POST GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME (CBCS)

M.A. in ENGLISH

SEMESTER - IV

DSE – 407

WOMEN'S WRITING: LITERATURE AND THEORY

Self-Learning Material

DIRECTORATE OF OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING

UNIVERSITY OF KALYANI

KALYANI, NADIA – 741235

WEST BENGAL

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May, 2024

Directorate of Open and Distance Learning, University of Kalyani.
Published by the Directorate of Open and Distance Learning, University of Kalyani,
Kalyani - 741235, West Bengal

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Director's Message

Satisfying the varied needs of distance learners, overcoming the obstacle of distance and reaching the unreached students are the threefold functions catered by Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems. The onus lies on writers, editors, production professionals and other personnel involved in the process to overcome the challenges inherent to curriculum design and production of relevant Self-Learning Materials (SLMs). At the University of Kalyani, a dedicated team under the able guidance of the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor has invested its best efforts, professionally and in keeping with the demands of Post Graduate CBCS Programmes in Distance Mode to devise a self-sufficient curriculum for each course offered by the Directorate of Open and Distance Learning (DODL), University of Kalyani.

Development of printed SLMs for students admitted to the DODL within a limited time to cater to the academic requirements of the Course as per standards set by Distance Education Bureau of the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India under Open and Distance Mode UGC Regulations, 2021 had been our endeavour. We are happy to have achieved our goal.

Utmost care and precision have been ensured in the development of the SLMs, making them useful to the learners, besides avoiding errors as far as practicable. Further suggestions from the stakeholders in this would be welcome.

During the production-process of the SLMs, the team continuously received positive stimulations and feedback from **Professor (Dr.) Amalendu Bhunia, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, University of Kalyani**, who kindly accorded directions, encouragements and suggestions, offered constructive criticism to develop it within proper requirements. We, gracefully, acknowledge his inspiration and guidance.

Sincere gratitude is due to the respective chairpersons as well as each and every member of PG-BoS (DODL), University of Kalyani. Heartfelt gratitude is also due to the faculty members of the DODL, subject-experts serving at the University Post Graduate departments and also to the authors and academicians whose academic contributions have enriched the SLMs. We humbly acknowledge their valuable academic contributions. I would especially like to convey gratitude to all other University dignitaries and personnel involved either at the conceptual or operational level at the DODL, University of Kalyani.

Their persistent and coordinated efforts have resulted in the compilation of comprehensive, learner-friendly, flexible texts that meet the curriculum requirements of the Post Graduate Programme through the Distance Mode.

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DSE - 407

WOMEN'S WRITING: LITERATURE AND THEORY

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Study Hours: 16

BLOCK - I

UNITS: 1 – 4

THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK

BY

DORIS LESSING

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

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UNIT - 1

UNIT 1 (A): LIFE AND WORKS OF DORIS LESSING

Doris May Lessing (1919-2013) was a British-Zimbabwean (Rhodesian) writer whose novels and short stories are largely concerned with people involved in the social and political upheavals of the 20th century. She was born in Persia (present-day Iran) to Captain Alfred Tayler and Emily Maude Tayler, both British subjects. Her father, who lost a leg during his

service in World War I, was later employed as a bank clerk, and her mother was a former nurse. After spending her early childhood in Iran, the family moved to the British colony of Southern Rhodesia (modern day Zimbabwe) in 1925, where her parents owned a farm. There she lived from age five until she settled in England in 1949. In the rough environment of Rhodesia, her mother Emily aspired to lead an Edwardian lifestyle. It might have been possible had the family been wealthy; in reality, they were short of money and the farm delivered very little income.

As a girl Doris was educated first at the Dominican Convent High School, a Roman Catholic convent all-girls school which she left at the age of 13 and was self-educated from then on. She left home at 15 and worked as a nursemaid. She started reading material on politics and sociology that her employer gave her and also began writing around this time. In 1937, Doris moved to Salisbury to work as a telephone operator, and she soon married her first husband, civil servant Frank Wisdom, with whom she had two children, before the marriage ended in 1943. Lessing left the family home in 1943, leaving the two children with their father. After the divorce, Doris's interest was drawn to the community around the Left Book Club, an organization she had joined the year before. It was there that she met her future second husband, Gottfried Lessing. They married shortly after she joined the group, and had a child together before they divorced in 1949. She did not marry again. Lessing moved to London in 1949 with her younger son, Peter, to pursue her writing career and socialist beliefs, but left the two older children with their father Frank Wisdom in South Africa.

Lessing's fiction is commonly divided into three distinct phases. During her Communist phase (1944–56) she wrote radically about social issues, a theme to which she returned in *The Good Terrorist* (1985). Doris Lessing's first novel, *The Grass Is Singing*, as well as the collection of short stories *African Stories*, are set in Southern Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe) where she was then living. This was followed by a psychological phase from 1956 to 1969, including the *Golden Notebook* and the "Children of Violence" quartet. Third came the Sufi phase, explored in the *Canopus in Argos* sequence of science fiction (or as she preferred to put it "space fiction") novels and novellas. Her first novel, *The Grass Is Singing*, was published in 1950. It is about a white farmer and his wife and their African servant in Rhodesia. Among her most substantial works is the series *Children of Violence* (1952–69), a five-novel sequence that centres on Martha Quest, who grows up in southern Africa and settles in England. *Going Home* (1957) describes her reaction to Rhodesia on a return visit and *In Pursuit of the English* (1960) tells of her initial months in England.

But the work that gained her international attention, *The Golden Notebook*, was published in 1962. It tells the story of a woman writer who attempts to come to terms with the life of her times through her art. It is one of the most complex and the most widely read of her novels. *The Golden Notebook* is considered a feminist classic by some scholars, but notably not by the author herself, who later wrote that its theme of mental breakdowns as a means of healing and freeing one's self from illusions had been overlooked by critics. She also regretted that critics failed to appreciate the exceptional structure of the novel. *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1975) is a prophetic fantasy that explores psychological and social breakdown. A master of the short story, Lessing has published several collections, including *The Story of a Non-Marrying Man* (1972) and *Stories* (1978); her African stories are collected in *This Was the Old Chief's Country* (1951) and *The Sun Between Their Feet* (1973).

In 1982, Lessing published two novels under the literary pseudonym Jane Somers to show the difficulty new authors face in trying to get their work printed. The novels were rejected by Lessing's UK publisher, but later accepted by another English publisher, Michael Joseph. She turned to science fiction in a five-novel sequence titled *Canopus in Argos: Archives* (1979–83). The novels *The Diary of a Good Neighbour* (1983) and *If the Old Could…* (1984) were published pseudonymously under the name Jane Somers to dramatize the problems of unknown writers. Subsequent novels include *The Good Terrorist* (1985), about a group of revolutionaries in London, and *The Fifth Child* (1988), a horror story, to which *Ben, in the World* (2000) is a sequel. In 1994 she published the first volume of an autobiography, *Under My Skin*; a second volume, *Walking in the Shade*, appeared in 1997. *The Sweetest Dream* (2001) is a semiautobiographical novel set primarily in London during the 1960s, while the parable-like novel *The Cleft* (2007) considers the origins of human society. Her collection of essays *Time Bites* (2004) displays her wide-ranging interests, from women's issues and politics to Sufism. *Alfred and Emily* (2008) is a mix of fiction and memoir centred on her parents.

As well as campaigning against nuclear arms, she was an active opponent of apartheid, which led her to being banned from South Africa and Rhodesia in 1956 for many years. In the same year, following the Soviet invasion of Hungary, she left the British Communist Party. In 2015, a five-volume secret file on Lessing built up by the British intelligence agencies, MI5 and MI6, was made public and placed in The National Archives. The file shows that Lessing was under surveillance by the British spies for around twenty years, from the early-1940s onwards for her political activism. In 2007, Lessing was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

She received the prize at the age of 88 years 52 days, making her the oldest winner of the literature prize. She also was only the eleventh woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature by the Swedish Academy in its 106-year history. She died on 17 November 2013, aged 94, at her home in London. By the time of her death, she had published more than 50 novels.

UNIT 1 (B): SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* is a multilayered novel that centrally concerns the life, memories, and writings of Anna Wulf in the 1950s, during her late twenties and early thirties in London and colonial Africa. The novel alternates between a linear narrative entitled *Free Women*, which is a framing narrative in the third person featuring the lives of Anna and her friend Molly, and Anna's four private notebooks: in the "Black Notebook" she recalls the time she spent in Africa, the novel she fashioned out of her experience, and her difficulties coping with the novel's reception; in the "Red Notebook" she recounts her ambivalent membership in and disavowal of the British Communist Party; in the "Yellow Notebook", she starts a novel that closely mirrors her pattern of unfulfilling relationships in London; and the "Blue Notebook" serves as her inconsistent personal diary, full of self-doubt and contradiction. The novel alternates between describing Anna's life experiences and revealing the content of the different notebooks. It eventually features a section from a fifth notebook: the golden notebook.

***Free Women*: 1**

The novel begins in London, in 1957. Two friends, Anna, a talented but sheepish writer and Molly, the boisterous and "worldly-wise" actress are catching up in Molly's apartment. Molly has recently returned from a trip abroad. While Molly was away, Anna was visited by Molly's ex-husband, Richard. Richard and Molly had been married for a short period of time and have a son together, Tommy. He has since remarried to a woman named Marion and has three sons with her. Richard, a wealthy businessman, now violently disdains the leftist politics that brought them together. He visits to talk about finding a job for their son Tommy, who has spent the last few months brooding in his room. He also wants advice about his current wife, Marion, who has become an alcoholic due to his numerous affairs. Richard and Molly argue, with Richard criticizing the way their son has been raised. Molly, in turn, points out Richard’s preoccupation with his business, his ill-treatment towards Marion and his infidelity.

Eventually, Richard suggests that Tommy come to stay with him and Marion. Overhearing all these, Tommy comes downstairs to refuse his father's offer and mentions that he might be interested in pursuing writing, referring to a series of conversations he has had with Anna about writing. Molly is surprised to learn that her son has had these conversations with her friend. To change the subject, Anna tells Molly about her waning interest in writing another novel, Richard's attempts to have an affair with her, the state of their communist friends, and her inability to get over her married ex-lover, Michael. Finally, Anna returns to her own flat, where she lives with her daughter, Janet. She takes out the four notebooks she regularly writes in.

The Notebooks: 1

Anna has four notebooks: one black, one red, one yellow, and one blue. In the black notebook, the pages are divided down the middle by a black line. The left side of the line reads "source"; the right side reads "money." The left side is about Anna's novel *Frontiers of War*, and the right is about transactions, money she received from it.

The Black Notebook" begins with a synopsis of her successful first novel, *Frontiers of War,* which she still considers inadequate and naïve. Anna drifts into recounting the events and people that inspired the novel. Deciding to stay in colonized Central Africa during World War II, Anna falls into an eclectic group of white socialists, passing her weekends drinking with them at the Mashopi Hotel and ending up in a long, sexless relationship with the German exile Willi Rodde. The illicit relationship between a white roadsman, George Hounslow, and the African hotel cook's wife, Marie, formed the basis for her novel, but she replaced George with a version of the charming, arrogant, Oxford-educated pilot Paul Blackenhurst, with whom she eventually elopes on their last day at the hotel, the day before he dies in an accident on the airstrip.

"The Red Notebook" begins with Anna's invitation to the British Communist Party, of which Molly was already an active, if critical, member. Anna recalls her discomfort with the party's ideology and the mounting evidence of the Soviet Union's horrific crimes against political dissidents, the contradictions she encountered visiting East Berlin with Michael, and meeting miserable housewives while canvassing in North London.

"The Yellow Notebook", entitled *The Shadow of the Third*, begins as the manuscript for a novel based on Anna's life. Its protagonist, Ella, works at a women's magazine responding to

reader letters that her boss, Dr. West, deems insufficient for his advice column. She is also secretly writing a novel about a man who makes all the requisite arrangements for death before committing suicide, as he realizes that "that's what I've been meaning to do." Ella begins an intense affair with the psychiatrist Paul Tanner, who starts spending every night at her house but pursuing affairs with other women, all the while neglecting his wife. He gradually loses interest in Ella's work and makes it clear that she is just a fling. When Paul abruptly moves to Nigeria, Ella is devastated.

"The Blue Notebook" follows Anna's sessions with her psychoanalyst Mrs. Marks. When Mrs. Marks asks whether Anna writes about their sessions in her diary, Anna's entries about them stop for four years — instead, she compiles newspaper clippings. When she resumes writing about analysis, she feels unable to write because of the violence in the world and believes Michael is about to leave her; when Mrs. Marks again mentions Anna's diary, she decides to stop going.

***Free Women*: 2**

In the next section of *Free Women*, a malicious and sullen Tommy visits Anna, contemplates the differences between her creative work and his father's career, and then starts reading her notebooks, bringing her to "an extraordinary tumult of sensations." He wonders why she compartmentalizes and brackets her thoughts, accusing her of irresponsibility and dishonesty for hiding herself from the world. After he returns home to Molly's house, he shoots himself in the head and is "expected to die before morning."

The Notebooks: 2

The **"Black Notebook"** covers meetings with film and television executives who want to buy the rights to *Frontiers of War*, but erase racism from the story and move it from Africa to England. In the **"Red Notebook",** Anna contemplates the myths that sustain communists' faith in the Soviet Union. In the **"Yellow Notebook",** Ella's story continues: hopelessly fixated on Paul more than a year after they split, Ella meets an attractive but unrefined American leucotomy doctor. Their mechanical, brief sex makes him realizes his degree of dissatisfaction with his marriage, but Ella feels no better about Paul. In the **"Blue Notebook"**, Michael ends his affair with Anna, and she decides to "write down, as truthfully as I can, every stage of a day. Tomorrow." Her day is full of tension: she must cater to Michael and her daughter Janet's every need and spends all day working at the Party headquarters for no pay, reporting on bad

novels she knows her boss John will publish anyway and responding to letters from mediocre writers. Realizing that she is powerless and her work is meaningless, she quits. She puts Janet to sleep and takes great pleasure in cooking dinner for Michael—who never comes, proving that their affair is over. This whole entry is crossed out; she rewrites it in brief, calling it "a normal day."

***Free Women:* 3**

In the third section of *Free Women*, Tommy miraculously survives his suicide attempt, but is left blind. He moves back into Molly's house, which his presence begins to dominate as he spends all his time reading, writing, and visiting with Marion. Anna visits Richard, who goes on one of his usual misogynistic rants, and feels she is beginning to "crack up" on her train ride home, where she has to deal with the new friendship between her boarder Ivor, her daughter Janet, and Ivor's lover Ronnie, who pays no rent and Anna soon kicks out of the house.

The Notebooks: 3

In the **"Black Notebook"**, Anna remembers a pigeon-hunting trip in Africa and describes her relationship with James Schafter, an American who egregiously parodied his way to the top of the literary world. In the red notebook, Anna recounts a year of "frenzied political activity" after Stalin's death, at the end of which her fellow communists concluded that the party was irreparably corrupt. In the yellow notebook's The Shadow of the Third, Ella begins receiving endless, unwanted attention from arrogant men who assume she will happily become their mistress. She decides not to let men "contain" her desire, and begins planning out short stories to make sense of her frustrations. The blue notebook returns to a lengthy reflection on psychoanalysis. Anna thinks the blue book's "record of facts" feels like a false representation of her experience and feels herself losing the ability to convey meaning through words—she recounts a recurring nightmare in which a figure takes "joy in spite."

***Free Women:* 4**

In the fourth section of *Free Women*, Anna tells Marion, who has been arrested at a protest, about the old revolutionaries she befriended in Africa. The black notebook ends with a single entry: Anna has a dream about a film being made at the Mashopi Hotel, which makes her realize that all her memories of Africa were "probably untrue." The red notebook ends with a story about a teacher dedicated to communism who visits the Soviet Union and realizes his recommendations will not be taken seriously. The yellow notebook breaks with Ella's narrative

to list nineteen ideas for short stories or novels, mostly about women taken advantage of by men.

The Notebooks: 4

The blue notebook picks up with Janet going off to boarding school and Anna finding herself with nothing to do. She takes on a boarder, Saul Green, an American writer who proves as sensitive and intelligent as he can be narcissistic and brutish—Anna develops extreme anxiety, which is connected to Saul. Their relationship swings unpredictably between serenity and hatred, political conversations over coffee, and explosive arguments in the bedroom, compounded by Anna's jealousy about the other women Saul visits and decided to start reading his diaries. They both accuse the other, and themselves, of insanity. Not only does Anna realize there are multiple Sauls and multiple Annas, but she starts to see versions of him in her and her in him. Anna begins to see the floor and walls moving, and she cycles through various dreams and personas. One day, Saul suggests she resume writing and she admits her writer's block. She buys a beautiful, golden notebook, although Saul does his best to claim it for himself.

The Golden Notebook

Anna switches to the golden notebook alone. She has a dream about Saul as a tiger and starts moving through her past, but realizes that an "invisible projectionist" is playing it all back for her—of course, this is also Saul, and they realize that they have each "become a sort of inner conscience or critic" for the other. In the morning, she plans a new story about "free women" and Saul insists that she start writing. In their last days together, they offer one another opening lines: Anna gives Saul the image of an Algerian soldier on a hill that becomes the first sentence of his successful novel, and he gives her the altogether dull sentence "The two women were alone in the London flat," the opening line of Free Women, which turns out to be not an objective account the life Anna recounted subjectively in her notebooks but rather her second novel, her fictionalization of the notebooks' reality: the multiple, conflicting voices Lessing offers in The Golden Notebook all turn out to be Anna's.

Free Women: 5

The last section of Free Women offers a markedly different version of the last two sections: Janet goes off to boarding school, and Anna goes insane pasting newspaper clippings around her room. An American named Milt moves in, makes her feel "protected and cared for," but also insists that he is "a feeder on women." After five days together, he leaves. Ultimately,

sometime later after Janet returns from school, Anna decides to work at a marriage counseling center, Molly marries a "progressive businessman," and Tommy ends up "all set to follow in Richard's footsteps."

UNIT - 2

UNIT 2 (A): BRIEF STUDY OF THE CHARACTERS

AnnaWulf

The protagonist of *The Golden Notebook* is a novelist and occasional activist in her early thirties, living in London after spending a portion of her life in colonial Africa. One of the most completely realized characters in modern literature; Anna Wulf represents the New Woman. Doris Lessing's achievement is in tracing the development of such a woman from her early twenties to her mid-thirties. Part of that development is an honest portrayal of the character's sexual identity. As a young woman, Anna was not fulfilled sexually in her relationship with a young Communist in Africa. It is only after she has moved to London and has established a relationship with Michael, the lover who eventually leaves her that she feels sexually fulfilled. Significantly, it is after Michael has left her that she feels her identity undergoing a crisis. In addition to having a lasting, meaningful relationship with a man, Anna feels the need to make a commitment which will give meaning to her life. Joining the Communist Party was one attempt at making that kind of commitment. A sensitive, highly intelligent woman, Anna longs to bring social justice to the world, and she believes that the Communist Party is the most effective avenue toward achieving that goal. As a girl in the South Central Africa, she witnessed the terrible results of racial discrimination, and she wants to do something to change it. Yet Anna discovers that the Communist Party is not finally the avenue she must follow; it contains inner paradoxes which will not allow her the freedom to experience a more subjective, individual meaning — a meaning she believes she must develop in order to live an authentic life. It is only in her writing, in her art, that she can achieve that sense of meaning. When she turns to the golden notebook, she begins to write the "Free Women" sections of the novel, and thus moves toward the possibility of an integrated, meaningful life.

Anna's relationship with Molly Jacobs allows Lessing to explore the concept of sisterhood, which in the novel becomes a necessary aspect of the New Woman. Both women

derive mutual support from their relationship; it enables them to face the loneliness of being without men, to endure the resentment of those people who fear nontraditional lifestyles, and to survive the emotional blows of life — such as Tommy's suicide attempt. Through it all, the two women communicate their inner lives to each other as they share in the bonds of friendship. As a writer and a political radical, Anna exists primarily as a highly developed and troubled child of her age rather than as a woman. She is disgusted with her first novel and torn by the dilemma of writing a second out of a fragmented consciousness. She has become disenchanted with the Communist Party because participating in it has only intensified the split within instead of healing it as she had hoped. Thus, her struggle to satisfy the creative and political needs of her being is not defined, or limited, by her femininity. But some of the consequences of her professional and social commitments draw her into painful awareness of the difficulties of women in a society dominated by men. In the conversation with the television editor who wants to buy the rights to her novel *Frontiers of War*, Anna expresses her opposition to his truth-denying commercialism through an ironic parody of his intentions to distort the story for his own uses. At first her irony is light, controlled; as his hostility deepens, it becomes wilder and almost hysterical. Of course the editor resents the (human) criticism of his values, but Anna's irony, implying an assertion of her intellectual and moral superiority, is an unforgivable transgression of the established limits of female graciousness, or submissiveness. Coming from a woman, ironic criticism is not simply a challenge – it is an insult, and the editor takes it as such. Afterwards Anna collapses "into depression, then angry self-disgust. But the only part of that meeting I am not ashamed of is the moment when I was hysterical and stupid" (p. 248).

Of course most women never have even the chance to challenge a man on professional, human terms. Much of the work Anna does for the Communist Party brings her face to face with the debilitating existence of the conventional woman. Answering her correspondence and canvassing from door to door, she is struck by the number of bored, guilty women "going mad quietly by themselves, in spite of husband and children or rather because of them" (p. 146). However, as Lessing accurately perceives, not just men but certain types of professional women capitalize on the domestic bondage of the majority of women. The work which gives Ella, the heroine of Anna's novel, the 'purpose in life' to save her from madness is on a magazine called, aptly, *Women at Home*. Aimed at the working class, this publication (like so many American women's magazines, whether geared for the swinger or the homebody) owes its success to appeasing the desires of frustrated women while steering clear of their real and desperate needs.

However, Anna, like so many "free" women, is not emancipated from domestic routine, primarily because of her child Janet. She suffers from "the housewife's disease" – the pressure of worrying over practical details – a tension which creates an inescapable barrier against pleasure, both physical and mental. Much of Lessing's fiction reverberates with the frustration of the emancipated mother as she tries to juggle her personal needs against the needs of her children. This dilemma is complicated, rather than eased, by the woman's conscious desire for children as a joy in themselves and a fulfillment of her own human potential. Anna is not free to discover the essence of her private self - both its creativity and its destructiveness - until Janet leaves for boarding school: "An Anna is coming to life that died when Janet was born" (p. 468).

But while the comparably free woman can identify with Anna up to this point, there may be a disruption in sympathy when sexuality enters the picture. Not only does Anna's lover Michael ignore Janet as a person, failing to join in Anna's positively sensuous enjoyment of the child, he resents the little girl for depriving him of her mother. Worse, in the early morning while Anna's thoughts are tensely focused on the need for haste in the practical processes ahead, he inflicts himself sexually on her in virtual punishment for her maternal responsibility. Of course the disruption in identification derives not from Michael's behavior but from Anna's response. Neither outwardly nor inwardly will she criticize her lover. Passively, Anna supports the status quo which is demeaning to both sexes. She excuses Michael's petulance about Janet by not only rationalizing, "If I were a man I'd be the same" (p. 286), but also suggesting that her biological role alone is responsible for her involvement with the child. This attitude presents a striking contrast to the extreme feminist position as it can be represented by the 1969 Manifesto of the New York Redstockings, one of the most militant and radical women's liberation groups. The Redstockings see male supremacy as the root of all forms of social exploitation, including those not directly concerned with women. And all men are responsible for male supremacy – "All men have oppressed women." They reject the notion that institutions are sources of oppression because "To blame institutions implies that men and women are equally victimized . . . ." They also "reject the idea that women consent to or are to blame for their own oppression."

The compromise view, so emphatically denounced above - that men and women are equally victimized, with its converse implication that they are also equally responsible for the

state of things does not seem foreign to the spirit of Lessing's work and the conscious attitudes of her female characters. The notion of equal responsibility is suggested by the success and self-respect with which many women in her fiction contribute to the aesthetic, psychological and political thought and work of the world. However, in the context of the sexual relationship, Anna's self-respect becomes twisted into self-denial, her voice takes on more than a tinge of sexist submissiveness. Anna curbs her resentment against Michael "because he will spend his day, served by secretaries, nurses, women in all kinds of capacities, who will take this weight off him" (p. 285). Here she becomes so irritating - smugly, she tells herself that the anger she feels is "impersonal." "It is the disease of women in our time. I can see it in women's faces, their voices, every day, or in the letters that come to the office. The woman's emotion: resentment against injustice, an impersonal poison. The unlucky ones, who do not know it is impersonal, turn it against their men."

Molly Jacobs

Molly Jacob is Anna's best (and perhaps only) friend, whom she sees as a sister or even, emotionally and psychologically speaking, lesbian partner. Whereas Anna is shy, small, and artistically talented, Molly is boisterous, imposing, emotionally expressive, and "worldly-wise," comfortable in any room and skilled at dressing to create an impression. Still, many people see the two women as "interchangeable" because they are both unmarried. She is a single mother who considers herself a free woman. Molly believes that Anna is a true artist and scolds Anna for wasting her talents. Molly is a relatively unsuccessful actress and, in the 1930s, was briefly married to Richard Portmain, whom she now openly disdains for his elitism and obsession with money and status, even though he still frequently asks her for advice about his current wife Marion and his and Molly's son, Tommy. At one time, Molly and Richard had common interests; now, Molly abhors most of what Richard stands for. He has a conservative political outlook, and he is only concerned with maintaining his high social status and extreme wealth. Molly even admits that she had married Richard out of a need for security and even respectability. Although Molly recognizes that her "twenties marriage" to Richard was based on a need for security and even respectability and not love, her classification of her current unmarried situation as a source of self respect is not altogether true. Her decision to remain single, while a reflection of her independence, co-exists with her decision to relinquish much of her freedom to Richard and Tommy. Molly is theoretically at liberty to do as she wishes, but both she and Anna allow themselves to be manipulated by men. Molly has many love

affairs, though the novel does not provide details. Although she shares many characteristics with Anna, the two women are also quite different. Molly is described as a woman who appears boyish. She is a woman who "took pleasure in the various guises she could use." Anna, on the other hand, is soft and more feminine and prides herself on always looking the same. While Anna tends to rely on men in romantic settings, Molly prides herself on the fact that "she (has) not . . . given up and crawled into. . . a safe marriage." Nevertheless, Anna and Molly both allow Molly's ex-husband (Richard) and son (Tommy) to bully them despite the fact that they are aware that the two men are hurting them.

Molly is more committed to the cause of socialism and women's rights than Anna, and she sticks with the Communist Party longer than Anna does. Molly and Anna talk frequently even after Anna moves out of Molly's apartment, and she often punctuates their gossip by proclaiming, "it's all very odd, isn't it Anna?" Molly spent much of the 1950s as an enthusiastic communist organizer, holding meetings at her house and often lacking the time or energy to have serious conversations with Anna during her busier periods. Nevertheless, she tends to alternate between parroting communist platitudes and declaring her frustration with the Party. She also introduces Anna to many of her friends, including De Silva and Saul Green. At the beginning of *Free Women*, she has just returned from a year traveling Europe and, at the story's end, she marries a "progressive businessman." But she plays a much less central role in Anna's notebooks, and in both narratives Anna increasingly distances herself from Molly as she builds a relationship with Saul Green or Milt—although they ultimately returns to their previous intimacy at the end of *Free Women*.

Richard Portmain

Richard is Molly's ex-husband, Marion's current husband, and Tommy's father. He is an arrogant, impatient, power-hungry, and well-respected businessman who looks down upon Anna and Molly for their left-wing political beliefs (even though he met Molly during a brief socialist phase of his own in the 1930s) and their indifference to marriage and work. He tries to control the lives of everyone in his family, especially Tommy, whom he tries to dissuade from writing and encourage in entering the business world. Richard cheats constantly and openly on Marion with a series of seemingly interchangeable younger mistresses who are often one of his secretaries — he even tries to sleep with Anna and, after she refuses, becomes even more furious and aggressive toward her whenever she dismisses his attempts to control his

family. At the end of *Free Women*, he amicably divorces Marion and moves with his new mistress into his house. He scarcely appears in the notebooks, but when he does, he appears to have three daughters rather than three sons, as in *Free Women*. He represents not only the prototypical bumbling, cheating husband but also the classic conservative businessman, who feeds the cycle of accelerating the social inequality under capitalism by prioritizing profit above people, happiness, and character.

Tommy

Tommy is Molly and Richard's son. He plays a central role in *Free Women* but only appears in passing, as a rather different character, in Anna's notebooks. In *Free Women*, he is judgmental and malicious, spending most of his times brooding in his room. While Tommy admires Anna's sensitivity, sense of moral purpose, and refusal to define herself through an occupation, he thinks she is dishonest and hypocritical for compartmentalizing her life in the notebooks out of her fear of chaos, rather than putting forth an authentic and integrated, if messy, version of herself. Anna feels partially responsible for Tommy's suicide attempt which she thinks is related to what he read in her notebooks earlier that day. He survives but is blinded and becomes an ominous presence in Molly's house where his mother feels increasingly uneasy and confined. He soon befriends Marion who comes over to discuss politics with him for hours at a time. Tommy ends up joining his father's company only because he comes to believe that capitalism can change the world for the better. In contrast, in the notebooks, Tommy was a conscientious objector who worked in the coal mines rather than serve in World War II. A few years older than in *Free Women*, Tommy dates a sociology student who converts him to a political ideology Molly considers insufficiently radical. By the end of the blue notebooks, he gets married, gives lectures about coal miners' issues, and considers joining independence fighters in Cuba or Algeria. The two radically different versions of Tommy point both to the questionable facticity of *Free Women* (which is ultimately revealed to be Anna's second novel), but their commonality is that in both versions, Tommy overcomes a state of existential crisis and self-doubt by learning to take concrete actions that balance his moral concerns with practical opportunities.

UNIT 2 (B): CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NOTEBOOKS

Anna's notebooks provide the teeming narrative with artistic unity and become a structural device that coherently connects its diverse themes. The four notebooks – black, red, yellow, and blue – become a faithful record of Anna's multi-faceted personality. The black notebook is associated with Anna's years in Africa and the evolution of her novel, *Frontiers of War*. The red notebook becomes her political consciousness and it records her experiences with the Communist Party. The yellow notebook becomes an extension of her creative self as it explores the parallel universe of Ella through the framework of Anna's novel, *The Shadow of the Third*. The blue notebook is designated to be Anna's journal where she records the events of her day-to-day life and its emotional turbulence. The four notebooks thus become a composite mélange that burgeons into the complex self of Anna Wulf. These notebooks bear testimony to her tormented self which yearns to compartmentalize itself in order to forestall the enveloping chaos. Anna's fragmented psyche finds a release through the notebooks which help her to deal with the complexities of postmodern existence. By highlighting Anna's fragmented self, Lessing seems to be commenting on the larger structure of the society as well. The notebooks thus become chronicles of not just Anna's world but the faithful record of an illusory and shifting world where ideologies are constantly re-moulded.

The majority of *The Golden Notebook* consists of the four colored notebooks in which Anna Wulf records her life, which symbolizes her disjointed and compartmentalized identity. At least two of these colors have obvious significance: the black notebook is about Anna's time organizing with socialist, anti-racist activists in Africa as well as the publication of her first novel, which was about the barbarity of the color line, and the red notebook records her work in the Communist Party. In the yellow notebook, Anna begins a new novel, *The Shadow of the Third*, and works through her real-life relationships by imagining fictional "third" versions of herself and the people she knows. In the blue notebook, Anna records her everyday life and her experience in psychoanalysis. Through her confrontations with Tommy in *Free Women*, Anna learns that she separates her life into these notebooks in an attempt to compartmentalize her identity; she recognizes its multifaceted character but tries to artificially partition the different components of herself into the notebooks, which are themselves fragmented as they are narratively and temporally non-linear. She fears that writing in only one notebook would be "such a mess," opening her to chaos. She also wants her notebooks to stay private—she feels "terribly exposed" when Tommy goes through them and worries about spreading her negative feelings in the world. However, Tommy thinks that Anna must choose between dividing her inner turmoil in the notebooks, so that she can spare herself from seeing the totality of her pain,

and revealing her thoughts to the world, which he sees as an act of social responsibility: telling the ugly truth others are afraid to hear.

