Ever since they were married, she had kept a diary. Some of their very few – he could not call them quarrels, say tiffs – had been about that diary. When he came in and found her writing, she always shut it or put her hand over it. “No, no, no,” he could hear her say, “After I’m dead – perhaps.” So she had left it him, as her **legacy**. It was the only thing they had not shared when she was alive. But he had always taken it for granted that she would outlive him. If only she had stopped one moment, and had thought what she was doing, she would be alive now. But she had stepped straight off the **kerb**, the driver of the car had said at the **inquest**. She had given him no chance to pull up Here the sound of voices in the hall interrupted him.

“Miss Miller, Sir,” said the maid.

She came in. He had never seen her alone in his life, nor, of course, in tears. She was terribly distressed, and no wonder. Angela had been much more to her than an employer. She had been a friend. To himself, he thought, as he pushed a chair for her and asked her to sit down, she was scarcely distinguishable from any other woman of her kind. There were thousands of Sissy Millers – drab little women in black, carrying attache cases. But Angela, with her genius for sympathy, had discovered all sorts of qualities in Sissy Miller. She was **the soul of discretion**; so silent; so trustworthy, one could tell her anything, and so on.

Miss Miller could not speak at first. She sat there dabbing her eyes with her pocket handkerchief. Then she made an effort.

“Pardon me, Mr. Clandon,” she said.

He murmured. Of course he understood. It was only natural. He could guess what his wife had meant to her.

“I’ve been so happy here,” she said, looking round. Her eyes rested on the writing table behind him. It was here they had worked – she and Angela. For Angela had her share of the duties that fall to the lot of the wife of a prominent politician. She had been the greatest help to him in his career. He had often seen her and Sissy sitting at that table – Sissy at the typewriter, taking down letters from her dictation. No doubt Miss Miller was thinking of that, too. Now all he had to do was to give her the brooch his wife had left her. A rather **incongruous** gift it seemed. It might have been better to have left her a sum of money, or even the typewriter. But there it was – “For Sissy Miller, with my love.” And, taking the brooch, he gave it her with the little speech that he had prepared. He knew, he said, that she would value it. His wife had often worn it.... And she replied, as she took it almost as if she too had prepared a speech, that it would always be a

treasured possession... She had, he supposed, other clothes upon which a pearl brooch would not look quite so incongruous. She was wearing the little black coat and skirt that seemed the uniform of her profession. Then he remembered – she was in mourning, of course. She, too, had had her tragedy – a brother, to whom she was devoted, had died only a week or two before Angela. In some accident was it? He could not remember – only Angela telling him. Angela, with her genius for sympathy, had been terribly upset. Meanwhile Sissy Miller had risen. She was putting on her gloves. Evidently she felt that she ought not to **intrude**. But he could not let her go without saying something about her future. What were her plans? Was there any way in which he could help her?

She was gazing at the table, where she had sat at her typewriter, where the diary lay. And, lost in her memories of Angela, she did not at once answer his suggestion that he should help her. She seemed for a moment not to understand. So he repeated:

“What are your plans, Miss Miller?”

“My plans? Oh, that’s all right, Mr. Clandon,” she exclaimed. “Please don’t bother yourself about me.”

He took her to mean that she was in no need of financial assistance. It would be better, he realized, to make any suggestion of that kind in a letter. All he could do now was to say as he pressed her hand, “Remember, Miss Miller, if there’s any way in which I can help you, it will be a pleasure” Then he opened the door. For a moment, on the **threshold**, as if a sudden thought had struck her, she stopped.

“Mr. Clandon,” she said, looking straight at him for the first time, and for the first time he was struck by the expression, sympathetic yet searching, in her eyes. “If at any time,” she continued, “there’s anything I can do to help you, remember, I shall feel it, for your wife’s sake, a pleasure . . .”

With that she was gone. Her words and the look that went with them were unexpected. It was almost as if she believed, or hoped, that he would have need of her. A curious, perhaps a fantastic idea occurred to him as he returned to his chair. Could it be that during all those years when he had scarcely noticed her, she, as the novelists say, had entertained a passion for him? He caught his own reflection in the glass as he passed. He was over fifty; but he could not help admitting that he was still, as the looking-glass showed him, a very distinguished-looking man.

“Poor Sissy Miller!” he said, half laughing. How he would have liked to share that joke with his wife! He turned instinctively to her diary. “Gilbert,” he read, opening it at random, “looked so wonderful. . . .” It was as if she had answered his question. Of course, she seemed to say, you’re very attractive to women. Of course Sissy Miller felt that too. He read on. “How proud I am to be his wife!” And he had always been very proud to be her husband. How often, when they dined out somewhere, he had looked at her across the table and said to himself, She is the loveliest woman here! He read on. That first year he had been standing for Parliament. They had toured his constituency. “When Gilbert sat down the applause was terrific. The whole audience rose and sang: “For he’s a jolly good fellow.” I was quite overcome.” He remembered that, too. She had been sitting

on the platform beside him. He could still see the glance she cast at him, and how she had tears in her eyes. And then? He turned the pages. They had gone to Venice. He recalled that happy holiday after the election. "We had ices at Florians." He smiled – she was still such a child; she loved ices. "Gilbert gave me a most interesting account of the history of Venice. He told me that **the Doges**. . ." she had written it all out in her schoolgirl hand. One of the delights of travelling with Angela had been that she was so eager to learn. She was so terribly ignorant, she used to say, as if that were not one of her charms. And then – he opened the next volume – they had come back to London. "I was so anxious to make a good impression. I wore my wedding dress." He could see her now sitting next to old Sir Edward; and **making a conquest** of that formidable old man, his chief. He read on rapidly, filling in scene after scene from her scrappy fragments. "Dined at the House of Commons To an evening party at the Lovegroves. Did I realize my responsibility, Lady L. asked me, as Gilbert's wife?" Then, as the years passed – he took another volume from the writing table – he had become more and more absorbed in his work. And she, of course, was more often alone It had been a great grief to her, apparently, that they had had no children. "How I wish," one entry read, "that Gilbert had a son!" Oddly enough he had never much regretted that himself. Life had been so full, so rich as it was. That year he had been given a minor post in the government. A minor post only, but her comment was: "I am quite certain now that he will be Prime Minister!" Well, if things had gone differently, it might have been so. He paused here to **speculate** upon what might have been. Politics was a gamble, he reflected; but the game wasn't over yet. Not at fifty. He cast his eyes rapidly over more pages, full of the little trifles, the insignificant, happy, daily trifles that had made up her life.

He took up another volume and opened it at random. "What a coward I am! I let the chance slip again. But it seemed selfish to bother him with my own affairs, when he has so much to think about. And we so seldom have an evening alone." What was the meaning of that? Oh, here was the explanation – it referred to her work in the **East End**. "I plucked up courage and talked to Gilbert at last. He was so kind, so good. He made no objection." He remembered that conversation. She had told him that she felt so idle, so useless. She wished to have some work of her own. She wanted to do something – she had blushed so prettily, he remembered, as she said it, sitting in that very chair – to help others. He had **bantered** her a little. Hadn't she enough to do looking after him, after her home? Still, if it amused her, of course he had no objection. What was it? Some district? Some committee? Only she must promise not to make herself ill. So it seemed that every Wednesday she went to **Whitechapel**. He remembered how he hated the clothes she wore on those occasions. But she had taken it very seriously, it seemed. The diary was full of references like this: "Saw Mrs. Jones. . . . She has ten children. . . . Husband lost his arm in an accident. . . . Did my best to find a job for Lily." He skipped on. His own name occurred less frequently. His interest slackened. Some of the entries conveyed nothing to him. For example: "Had a heated argument about socialism with B. M." Who was B. M.? He could not fill in the initials; some woman, he supposed, that she had met on one of her committees. "B. M. made a violent attack upon the upper classes I walked back after the meeting with B. M. and tried to convince him. But he is so narrow-minded." So B. M. was a man – no doubt one of those "intellectuals," as they call themselves, who are so violent, as Angela said, and so narrow minded. She

had invited him to come and see her apparently. "B. M. came to dinner. He shook hands with Minnie!" That note of exclamation gave another twist to his mental picture. B. M., it seemed, wasn't used to parlourmaids; he had shaken hands with Minnie. Presumably he was one of those tame working men who air their views in ladies' drawing-rooms. Gilbert knew the type, and had no liking for this particular specimen, whoever B. M. might be. Here he was again. "Went with B. M. to the Tower of London. . . . He said revolution is bound to come. . . . He said we live in a Fool's Paradise." That was just the kind of thing B. M. would say – Gilbert could hear him. He could also see him quite distinctly – a **stubby** little man, with a rough beard, red tie, dressed as they always did in tweeds, who had never done an honest day's work in his life. Surely Angela had the sense to see through him? He read on. "B. M. said some very disagreeable things about – "The name was carefully scratched out. "I told him I would not listen to any more abuse of –" Again the name was **obliterated**. Could it have been his own name? Was that why Angela covered the page so quickly when he came in? The thought added to his growing dislike of B. M. He had had the **impertinence** to discuss him in this very room. Why had Angela never told him? It was very unlike her to conceal anything; she had been the **soul of candour**. He turned the pages, picking out every reference to B. M. "B. M. told me the story of his childhood. His mother **went out charring** . . . When I think of it, I can hardly bear to go on living in such luxury. . . . Three guineas for one hat!" If only she had discussed the matter with him, instead of puzzling her poor little head about questions that were much too difficult for her to understand! He had lent her books. *Karl Marx. The Coming Revolution*. The initials B.M., B. M., B. M., recurred repeatedly. But why never the full name? There was an informality, an intimacy in the use of initials that was very unlike Angela. Had she called him B. M. to his face? He read on. "B. M. came unexpectedly after dinner. Luckily, I was alone." That was only a year ago. "Luckily" – why luckily? – "I was alone." Where had he been that night? He checked the date in his engagement book. It had been the night of the **Mansion House** dinner. And B. M. and Angela had spent the evening alone! He tried to recall that evening. Was she waiting up for him when he came back? Had the room looked just as usual? Were there glasses on the table? Were the chairs drawn close together? He could remember nothing – nothing whatever, nothing except his own speech at the Mansion House dinner. It became more and more **inexplicable** to him – the whole situation; his wife receiving an unknown man alone. Perhaps the next volume would explain. Hastily he reached for the last of the diaries – the one she had left unfinished when she died. There, on the very first page, was that cursed fellow again. "Dined alone with B. M. . . . He became very agitated. He said it was time we understood each other. . . . I tried to make him listen. But he would not. He threatened that if I did not . . ." the rest of the page was scored over. She had written "**Egypt. Egypt. Egypt,**" over the whole page. He could not make out a single word; but there could be only one interpretation: the scoundrel had asked her to become his mistress. Alone in his room! The blood rushed to Gilbert Clandon's face. He turned the pages rapidly. What had been her answer? Initials had ceased. It was simply "he" now. "He came again. I told him I could not come to any decision. . . . I **implored** him to leave me." He had forced himself upon her in this very house. But why hadn't she told him? How could she have hesitated for an instant? Then: "I wrote him a letter." Then pages were left blank. Then there was this: "No answer to my letter." Then more blank pages; and then this: "He has done

what he threatened.” After that – what came after that? He turned page after page. All were blank. But there, on the very day before her death, was this entry: “Have I the courage to do it too?” That was the end.