When Anna finally combines her thinking into the golden notebook, she symbolically makes herself whole, overcoming the sense of alienation and creative paralysis that has plagued her as she failed to find love, independence, or another novel within herself. Indeed, just before the golden notebook, Anna's four notebooks begin to mix, as she often realizes she is slipping into the wrong kind of content. As she begins writing in the singular golden notebook, Anna loses not only the rigid distinctions between the different parts of herself, which mix in the dreams she describes in the golden notebook, but also the distinction between herself and Saul, who seems to invade her consciousness and dreams. Furthermore, when she eventually writes *Free Women*, the novel's frame story, Anna not only dissolves the artificial divisions she has created in her identity but also makes the totality of her experience public in the form of fiction, breaking her cycle of creative failure and fulfilling the hopes Tommy had in mind when he promised he would give her "another chance" to honestly address and create from her suffering.

The non-linear narrative style is enhanced by the excerpts from the four notebooks. As events pile on one another, there is often an overlap that provides diverse interpretations. The notebooks sustain the logicality of the otherwise chaotic narrative. The yellow notebook constitutes another diegetic level and though it does not become a "mise en abyme", it does closely mirror the events in the main narrative. This meta-fictional strategy becomes all the more interesting as Anna writes the story of Ella and Ella in turn, is composing another literary work. Through this strategy, Lessing is perhaps trying to project the therapeutic effect of writing. Anna writes Ella's story so as to efface the pain of her separation from Michael and in the sub-diegetic level, Ella writes another story to subdue the feelings of hurt and betrayal. Lessing also comments on the constructed-ness of ontological notions like "Truth" and "Reality" when Anna pastes newspaper clippings in her blue notebook. Thus the notebook contains Anna's version of the world and the world as seen from an outsider's perspective. The blue notebook which acts as the repository of Anna's memories and desires is transformed into an objective record of the outside world. However, this objectivity is again punctured by Anna's subjective worldview as she persists in pasting newspaper clippings detailing news of war and death. Lessing seems to suggest that there is no "truth" outside one's subjective worldview. Just as Anna's predilection colour her "selection" of news, other characters also evince a worldview that is predetermined. Anna realizes that objectivity is a mere chimera and she says: ". . . blue

notebook, which I had expected to be the most truthful of the notebooks, is worse than any of them. I expected a terse record of facts to present some sort of a pattern when I read it over, but this sort of record is as false as the account of what happened on 15th September, 1954, which I read now embarrassed because of its emotionalism . . ."

As Anna's world comes crashing down and she is unable to fend off the ensuing chaos, she tries to get her life back by re-assembling her thoughts in the golden notebook. The golden notebook symbolizes her frantic attempts to re-establish order and re-group her fragmented selves. She is initially unaware of what she wants to do with the golden notebook but later it accelerates the process of self-healing. She says, "I'll pack away the four notebooks. I'll start a new notebook, all of myself in one book". Saul Green urges her to rejuvenate her spring of creativity and the notebook offers the promise of healing. The golden notebook is symbolic of a creative principle; one that tries to restore sense out of senselessness and form out of formlessness. However, the promise of rejuvenation is not immediately realized as Anna falls into a psychotic episode, but she soon bounces back. Though she gifts the golden notebook to Saul Green, the four notebooks are never discarded and towards the end, as she peruses them again, she understands that they form an indelible part of her psyche.

UNIT - 3

UNIT 3 (A): DISILLUSIONMENT WITH COMMUNISM

The red notebook focuses primarily on Anna's ambivalent relationship to communism, which she agrees with in theory but finds it difficult to support in practice. She finds the British Communist Party unnecessarily dogmatic, stuck in the past, and is unable to cope with communism's transformation into authoritarian terror in the Soviet Union. Many of the novel's communists blindly defend the Party and others become so disillusioned that they lose faith in politics altogether. Anna herself tends to oscillate between these two extremes until she finds a way to toe the line between participating in and critiquing the Party. By the end of the book, she manages to understand the limits of leftist institutions while continuing to believe in the values underlying the leftist politics. Her gradual transformation towards a less radical, but more practical, political orientation mirrors the predicament and trajectory of the Western left at the crucial turning point of the novel's setting, the mid-1950s. Anna becomes disillusioned

with politics simply because communism has begun to fail her: it has become untenable in England and openly authoritarian in the Soviet Union. From the 1930s through the 1950s, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin ruthlessly persecuted his political enemies, including many inside his own Communist Party, executing hundreds of thousands of people and sending millions to prison camps in Siberia. As rumors of these crimes reach England, Anna notices that most of her fellow communists simply deny them, insisting that the Soviet Union could not have possibly been responsible for such atrocities. When these rumors are openly confirmed after Stalin's death, Communist Parties break down throughout the West, where it is already clear that revolution would never occur. Most of all, even in England, Anna notices that communism proclaims a belief in egalitarianism, but communist institutions end up completely anti-egalitarian because of their demand for consensus and centralized power.

Anna and Molly criticize the Party's orthodox support for the Soviets, air of secrecy, strict hierarchy, low editorial standards, and suspicion toward intellectuals. Most of all, there is no remaining space for dissent — everyone who agrees with the Party's ends but disagrees with its means gets shunned, which makes it difficult to reform a political project gone awry. Because Anna and Molly believe that the Communist Party has become anti-communist, they end up "bored" with it and mired in conflicting feelings: they know they should celebrate when Stalin died because the Party will have to change its thinking, but instead they agonize because they recognize that his death threatens the end of communism everywhere. Anna realizes that it is illogical for her to feel more incensed about the Rosenbergs' execution, but she cannot bring herself to feel differently. Because they feel stuck to a party-line they do not agree with anymore, many of the book's communists do nothing political — they dream of a better future but simultaneously lament the failures of the present that their loss of all faith in political actions. Most of Anna's socialist friends in Africa gradually move from planning meetings and protests to mocking their previous revolutionary zeal. They realize that they can do nothing about colonial racism, and the Oxford-educated airmen in the group make fun of Willi's deep commitment to socialist theory—Paul Blackenhurst even openly brags about his future in the business world. Party meetings in London also inevitably lead to internal divisions and ambiguous conclusions — like when the reading group concludes that Stalin's writings on linguistics make no sense, or when the canvassing group uses humor to deflect their question about whether it is better to advance their candidate or to support the Labour Party candidate who is more likely to win the election.

While Lessing believes that blind faith can be a self-sabotaging political attitude, given that reality inevitably fails to live up to leftists' expectations, she also seems to show that a more measured, realistic kind of faith — one that recognizes the improbability of its fulfillment — can both encourage people to pursue incremental progress and make radical social transformation more possible. Anna realizes that the Party "is largely composed of people who aren't political at all, but who have a powerful sense of service," or who are lonely and seeking community. The happiest party members are not satisfied because of society's progress, but rather because of their everyday personal contributions to the movement. It is accordingly unsurprising that, having been motivated by service rather than community, Anna decides at the end of *Free Women* to campaign for Labour (a progressive mainstream party) and teach children, prioritizing practical, tangible acts of service above the endless, circular discussions and blind hope she finds in the Party. In the golden notebook, Anna and Saul come up with a metaphor from the Greek myth of Sisyphus: the great majority of the leftists are busy pushing a boulder up a "great black mountain" toward the "few great men" at the top, who have already figured out what it means to live in freedom. More practical and less idealistic politics might perhaps achieve only an inch of progress, an incremental advancement in collective knowledge, but it is progress nonetheless. While Anna leaves the Party and Molly marries a businessman, they never stop fighting for justice — regardless of whether they believe in communist revolution or not, they do not confuse radical faith with realistic expectations; they recognize that socialism is fragile and unlikely but still do what is in their power to improve the world.

In the years after she published *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing insisted that she sought to be descriptive, not prescriptive: she wanted to capture the spirit of a time when communists were realizing their project would not be viable in the West, well before it started to seem impossible in the whole world. While she recognizes that the left had to scale down its expectations out of historical necessity, she laments the communists' tendency to give up a notion of the common good altogether because their particular hopes were dashed. Anna and Molly's final and ambivalent political stances in *Free Women* suggest that they were still disappointed by the death of the communist hope for a radically transformed society, but still managed to find more realistic, limited ways to effect change.

UNIT 3 (B): FEMALE BONDING AND MALE RESISTANCE

Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* is fraught with gendered politics and its myriad nuances. It also foregrounds the theme of sisterhood. Anna's relationship with Molly boasts of an easy camaraderie that is indicative of their mutual trust and concern. Much has been written about the glories of male bonding, however, a close perusal of the annals of literature reveals that the theme of female friendship is curiously absent from canonical literature. Lessing's depiction of the theme of female friendship becomes all the more relevant because it is showcased as one of the most crucial aspects governing Anna's evolution as a balanced individual. Molly becomes an extension of Anna's self as they live out their separate yet strangely conjoined lives. Lessing problematizes the male resentment towards female bonding through characters like Michael who try to sever Anna's ties with Molly in *The Golden Notebook*. There are no scenes of violence. Instead, men oppress women emotionally. Thus, Doris Lessing describes every minute detail concerning her heroines and scrutinizes their feelings when they are in love, and when they are betrayed or deserted.

Anna's close relationship with Molly is one that is fostered by years of companionship and they draw strength from each other's presence. Though they are drastically different personalities, they share a common worldview. *The Golden Notebook* starts with Molly and Anna introducing themselves as 'free women'. They believe that to be free means to be single, free of marital obsessions, and to have physical relations whenever they want even with married men. *In A Literature of Their Own* (1999), Elaine Showalter comments: “The novel of the 1960s, particularly Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, began to point out in a variety of notes of disillusionment and betrayal, that the 'free women' were not so free after all. Lessing's free women are Marxists who think they understand how the oppression of women is connected to the class struggle, who have professions and children, and who lead independent lives: but they are fragmented and helpless creatures, still locked into dependency upon men. Thus, the title 'Free Women' is ironic because they are not free at all. Being 'not free' is also highlighted through this conversation between Molly and Anna:

> Anna: If we lead what is known as free lives, that is, lives like men, why shouldn't we use the same language?
> Molly: Because we are not the same. That is the point.

Thus, when they become completely aware of their identities they feel that they are not actually free. Also, when Anna looks back at her life, she discovers that her life, as well as Molly's, has not been free from men. On the contrary, they are badly influenced by them:

> "Both of us are dedicated to the proposition that we are tough – no listen, I'm serious. I mean – a marriage breaks up, well, we say, it's not important. We bring up kids without men – nothing to it, we say we can cope. We spend years in the communist party and then we say, well, well, we made a mistake, too bad. Now we had to admit that the great dream has faded and the truth is something else that we'll never be any use."

As Ella and her friend Julia – the heroines of the novel inside the novel – are Anna's and Molly's alter egos, they, like Anna and Molly, have the same attitude towards being "free women":

> Ella: My dear Julia, we've chosen to be free women, and this is the price we pay, that's all.
> Julia: Free! What's the use of us being free if they aren't? I swear to God, that every one of them, even the best of them, has the old idea of good women and bad women.

Thus, the attempt to achieve freedom is the main reason behind the heroines' sense of fragmentation. They are trying all the time to get rid of this feeling in pursuit of wholeness. In his book *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change* (1994), Gayle Greene comments: "Lessing demonstrates that both male and female behaviors represent crippling adjustments to a destructive society, but that men are more crippled because they are locked into postures that prohibit change." Being unable to live in a complicated society, men sometimes kill or try to kill themselves like Molly's son, Tommy, who tried to shoot himself but the shot left him blind. Besides, some men try to survive in such a society through trapping women or gaining money like Michael, Anna's lover. However, the main focus in such disintegrated societies is on women who suffer self-disintegration and always try to achieve integration and wholeness. For instance, being a member of the Communist Party is one of Anna's attempts to achieve integration: "…a need for wholeness, for an end to the split, divided, unsatisfactory way we all live". However, she gradually discovers that there is a yawning gap between the communists' theories and realities.

All the women in the novel are placed in a society that does not provide women with any sort of freedom. They are treated like second-class citizens, a fact asserted by Anna and Saul:

> Saul: I've always been a hypocrite and in fact I enjoy being boss where women are second class citizen, I enjoy being boss and being fattered.
> Anna: 'Good', I said. Because in a society where not one man in ten thousand begins to understand the ways in which women are second-class citizens, we have to rely for company on the men who are at least not hypocrites.

Male oppression towards females in the novel is represented through Anna's love for Michael who deserted her to marry another woman even after a five-year long relationship. Roberta Rubenstein in *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness* (1979) opines: "The most profound dimension of Anna Wulf's psychic split is generated, however, not at the political but at the emotional level, by the dissolution of a five-year relationship with her lover, Michael, the dynamics of which form the central subject of the yellow notebook." The novel highlights the sterility of the man's emotions and the fuller feelings of a woman's emotions. Even Anna, who attained that sense of integrity and wholeness whenever she was with Michael, was deserted afterward: "The morning when Michael woke in my arms he opened his eyes and smiled at me. The warm blue of his eyes as he smiled into my face. I thought: so much of my life has been twisted and painful that now when happiness flooded over with warm glittering blue water, I can't believe it. I say to myself: I am Anna Wulf, this is me, Anna, and I'm happy." However, this feeling of happiness and integrity changed into a sense of loss when Michael deserted her. She tried to reconstruct her identity by saying: "Anna, Anna, I am Anna,…and anyway, I can't be ill or give way because of Janet, I could vanish from the world tomorrow, and it wouldn't matter to anyone except to Janet. What then am I, Anna?… who am I, Anna?"

Another female figure in the novel who is subjected to male oppression is Marion, the wife of Richard, Anna's ex-husband. Richard's oppression of Marion is summoned in Marion's conversation with Anna:

> “I've been married to him for years and years and all that time I've been wrapped up in him. Well women are, aren't they? I've thought of nothing else. I've cried myself to

> sleep night after night for years. And I've made scenes, and been a fool and been unhappy and … the point is, what for? Because the point is he is not anything, is he? He's not even very good looking. He's not even very intelligent - I don't care if he's ever so important and a captain of industry. …I thought, my God, for that creature, I've ruined my life."

It is Marion's fragmentation and her sense of the loss of identity that led her to adopt an odd behavior like deserting her husband and children, moving to Anna's house and becoming Tommy's friend. Anna describes such eccentricity: "My husband's second wife moving into my house because she can't live without my son …I was sitting upstairs quiet as a mouse, so as not to disturb Marion and Tommy and thinking I'll simply pack a bag and wander off somewhere and leave them to it."

In the black notebook, there is another figure who is subjected to male oppression; namely, Marie. During the war, Anna joined a communist group and spent a long time with them at a hotel named Mashopi, owned by the British couple; Mr. and Mrs. Boothby. Paul, a member of the communist group, befriended Jackson, the Boothby's' African cook. However, another member of the group, George Hounslow, had an affair with the cook's wife Marie which resulted in the cook and his wife being sacked by the Boothbys. Jackson found another job in the city, but as his wife and children were unable to stay with him, so he sent them to Iceland. Thus, the only victim was the black-African woman, Marie, who was dispatched from her life at The Mashopi Hotel, as well as from her husband. Besides Marie, there is another character in the yellow notebook named Ella who is Anna's alter ego and the heroine of the novel inside the novel titled *The Shadow of the Third*. Ella greatly suffered due to Paul who deserted her for another woman. After Anna's refection of her relationship with Michael, she identifies herself with Ella by saying: "Paul gave birth to Ella, the naïve Ella. He destroyed in her the knowing, doubting, sophisticated Ella and again and again he put her intelligence to sleep, and with her willing connivance, so that she floated darkly on her love for him, on her naivety … what Ella lost during those five years was the power to create through naivety."

Although *The Golden Notebook* embraces political themes, the gender issue is actually treated more seriously than politics. This fact is admitted by Anna herself as she states: "The blue notebook, which I had expected to be the most truthful of the notebooks, is worse than

any of them." Consequently, she thinks that the blue notebook, which records her emotional life and her love for Michael is the most truthful of them.

UNIT - 4

UNIT 4 (A): FRAGMENTATION

Fragmentation has become one of the popular concerns of postmodern novelists. This concern does not only show itself in the thematic sphere, but also it echoes in the structures of many postmodern novels. In this respect, the Nobel Prize winner Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* is quintessential as the novel displays an almost obsessive concern with fragmentation. The book is structurally fragmented. Lessing explores the microcosmic world of the fragmented individual which coalesces into the inevitable fragmentation of the societal macrocosm. The very structure of the novel and the non-linear narration employed is indicative of the fragmentary nature of Lessing's creative cosmos. The characters constantly express their anguish in helplessly living out such a divided existence. Anna tries to decipher her various selves by categorically recording her various "lived experiences" in her notebooks. Thus the four notebooks become the leitmotif in a narrative that highlights the notion of fragmentation in the postmodern world. From the very beginning of *The Golden Notebook*, when protagonist Anna Wulf tells her closest friend and confidante Molly Jacobs that "everything's cracking up," the fragmentation of world and mind emerge as driving forces in the novel. Its plot revolves around Anna's own gradual mental breakdown, or "crack up." Throughout the novel, she writes endlessly about her deep fear of insanity in four different notebooks in different colors that cover four different aspects of her life — her African past (black), her politics (red), her fiction (yellow), and her present (blue) — but realizes that none of them captures the real "truth" of her identity and experience. When she gives up the four books and begins writing everything in the single, titular golden notebook, Anna descends into madness, but she emerges whole, healthy, and able to write.

Instead of blocking out parts of her identity to find a single, consistent truth, Anna only achieves a sense of unity and purpose by confronting the chaos within herself and refusing to partition her mind into different books. For Lessing, identity is never simple or coherent, but rather results from the varied, often contradictory experiences and attitudes that make up any

life; anyone who tries to define themselves by one thing (like their job, their family role, their belief system) is far more delusional than someone like Anna, who finally refuses to compartmentalize herself and finds sanity by embracing, not rejecting, the contradictions in her identity. Lessing, then, experiments with innovative narrative strategies to reflect and stress the complexity of experience. The book's obsessive thematic concern on the fragmentation, that is the breakdown of a blocked writer, is well echoed in the structural and formal characteristics. Lessing divides her book into parts, each associated with a different colour. The first part is titled as "Free Women" which, in Lessing's words "is a conventional short novel, about 60,000 words long, and which could stand by itself". This short novel or novella is divided in itself with four different notebooks – Black, Red, Yellow, Blue – ensuing each Free Women section. There are five “Free Women” sections each followed by these notebooks. Following these coloured notebooks "The Golden Notebook", which is also followed by the last "Free Women" section which operates, physically speaking, like a conclusion part, appears. The protagonist of the novel is Anna Wulf who is a blocked writer. Her 'realist' novel, *The Frontiers of War*, was a success which provided her with an income sufficient to make her living. However, she believes that this novel was just a "lying nostalgia, a longing for license, for freedom, for the jungle, for formlessness". Owing to this dissatisfaction with her first novel which took its place in the traditional stream with its realist bearings, she is in a desperate search for new models to relate her experience in a more truthful manner. Yet, Anna is obsessed with the fragmentation. Her attempts to come up with a suitable and reliable method in order to achieve a kind of wholeness constantly results in frustration. As a matter of fact, it is Anna's attempts to recover from the block that renders the book so fragmented and divided. She wants to impose an order upon the chaos of her life. She admits that the only kind of the book which interests her is "a book powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life".

However, her attempts only prove that the reality which she struggles to reflect is itself split. "Free Women" is written in the third person omniscient narrative; sections have an objective and authoritarian voice. Its rational voice and ordered structure can be associated with the elements of the conventional realist novel. For instance, "Free Women" achieves an ending unlike notebooks. In a sense, "Free Women" is a parody in its flatness and orderliness when compared to the chaotic and fragmented notebooks. This comparison also emphasizes and stresses the fragmented nature of the notebooks. The "Free Women" sections are crucial for the text since they provide the reader with the necessary information and function as the

skeleton for the structure of the novel. However, there are differences between the notebooks and the "Free Women" sections. For instance, when compared to the highly subjective first person account of notebooks, the "Free Women" sections give the sense of a highly controlled narrator with a tight formal structure. Yet, the "Free Women" sections appear dissatisfactory with the lack of a tension and suspense which characterize the notebooks. The first "Free Women" section starts with the sentence: "The two women were alone in the London flat". However, in the inner "Golden Notebook", it is realized that this sentence is offered by Saul Green to Anna, to make it the first sentence of the next novel. Then, unlike the apparent idea, it is clear that the "Free Women" is born out of the notebooks. In other words, the “Free Women” is the fictionalized version of the notebooks. The narrative indeed resembles to Mobius strip as the content of the novel folds back in on itself as the end of the novel takes the reader back to the beginning. In the notebooks, Anna attempts to examine her life in disparate styles and perspectives. The memoirs from Africa constantly haunt her; communism disappoints her; as a woman she is still dependent on a man and is defined in terms of male discourse; as a writer, she is dissatisfied with the common models and suffers from the writer's block. All of these aspects of Anna found their voices in the separate notebooks.

"The Black Notebook" is divided into two columns, headed 'Source' and 'Money' and written in the first person. In it, Anna deals with her past experiences in Africa, mostly her frustration both in the African blacks' internal conflict and the oppressive attitude of the whites upon them. Due to her block, the notebook ends with pastiches and copied materials. In “The Red Notebook”, Anna relates her experience with the British Communist Party. Day by day, Anna's unease with the party grows, and finally, she decides to leave the party. Again, this notebook ends with the newspaper cuttings about violence. In "The Yellow Notebook", Anna writes a novel called *The Shadow of the Third*, which is in fact her fictionalized life. It also bears her comments on the process of writing it. The narration is in the third person omniscient. "The Blue Notebook" consists of Anna's diary writings. It is, in fact, an obvious attempt to keep a factual account of what happens rather than a fictionalized version. Mainly, it deals with Anna's mental break-down, her block and sessions with psychotherapist. Yet, she cannot unify these disparate perspectives of her life in a single piece. Finally, in the golden-coloured notebook, Anna synthesizes the various experiences kept separate in the other books, so that they approximate to a kind of wholeness. Attaining this integration enables her to begin to write again. Anna's major motive in separating aspects of her life is to impose a certain order on chaos. However, in the final part, Anna realizes that by allowing the chaos in, she could create

something as an artist. She abandons her notebooks and records events solely in the golden notebook which, in itself, welcomes dissolution and separation. The reader is also taken back to the beginning as it is understood that the beginning sentence of the "Free Women" would be the first sentence of Anna's next novel. Thus, in a cyclical manner, Anna turns back to fragmented beginning.

UNIT 4 (B): GENDER POLITICS

The Golden Notebook has often been hailed as a feminist text that focuses on the interminable "war of the sexes." The novel's female characters are seen by some critics as the champions of the feminist ideology who chose to dispute the traditional gender roles assigned to them. However, Lessing deliberately refutes such an interpretation as she believed that the novel's primary theme was one of self-healing. She says in her preface, "But this novel was not a trumpet for Women's Liberation. It described many female emotions of aggression, hostility, resentment. It put them into print". Thus while Lessing skillfully delineates the trajectory of feminine experience, she does not project it as a battle cry for the feminist revolution. However, this does not mean that Lessing is in any way belittling the notion of female empowerment. Through her works she demonstrates how women have to wage a savage war to preserve their individuality.

When Anna and Molly describe themselves as "free women," they are being consciously ironic — they do not feel "free," they are not actually "free" from social pressures and attitudes that constrain their potential and define them in terms of their relations to men, and because they are unmarried, men see them as sexual objects, "free" for the taking. Yet Lessing's early readers were right to see these characters' ability to recognize and reject the oppressive gender roles as an important, progressive, if not entirely revolutionary step in the second wave of western feminism. Anna and Molly recognize that, in the traditional marriages which predominate among their peers, men's economic labor is valued while women's emotional and domestic labor is made invisible — and those women who have begun to enter the workforce in limited ways also find their economic labor ignored. Under this system, women end up isolated, miserable, and unappreciated, living a sort of life Molly and Anna firmly believe they should not be forced to live; while they claim their "freedom" by refusing to do so, their true innovation

is not merely their decision to live as single mothers, but their deeper recognition that this "freedom" is also limited and inadequate without a broader transformation in gender relations.

This book shows how men's labor is always construed as extremely valuable even though it is invisibly supported everywhere by women. Molly's pompous, arrogant, dominating ex-husband Richard denigrates Molly and Anna for ostensibly not working hard enough but never acknowledges his wife Marion for taking care of the kids and spends his days at the office surrounded by secretaries and assistants who do most of the day-to-day work for which he takes credit. Anna, too, supports the men she dates not only materially, by cooking and cleaning for them, but also emotionally, by protecting their egos. In the blue notebook, she chronicles one day of frantically switching from one task to another, caring for her daughter Janet and lover Michael in the morning, working with the Communist Party without payment all day (further showing how her labor is undervalued) and making Janet and Michael a special dinner all night — but Michael never shows up and she ends up alone, in a dress she chose just for him, throwing out the veal she obsessed over making perfectly just to please him.

This unequal division of labor transforms marriage into an emotional and economic cage: women have no choice but to do domestic work yet are compensated neither formally nor informally, and they lose their husbands' romantic interest precisely for doing what the society demands of them. Marion's relationship with Richard attests to this: he has completely ignored her for years yet blames her for her alcohol abuse. She is miserable and tells Anna and Molly how much she wishes she could be "free" like them. However, when she finally grows close to Tommy, the first person to ever offer her serious attention and affection, she stops drinking, finds a passion for politics, and declares herself "free," to Richard's chagrin. Meanwhile, Anna's fictional alter ego Ella works at “Women at Home” magazine, the extraordinarily limited scope and style of which depresses her — her job is to write letters to neurotic housewives, who are driven mad by their confinement but not mad enough to be deemed properly "medical" by the womanizing Dr. West, who (absurdly enough) runs the women's advice column. The magazine's self-help angle is designed to help women accept their subordinate role rather than challenge it. When Ella visits her lover Paul Tanner's house, she finds that his wife — with whom he has scarcely spent a night in years — is an avid reader of the magazine. Paul is proud that his wife so openly embraces the role of a traditional housewife, but both he and Ella recognize that she is miserable because he has essentially abandoned her. So, even when Anna and Ella's affairs with men fail, they do not seek out marriage for their

own sake, because they know that their relative "freedom" saves them from the suffering of women like Marion and Paul's wife.

Ultimately, while Anna and Molly recognize that they are in no way "free" from patriarchy, by choosing divorce over unhappy marriages, they still avoid being held "prisoner." They also offer an important example for women like Marion, who decides to follow their path and finds herself to be perhaps the book's happiest character by its end. And, of course, Anna's relationship with Molly also serves a function similar to a kind of marriage (she even describes Ella and Julia, fictionalized versions of herself and Molly, as "Lesbian, psychologically if not physically"). The last time Anna describes a psychoanalysis session with Mrs. Marks, she decides to refuse others' expectations and "walk off, by myself, Anna Freeman." Crucially, at this moment, she uses her maiden name "Freeman," both referencing her previous freedom from marriage and playing on the title “Free Women”, which she soon reveals is her second novel, proof of her eventual ability to create and freedom from her emotional paralysis. While Mrs. Marks insists that women have always been able to, and will always be able to, live freely, Anna points out that claiming this freedom usually requires women to live like men — to become "Freeman" rather than Free Women — which does nothing to resolve the broader problem of women's subordination to men. This explains Anna's ultimate decision to become a marriage counselor at the end of “Free Women”, suggesting that solidarity among women can offer them the chance to live on their own, fulfilling lives, with or without men.

While many (mostly anxious male) critics complained that Lessing's characters hated, rejected, and dominated men, switching the gender hierarchy to put themselves on the top, the fact is that Lessing deliberately chose to show the opposite: Anna and Molly's freedom from marriage does not free them from patriarchy. Men continue to treat them as disposable and subordinate, and they remain stuck in unpaid domestic labor (Anna continues to organize her life around caring for her daughter Janet and serve as a metaphorical "welfare worker" for those around her, like Tommy). Lessing's feminism, while in many ways archaic and essentialist by today's standards, is the most radical in her recognition that women cannot simply achieve "freedom" by turning away from men, but must rather work to change the entire set of social relations that render their work, love, and humanity invisible to the men with power over them.

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6. Majoul Bootheina. *Doris Lessing: Poetics of Being and Time*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.
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ASSIGNMENTS

Essay Type Questions

1. Compare and contrast the characters of Anna and Molly.

2. Write a note on the issue of fragmentation in the novel *The Golden Notebook*.

3. Do you consider both Anna and Molly as "free women"? Substantiate your answer with proper textual references.

4. Comment on the significance of four different notebooks Anna maintains throughout the novel and show how they contribute to the postmodern narrative technique of the novel.

5. Through the characterization of Anna and Wulf Lessing actually tries to portray decline and disillusionment of Communism in the world. Do you agree? Discuss with close reference to the text.

6. Do you think female solidarity can help the women sustain their existence in the ruthlessly patriarchal world? Elucidate your argument providing illustrative textual references.

Short-Answer Type Questions

1. Write a short note on the characterization of Richard.
2. Illustrate how the job of writing novel proves therapeutic for Anna.
3. Comment on the treatment of women in the hands of men in the novel *The Golden Notebook.*
4. Critically comment on the psychological crisis of Tommy.
5. Write a short note on the parent-child relationship of the novel.

BLOCK – II

UNITS: 5 – 8

THREE SISTERS

BY

ANTON CHEKHOV

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

Unit 5 (a): Anton Chekhov Biography – Life and Works

Unit 5 (b): Act-Wise Summary of the Play

Unit 5 (c): The Socio-Political History of Russia and its Impact on the Thematic Aspects of the Play

Unit 6 (a): Analysis of the Major Characters

- **i. Character of Olga**
- **ii. Character of Masha**
- **iii. Character of Irina**

Unit 6 (b): Loss, Longing, and Nostalgia

Unit 6 (c): Waiting and Inaction

Unit 7 (a): The Search for Meaning and Purpose of Life and Existence

Unit 7 (b): The Passage of Time, Regret and Dissatisfaction

Unit 7 (c): Socio-cultural Dislocation, Belonging and Escape

Unit 8 (a): The Issue of Social Class and the Decline of Aristocracy
Unit 8 (b): The Symbol of Moscow
Unit 8 (c): Love, Romance Marriage and Disillusionment – Analysis of the Couples
References

Suggested Readings

Assignments

UNIT - 5

UNIT 5 (A): ANTON CHEKHOV BIOGRAPHY – LIFE AND WORKS

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860-1904) was a Russian playwright and a brilliant modern short story writer who is generally regarded as one of the greatest authors of all time. Along with Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg, Chekhov is often referred to as one of the three seminal figures of early modernism in the theatre.

His father ran a grocery store where he forced him to serve. He was physically abusive towards him which left a painful influence in his psyche. Interestingly, this agonising memory left a massive impact on his later works. In many interviews and write-ups, he severely criticised his father's tyranny which made their childhood frightening. After his father went bankrupt, his family had to move to Moscow for a new beginning. Chekov was left behind to sell all his family's belongings and finish his education. At that time, he had to pay for his education, which he could manage by doing different jobs such as private tutoring and selling short sketches to the newspapers. He used to send every Ruble to his family in Moscow until he himself joined them. In Moscow, he enrolled himself in the state medical university as a medical student and graduated as a doctor in due course. But he earned little money from his medical profession as he used to treat the poor free of cost.

In Moscow, Chekhov gradually became the primary breadwinner of the family. He began his literary career as a pseudonymous writer in humorous journals. He became quite famous within that section of the readers as a satirical chronicler of the Russian street life. He infused elements of human suffering and melancholy in his range of humorous works on vignettes of contemporary Russian life. At last, his inclination towards short comic works faded out and he concentrated on more serious themes to work on. Early in 1886, he was invited to write for the most popular paper of the time *New Times*, owned and edited by the millionaire Alexey Suvorin, who became his lifelong friend.

In 1887, he published a lengthy story entitled "Steppe" which describes a journey in Ukraine as seen through the eyes of a child. It is the first among more than fifty stories published in various journals until he died in 1904. His play *Ivanov* deals with the suicide of a

man who is Chekov's age. Though he mainly focused on solemn and grave themes during this period, the comic vein remained an underlying component of his works. The death of his brother Nikolai influenced "A Dreary Story," which belongs to a group among Chekhov's works that have been called clinical studies. They explore the experiences of the mentally or physically ill in a spirit that reminds one that the author was himself a qualified and practicing doctor.

In early 1890, he suddenly went on an expedition to a remote island named Sakhalin to seek refuge from the urban intellectual life. It was an imperial Russian penal settlement, situated on the other side of Siberia. Chekhov's journey there was a long and hazardous ordeal by carriage and riverboat. After arriving unscathed, he stayed there for three months, studying local conditions and conducting a census of the islanders. He also witnessed there incidents such as beating, embezzlement of supplies, forced prostitution, plight of children which shocked him profoundly. Upon returning he published his findings as a research thesis, which attained an honoured place in the annals of Russian penology: *The Island of Sakhalin* (1893–94). During the years before and after his Sakhalin experience, Chekov kept writing plays. He wrote *Wood Demon, Uncle Vanya, The Bear, The Proposal, The Wedding, The Anniversary,* etc.

During the disastrous famine of 1891-92 in Russia, Chekov worked tirelessly as a doctor. Then he moved into a village named Melikhovo with his aging parents and an unmarried sister. The Melikhovo period was the most creative one of his entire career. During the six years, he wrote "The Butterfly," "Neighbours," "An Anonymous Story," "The Black Monk," "Murder" and "Ariadne" and some others. The depiction of Russian village life and the sentimental portrayal of the villagers became a common motif in his works. Simultaneously, he created intriguing portraits of the urban intelligentsia and the commercial world. His works provide a panoramic and accurate study of the Russia of his day. In many of his stories, Chekov criticised the legendary Russian writer Leo Tolstoy. *The Seagull* was his only play from this period and was poorly received. On the very first night, Chekhov attended the theatrical production. After witnessing the negative reaction of the audience he went out in the middle of the play and vowed never to write any play again. However, in the later years, the play received positive reviews.

In 1897, Chekov went through a lung haemorrhage caused by tuberculosis and became semi-invalid. He sold his Melikhovo estate and moved into Yalta. He became attracted to a

young actress named Olga Knipper whom he eventually married. Chekov returned to dramatic productions during this period and his most significant plays, *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* were produced at that time. He wrote both plays for the Moscow Art Theatre but became dissatisfied with the performances. He died of tuberculosis within six months. Chekhov's posthumous reputation grew exceedingly, placing him in the second position as a literary celebrity in Russia, after Tolstoy. His works were also praised by several of Russia's most influential radical political thinkers. In Chekhov's lifetime, British and Irish critics generally did not find his work pleasing. Though already celebrated by the Russian literary public at the time of his death, Chekhov did not become internationally famous until the years after World War I, by which time the translations of Constance Garnett (into English) and of others had helped to publicise his work.

UNIT 5 (B): ACT-WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Three Sisters was written in 1900 which describes the lives of the Prozorov sisters as their fortune declines and they strive hard for a happy life against all adversities. The play also focuses on the complications faced by the urban people who are trapped in the rural lifestyle. It was first performed in 1901 at the Moscow Art Theatre, directed by Konstantin Stanislavski and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. The play opened to mixed reception then, and Chekhov disapproved of Stanislavski's direction. Since it was first produced, the play has been widely revived worldwide and is considered one of the greatest works of dramatic literature. Regarded by many as the playwright's masterwork, *Three Sisters*—the third of Anton Chekhov's four major full-length dramas—is his longest and most complex play. Chekhov's contemporary Maxim Gorky memorably praised it as the most profound and effective of Chekhov's plays.

Act I

Three Sisters opens one year after the death of the Prozorov father, Sergei. The three Prozorov sisters are sitting in their drawing room on the fifth of May. Captain Prozorov moved his family from Moscow to a Russian village eleven years earlier during his service in the army. On the anniversary of his death, his three adult daughters contemplate their futures. Olga, 28, works as a schoolteacher and a tutor after school hours, although she hates her job. She is dressed in her schoolteacher's uniform. Masha, 23, is the middle sister who is a trained concert pianist

but feels her artistic talents are wasted in her current surroundings. She is married to a schoolteacher named Feodor Kulygin. Previously, she was enchanted by his wisdom, but now she is disillusioned by her marriage. She is dressed in all black and reading a book. Irina, the youngest sister, is 20 years old and is wearing a white dress. She remains full of expectations and optimistic. She desperately wishes to return to Moscow where she assumes she will meet her true love. They grew up in Moscow and ardently desire to return to the happy life they once led there.

Olga speaks first, noting that it has been a year since their father died, on May 5th. Olga remembers that they left Moscow eleven years ago because their father was brought to the country by the military. They eagerly discuss their plans to return to Moscow and how much better life was for them there. Olga observes that Irina and Masha are still beautiful but she has lost her beauty. She looks old and thin and often becomes short-tempered while dealing with her students. She says that her life could have been better if she had been married and could stay home. Andrei is the only young man in the family and his sisters adore him. Irina thinks Andrei might become a professor and they can all return to Moscow with him. However, he has fallen in love with Natalia Ivanovna, also known as Natasha. She is quite "common" compared to the sisters and regarded by them with disdain.

In the village, the sisters have little scope for education, aspirations, or even socialisation, except for the soldiers who live there. It is Irina's birthday that day when the act begins. Unlike the lavish parties they used to throw in Moscow, Irina's birthday celebration will be attended only by a handful of those nearby soldiers. Guests begin arriving, including Tuzenbach, Solyony, and Chebutykin, an army doctor who has known the family for years. Also in attendance is the new commanding officer, Vershinin, a dashing soldier who knew the Prozorov family in Moscow. He is in his 40s, talkative, and married for the second time but his wife often attempts to commit suicide to get his attention.

In the gathering, Irina tells people that she thinks happiness comes from work, whether one is a labourer, a shepherd, or a schoolteacher. She thinks it is better to be engaged with any sort of work rather than being a young woman who awakes at noon, takes coffee in bed, and then spends two hours dressing. After Irina finishes talking about the virtues of work, Olga tells the men that Irina spends all morning in bed thinking. Tuzenbach agrees with Irina and says that he too has been cushioned by his privileged upbringing, but he would also like to work. Then he leaves the room and Irina guesses he has a present for her. Then the old servants,

Anfisa and Ferapont, bring in a cake that Mikhail Protopopov, the head of the District Council, has sent for Irina. Chebutykin enters with a silver samovar (a highly decorated tea set used in Russia). The sisters object to such expensive gifts.

Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin arrives and remembers meeting the sisters when they were just little girls. The sisters are delighted to learn that Vershinin is from Moscow, having served as an officer in their father's brigade. He even lived for a time on the same street. The sisters tell him they expect to move to Moscow by the autumn. Masha suddenly remembers Vershinin—when they were girls, they used to teasingly call him "The Lovesick Major." The group talks about the state of the world, whether life is improving, and whether there is a purpose to existence. Vershinin mentions the sisters' mother, and Masha remarks that she is beginning to forget her mother's face—and that someday, they, too, will be forgotten. Vershinin agrees that being forgotten is human destiny. He states that the things that seem significant to us will no longer seem important to future generations. Solyony just says, "Cluck, cluck, cluck" in mockery of their philosophical talk.

Offstage, Andrey is heard playing the violin. Irina explains that he is their family's scholar and will someday become a professor. Irina points out to the guests that Andrei has made several of the portraits in the house and he becomes embarrassed. He explains to the guests that their late father has tried to educate them in many spheres. Andrei discusses his scholarly frustrations, revealing that he can read in English, German, and French, and telling Vershinin that Irina knows Italian. Masha explains that knowing three languages in a town like this is useless. Vershinin launches into a monologue about the importance of education and imagines a beautiful and ideal future in which everyone is educated. Tuzenbakh agrees with Vershinin but says that to prepare for that "beautiful and amazing" life, one must work. Andrei has invited Natasha and the sisters tease him for her common upbringing, even her choice of clothes. The sisters all hope Natasha will marry the District Council head, Protopopov.

Suddenly, Kulygin, Masha's husband, comes in and offers Irina his good wishes and kisses his wife Masha. He is a teacher at the local school where Olga also teaches. When he gives Irina a book, she tells him he has already given it to her for Easter. Vershinin excuses himself, embarrassed that he did not know it was Irina's birthday, but they invite him to stay for lunch. Kulygin tells Masha that they have to go to a picnic at the Principal's house. Masha, at first, angrily refuses to go, then changes her mind. Masha complains about having to spend a boring evening with Kulygin's colleagues. Irina tells Tuzenbakh that when Masha married

Kulygin at 18, he seemed very intelligent to her. Although he is “the kindest of men,” he no longer seems so intelligent. Now that they are alone together, Tuzenbakh begins speaking to Irina about his love for her but she tries to cut him off by saying life is bad, but she must work.

Two special lieutenants, Fedotik and Rodet, arrive with a basket of flowers for Irina. Fedotik takes photographs and gives her a spinning top as a gift. Irina is delighted. Natasha arrives wearing a pink dress and a green belt. Seeing so many guests, she feels embarrassed. Olga comes out and says that her green belt does not go with her outfit. Natasha runs out of the hall, embarrassed. Andrey follows Natasha into the drawing room and begs her to stay. Natasha mournfully says that she is constantly being ridiculed by them. Andrey assures her that everyone is fond of her and does not mean any harm. They move out of sight of the other guests, and Andrey declares his love for Natasha and proposes marriage.

Act II

Act II flashes forward nearly two years. Andrey and Natasha are married and have a little boy named Bobik (Bobby). Andrey has developed a gambling problem, and Natasha is hinted to be having an affair with the District Council head Protopopov. Since marrying Andrey, Natasha has transformed from a shy young woman into a dominating one. She runs the house by ordering and manipulating everyone. She even tells her husband that Irina should move into Olga’s bedroom so that little Bobik can have his own room. The sisters had been planning a party that evening, but Natasha cancels it claiming Bobby is sick. Andrey laments about his life decisions as he is now the secretary of the District Council where Protopopov is the Chairman. He bemoans the lost dream of becoming a professor at the Moscow University. He exclaims that he is very lonely as “My wife doesn’t understand me, and I’m afraid of my sisters. Afraid they’ll laugh at me and make me ashamed of myself...” He wishes he were in Moscow, where “you don’t feel [like] a stranger.” In this provincial city, “everyone knows you, but you’re a stranger.”

Masha and Vershinin enter and it is gradually understood that a romance has developed between them. Masha does not find her husband Kulygin interesting anymore and Vershinin complaints about his quarrelsome wife. He begins telling Masha how much he loves her and kisses her hand. As Irina and Tuzenbach enter, they become embarrassed and change the subject. Tuzenbach also declares his love for Irina. Irina asserts that she needs to find a better job. She tells everyone that Andrei has probably developed a gambling habit and he has lost

200 Rubles in the club. She also emphatically says that she dreams every night about returning to Moscow "like a madwoman" and announces that they are definitely going to move there in June.

Vershinin suggests to Tuzenbach that they can talk about philosophy and assume what life will be after two or three hundred years. Tuzenbakh says that humanity will be fundamentally the same, even if technology and science will advance. Vershinin believes that people will be happier in the future. Even though they won't live to see it, they must work and suffer to create that happy life. Tusznbakh objects that Vershinin's view keeps happiness out of their reach. He argues that even a million years from now, life will remain the same. Masha interjects that unless people have faith and search for meaning, life is empty and nonsensical. Vershinin gets a message from his daughter, telling him that his wife has attempted suicide again. Tuzenbach says that he is resigning from the army and going to take up civil work in the hopes of impressing Irina. Solyoni, a brutish captain, also declares his love for Irina, but she immediately rejects him. Embittered, Solyoni vows to kill anyone else who attempts to woo her.

Natasha comes in and tells Irina that she must move in with Olga so that Bobik can have his room. Then a maid tells Natasha that Protopopov has arrived and has invited her to take a sleigh ride with him. She agrees and exits. Olga arrives home with a headache, exhausted from school and troubled by rumours of Andrey's gambling losses. After she and the guests leave the room, Irina finds herself alone and is "overcome by longing," saying, "Moscow! Moscow! Moscow!

<u>Act III</u>

A year later, a fire is raging in the town. A fire alarm rings incessantly, and people frantically rush through the house with supplies to help the townsfolk affected by the fire. Olga is handing out clothing for those whose homes have burnt. The Vershinins' house almost burned so they will be spending the night. Natasha comes in, saying they must form a charitable association to help the fire victims. She is quickly distracted by her reflection in the mirror, worrying that she looks bad while so many people are in the house. Natasha viciously reprimands Anfisa who is exhausted from helping, for daring to sit down in her presence. Anfisa is an old nurse who has served the Prozorov family for years. She tells Olga she does not understand why the Prozorovs keep the old woman, who is no longer capable of working much. She suggests that

the old woman should be sent back to the countryside which highlights her usurpation of household power. Angered by Natasha's attitude, Olga says that Anfisa has been with them for thirty years. Natasha stamps her feet and insists that she is in charge of the household, not Olga.

Conversations reveal that Chebutykin has become an alcoholic, and he laments that he has forgotten everything he knew as a young doctor. He delivers a monologue, complaining that he has lost his memory and become a horrible doctor. He cries while admitting that a woman died under his care because of his negligence. Irina, Tuzenbakh, and Kulygin come in and talk about arranging a benefit concert for the fire victims. Tuzenbach has left the army and taken up civilian work to impress Irina. Vershinin reveals no change in his unhappy existence: his wife continues to torment him and the children, leaving him to philosophise about the meaning of life constantly. Vershinin mentions that the brigade might be transferred to Poland soon; Irina says they will also be leaving for Moscow.

Andrey has mortgaged the sisters' house to pay his gambling debts, but Natasha has taken all the money. Irina laments that Natasha has led Andrey astray. The town laughs at him because he is oblivious to Natasha's affair with Protopopov, the chairman. Andrey comes to his sister and asks what they all have against him. He knows they have always disliked Natasha ever since his wedding day. Finally, he asks their forgiveness for mortgaging the house without their permission. He confesses that he has no income to pay his card-playing debts, though claims to have stopped playing cards now.

Masha comes and confesses that she loves Vershinin. Irina weeps that they won't be moving to Moscow after all. She works in the Town Council and hates it. Olga advises her sister to marry Baron Tuzenbakh. He may not be handsome, but he is "decent and honest," and "after all, we marry not for love but just to do our duty." Olga herself would marry without love, as long as a "decent man" proposed, even if he were old. Irina replies that she has been waiting until they move to Moscow—she dreams of meeting her true love there. But that has "turned out to be nonsense, all nonsense." Olga and Irina discuss the rumour that the brigade will be transferred somewhere far away. Finally, Irina says that she will accept Tuzenbach's marriage proposal, even though he is unattractive and she does not love him. She says, "Let us go to Moscow! I beg you, let us go! There's nothing better than Moscow in the whole world!"

Act IV

Another year has passed. The rumour of the soldiers leaving has turned out to be true. The sisters sit in their garden as the soldiers arrive to say goodbye. Fedotik takes a photograph to remember them and they march out for Poland. Tuzenbakh, retired from the military, observes that "a terrible boredom" will descend on the town in the brigade's absence. Kulygin says that with the Army's departure, everything will return to what it was before. He out of context says, Masha is "a fine, honest woman," and asks about Olga's whereabouts. Irina replies that Olga has now become the headmistress and that she lives at the gymnasium, leaving Irina alone and bored. Andrey admits that he finds Natasha "amazingly coarse," "not human" and "impossibly vulgar", now and cannot remember why he once loved her.

The wedding between Irina and Tuzenbach is imminent, but Irina remains depressed. Tuzenbach swears to be good to her and love her forever even if the feelings are never mutual. She has decided to start a teaching career after her marriage. Irina and Kulygin tell Tuzenbach that they have heard a rumour that Solyony loves Irina and lost his temper with Tuzenbakh the day before. Andrey also asks about the incident between them in the town. Solyony challenged him to a duel after an angry exchange of words. In fact, the time for the duel was approaching. Masha says this duel should not be allowed, as he could be killed.

Irina and Tuzenbach enter. She asks Tuzenbakh why he is so distracted today. He will not answer and does not want to discuss what happened with Solyony in town yesterday. He deflects by telling her that he has loved Irina for five years. He also knows she does not love him back in the same way. Irina tells him that she does not have it in her to love him. Then Tuzenbach says that he has an errand to do now and then will return to her. He again tells Irina how much he loves her and that they will go away together tomorrow and be happy. Irina weeps. She has never loved anyone. He kisses her again and walks off at a loss for words.

Natasha has had another baby, Sophia, but whether Andrey or Protopopov is the father is unclear. Andrey comes in, pushing the baby's carriage again. He wonders where time and hope have gone. Yet he imagines a better future when he and his children will be freed from this pathetic life. Natasha looks out the window and scolds him for loudly talking around the sleeping baby.

Olga has returned to their home. She says now that she has become headmistress, a job she never sought, she will not go to Moscow. Vershinin arrives to say goodbye and Masha gives him a long kiss. When Olga tells them to stop, Masha sobs. He asks her not to forget him

and quickly leaves. Olga tries to stop Masha's tears. After Vershinin leaves, Kulygin comes in and tells Olga to let her cry. Masha said that he would not say a word about it and that they could just go back to their life as it was. He says, "You are my wife and I am happy in spite of everything […] We will begin to live again as we used to and I won't say one word to you." Olga and Irina sit with Masha, trying to comfort her. Kulygin unquestioningly comforts her despite knowing she loves another man.

Suddenly the sound of a muffled gunshot comes from a distance. After a while, Chebutykin comes in and reluctantly whispers something in Olga's ear. Olga embraces Irina and struggles to tell her what has happened—Tuzenbakh has just been killed in the duel. Irina weeps: "I knew it, I knew it…" The three sisters stand clinging to one another. Masha says they must start life anew. Irina says that someday they will understand the reason for all this suffering, but for now, there is nothing to do but work. Irina does not mourn the loss, focusing instead on her teaching career. Olga hugs her sisters and says that although they will be forgotten in time, their suffering will become a joy for those who come after—if only they knew why they suffer. Drunk Chebutykin suggests life is meaningless and mutters, "What can it matter!" Olga laments again, "If only we knew, if only we knew!"

UNIT 5 (C): HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF RUSSIA AND ITS ROLE IN SHAPING THE THEMATIC ASPECTS OF THE PLAY

The historical background of Russia provides a crucial context for understanding Anton Chekhov's play *The Three Sisters*. Chekhov, a renowned Russian playwright and short story writer, lived during a transformative period in Russian history, marked by social, political, and cultural upheavals. The late nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the decline of the Russian Empire, the ending of the autocratic rule of the Romanov dynasty, the emergence of revolutionary ideas, and the eventual collapse of the old order.

Decline of the Romanov Dynasty in Russia

The last decades of the Russian Tsar Empire, spanning from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, were marked by significant political, social, and economic changes. Nicholas I, who reigned as the Tsar of Russia from 1825 to 1855, played a pivotal role in shaping the country during a period marked by conservatism and strict autocracy for which he

earned the moniker "Iron Tsar." He believed in the divine right of kings and upheld the principles of orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality as the guiding ideologies of the state. Fiercely opposed to liberal and revolutionary ideas, Nicholas I implemented a range of repressive measures to suppress any kind of dissent. The secret police force, the 'Third Section,' was established to monitor and crush opposition, leading to widespread censorship and smothering of intellectual freedom.

Nicholas I's reign focused on maintaining social stability and order, often at the expense of individual liberties. He resisted calls for political reform and upheld the traditional hierarchical structure of Russian society. His policies included the strengthening of serfdom, a system where peasants were tied to the land and subject to the will of their landowners. Nicholas I's emphasis on conservative values and autocracy contributed to suppressing social and political movements that advocated for change. The repressive measures implemented during his reign sowed seeds of discontent which ultimately led to the downfall of the Romanov dynasty during the Russian Revolution of 1917.

After the death of Nicholas I in 1855, the country's reins were handed over to his son, Alexander II, marking a period of significant socio-political transformation in Russia. Alexander II is often called the "Tsar Liberator" due to his transformative reforms. By the time he ascended the throne, the tradition of 'Serfdom' (labourers who were compelled to work on the lands of their owners without compensation) in Russia had almost become a form of slavery due to extreme oppression. Serfs were not only deprived of personal freedoms and possessions but were also bound to the land they toiled on, enduring heavy taxation to sustain the lavish lifestyles of their landowners. The Tsar saw a populace torn between oppressed serfs and disgruntled aristocrats. Recognising the volatile climate, Alexander II sought a compromise between landowners and the marginalised peasantry. Also, Nicholas I's rule had left the nation devastated by war and in financial ruin. In a landmark attempt to revive the country's economic vitality through societal reforms, Alexander II emancipated 23 million serfs from their lifelong contracts. The emancipation plan promised a series of social reforms aimed at freeing the serfs. Officially the former serfs were liberated to pursue education, secure the employment of their choice, and enjoy increased social mobility. Unfortunately, most of the emancipated serfs were receiving harsh treatment in the new societal structure. In reality, they were given very limited opportunities for advancement and often ended up living in conditions worse than those during their serfdom.

Despite his attempts at reform, Alexander II faced strong opposition from conservative elements within Russian society. In 1881, he was assassinated by members of the revolutionary group "The People's Will." Alexander II's assassination marked the end of significant liberal reforms in Russia, as the subsequent rulers, mainly his son Alexander III, took a more conservative approach, reversing some of the changes made during Alexander II's reign.

Alexander III ruled as the Tsar of Russia from 1881 to 1894 and his reign marked a return to conservative and autocratic policies after the comparatively liberal reforms of his father. Alexander III sought to undo many of the reforms implemented by his father, particularly those related to liberalisation and modernisation, believing that they had contributed to social unrest and political instability. He was a staunch advocate of autocracy and rejected any attempts to limit the monarchy's power. The government became increasingly repressive, with censorship tightened, and political activists subjected to harsh measures. To strengthen the cohesion of the Russian Empire, Alexander III pursued 'Russification' policies. This involved suppressing non-Russian cultures and imposing Russian language and traditions on the diverse ethnic groups within the empire.

Alexander III's reign set the stage for the rule of his son, Nicholas II, and the tumultuous events that would follow, including the Russian Revolution of 1905 and, eventually, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The repressive policies and resistance to political reforms during Alexander III's rule contributed to the discontent that fuelled revolutionary movements in the early twentieth century. Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia, ascended to the throne in 1894, succeeding his father, Alexander III. His rule was marked by political instability, economic challenges, and the eventual collapse of the Russian Empire. He inherited a vast and diverse empire grappling with socio-economic issues, including industrialisation, rural poverty, and a growing urban working class. Additionally, Russia's participation in World War I greatly strained the country's resources. Nicholas II continued the autocratic traditions of his predecessors, maintaining absolute power over the state. However, his rule lacked the firmness exhibited by the earlier Tsars. Nicholas was known for being indecisive and often swayed by those around him, leading to a perceived weakness in leadership.

Gradually, mass protests and strikes erupted across the country, demanding political reforms, workers' rights, and an end to autocracy. Russia's entry into World War I in 1914 exacerbated existing challenges. The strain of war, coupled with economic hardships and military defeats, intensified discontent among the population. In 1917, widespread protests and

mutinies erupted in Petrograd (St. Petersburg), leading to Nicholas II's abdication in March. The Provisional Government assumed power, marking the end of the Romanov dynasty and the beginning of a new chapter in Russian history. Nicholas II's rule is often associated with the decline and fall of the Russian Empire. His inability to address the pressing issues facing the country, coupled with a perceived detachment from the needs of the population, contributed to widespread disillusionment and paved the way for the revolutionary events of 1917.

Socio-economic and Cultural Changes

The late nineteenth century also saw significant socio-cultural changes in Russia. The country was undergoing a process of industrialisation during this period, leading to the gradual urbanisation of the society and the emergence of a new industrial working class. Cities expanded rapidly, attracting migrants from rural areas in search of employment opportunities. However, the urban working class faced harsh working conditions, low wages, and overcrowded living conditions, leading to social discontent and labour unrest. Strikes, protests, and labour movements became increasingly common as workers demanded better working conditions and political representation. Despite the abolition of serfdom in 1861, rural life remained marked by poverty, land shortages, and agrarian unrest. The emancipation of the serfs did not lead to widespread land redistribution, leaving many peasants landless or with insufficient land to support their families.

Additionally, the country was grappling with the tension between traditional values and the influence of Western ideas. Russia witnessed a flourishing of intellectual and cultural movements. The intelligentsia was a class of educated and socially conscious individuals (especially the middle class) who profoundly shaped the intellectual climate of the time. Writers, artists, and intellectuals challenged traditional values and questioned the legitimacy of the autocratic regime. Chekhov himself was part of this intellectual class, and his works often reflected the societal shifts occurring in Russia. These changes encompassed various aspects of Russian society, including shifts in class dynamics, the impact of modernisation and industrialisation, the emergence of revolutionary ideologies, and the questioning of traditional values. The late Tsarist era saw a widening gap between the privileged elite and the disenfranchised masses. The ruling aristocracy enjoyed wealth and privilege, while the working class faced harsh working conditions and economic hardships. The spread of

revolutionary and socialist ideologies among the intelligentsia contributed to the growing discontent with the Tsarist government.

The transition from Tsarist rule was ultimately precipitated by the cumulative effects of these social, political, and economic tensions. The February Revolution of 1917, sparked by widespread strikes, protests, and mutinies, led to the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the establishment of a provisional government. However, the provisional government's inability to address the deep-rooted problems facing Russia, coupled with the Bolshevik seizure of power in the October Revolution later that year, marked the end of the Russian Empire and the beginning of a new era in Russian history characterised by the establishment of the Soviet Union.

Influence on Chekhov’s literature

Anton Chekhov’s lifetime intersected with significant events in Russian history, particularly the period of transition from serfdom to emancipation. Born in 1860, just before the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861, Chekhov witnessed the aftermath of this pivotal decision in Russian society. He witnessed the reigns of three Tsars and his life ended within months of the ‘Bloody Sunday’ or ‘Red Sunday’ event. These tumultuous historical incidents shaped the outlook and writing of every writer in Russia, and Chekhov was no exception.

The emancipation of the serfs brought profound changes to the socio-economic landscape of Russia, impacting individuals across all strata of society, including Chekhov himself. The emancipation marked the end of centuries of serfdom, where peasants were bound to the land and subject to the whims of their landlords. It was a watershed moment, driven by a combination of economic, social, and political factors. In 1860, Anton Chekhov entered this transformed landscape, liberated from the shackles of serfdom by a grandfather who had purchased his freedom. This afforded Chekhov a degree of mobility within the Russian Empire and across Europe. He must have closely observed these tensions and complexities growing up in post-emancipation Russia.

The reforms introduced by Alexander II aimed to address some of the challenges faced by the former serfs. They were provided with greater rights and opportunities, such as the ability to purchase land and enjoy greater mobility. However, the reforms were not comprehensive enough to fully address the deep-rooted inequalities and tensions within Russian society. Chekhov’s observations of these social dynamics and his experiences living

in a rapidly changing Russia undoubtedly influenced his writings. His works often explore themes of social injustice, the human condition, and the complexities of Russian society during this period of transition. His life and work are deeply intertwined with the historical context of his time, particularly the emancipation of the serfs and its aftermath, reflecting the broader societal changes and tensions of late 19th-century Russia. The decline of the Tsarist rule coincided with significant changes in Russia's agrarian society. The emancipation of the serfs and the subsequent shifts in land ownership and agricultural practices impacted rural life. Chekhov's works frequently explore the lives of peasants and the challenges they faced in the changing socio-economic landscape.

Chekhov's lifetime coincided with the last decades of the Russian Empire. This period was characterised by a stark contrast between the privileged elite and the impoverished masses. The ruling Romanov dynasty faced increasing challenges from radical movements, including revolutionary and socialist ideologies. The rigid class structure and the vast economic disparities contributed to widespread dissatisfaction among the population. The decline of the Tsar's rule in Russia during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century profoundly impacted his literature. Chekhov was uniquely positioned to observe and reflect upon the social, political, and cultural changes that unfolded during this time. His literature is characterised by a keen observation of everyday life and a commitment to social realism. As the Tsarist regime faced mounting challenges and social tensions, his works became a medium for critiquing the existing social order. Through his plays and short stories, Chekhov depicted the struggles of various social classes, the disparities between the aristocracy and the common people, and the impact of societal changes on individuals. His characters often grapple with the uncertainties and challenges brought about by the decline of traditional structures.

Chekhov himself belonged to the educated intelligentsia, a class of individuals who played a crucial role in Russia's intellectual and cultural life. The intelligentsia became a prominent subject in Chekhov's works, reflecting the conflicts and dilemmas faced by those who sought to navigate the changing landscape of Russian society. The decline of the Tsarist rule and the emergence of revolutionary ideas led to a sense of disillusionment among the intelligentsia, and Chekhov's literature captured the complex emotions and moral quandaries of this class. Chekhov was a pioneer in exploring the complexities of human psychology and emotions. Against the backdrop of political and social upheaval, his characters grapple with

personal and existential dilemmas, reflecting the broader uncertainties of the era. The decline of the Tsarist regime created an atmosphere of instability and transition. Chekhov's characters often reflect the dissonance between personal desires and societal expectations, showcasing the psychological impact of historical change.

Anton Chekhov's literary style and thematic interests were profoundly shaped by the social and cultural milieu of his era. Recognised for his acute insights into human behaviour and his adeptness at portraying the subtleties of ordinary existence, *Three Sisters* delves into the lives of the Prozorov sisters as they yearn for deeper fulfilment. Through his play, Chekhov captures the poignant longing and disillusionment experienced by individuals constrained within a society undergoing significant change. Within *Three Sisters*, Chekhov delves into themes of longing, dashed hopes, and the inexorable march of time. The characters' desires for a brighter future and their wistful reminiscences reflect the pervasive societal dissatisfaction prevalent in Russia. Serving as emblematic figures of their era, the characters embody the societal upheavals and transformations of the time, encapsulating the broader historical and cultural shifts within the microcosm of the play.

During the era depicted in the play, Russia experienced a period of military peace, evidenced by the prolonged and uneventful stay of the Brigade in the Prozorovs' town. Nicholas II ascended to the throne in 1894 and upheld the autocratic traditions of the Romanov dynasty, suppressing dissenters who advocated for more democratic governance structures. Under Nicholas's rule, the vast Russian empire was administratively organised into 50 provinces, further subdivided into districts, overseen by a complex system of 14 ranks of civil servants. For example, Andrey Prozorov's ineffective service on the local District Council exemplifies this bureaucratic structure. Life in the provinces was often characterised as tranquil yet culturally stagnant, prompting the sisters' persistent longing to return to the rapidly modernising city of Moscow. A noticeable disparity existed between the lifestyles of the upper classes—comprising the aristocracy and provincial nobility—and those of the peasant and servant classes. Set against the backdrop of the pre-revolutionary era, the play brims with a palpable sense of restlessness and the gradual erosion of cultural unity.

During that time, life among middle- and upper-class families brimmed with artistic, cultural, and scholarly pursuits. The Prozorov family epitomised this bourgeois lifestyle, with children fluent in multiple languages and adept at playing classical instruments. They

embodied the affluent middle class whose social status and prosperity faced threats from the newly empowered lower classes. As education ceased to be a hallmark of privilege, the upper and middle classes leaned towards materialism, further accentuating their bourgeois veneer. While Russia underwent rapid transformations, most of these changes unfolded in urban centres, leaving rural villages dominated by impoverished, uneducated peasants under the church's sway. In contrast, major cities like Moscow thrived with cultural vibrancy. The Prozorov sisters, with their musical talents, linguistic prowess, and refined artistic sensibilities, would have thrived in such cosmopolitan settings.

The discontent among the serfs led to numerous uprisings, prompting the government to deploy troops to villages, including the one inhabited by the Prozorov family, in order to maintain order. Amidst the upheaval of the longstanding social hierarchy, certain lower class segments could ascend beyond their previous status, gaining newfound rights such as citizenship, autonomy in marriage, and property ownership. However, these advancements were tempered by the imposition of onerous redemption taxes, which disproportionately burdened the former serfs for the benefit of their former landowners. This societal transformation finds expression in Natasha's assertion of dominance within the Prozorov household, as the modest village girl supplants the educated, aristocratic sisters in positions of authority. The character of Natasha embodies the social changes and turmoil within *Three Sisters,* symbolising the evolving dynamics of Russian society in the late 19th century. Her ascent from a lower social stratum to a position of authority within the Prozorov family reflects the broader shifts in societal norms and values during this period.