Gilbert Clandon let the book slide to the floor. He could see her in front of him. She was standing on the kerb in **Piccadilly**. Her eyes stared; her fists were clenched. Here came the car. . . .

He could not bear it. He must know the truth. He strode to the telephone.

“Miss Miller!” There was silence. Then he heard someone moving in the room.

“Sissy Miller speaking – her voice at last answered him.

“Who,” he thundered, “is B. M.?”¹

He could hear the cheap clock ticking on her mantelpiece; then a long drawn sigh. Then at last she said:

“He was my brother.”

He was her brother; her brother who had killed himself. “Is there,” he heard Sissy Miller asking, ‘anything that I can explain?’

“Nothing!” he cried. “Nothing!”

He had received his legacy. She had told him the truth. She had stepped off the kerb to rejoin her lover. She had stepped off the kerb to escape from him.

2.2.2 Glossary

legacy	: something left to someone in a will.
kerb	: stone edging to a raised path or pavement.
Piccadilly	: Piccadilly is located in the City of Westminster, the commercial centre of London.
pounced upon	: moved suddenly to seize.
inquest	: official enquiry to learn facts concerning a death which may not be due to natural causes.
the soul of discretion	: a person endowed with, the ability to keep a secret, a very tactful dependable person.
incongruous	: out of place.
intrude	: come into a place or situation where one is unwelcome or uninvited.
threshold	: a strip of wood or stone on the floor of the entrance; this has to be crossed to enter a room or house.
the Doges	: the chief magistrate of Venice from about 697 AD to the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1796 was known as the Doge.
making a conquest	: winning the affection.
speculate	: form a theory without firm evidence.

East End	: The East End has always been one of the areas of London.
bantered	: made friendly teasing remarks.
Whitechapel	: a district of the East End, adjacent to the City of London, synonymous in the Victorian and Edwardian periods with the miseries of poverty, overcrowding, pollution etc.
stubby	: short and fat.
obliterated	: erased or covered completely.
impertinence	: rude behaviour
soul of candour	: a person who is open and honest.
went out charring	: worked as a charwomen in a number of houses; a charwoman is a servant who cleans houses, offices etc.
Karl Marx	: Karl (Heinrich) Marx (1818-83), German revolutionary and founder of Communism. In his Communist Manifesto, Marx attacked the state as the instrument of oppression; religion and culture as the ideologies of the capitalist class, and predicted the overthrow of the capitalist system.
'The Coming Revolution'	: The Coming Revolution in England (1884) is a 32-page document by Henry Mayers Hyndman (1842-1921), a famous Socialist of his day.
Mansion House	: the Mansion House is the official residence of the Lord Mayor of London.
inexplicable	: which cannot be explained.
scored over	: deleted words by drawing a line through it; cut out.
'Egypt. Egypt. Egypt.'	: possibly an allusion to the bondage of the Israelites in Egypt, as described in "Exodus" 1-14 of the old Testament of the Bible. Angela feels trapped between her fidelity to her husband and her love for Sissy Miller's brother. "Egypt" could also be a reference to Anthony's dying words in Shakespeare's play Anthony and Cleopatra (Act 4), "I am dying, Egypt, dying". Cleopatra responds, "Hast thou no care of me? Shall I abide / In this dull world, which in thy absence is/ No better than a sty?" Cleopatra commits suicide, not wanting to live in a world bereft of Mark Anthony; Angela too commits suicide following the death of "B.M."
implored	: requested earnestly

2.3 DISCUSSION

The story begins with Gilbert Clandon taking up the pearl brooch left behind by his recently dead wife, Angela Clandon, for her secretary with the inscription: “For Sissy Miller, with my love.” Angela had left for every one of her friends a little token of her affection. For her husband, Gilbert, Angela had “left nothing in particular, unless it were her diary.” He could see fifteen little volumes, neatly bound in green leather, lying in wait on her writing table as her legacy to him. He had often seen her busy with the diary but whenever he came into the room she would shut it or put her hand over it. Gilbert reflects that “it was the only thing they had not shared when she was alive.” Gilbert Clandon initially misreads his wife’s death as an accident for, his wife left the house in perfect health six weeks ago and was killed by a car off the kerb in Piccadilly.

When Sissy Miller arrives at Gilbert’s behest, he finds her terribly distressed. For Sissy Miller, Angela had been much more to her than an employer. She was in a kind of double mourning for she had also lost a brother who had died only a week or two before Angela. After giving Sissy Miller the pearl brooch, Gilbert tells her: “Remember, Miss Miller, if there’s any way in which I can help you, it will be a pleasure” Before leaving, Sissy Miller also assures him: “Mr. Clandon,” “If at any time there’s anything I can do to help you, remember, I shall feel it, for your wife’s sake, a pleasure . . .”

After Sissy Miller departs, Gilbert wonders whether Sissy may have had some feelings for him. He looks at himself in the mirror and pauses to admire, seeing himself as “a very distinguished-looking man.” He decides to read the diary, wishing he could tell his wife that he thought that Sissy Miller had a “passion” for him. In the first few entries, she describes how handsome Gilbert is, and how proud she is to be his wife. He thinks of how proud he was to be her husband, but only because he thought she was with the prettiest woman there. Perhaps he just wanted to show her off. Initially Gilbert leafs through the pages of Angela’s diary looking almost entirely for reflections of himself. But gradually he is intrigued to find frequent references to someone called “B.M.” As he learns from fragments in the diary of an apparent affair between her and this mysterious “B.M.,” he begins to discover that he actually did not know his wife at all.

In the story, Gilbert comes to find out more about his wife within the pages of her diary than he ever did during the years he was married to her. Blinded by his own self-interests he is never able to find out how Angela’s desire to work outside of the home turns into a forbidden relationship with a man who is not her husband. Since Gilbert is all too absorbed in his own affairs, Angela begins to feel ignored by him and speaks less of him in her diary. Instead, the initials “B.M.” continually show-up. At first he thinks B.M. is a woman, and then realizes he is a man. Later he learns that she is having serious conversations with this person B.M., and a little further down on the page is a name that’s scratched out, B.M. said some very disagreeable things about xxxx and then the name is scratched out, and she says “I would not listen to any more abuse about xxxx.” And the name is scratched out. Gilbert thinks, “Hmmm, maybe they’re talking about me.” So whatever it was, she scratched it out, so he can’t know for sure. Later it says “B.M. came unexpectedly to dinner, luckily I was alone,” so now jealousy starts to occur as Gilbert is wondering why she was with this man.

Gilbert is trying to remember what things were like, if he had seen anything that was inappropriate. Later B.M. tells her “it was time we understood each other.” Angela writes, “I tried to make him listen but he would not. He threatened that if I did not..” and the rest of the page is scored over. She writes “he came again. I told him not to come. I implored him to leave me, I wrote him a letter, no answer and then he has done as he threatened, have I the courage to do it too?” And so what we understand is that whoever this B.M. was – he had killed himself. Gilbert telephones Sissy Miller, and he finds out B.M. was her brother who had killed himself. And at last he understands that his wife didn’t die in an accident, that the person that she loved or obviously wanted to be with had killed himself and she said, “Have I the courage to do it too.”

The realization finally dawns on him that Angela’s death is not an accident but that she had committed suicide in response to the death of her lover, B.M., leaving her husband to discover the truth from her diary: “He had received his legacy. She had told him the truth. She had stepped off the kerb to rejoin her lover. She had stepped off the kerb to escape from him.”

‘The story demonstrates how Gilbert and Angela Clandon represent the epitome of disguise by existing within a relationship under the illusion of love and also that love is often not enough to sustain a relationship between two people. You may have seen from your reading of the story and the brief biographical sketch how the story reflects Virginia Woolf’s own concerns regarding the institution of marriage and her own sense of a hidden life, of important moments just beneath the surface of what can be seen and heard. The diaries of Angela Clandon provide a glimpse into her inner life and reveal the complexities of her own concerns as a woman trapped in a marriage wherein she is expected to simply enact the role her rather indifferent husband expects her to perform. Angela’s predicament is indicative of Woolf’s own sense of entrapment in a rigid social structure that made it difficult for women to break free of their ties.

2.4 CHARACTERS

Successful character portrayal, like effective plot organization, is an important element in a short story. It is partly the result of creative instinct and partly the result of a skilful application of principles derived from the works of many authors. The writer must begin with a clear idea of the character and the role of that character in the intended effect of narration. Characters in a story are individualized by their motives as well as their external or internal characteristics.

In terms of character delineation, Woolf succeeds in combining the descriptions of external physical appearance of major characters in the story with their inner traits like moods, feelings or ideas so that the reader can identify the characters as individuals. As you may have noticed, each one of the characters who appears in ‘The Legacy’ is unique in some way. In the following subsection we shall discuss the character of Gilbert Clandon. Based on our discussion, you should write character sketches of Sissy Miller and B.M.

2.4.1 Gilbert Clandon

Gilbert Clandon’s journey from illusion to reality is one of the interesting features of the story. His posthumous enlightenment from the reading of his wife’s diaries

brings him face to face with the realities of a relationship that he had taken for granted. Angela had died six weeks before when the story starts, and he notices that she had left a little gift of some sort for everyone of her friends. It appears to him “as if she had foreseen her death in an accident. He is surprised that “To him, of course, she had left nothing in particular unless it were her diaries, fifteen little volumes.” He remembers that she never let him read them while she was alive, and she would tell him that perhaps after she died he would perhaps be able to read them. Sissy Miller comes by, and he wants to give her the present that Angela had left her, and he wants to find out if she needs any help. Presuming that she may need financial help because she’s now unemployed, he asks her, “Is there anything I can do for you?” He is surprised when she offers him help instead by stating: “If there is anything I can do for you, remember I shall feel it for your wife’s sake a pleasure.”

He interprets her offer of help as an expression of her passion for him. And so we start getting the idea of Gilbert’s character that he thinks only of himself, assumes that she would say these things because she loved him. Sissy Miller, to him is “scarcely distinguishable from any other woman of her kind. There were thousands of Sissy Millers – drab little women in black carrying attache cases.” And he wonders at his wife’s genius for sympathy, that made her see all sorts of qualities in Sissy Miller. Gilbert is all admiration for his own self: “He was over fifty; but he could not help admitting that he was still, as the looking-glass showed him, a very distinguished-looking man.”

We get a better insight into Gilbert’s character when he begins revealing his impressions of Angela as he leafs through the pages of the diaries. He just feels that she was very beautiful and that she was just fine the way she was and he never realizes how she wanted to do more with her life. Reflecting on the years of their married life, he remembers how, as the years went by, he was more absorbed with his work, and she was left more alone. He realizes while reading these diaries that she had wanted children, and he really didn’t regret not having children, but it’s almost as if he never really knew her. When she asked him if she can have some work of her own where she could help others, his response was: “Hadn’t she enough to do looking after him, after her home? Still, if it amused her, of course he had no objection. What was it? Some district? Some committee? Only she must promise not to make herself ill.” He doesn’t seem to have much respect for her mind or for her as a person. He just wants her to take care of him and the house and be his wife, and he doesn’t have any other hopes, dreams or ambitions for her. She has many hopes, dreams and ambitions for him, but he does not reciprocate. Engrossed in his own career and eventful life, he fails to see how lonely her life has been without a child. All he could visualize were the “little trifles, the insignificant, happy, daily trifles that had made up her life.”