Traditional hierarchies were undergoing a massive transformation in the wake of modernisation and urbanisation. Natasha's rise parallels the societal upheavals in Russia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The emancipation of the serfs in 1861 heralded an era of social unrest marked by calls for improved labour conditions and increased equality. However, Nicholas II's ineffective governance exacerbated tensions, leading to the revolutionary movements of 1905 and ultimately the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Like the sisters, the Russian elite yearned to return to a previous era of stability and prosperity. Yet, their failure to address the grievances of the lower classes precipitated the downfall of imperial rule and the ascent of communism. Natasha's narrative arc serves as a microcosm of these broader societal transformations, highlighting the complexities and repercussions of social change in late imperial Russia.

In conclusion, the historical background of late Imperial Russia provides a rich backdrop for understanding Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. The play poignantly reflects the societal upheavals, cultural tensions, and individual struggles that marked this transformative period in Russian history. Chekhov's ability to capture the complexities of human experience within the context of historical change contributes to the enduring relevance and significance of his work.

UNIT - 6

UNIT 6 (A): ANALYSIS OF THE MAJOR CHARACTERS

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ii. Olga

Olga Sergeyevna Prozorova, one of the titular sisters in Anton Chekhov's play *Three Sisters*, is a complex character whose personality and actions contribute significantly to the thematic depth of the play. She is 28 and the eldest of the three Prozorov sisters. By profession, she is a teacher at a girl's school – a job she finds exhausting. By the end of the play, it is informed that she has been promoted to the position of the Headmistress in that school. She assumes the role of caretaker and matriarchal figure in the family following the death of their father. She takes on the responsibilities of managing the household, caring for her siblings, and maintaining stability, order, and routine in their home. Her sense of duty and obligation is palpable throughout the play, as she sacrifices her personal desires for the sake of her family's well-being. She represents tradition and stability amidst the upheaval and uncertainty of the changing times. Her strong work ethic and sense of duty contribute to her character's portrayal as a reliable and dependable figure in the family. Olga demonstrates a deep sense of care and concern for her younger siblings by offering guidance and comfort during times of distress.

Olga navigates through a web of complex relationships with the other characters in the play. Her relationship with her younger sisters, Masha and Irina, is characterised by a deep sense of care and protection. She listens attentively to their concerns, provides a shoulder to lean on, and offers words of wisdom to help them navigate life's challenges in their provincial town. Olga's interactions with Colonel Vershinin, a military officer stationed in their town, are marked by a sense of intellectual connection and mutual understanding. They engage in thoughtful conversations about life, philosophy, and the passage of time, sharing a sense of

disillusionment with their respective circumstances. She and Kulygin (Masha's husband) have a curious relationship as he claims that he would have married Olga if he had not met Masha first. It is well understood that he and Masha are in an unhappy marriage since his wife is having an affair with Vershinin.

Olga's interactions with Dr. Chebutykin, the family doctor, are marked by a sense of respect and familiarity. Despite Chebutykin's eccentricities and fondness for alcohol, Olga treats him with kindness and compassion, recognising his role as a trusted friend and confidante. She listens patiently to his ramblings and offers words of encouragement, demonstrating a sense of empathy and understanding toward his struggles. Olga's relationship with Natasha, the new wife of their brother Andrei, is characterised by tension and conflict. Their relationship becomes strained as Natasha asserts control over the household and undermines Olga's authority. She struggles to assert herself against Natasha's domineering presence, leading to frustration and resentment towards her sister-in-law. At the end of the play, Olga takes their elderly servant Anfisa with her so that she will no longer be mistreated by their sister-in-law Natasha.

Olga is unmarried but wishes to marry a decent man. She initially holds an idealistic view of marriage and love, dreaming of finding a romantic relationship that will bring her happiness. However, as the play progresses and her own romantic prospects dim, she becomes more disillusioned with the idea of love as a source of personal happiness. Instead, she sees marriage as a pragmatic arrangement, influenced by social conventions and practical considerations rather than romantic ideals. Her commitment to the family's well-being leads her to prioritise practical concerns over matters of the heart, emphasising the sacrifices she makes for her family's happiness. Over time, she becomes resigned to the idea that she may never experience the kind of passionate love she once dreamed of. Instead, she accepts her role as a single woman devoted to her family, finding contentment in her duties as a caregiver and provider. Her observations of the romantic relationships and marriages of those around her also shape her views on love and marriage. She witnesses the disappointments and disillusionments experienced by her sisters and other characters, which further reinforces her pragmatic approach to love and relationships.

Olga exhibits a tendency towards emotional repression, often suppressing her own feelings and desires for the sake of maintaining harmony within the family. She struggles with inner turmoil and conflicting emotions, yet she rarely expresses these sentiments openly,

choosing instead to maintain a facade of stoicism and strength. Her emotional repression serves as a coping mechanism for dealing with the disappointments and disillusionments of life. Despite her outward appearance of composure and selflessness, Olga harbours a deep sense of discontent and unfulfilled aspirations. She yearns for a life beyond the confines of provincial existence in their small town and the monotony of her job as a schoolteacher. Her longing for something more meaningful and fulfilling is a central aspect of her character. Throughout the play, her character transforms from hopeful optimism to resignation and acceptance of her fate. She initially expresses hope for a brighter future, dreaming of returning to Moscow and finding fulfilment in her career. However, as the years pass and their dreams remain unrealised, Olga becomes increasingly resigned to their circumstances, recognising the futility of their aspirations.

Olga's thoughts about Moscow are often tinged with nostalgia and longing to return to the city where she and her sisters spent their childhood. Moscow represents a distant memory of happier times, a place where they were surrounded by family and friends. For Olga, Moscow embodies a sense of comfort and familiarity, evoking memories of a simpler and more joyful past. Despite her deep attachment to Moscow, Olga's thoughts about the city also reflect a sense of disappointment and unfulfilled dreams. Moscow becomes a symbol of escapism, a place where Olga believes she can leave behind the burdens of responsibility and duty that weigh heavily on her shoulders. However, as the play progresses, it becomes clear that Moscow exists more as a distant fantasy than a tangible reality. As the play unfolds, Olga's thoughts about Moscow become increasingly conflicted, as she grapples with the stark contrast between her idealised fantasies and the harsh realities of their present circumstances.

ii. Masha

Masha Sergeyevna Prozorova, one of the titular sisters in Anton Chekhov's play *Three Sisters*, is a complex and multifaceted character. Masha is depicted as a woman with intense emotions and passions. Unlike her older sister Olga, who is more reserved and pragmatic, Masha wears her heart on her sleeve, often expressing her feelings with fervour and intensity. She is not afraid to speak her mind or act on her desires, even when they conflict with societal expectations or the wishes of her family. Despite her outward display of confidence and assertiveness, Masha harbours deep-seated feelings of discontent and unfulfilled desires. Masha's relationships with her family members, particularly her sisters Olga and Irina, are

marked by a mix of love, jealousy, and rivalry. While she cares deeply for her sisters, Masha also harbours feelings of resentment towards them, particularly towards Irina, whom she sees as naive and idealistic. Despite their differences, the sisters share a bond forged by shared experiences and familial ties.

Her longing for passion and romance is palpable throughout the play, as she yearns for a deeper connection that eludes her within the confines of her marriage. Masha's marriage to Kulygin is primarily portrayed as one of duty and societal obligation rather than genuine love or affection. She entered into the marriage out of a sense of familial responsibility and social convention, rather than a deep emotional connection with her husband. Now she feels stifled and unfulfilled in her marriage, yearning for passion and excitement that she does not find with Kulygin. Her character is also defined by her forbidden love affair with Lieutenant Colonel Vershinin, a married man stationed in their town. Their clandestine relationship serves as a source of both excitement and torment for Masha as she grapples with the complexities of her feelings and the societal taboo surrounding their affair. Despite the risks and consequences, Masha cannot resist the allure of forbidden love, highlighting her rebellious and passionate nature. Their affair also represents a form of escapism from the monotony and disillusionment of her everyday life. She seeks refuge from the mundane realities of her marriage and provincial existence in the excitement and intensity of her relationship with Vershinin.

Throughout the play, Masha grapples with the conflict between her sense of duty as a wife and her desires for emotional fulfilment and romantic love. She is torn between her loyalty to Kulygin and her passionate feelings for Vershinin, struggling to reconcile the societal expectations placed upon her with her own yearnings for happiness and self-fulfilment. Masha's internal conflict highlights the complexities of navigating love and marriage within the constraints of societal norms and expectations. Despite the excitement and passion of her affair with Vershinin, Masha ultimately comes to realize the fleeting nature of their connection and the impossibility of finding lasting happiness in a forbidden love affair. Masha eventually tells her sisters about this affair and their lack of astonishment proves that it has been an open secret for quite some time. She is the most emotional one among the three sisters and openly cries when Vershinin leaves. After Vershinin's departure, Kulygin forgives her and recommits to their marriage, though Masha remains unsatisfied and bereft.

For Masha, Moscow evokes memories of a happier and more vibrant past. She fondly recalls the bustling streets, lively social scene, and cultural vibrancy of the city where she spent

her childhood. Moscow represents a distant dream of a life filled with excitement, opportunity, and possibility, far removed from the monotony and disillusionment of her current existence. Moscow also symbolises a sense of freedom and independence for Masha, offering an escape from the constraints and limitations of their provincial town. In Moscow, Masha imagines herself liberated from the societal expectations and obligations that weigh heavily upon her in their small community. The city represents a realm of endless possibilities, where she can pursue her desires and aspirations without fear of judgment or censure. She yearns to leave behind the monotony of her loveless marriage and the suffocating atmosphere of their provincial town in favour of the excitement and adventure that Moscow promises. However, as the play unfolds, Masha comes to realise the fleeting nature of her fantasies and the impossibility of finding true happiness in an idealised vision of Moscow.

iii. Irina

Irina Sergeyevna Prozorova in Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* is a character who undergoes significant development throughout the play. Irina, the youngest sister of the Prozorov family, is characterised by her youthful idealism and naivety. As the youngest and the most optimistic member of the Prozorov family, Irina undergoes significant character development throughout the play. Initially, she harbours dreams of a fulfilling life filled with meaningful work and romantic love. She enters the play with dreams of returning to Moscow, where she believes she will find true happiness. Irina's optimistic outlook toward life often contrasts with the harsh realities of their provincial existence, highlighting her innocence and lack of worldly experience.

Despite her initial naivety, Irina possesses a deep desire for purpose and fulfilment in life. She longs for meaningful work and opportunities to contribute to society, viewing her job as a telegraph operator as a step towards achieving her aspirations. Her search for purpose reflects her yearning for autonomy and self-determination, as she seeks to carve out her own path in a world filled with uncertainty and change. As the play progresses, Irina grapples with disillusionment and disappointment as her dreams of returning to Moscow remain unfulfilled. She becomes increasingly disillusioned with the realities of their provincial existence, as the monotony of daily life and the limitations of their social circumstances begin to wear on her optimistic outlook.

Irina's relationship with Baron Tuzenbach begins with a sense of mutual admiration. Tuzenbach is drawn to Irina's youthful innocence and idealism, while she admires his intelligence, kindness, and noble character. However, Irina's relationship with him is influenced by pragmatic considerations and societal expectations. Tuzenbach is seen as a suitable match as marrying him will guarantee stability and security. As their relationship progresses, Irina grapples with conflicting emotions and uncertainties about her future with Tuzenbach. Irina experiences moments of doubt and hesitation as she confronts the complexities of love, duty, and personal fulfilment. Irina's interactions with Tuzenbach challenge her to confront her own desires and fears, leading to moments of introspection and growth. Ultimately, her relationship with Tuzenbach becomes a symbol of lost dreams and unfulfilled aspirations.

At the beginning of the play, Irina holds romantic notions about love and marriage, viewing them through a lens of idealism and optimism. She dreams of finding true love and happiness, often fantasising about romantic encounters and the possibility of meeting her soul mate. Her youthful idealism colours her perceptions of love, leading her to believe in the transformative power of romantic relationships. As the play progresses, Irina's attitude towards marriage and love becomes more pragmatic and realistic. She begins to recognise the importance of stability and security in a romantic relationship, viewing marriage as a means of achieving financial independence and social status. Her desire for stability reflects her growing awareness of the practical considerations involved in choosing a life partner. She attracts many suitors in the play. Both Solyoni and Tuzenbach vie for her affections. By the play's conclusion, Irina resigns herself to the fate of spinsterhood, particularly after the tragic outcome of the duel between Solyoni and Tuzenbach. Irina's journey is marked by moments of disillusionment and disappointment as her romantic aspirations clash with the harsh realities of life. She experiences setbacks and heartaches in her pursuit of love, confronting the complexities of human relationships and the inevitability of compromise. Her struggle with disillusionment reflects the universal experience of coming of age, as she grapples with the tension between youthful idealism and the harshness of reality.

Moscow symbolises a symbol of hope and opportunity for Irina, offering the promise of a life filled with excitement, opportunity, and possibility. She sees the city as a place where she can pursue her dreams and aspirations, escaping the monotony and disillusionment of their provincial existence. Moscow represents a realm of endless possibilities, where Irina imagines

herself achieving success, happiness, and fulfilment in her personal and professional life. Her thoughts about Moscow are tinged with nostalgia and longing for a past she remembers fondly. She recalls the vibrant streets, bustling social scene, and cultural vibrancy of the city where she spent her childhood, yearning to return to a time when life seemed full of promise and excitement. Moscow evokes memories of happier days for Irina, serving as a reminder of the joy and innocence of youth that she longs to recapture.

She yearns to leave behind the monotony of their everyday existence in favour of the excitement and adventure that Moscow promises. The city becomes a symbol of freedom and independence for Irina, offering her a chance to break free from the constraints of societal expectations and carve out her own path in life. Irina's thoughts about Moscow often take on a fantastical and idealised quality, as she imagines the city as a utopian paradise where all her dreams can come true. Moscow becomes a beacon of light amidst the darkness of her everyday life, offering her a glimpse of a brighter future filled with possibility and potential. However, this idealised vision of Moscow remains largely out of reach, existing more as a distant fantasy than a tangible reality for Irina.

UNIT 6 (B): LOSS, LONGING AND NOSTALGIA

In Anton Chekhov's play *Three Sisters* the themes of loss, longing, and nostalgia are woven intricately throughout the fabric of the characters' lives, driving much of the narrative and imbuing the play with a sense of poignant melancholy. These themes reflect the universal human experience of yearning for a better life, a return to the past, or a sense of belonging that often eludes us. One of the central motifs in *Three Sisters* is the characters' nostalgia for their former life in Moscow. The Prozorov sisters—Olga, Masha, and Irina—repeatedly express their longing to return to the bustling city where they spent their youth. Moscow represents a symbol of happiness, fulfilment, and intellectual stimulation that contrasts sharply with their current existence in a provincial town. The sisters' nostalgia for Moscow serves as a driving force in the play, shaping their hopes, dreams, and aspirations. They cling to the memory of Moscow as a source of comfort and solace amidst the monotony and dissatisfaction of their present lives.

The play opens with Olga, the eldest sister, stating that it is May 5, the first anniversary of their father's death on a cold, snowy night. She remarks, "I thought I wouldn't live through it, and you lay in a faint as if you were dead". This opening speech introduces a strong sense of loss and grieving into the play and her words convey a profound sense of loss and mourning. Despite the initial pain, Olga notes a transformation in their emotions, suggesting a gradual healing process. She continues, "But now a year has passed and we're remembering it without pain, you're wearing white again, your face is radiant". It is discernible that the earlier sense of loss and grief have eventually been subdued over time. When Olga reminiscences further about the day of their father's death, Irina tries to avoid the topic and says, "Why bring it all back!" Gradually, the tragic issue of the loss of the father metamorphoses into the loss of Moscow. Olga's memory transfers into remembering about the home they left in Moscow. She contrasts their present provincial town's coldness with memories of a vibrant Moscow from eleven years ago. She vividly describes the warmth and beauty of spring in Moscow, expressing a deep longing for their former home: "already in bloom . . . warm . . . [and] bathed in sunshine.. saw spring, and joy welled up in my soul . . . I had a huge longing for home". Through Olga's words, Moscow emerges as a symbol of comfort and belonging for the sisters, encapsulating their shared desire for a return to a happier time.

The narrative of the play is permeated with their wistful longing for the former life in Moscow. For years, they cling to the hope of a swift return to the city, believing it to be a panacea for their dissatisfaction. Moscow represents an idealised realm where everything surpasses their current existence in the village: the people are more cultured, the social gatherings more lively, and the potential suitors more alluring. Irina, in particular, harbours a steadfast conviction that her true love awaits discovery in Moscow, dismissing the notion that it could ever be found in the provincial setting. Their nostalgia for Moscow is deeply rooted in memories of a more affluent and socially esteemed existence. In contrast to their current circumstances, life in Moscow was marked by the presence of both parents, a bustling social scene, and the prestige associated with belonging to the upper echelons of society. However, the loss of their parents further exacerbates their yearning for the past, serving as a poignant reminder of a time when their family was whole. Interestingly, their longings for Moscow lack practical considerations such as transportation arrangements, living arrangements, or employment prospects. These longings appear to be more of an emotional escape or fantasy rather than a concrete plan. The idea of returning to Moscow serves as a symbol of comfort and nostalgia, offering solace in the midst of their dissatisfaction with their current lives. It's a

longing for a place of familiarity and belonging rather than a realistic aspiration with tangible steps toward realisation.

Beyond their specific desire to return to Moscow, the sisters' longing encompasses a broader yearning for a more meaningful and fulfilling existence. They grapple with existential questions about the purpose of their lives and the pursuit of happiness. Each sister expresses her own unique aspirations and desires: Olga longs for stability and purpose in her role as a schoolteacher, Masha yearns for love and passion outside her unhappy marriage, and Irina dreams of finding true love and fulfilling her potential in her career. The characters in the play are deeply discontented with their current circumstances, feeling trapped and stifled by the limitations of their provincial life. They struggle to find fulfilment in their roles as daughters, sisters, wives, and teachers. A profound sense of discontent permeates the play, manifesting in various forms: Irina's disillusionment with her current job, Masha's frustration with her loveless marriage, and Olga's resignation to a life devoid of excitement or passion. The characters experience loss in different ways also. The love story of Colonel Vershinin and Masha remains unfulfilled as his military duties force him to relocate, leaving Masha heartbroken. Meanwhile, Kulygin remains oblivious to Masha's infidelity, praising her virtues even as she secretly meets with Vershinin. Eventually, Kulygin learns of Masha's affair but chooses to forgive her, though their relationship is irreversibly altered. With Vershinin's departure, Masha returns to Kulygin, but their reunion is tainted. It is understandable that a sense of loss will cast its shadow forever. Before marrying Natasha, Andrey was moving towards a promising academic career and had musical talents. He lost those dreams and now toils under the drudgery of a secretarial job and family responsibilities. He mourns the loss of his youthful dreams and the brightness of his past, now overshadowed by financial troubles and marital discord. Andrey mournfully exclaims, "Oh where is it now, where has my past gone, the time when I was young, merry, clever, when I had fine thoughts, fine dreams, when my present and my future were lit up by hope?" By Act Three, Andrey's gambling addiction and mounting debts drive him to desperate measures, including mortgaging the family home without informing his sisters. His unhappy marriage further intensifies the sense of loss. Despite Chebutykin's counsel to abandon Natasha, Andrey remains entangled in their troubled marriage, grappling with his wife's infidelity and his own sense of resignation.

The narrative of the play is imbued with feelings of boredom, waiting, longing and meaninglessness. The play might be described as a series of gatherings among four siblings,

their spouses, and several military officers, each character waiting and longing for something that never materialises. The characters somehow remind us of Vladimir and Estragon in their moments of perpetual waiting. Throughout the play, characters engage in conversations about life's meaning, sharing their experiences of loss, grief, and grievances, all the while waiting for things to change. Amidst these exchanges, the sisters' constant longing to return to Moscow pervades the entire narrative, echoing the perpetual wait in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Much like Vladimir and Estragon perpetually waiting for someone's arrival in *Godot,* Chekhov's characters wait for departure which remains elusive. Through this overarching theme of longing, Chekhov interweaves various events that animate shifting perspectives on love, work, and the meaning of life, while also addressing themes of class distinctions. Through these interactions, Chekhov captures the essence of human existence, where hope and longing mingle with disappointment and uncertainty, shaping the characters' collective journey.

Their lives are consumed by the present moment, leaving them trapped in a cycle of longing and despair. Moreover, the characters' lofty aspirations for the future are revealed to be hollow and devoid of substance. Their grandiose pronouncements about returning to Moscow ring hollow in the face of their inability to take decisive action to realise their dreams. In their fixation on the past, the sisters fail to embrace the present moment, forfeiting whatever semblance of happiness they may have had. This is evidenced by the deterioration of Masha's marriage, Irina's failed engagement, and Olga's perpetual discontent with her work. Their inability to adapt to their current reality culminates in the loss of their home to Natasha, symbolising her ascent to power within the family. Despite their fervent longing and desires for change, the characters in *Three Sisters* find that happiness remains elusive and out of reach. Their attempts to escape their current circumstances or find meaning in their lives often end in disappointment or disillusionment. The play explores the human tendency to idealise the past or yearn for a better future, only to discover that true happiness lies in acceptance of the present moment and embracing life's uncertainties.

UNIT 6 (C): WAITING AND INACTION

The themes of waiting and inaction permeate the play, symbolising the characters' sense of longing, stagnation, and disillusionment in the face of unfulfilled dreams and aspirations. It also epitomises their inability or unwillingness to take control of their lives and pursue their

dreams. Through the motif of waiting, Chekhov explores the human condition, depicting the characters' struggles to find meaning and purpose amidst the passage of time and the anticipation of a better future. He attempts to also show the consequences of passivity, indecision, and complacency in the face of personal and societal challenges. The sisters—Olga, Masha, and Irina—spend much of the play waiting for their lives to change, longing for the return to their beloved Moscow, where they believe they will find fulfilment and happiness. They find themselves trapped in a state of inertia, longing for change but unable to take decisive action to achieve it. Despite their aspirations for a better life and a return to their beloved Moscow, they remain mired in the monotony and disillusionment of their provincial existence.

The theme of waiting is further underscored by the characters' stagnant lives and unfulfilled desires. Their lives seem to be driven by a sense of aimlessness and dissatisfaction, waiting for something—or someone—to rescue them from their mundane existence. Whether it be through marriage, career advancement, or a return to Moscow, the sisters cling to the hope that their lives will eventually change for the better. Their inaction is further underscored by the characters' reluctance to confront their own desires and confrontations. The sisters deal with personal struggles and unfulfilled desires, yet they fail to assert themselves or pursue their aspirations with conviction. Instead, they resign themselves to the status quo, allowing external circumstances and societal expectations to dictate their lives. Their inertia is characterised by a sense of resignation and apathy, as they passively wait for their circumstances to improve without actively working towards change. However, their dreams of returning to Moscow remain elusive, and they find themselves trapped in a cycle of longing and waiting.

Richard Gilman in a much praised book on Chekhov's plays, has attempted to link Chekhov's play with Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. These two plays share many identical themes. According to him, both plays abound with "Eventful immobility, or movement around a still centre, or a circle, or a series of flat planes rather than a more or less straight line". The sisters' relentless waiting is similar to the two tramps in Beckett's text. As Irina laments in Act III, "Life is passing and will never return, never, we will never go to Moscow... I see that we will never go…" The sisters' relentless longing to return to Moscow symbolises their hope for a more meaningful existence, yet their aspirations remain perpetually deferred, leading to a sense of futility and disillusionment. Under the shadow of hope endlessly deferred, the three sisters "see no meaning in their lives, in their sufferings". As Irina's lamentation suggests, the sisters are acutely aware of the fleeting nature of life and the inevitability of missed

opportunities. Despite their dreams of returning to Moscow, they resign themselves to the reality that their hopes will never materialise, condemning them to a life devoid of purpose or fulfilment.

Three Sisters can be seen as a true embodiment of the consequences of inactive waiting in human life. Chekhov's exploration of absurdity in the play diverges from Beckett's approach by focusing not on external circumstances but on the characters' internal struggles and inertia. Irina believes that "there is nothing in the world better than Moscow." Despite lacking any tangible obstacles to reaching Moscow, the sisters remain immobilised, unable to take meaningful action to change their circumstances. As Borny asserts "Chekhov's play does not depict a world in which there is nothing to be done, but one in which no one is doing anything". The characters' inertia and passivity in *Three Sisters* make their lives absurd. This inertia transforms their lives into a passive waiting game, as they cling to the illusion of a better future that never materialises. Chekhov paints a bleak picture of a world devoid of hope, where ordinary people lead monotonous lives in provincial Russia. Their daily routines are characterised by mundane activities such as playing cards, gossiping, and drinking vodka, all while grappling with a sense of emptiness and ennui.

The characters' discussions about the future reflect their philosophical resignation to their fate. They have lost hope for any meaningful change, resigning themselves to a life of stagnation and disillusionment. Chekhov's portrayal of their existential malaise underscores the absurdity of human existence, where the pursuit of happiness and fulfilment remains elusive amidst the suffocating monotony of everyday life. "They play cards, gossip, philander, drink vodka, and go to their offices without ever being able to overcome their ennui. . ." The characters' sense of loss and disillusionment further underscores the theme of passive waiting. The sisters passively wait for their future to come in a changed way. Such passive waiting leads to more unhappiness with the present life as well as to more disappointment. Masha is not happy with her marriage to a person she mistakenly though as being intelligent. Kulygin has disappointed Masha to the point that she is also passively waiting for a change as well. She thinks her husband is "not fine enough, gentle enough". She finds life meaningless and is almost most of the time suffering from constant headaches, and always tired of her job as a teacher. For her, life is empty and boring.

Masha and Vershinin's failed love affair, Andrei's lost ambition, and Irina's shattered dreams of a future husband all serve as poignant reminders of the characters' inability to escape

the suffocating ennui of their provincial existence. Their lives are consumed by the present moment, leaving them trapped in a cycle of longing and despair. Moreover, the characters' lofty aspirations for the future are revealed to be hollow and devoid of substance. Their grandiose pronouncements about returning to Moscow ring hollow in the face of their inability to take decisive action to realise their dreams. Instead, they passively wait for change to come, resigned to their fate as passive observers of their own lives. Ultimately, Chekhov's exploration of the theme of passive waiting underscores the absurdity of human existence and the futility of clinging to false hopes and illusions. The characters' inability to break free from the cycle of waiting reflects the profound sense of alienation and despair that pervades their lives. Through their plight, Chekhov invites audiences to confront the existential challenges of life and grapple with the uncertainty of the human condition.

The motif of waiting also reflects the broader socio-political context of late 19th-century Russia, characterised by social upheaval, economic instability, and cultural stagnation. The characters' longing for a better future mirrors the collective disillusionment and discontentment felt by many Russians during this period of transition and uncertainty. Similarly, the theme of inaction is reflected in social stagnation, political repression, and cultural malaise. The characters' passivity mirrors the collective sense of disillusionment and helplessness felt by many Russians during this period of societal upheaval and uncertainty. Additionally, the theme of waiting serves as a commentary on the human condition, highlighting the universal experience of longing and anticipation in the face of uncertainty and adversity. On the other hand, the motif of inaction highlights the universal tendency towards procrastination, indecision, and avoidance in the face of adversity.

The theme of waiting in *Three Sisters* is tinged with a pervasive sense of negativity, as none of the sisters ever make progress towards their dream of returning to Moscow. Despite their hope, enthusiasm, and ability to change their circumstances, they remain trapped in their stagnant lives. Chekhov's portrayal of this negative attitude towards life is reflective of the zeitgeist of the early 1900s, a time of societal upheaval and disillusionment. In Rosamund Bartlett's biography, *Chekhov: Scenes from A Life*, the play is interpreted as embodying pessimistic views towards life and its meaning. Tusenbach and Vershinin's long speeches appear to be mere long philosophies about life and their long words substitute their impotency in taking any action. The approximately nonsensical monologue. Chekhov's scepticism towards revolutionary ideals, which promised to bring about peace and harmony through the

overthrow of the old order, is evident throughout the play. The rural setting of the play serves as a backdrop to Chekhov's critique of the injustices and cruelties of Russian society. Despite being disconnected from metropolitan culture, Chekhov's characters are deeply affected by the social and political movements of the time. *Three Sisters*, written in 1901, reflects Chekhov's engagement with the philosophical and political ideas of his era, as he grapples with the complexities of Russian society and its uncertain future.

UNIT - 7

UNIT 7 (A): THE SEARCH FOR MEANING AND PURPOSE OF LIFE AND EXISTENCE

In Anton Chekhov's play *Three Sisters*, the theme of the search for meaning and purpose in life and existence is a central motif that resonates deeply throughout the narrative. Through the characters of Olga, Masha, and Irina Prozorov, Chekhov explores the universal human desire to find fulfilment and significance amidst the challenges and uncertainties of existence. The Prozorov sisters are depicted as intelligent and sensitive individuals who yearn for a life that is meaningful and fulfilling. Despite their once-privileged background, they find themselves trapped in a provincial town, far removed from the cultural and intellectual stimulation of their former home in Moscow. Each sister expresses her own unique aspirations and desires: Olga longs for stability and purpose in her role as a schoolteacher, Masha yearns for love and passion outside her unhappy marriage, and Irina dreams of finding true love and fulfilling her potential in her career.

Throughout the play, the sisters confront the gap between their idealised visions of the future and the harsh realities of their present circumstances. They struggle to find meaning in their lives and often feel trapped by the constraints of social expectations and personal obligations. Their attempts to find fulfilment outside their current roles and responsibilities often end in disappointment, highlighting the challenges of reconciling personal desires with societal norms and expectations. Despite their setbacks and disappointments, the sisters continue to search for happiness and fulfilment, refusing to resign themselves to a life of quiet desperation. They cling to the hope of a brighter future, whether through romantic fantasies, intellectual pursuits, or dreams of returning to Moscow.

The Prozorov sisters navigate the intricacies of change and suffering as they seek to comprehend the purpose of their existence. Through their encounters with individuals like Vershinin, an intellectually inclined army officer, and Chebutykin, a disenchanted family friend, they get to know about contrasting perspectives on life's meaning. Vershinin offers an abstract and optimistic outlook but Chebutykin, who struggles with personal failures, presents a more pessimistic view. Vershinin's attitude towards life is characterised by abstract optimism. He views present challenges as temporary and believes that humanity is moving towards a future filled with happiness, even though they will not be here anymore to experience it. According to him, progress is an unstoppable force in human existence, and each person's actions in the present contribute to shaping a better future for generations to come. This outlook encourages people to battle and endure present difficulties with the belief that they are actively contributing to the creation of a brighter tomorrow, even if the exact outcome will not impact them personally. He passionately states, "In two or three hundred or even a thousand years—the point isn't in the precise period—a new, happy life will dawn. Of course, we won't take part in that life, but we are living for it now, working, yes, suffering, we are creating that life—and in this alone lies the goal of our existence and, if you like, our happiness."

Following a devastating fire that ravages the town, Vershinin engages in profound philosophical reflection, contemplating the transient nature of human existence. Despite the chaos and terror of the moment, he maintains a detached perspective, drawing parallels between the fire and historical conflicts of the past. He states, "And when my [daughters] were standing at the door in just their night clothes and the street was red from the fire and the noise was terrifying, I thought that it must have been something like this many years ago when an enemy attacked suddenly and pillaged and burned […] And when just a bit more time goes by, say two or three hundred years, people will look at our life today both with alarm and with mockery […]". Vershinin implies that the trials and tribulations of today will eventually be trivialised by the passage of time. Vershinin's optimistic outlook implies a belief in the inherent progress of humanity. He envisions a future where society has evolved to such an extent that present-day hardships are regarded with disdain and amusement. This perspective encourages individuals to transcend their immediate struggles and embrace a broader understanding of life's trajectory. Vershinin's perspective suggests that individuals possess agency in shaping their perception of life and existence. He proposes that people can subjectively determine the meaning of life by choosing how they interpret their experiences. Rather than submitting themselves to a life of despair or resisting the inevitable change,

Vershinin advocates for an attitude of optimism and acceptance towards life. In doing so, he highlights the transformative potential of perspective in finding meaning and purpose amidst life's uncertainties. By embracing a forward-looking outlook, Vershinin urges individuals to rise above their immediate challenges and imagine a future where present hardships are mere fleeting moments in the vast tapestry of human existence. His words serve as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and its ability to find significance in even the most difficult circumstances. In stark contrast, Chebutykin's outlook on life is steeped in personal despair and resignation. His contemplations are shadowed by remorse over past shortcomings, prompting him to question the very purpose of his existence. Unlike Vershinin's hopeful optimism, Chebutykin's viewpoint emphasises the existential dread which is associated with life's inevitable uncertainties and disappointments. Through Chebutykin's narrative, Chekhov paints a cautionary picture, warning against the dangers of yielding to despair when faced with life's challenges. Chekhov employs these divergent perspectives to underscore the intrinsic ambiguity surrounding the meaning of life. While Vershinin's optimism presents a glimmer of hope, Chebutykin's despondency reflects the grim realities of human experience.