He considered his wife to be a simple woman without much intelligence. He obviously thought his wife too unintelligent for conversation; he read in her diary about her discussions with “B.M.” and thought to himself, “If only she had discussed the matter with him, instead of puzzling her poor little head about questions that were much too difficult for her to understand!” Initially, he is intrigued by the appearance of B.M. in the diary entries: “Who was B. M.? He could not fill in the initials; some woman, he supposed, that she had met on one

of her committees.” He was a self-centred man, unable to focus his attention on anyone but himself. As his name appeared less and less in the diary, he became less interested. Thus, he immediately thinks of how something affects him when something bad happens. Gilbert becomes upset when he realizes that Angela has committed suicide. He is upset not because he realizes that he should have spent more time with his wife, but because his wife had an affair with her lover B.M. His illusions are finally shattered as reality dawns upon him: “She had told him the truth. She had stepped off the kerb to rejoin her lover. She had stepped off the kerb to escape from him.”

Check Your Progress 1

1. Discuss what Angela’s legacy reveals about her character and her emotional needs. What motivated her to do as she did?
2. In one of the entries in the last of her diaries Angela had written ‘Egypt. Egypt. Egypt,’ over the whole page. Explain the possible allusion to ‘Egypt’.
3. Discuss how Gilbert Clandon’s reflections foreshadow the real circumstances surrounding Angela’s death. Does he fully understand the implications of her diary?

2.5 STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

“Examine for a moment,” wrote Virginia Woolf in *The Common Reader*, “an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel... Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.” Woolf’s method, as observed by Eudora Welty, “was to take moments and split them into a myriad of sensations, finding, or searching for all their several and separate components just as a scientist might split and examine an atom.” Woolf does not believe in chronological narrative – beginning at the beginning and proceeding on the basis of historical time. She presents all events, from different times, which enter the character’s consciousness.

‘The Legacy’ is a story about a widower who discovers from reading his wife’s diaries that she had fallen in love with a radical working man and committed suicide. But you may have noticed that it is also a story that illustrates one of Woolf’s underlying beliefs about fiction – that it should not present reality as absolute and neatly packageable, but rather as it is subjectively experienced by individuals.

The strength of the story lies in Woolf’s narrative ability to create interest from the very beginning and sustain it till the last line. There is the element of foreshadowing resulting out of Gilbert’s imagination which evokes in the reader the curiosity to know what happens next. Look at the two passages given below:

Yet how strange it was, Gilbert Clandon thought once more, that she had left everything in such order – a little gift of some sort for every one of her friends. It was as if she had foreseen her death. Yet she had been in perfect health when she

left the house that morning, six weeks ago; when she stepped off the kerb in Piccadilly and the car had killed her.

But he had always taken it for granted that she would outlive him. If only she had stopped one moment, and had thought what she was doing, she would be alive now. But she had stepped straight off the kerb, the driver of the car had said at the inquest. She had given him no chance to pull up ...

Gilbert wonders how his wife Angela had the premonition of her approaching death for he believes that her death was a result of an accident. Not until he reads the entries in the last diary does he realize how she had meticulously planned her end. When he meets Sissy Miller he wonders: "Could it be, that during all those years when he had scarcely noticed her, she, as the novelists say, had entertained a passion for him?" Again, when the name of B.M. appears in the diary, he finds it convenient to presume what is suitable for him: "Had a heated argument about socialism with B. M. Who was B. M.? He could not fill in the initials; some woman, he supposed, that she had met on one of her committees." Mixing light and shade like a skilful painter, Woolf makes Gilbert alternate between imagination and reality to comprehend the truth.

After Gilbert's brief meeting with Sissy Miller the action revolves around the diary entries and we get to see a probing revelation of the life of Angela, both through the perception of Gilbert and through her own sensitive observations about her own inner life, and her relationships with her husband and her lover B.M. The triangular relationship is fully examined, directly and indirectly, and the story ends ironically with Gilbert's awareness of a reality that he had hitherto missed. You, will find it interesting to note how, at the end of the story, Woolf captures Gilbert's final moment of agony as the truth dawns on him: "He could hear the cheap clock ticking on her mantelpiece; then a long drawn sigh... He had received his legacy. She had told him the truth. She had stepped off the kerb to rejoin her lover. She had stepped off the kerb to escape from him."

Woolf was a proponent of the "stream of consciousness technique." She succeeds in revealing the inner lives of her characters through Gilbert Clandon's state of mind when he reads the diary.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

This short story deals with the life and aspiration of Angela Clandon who yearns for a life of happy togetherness with her beloved B.M. Trapped within the fetters of a conventional marriage, Angela realizes how societal norms of propriety forbid her from deserting her husband Gilbert for her lover. Virginia Woolf wrote this story in 1940 but it significantly anticipates the primary concerns of the real women's movement by presenting women as intelligent, rational creatures who had the ability and desire to make their own way in the world.

2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Please refer to sections 2.3

2. The allusion may be to the great star-crossed lovers from Egypt, Anthony and Cleopatra. Anthony dies and Cleopatra can’t live without him and so also ends up dying. She kills herself to be with him otherwise she would have been dragged back to Rome, and subjected to insult. Angela here would be left with a life with Gilbert, with a man who didn’t understand her and didn’t even know who she was. B.M. really gave her an entirely different outlook, treated her as if she were a thinking, strong individual who could make her own decisions. So she decides to join him after death. Or the allusion may be Biblical, to the slavery that the Jews suffered in Egypt till Moses led them to freedom in the Promised Land.
3. Please refer to the text and sections 2.3 and 2.5



UNIT 3 ‘THE YELLOW WALLPAPER’ BY CHARLOTTE PERKINS

Structure

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Religious Revivalism in late 19c. America

3.1.2 Feminism in late 19c. America

3.1.3 Society and Motherhood

3.2 About the Author: Charlotte Perkins

3.3 The Text – Excerpts from Charlotte Perkins’ ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’

3.3.1 Textual analysis

3.4 Let Us Sum Up

3.5 Aids to Activities

3.6 Glossary

3.7 Unit End Questions

3.8 References and Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After a detailed study of this Unit, you will have

- an insight into the status of women in the late nineteenth century American society
- a basic idea of the social, cultural and religious tendencies of the latter half of the nineteenth century
- an overall grasp of what is mental illness and psychological stress
- understood society’s **conventional** attitude toward women after childbirth is **universal**
- become sensitive to the need to enable women to decide what happens to them and their bodies
- realized that women have special needs and this does not make them odd and eccentric

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

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Societies have always been **patriarchal** except for some rare exceptions. Whether we like it or not we cannot ignore the fact that various branches of learning have been shaped by men and their perspectives. Women have been accommodated, just like guests who are welcome as long as they agree to the master’s ground

rules and keep their opinion to themselves. Have you ever wondered why women are always in the background?

‘The Yellow Wallpaper’
By Charlotte Perkins

Activity 1

Ask families, domestic help and guards in your neighbourhood

- i) Who is the head of a family?
- ii) Are women able move within and outside their homes as freely as the men?

Let us explore the world of women. “*Is this possible?*” Well, if you have been thinking so, you are not alone. We see around us that in every possible field women have only contributed marginally in the past, down the history. Most of us conclude that this demonstrates and proves that women are naturally not inclined to participate in or contribute to activities and fields outside the domestic four walls. Have we looked inside the four walls? What happens to *the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world*? Motherhood is a life-changing experience for women. It is a unique and a different experience for every woman. Then why is it that across cultures everywhere women are **treated with kid gloves** so much so that it makes them extremely uncomfortable.

Activity 2

1. Tell your mother, grandmother and a close woman relative to list two or three ways in which the family makes them feel different or special.

In this introduction, we will get to know about the American society of Charlotte Perkins’ time as also the status of women then. This will help us become aware of the reasons behind female **marginalisation** and why woman representation and participation is a must at all levels in society.

3.1.1 Religious Revivalism in late 19c. America

All of us know that *American Declaration of Independence* took place on July 4, 1776. In 1886, France gifted the Statue of Liberty to America. This statue is a universal symbol of **emancipation** and freedom. Officially, America which was earlier called United Colonies now became United States.

United States of America (USA) in the late nineteenth century was full of confidence and good will. There was rise in education and religious activism. Different religious streams like Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Confucianism were revisited. What do you think happens when we (men and women) get educated and consider religions other than our own? Does society become dynamic and less rigid? Well, Americans started debating issues of slavery and women rights!

3.1.2 Feminism in late 19c. America

The word feminism brings to our minds a number of women-centric activities and movements which help and support a woman to participate in any field she wishes to, without fear of being bullied and harassed by a male-dominated society. Feminist movement began in America in the nineteenth century. Here, education was widespread. However, women despite their education were considered

secondary and inferior to men. Women had no right to vote, own property, take custody of their children, divorce abusive husbands or get employment. The man – her husband or a male relative was her custodian and the guardian to whatever she possessed.

Activity 3

1. List two reasons why feminism began in America in the nineteenth century.

You must have a fair idea by now of how women must have felt about their social status in the late nineteenth century America. Women started questioning the patriarchal assumption that men are naturally superior to women. In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton created history by drafting the first ever **charter** on women's right to equality. Resistance to unjust and unfair treatment had begun! Soon, in 1920s women got the right to vote and join forces in choosing and forming their country's government.

3.1.3 Society and Motherhood

We are well aware that women are biologically different from men. You will agree with me that men and women require different medical treatment and care because their bodies and minds do not act and react in the same manner. However, we see that medicine and medical treatment mainly centres around male bodies. Men have brought their understanding of a woman, her body and her psychology into the medical profession. It is intriguing that traditionally women have been considered as **hysterical** and **high strung**. In the nineteenth century, across America there was a general agreement that women should not be given authority or independence because an out of the ordinary situation would intensify their natural nervousness and induce anxiety attacks. It was indeed sad that women could neither study about nor decide on the medical treatment they needed.

Motherhood is one of the most unique, extraordinary and life-changing experience that a woman has. However, patriarchal society has the same set of rituals and practises for all women who give birth. Medically too, women – all of them – were traditionally kept in isolation to rest. We need to understand that women had to conform even when they did not want to, because they were not part of either the medical profession or the accepted medical practices.

Things began changing in America in the nineteenth century when women started writing and recording their anxieties and trauma of motherhood, especially when they were forced to be all by themselves against their wish because what they wanted and needed was not part of a doctor's education. A **gynaecologist** was unheard of.

Activity 4

1. Why were there no gynaecologists in nineteenth century America?

3.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR: CHARLOTTE PERKINS

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) is an American feminist writer who is memorialised in the prestigious *National Women's Hall of Fame* at New York. She

wrote extensively on issues related to women and had an extraordinary life which showed her courage of conviction. Gilman's childhood was distressful. Her father left his family within a few months of her being born which made her mother a strict disciplinarian. Money was hard to come by. Gilman's education was severely affected but Gilman visited libraries and read intensively. The family led a **hobo** existence, living off relatives' charity, moving from one place to another. However, Charlotte had the advantage of getting to know her aunts who were strong, educated, independent-minded women – "Isabella Beecher Hooker, a suffragist; Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Catharine Beecher, educationalist."¹ Later in her life she had two intense friendships with women that led to speculation over her sexuality.