As the play progresses, the sisters come to realise the futility of their dreams and aspirations, leading to a sense of resignation and acceptance of their fate. They recognise the inevitability of change and the transient nature of human existence, coming to terms with the limitations of their own agency. Despite their disillusionment, the sisters find solace in their bond with each other, drawing strength from their shared experiences and mutual support. Their acceptance of life's uncertainties and imperfections symbolises a mature understanding of the complexities of human existence. *Three Sisters* explores the theme of the search for meaning and purpose in life with sensitivity and depth, portraying the universal human struggle to find gratification amidst the challenges and uncertainties of existence. Through the characters of Olga, Masha, and Irina Prozorov, Chekhov offers profound insights into the complexities of human longing and the eternal quest for happiness and meaning.

Irina grapples most with the existential question of purpose, yearning to imbue her life with significance and meaning. As the youngest of the sisters, she perceives a vast expanse of possibilities stretching before her, yet struggles to discern a path that resonates with her innermost aspirations. Faced with the daunting task of shaping her own destiny, she is left with a profound sense of uncertainty and apprehension. In her quest for purpose, she arrives at the

conviction that meaningful fulfilment lies in productive labour. This notion finds resonance in her relationship with Tusenbach, who shares her belief in the intrinsic value of industrious endeavour. Together, they envision a future marked by toil and purpose, forging plans to embark on a journey of shared labour and commitment. Despite the tragic demise of Tusenbach, Irina remains steadfast in her resolve, determined to pursue their shared vision of purposeful existence even in his absence. The narrative portrays Irina's journey as a poignant exploration of the human quest for purpose and fulfilment, underscoring the complexities inherent in navigating the existential terrain of self-discovery and meaning-making. Irina's resilience and unwavering determination serve as a testament to the indomitable human spirit, even in the face of adversity and loss. Through her journey, the play offers a profound meditation on the pursuit of purpose and the transformative power of labour in shaping individual destinies. The play thus ends as it began: With themes of life and death, or death and life intertwined. Irina says, "A time will come and everyone will know the reason for all of this, all this suffering . . . but for the time being we must live, we must work, just work!"

UNIT 7 (B): THE PASSAGE OF TIME, REGRET, AND DISSATISFACTION

In Anton Chekhov's play *Three Sisters*, the theme of the passage of time and regret permeates the narrative, infusing it with a sense of melancholy and introspection. Through the characters' reflections on the past, present, and future, Chekhov explores the fleeting nature of time and the profound impact of regret on the human psyche. Throughout the play, the characters engage in nostalgic reminiscences about their former life in Moscow and the happier times they shared together as a family. Moscow becomes a symbol of the sisters' lost youth and innocence, representing a time of hope, excitement, and possibility. The characters' reflections on the past underscore their longing to return to a happier time, highlighting the transient nature of human existence and the inevitability of change. As the play progresses, the characters come to realise the futility of dwelling on the past and lamenting missed opportunities. They grapple with feelings of regret and disappointment as they confront the gap between their idealised visions of the future and the harsh realities of their present circumstances. The theme of regret underscores the characters' recognition of the irreversibility of time and the impossibility of reclaiming what has been lost. Their poignant reflections on the past serve as a reminder of the fleeting nature of human existence and the inevitability of change.

Time emerges as a central motif in *Three Sisters* as the characters confront the inexorable march of time and its effects on their lives. The play spans several years, allowing the audience to witness the characters' growth, evolution, and eventual disillusionment. The characters experience the passage of time in different ways: some embrace change and adapt to new circumstances, while others struggle to come to terms with the passage of time and its impact on their hopes and dreams. As the characters confront the realities of their lives, they grapple with the burden of unfulfilled dreams and aspirations. They come to realise that time waits for no one and that their opportunities for happiness and fulfilment are finite. The theme of regret underscores the characters' recognition of the consequences of their choices and actions, highlighting the importance of living authentically and embracing life's uncertainties. Ultimately, the characters in *Three Sisters* come to accept the inevitability of change and the impermanence of human existence. They recognise the futility of dwelling on the past and instead focus on finding meaning and purpose in the present moment. While the characters may experience moments of regret and longing, they ultimately find solace in their bond with each other, drawing strength from their shared experiences and mutual support. Their acceptance of life's uncertainties and imperfections symbolises a mature understanding of the complexities of human existence.

Chekhov's works are fundamentally preoccupied with the complexities of ordinary existence. He once famously expressed, "All I wanted was to say honestly to people: 'Have a look at yourselves and see how bad and dreary your lives are!'" He famously expressed this desire to candidly depict the dreariness and flaws of human life, a sentiment he faithfully encapsulated in *Three Sisters*. The prevailing sentiment is one of discontentment, with the sisters bearing the weight of dissatisfaction that permeates every aspect of their provincial existence, from their occupations to their marital unions and their aspirations for the future. At the outset of the play, Olga articulates her discontentment with her role as a schoolteacher, while Masha bemoans the state of her marriage. As the narrative unfolds, the sisters try to come to terms with their dissatisfaction, desperately seeking glimpses of happiness, however fleeting or incomplete they may be. Olga throws herself into her work and earns a promotion to headmistress, yet remains trapped in a cycle of unhappiness and overwork. Masha embarks on an affair with Vershinin, only to face heartbreak when circumstances force him to depart. Meanwhile, Irina resigns herself to marrying Tuzenbach despite lacking genuine affection for him, only to witness his untimely demise in a duel with Solyoni. They regrettably confront the harsh reality that their dreams of returning to Moscow will never be realised. As the curtains

draw to a close, none of the characters finds solace or contentment, underscoring the pervasive theme of dissatisfaction and regret that pervades the play. Ultimately, Chekhov leaves audiences with the sobering realisation that accepting one's unhappiness without complaint is an inescapable facet of life's harsh realities. Despite Irina's optimism about finding love and meaningful employment, she acknowledges the pervasive disappointment that has characterised their lives thus far, "You say that life is beautiful ... The life of us three hasn't been beautiful yet; it has been stifling us as if it was weeds."

Disappointment permeates the lives of each character in the play, casting a shadow over their hopes and aspirations. Irina finds herself disillusioned with her mundane job at the telegraph office and mourns the loss of their dream to relocate to Moscow, while also grappling with her lack of affection for Baron Tusenbach, her intended husband. Olga harbours regrets about her unmarried status and feels stifled by her role as headmistress at the school. Masha's marriage brings her little joy, and her forbidden love for Vershinin only compounds her sense of disillusionment. Tusenbach is left disheartened by Irina's perceived indifference towards him, while Andrei's aspirations of becoming a university scholar remain unfulfilled. In Act Three, Chebutykin's regret reaches a breaking point as he claims to have forgotten his medical skills, leading to a tragic outcome for a patient under his care. In his inebriated state, he expresses profound despair, questioning the very essence of his existence. He laments his perceived loss of identity, wondering if he is merely an illusion of a person, devoid of any true substance. Chebutykin's emotional turmoil reflects the harsh reality of time's relentless passage, which can erode one's sense of self and evoke profound regret. Collectively, the characters form a melancholic ensemble, their lives overshadowed by unfulfilled desires and persistent discontent.

In Act Four, as Vershinin prepares to depart for Poland with his military unit, facing the imminent separation from his lover Masha, he once again turns to abstract philosophical musings. He speaks of life as a burdensome journey, acknowledging its bleakness and yet holding onto a glimmer of hope for a brighter future. However, his optimism is tinged with a sense of resignation as he acknowledges the prevailing sense of hopelessness and the struggle to find meaning in the emptiness left by past turmoil. Masha, again resorts to abstract philosophising: "Life is a heavy load. Many of us find it blank, hopeless, but still one has to admit it is becoming brighter and easier every day, and one can see the time is not far off when it will be filled with light. […] all that [violence] has now had its day, and left behind a huge

empty space, which for the time being there is nothing to fill; humanity is passionately seeking that and of course will find it."

As the play progresses, the characters confront the cycle of disillusionment and resignation that accompanies their pursuit of happiness. They come to realise that the happiness they seek is often elusive and ephemeral, leading to feelings of resignation and acceptance of their fate. Despite their struggles and disappointments, the characters find solace in their bond with each other, drawing strength from their shared experiences and mutual understanding of the challenges they face. At the play's conclusion, the characters grapple with the relentless passage of time and the inevitability of change, resulting in a blend of hopefulness and despair, ultimately settling into a sombre acceptance of life's uncertainties. As the play draws to a close, the three sisters are confronted with the apparent futility of their struggles: Olga faces a bleak future, Masha's lover has departed, and Irina's fiancé has met a tragic end. Olga attempts to find solace in the belief that their sufferings will one day be understood as necessary for future happiness and peace. Olga says "Time will pass and we will be gone forever […] but for those who live after us our sufferings will become joy—happiness and peace will come down on earth, and there'll be a kind word and a blessing for those who are living now. […] The band is playing so gaily, so joyfully, and I think in a little while we too will know why we live, why we suffer…If we only knew, if we only knew!" Irina laments: "I'm forgetting everything, everyday forgetting, and life slips away and will never return, never, we'll never go to Moscow . . . I can see we'll never go. . . no satisfaction of any kind, and time is passing, and it all seems to be moving away from any real, beautiful life all moving away farther and farther into some abyss. . . I'm in despair, and now I'm alive, how is it I haven't killed myself, I can't understand. . . ."

The characters' dissatisfaction with their present life and perpetual longing for happiness remain a pervasive motif throughout the play. They yearn for a sense of fulfilment and contentment in their lives, believing that happiness lies just beyond their reach. They seek happiness in various forms: Olga hopes for stability and purpose in her role as a schoolteacher, Masha longs for love and passion outside her unhappy marriage, and Irina dreams of finding true love and fulfilling her potential in her career. The characters' pursuit of happiness reflects the universal human desire for fulfilment and meaning in life, even in the face of obstacles and challenges. The characters also pursue happiness through material comforts and possessions, believing that wealth and status will bring them contentment and fulfilment. They seek solace

in the trappings of their former aristocratic lifestyle, clinging to the illusion of happiness that it represents. However, their pursuit of material comforts ultimately proves to be hollow and unfulfilling, as they come to realise that true happiness cannot be bought or acquired through external means. The characters in *Three Sisters* indulge in fantasies of escape and redemption, believing that happiness lies just beyond the confines of their provincial existence. They dream of returning to Moscow, where they can reclaim the happiness and excitement of their youth. However, their fantasies of escape and redemption serve as a poignant reminder of the transient nature of happiness and the impossibility of reclaiming what has been lost.

UNIT 7 (C): SOCIO-CULTURAL DISLOCATION, BELONGING AND ESCAPE

In *Three Sisters* the theme of socio-cultural dislocation plays a significant role in shaping the lives and experiences of the main characters, particularly the Prozorov sisters—Olga, Masha, and Irina. Set against the backdrop of a provincial town in Russia, the play explores the sense of alienation, dissatisfaction, and longing for something more that arises from being disconnected from one's cultural and social roots. The Prozorov sisters experience a profound sense of stagnation and ennui as they grapple with the limitations of their provincial life. They find themselves trapped in a stifling environment devoid of intellectual stimulation, cultural opportunities, and social excitement. The sisters long for a return to their former home in Moscow, where they spent their youth and experienced a sense of vitality and purpose. The provincial town serves as a symbol of their cultural and social dislocation, highlighting their sense of estrangement from their true selves.

The characters in *Three Sisters* yearn for a more cosmopolitan existence that is characterised by sophistication, culture, and intellectual pursuits. They long for the excitement and vibrancy of city life, where they can engage with art, literature, and society in meaningful ways. The provincial life in a seemingly small town has no colour for this family, as they are in isolation from the great events of the day The Prozorov siblings are living in a status of semi-exile from the cultural capital of Moscow. Moscow represents the sisters' idealised vision of a better life, where they can escape the confines of their provincial existence and pursue their dreams and aspirations. Their yearning for Moscow reflects their desire to reconnect with their cultural and social roots and reclaim a sense of identity and belonging. The Prozorov sisters

grapple with questions of identity and belonging as they navigate the complexities of their social and cultural milieu. They feel disconnected from the provincial town where they reside, struggling to reconcile their own aspirations and values with the expectations of society. The characters' sense of cultural dislocation is compounded by their status as members of the educated middle class, or intelligentsia, who find themselves caught between the traditional values of the past and the emerging social and cultural trends of the present.

It is apparent that the Prozorov sisters are dissatisfied with the relocation to the province and even after eleven years of living there, they have not yet been assimilated into the life. They constantly lament the lack of intellectual stimulation and cultural refinement that their rural existence affords. Irina and Andrei harbour concerns that their education is being squandered amidst the monotony of country living. Irina's panic over forgetting the Italian word for "window" serves as a poignant reminder of the perceived dulling of her intellect in this rural setting. Andrei, once harbouring aspirations of scholarly greatness, now finds himself resigned to the modest ambition of joining the District Council. Similarly, Masha finds herself disillusioned with the mundane role of a schoolteacher's wife, yearning for excitement and adventure beyond the confines of their provincial existence. Her affair with Vershinin provides a fleeting escape from the tedium of country life, offering a glimpse of the excitement she craves. The sisters' disdain for Natasha stems from her lack of refinement and sophistication, contrasting sharply with their own cultivated tastes and aspirations. Natasha's presence serves as a constant reminder of the provincial mediocrity they seek to escape. Throughout the play, the household grapples with a pervasive sense of discontentment as its members struggle to reconcile their aspirations with the limitations of their country lifestyle. Their collective quest for contentment and fulfilment forms the central arc of the narrative, underscored by their perpetual longing for a more stimulating and fulfilling existence beyond the confines of rural life.

The theme of socio-cultural dislocation drives the characters' search for meaning and purpose in life. They yearn for a sense of fulfilment and significance that eludes them in their provincial existence, seeking to reclaim a sense of agency and autonomy over their own lives. The sisters' struggles with socio-cultural dislocation reflect the broader human experience of longing for connection, belonging, and meaning in a world marked by change and uncertainty. The dislocation creates a sense of distance and alienation between the sisters and the other residents of the provincial town, as well as among themselves. The characters' longing for

connection and belonging drives them to seek out meaningful relationships and experiences, even as they struggle to overcome the barriers of social and cultural dislocation that separate them from their true selves.

Furthermore, the theme of escape serves as a significant motif that influences the lives and actions of the main characters, particularly the Prozorov sisters. Set against the backdrop of late 19th-century Russia, the play portrays the characters' desire to escape their current circumstances in search of a better life or a sense of accomplishment. One of the central manifestations of the theme of escape in *Three Sisters* is the characters' longing to return to Moscow, the city of their youth. Moscow symbolises a world of excitement, opportunity, and cultural stimulation that contrasts sharply with the provincial town where the sisters currently reside. Throughout the play, the sisters express a deep yearning for Moscow, believing that a return to the city will bring them happiness and fulfilment. Moscow represents an escape from the monotony and dissatisfaction of their provincial existence, offering the promise of a brighter future.

The characters also seek escape through fantasies of love and romance, believing that passionate relationships will bring them the happiness and gratification they desire. Masha, for example, engages in an affair with Vershinin, hoping to find solace and excitement outside her unhappy marriage. However, the characters' fantasies of love and romance ultimately prove to be illusory, leading to disillusionment and disappointment as they confront the realities of their relationships. Another form of escape pursued by the characters is the desire for intellectual stimulation and cultural enrichment. The sisters long for a return to the intellectual pursuits and cultural vibrancy of Moscow, where they could engage with art, literature, and society in meaningful ways. Their desire for intellectual stimulation represents a form of escape from the provincial town where they feel stifled and intellectually unfulfilled. They seek solace in the pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment, hoping to find meaning and purpose in a world that often feels devoid of meaning.

At its core, the theme of escape in *Three Sisters* reflects the characters' yearning for a different life—a life that is characterised by freedom, satisfaction, and purpose. The sisters long to escape the constraints of their current circumstances and pursue their own desires and aspirations. However, their attempts to escape often end in disappointment and disillusionment, as they confront the harsh realities of their lives and the limitations imposed by society, fate, and their own choices. The themes of dislocation and escape shape the characters' relationships

and interactions with others, influencing their choices and behaviours. It creates a dynamic of longing and dissatisfaction that permeates their interactions and drives them to seek solace outside their current circumstances. Despite their struggles and disappointments, the characters find solace in their bond with each other, drawing strength from their shared experiences and mutual understanding of the challenges they face. Through their pursuit of escape and their eventual disillusionment, Chekhov offers profound insights into the complexities of human nature and the eternal quest for freedom, fulfilment, and meaning of existence.

UNIT - 8

UNIT 8 (A): THE ISSUE OF CLASS AND THE DECLINE OF ARISTOCRACY

In Anton Chekhov's play *Three Sisters* the theme of the decline of the aristocracy is a significant backdrop that impacts the lives and experiences of the characters. The issue of class plays a significant role in shaping the characters' identities, aspirations, and relationships. Set against the backdrop of late 19th-century Russia, the play portrays the fading glory of the aristocratic class and the challenges faced by its members as they confront changing social, economic, and cultural realities. The play explores the complexities of class dynamics and the pervasive influence of class-consciousness on society.

The Prozorov sisters belong to the once-privileged aristocratic class, but they find themselves grappling with the loss of their social status and privileges. A sense of displacement and dissatisfaction colours their provincial living as they long for the cosmopolitan and culturally rich environment of Moscow, where they spent their formative years. Their yearning for Moscow also reflects the desire to reclaim their social status and cultural identity, highlighting the importance of class affiliation in shaping one's sense of belonging and self-worth. As the play unfolds, the sisters come to terms with the declining fortunes of their family and the erosion of their once-great legacy. The decline of the aristocracy is symbolised by the fading grandeur of their family home, which serves as a physical reminder of their dwindling influence and prestige in society.

The theme of the decline of the aristocracy underscores the characters' sense of displacement and estrangement as they struggle to come to terms with their changing social

status. They feel disconnected from the world around them, unable to reconcile their aristocratic upbringing with the realities of a changing society. The sisters long for a return to the past, where they could bask in the privileges and comforts of their aristocratic upbringing. However, they find themselves increasingly out of place in a world that no longer values the traditions and customs of the aristocracy. The decline of the aristocracy is closely linked to economic factors, as the once-wealthy families find themselves struggling to maintain their lavish lifestyles in the face of dwindling resources and financial instability. The Prozorov family, once prosperous landowners, faces mounting debts and financial woes. The characters' financial struggles reflect broader economic trends in late 19th-century Russia, as the country grapples with the challenges of modernisation, industrialisation, and social change.

The characters' interactions with members of different social classes further illustrate the impact of class on their lives. The arrival of military officers and other townspeople into their provincial town introduces a dynamic of social hierarchy and power dynamics, with the officers representing a higher social stratum and exerting influence over the local community. The Prozorov family's clash with Natasha, who comes from a lower social class, serves as a focal point for exploring the complexities of class dynamics and the tensions between privilege and provincialism. In Act One, Andrey introduces his new love interest, Natasha, to the family. Natasha, feeling insecure and inferior compared to the sisters' sophistication and privilege, faces their disdain. The class-conscious sisters were mocking her accent, voice, and fashion sense. They perceive Natasha to be inferior to them, lacking refinement and class. Masha remains relentless in her mockery towards Natasha, even over trivial matters like her mismatched belt with dress.

However, once Natasha becomes Andrey's wife and especially when Olga leaves the household to become the headmistress, she gains control of the household. Her previous sense of insecurity and inferiority now turns into authoritarianism and avarice. The sisters' dislike of her intensifies as she usurps the power of the Prozorov household after their marriage. Natasha's abysmal treatment of the household servants remains throughout the play and the sisters' dislike for her deepens. In contrast, Olga exhibits kindness towards the servants, even providing assistance to Anfisa, the elderly family servant, by offering her a room in her new apartment when she is promoted to headmistress. Anfisa expresses profound gratitude for Olga's compassionate treatment. This aspect of Olga's character resonates with Chekhov's own acts of kindness, as he was known to provide free medical care to peasants in need. The sisters'

criticism of Natasha's appearance and mannerisms reflects their implicit judgment of her class background and provincial upbringing. Their disdain for her perceived lack of sophistication or refinement is indicative of the classist attitudes prevalent within their social circle. Natasha, in turn, struggles to navigate the expectations and judgments of her husband's family, feeling out of place among them due to her lower social status.

Moreover, the characters' attitudes towards work and social mobility reflect the prevailing class structures of Russian society at the time. While characters like Irina and Tuzenbach express idealistic aspirations for meaningful work and professional fulfilment, their ability to pursue these goals is constrained by their social standing and limited opportunities for advancement. Similarly, Masha's affair with Vershinin, a military officer of higher social status, underscores the complexities of social class and the allure of upward mobility. The concept of class also intersects with themes of love and marriage in the play. The sisters' romantic relationships are often shaped by considerations of social status and class compatibility. Irina's decision to marry Tuzenbach, despite her lack of romantic love for him, reflects a pragmatic acceptance of her social role and the limited options available to her within her social class.

Chekhov subtly addresses class divisions in this work, showing compassion for both the privileged and the economically disadvantaged. Interestingly, Chekhov chooses Tusenbach, a baron by social standing and an army officer by profession, who previously announced his privileged lifestyle owing to which he never had to work in his life, to prophetically declare about the end of all privileges for the upper-class people. This statement accurately anticipates the Russian Revolution, which occurred more than fifteen years after the play's composition. However, it is also noteworthy that Chekhov, himself the son of a former serf, maintains a forgiving attitude toward the aristocracy. His father became a grocer but ultimately could not make ends meet. Thus, by age 15 only, Chekhov had to support his family from a young age by writing short pieces for magazines. Despite this underprivileged background, he ultimately became a physician and a renowned writer. Overall, Chekhov's exploration of class in *Three Sisters* illuminates the pervasive influence of class consciousness on individuals' lives and relationships in late 19th-century Russia. The characters' struggles with identity, aspiration, and social mobility underscore the enduring relevance of class dynamics in shaping society and individual experience. Through nuanced characterisations and

richly layered relationships, Chekhov invites audiences to reflect on the complexities of class and its impact on human behaviour and relationships.

UNIT 8 (B): MOSCOW

In Anton Chekhov' play *Three Sisters* Moscow holds profound significance for the Prozorov siblings. Moscow represents not only a physical location but also a symbol of their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for a better life. The desire to return to Moscow serves as a powerful motivator, especially for the sisters, driving much of the narrative as they grapple with the challenges and uncertainties of their provincial existence. Moscow symbolises a world of opportunity, excitement, and cultural richness that contrasts sharply with the provincial town where the sisters currently reside. It represents a place of belonging, where the sisters can reclaim the happiness and vitality of their youth. Throughout the play, Moscow serves as a focal point for the sisters' dreams and aspirations, offering the promise of a brighter future that is lacking in their current circumstances.

Moscow: OLGA. Yes, to Moscow! As soon as we can.

[CHEBUTYKIN and TUZENBACH laugh.]

IRINA. Andrew's probably going to be a professor and he won't live here

anyway. There's nothing stopping us except poor Masha here.

OLGA. Masha can come and spend the whole summer in Moscow every year.

[MASHA softly whistles a tune.]

IRINA. I only pray it will work out all right.

For the three sisters, Moscow embodies their deepest desires and aspirations, representing an elusive ideal that seems just out of reach. In Act One, Olga fondly recalls her departure from Moscow eleven years prior, "I remember very well, at the beginning of May just now in Moscow everything is already in bloom, it's warm, everything's bathed in sunshine.

[…] This morning I woke up, I saw a mass of light, I saw the spring, and joy welled up in my soul and I had a huge longing for home.” Despite her current residence in the provinces, Olga still regards Moscow as her “home”, even after a decade and the beauty of her provincial surroundings only serves to intensify her melancholic longing for the capital city. Similarly, Irina’s dissatisfaction with her mundane job at the Telegraph Office fuels her obsession with Moscow, believing that only a move to the city can fulfil her suppressed dreams: “What I wanted, what I dreamed of, it definitely does not have.” In response to her discontentment at work, Irina obsesses over Moscow: “I dream of Moscow every night. I’m just like a madwoman […] We’re moving there in June.” Presumably, Irina could find work that does offer “what [she] dreamed of.” Instead, she believes that moving to Moscow is the only way to fulfil all her suppressed desires. Masha also asserts that the poor weather in Moscow will not be a problem for her because living in Moscow is worth anything.

However, Vershinin tells them a story and cynically challenges the sisters’ romanticised views of Moscow. The story is about an imprisoned French minister who pined for natural beauty. But Vershini continues: “Of course, now he’s been released, he doesn’t notice the birds, just as before. In the same way you too won’t notice Moscow when you’re living there. We have no happiness and it doesn’t exist, we only desire it.” He asserts that true happiness is an illusion and that the pursuit of it is what defines human nature. He suggests that even if they were to move to Moscow, their longings would simply transfer elsewhere, leaving them perpetually unsatisfied. Despite this argument offered by him, the sisters continue to cling to the idea of Moscow as the solution to their discontent, viewing it as a symbol of their unattainable desires and unfulfilled potential.

Olga tries to convince her sister Irina to marry Baron Tuzenbach because he is “so decent and honest,” even though Irina does not love him. Irina regretfully exclaims, “I’ve been waiting [to marry]. We were going to move to Moscow and there I would meet my true love, I dreamed of him, I loved him…But all that’s turned out to be nonsense.” Even though she later agrees to marry the Baron halfheartedly, she cries to her sister, “only let us go to Moscow! I beg you, let us go! There’s nothing better than Moscow in the whole world!” At this point, Irina realises that the envisioned relocation to Moscow is nothing more than a fantasy; Moscow has transformed into a representation of contentment within her psyche, rather than a tangible destination. Despite accepting a practical marriage arrangement and resigning herself to the belief that happiness may be out of reach, she vocalises her idealistic longing one last time. For

each of the sisters, Moscow symbolises more than just a physical location; it serves as a surrogate for their unresolved compromises and unfulfilled hopes, encapsulating their inner struggles and disappointments. This longing for Moscow is not limited to the sisters alone; their brother Andrey also yearns for the intellectual and professional success he once enjoyed. Andrey tells his servant, "... To be a member of the local District Council when every night I dream that I am a professor at Moscow University, a famous scholar who is Russia's pride!" Despite his current position on the local District Council, Andrey is consumed by memories of his past academic achievements and dreams of a prestigious career in Moscow. His dissatisfaction with his present circumstances is palpable, leading to confrontations with his sisters and a sense of inner turmoil that cannot be assuaged.

The characters' desire to return to Moscow reflects their longing for change and renewal in their lives. They believe that a return to the city will bring them happiness, contentment, and a sense of purpose that is missing in their provincial existence. Moscow represents a fresh start—a chance to escape the monotony and dissatisfaction of their current circumstances and pursue their own desires and aspirations. For the Prozorov sisters, Moscow is more than just a city—it is a place of home and belonging. It represents a return to their roots, where they can reconnect with their past and reclaim their sense of identity and purpose. The sisters long for the familiarity and comfort of Moscow, where they hope to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance that is lacking in the provincial town where they currently reside. Despite their fervent desire to return to Moscow, the sisters find themselves unable to attain their dreams. Various obstacles and challenges stand in their way, preventing them from realising their aspirations and escaping their provincial existence. Economic constraints, social obligations, and personal responsibilities all contribute to the sisters' inability to go to Moscow. Their dreams of returning to the city remain unfulfilled, leading to feelings of frustration, disillusionment, and resignation.

The inability to go to Moscow has a profound impact on the characters, shaping their attitudes, behaviours, and interactions with others. It creates a sense of longing and dissatisfaction that permeates their lives, driving them to seek solace and complacency in other ways. The characters' inability to go to Moscow serves as a poignant reminder of the limitations and constraints imposed by society, fate, and their own choices. It highlights the complexities of human desire and the often elusive nature of happiness and composure. Moscow represents a symbol of hope, longing, and aspiration for the characters in Chekhov's

play. The desire to return to Moscow reflects their yearning for change, renewal, and belonging in a world that often feels devoid of meaning and purpose. However, their inability to fulfil this desire serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges and uncertainties of human existence, highlighting the complexities of longing, disappointment, and resilience in the face of adversity.

Moscow transcends its physical setting to become a powerful symbol and quasi-character in its own right, deeply intertwined with the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the main characters. Moscow serves as a focal point around which the sisters' desires, frustrations, and sense of identity revolve, imbuing the play with layers of meaning and complexity. It symbolises a sense of homecoming and belonging for the Prozorov sisters, representing a return to their roots and the familiarity of their youth. It embodies memories of happier times and cherished experiences, serving as a sanctuary where the sisters can find solace and comfort amidst the challenges of their provincial existence. The longing for Moscow reflects the characters' yearning for a sense of identity and belonging in a world that often feels alienating and uncertain. Moscow serves as a beacon of hope and aspiration for them, offering the promise of a world of opportunity, excitement, and cultural richness that contrasts sharply with the monotony and dissatisfaction of their current circumstances. The sisters' desire to return to Moscow reflects their longing for change and renewal in their lives.

Throughout the play, Moscow serves as a catalyst for change, driving much of the narrative as the characters grapple with the challenges and uncertainties of their lives. The desire to return to Moscow motivates the sisters to confront their own desires, aspirations, and fears, leading to moments of introspection, conflict, and self-discovery. Moscow represents a metaphorical journey—a quest for meaning, purpose, and fulfilment—that transcends its physical location and becomes a deeply personal and transformative experience for the characters. Despite the sisters' fervent desire to return to Moscow, the city remains elusive and unattainable throughout much of the play. Various obstacles and challenges stand in their way, preventing them from realising their aspirations and escaping their provincial existence. Moscow's elusiveness underscores the characters' sense of longing and dissatisfaction, highlighting the gap between their idealised visions of the future and the harsh realities of their present circumstances. It serves as a poignant reminder of the limitations and constraints imposed by society, fate, and their own choices. Moscow's presence—both as a physical location and a symbol—has a profound impact on the characters, shaping their attitudes,

behaviours, and interactions with others. It serves as a catalyst for self-reflection and personal growth, driving the characters to confront their own desires, fears, and aspirations. Moscow's significance extends beyond its physical setting to become a metaphor for the characters' inner journey—a quest for meaning, purpose, and happiness in a world marked by change and uncertainty. It represents a longing for home, belonging, and identity—a yearning that transcends time and space and speaks to the universal human experience.

UNIT 8 (C): ROMANCE, LOVE, MARRIAGE, AND DISILLUSIONMENT - ANALYSIS OF THE COUPLES

In Anton Chekhov's play *Three Sisters*, the themes of love, relationships, and marriage are central to the lives and experiences of the main characters, shaping their interactions, choices, and aspirations. The Prozorov sisters present diverse perspectives on the intersection of love and marriage, showcasing varied experiences and outlooks. Olga views marriage pragmatically, prioritising practicality over romantic ideals; Masha has outgrown the husband she deeply admired in her youth; and Irina, in his girlish idealism, longs for a passionate match who she thinks can be found in Moscow. Through the experiences of the Prozorov sisters, Chekhov suggests that love and marriage are complex and multifaceted concepts that do not always align.

Olga sees marriage as a means of escaping the monotony of daily life and finds solace in the idea of being a devoted wife. It is not an idealistic quest for a soul mate to her. Early in the play, Olga complains about her job by saying, "Life is good, everything in life comes from God, but I think it would be better if I were to marry and be sitting at home all day. […] I'd love my husband." Significantly, the love she imagines sharing with her husband is an afterthought—the real attraction of marriage is relief from unrewarding toil. After Irina's emotional breakdown due to a series of unfulfilling jobs, Olga urges her sister to marry Baron Tuzenbakh, since after all "we marry not for love but just to do our duty," and Olga herself would marry whoever proposed to her, "provided only he was a decent man." This is further proof of Olga's pragmatic outlook on marriage which is merely a means of fulfilling one's conventional duty.