Into adulthood, Charlotte attended the Rhode Island School of Design where in 1884 she married the artist, Charles Stetson and had a daughter the very next year. Motherhood was not easy on Charlotte and she experienced intense anxiety – a period that inspired her semi-autobiographical short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Her husband ensured that she had the best possible medical treatment which however proved ineffective in improving her condition and provoked her to write a letter to her doctor – a letter which went unacknowledged and unanswered. In 1888, Gilman left her husband to finally divorce him in 1894. Her divorce became a **salacious** scandal. In 1900 she married George H. Gilman. In 1933 she was diagnosed with cancer which was then incurable. In 1935, she "chose chloroform over cancer"² and died by consuming excess chloroform.

Charlotte Perkins' personal life has always been subject to scrutiny. However, there was revival of interest in her work in the wake of women's movement in the nineteen sixties and with Perkins' daughter gifting her mother's writings to the *Schelsinger Library* at Harvard in 1971-'72. Her book, *Women and Economics – A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (1898) had been a brilliant success and continues to engage readers and social thinkers to date. Perkins is read and celebrated as a woman activist who supported unconditional woman suffrage and believed that every woman should be financially independent. She remains relevant to contemporary times wherein we still grapple with issues of domesticity and unaccounted, unpaid female labour at home.

3.3 THE TEXT – EXCERPTS FROM CHARLOTTE PERKINS' 'THE YELLOW WALLPAPER'

...John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house...

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?

... there is something queer...

John laughs at me ...one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme...

...he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

...If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures... there is... but temporary nervous depression... – what is one to do?

My brother... a physician... of high standing... says the same thing.

So I take phosphates... absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again.

Personally, I disagree with their ideas.

...I believe that **congenial** work... would do me good.

Activity 5

1. What work does the woman have in mind? Does she get to do it, why?

...about the house.

...It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village...

There is a delicious garden!

...There were greenhouses... all broken now.

...the place has been empty for years.

...there is something strange about the house...

Activity 6

1. Why does John's wife not like the house?

...John... said what I felt was a draught, and shut the window.

...I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty... hangings! But John would not hear of it...

I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. So we took the nursery at the top of the house.

...a big, airy room.. with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine **galore**... the windows are barred...

The paint and paper... is stripped off... I never saw a worse paper in my life.

One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns...

dull enough to confuse the eye... lame uncertain curves... suddenly commit suicide...

The color is **repellent**... a **smouldering** unclean yellow...

... I am sitting by the window... in this **atrocious** nursery, and there is ...lack of strength.

John is away all day, and even some nights...

...John does not know how much I really suffer.

...what an effort it is...to dress and entertain...

It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby...

And yet I cannot be with him, it makes me so nervous.

...John ...laughs at me so about this wallpaper!

...he said that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.

"let us go downstairs," I said, "there are such pretty rooms there."

Then he... called me a **blessed little goose**, and said he would go down to the cellar, if I wished, and have it whitewashed into the bargain.

...of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a **whim**.

...There is a beautiful shaded lane... I see people walking... John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy...

...if I... write a little it would... rest me.

...It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work.

...John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but... as soon **put fireworks in my pillow-case** as... have those stimulating people about now.

... This paper ...knew what a **vicious** influence it had!

... the pattern **lolls** like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down.

I get positively angry with the impertinence of it... I never saw so much expression in an **inanimate** thing before...

The wall-paper... it sticketh closer than a brother – they must have had **perseverance** as well as hatred.

...John's sister...

...a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper... hopes for no better profession... she thinks the writing made me sick!...

This wall-paper has a kind of sub-pattern... I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure... **skulk** about behind that...

...John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell...

But I don't want to go there... he is just like John and my brother, only more so!

...I cry at nothing... most of the time.

...I'm getting really fond of the room in spite of the wall-paper. Perhaps because of the wall-paper.

...I lie here... follow that pattern about by the hour. It is as good as gymnastics...

...when the crosslights fade and the low sun shines directly... **interminable grotesques** seem to form...

...Dear John! He loves me very dearly... I tried... real earnest... tell him... let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.

But he said I wasn't... to go... I was crying before...

...He said I was his darling and his comfort... I must take care of myself for his sake...

There's one comfort, the baby is well and happy...

If we had not used it, that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape!

Activity 7

1. What is the child's fortunate escape from?

There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me...

Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day.

...like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern... I wish John would take me away from here!

It is so hard to talk with John... so wise... he loves me so.

But I tried...

...I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wall-paper till I felt creepy.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.

I got up...to see if the paper did move, and when I came back John was awake.

...I told him that I really was not gaining here...

"Why darling!"...

You are **gaining flesh and color**, your appetite is better..."

"I don't weigh a bit more," said I, "...my appetite... is worse in the morning when you are away! "

...he...looked at me with such a stern, **reproachful** look...

"...Can you not trust me as a physician...?"

...I ...lay there for hours...

...the pattern is torturing.

...like a bad dream.

... a florid **arabesque**... a fungus... in endless **convolutions**...

By moonlight...

...it becomes bars! ...and the woman behind it is as plain as can be.

...By daylight she is subdued... It keeps me quiet...

I am getting a little afraid of John.

... I've caught him several times looking at the paper! And Jennie too.

...she said that the paper stained... yellow **smooches** on all my clothes and John's...

Life is very much more exciting now...

John is so pleased to see me... flourishing in spite of my wall-paper.

... it was because of the wall-paper...

I don't sleep much at night... but I sleep a good deal in the daytime.

In the daytime it is tiresome and **perplexing**.

There are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it.

I cannot keep count of them... **conscientiously**.

...that wall-paper! It makes me think of... old foul, bad yellow things...

– the smell!

... creeps all over the house.

...hovering in the dining-room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall... on the stairs.

It gets into my hair.

Such a peculiar odor...

...the subtlest, most enduring odor...

In this damp weather it is awful... in the night... hanging over me.

It used to disturb me at first...

...it is like the color of the paper! A yellow smell.

There is a very funny mark on this wall, low down... A streak that runs round the room... behind every piece of furniture, except the bed, a long, straight, even smooch, as if it had been rubbed over and over.

...I really have discovered...

...The front pattern does move... The woman behind shakes it!

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast...

...in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.

And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern – it strangles so... many heads.

They get through... the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white!

...I think that woman gets out in the daytime!

...I can see her out of every one of my windows!

...she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight.

I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!

I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night... John would suspect...

And John is so queer now... I wish he would take another room! Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself.

I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once.

But, turn as fast as I can, I can only see out of one at a time.

...creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind.

...John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes.

...He... pretended to be very loving and kind.

... As soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.

I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.

...when the sun came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me, I declared I would finish it to-day!

...I quite enjoy the room, now it is bare again.

How those children did tear about here!

This bedstead is fairly **gnawed**!

But I must get to work.

I have locked the door and thrown the key down into the front path.

I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes.

...I've got a rope up here... If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!

...I could not reach far without anything to stand on!

This bed will not move!

...I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner – but it hurt my teeth.

...All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with **derision**!

I am getting angry enough... To jump out of the window... but the bars are too strong even to try...

I don't like to look out of the windows even – there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast.

I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did?

But I am securely **fastened** now by my well-hidden rope – you don't get me out in the road there!

I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night...

It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!

I don't want to go outside...

For outside you have to creep on the ground...

Why there's John at the door!

...he does call and pound!

Now he's crying for an axe.

...“John dear!” said I in the gentlest voice, “the key is down... under a plantain leaf!”

...Then he said – very quietly indeed, “Open the door, my darling!”

“I can't”, said I. “The key is down by the front door under a plantain leaf!”

...I said it... so often that he had to go and see, and he got it... and came in

“What is the matter?” he cried. “For God's sake, what are you doing!”

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

“I've got out at last,” said I, “in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!”

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!

3.3.1 Textual analysis

Written as a short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper* is an **expose** on patriarchy where men dominate and remain indifferent to women-specific concerns. The story reads like a supernatural thriller and provokes the curiosity of its readers. After having read substantially into the story, we realise that it is about a woman who has given birth to a baby and feels nervous on becoming a mother. She is separated from the child and is confined to a nursery in a forbidding lonely region. The woman keeps telling her husband that she is “sick” but he just does not consider her opinion. The anxiety of motherhood and the trauma of confinement make the woman mentally unstable. The husband's complete lack of understanding towards his wife is clear at the story's climax when he is baffled at seeing her tied with a rope, crawling at the wall's skirting.

The Yellow Wallpaper dramatizes **postpartum** stress which is differently experienced by every woman. But medical profession has always been male-dominated. As such, men diagnose a woman, decide how ill she is and then

prescribe treatment for her. You will agree with me that men and women are biologically different. There are women specific health issues which men cannot understand the way women do. Becoming a parent is experienced differently by men and women. Women undergo far more radical changes. Some women even get psychologically agitated and have nervous breakdowns. Many find taking care of a new born stressful. Men cannot understand this without engaging and hearing the concerned woman. You must have been surprised by the narrator's husband and brother who despite being educated and qualified physicians assume **regressively** that women are naturally weak-minded which gives men authority over them and their bodies. In the nineteenth century, a woman was expected to conform to and obey her husband without raising any objection or question. The entire story is about a woman being forced to accept whatever her husband wants her to do, and the man's obsession with what he thinks is right even if it leads his wife to madness. Have you wondered why the female narrator has no name? Well, the writer wants us to realise that after marriage a woman had no legal identity of her own. By law, a man became the sole owner of his wife's possessions, property and children.

The Yellow Wallpaper is self-confessional literature where the writer speaks of her personal life experience – about marriage and motherhood making her virtually insane because of her husband's refusal to listen to her emotional and physical problems. She insisted that she was "sick" and needed to remain intellectually stimulated in order to rest and recover. However her husband forced her into isolation. He was a doctor who hardly knew anything about women medically. But like the other men of his generation, he thought he knew what was best for women – women were assumed to be hysterical, unadaptable and incapable of thinking or analysing. It was believed that women should not do any intellectual activity because it could make them more nervous.

Have you noticed how the story begins? Yes, you are right if you said *a note of protest*. The female speaker tells us that her husband John purchases a huge **palatial** mansion even though she tells him she does not like it as it is at an isolated location and has weird architecture. He laughs in her face. The speaker is not able to retaliate because it was socially accepted that women are silly and ridiculous, and there was nothing wrong if a man made fun of his wife. The *brotherhood* of men refused to give women a chance to be heard, forget about equal participation. The narrator's brother who is also a qualified physician agrees with John that she needs rest in isolation. Later in the story when the narrator has stress induced **schizophrenia**, she says that though torn everywhere, the yellow wallpaper sticks together like brothers. We can see how difficult it must have been for her to live in a society where everything was for men, by men and of men. She is observant and reasons intelligently. All her requests are logical unlike her husband's whose decisions are arbitrary because he incorrectly presumes men are more intelligent. John not only forces his wife to move into a mansion where there are hardly any people but here he makes her stay against her wishes on the upper floor in a huge room with windows everywhere – a room which makes everything appear extremely austere and lonely. From the room only abandoned huts, broken greenhouses and empty green lawns can be seen.

The woman's harassment is extreme and she is without help. She requests, even begs John to let her stay on the ground floor which has dainty curtains, wall

hangings, and a veranda that opens into a garden in bloom. However John just does not hear her out. Have you noticed how he instead manipulates her? He cannot come up with a valid reason for not letting her stay on the aesthetically done ground floor. So he tells her that he will go and live in the basement which is perhaps as unliveable as this room on the first floor. He slyly plays with her emotions and says that because she will feel guilty if he moves into an uncomfortable place, he will spend extra money to whitewash its walls. She is tricked into thinking that John is considerate and she is selfish. Already very upset over being forced to stay in a huge room that has hardly any privacy or an attractive décor, she is totally stumped into silence by John saying that if she stayed in the nursery, the baby could be in a better room. Can you see, for John a child is more precious than a woman? He considers women to be as immature as children!

The wife is made to feel grateful over her child being cared for by another woman, Martha. But, you will agree with me that it is just not acceptable that the child has a dedicated fulltime babysitter while the wife is forced to remain alone despite her overwhelming need for companionship. We feel frustrated and very sad when this woman who is well read and educated is required to do nothing but be alone in the room with nothing to keep her busy. Except for the wallpaper and the bed, the huge room is empty. John tells her again and again that she is to rest and not to exert herself in any way. Do you think a person can exist in isolation without thinking, with nothing around and with no company or work for days at a stretch? It is just not possible! Solitary confinement obviously triggers abnormal behaviour. Are women unthinking beasts who are expected to deliver babies and behave as if it was just an everyday occurrence and not a life-changing event? Our story's narrator comes across as a woman with courage and character. Not willing to give up, she starts writing her thoughts and experiences in a diary. However, she feels guilty lying about her writing and trying to hide it. She pleads to John to let her cousins either come over to meet her or let her go on a short visit to them. You have correctly anticipated that John will not agree. And he does not agree. He says that meeting people would excite her and disturb her; he'd rather *put fireworks in her pillow*.

Without friends and without anything to keep her busy, the narrator is rattled. John threatens to send her to the famous/infamous psychiatrist Weir Mitchell, the brain behind the *rest cure* treatment. *Rest Cure* treatment prescribed that the patient be overfed and practically immobilised in order to gain strength and good health. Our author, Charlotte Perkins too had been treated by this doctor but it resulted in her becoming frustrated and even more restless. The narrator becomes excessively troubled and agrees to do whatever John wants her to do. Desperate and helpless, she takes out her anger and frustration on the yellow wallpaper in her room. Initially she is disgusted by its colour and mind boggling pattern of curves and lines. Her stress gets the better of her and she starts imagining that the wallpaper is **animate**. As and when her stress levels change the yellow paper becomes her alternate ego and a doppelganger or an accomplice to crimes against women. **Somnambulating** during the day, this woman becomes schizophrenic. She tries to rip the paper from the walls with her bare hands and does not realize that the spots in the paper are the room's wall showing through the torn paper. As her confinement increasingly gets on her nerves, she starts relating to the paper

as a prison with bars behind which she thinks she sees a woman trying to escape without success. No matter what this imaginary woman does or wherever she goes, she has nowhere to escape to. This woman represents an ugly slice of reality which forces women to remain with their heartless partners – the society does not give women the freedom to live their lives on their own terms. The tragedy of the narrator's life is that she is a wife and a mother who is denied an identity. As time passes by, the woman is perplexed by a smell that hangs over her and seems to never leave her alone. We soon realise to our absolute horror, that at night this lady loses every bit of self-control and is so terrified that she crawls and even urinates against the walls. She loses her perspective and goes into a state of denial. Have you noticed how she lacks privacy because of the many windows in her room? When her clothes stink, she imagines that the smell is alive and lies in wait for her. She uses the word “skulk” to describe the wallpaper and the stink which seem to her to spy on her and dog her wherever she goes. In her disturbed state of mind, her husband, his sister, the society, the stink and the wallpaper – all seem to be similar. I hope you realise how women feel when they have no say in what happens to their bodies, mind and emotions. Yes, it is awful and terrifying not to be in control of your own self.

John is a diligent physician who takes his wife for granted and treats her shamelessly. This is without a shred of doubt, domestic violence! John talks to his wife gently but his behaviour towards her is harsh. He looks at her threateningly when she contradicts him and insists that she has lost appetite and weight after staying in the room with the yellow wallpaper. She is scared. Whenever she tells John that she is lonely, especially during the few nights when he is with her, he shows no sympathy. John either **admonishes** his wife for imagining too much or else says that it is the outside weather, not the room, that makes her uncomfortable. It seems that John is well-intentioned but is not able to see that the room is not liveable – the floor is uneven and bare, the walls are hardly beautiful with ugly objects in it, too many windows leave no scope for privacy and make the room windy. Well, let us see closely to find out whether John lacks understanding or he is manipulative and calculating. In the story, we meet a third person, Jennie who brings food to the narrator and tells her unkindly that there are yellow smooches everywhere and yellow stains on her clothes and John's. She is John's sister. Both, the brother and the sister stay downstairs where the narrator had begged to be. The two live comfortably downstairs with a nanny, Mary who looks after John and the narrator's baby. I hope you can see how John considers women. As long as they agree to him and do housework they are welcome. An independent-minded woman who wants to do something by herself or for herself has to be checked, even punished.

In need of comfort and understanding, especially after having given birth to a child, the narrator is desperate for care and affection. In virtual confinement where the massive and cold room makes her feel small, helpless and vulnerable, the lady turns to the yellow wallpaper in her room. Though we are not told directly, we gather that in her psychologically unstable state she vents her feelings on the yellow wallpaper. When she is angry, she tears it. When she is desperate for affection, she kisses it and embraces it. Her clothes stain. Her urine and the wallpaper stick to her. Have you observed how John never notices this? Yes, it could be because he does not come home often, and when he does come it is at night. The yellow wallpaper scares the woman. During the day, too much light

from the windows on the yellow colour makes the complicated pattern of lines and circles on it appear even more complex, even mind boggling. During nights, the moonlight scatters everywhere – the play of shadows and light makes bars appear on the wallpaper. This completely unsettles the woman. She loses her sanity. She starts to hallucinate and imagines that the wallpaper is a barred prison where a woman is kept in confinement. As the patterns change, the narrator imagines that the lady has been successful in escaping, but she keeps returning to being behind the bars because she has nowhere to go.

Clearly, what she imagines is obviously for her own person. In the writer's age, the American legal system gave a man exclusive hold on his wife, her property and assets. Women could not get respectable employment even if they were educated. How was a woman to survive and remain respectable if she had no job or money? It was just not possible. A woman who left her husband or was abandoned by him was looked down upon by society. Do you understand how serious the issue is? John's wife must have despaired and hopelessly thought of running away from the mansion. But she could not have gathered courage to live in a society that would not accept her or give her respectable employment. Her situation would be bad whether she chose to stay or run away. Her anxiety does not let her think clearly. Her emotions and imagination run riot. The wallpaper's complex pattern seems to her as perplexing as her own life: "nobody could climb through that pattern... the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white!" On the edge, she imagines that the woman behind the bars in the wallpaper sometimes does slink away during the day to hide behind trees outside. Is it possible that the narrator herself has been jumping out of the windows and trying to stay out of sight? Well, we do not know because the narrator recorded her feelings and memories when she was not feeling as low as she sometimes did. Perhaps she did not remember what she had done during her anxiety attacks. Toward the end of the story she is in a highly agitated state: the wallpaper seems to trap not one woman but many. At the climax of the story, we see that the narrator is suicidal and very desperate to have a normal life. She is ready to inflict pain on herself to make herself accepted. She tries to stop thoughts of escape and so tries to keep an eye on the imaginary walled woman who seems to be in the garden. She does not succeed because her thoughts and her sight run unchecked. The day her husband is to arrive in the afternoon, she decides subconsciously that she will not be afraid, and locks herself in her room, throws the key outside the window and ties herself with a rope, all the while imagining she is tying the woman in the wallpaper. Why does she do that? Yes, she thinks she will make her husband happy by agreeing to do whatever he wants her to do – even kill herself if that would please him. She even bites her bed's huge bedstead in anger when she tries to move it, thinking in her crazied state that she could use it to tie the woman in the wall.

The story comes to an end, leaving us with an uneasiness that cannot be shaken off. Have you noticed that the final words the narrator says is that she has been able to get out despite John and Jane trying to keep her back. Who is Jane? Critics think that this is a reference to the novel, *Jane Eyre* where the mentally disturbed wife dies in confinement by jumping off the roof. The writer suggests that the narrator remains hopeful for a better tomorrow and that every woman who is forced to conform should resist till patriarchy hears them out. Suicide is never an alternative. Perkins as a writer impresses us with this brilliant tale which

is autobiographical and definitely a horrific psychological thriller. *The Yellow Wallpaper* is a **testimony** to the trauma women across the world experience because society and the medical profession continue to remain largely dominated by men who still shut out women's voices. The story needs to be read and re-visited to understand that women should have as much access to rights and justice as men. Women marital rights cannot be shelved if we want a sane and happy society. The story is right in insisting that every woman, married or single, has the right to decide what she wants to do. Marriage for women should not limit their identities to just being wives dedicated to housework and nothing else.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

- *The Yellow Wallpaper* is self-confessional literature in which the narrator has written about her personal experience after giving birth to her daughter, Kathrine
- A short psychological thriller, the story, *The Yellow Wallpaper* deals with postpartum anxiety
- The narrator has no name, just a voice, so as to stress that across the globe women's experience after childbirth is shaped by men and their medical expertise
- Unable to take care of her new-born baby, her husband and the housework, the narrator becomes extremely anxious
- The narrator's family moves into a huge, isolated mansion against her wishes because her husband, John is a physician who decides that living in an isolated place will calm her
- The narrator insists she is not well but John says she is merely hysterical like all women naturally are
- John emotionally blackmails the narrator and forces her to stay on the first floor in a desolate room with hardly any privacy
- John leaves his wife alone in the room for days at a stretch. She has no company and is not allowed to do any kind of work. John's sister, Jennie sometimes brings her food but no conversation.
- John, their baby and Jennie live in attractive lodgings downstairs
- The narrator becomes schizophrenic because she is not allowed to have visitors, or move out of her room, or do anything like writing or reading
- She becomes obsessed with a yellow-coloured wallpaper in her room. The yellow wallpaper starts tormenting her and she tries to tear it down.
- As her anxiety levels increase, the wallpaper becomes even more hideous to her- it becomes a prison and a jailor that strangles its women inmates if it catches them escaping
- She starts walking in her sleep during the day and remains awake during the night

- She keeps crawling in the room and against the walls trying to figure out how to escape. In her frightened state she also urinates and wakes up with a stench that refuses to leave her
- John visits her once in a while but refuses to accept that his wife’s health has deteriorated. When she contradicts him and insists that she is losing her appetite and weight, he terrifies her into absolute silence by looking at her threateningly
- With no help, the anxious female-narrator starts going insane. She hallucinates that a woman is imprisoned in the yellow wallpaper which has bars.
- Towards the end of the story the woman hopes to gain her husband’s favour and sympathy by not letting the woman in the wallpaper escape.
- The story ends with the husband seeing his wife on all fours crawling against the wall, tied with a rope

3.5 AIDS TO ACTIVITIES

- Activity 1** : i. The head of family is the father or the grandfather.
ii. Women will generally work and go out of their houses only with the permission of their husbands, fathers or some senior family member.
- Activity 2** : Women are made to feel special during festivals like Karvachauth, Eid, Navroz or Christmas when they get traditional gifts. They feel treated differently when their opinion is not considered, e.g. when money has to be invested or vehicles are bought.
- Activity 3** : Feminism began in nineteenth century America because women had no identity of their own:
i. Women could not get meaningful employment even if they were well-educated.
ii. Women found it unjust that all men could own property and vote, while a woman could neither vote nor own property.
- Activity 4** : There were no gynaecologists in nineteenth century America because it was a male-dominated society. Here only men were doctors and physicians. Male doctors refused to accept that women had bodies with biological needs that were very different from men.
- Activity 5** : The work that the woman is thinking of is writing which she really enjoys. She does not get to do it because John does not let her. He thinks that women get excited and disturbed easily. Writing could make them mentally unwell.
- Activity 6** : John’s wife does not like the house because it is lonely, isolated and has no people living nearby. It has a huge garden but hardly any plants and trees.