Masha, on the other hand, experiences disillusionment with the notion of love and marriage. Her marriage to Kulygin, whom she once admired in her youth, has grown stale and

unfulfilling. Kulygin expresses a passing sentiment that he might have married Olga instead if not for Masha. He says, "I'm exhausted. My dear little Olga…I often think, if there hadn't been Masha, I would have married you..." It is a remark under emotionally strained circumstances, and it is no passionate declaration. However, this comment underscores the idea that people may miss out on more compatible partners due to circumstances or societal expectations. Masha's experience suggests that love and marriage do not always align and that romantic ideals may not withstand the realities of life. However, in keeping with Olga's own pragmatism, it suggests that for one reason or another, people simply miss out on spouses to whom they might have been more contentedly matched.

Through the portrayal of various couples in the play, Chekhov explores the complexities and challenges inherent in romantic relationships and marital bonds, highlighting the universal human desire for love, companionship, and meaningful connection. Love and longing permeate the lives of the characters in *Three Sisters*, driving their actions and shaping their relationships. The characters yearn for love and companionship, seeking comfort and satisfaction in the arms of others amidst the challenges and uncertainties of their lives. Marriage serves as both a source of stability and a source of disillusionment for the characters in the play. While some characters view marriage as a means of finding security and happiness, others experience disillusionment and disappointment as they confront the harsh realities of their relationships. The characters grapple with feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and unfulfilled desires as they navigate the complexities of their romantic entanglements.

Through the portrayal of various couples in the play, Chekhov underscores the complexity of human relationships and the challenges inherent in navigating the intricacies of love, desire, and commitment. He highlights the universal human desire for connection and intimacy, as well as the inherent difficulties and limitations of romantic relationships and marital bonds. Ultimately, the characters in *Three Sisters* grapple with the complexities of love, relationships, and marriage as they search for meaning and fulfilment in a world marked by change, uncertainty, and disillusionment. Through the portrayal of various couples and their struggles, Chekhov offers profound insights into the complexities of human emotion and desire, highlighting the universal themes of love, longing, and regret that resonate across time and culture.

Analysis of the couples

1. Masha and Kulygin

Masha, the middle sister, is married to Kulygin, a schoolteacher who is considerably older than her. The relationship between Masha and Kulygin serves as a poignant exploration of the complexities and challenges inherent in a marriage that lacks passion, intimacy, and genuine emotional connection. Masha, the middle sister, feels trapped in a loveless union and longs for passion and excitement outside her marriage. Kulygin, on the other hand, is oblivious to Masha's unhappiness and remains devoted to her despite her emotional distance. The relationship between Masha and Kulygin highlights the challenges of maintaining a marriage based on practicality rather than genuine affection. Their inability to communicate openly about their feelings leads to resentment and disillusionment. Their relationship is characterised by indifference, dissatisfaction, and a sense of unfulfilled longing, reflecting the broader themes of disillusionment and the search for meaning in the play.

Masha's indifference towards Kulygin is evident in her behaviour and demeanour, as she displays little interest or enthusiasm in their relationship. She finds herself increasingly disillusioned with her marriage and longs for something more meaningful and passionate. Masha's dissatisfaction with her marriage stems from her unfulfilled longing for passion, excitement, and emotional connection. She yearns for a deeper sense of intimacy and passion that is lacking in her relationship with Kulygin, leading her to seek solace and excitement outside the confines of her marriage. Her affair with Vershinin, a married army officer, serves as a manifestation of her unfulfilled desires and longing for a compatible emotional connection. Masha tells Vershinin, "I was married when I was eighteen and I was frightened of [Kulygin] because he was a schoolmaster and I'd barely finished school. He seemed to me then terribly learned, clever and important. But now, unfortunately, it's rather different." Masha's decision to marry Kulygin stemmed from her desire for a partner whose intelligence she could admire and respect. However, as Masha's own intellect matured and evolved, she began to feel a lack of connection with Kulygin, leading her to perceive her life as "cursed" and "intolerable." This dissatisfaction with her marriage highlights the notion that the marital bond can be undermined by individuals' personal growth and changing priorities. This affair serves as a poignant example of how the dynamics of marriage can be challenged and compromised by the evolving needs and desires of individuals within the relationship.

Kulygin, in contrast, remains devoted to his wife despite her emotional distance and indifference. He is oblivious to Masha's inner turmoil and dissatisfaction, continuing to express affection and concern for her well-being. Kulygin's devotion to Masha highlights his loyalty and steadfastness as a husband, but it also underscores his lack of awareness and insight into the true nature of their relationship. He fails to recognise Masha's longing for something more meaningful and fulfilling, remaining content with the status quo. Despite being aware of Masha's affair and her emotional unresponsiveness towards him, Kulygin continues to love her unconditionally. When he inadvertently witnesses Vershinin kissing Masha goodbye, Kulygin's initial reaction is one of embarrassment, but he ultimately chooses to accept Masha and their marriage without reproaching her for her infidelity. This remarkable display of forgiveness and unconditional love underscores Kulygin's steadfast commitment to Masha, even in the face of her emotional turmoil and attraction to another man. He states, "It doesn't matter, let her cry, just let her…My sweet Masha, my good Masha…You are my wife and I am happy in spite of everything … […] We will begin to live again as we used to and I won't say one word to you, not a hint…" Kulygin's decision to recommit himself to Masha, despite her tears for another man, highlights his deep love and devotion towards her. Rather than succumbing to bitterness or resentment, Kulygin chooses to prioritise the preservation of their marriage and the well-being of his wife. His ability to extend forgiveness and understanding towards Masha reflects his capacity for empathy and compassion, even in the midst of personal pain and disappointment.

2. Vershinin and Masha

Masha's affair with Vershinin, a married army officer, is born out of mutual dissatisfaction with their respective marriages and a shared longing for something more meaningful and gratifying. Their relationship serves as a subplot that explores themes of longing, dissatisfaction, and the search for emotional fulfilment. Masha, the middle sister, becomes infatuated with Vershinin, a married army officer stationed in the provincial town where the sisters reside. Their relationship unfolds against the backdrop of Masha's loveless marriage to Kulygin, her desire for passion and excitement, and Vershinin's own struggles with his troubled marriage. Vershinin provides Masha with the passion and excitement she craves, offering her an escape from the monotony of her marriage to Kulygin. Despite their deep emotional connection, Masha and Vershinin's relationship remains fraught with tension and

uncertainty, highlighting the complexities of love and desire in a world marked by social constraints and moral conventions.

Masha's relationship with Vershinin represents a forbidden passion that offers an escape from the monotony and dissatisfaction of her marriage to Kulygin. She becomes infatuated with Vershinin's intellect, charisma, and worldly outlook, viewing him as a source of excitement and emotional connection that is absent from her relationship with her husband. Despite the societal taboo surrounding their relationship and the potential consequences of their actions, Masha and Vershinin cannot resist the magnetic pull of their mutual attraction. Their relationship becomes a refuge from the challenges and uncertainties of their respective marriages, offering them a sense of intimacy and connection that is lacking in their everyday lives. Despite the intensity of their feelings for each other, Masha and Vershinin's relationship is fraught with tension and conflict. They must contend with the disapproval of society, the potential repercussions of their actions, and the complexities of their own emotions.

Furthermore, this relationship is also characterised by a sense of illusion and escapism, as they seek refuge from the harsh realities of their lives in the fantasy of their forbidden love. They cling to the fleeting moments of passion and connection they share, believing that their relationship offers an escape from the mundane and the ordinary. However, as the play progresses, Masha and Vershinin come to realise the limitations of their relationship and the impossibility of sustaining their passion in the face of societal expectations and personal obligations. Their love affair ultimately becomes a bittersweet reminder of the transient nature of human desire and the complexities of human relationships. Through their interactions and conflicts, Chekhov underscores the universal themes of love, desire, and the search for meaning in a world marked by social constraints and personal limitations. Their relationship serves as a poignant reminder of the complexities of human emotion and the eternal quest for connection and understanding.

3. Irina and Baron Tuzenbach

The relationship between Irina Prozorova and Baron Nikolai Tuzenbach is a complex and poignant exploration of unrequited love, societal expectations, and the human longing for connection. For Irina, love represents an expression of her deeper idealism about the world and her aspirations for a fulfilling life. Initially, she holds onto romantic notions of finding true love in Moscow, believing it to be the key to happiness. However, when her long-cherished

dreams of finding romantic love fail to materialise as she had hoped, Irina finds herself compromising for a marriage that is sensible, practical, and devoid of passion. Her conversations with Baron Tuzenbach highlight this shift in perspective. They often discuss the hypothetical joys of a meaningful working life, with Irina expressing enthusiasm and cheer about the possibilities ahead. Tuzenbach, reflecting on Irina's past optimism and idealism, reminisces about the vision they once shared for a happy life filled with purpose. He tells her: "I look at you now and I remember how, long ago, on your name-day, you were talking of the joys of work, full of enthusiasm and cheer…And what a vision I had then of a happy life! Where has it gone? […] If only I were allowed to give up my life for you!" However, as time passes and the harsh realities of life set in, both Irina's enthusiasm for work and her appetite for romantic love begin to fade.

Olga's pragmatic encouragement for Irina to marry Tuzenbach despite her lack of romantic love highlights Irina's shifting perspective on marriage and idealism. Initially, Irina dreamed of finding her true love in Moscow. However, as her dreams of Moscow are shattered and she confronts the harsh realities of life, Irina resigns herself to a sensible marriage devoid of passion or love. Tuzenbach's assurance that his dreams will bring happiness to Irina, despite his awareness of her lack of love for him, only deepens her sense of despair. Irina's longing for love is palpable, but she feels as though her ability to love lies dormant and inaccessible, likening her soul to an expensive piano with its key lost. This poignant metaphor underscores Irina's inner turmoil and the profound sense of loss she feels as her dreams of love and idealism crumble before her. The tragic end to Tuzenbach's life in a duel further emphasises the elusive nature of happiness and fulfilment in marriage. Despite the possibility of finding happiness together, Irina and Tuzenbach's union is abruptly cut short by his untimely death, leaving the long-term viability of their relationship uncertain.

Their relationship begins with a mutual attraction and shared camaraderie. Tuzenbach is drawn to Irina's youthful optimism and intellectual curiosity, while Irina appreciates Tuzenbach's steadfast loyalty and genuine affection for her. Their initial interactions are characterised by playful banter and genuine affection, hinting at the potential for a deeper connection between them. As the play progresses, it becomes evident that Tuzenbach's feelings for Irina far outweigh her own. While Irina cares for Tuzenbach, her sense of individuality, dreams of a passionate match and longing for a better partner prevent her from fully reciprocating his affections. Tuzenbach, on the other hand, is willing to sacrifice his own

happiness for the sake of Irina's well-being, expressing a willingness to wait for her indefinitely, despite knowing that their relationship may never come to fruition. Their dynamic is characterised by a sense of unrequited love and sacrifice, as Tuzenbach remains steadfast in his devotion to Irina, even in the face of rejection. This relationship serves as a symbolic representation of the broader themes of longing and disillusionment within the play. Their inability to completely commit mirrors the characters' collective sense of disillusionment and dissatisfaction with their lives in the provincial town. Additionally, their dynamic foreshadows the inevitable tragedy and unfulfilled aspirations that permeate the narrative, as their relationship ultimately ends in heartbreak and disappointment.

Tuzenbach's sudden and unfortunate demise is a pivotal event in the play, marking a tragic culmination of unfulfilled dreams and unrequited love. He dies in a duel with Solyony, another officer stationed in the town where the Prozorov sisters reside. The duel is a result of simmering tensions and conflicts between the characters, particularly involving their romantic entanglements. Tuzenbach, who harbours deep affection for Irina, finds himself embroiled in a rivalry with Solyony, who also expresses romantic interest in Irina. The escalating tensions between the two men eventually lead to a fatal confrontation, with Tuzenbach tragically losing his life in the duel. After Baron Tuzenbach's death in the duel with Solyony, Irina experiences a profound sense of grief and despair. The loss of Tuzenbach, whom she cared for despite her inability to fully reciprocate his affections, leaves her emotionally fraught. She also grapples with feelings of guilt and regret, questioning whether her actions played a role in the tragic outcome.

4. Natasha and Andrei

The relationship between Natasha (Natalia) Ivanovna and her husband, Andrei Sergeyevich Prozorov, serves as a compelling portrayal of the dynamics within a marriage, as well as the broader societal influences that shape gender roles and power dynamics in late 19th-century Russia. Natasha and Andrei's relationship is characterised by tension, conflict, and the unequal distribution of power, reflecting the complexities of marital life in a patriarchal society. One of the central aspects of their relationship is the evident power imbalance between them. Natasha, as the dominant spouse, exerts considerable control over Andrei's actions and decisions, often dictating his behaviour and manipulating him to suit her own desires. Andrei, on the other hand, is submissive and passive in his interactions with Natasha, yielding to her authority and

allowing her to shape the course of their marriage. He lacks agency and autonomy, becoming increasingly dependent on her for guidance and validation.

Natasha’s domineering behaviour towards Andrei is evident throughout the play, as she asserts her authority over him and expects him to conform to her wishes. She frequently criticises and belittles Andrei, undermining his confidence and self-esteem. Her domineering behaviour is rooted in her desire for control and social status, as she seeks to maintain her position of power within the household and society at large. Her treatment of Andrei reflects the broader gender norms and expectations that govern marital relationships in late 19th-century Russia. She often employs emotional manipulation to maintain her control over Andrei and ensure his compliance with her wishes. She uses guilt, shame, and affection to manipulate his emotions and elicit the responses she desires from him. Andrei, in turn, becomes increasingly vulnerable to his wife’s manipulative tactics, struggling to assert his own needs and desires in the face of her domineering behaviour. Their relationship becomes characterised by a cycle of manipulation and submission, with Natalia holding the upper hand.

The strain and discontent within Natasha and Andrei’s marriage become increasingly apparent as the play unfolds. Andrei grows resentful of her control and begins to question his own feelings of happiness within the relationship. Natasha, meanwhile, becomes frustrated by Andrei’s perceived inadequacies and failures to meet her expectations, leading to further tension and conflict between them. Their marriage becomes a source of unhappiness and dissatisfaction for both parties. Their relationship is also influenced by broader societal expectations and gender roles that govern marital relationships in late 19th-century Russia. Natalia’s domineering behaviour can be seen as a reflection of her desire to assert her authority within the patriarchal framework of society. Andrei, as the husband, is expected to fulfil the role of provider and protector, but he struggles to assert his authority in the face of her dominance. Their relationship serves as a commentary on the limitations and constraints imposed by traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Through their interactions and conflicts, Chekhov explores themes of power, control, and the impact of societal expectations on individual relationships. The strained dynamic between Natasha and Andrei serves as a microcosm of the broader social and cultural forces at play in Chekhov’s exploration of human relationships.

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SUGGESTED READINGS

1. *Anton Chekhov’s Life and Thought; Selected Letters and Commentary* - Anton Chekhov
2. *The Cambridge Introduction to Chekhov* - James N. Loehlin
3. *Anton Chekhov’s “Three Sisters”* - Michael Pennington
4. *Anton Chekhov: A Life* - Donald Rayfield
5. *Anton Chekhov and His Times* - Andrei Turkov
6. *Anton Chekhov: Routledge Modern and Contemporary Dramatists* - Rose Whyman
7. *From Chekhov to the Revolution: Russian Literature: 1900-1917* - Marc Slonim

ASSIGNMENTS

1. How does Anton Chekhov explore the themes of loss, longing, and nostalgia in *Three Sisters*, and how do these themes shape the characters’ experiences and relationships throughout the play?
2. How does the historical background of Russia during Anton Chekhov’s time, including its social, political, and cultural changes, influence the thematic aspects of *Three Sisters*?

3. What do the characters in Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* reveal about the complexities of human nature, relationships, and societal roles in late 19th-century Russia?
4. In Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, how does the character of Olga embody and reflect the societal expectations and pressures faced by women in late 19th-century Russia, and how does her portrayal contribute to the overall thematic exploration of identity, duty, and disillusionment?
5. Evaluate the character of Masha in *Three Sisters,* keeping in mind the role she plays in exploring themes of love, dissatisfaction, and the search for fulfilment within the context of late 19th-century Russian society.
6. Do you think that Irina's character navigates the tensions between youthful idealism and disillusionment? What insights does her portrayal offer into the challenges faced by young women striving for meaning and fulfilment in late 19th-century Russian society?
7. Critically assess Chekhov's depiction of the relationship between Andrey and his wife Natalia in *Three Sisters*, and what does their dynamic reveal about the complexities of marital dynamics, societal expectations, and individual desires in contemporary Russia?
8. Write a detailed analysis of Chekhov's exploration of the theme of socio-cultural dislocation in *Three Sisters*, and what insights does the play offer into the effects of societal upheaval, longing for a sense of belonging, and the search for meaning amidst a changing world?
9. What does the characters' yearning for escape reveal about their desires, frustrations, and perceptions of their circumstances in late 19th-century Russian society as represented by Chekhov in his play *Three Sisters*?
10. What insights does Chekhov's *Three Sisters* offer into the characters' quests for meaning and purpose of life and existence amidst the challenges and uncertainties of late 19th-century Russian society?
11. In Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, how does the symbol of Moscow function within the narrative, and what does it represent to the central characters? Furthermore, how does their longing for Moscow reflect broader themes of longing, nostalgia, and unfulfilled aspirations?

12. Critically analyse the characters' experiences with love and marriage in Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and how do these notions reflect the complexities of human relationships, societal expectations, and personal fulfilment.
13. How does the theme of the decline of the aristocracy manifest in the lives and experiences of the Prozorov family, and what insights does the play offer into the challenges faced by the aristocratic class amidst societal changes and shifting power dynamics in late 19th-century Russia?

BLOCK - III

UNITS: 9 – 12

A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN

BY

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

Unit 9 (a): Life and Works of Mary Wollstonecraft

Unit 9 (b): ***A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*****: An Introduction**

Unit 9 (c): A Brief Summary of Chapter I: "The Rights and Involved Duties of Mankind Considered"

Unit 9 (d): A Brief Summary of Chapter II: "The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed"

Unit 10 (a): A Brief Summary of Chapter III: "The Same Subject Continued"

Unit 10 (b): A Brief Summary of Chapter IV: "Observations on the State of Degradation to Which Woman Is Reduced by Various Causes"

Unit 10 (c): A Brief Summary of Chapter V: "Animadversions on Some of the Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity, Bordering on Contempt"

Unit 10 (d): A Brief Summary of Chapter VI: "The Effect Which an Early Association of Ideas Has upon the Character"

Unit 11 (a): A Brief Summary of Chapter VII: "Modesty—Comprehensively Considered, and Not as a Sexual Virtue"

Unit 11 (b): A Brief Summary of Chapter VIII: "Morality Undermined by Sexual Notions of the Importance of a Good Reputation"

Unit 11 (c): A Brief Summary of Chapter IX: "Of the Pernicious Effects Which Arise from the Unnatural Distinctions Established in Society"

Unit 11 (d): A Brief Summary of Chapter X: "Parental Affection"

Unit 12 (a): A Brief Summary of Chapter XI: "Duty to Parents"

Unit 12 (b): A Brief Summary of Chapter XII: "On National Education"

Unit 12 (c): A Brief Summary of Chapter XIII: "Some Instances of the Folly Which the Ignorance of Women Generates..."

Unit 12 (d): ***A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*****: Reception and Criticism**

Conclusion

Works Cited

Suggested Readings

Assignments

UNIT - 9

UNIT 9 (A): LIFE AND WORKS OF MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (1759 – 1797)

One of the early precursors of feminist literary theory, Mary Wollstonecraft was born on April 27, 1759, in Spitalfields, London, as the second of the seventh children of Edward John Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Dixon. As a child, she briefly attended a day school in Beverley but was largely self-tutored. Her childhood days were spent in unhappiness owing to her father's lack of knowledge of the material aspects which terribly affected the family's financial condition. Moreover, her father was a violent man by nature who would beat his wife in a drunken state, and Mary had to play a pivotal role in protecting her mother from being physically abused. The sorrow of her unhappy childhood was lessened in the close proximity of her two friends, Jane Arden in Beverley, and Frances (Fanny) Blood in Hoxton.

After years of unhappiness, Mary opened a school with her sister and Fanny Blood at Newington, which was then occupied by a community of Dissenters, and made the acquaintance of Richard Price and other eminent Dissenters. It was during this time, she wrote "Thoughts on the Education of Daughters," a conduct book that offered advice on the importance of education of women to the emerging middle class. It came out in 1787; by that time, Wollstonecraft had left England for Ireland as a governess of Lord. She returned in 1788

with the aim of becoming a writer and worked under the radical publisher Joseph Johnson, who published her works, both fiction and non-fiction alike. Moreover, her dearest friend Fanny Blood's death in 1785 devastated her mental health, at the same time, provided inspiration for her first novel *Mary: A Fiction* (1788), which chronicles the tragic of the titular character's successive "romantic friendships" with a woman and a man. The novel, though generated controversy in the critical circle, was immensely successful, strengthening the ground for the emerging female creativity. In the same year, her *Original Stories from Real Life*, the first and only complete work of children's literature, based on her experiences as a governess of the Kingsborough's children, was also published.

During these years, she was introduced to leading intellectuals of Johnson's literary circle, including William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, and Henry Fuseli in London. A romantic relationship developed between Mary and Fuseli, the artist, despite the fact that Fuseli was a married man. She was, as she wrote later, enchanted by his genius, "the grandeur of his soul, that quickness of comprehension, and lovely sympathy." She even proposed a platonic living arrangement with Fuseli and his wife, but Fuseli's wife was appalled and he broke off the relationship with Wollstonecraft. After Fuseli's rejection, she was heartbroken and decided to travel to France to escape the humiliation and to participate in the revolutionary events that she had celebrated in her recent *A Vindication of the Rights for Men*. Written in response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (November 1, 1790), Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights for Men* (published on November 29, 1790) was a political pamphlet which attacked the hereditary privilege and the ruthlessness of French aristocracy and advocated republicanism. The pamphlet made her famous overnights, and Wollstonecraft was compared to the leading intellectual figures like Joseph Priestley and Thomas Paine, whose *Rights of Man* (1791) would prove to be the most influential piece to critique Burke's argument in *Reflections*. However, she developed her ideas, outlined for the *Rights of Men* further in her next work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which is considered to be the most influential of all her literary creations as it advocated the necessity of education for women.

In December 1792, she went to Paris, and met Gilbert Imlay, an American adventurer and writer, and fell passionately in love with him, and gave birth to his daughter, Fanny in 1794. In the same year, she published her 'View' of the French Revolution, expressing the utter disillusionment of her republican ideals. In 1795, she travelled through Scandinavia, accompanied by her maid and her infant daughter, a journey which produced her remarkable and observant travel book, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and*

Denmark, published by Johnson in 1796. She returned to London in 1795, where Imlay's neglect drove her to two suicide attempts. However, after a period of recovery from psychological stress, she reintroduced herself to William Godwin, who had a great appreciation of her intellectual capacity. Their affair developed at a rather slow pace, and the couple decided to get married after Mary became pregnant with Godwin's child. Their marriage in 1797 revealed that Mary was never married to Imlay, and as a result, both she and Godwin grew distanced from the intellectual circle. After the birth of their daughter, who was named after her mother, Wollstonecraft died of septicemia on December 10, 1797. In the following year, Godwin published his *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; edited her *Posthumous Works* (which included her unfinished novel, *The Wrongs of Woman*) in the same year, and portrayed her in his novel, *St. Leon* (1799).

UNIT 9 (B): *A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN*: AN INTRODUCTION

If one aims to look at the history of feminism in Europe, (s)he must trace it back to the eighteenth century, in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft. In an age where the labour of men (be it in the field or in literature) was privileged over that of women, Wollstonecraft provided the first major theoretical exploration of gender inequality. In her famous treatise, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, Wollstonecraft attacks the educational restrictions imposed upon women, and "mistaken notions of female excellence," that kept women in a state of "ignorance and slavish dependence."

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman is, in large part, a rebuttal to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas, expressed primarily in his book *Émile: Ou, De l'éducation* (*Emile, or On Education*) concerning the proper education of men and women. The title of Wollstonecraft's collection also reflects that of another work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, which Wollstonecraft wrote in response to Burke's criticisms of the French Revolution, which he expressed in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Burke rejects not only the revolution's violence, but also the premise that all men could and should govern themselves. Wollstonecraft's critique points out the flagrant problems among the working classes in England, effectively disputing Burke's claims.

Divided into thirteen chapters, the treatise is dedicated to Charles M. Talleyrand-Perigord, the former Bishop of Autun, also an influential French political figure in the new regime, whose views on women's education were derogatory, and hence, became an object of criticism for Wollstonecraft. In the preface addressed to Talleyrand, she explains that she "pleads for her sex – not for myself [and out of] affection for the whole human race" (65). While recognizing that France was at the time in advance over other European nations in terms of knowledge she reminds Talleyrand that Revolutionary France remains behind England by not trying to change the sensually marked relationship between French women and men. The latter are remnants of a residual aristocratic ideology of gender relations that stands as a flagrant contradiction to the emancipation project that legitimates the new French regime. In other words, Wollstonecraft elevates rational morality for both women and men as the prerequisite for the realization of political ideals sustained by philosophical rationalism. It is implied that rational morality cannot be obtained without allowing women the right to exercise their reason and achieve that autonomy necessary for proper conduct in the domestic and public spheres. She hopes that Talleyrand and some other "enlarged minds who formed your constitution" will accept to amend that constitution once they understand that educated women "would advance, instead of retarding the progress of those principles that give a substance to morality" (65). The Introduction to this treatise sets out her view the prevailing situation of women in society is largely that of subjugation, and it has happened because of their lack of education.

The major thrust of Wollstonecraft's treatise is "civilization". In the first chapter entitled "The Rights and Involved Duties of Mankind Considered," Wollstonecraft asks three rhetorical questions to evaluate the principles on which civilization rises and falls. The first question is related to reason as a distinguishing mark that makes for the pre-eminence of civilized and rational men over brutes. The second question concerns the criterion of excellence among people, which she identifies as the acquisition of virtue. The third question is linked to the reason why God has "implanted passions" in man, which she answers by saying that experience shows that they are there to be struggled with so that they can "attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes" (Wollstonecraft 76). It is in light of these principles that Wollstonecraft seeks to assess the state of civilization in the Enlightenment period. Her main conclusion is that the "civilization of the bulk of the people of Europe is very partial" (Wollstonecraft 77).

It is in this civilization that reason is prostituted by being employed to rationalize imbibed or acquired prejudices instead of acting as a principle for the "conduct of understanding." "Intellectual cowardice" has made people shrink from the task of rooting prejudice, "or only

do it by half'. Its principles are sacrificed at the altar of expediency to such an extent that "truth is lost in the mist of words, virtue in forms, [and] knowledge rendered as sounding nothing." Through prescription, this corrupted civilization has "deprived men (or women) of their natural rights".

In the course of the subsequent chapters, Wollstonecraft rejected the established view that women are naturally weaker or inferior to men. The unequal nature of gender relations, she proposed, was because of the lack of education that kept women in a secondary position. Since women are trained to rely upon their beauty, conduct and manners, they turn into unpalatable human beings for others to notice and desire. Women's lack of education has resulted in intellectual barrenness, as she states,

> One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women than human creature, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistress than affectionate wives and rational mothers; and the understanding of the sex has been so bubbled by their specious homage, that the civilized woman of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect.

Wollstonecraft argued that women must be treated as equal to men, because they played a crucial role in society, namely in the bringing up of children. Women themselves should strive to become "companions" rather than mere wives to their husbands. For this change in status and role, women should acquire an education.

Wollstonecraft argues that girls are forced into passivity, vanity and credulity by a lack of physical and mental stimulus., and by the constant insistence on the need to please men. She attacks the "unmanly, immoral" theories of education propagated by Enlightenment philosophers like Philip Dormer Stanhope Chesterfield and Jean Jacques Rousseau (who, in her view, made false discriminatory distinctions in his approach to the sexes in Emile), concluding that, "From the tyranny of man…the greater number of female follies proceed." Wollstonecraft closes her debate with Rousseau about the state of civilization by sorting out three main positions: "Rousseau exerts himself that all was right originally; a crowd of others that all is right now; and I, that all will be right." Hence, what she proposes for salvaging civilization is a project of a future enlightened society propped by a rational political system

and a rational morality based on a well-reflected educational system. Rousseau is of the Enlightenment philosophers who laid down the ideological basis of the Revolution in France, so indirectly Wollstonecraft's critique of his political philosophy is also meant as a constructive critique of Revolutionary France in its constitutional discrimination against women. That's why after having settled accounts with Rousseau over the issue of civilization versus the primitive state of nature, she turns to the issue of education with the main emphasis on the French author's educational prejudices against women. One of the major arguments in Wollstonecraft's arsenal is that character taken in the large sense of selfhood, subjectivity, or identity is the result of nurture and culture rather than nature. In other words, character is a cultural construct largely determined by the political, social, economic, and cultural environment. Wollstonecraft's deconstruction and re/construction of character were thought over mostly in an analogical manner intersecting public politics and the politics of sexuality.

Thus, Wollstonecraft astutely unpacked the stereotype of the woman as a creature of sentiment when she argued that women prone to excessive emotion abandoned rationality. it was this tendency, Wollstonecraft argued, that kept women subordinated. Influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment, Wollstonecraft suggested that rationality and reason must be given importance over sensibility and feeling.

UNIT 9 (C): A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTER I: "THE RIGHTS AND INVOLVED DUTIES OF MANKIND CONSIDERED"

This book was published in 1792, a time when the French Revolution was still in progress and America was experimenting with setting up a democratic republic, a new constitution, and a Bill of Rights. Wollstonecraft connects her arguments with the philosophies and politics of those recent events, so she begins with the idea that reason, virtue, and knowledge are vital qualities.

She identifies reason, virtue, and knowledge as the elements that "distinguish the individual." She acknowledges many flaws in the society of her time, including the servile flattery afforded to "hereditary honors, riches, and monarchy." These things led philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau to condemn society and embrace solitude.

Wollstonecraft has strong disagreements with Rousseau. She claims his "arguments in favor of a state of nature are plausible, but unsound." She agrees with his rejection of the artifices of aristocratic society but objects to Rousseau's celebration of "savagery." Wollstonecraft also notes that Rousseau does not claim living as a savage produces any particular virtues. Rousseau goes against God, she insists, and she prefers to trust in God rather than Rousseau. The solution is the "establishment of true civilization," she claims, rather than Rousseau's idea of a society of man in his "state of nature."

The real problem with society, she argues, is "arbitrary" and "regal" power—in other words, the monarchy and aristocratic power. With poor leadership from kings and nobles, how can the ordinary man be wise? It is "madness" to put the lives and health of so many under the power of a single "weak fellow creature."

She also criticizes professions "in which great subordination of rank constitutes its power," calling them "highly injurious to morality." As examples she cites a standing army, sailors and "naval gentlemen," even the clergy and the "rules" of fashion for gentlemen. She points out that "the character of every man is, in some degree, formed by his profession" and argues against a society filled with professions that force men to look foolish.

UNIT 9 (D): A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTER II: "THE PREVAILING OPINION OF A SEXUAL CHARACTER DISCUSSED"

In this chapter, Wollstonecraft turned towards the pivotal issue: women's education. Wollstonecraft herself experienced the education—or lack thereof—of a typical middle-class English girl as she grew up. She also ran a school for girls, served as a governess, and published her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*.

She begins with the claim that differences between men and women are largely because of how girls are raised. She acknowledges qualities men complain about in women; Wollstonecraft calls these "the natural effect of ignorance" because society teaches women that being beautiful is all that matters.

She argues education should be shaped to each individual person, but it should also reflect "the opinions and manners of the society they live in." Unfortunately for women, society strictly

limits female education. Wollstonecraft argues the best education will "enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent."

Objecting to how men write about female education, Wollstonecraft says they have made women "more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been." Rousseau is a particular target. Wollstonecraft criticizes his idealized view of women, which is represented in his character Sophie, who is "captivating" but "grossly unnatural." She objects to Rousseau's claim that a woman should be "made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire."

Wollstonecraft also disapproves of Dr. Gregory's book, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*. Gregory believes women are naturally fond of dressing up, but Wollstonecraft asserts that a woman focuses on clothes because a well-dressed woman commands attention. She says Gregory tells women to lie about ways in which they are not "typical" and that he also recommends a woman never tell her husband how much she loves him. Wollstonecraft fiercely rejects such deceptions.

She argues men should not be made responsible for women's moral and intellectual growth. If men became perfect at "maturity," maybe his wife could depend on him to guide her, but adult men "are often only overgrown children ... if the blind lead the blind, one need not come from heaven to tell us the consequence."

Wollstonecraft claims love should "not be allowed to dethrone superior powers," arguing marrying for love is not always a practical choice. Instead, she writes that a good marriage should be based on friendship rather than love.

From a theological perspective, Wollstonecraft states that a woman's education prepares her for marriage, yet the Bible says there is no marriage in Heaven. Using a rhetorical question, she asks readers: how are women prepared to go to Heaven given the education they receive?

Wollstonecraft asserts women's feelings of inferiority have increased because of their treatment. She claims women must be given room to develop and "then determine where the whole sex must stand in the intellectual scale." If, after they are given opportunities, women do not prove equals to men, then men's superiority will be clear. Just as kings do not always prove to be better than ordinary men, Wollstonecraft suggests that men will not always be better than women: "As sound politics diffuse liberty, mankind, including woman, will become more wise and virtuous."

UNIT - 10

UNIT 10 (A): A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTER III: “THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED”

In continuation with the previous chapter, Wollstonecraft asserts that "bodily strength seems to give man a natural superiority over women ... the only solid basis on which the superiority of the sex can be built." But if strength is good, why are women so proud of being "delicate" and weak? How can a woman be any good as a wife and mother if she must spend all her time protecting herself from illness?

Women remain weak because society does not teach them to use their bodies in any useful or challenging way. Instead, sewing and playing with dolls are the kinds of activities put in front of girls to master. If that's all the activity open to them, no wonder they remain weak and unprepared to fulfill more roles in society. Wollstonecraft again refutes Rousseau, who claims girls inherently prefer such things. In her experience, she says, a girl will not choose such things unless others teach her to do so.

Wollstonecraft also begins another theme in the book—attacking the "sensualists." Wollstonecraft claims they have caused problems because they only praise physical beauty rather than intellectual beauty.

Beauty may help a woman obtain a good husband, but what happens if he dies? The wife will now need to serve as both mother and father, and her preparation has encompassed only those skills needed to raise children and please a husband and father. Women may have different duties than men, Wollstonecraft says, "but they are *human* duties" and deserve respect.

UNIT 10 (B): A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTER IV: “OBSERVATIONS ON THE STATE OF DEGRADATION TO WHICH WOMAN IS REDUCED BY VARIOUS CAUSES”

In the fourth chapter, Wollstonecraft cites various causes which have denigrated women to an inferior position in relation to the men in society and family. She argues that women have been "degraded" by society, a lack of education, and the attitudes of men. Society and the attitudes of men work together to prevent a comprehensive education for girls and women. Wollstonecraft believes this lack of real education causes many of the faults usually attributed to women. People—principally men—incorrectly believe the purpose of education is to prepare a child for the world. Wollstonecraft believes education should help the individual take a step toward eventual perfection, both spiritually and intellectually.

Knowledge requires "the power of generalizing ideas, of drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual observations," she argues, but this has been denied to women because men believe "it is inconsistent ... with their sexual character." Wollstonecraft challenges men to prove this "inconsistency."

She defines reason as "the simple power of improvement; or, more properly speaking, of discerning truth." Women cannot develop the skills of rational thinking fully because fathers and husbands shelter and overprotect them: Wollstonecraft believes reason develops as a response to adversity; instead, "pleasure is the business of a woman's life."

Wollstonecraft asks "affectionately" why women accept such a state, and she answers herself: people tend to make the best of their situation. She suggests some women enjoy their lives because they don't know any better. She compares women to rich men, who do not know how to do anything useful but enjoy their lives and work on improving their etiquette and manners. Society teaches women to focus on "sensation," to enjoy novels and music and gallant behaviour by men. She argues this focus on emotion weakens the rational part of a woman's mind. The effect is often they act and think like children.

She again takes issue with Rousseau, who dislikes the idea of a "man's education" for women because a woman so educated will have less power over men. Wollstonecraft is glad of that. She doesn't want power over men. She wants women to acquire power over themselves.

Society expects a wife and mother to manage her family and household, but if she is not well-educated, how can she competently manage her family? On the other hand, if she isn't caring for her family, she is no better than her husband's mistress because she is only there to please him. Wollstonecraft repeats the suggestion that marriage based on friendship might be more successful than marriage based on romantic love.

Wollstonecraft addresses specific situations which some women face. A widowed mother must serve as both father and mother, but how can she, when her education is inadequate? Wollstonecraft describes unmarried women who are left dependent on brothers because the men in their life do not let her make her own decisions.

She discusses polygamy in foreign countries and cites pseudo-science about the effects of polygamy. Wollstonecraft also explores "marriage with the left-hand"—living together without being married—and how it affects women who choose this arrangement because they are "broken off from society." She points out the consequences of such a union are far worse for the woman than the man.

UNIT 10 (C): A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTER V: "ANIMADVERSIONS ON SOME OF THE WRITERS WHO HAVE RENDERED WOMEN OBJECTS OF PITY, BORDERING ON CONTEMPT"

In this chapter, Wollstonecraft critically addresses how some other writers have written about women.

Section 1: Rousseau

Rousseau, unsurprisingly, is a chief target. Wollstonecraft disagrees with his claims that women are weaker than men, so their role is to please men:

> Sophia, says Rousseau, should be as perfect a woman as Emilius is a man, and to render her so, it is necessary to examine the character which nature has given to the sex. He then proceeds to prove that woman ought to be weak and passive, because she has less bodily strength than man; and hence infers, that she was formed to please and to be subject to him; and that it is her duty to render herself agreeable to her master-- this being the grand end of her existence (Wollstonecraft 86).

Rousseau wants the education of women to focus solely on how to please men. Her whole purpose is to be "a more alluring and indulgent companion." Wollstonecraft queries how such education prepares women to become "chaste wives and sensible mothers." She says "many

women in the world ... have strengthened their own minds ... yet have never met with a hero, in the shape of a husband."

Wollstonecraft acknowledges men's physical strength, but says, "were it not for mistaken notions of beauty, women would acquire sufficient to enable them to earn their own subsistence, the true definition of independence."

Section 2: Dr. Fordyce

Dr. Fordyce's sermons are often recommended to young girls, but Wollstonecraft would not share them with her students. She objects to the "lover-like phrases of pumped up passion" with which he describes the loveliness of women. Speaking to women in such a way limits their ability to see themselves as "rational creatures." Fordyce suggests women need only "a small degree of knowledge" to maintain their appeal to men.

Although men in literature have a wide range of different characters and roles to play, women are always supposed to be the same. Wollstonecraft thinks Fordyce's description of women as "levelled, by meekness and docility, into one character of yielding softness and gentle compassion" is impossible and unrealistic. She doesn't think he intends any harm, but so many people read his books she feels compelled to respond.

Section 3: Dr. Gregory

Wollstonecraft returns to *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*, which she admits is written with "parental solicitude," but is seriously misguided.

Gregory thinks all men will set out to deceive his daughters. If all men are untrustworthy, Wollstonecraft queries, why teach women to depend on men for everything? Gregory warns his daughters not to be "out of the track of common life" and tells them to conceal it if they have more learning than others, particularly from men. The "dissimulation" and deceit are what bothers Wollstonecraft most.

Section 4: Other Writers

Wollstonecraft says she will not attempt to respond to all writers because most of them hold similar ideas. She objects to Baroness de Stael's reaction to Rousseau. The Baroness is willing to forgive his sexism, but Wollstonecraft cannot.

Madame de Genlis wrote *Letters on Education*, which Wollstonecraft describes as full of unreasonable and strong prejudice, as in her expectation of "not only *blind* submission to parents; but to the opinion of the world."

On the other hand, Wollstonecraft believes Mrs. Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* deserve praise and that English historian Catharine Macaulay has not received the respect she deserved. Wollstonecraft refuses to use the phrase "masculine understanding" in referring to Macaulay, but her work "was a proof that a woman can acquire judgment, in the full extent of the word."

Section 5: Lord Chesterfield

Wollstonecraft turns to letters written by Lord Chesterfield to his son, which became a popular manual for the education of young men. She objects to "the art of acquiring an early knowledge of the world," asking why young men should be expected to develop wisdom about the world at a young age? She refers to the Bible and the famous line from it: for everything there is a season.

She rejects the idea of "blind obedience," arguing education should prepare people "to encounter the evils of life with dignity, and to acquire wisdom and virtue by the exercise of their own faculties." Wollstonecraft suggests men may develop "superior judgment, and more fortitude than women" because they allow themselves to experience "grand passions" and make mistakes. Wollstonecraft insists a young person cannot have a "just" view of life until he has experienced it for himself and she objects to "hasty premature instruction" that forms and solidifies prejudices.

UNIT 10 (D): A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTER VI: “THE EFFECT WHICH AN EARLY ASSOCIATION OF IDEAS HAS UPON THE CHARACTER”

With this perspective on the current state of women's education, Wollstonecraft asks how such an education could possibly produce wise or reasonable women. She suggests a mind well-stocked with information can make better judgments. Wollstonecraft describes the "habitual association of ideas" that occurs in the human mind. She argues the "habitual slavery, to first impressions, has a more baneful effect on the female than the male" because women are not exposed to new ideas, but are kept in a semi-childlike state forever. All their ideas are connected to beauty, delicacy, and achieving the desired effect in a man.

She refutes criticisms of women who use the same set phrases as if "learned by rote," saying the women well may have memorized those phrases to please the men in their lives. Some criticize women for being susceptible to "rakes," but Wollstonecraft argues women are not taught to appreciate good sense. They respond to a good appearance and a pleasing personality because that is what they are taught to cultivate in themselves. Why should they appreciate depth and wisdom in a man when society teaches them to dismiss such things in themselves? If women get a proper education in the future, she insists, they will reject scoundrels and rakes.

Wollstonecraft says a woman should not choose a husband based on his qualification as a lover because no husband remains a lover forever. She says a better education would prepare a woman "to love but once in their lives; and after marriage calmly let passion subside into friendship."

She concludes the chapter by saying that cultivating reason should be one of humanity's top priorities because "the right use of reason alone ... makes us independent of everything."

UNIT - 11

UNIT 11 (A): A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTER VII: "MODESTY—COMPREHENSIVELY CONSIDERED, AND NOT AS A SEXUAL VIRTUE"

Vindication of the Rights of Woman was essentially a rough draft when it was published. Wollstonecraft asserts her desire to be "unaffected" and write her honest thoughts,

but she also indicated at the time her intention to go back and revise it as well as add to it with future volumes. She never did substantially revise or add to it. This chapter is one of those which might have benefitted from some judicious revision. Here, Wollstonecraft defines modesty in two ways: the traditional way associated with the body and sexuality and also a modesty of the mind that requires one "to form a just opinion of ourselves" and "teaches a man not to think more highly of himself than he ought." In citing this non-sexual form of modesty, she gives examples including Milton, President George Washington, and Jesus Christ.

Wollstonecraft also differentiates modesty of mind from the idea of "innocence," which men try to foist on women. She argues men keep women from studying subjects such as botany because it is inconsistent with "female delicacy." Wollstonecraft claims a woman "who has dedicated a considerable portion of her time to pursuits purely intellectual" may in fact have more "purity of mind" than an "ignorant being" who focuses on "gay pleasures or schemes to conquer hearts."

Arguing that a woman who "can discern the dawn of immortality" may respect the body "as a sacred temple," Wollstonecraft claims "women are more chaste than men." She criticizes men for staring at women, arguing it represents a lack of respect for women and objects to the male habit of telling inappropriate or obscene jokes. She finds it lamentable men engage in these crass behaviors, while women are supposed to let men make decisions about their own modesty. Wollstonecraft also complains about men who brag about "their triumphs over women."

"Modesty must be equally cultivated by both sexes," Wollstonecraft says. She cites examples of how girls are misled at an early age by exposure to other girls who may have learned "very nasty tricks from ignorant servants." For modesty's sake, Wollstonecraft believes that "girls ought to be taught to wash and dress alone."

UNIT 11 (B): A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTER VIII: "MORALITY UNDERMINED BY SEXUAL NOTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD REPUTATION"

In this chapter, Wollstonecraft address an issue which was quite controversial in those days – women's sexuality. She challenges the overriding importance of a "good reputation." According to Wollstonecraft, people claim "respect for the opinion of the world" is "the principal duty of woman." Such advice, Wollstonecraft claims, may actually help destroy a woman's morality.

Wollstonecraft cites examples of women "in high life" who are unfaithful to their husbands out of boredom or a desire for additional praise. She describes women in loveless marriages who spend all their time indulging themselves, even at the expense of their own children. Yet these women, she says, are still praised for "their unsullied reputation."

English philosopher and economist Adam Smith suggests people are rarely held responsible for crimes they do not commit, but "the established opinion of the innocence of his manners will often lead us to absolve him where he has really been in the fault." Wollstonecraft agrees, suggesting people should worry more about what God thinks of them than what other people think. Wollstonecraft suggests a single rule: "to cherish such a habitual respect for mankind as may prevent us from disgusting a fellow-creature for the sake of a present indulgence."

Society puts too high a value on chastity, she says. A woman may do almost anything to her family, as long as she remains chaste. She cites the English historian, Catharine Macaulay, who refutes the idea that a woman who has lost her chastity is utterly ruined as a human being. Instead, she posits that total rejection by those close to them ruins many of these women.

According to Wollstonecraft, "men are certainly more under the influence of their appetites than women," drawing a parallel between food and other appetites. She attributes female weaknesses to "one grand cause—want of chastity in men." She claims women become more "voluptuous" in an effort to please men, saying some women will even reject pregnancies or babies in order to please men. Wollstonecraft concludes that "the two sexes mutually corrupt and improve each other."

UNIT 11 (C): A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTER IX: "OF THE PERNICIOUS EFFECTS WHICH ARISE FROM THE UNNATURAL DISTINCTIONS ESTABLISHED IN SOCIETY"

In this chapter, Wollstonecraft takes a dig at the society in general because it respects people of wealth rather than people of worth. She reminds the reader of the proverb about the devil employing idle people and asks what causes more idleness than hereditary wealth. Wealthy women, she points out, often choose not to care for their own children. How can society expect virtuous women if it only teaches them to be beautiful and well-mannered?

Duty is very important to Wollstonecraft: "Society is not properly organized which does not compel men and women to discharge their respective duties." She claims true happiness comes from affection and "an affection includes a duty" (for example, toward children). Wollstonecraft says a woman's first duty should be to herself and her second to her children, if she has them. She paints vivid images of a woman nursing her baby and a woman caring for her children—with a maid to help keep the house tidy—and claims this family will be happier than other even wealthier households because all members of the family have affection and duty. She does specify the family would need enough money for its necessities plus a little extra for books or to give to the poor.

Wollstonecraft briefly addresses how men can ennoble themselves in their professions, but she argues that few men truly do so. She claims they are more involved in gambling and fun than in nobly doing their jobs.

Directly attacking the way laws treat women, Wollstonecraft compares women to "poor African slaves" and objects to laws that "make an absurd unit of a man and his wife; and then, by ... only considering him as responsible, she is reduced to a mere cypher." Women are deprived of their natural rights because they have no identity other than as an adjunct to their husbands. Wollstonecraft makes the point that upper-class women who neither breastfeed nor actively raise their children don't deserve civil rights: "to render her really virtuous and useful, she must not, if she discharges her civil duties, want, individually, the protection of civil laws."

In one of her most revolutionary statements, Wollstonecraft claims "women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government." She acknowledges her idea may find ridicule, and she admits there are many citizens, not just women, who lack true representation in government.

Wollstonecraft also wants job opportunities for women. She suggests they "study the art of healing, and be physicians as well as nurses. And midwifery, decency seems to allot to them." Business is another option for them "if they were educated in a more orderly manner." She

recommends women study politics and history rather than solely reading romances. If society permitted women to work, they would not marry solely for financial support, she argues.

At the time Wollstonecraft wrote this book, working women received bad treatment, with many employers treating them no better than prostitutes. The jobs that are open to women are mostly menial, and even jobs like governess are not respected. Wollstonecraft blames the government because it "does not provide for honest, independent women, by encouraging them to fill respectable stations."

Wollstonecraft writes "How much more respectable is the woman who earns her own bread by fulfilling any duty, than the most accomplished beauty!" She warns women that if they continue to tolerate a society that only values them for their beauty, they should consider the view society will have of them when their beauty fades: "I wish, from the purest benevolence, to impress this truth on my sex," but she fears they will not listen. Wollstonecraft asks men to help "snap our chains and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience."

UNIT 11 (D): A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTER X: "PARENTAL AFFECTION"

As the title suggest, this chapter addresses the issue of parental affection. Wollstonecraft says many parents "love their children in the most brutal manner" and "sacrifice every relative duty to promote" their children's advancement in the world, yet they create bitterness in their children "by the most despotic stretch of power." She insists "parental affection ... is but a pretext to tyrannize where it can be done with impunity." This apparently is in reference to fathers because she claims a woman "either neglects her children or spoils them by improper indulgence."

Wollstonecraft suggests the duty of caring for infants and small children could "afford many forcible arguments for strengthening the female understanding." She argues that "a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess" to be a good mother.

She criticizes women who do not nurse their own children because "this duty is calculated to inspire maternal and filial affection." Wollstonecraft argues a child can be a "pledge of affection" between husband and wife, naturally maintaining those ties when the passionate love

between them has changed to friendship. However, she says, the "pledge of affection" only holds if the parents get involved in raising the child.

UNIT - 12

UNIT 12 (A): A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTER XI: “DUTY TO PARENTS”

Wollstonecraft now addresses children's responsibility to their parents. "If parents discharge their duty, they have a strong hold and sacred claim on the gratitude of their children," she says, but most parents instead demand "blind obedience." The relationship between parent and child is rational, she argues: the parent helps the child in infancy and the child helps the parent in old age. But some parents insist on controlling their children's lives even after the children are grown. This, she says, causes damage to the family relationships and to the child's morality. Wollstonecraft wants to "distinguish between the natural and accidental duty due to parents."

She says children are inclined to listen to their parents' advice, even after they are grown. A parent who helps the child grow deserves such respect "and his advice, even when his child is advanced in life, demands serious consideration." She gives the example of marriage, saying a 21-year-old son might reasonably marry anyone he chooses without parental consent, but a son younger than age 21 might wait for a few years out of respect for his parents' wishes. However, she says, most parents do not treat their children this way. Instead, they demand unreasoning obedience and "implicit respect," which is due only to God.

According to Wollstonecraft, much of the world's misery "is allowed to rise from the negligence of parents." She describes parents "of high rank" who "extort a shew of respect" but drive the child to bad behaviour because of their tight control. She suggests parents could, but don't, talk to their children as follows: "It is your interest to obey me till you can judge for yourself," following that with "when your mind arrives at maturity, you must only ... respect my opinions, so far as they coincide with ... your own mind."

Things are even worse for female children. Wollstonecraft suggests this tight control breaks the spirit of a child, citing Locke: "if the mind be curbed and humbled too much in children ...

they lose all their vigour and industry." Girls are groomed to be slaves in marriage, and if they are not slaves, Wollstonecraft says, they are tyrants.

"Children cannot be taught too early to submit to reason," she insists. She acknowledges commanding a child is easier than reasoning with the child, but "the irregular exercise of parental authority ... injures the mind, and to these irregularities girls are more subject than boys." Wollstonecraft observes how girls learn to manipulate their families and later use these skills to manage their husbands. She sadly concludes of women: "when their first affection must lead them astray ... little can be expected from them as they advance in life."

UNIT 12 (B): A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTER XII: "ON NATIONAL EDUCATION"

In this chapter, Wollstonecraft voices the urgency of a sound system of education, as that has become a "grand national concern." The development of a child is never complete without education, therefore, children should be given an opportunity and encouraged to expand their mental and intellectual faculties and think for their own wellbeing. This can only be achieved when children are put together on the same plane, and be educated in the same subjects.

Wollstonecraft expresses her strict anguish over formal education in schools, especially private boarding schools, as she thinks, "At schools, boys become gluttons and slovens, and instead of cultivating domestic affections, very early rush into the libertinism which destroys the constitution before it is formed; hardening the heart as it weakens the understanding." On the other hand, if they are educated alone at home by their parents, though the plan of study might be more "orderly", they can become imperious and spoiled by the over-affectionate nature of their mothers, and thus, would become "vain and effeminate."

The most appropriate form of education, according to Wollstonecraft, would be that which combines the public and private education. In her opinion, the "country day school" is the most significant example of this; the boys who attended this type of schools learn to respect and revere their school as well as their home. At the same time, they would hardly ever recollect with fondness their days spent in the confines of the boarding school, where "the relaxation of the junior boys is mischief; and of the senior, vice." There is also an established practice of tyranny, as well as an intrinsic attitude of laziness, amongst the boys, and ignorance of duty.

Moreover, while remaining under a liberal form of governance, they often ignore the ceremonial prayers and worships, and eventually develop a feeling of contempt over those.

A major drawback of education in public schools is that their false advocacy of religion, as it is reflected in their "irksome ceremonies and unreasonable restraints." Moreover, these educational institutes are housed by a "dogmatical or luxurious set of men," the teachers, whom Wollstonecraft considers as "pedantic tyrants" in their acts of negligence and hypocrisy. Hence, it is not a matter of surprise that under the leadership of such tyrannical teachers, the boys would naturally become "selfish and vicious."

Therefore, a proper mode of education is required for the development of a child's intellectual faculty and a sense of morality. Public education should be accessible to every member of the society and should be aimed at forming true human beings. This goal cannot be achieved unless a certain degree of affection is instilled in the child's heart since infancy. As she states,

> Public education of every denomination, should be directed to form citizens; but if you wish to make good citizens, you must first exercise the affections of a son and a brother…for this is the only way to expand his heart; for public affections, as well as public virtues, must ever grow out of the private character.

The growth of this affection should begin from his family, in his show of affection towards his parents and siblings, because, Wollstonecraft believes, no one can have affection for mankind unless he affection for his father, mother, sister, brother and siblings.

The common day schools, Wollstonecraft advocates, must be made into national establishments. The boys must get out of the shackles of the masters who "are dependent on the caprices of parents." This creates a very bad effect on the young boys who have nothing to reflect upon other than the things that they have memorised blatantly without a clear understanding of the subject, and are compelled to recite them in front of their parents just to impress them. The situation becomes irreversible since the teachers remain dependent on the guardians for their income, and there sustains an invisible completion among the schools for the increase of students and funds.

Thereafter, Wollstonecraft goes on to discuss the nature of education of girls in different public schools, who are "more restrained and cowed than boys" and "speak of wearisome confinement which they endured at school." Owing to their femininity, they are subjected to more

restrictions, are not allowed to step out in the garden, or stroll over the grassy path, as that would curb their chastity. While remaining in such a confined status,

> …the pure animal spirits, which make both mind and body shoot out, and unfold the tender blossoms of hope are turned sour, and vented in vain wishes, or pert repinings, that contract the faculties and spoil the temper; else they mount to the brain and sharpening the understanding before it gains proportionable strength, produce the pitiful cunning which disgracefully characterizes the female mind –and I fear will ever characterize it whilst women remain the slaves of power!

Moreover, the over-imposition of strict rules on women might result in the stagnation of intellectual and rational faculty, they might become stupid; or, they might eventually turn towards achieving a certain degree of cunningness. Wollstonecraft also marks a stark distinction in the status of men and women in society. She observes, "Women have been allowed to remain in ignorance, and slavish dependence, many, very many years…" She argues that this dependence has created a negative impact upon the minds of the ladies, who cannot think themselves beyond the domestic walls and believe themselves to be the objects of pleasure to satisfy the needs of their husbands.

While women, Wollstonecraft observes, are viewed as paragons of chastity, men rarely pay attention to the preservation of that virtue. Rather, at schools, the boys would inevitably lose that decent "bashfulness" and often take recourse to laughter and ridicule as a means of upholding their superiority and dominance.

As an attempt to uphold the "national education" of her country, Wollstonecraft suggests certain measures to be adopted by the government. First of all, every child, aged between five to nine years, regardless of his or her social rank and sex, must attend schools and pursue their academic courses together: "…day schools for particular ages should be established by government." The teachers should be selected from the community, rich or poor alike, and should adhere to the same rules and dress themselves up in the same way. In terms of academics, they should be taught a number of subjects, including Arithmetic, Natural history, natural philosophy, Religion, history, politics, Botany, Mechanics, and astronomy. Apart from academic exercises, students should also be encouraged to involve in physical activities and must exercise daily for a substantial amount of the day in the adjoining playground, which Wollstonecraft perceives as an intrinsic part of the institution.

After nine years of age, boys and girls who are destined to pursue their career either in mechanics or domesticity, should attend other schools and receive instruction according to their desired areas of employment. Both sexes will be educated together in the morning, but in the afternoon, girls should attend another school where "plain work, mantua-making, millinery, etc. would be their employment."

The young pupil of superior ability or fortune would then be taught in a separate school and be acquainted with the "dead and living languages" along with some scientific measures, history, and politics (including political literature). At this stage as well, girls and boys will still be together. It would enhance the scope of mutual understanding, and might even result in "early marriages," from which, Wollstonecraft believes, "the most salutary physical and moral effects naturally flow."

Therefore, Wollstonecraft advocates a system of education that would combine elements of both private and public education, and which will be shared by all children, irrespective of their sex, rank and social position. In this mode of education, students would get the opportunity to continue with their education while living at home, not in boarding schools, only going out to attend the school in the course of the day, and return by the evening. "These would be schools of morality" where boys are not be trained to be debauched or selfish, and the girls to be weak, vain and frivolous. If women are taught to respect themselves, they would properly attend their domestic duties while fully embracing their intellectual and active minds. Moreover, it would also create a healthy conjugal relationship, since women would become companions to their husbands in the truest sense of the term, and not merely wives, or machines of reproduction. As she states,

> Nay, marriage will never be held sacred till women be being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions, rather than their mistresses; for the mean doublings of cunning will ever render them contemptible, whilst oppression renders them timid. So convinced am I of this truth, that I will venture to predict, that virtue will never prevail in society till the virtues of both sexes are founded on reason; and, till the affection common to both are allowed to gain their due strength by the discharge of mutual duties.

The true purpose of education, according to Wollstonecraft, is to attain the overall development of the human mind, to achieve liberty from the narrow shackles of domesticity, and to achieve the height of intellectual expansion by means of reliance on one's rational faculty. A truly

proper form of education would benefit the entire society as a whole. In her treatise on the need of education, woman forms a focal point of interest because she has to perform a very significant role in her family, as well as in society, that of motherhood. And no woman can become a good mother unless she is equipped with a proper form of education since education alone could bring about social and intellectual enlightenment. Therefore, Wollstonecraft proposes, “Let men take their choice, man and woman were made for each other, though not to become one being; and if they will not improve women, they will deprave them!”

UNIT 12 (C): A SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTER XIII: “SOME INSTANCES OF THE FOLLY WHICH THE IGNORANCE OF WOMEN GENERATES WITH CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON THE MORAL IMPROVEMENT THAT A REVOLUTION IN FEMALE MANNERS MIGHT NATURALLY BE EXPECTED TO PRODUCE”

In the conclusion, Wollstonecraft states, "there are many follies ... peculiar to women ... all flowing from ignorance or prejudice." She plans to identify some of them as further evidence of how women's limited lives and education cause damage.

Section 1

She criticizes women who believe in "nativities" (horoscopes), and she asks a series of questions to remind them of their belief in God. She also attacks those who believe in "magnetizers" (mesmerists or hypnotists), saying their stunts lack any support from science. Wollstonecraft blames the men performing these acts because they do their work for money and calls it "little short of blasphemy to pretend to such powers!" She defends Christianity and the traditional religious beliefs of her era.

Section 2

Wollstonecraft complains about sentimentality. She blames some of it on poor reading materials, such as novels, which women are encouraged to enjoy. Wollstonecraft recommends weaning someone from a dependence on novels by "judicious" use of "ridicule," pointing out to the reader how overwrought and unrealistic events in the novel are and how they pale in comparison to actual history.

Section 3

She addresses women's preoccupation with dressing well and "ornamentation," arguing such behaviours are innate in all human beings. She gives examples of "barbarous states" where men "adorn themselves" and claims that "when the mind is not sufficiently opened to take pleasure in reflection, the body will be adorned with sedulous care." Women obsess about clothes, she says, because society hasn't taught them to use their minds to think of anything else. She concedes that if someone can prove women should be subordinate to men, then focusing on their clothes and how their clothes will please men is natural for women. Because no one has proven it, however, she sees the obsession with image and fashion as a fault in women.

Section 4

Although at the time most people believed women were more generous than men, Wollstonecraft says, in her experience women tend to be tightly focused on their own loved ones. She claims the limitations placed on women's worlds mean they have little appreciation for what happens to others outside their restricted scope of experience.

Section 5

Wollstonecraft addresses "the rearing of children," which is considered a wholly female domain. She acknowledges the logical reasons for women's involvement but says women are so ignorant they are unintentionally harming their own children. She contrasts a man's knowledge of breeding horses with a woman's lack of knowledge about caring for her own children. She continues the comparison, likening a wild, unmanageable child to a "spirited filly" that can suffer crippling injuries if trained incorrectly.

Based on her experience, Wollstonecraft says a child's "moral character ... is fixed before their seventh year," a period of time in which a mother and the servants exclusively care for them. Wollstonecraft objects to the way many mothers treat servants in the children's presence because it teaches the children to demand assistance rather than to do things for themselves. She criticizes mothers who choose to play cards and attend balls, leaving the children with the servants for long periods of time. These mothers, she argues, are a bad example to their children because they do not care for anything except themselves. These faults, she contends, result from a poor education: "For it would be as wise to expect ... figs from thistles, as that a foolish ignorant woman should be a good mother."

Section 6

Wollstonecraft makes her concluding argument. She says "the sagacious reader" no doubt already understands her point, but she wishes "to add some explanatory remarks to bring the subject home ... to that sluggish reason, which supinely takes opinions on trust."

"To render women truly useful members of society," she says, they need more knowledge and training in rational, critical thinking. This knowledge will make them more virtuous as well. Wollstonecraft claims it is "not to be disputed" that woman of her time "are by ignorance rendered foolish or vicious." She reiterates some of her key points about the effects of oppression on the human spirit. She concludes by claiming that if women obtain civil rights and other liberties of citizenship but do not "change their character and correct their vices and follies," women will have proven themselves lesser than men and men can rightfully rule over them. Until that time, she warns men to "allow her the privileges of ignorance, to whom ye deny the rights of reason."

UNIT 12 (D): *A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN*: RECEPTION AND CRITICISM

The publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792 led to an unprecedented amount of debate regarding the necessity of education of and for women, and their status in society. According to the historians, the treatise had generated a sheer amount of shock, disbelief, cynicism and marvel, and had to undergo a continuing misclassification. One of Wollstonecraft's biographers, R. M. Janes in "On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" (1798), avouched that Wollstonecraft's work was positively received especially by those who implored for social, educational, and political reformations. The Gentleman's Magazine, the most successful of the eighteenth-century periodicals, observed the imparity between Godwin's version and Wollstonecraft's treatise:

> The readers of the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, will perhaps be surprised when he is informed, that, during her last illness, no religious expression escaped the author's lips. In that work, the grand principle is, that woman is not inferior of man, but his equal in moral rank, walking along with

> him the road of duty, in which “they are both trained for a state of endless improvement.

Moreover, many felt that the *Vindication* was addressed to the female audience only; but, in fact, Wollstonecraft believed that women could not perform the revolution alone, which indicates that men are also needed to effect the change. In other words, as argues by Amy Elizabeth Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft addressed readers of both genders to accomplish her aims in the Vindication. Indeed, Mary Wollstonecraft has specifically mentioned about the middle-class women as her target audience when she claims: “the instruction which has hitherto been addressed to women, has rather been applicable to ladies…but, addressing my sex in a firmer tone, I pay particular attention to those in middle-class because they appear to be in the most natural state.” (quoted in Smith 556-557). Therefore, Wollstonecraft wants to recreate a dynamic relationship and a mutual feeling of liability between men and women.