Activity 7 : The tone of the sentence, “the child’s fortunate escape” is bitter. The narrator is shocked that her husband is not really concerned about her. He forces her into staying in a hideous room which is actually a child’s nursery, and expects her to be grateful that because of her their child will now get a pleasant and cosy room.

3.6 GLOSSARY

admonishes	: scolds
animate	: alive
atrocious	: horrible
arabesque	: Arabic design pattern with flowers and fine lines
blessed little goose	: darling
charter	: written document
congenial	: happy and productive
conscientiously	: with sincerity
conventional	: traditional
convolutions	: complex twists and turns
derision	: making fun of someone
emancipation	: freedom
expose	: description of
fastened	: tied
florid	: flowery
gaining flesh and color	: recover and become healthy
galore	: many
gnawed	: roughly bitten and worn out
gynaecologist	: lady doctor
grotesques	: shapes that have a horrible appearance
high strung	: very nervous and excited
hobo	: a person who is poor and homeless
hysterical	: overexcited
inanimate	: without life
interminable	: endless
lolls	: lies

marginalisation	: making powerless
palatial	: palace like
patriarchal	: male-dominated
perplexing	: confusing
perseverance	: not giving up
postpartum	: woman’s experience after child birth
put fireworks in my pillow-case	: make me very excited
regressive	: narrow-minded and not progressive
repellent	: disgusting
reproachful	: very angry
salacious	: gossipy
schizophrenia	: mental illness in which you hallucinate and see things that are not there
skulk	: hide and wait, spy
smooches	: kisses
smouldering	: intense
somnambulating	: sleepwalking
testimony	: evidence
treated with kid gloves	: given extra care because of being considered delicate
universal	: everywhere
vicious	: extremely cruel
whim	: impulse

3.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) How does the narrator feel after giving birth to her child? What is John’s reaction?
- 2) What does John’s wife tell him on seeing her room on the upper floor? Does John understand?
- 3) How does Jennie treat the narrator? Why?
- 4) Why does the narrator say that her husband does not understand her suffering?
- 5) What does the woman behind the wallpaper do? What does she represent?
- 6) Why does John faint at the end of the story? Describe in your own words.

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UNIT 4 ‘A KITCHEN IN THE CORNER OF THE HOUSE’ BY C.S. LAKSHMI (AMBAI)

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 About the Author, C.S. Lakshmi ‘Ambai’
- 4.3 Excerpts from ‘A Kitchen in the Corner of the House’
- 4.4 Analysis of the Text
 - 4.4.1 Spatiality of the Kitchen
 - 4.4.2 Symbolic Importance of the Kitchen
 - 4.4.3 The Politics of Food
 - 4.4.4 Where are the Men?
- 4.5 Structure
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Aids to Activities
- 4.8 Glossary
- 4.9 Unit End Questions
- 4.10 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help the students understand the story ‘A Kitchen in the Corner of the House’ written by C.S. Lakshmi who writes under the pseudonym Ambai. The students will understand the concept of patriarchy that has been satirized in the story. It is a critique of patriarchy and its subtle methods that are employed to confine women to a life of domesticity. The code of conduct for women is decided by men according to their convenience, and women, right from their infancy, are conditioned to believe that the boundaries set by men are their only world. This unit will help students understand the power dynamics within a household as portrayed in the story, and the subtle, unobtrusive ways of men to maintain that power balance in their favour.

Also, the story will enable the students to understand how patriarchy ensures that the kitchen and its periphery is glorified enough before women that they feel proud to be restricted within its four walls. The glorification is taken to the level of creating a staunch belief amongst women that whoever rules the kitchen, rules the world. The balance of power is always maintained in favor of men even when women are engaged in a power struggle over the authority of the kitchen.

The kitchen has been made to be an important part of a woman’s life and its location in the house is a significant reflection of the status of women in that household. The students will understand, through a reading of the story, the politics of space as used by men to subjugate, and dismiss women to enclosed areas

where they are reduced to objects of male pleasure and comfort, and their existence and identity is lost in the flames of the hearth.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Look around carefully and notice the kind of activities that are performed in an average household. Cleaning, sweeping, cooking, dusting, laundry, caring for the family, earning money for subsistence—these are some common activities that are performed on a daily basis. Except for earning money, the rest are considered to be women's forte. Women are thought to be naturally gifted to perform these duties. They are presumed to be emotional, caring and loving while men are thought to be more rational, logical and less emotional. This is because of the concept of 'gender' as developed and perpetuated by society over generations. Being male and female is about biology, about how nature created human beings, but being a man or a woman is all about the qualities of masculinity and femininity that society has associated with the sexes.

Ever since a child is born, s/he is taught to behave in a certain manner, wear certain types of clothes, is allowed or prohibited to go to certain types of places based on his/her gender. To maintain this distinction, those who do not follow these unwritten regulations of society are either ridiculed, reprimanded or ostracized depending on the severity of the violation.

The idea of gender entails the concept of power - power understood as the control of one over the other, the privileges enjoyed by one at the expense of the other. This power is maintained and perpetuated down the generations through a system of social acceptance and orientation. There are various ways in which power is handed down the generations to the intended beneficiaries. The most effective tool is 'patriarchy'. Patriarchy is a system of social hierarchy where a man is the head of a family, he takes all the decisions-big or small- about everyone in the family, and only a male child inherits all the wealth. Patriarchy places men in positions of power - economic as well as social - and women are relegated to the background. It employs subdued methods to make women believe in the physical and intellectual supremacy of men. It operates inconspicuously, under the garb of normalcy and grips women tightly.

ACTIVITY 1 - How does inheritance of wealth by men help maintain their social hegemony?

4.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR, C.S. LAKSHMI (AMBAI)

Dr. C. S. Lakshmi, born in 1944 in Tamilnadu, is a prominent Indian English writer of fiction, researcher, historian and archivist who writes under the pseudonym Ambai. Her first novel *Andhi Malai* came out in 1966 for which she won the "Kalaimagal Narayanaswamy Aiyar" prize. Though she started getting published when she was a teenager, she gained first critical acclaim for her short story 'Siragukal Muriyum' (Wings Get broken 1967). She brought out a collection of short stories by the same name in 1976. In the year 1988 her second collection of short stories *Veetin Mulaiyil Oru Samaiyalarai* (A Kitchen in the Corner of the House) was published. She writes primarily in Tamil. Her stories have been translated into English and collected in five volumes titled *In a Forest, A Deer*,

Fish in a Dwindling Lake, A Meeting on the Andheri Overbridge, The Purple Sea, and A Night with a Black Spider. In 1988 she founded SPARROW (Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women), an NGO to archive the works of female writers and artists. Her writings are full of gentle humour, wit and satire. Her presentation of the Tamil household has a lyrical quality about it. Even when she savagely satirizes the social conventions that suffocate women, she never loses her touch of sympathy. She is a feminist writer who focuses on the silence of women, their sexuality, love, space, their relationships and the struggles contained therein. She is a keen observer of societal norms, power dynamics of society and their patriarchal underpinnings. She raises doubts about these norms, questions them and challenges the yardsticks set for women.

4.3 EXCERPTS FROM C.S. LAKSHMI’S ‘A KITCHEN IN THE CORNER OF THE HOUSE’

- It seems that Kishan’s father had bought the land at the rate of eight annas per square yard and built the house upon it. A row of rooms like railway carriages. Right at the end, the kitchen, stuck on in a careless manner. Two windows. Underneath one, the tap and basin. The latter was too small to place even a single plate in it. Underneath that, the drainage area, without any **ledge**. As soon as the taps above were opened, the feet standing beneath would begin to tingle. Within ten minutes there would be a small flood underfoot. Soles and heels would start cracking from that constant wetness. Kishan’s mother called Jiji by everyone—would present a soothing ointment for chapped heels on the very first day one entered the kitchen, cooked a meal and was given the traditional gold bangle.
- There were green mountains outside the window that looked eastward from the kitchen. Somewhere on top of them there was a white dot of a temple. A temple to Ganesha. The cooking area was beneath this very window. The green mountains might have made one forget one’s chapped heels. But since the clothes line was directly beyond this window, trousers, shirts, pyjamas, saris and petticoats spread out to obscure the view.
- Their style of life did indeed **encompass** the kitchen; was woven around the concept of the kitchen. The **lineage** had a reputation for its love of food and drink.
- On a small stove, in the corner of the kitchen, there was always water boiling for tea. If anybody they knew appeared at the **threshold** of the house at meal times, first they received ice-cold water. Then, Papaji would begin. ‘You must eat with us. Give Uncle a plate.’
- All the same, the actual details, the concrete facts of the kitchen and its space didn’t seem to matter to them. It was almost as if such things didn’t actually exist. In their family houses, one crossed the wide stone-paved front courtyard and the main room before reaching the kitchen in a dark corner. A zero watt light bulb hung there. The women appeared there like shadows, their heads covered, their deep-coloured skirts melting

into the darkness of the room, slapping and kneading the chappati dough or stirring the fragrant, spicy dal. The kitchen was not a place; it was essentially a set of beliefs. It was really as if all that delicious food which **enslaved** the tongue appeared as from a magic carpet.

- On one occasion, when they were eating, Minakshi raised the subject. Papaji was building a room above the garage at that time.
- ‘Papaji, why don’t you extend the verandah outside the kitchen?’ Papaji looked for a moment as if he had been assaulted by the words expressing this opinion. Jiji in turn looked at him shocked. Daughters-in-law had not thus far offered their opinions in that house.
- Bari-jiji was Papaji’s stepmother. When Papaji was seventeen, his father had married a second time, a young girl who was also seventeen years old. In the following years five daughters were born to her. Papaji had been her **mainstay** and comfort. She was only Bari-jiji in name. Between her and Jiji there was only a difference of two years.
- It was a food war. The **protagonists** were Jiji, Bari-jiji. When grandfather was alive, Bari-jiji ruled absolutely and tyrannically. Jiji kneaded mountains of chapati dough. She sliced baskets of onions and kilos of meat. She roasted pappads in the evening while Bari-jiji drank her kesar-kasturi. She made the pakoras. She fried entrails. Then grandfather died. Within ten days Jiji was sworn into power. Bari-jiji lost her rights to kumkum, betel leaves, meat and spirits; she also lost in the matter of everyday meals...Before she could be attacked again, she started a second offensive of her own. Once in six months, Bari-jiji began to be possessed by Amba. ‘Give me the drink that is due to me. I want kesar kasturi. I want a kilo of barfi. I want fried meat...ah...ah.’ when she was given all these things, she would say, ‘Go away, all of you.’ And for a while there would be loud celebratory noises emerging from Bari-jiji’s room...It might have been possible to bandy words with Bari-jiji, but Jiji did not have the courage to question Amba.
- Next to her [Jiji’s] bed was a wooden cabinet in which were kept cloves, saffron, cinnamon, peppercorns, raisins, cardamom, sugar ghee, cashewnuts. You could not get any of these things without going past her. Before that you were subjected to a severe **catechism**...
- From that dimly lit, narrow-windowed kitchen, there were hands reaching out to control, like the eight tentacles of the octopus which lives in the sea. They reached out to bind them tightly, tightly; and the women accepted their bonds with joy. If their waists were bound, they called them jewelled belts; if their feet were held back, they called them anklets; if they touched their foreheads, they called them crowns. The women entered a world that was enclosed by wire on all four sides and reigned there proudly; it was their kingdom. They made earth shaking decisions: today we’ll have mutton pulao; tomorrow let it be puri-masala.
- The picnic to the lake had been decided upon only the previous evening. The plan was for all the relations to make a trip to the lake together. For twenty people : a hundred puris, with enough potato, and tomato chutney;

a hundred sandwiches, things to munch, bottles of milk for the babies, hot water in flasks. A portable stove to cook hot pakoras in the evening. Oil, besan, onions, chilli powder, salt and green peppers for bhajias...Mina had not thought about this whole aspect of the trip to the lake.

- Radha Bhabhiji was muttering to herself, 'The children have to be bathed. It might be a good idea to take two or three extra pants in a plastic bag. Priya sometimes forgets to ask. I must roll up five or six rugs for spreading on the grass. How many tiny babies will there be? Four. Milk powder. Glaxo for Minoo. Archana's baby takes Lactogen. Mustn't forget the packet of biscuits. Mine only likes salty ones. If there aren't any, we'll stop on the way. Otherwise the child won't stop crying. And he hates that. Sugar. Mustn't forget the spoon. Serving spoons. Plates. Kusuma, take that bottle of soap to wash the plates. There's a tap there. Bari-Jiji, please slice ten or fifteen onions. If we take them in a plastic bag, the pakoras will be done in minutes. Mina, please, will you bathe the children?'

Bhabhiji, it's only six o'clock now. They'll cry if they are woken up. Why doesn't Gopal Bhaisaheb give them their bathe later?'

'O yes, he'll bathe them. Keep thinking that.?'

- 'What's all that **racket** in the kitchen? You are not allowing us to get any sleep,' came a voice.

Immediate silence...By the time eight o'clock struck, all necks and underarms were raining sweat. Cholis were stuck to bodies. Oil smoke irritated their eyes. Their eyelids were heavy from lack of sleep. Papaji peeped into the kitchen, 'As soon as the trip to the lake was mentioned, the lot of you began to leap with enthusiasm.' He laughed aloud.

- At that time, Minakshi had found a few whitish spots on her hand which gave her some discomfort. Papaji introduced her to the skin specialist. This is Kishan's wife. She never stops roaming the town. She always has a book in her hand. A chatterbox. Examine her hands.

The expert's advice: Just stay at home. Be like the other women. Everything will come out all right. If people live as they ought, why should anyone fall a prey to disease?

'Aha,' said Papaji, in admiration.

- Before the family could come rushing to her [Jiji's] aid, her heavy body had fallen to the ground. She was streaming with sweat and was drenched in her own urine. 'I am going... I am going...My daughters-in-law are all elsewhere ...That wretched Bari-Jiji will rule in the kitchen... Hé Bhagawan.'
- They closed the door and removed Jiji's clothes. Her body was like a fruit that has passed its full ruddy ripeness and is now wilting. Upon the backs of her **wizened** hands, the veins stood out. Heavy lines ran along the palms. There were scars of childbirth on her lower abdomen, as if she had been deeply ploughed there...On her neck were dark lines, caused

by heavy gold chains. A wide, polished scar as if she were going bald, shone at the lower edge of her centre parting, where the gold band with its heavy pendant had constantly pressed.

A body that had lived. A body that had expelled urine, faeces, blood, children. A body with so many imprints.

- We had a baby, a son, even before Gopal. Did you know that? He died at the age of one. There was a puja that day. Everyone was in the kitchen. The baby had climbed the stairs and fallen off the parapet wall. He had crawled up thirty steps... heard that huge scream just as I was putting the puris into the hot oil ... It seemed to knock me in the pit of my stomach... The base of his skull was split...His brains were splattered all over the stone pavement, like white droppings... After all the men returned ... I fried ... Mina, are you listening... I fried the rest of the puris.' Minakshi stroked Jiji's forehead.
- Minakshi bent low to those withered earlobes wearing flower shaped earstuds covered in pearls and brightly coloured gemstones. They were alone, Jiji and she; alone as Maha Vishnu on his serpent bed floating upon the widespread sea. In that darkened room, there was a feeling like that of the cutting of an umbilical cord. We cannot be certain whether this conversation was actually started by her, or whether it happened on its own, or whether it only seemed to her to have occurred because she had imagined it so often. It is not even certain whether that conversation was between the two of them alone.
- Jiji, no strength comes to you from that kitchen; nor from that necklace nor bangle nor headband nor forehead jewel. Authority cannot come to you from these things.

That authority is Papaji's.

From all that

be free

be free

be free.

But if I free myself...then...what is left?

You alone, having renounced your jewellery, your children and Papaji. Yourself, cut free. Just Dularibai. Dularibai alone. And from that, strength. Authority.

- How could you think that

your strength came from food that was given in the appropriate measure and jewellery that weighs down ears and neck and forehead?

Sink deeper still

When you touch bottom you will reach the universal waters. You will connect yourself with the world that surrounds you. Your womb and your breasts will fall away from you. The smell of cooking will vanish

away. The sparkle of jewellery will disappear. And there will be you.
Not trapped nor diminished by gender, but freed.

**‘A Kitchen in the Corner of
the House’ By C. S. Lakshmi
(Ambai)**

So touch the waters, Jiji

and rise

rise

rise.

Jiji turned, searched for and held fast to Minakshi’s hand.

4.4 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

‘A Kitchen in the Corner of the House’ is a loosely structured story about human relationships, power plays and patriarchal methods in an Indian household. The story revolves around the lives of the women-folk in a large Rajasthani family that lives in Ajmer. Papaji is the head of the family, the patriarch, who lives with his stepmother called Bari-jiji, his wife Jiji (Dularibai), three sons Gopal, Kishan and Satish, and their wives, Radha, Minakshi and Kusuma, respectively.

4.4.1 Spatiality of the Kitchen

At the beginning of the story, it is made evident that this is a big house with many rooms. But the way the kitchen has been placed carelessly, almost as an after-thought, in a neglected corner of the house with no thought given to the comforts of the women working there, establishes the fact that women are considered to be holding a place of least importance in the social or domestic hierarchy symbolized by the metaphor of the train. There is a clear difference between the space allocated to rooms and the courtyard in the house and the space left for the kitchen. The kitchen is situated in some dark corner of the house where the women work like shadows.

The sheer indifference towards the amenities provided (or an absence thereof) is remarkable. The kitchen does not have adequate light and ventilation. There are only two small windows. There is ‘a tap and basin’ under one window, and the other one is too small to accommodate even a plate. Without any proper arrangement for drainage, the feet of the women working there are wet all the time. Instead of thinking of some remedy for the poor drainage, Jiji, Minakshi’s mother-in-law, presents an ointment for chapped heels (along with the ceremonial gold bangle) to everyone who has been initiated into the kitchen. The very idea of thinking of women’s comfort and their priorities seems to be alien to them.

ACTIVITY 2 - Why do the women not object to the inconvenience that they face in the kitchen? Is it because of the reward of the gold bangle?

The space of the kitchen is representative of not just women’s physical confinement and discomfort but also of the psychological deprivation that they are deliberately subjected to. The window of the kitchen opens to a beautiful view of the mountain on top of which there is a temple of Lord Ganesha. But since a clothesline hangs just outside it the view of the mountains is restricted. Any relief that the women might have derived from the pleasant view is denied to them. The interesting fact is that none of the women object to it. The triumph

of patriarchy is indicated through the fact that women, except Minakshi, consider it to be only appropriate to be confined and uncomfortable—physically and emotionally. When Minakshi proposes to have a new basin in the kitchen and extend the verandah outside it so that they can enjoy a better view of the mountains Papaji and Jiji are highly offended - Papaji because Minakshi is an outsider, she talks a lot and gives her opinion too freely, Jiji because she feels threatened by her audacity - and retorts and reasserts the claims of patriarchy by placing even more clothes lines to restrict the view even further.

The family has been portrayed as being a great lover of food and preparation of food is the chief concern of the women of the house. Enormous quantities of food items are prepared and served throughout the day. Yet the women working in the kitchen do not seem to be actual living beings. The kitchen is dimly lit and the darkness of the kitchen merges with the dark-coloured clothes of the women who labour ceaselessly there. Ambai creates this image of darkness prevailing in the kitchen to suggest not just literal lack of light but also the darkness that has engulfed the very beings of women. Also, Ambai, while describing the activities of the kitchen focuses on verbs like kneading, stirring, cutting, slicing instead of on the person doing them, intending to emphasize the fact that the women working there are disembodied beings without any definite, recognizable existence. Men do not object to this darkness as it does not affect them (it is rather their own doing). But even the womenfolk seem to have accepted it as the only way of life. They have lost their identity, even their existence in this darkness that pervades on the levels of conscience as well.

ACTIVITY 3 - What is the darkness in the kitchen symbolic of?

4.4.2 Symbolic Importance of the Kitchen

Kitchen is a place that has been portrayed as a symbol of freedom, authority and power for the women of one generation - for Bari-jiji and Jiji, and of confinement, suffocation, and subordination for another generation - for Radha, Minakshi and Kusuma. The idea of the kitchen being the kingdom of women has been deeply entrenched in the minds of Bari-jiji and Jiji. Jiji recalls her wedding day when her mother whispered the magic mantra in her ears, “Take control over the kitchen. Never forget to make yourself attractive. These two rules will give you all the strength and authority you will need.” She abides by the rules all her life. Ambai presents this small incident as an illustration of how women further the cause of patriarchy by passing on its ideology down the generations.

The kitchen here becomes a sight of power struggle for them. The fact that all women forget is that whatever authority the kitchen might provide to a woman, it is operational only till her husband is alive. This authority that they are so proud of is mock authority created by men—deceptive and unreal. Bari-jiji is the ruling queen of the kitchen till her husband is alive. She is the one who decides what gets cooked and when. She is at a higher level in the kitchen hierarchy, and only commands and supervises. But when her husband dies, Bari-jiji loses all authority and Jiji takes over and rules the place ‘like a queen’. They become oppressors of their own gender once they start wielding the power the idea of which is created by men. Jiji is very watchful and strict with the consumption of spices and expensive ingredients like dry fruits and keeps them under lock and key. When she falls ill towards the last part of the story, her chief fear is of losing

her authority once again to Bari-jiji. On the other hand, Bari-jiji not just loses her authority around the kitchen after her husband's demise, she also loses her right to consume the food of her choice. Since she is a widow, she cannot consume alcohol and meat. In this struggle for power Bari-jiji avenges herself by emanating various disgusting noises, and uses the weapon of religious beliefs to win back some of her lost ground. Every once in a while, she makes people believe that she is possessed by Goddess Amba and demands for alcohol, meat and sweets as offerings for the Devi that she would consume and satisfy her urge.

For the women of the younger generation, Radha, Minakshi and Kusuma, the kitchen is a place that controls them, confines them, and clips their wings. Radha was very keen on pursuing her studies in Maths which was her favorite subject but her family did not allow her. So, she works at a bank in Jodhpur and Gopal is a doctor there. Her working hours are as long as her husband Gopal's. Yet she is the one who manages the household and does all the chores around the kitchen while Gopal feels proud of the fact that he cannot do anything to help her wife. When Kishan and Minakshi visit them, he expresses his helplessness around the kitchen with great pride. When the family is going for a picnic Radha finds it difficult to get the kids ready in time, Minakshi suggests that Gopal bhaisaab could bathe the children. Radha reacts sarcastically to the suggestion by saying, "O yes, he'll bathe them. Keep thinking that." Despite her frustration and discontent with the way things are, Radha does not object to anything.

Kusuma is an illustration of an ideal daughter-in-law by Papaji and Jiji's standards. She is 'well-educated, fair-skinned and quiet'. She is an MA in Political Science and also has a diploma in French. She sews, cooks, embroiders, makes jams, juices and pickles, has learnt flower arrangement and baking. Since she is the quiet type, she does not vocally object to the bonds and constraints of patriarchy yet her craving for freedom is symbolized by the birds that she so longingly observes while returning from the family picnic. She seems to be an epitome of perfection to Minakshi who looks at everything around her with a critical eye. Minakshi is a south Indian and brings an outsider's perspective to the practices portrayed here. She reads a lot, questions beliefs and gives suggestions freely. She is the one who suggests to Radha that Gopal can take care of the children while she is busy, that the verandah outside the kitchen should be extended to provide a better view of the mountains; she asks for Kishan's help in the kitchen. She seems to be different from the other two daughters-in-law of the family by many standards. Yet despite all her objections and suggestions, she does not revolt openly. She challenges many family traditions, yet she adjusts with many others and seems to have adopted many of the practices of the household. Papaji and Jiji have accepted her in the family for their son's sake, but they feel dismayed and challenged by her courage and fearlessness.

She is amazed at the amount of time, energy, effort and thought spent in preparation of food here. She is the only female character in the story who seems to understand the politics of patriarchy as used to keep women bound and chained willingly. When, in the last section of the story, Jiji falls ill and is in a trancelike state Minakshi urges her to renounce her idea of deriving glory out of a gold bangle or necklace. She urges Jiji to realize that Papaji's authority is not hers. She needs to 'free' herself and try to find her true identity not as Jiji, the wife of Papaji, but as Dularibai, the human being that she is. She points at the fact that if she did not

have to cook three hundred chapattis every day, or take care of fourteen pregnancies that she had, or the constant cares of the kitchen - of taking care of the spices, groceries, pickles and jams - she might have been able to explore her relationship to the world.

ACTIVITY 4 - What does the kitchen mean to different women and men in the story?

4.4.3 The Politics of Food

Lakshmi Holmstrom, the translator of the story from Tamil to English, points out, “Ambai also sees food and cooking as ways of imposing control within the family, and maintaining boundaries within communities. She questions the value of hospitality, which merely reflects the status and importance of the pater families”. This story also exemplifies the above observation. There are numerous references to food and elaborate food preparation in the story. The kitchen might seem like a reluctant addendum to the architecture of the house, but food is not an after thought here. It is an integral part of their prestige and self-image. We find Papaji to be very fond of entertaining guests with good food and drinks. No guest could leave the house without having some snacks, if not a proper meal. One stove in the kitchen is always occupied for boiling water in case there are some guests. It is a matter of prestige and pride for Papaji to feed his guests well.

When analysed closely, we realize that this warmth and generosity shown to the guests is an indicator of the rank and position of Papaji in the society. His insistence on serving his guests well is a means for him to strengthen his social prestige. The endless varieties of snacks and cuisines that are cooked in this kitchen require enormous amounts of labor on the part of the women. There are different cuisines cooked for different meals of the day. For the family picnic the women get up at four in the morning to prepare breakfast, lunch and snacks and all that the men contribute is to yell at them for disturbing their sleep. For Papaji and other men in the family the labor and efforts seem to be immaterial, inconsequential. Jiji's enthusiastic participation in feeding her guests reflects her internalization of the values upheld by Papaji and this is the triumph of patriarchy. She is the one who holds the responsibility of furthering the good name and reputation of Papaji for his sake. This internalization of patriarchal values is so deep rooted and unobtrusively pervasive that when Priya, Radha bhabhiji's daughter, is asked about her future plans, she lispingly says that she wants to cook chapattis when she grows up.

Food has another aspect attached to it. When Bari-jiji's husband dies she has to give up her sindoor, betel leaves, colored clothes as well as drinking spirits and meat. She has only to eat vegetarian food, mostly potatoes. Food here becomes a weapon in the hands of society in general and of Jiji in particular to exercise power over Bari-jiji.

4.4.4 Where are the Men?

There are three male characters in the story, Papaji, Gopal bhaisaheb, and Kishan. But their role in the story is only peripheral. There is only one episode dedicated to Gopal bhaisaheb and two to Kishan. Papaji has been given a better presence in the story by Ambai. On the surface the story seems to be a simple tale of the

average life of women in and around a kitchen in a household in Rajasthan. It is women characters who are discussed in detail with only occasional references made to their male counterparts.

But a closer and more careful look makes the readers realize the scathing criticism of patriarchy that this story presents. Though the men are not present physically, it is they who regulate each and every aspect of the lives of women. The kitchen seems to be a battleground for women to fight for power, but it is actually dictated by men who have been likened to an octopus whose eight tentacles reach out to control and subjugate women. And the irony is that women enjoy these bonds. The success of patriarchy lies in making women willingly accept the yoke and not object to it. Men have created a small world for women-the world of domesticity, ‘fenced it with wires’ and have made them rule there. Women rejoice under the deceitful notion of their supremacy within those confines and are conditioned to forget the fact that they have been chained, gagged and crippled. Anyone who speaks, thinks and goes against the dictates laid down for women is an eyesore.

The family picnic episode is a significant exposition of the octopus analogy. The women are up very early in the morning as they have to prepare an enormous amount of food for the extended family. There is a lot of chattering during the process. And then an unspecified male voice comes from outside, “What’s all that racket in the kitchen? You are not allowing us to get any sleep.” There is immediate silence and everyone talks in hushed tones. By eight o’clock all the women are sweating profusely because of the labor. Papaji peeps inside and declares, “As soon as the trip to the lake was mentioned, the lot of you began to leap with enthusiasm.”

During the picnic, it is the women who keep cooking and taking care of the children. While they are away attending to their kids, it is the young girls in the family who take their place and serve water to the men. While they are returning, Kusuma slows down as she has not got enough time to observe the beautiful birds. But she is also worried about the evening meal that she has to peel garlic for.

The birds, mountains and temples that are not available to these women are the dreams and aspirations that they have to sacrifice in order to fit into the mould. They yearn but do not protest, even the highly educated ones like Radha and Kusuma.

ACTIVITY 5 - Are the men really invisible and insignificant in the story?

ACTIVITY 6 - Is it really the women who are excited about the picnic? If not, then why does Papaji want to make everyone believe that women are excited?

4.5 STRUCTURE

The story does not follow the regular, classic narrative structure of a beginning, a middle and an end. It is a loose arrangement of some episodes in the life of an average household that is as commonplace as any other. It has been divided into

four parts that focus on different aspects of the relationships, power struggles, aspirations, and confinement of the people living there. The first part focuses on the spatiality of the kitchen and its implications, the next one on the battleground that the kitchen is turned into, the third one on the dynamics of gender roles and the ensuing suffocation. The last part is more like an epiphany that the author wants every woman to have.

The effect created by this episodic, casual structure of the story is one of informality and ease. But more importantly, it highlights the sophisticated, understated methods of patriarchal set up that have been successful in normalizing the disembodied, identity-less existence of women. A casual reading of the story creates an impression of this being a story about some women leading an ordinary, uneventful life in a wealthy household. The fractured narrative structure is a reflection of the fractured, incomplete, even non-existent identities of the women characters.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

1. C. S. Lakshmi 'Ambai' focuses on women's life within the four walls of household, their joys, pains, female sexuality, and the struggle that relationships within confined spaces entail.
2. The idea of gender defines specific roles for men and women alike and expects them to stick to these roles for the sake of maintaining 'order' in society.
3. The role assigned for women is that of nurturer and caregiver. They are expected to restrict themselves to the household and take care of the family. Men are given the role of breadwinners for the family. A clear demarcation is maintained within the social sphere regarding the duties both have to perform.
4. The concept of gender encourages the idea of separate functional spaces for men and women. Men have to be away from the kitchen whereas women have to be restricted to the kitchen and the household.
5. The story is an exposition of the separate gender roles and distinct spaces that are used to maintain the balance of power in favour of men.
6. Despite being invisible from the real action of the story, men are the ones who control everything.
7. Anyone who challenges the patriarchal authority and questions the traditional beliefs is first derided and then ignored. Meenakshi tries to improve some facilities in the kitchen and she is shown her place.
8. The roles of Jiji and Bari Jiji expose the conspiracy of patriarchy where they make women believe that the household and kitchen is their kingdom and they are its reigning queens.
9. Kusuma, Radha bhabhiji and Minakshi do not believe in the authority that kitchen provides, and yearn for an identity of their own - outside the kitchen.

10. The story, finally, ends on a note of hope and with a message to the women of the world. The kitchen is not a kingdom to be ruled. Kitchen is not a space that can define the true identity of a woman. Women must find their real selves - outside the kitchen.

4.7 AIDS TO ACTIVITIES

- Activity 1** - Inheritance of wealth gives men enough economic authority to make women, who do not have economic freedom, fall in line.
- Activity 2** - They have been conditioned into believing that the inconvenience is normal. Gold bangle might make them forget the discomfort momentarily.
- Activity 3** - It is symbolic of a lack of light outside and within. The disembodiment of women is complete and often voluntary.
- Activity 4** - It means freedom and authority for some and imprisonment for some other. For men, the kitchen is a place that is symbolic of their power and domination, and a means of increasing their social worth.
- Activity 5** - Men are invisible but not insignificant.
- Activity 6** - It is the men who have planned the picnic. Women are merely a tool for smooth execution of the whole plan. It is important to make women believe that they are excited so that they do not even think of showing their discomfort or displeasure.

4.8 GLOSSARY

- **Ledge** – A raised edge
- **Encompass** – To include comprehensively
- **Lineage** – The line of descendants of a particular family
- **Threshold** – The sill of a doorway
- **Enslaved** – Hold someone in slavery or bondage
- **Mainstay** - Chief support
- **Protagonists** - The leading character
- **Catechism** - A series of questions
- **Racket** - Loud noise
- **Wizened** - Shrivelled

4.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the view of Jiji regarding the authority a woman has in a household. Is it true power? Why or why not?

2. Why is it necessary for patriarchal methods to be unobtrusive and subtle?
3. All the female characters have an individual story to tell. How are these stories similar or different? Do they help in creating an inclusive, complete picture of patriarchy?
4. Minakshi's views and attitude are different from everyone else in the story. Does her being an outsider have anything to do with her perspective?
5. Comment on the symbolic value of the kitchen in the story.

4.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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