The scholars and critics of Wollstonecraft put a great interest in Wollstonecraft’s style and language, and they have intrinsically remarked that illustrations and aesthetic tropes are predominantly used in her *Vindication*. Wollstonecraft herself asserts this in the advertisement she presented for her treatise:

> When I began to write this work, I divided it into three parts, supposing that one volume would contain the full discussion of the argument which seemed to me to rise naturally from a few simple principles; but fresh illustrations accruing as I advanced, I know present only the first part to the public (Wollstonecraft xv).

As observed by Inna Volvoca, and cited by Amina Benladghem, Wollstonecraft’s polemics are mainly supported by examples and simple principles in a broad sense to be more relevant to audience perceptions, by this she tends also to teach readers observation skill. Furthermore, Mary Wollstonecraft’s style of writing is distinguished from those sentimental letters of cry words, divisively, her literary work seems to be more rimmed and factual, in which she came close to the serious matters in society. The fact that she was more limited to exact rules does not mean that she was exempted from the harsh critics, her choice of arguments and style is almost described as signs of misogyny by the contemporary critics, for this reason, she sought to avoid such stereotypes by defending her style.

Recent critics also are directed to Wollstonecraft’s style and themes and the subject. The American philosopher Carolyn Korsmeyer propounds three fundamental themes involved in the Vindication, namely - reason, women’s inferiority, and educational opportunities. On the

other hand, the American literary critic Mary Poovey reprehends Wollstonecraft because she puts herself in a separate position from women instead of recognizing them as allies. Additionally, Poovey refers to Wollstonecraft's failure in describing women's state out of ideological notions. Similarly, from a linguistic perspective, the renowned French feminist Luce Irigaray argues that language in Wollstonecraft's book is not so adapted to women's ignorance, "It is to resubmit herself... .to ideas notably about her elaborated in and through a masculine logic but to bring out by an effect of playful repetition what was to remain hidden: the recovery of a possible operation of feminine in language".

In later years, European Feminist thinkers started their movements in the nineteenth century asking for women's equality in social and political matters taking Mary Wollstonecraft as a model. Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was wholeheartedly accepted by American women's moral reformers in particular, like Angelina and Sarah Grimke who spoke publicly about the abolition of certain restrictions on women and other quandaries. On the same wave, the French Women's newspaper *La Femme Libre*, ascribed to Jeanne Deroin, one of the eminent thinkers in French feminist movements who condemned the way women were oppressed in choosing their partners, thereto, the article reported, "Let us refuse as husbands any man who is not sufficiently generous to consent to share his power; we want no more this formula, ... we demand equality in marriage."

CONCLUSION

Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* encourages women to rely on their rational faculty. As Charles Taylor points out, "Reason is the capacity to see and understand." Wollstonecraft sincerely believed that women must absorb their own identities from knowledge, education and reason. Moreover, her observation on society's structure is used to push woman inside society as an individual, and to overturn the traditional rudiments in which, " women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from a participation of the natural rights of mankind." By this Wollstonecraft aims to draw an appropriate way in order to involve women in public, and she does not deny the difference between woman and man at all, but sometimes she blames women who directly follow sensibility and passion instead of reason.

Wollstonecraft was one of the first thinkers to propose that gender roles are not natural, but social. While Wollstonecraft was radical in seeking education as a means of "improving" women's position in society, she was hesitant to upset the gender hierarchies. Education, as Wollstonecraft saw it, was about "improvement", not considering it, however, as a means of overturning power. Rather, she believed that education would definitely instil a love for domestic life.

Therefore, as Gariti and Zerar argue that *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,

> "… completes *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* in the work of ideological deconstruction of femininity. If the latter chastens the aristocratic figure of Burke and celebrates in Price the surrogate tamed or civilized father that Wollstonecraft had never had, the former gives ample room to the mother envisaged both as a human figure (an immanence) and a metaphysical representation of freedom (transcendence). So we shall argue that looked at from the perspective of the two works together, Wollstonecraft's Gothic feminism, contrary to Hoeveler's conclusion, is not concerned with the "gendering of the civilization process." What emerges from the two works is that European civilization can be redeemed only if gender inequality is dislodged. The slippage from text to author in both works gives the picture of a redefined civilized family wherein sexual and sociological roles are adjusted according to the rules of reason and rational morality" (33).

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ASSIGNMENTS

1. Would you consider Mary Wollstonecraft as a precursor of feminist literary movement? Discuss.

2. How did Wollstonecraft challenge the opinion of the Enlightenment philosophers and intellectuals on the necessity of education for women?

3. What was Wollstonecraft's stake on "national education"? Discuss reference to Chapter XII of *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman*.

4. Make a critical estimate of Mary Wollstonecraft's major propositions in *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman*.

BLOCK - IV

UNITS: 13 – 16

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

BY

VIRGINIA WOOLF

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

Unit 13 (a): Life and Works of Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

Unit 13 (b): An Introduction to *A Room of One's Own*

Unit 14 (a): Summary of *A Room of One's Own*

Unit 14 (b): A Brief Synopsis of Some Selected Chapters from *A Room of One's Own*

Chapter-2

Unit 15 (a): A Brief Synopsis of Chapter – 5

Unit 15 (b): A Brief Synopsis of Chapter – 6

Unit 16 (a): A Feminist Reading of *A Room of One's Own*

Unit 16 (b): Alice Walker's reply to Virginia Woolf - "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens"

Conclusion

Works Cited

Suggested Reading List

Assignments

Unit - 13

UNIT 13 (A): LIFE AND WORKS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF (1882-1941)

In her biography of the renowned Modernist writer, Linda Anderson writes, "Virginia Woolf shaped and defended the modern novel and left nearly 4,000 letters and thirty volumes of a diary. No writer's life can be so fully documented. Yet, the woman's writing remains elusive..." The combination of an extraordinarily fertile mind and a dramatic life paved the way for the perpetration of Woolf's creative genius. Born on 25th January 1882 to Leslie and Julia (Duckworth) Stephen, Virginia's apparently happy childhood was disrupted by the early death of her mother in 1895, followed by her first mental breakdown. The death of her half-sister, Stella Duckworth, two years later further damaged her fragile psychological health. As Gordon observes, "There was, at the age of fifteen, so much against her: the deaths of her two protectors; the emotional withdrawal of her father; and above all the mental illness that now set in, that always threatened to surface, and that often succeeded in these first, most vulnerable twenty years in bouts of varying severity, the last of which coincided with the publication of her first novel in 1915."

In 1898, Virginia met Kitty Maxse, who later became the model for her fictional character Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway. The following year, her brother Thoby entered Trinity College, Cambridge, and developed a friendship with Clive Bell, Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey, and Saxon Sydney-Turner, all of whom eventually became a part of the intellectual circle as they matured. In 1904, upon the death of her father Sir Leslie Stephen, Virginia suffered her second and the more acute breakdown, during which she attempted suicide. The same year, the Stephen family moved to Bloomsbury; shortly thereafter, Thoby started 'Thursday Evenings' at their 46 Gordon Square Residence with his University friends, which marked the beginning of the famous 'Bloomsbury Group'. In October 1907, after her brother, Thoby's death and sister Vanessa's marriage to Clive Bell, Virginia started working on her first novel "Melymbrosia", which was eventually published in 1915 as *The Voyage Out*. In August 1912, she married Leonard Woolf, after an attack of mental illness earlier that year; the following year she fell seriously ill again and attempted suicide by medicinal overdose. However, she began to recover after the publication of *The Voyage Out* in 1915, and in 1917, the Woolfs started the Hogarth Press at home. Woolf continued to write and publish both fiction and prose – *Night and Day*

(1919), *Monday or Tuesday* (1921) and *Jacob's Room* (1922) even as their publishing venture began to flourish amongst intellectuals. 1922 was an eventful year in Woolf's life: she published *Jacob's Room*, her friend Kitty Maxse died, and she met Vita Sackville-West, with whom she was to have a prolonged and dense romantic affair which was not restricted to the boundary of the psychological.

The following years were immensely exhaustive, and at the same time, fruitful for Woolf. Both her works, *The Common Reader* and *Mrs. Dalloway* were published in 1925 and *To the Lighthouse* in 1927. With the development of her relationship with Vita, Woolf started writing *Orlando*, which was published in 1928. The same year, she delivered lectures at Cambridge that were published as *A Room of One's Own* in 1929, followed by the publication of The Waves in 1931. By the mid-30s, however, the strains of her emotional and intellectual struggles began to overtake her. After a rigorous act of labour over *The Years* through 1935-1936, she published *Three Guineas*, another of her political tract besides *A Room of One's Own*, in 1938. In February 1941, though she managed to finish writing her final novel *Between the Acts*, the curtain was about to descend on her own tumultuous life. Upon the rapid deterioration of her mental health, she drowned herself in the River Ouse on March 28. *Between the Acts* was published in the same month in1941.

UNIT 13 (B): AN INTRODUCTION TO *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN*

Published initially as "Women and Fiction" in the American journal *Forum* in 1929, *A Room of One's Own* is one of the most significant feminist texts of the twentieth century. The text, chronicling the first literary history of women writers, is radical in the sense that it anticipates many of the concerns of Second Wave Feminism some forty years later. Woolf initially gave a version of the essay in the form of two lectures delivered at the women's colleges of Cambridge University, Newnham and Girton. Denied a formal education herself, and self-educated in her father's library, Woolf stepped into a University in 1928 to address women who had gained access to higher education. By that time, she had excelled in the field of creative writing, and a number of her works had already been published. Her aversion to the male-dominated institution, so familiar to her brothers, her husband, and the male members of

the Bloomsbury group, was fostered by her desire to share her experiences and ideas as a writer with the young scholars. Despite women's presence in the intellectual sphere, Woolf was aware of the oppositions they had to encounter while traversing the apparently untrodden path. It is important to note that Girton was founded by Emily Davies in 1869 and Newnham by Anne Jemima in 1871, but women in Woolf's audience weren't awarded degrees and were required to sit in segregated areas during lectures. In 1932, when Woolf was again invited back to Cambridge, this time to deliver the prestigious Clark lectures in English Literature, previously given by her father Leslie Stephen, she declined. Her dislike of lecturing as a form, of pomp and ceremony, and her refusal to receive honours from an institution which continued to marginalize women, prevented her from accepting. She was convinced, however, of the importance of encouraging young women to work to change the situation.

Unit - 14

Unit 14 (a): Summary of *A Room of One's Own*

Woolf begins the essay with a question directed towards her immediate audience – "But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction – what has that to do with a room of one's own" (7). While dealing with the interrelationship between women and fiction, Woolf wonders what would be the topic – will it address the question of what women are like; the fiction women write; the fiction that is written about women; or a combination of the three. Instead, she has come up with "one minor point", that – "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction " (7). In a tone of clarification, she talks about her use of a fictional narrator whom she calls Mary Beton and who acts as her alter ego, to relate how her thoughts on the lecture mingled with her daily life.

A week ago, the narrator, after crossing a lawn at the fictional Oxbridge university, tries to enter the library and passes by the chapel. She is intercepted at each station and reminded that women are not allowed to do such things without accompanying men. She goes to lunch, where the excellent food and relaxing atmosphere make way for good conversation. Back at Fernham, the women's college where she is staying as a guest, she is served a mediocre dinner. She later talks with a friend of hers, Mary Seton, about how men's colleges were funded by kings and independently wealthy men, and how funds were raised with difficulty for the women's college.

She and Seton denounce their mothers, and their sex, for being so impoverished and leaving their daughters so little. Had they been independently wealthy, perhaps they could have found fellowships and secured similar luxuries for women. However, the narrator realizes the obstacles they faced: entrepreneurship is at odds with child-rearing, and only for the last 48 years have women even been allowed to keep the money they earned. The narrator thinks about the effects of wealth and poverty on the mind, about the prosperity of males and the poverty of females, and the effects of tradition or lack of tradition on the writer.

Searching for answers, the narrator explores the British Museum in London. She finds there are countless books written about women by men, while there are hardly any books by women on men. She selects a dozen books to try and come up with an answer to why women are poor. Instead, she locates a multitude of other topics and a contradictory array of men's opinions on women. One male professor who writes about the inferiority of women angers her, and it occurs to her that she has become angry because the professor has written angrily. Had he written "dispassionately," she would have paid more attention to his argument, and not to him. After her anger dissipates, she wonders why men are so angry if England is a patriarchal society in which they have all the power and money. Perhaps holding power produces anger out of fear that others will take one's power. She posits that when men pronounce the inferiority of women, they are really claiming their own superiority. The narrator believes self-confidence, a requirement to get through life, is often attained by considering other people inferior in relation to oneself. Throughout history, women have served as models of inferiority who enlarge the superiority of men.

The narrator is grateful for the inheritance left her by her aunt. Previously, she was compelled to live on loathsome, slavish odd jobs available to women before 1918. In the present context, since nothing can take away her money and security, she argues, she need not hate or enslave herself to any man. She now feels free to "think of things in themselves", she can judge art, for instance, with greater objectivity.

The narrator investigates the condition of women in Elizabethan England, puzzled why there were no women writers in that fertile literary period. She believes there is a deep connection between living conditions and creative works. She reads a history book, learns that women had few rights in the era, and finds no material about middle-class women.

In the third chapter, she imagines what would have happened had Shakespeare had an equally gifted sister named Judith. She writes, “Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say.”

“Shakespeare himself went, very probably, —his mother was an heiress—to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin—Ovid, Virgil and Horace—and the elements of grammar and logic.” He had married early, and became a father quickly which compelled him to go to London to earn a living. Woolf writes,

> He had, it seemed, a taste for the theatre; he began by holding horses at the stage door. Very soon he got work in the theatre, became a successful actor, and lived at the hub of the universe, meeting everybody, knowing everybody, practising his art on the boards, exercising his wits in the streets, and even getting access to the palace of the queen.

“Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home.” She was not able to attend school and her family discouraged her from independent study. She would be forced to get married against her will as a teenager, and thus ran away to London. The men at a theatre denied her the chance to work and learn the craft:

> She stood at the stage door; she wanted to act, she said. Men laughed in her face. The manager—a fat, loose-lipped man—guffawed...no woman, he said, could possibly be an actress...—for she was very young, oddly like Shakespeare the poet in her face with the same grey eyes and rounded brows—at last Nick Greene the actor manager took pity on her; she found herself with child by that gentleman and so—who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet’s heart when caught and tangled in a woman’s body?—killed herself one winter’s night and lies buried at some cross–roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle.

Thus, Woolf outlines the possible course of Shakespeare's life: grammar school, marriage, and work at a theatre in London. His sister, however, was not able to attend school and her family discouraged her from independent study. She was married against her will as a teenager and ran away to London. The men at a theatre denied her the chance to work and learn the craft. Impregnated by a theatrical man, she committed suicide.

The narrator believes that no women of the time would have had such genius, "For genius like Shakespeare's is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people." Nevertheless, some kind of genius must have existed among women then, as it exists among the working class, although it never translated to paper. The narrator argues that the difficulties of writing--especially the indifference of the world to one's art--are compounded for women, who are actively disdained by the male establishment. She says the mind of the artist must be "incandescent" like Shakespeare's, without any obstacles. She argues that the reason we know so little about Shakespeare's mind is that his work filters out his personal "grudges and spites and antipathies." His absence of personal protest makes his work "free and unimpeded."

The narrator reviews the poetical works of some of the aristocratic ladies of Elizabethan England and finds that anger toward men and insecurity mar their writing and prevents their genius from shining through. The writer Aphra Behn marks a turning point: a middle-class woman whose husband's death forced her to earn her own living, Behn's triumph over circumstances surpasses even her excellent writing. Behn is the first female writer to have "freedom of the mind." Countless 18th-century middle-class female writers and beyond owe a great debt to Behn's breakthrough. The narrator wonders why the four famous and divergent 19th-century female novelists George Eliot, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and Jane Austen--all wrote novels; as middle-class women, they would have had less privacy and a greater inclination toward writing poetry or plays, which require less concentration. However, the 19th-century middle-class woman was trained in the art of social observation, and the novel was a natural fit for her talents.

The narrator argues that traditionally masculine values and topics in novels such as warfare valued more than feminine ones, such as drawing-room character studies. Female writers, then, were often forced to adjust their writing to meet the inevitable criticism that their work was insubstantial. Even if they did so without anger, they deviated from their original visions and their books suffered. The early 19th-century female novelists also had no real tradition from which to work; they lacked even a prose style fit for a woman. The narrator argues that the novel was the chosen form for these women since it was a relatively new and pliable medium.

The narrator takes down a recent debut novel called *Life's Adventure* by Mary Carmichael. Viewing Carmichael as a descendant of the female writers she has commented on, the narrator dissects her book. She finds the prose style uneven, perhaps as a rebellion against the "flowery" reputation of women's writing. She reads on and finds the simple sentence "'Chloe liked

Olivia.'" She believes the idea of friendship between two women is ground-breaking in literature, as women have historically been viewed in literature only in relation to men. By the nineteenth century, women grew more complex in novels, but the narrator still believes that each gender is limited in its knowledge of the opposite sex. The narrator recognizes that for whatever mental greatness women have, they have not yet made much of a mark in the world compared to men. Still, she believes that the great men in history often depended on women for providing them with "some stimulus, some renewal of creative power" that other men could not. She argues that the creativity of men and women is different and that their writing should reflect their differences. The narrator believes Carmichael has much work to do in recording the lives of women, and Carmichael will have to write without anger against men. Moreover, since everyone has a blind spot about themselves, only women can fill out the portrait of men in literature. However, the narrator feels Carmichael is "no more than a clever girl," even though she bears no traces of anger or fear. In a hundred years, the narrator believes, and with money and a room of her own, Carmichael will be a better writer.

The pleasing sight of a man and woman getting into a taxi provokes an idea for the narrator: the mind contains both a male and female part and for "complete satisfaction and happiness," the two must live in harmony. This fusion, she believes, is what poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge described when he said a great mind is "androgynous": "the androgynous mind transmits emotion without impediment it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided." Shakespeare is a fine model of this androgynous mind, though it is harder to find current examples in this "stridently sex-conscious" age. The narrator blames both sexes for bringing about this self-consciousness of gender.

Woolf takes over the speaking voice and responds to two anticipated criticisms against the narrator. First, she says she purposely did not express an opinion on the relative merits of the two genders--especially as writers--since she does not believe such a judgment is possible or desirable. Second, her audience may believe the narrator laid too much emphasis on material things, and that the mind should be able to overcome poverty and lack of privacy. She cites a professor's argument that of the top poets of the last century, almost all were well-educated and rich. Without material things, she repeats, one cannot have intellectual freedom, and without intellectual freedom, one cannot write great poetry. Women, who have been poor since the beginning of time, have understandably not yet written great poetry. She also responds to the question of why she insists women's writing is important. As an avid reader, the overly

masculine writing in all genres has disappointed her lately. She encourages her audience to be themselves and "Think of things in themselves." She says that Judith Shakespeare still lives within all women and that if women are given money and privacy in the next century, she will be reborn.

UNIT 14 (B): A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF SOME SELECTED CHAPTERS FROM *A ROOM OF ONE'S* OWN: CHAPTER – 2

A Room of One's Own might be seen as a kind of cultural odyssey where we experience someone moving past different landmarks towards a settled place, or in this case, a settled opinion. While the first chapter is concerned with the narrator's journey to the fictional Oxbridge University and her varied experiences, leading her to conclude that men and women do not receive similar treatment owing to the societal, stereotypical gendered opinion and prejudices, the second chapter shifts to London as the scope of her journey widens. The narrator pays a visit to the British Museum, where, in a wonderful image, "one stood under the vast dome as if one were a thought in the huge bald forehead." Here, she suggests, one might hope to find "the essential oil of truth (30)," and discover answers to questions like:

- Why men drink wine and women water?
- Why one sex is prosperous and the other poor?
- What effect poverty has on fiction?
- And what conditions are necessary for the creation of a work of art?

In order to find answers to these questions, the narrator looks at books that have been written about women by men.

At the very outset of her enquiry, the narrator wonders, why men write the kind of books that are so full of prejudices and contradictions in terms of their representation of women. She takes a very pertinent question to highlight her argument – are women capable of having an education? – Napoleon says: no; Dr. Johnson says: yes. Finally, she reaches the conclusion that the books written by men on women are mostly unscientific. Usually written by professors,

they seem to be written “in the red light of emotion rather than the white light of truth”(36); and their anger seems obvious by their lack of dispassionate argument.

But why men are mad at women, the narrator asks. “How to explain the anger of the professors?”, and especially, since England “is under the rule of patriarchy” (37). Woolf argues that the patriarchal agents are angry with women because they realize that women provide an essential psychological function which they are afraid of losing. The function is the insurance of self-confidence. Therefore, the professors and other esteemed men are not concerned with women’s inferiority, but instead, what bothers them is their own superiority which has been preserved across centuries. “Women,” the narrator states, “have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting man as twice his natural size” (41). Further, she argues that a piece of criticism from a woman is much more hurtful to a man than the same would be if it came from a man. If women tell the truth, she says, the figure in the looking glass shrinks.

However, the truth is valuable in its own right and the narrator claims that with an independent income of the sort that she has, women would be free to relate differently to men and to explore the nature of the sex as theirs is explored. Having complete trust in women to be “magnanimous in their assessments,” she suggests that a regular stipend of about five hundred pounds a year would do the trick. With these observations, the narrator concludes her “contributions to the dangerous and fascinating subject of the psychology of the other sex” (42).

In this chapter, the reader is exposed to a version of institutionalized sexism; all the books in the library about women are by men, and frequently men with a chip on their shoulder. The narrator quickly identifies this chip as defensiveness. Men, habituated in feeling superior at the expense of women, grow angry and fearful when their superiority is threatened. Hence, they cut down women in an attempt to enlarge themselves, as the narrator describes through the metaphor of a "looking-glass".

There are two reasons why this instinctive aggression is harmful. First, it produces many of the social ills the narrator outlines, among them war. In their constant battle for power, men destroy that which they are fighting for. Remember the narrator's nostalgia for the pre-war musical hum of conversation, now replaced by regular conversation.

The second, more subtle, reason men's aggression is harmful relates to freedom of thought. The men are overly concerned with attacking the other sex and so, ultimately, end up concentrating mostly on their gender. Their arguments lose objectivity, as they are not developed "dispassionately," and instead become subjective, easily picked-apart beliefs. Their power does not confer freedom of thought but pigeonholes them into a confined way of thinking.

Woolf does not believe this defensiveness is exclusive to men; she points out that both men and women require "confidence" in life. She will later explore how such defensiveness impairs women's freedom. For now, however, money remains the greatest guarantee of freedom, as the narrator expresses in a well-known passage regarding the personal effects of her inheritance. It is no wonder, then, that she believes money is a greater tool than the right to vote; money eliminates a woman's dependence on a man, whereas the right to vote only gives her the right to choose which man rules over her.

As the narrator says, money has given her the freedom to "think of things in themselves." Woolf is developing an aesthetic ideology with this concept of personal freedom granting objectivity of thought, and we can trace it in her metaphors that revolve around light and refined purity. Here, as she often does, the narrator absorbs the brilliant light of the sky: "a fiery fabric flashing with red eyes." Remember also the "nugget of pure truth", the narrator says, she understands the audience's desires in Chapter One. Perhaps the most important metaphor combines light and refined purity in Chapter One when she describes brilliance as "that hard little electric light."

In the same way, by creating a fictional narrator, Woolf has somewhat removed her own personality from the essay and argued "dispassionately." Though the narrator is obviously based on Woolf and shares her voice, the essay is ultimately not about her and is even less about Woolf. In contrast to the angry professor whom the narrator sketches, the narrator is detached and able to think clearly and without personal prejudices.

Unit - 15

UNIT 15 (A): A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTER – 5

In this chapter, Woolf tries to locate the point of distinctiveness about and their writing in the modern era, a period in which there were almost as many books written by women as there are by men, and in which many of the debilitating restrictions on women had been lifted. It was a time in which women were able to make contributions. The narrator aims to look at two particular contributions of women:

- The ability to portray women in an expanded manner, which goes beyond the way in which they are portrayed by men; and
- The ability to present features of men that men are unable to see about themselves.

The vehicle for the narrator's exploration in this chapter is the fictional "Life's Adventures" by Mary Carmichael. This work is considered "...the last volume in a fairly long series...from Lady Winchilsea's poems and Aphra Behn's plays and novels of the four great novelists" (87). It is a part of a developing tradition of women and fiction.

However, the contemporary woman artist can break new ground, especially in her depiction of women, and in her depiction of the relationships between women. The sentence "Chloe liked Olivia" (Woolf 89), the narrator says, which she finds in "Life's Adventures" is a radical departure because it depicts something about women that male writers don't notice: that women often actually like one another. This is significant because it allows one to see women in a different light than how they are portrayed by men.

The narrator wonders at the fact that how literature would suffer if men were only portrayed in a manner comparable to that in which women have been traditionally portrayed by men, as lovers of women only, that is, and never as friends of other men, or as soldiers, or thinkers, or dreamers. If such is the case, in Shakespeare, we would retain most of *Othello*, and a good deal of *Anthony*, but no *Caesar*, no *Hamlet*, no *Lear* (Woolf 90).

Moreover, literature has, in fact, been impoverished by the restricted portrayal of women that it has largely obtained, and the contemporary female artists must explore this ground – to portray "those unsaid or half-said words" which form themselves when women are alone; "those gestures which appear unlit by the capricious light of the other sex" – and thereby to see women as they are and not as they appear to men.

Furthermore, because of the natural relations that exist between men and women, women writers have a distinctive role to play in the portrayal of men. Women are able to see some aspects of men that they can't see themselves, and they need, the narrator says, to be able to learn to laugh in fiction at the "vanities", or rather the "peculiarities" of the other sex. Presumably, men might profit from the seeing of women in the absence of such acerbity. But however, it's done. The narrator says that if Mary Carmichael is "very brave and very honest, she would go behind the other sex and tell what she found there. For a true picture of man as a whole can never be painted until a woman has described that spot the size of a shilling" (99).

There are many ways, the narrator concludes, that men and women can be useful to one another because they are different; for indeed, she says, men have always gotten from women something that their own sex was unable to supply.

Mary Carmichael is the literary heir not only to the great women writers discussed in the previous chapter but also "the descendent of all those other women whose circumstances I have been glancing at" (89). Yet she takes on something very different than they would have attempted. Woolf gives us a little lesson in reading experimental writing (like Woolf's own), reminding us that "she has every right" to attempt new forms and styles, as long as she is creating something new rather than merely destroying what has gone before. Carmichael represents Woolf's take on the state of women's fiction in her own historical moment. She sees the female literary tradition as being poised on the verge of something unprecedented and exciting, and she takes the opportunity to point out its current shortcomings and to articulate a direction for the future.

"The natural simplicity, the epic age of women's writing may have gone (87)," remarks the narrator, in reviewing the range of subjects upon which women in her own time have made themselves authors. This is the next logical step from Woolf's historical identification of "a woman's sentence." Although she draws attention to the idea that there is a natural way for women to write, a distinctive "woman's sentence," for example, she is also open to the idea that even that naturalness may be historically contingent. As women change, and as their social roles and circumstantial realities evolve, what is "natural" to them will presumably change as well. Such a change will indeed be for the better: "She may begin to use writing as an art, not as a method of self-expression." When this happens, will there still be such a thing as a "woman's sentence"? Woolf imagines so, for she wants to preserve the richness of difference between men and women. But it must be as flexible and evolving as women themselves.

Women have a creative power that differs substantially from that of men, one that has found expression, even in bygone ages, in non-literary ways. Education, she argues, should bring out those differences rather than enforcing similarity, and so acknowledge and enhance the richness and variety of human culture. "For we have too much likeness as it is."

UNIT 15 (B): A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTER – 6

The last and the final chapter of the text is replete with images. At the very outset, the narrator looks out of the window and comes across an ordinary spectacle: a man and a woman come down the street, meet at the corner, and get into a taxi together. Though an apparently common image, the narrator feels that it suggests an image of cooperation that interferes with the unity of minds. The image of two people of opposite sexes getting into the taxi generates an idea in her mind: "...there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and they [may need to] be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness." "In each of us," the narrator proposes,

> "[T]wo powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain, the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain, the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating" (106).

This might be what Coleridge meant when he said that a great mind is "androgynous" (106) Androgyny, therefore, is the third and final cultural perspective, presented by Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*. Derived from the ancient Greek 'andro' (or male) and 'gyn' (or female), androgyny views the sexes and the impulses expressed by men and women as open to change, and it suggests a blending of two viewpoints that are apparently separated.

From the point of view of androgyny, the aim of the artist is not to function as a male or a female. Rather, the goal is to function fully as a complete human being, as a fusion of the male and female facets of one nature, even if one's own gender predominates. Therefore, the narrator

contends, some collaboration should take place in the mind between the man and the woman before any form of creation can be accomplished.

After responding to a couple of objections, Woolf concludes the book with a return to her most famous image, with a suggestion that Shakespeare's sister lives in the person of every modern woman, and she can flourish if they can face the reality and work to make an environment conducive to such a genius. As she states:

> ...that Shakespeare had a sister...She died young – alas she never wrote a word. She lies buried where the omnibuses now stop, opposite the Elephant and Castle... [but] my belief is that this poet...still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here...for they are washing up the dishes and putting children to bed. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh.
>
> If we face the fact that there is no arm to cling to...that we go alone...Shakespeare's sister can be born, drawing her life from the lives of those who were her forerunners...the world must be prepared for...[but] she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in property and obscurity, is worthwhile (122).

To conclude the essay, Woolf sheds her Mary Beton persona and directly addresses her audience—presumably women writers. She encourages them to work incrementally for the future of women in general, and specifically for women writers. This recalls the imagery of Chapter 1, as she imagines the building of the great chapel and other university buildings and the great wealth of generations that went into the building. It is true—and her essay provides ample evidence—that women are at a disadvantage because of generations of poverty and limited existence. Yet progress has been made, and it takes time to build something great and lavish. Woolf exhorts the women writers of her time to obtain money and a room of their own—and to write. They might not be the Judith Shakespeare who can write unhindered, but they can prepare the way for her. "Without that effort on our part," she tells them, "without that determination that ... she shall find it possible to live and write her poetry" (122), such a Judith Shakespeare will never come to be.

Unit - 16

UNIT 16 (A): A FEMINIST READING OF *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN*

The study of *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* concentrates on leading essays in which she developed an innovative and politically challenging analysis of the causes and effects of women's exclusion from the British cultural, political and economic life. Mrs. Woolf searched for a history that belonged to women, and in doing so, discovered that history was inseparable from the history of women's relation to language. Starting from a consideration of the troubled relations between women and fiction in *A Room of One's Own* 1929, she moves on to a much broader analysis of the political and cultural implications of women's oppression in *Three Guineas* 1938. In both, women are the centre and the target of the author's interest, particularly how society responds to and considers her position and rights.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf develops the theory of the relation between gender and writing. She examines the exclusion of women from educational institutions and the relations between this exclusion and the unequal distribution of wealth. Her fictional narrator Mary Beton experienced this exclusion when she was in Oxbridge where she was prevented from entering the library of all men's college. In this work, Mrs. Woolf faced and experienced male dominance and she was forced by this dominance to raise the feminist goal of changing society or the world to a place where the male and the female voices may have been equally valued. Despite her adamant persistence in this field, this dream of equality remained essentially inaccessible. It is for this reason, that the tone of *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* was full of resentment and discontentment.

The result of ten years of research was Woolf's *Three Guineas* which built on the argument; she developed in *A Room of One's Own*. In this essay, she advocated a form of radical political action in which women would form themselves into a society of outsiders in order to challenge the rise of fascism and the drift towards war. She also analysed women's position in culture hastening towards war.

Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is a landmark in feminist literature. It is considered as the first major work in feminist criticism since it has been viewed as the "first modern text of feminist criticism, the model in both theory and practically socialist feminist of a specifically socialist feminist criticism"(Kaur 285).

Woolf employs a number of methodologies, historical and sociologist analysis, fictional hypothesis, and philosophy, notably to answer her initial question of why there have been so few female writers. As described, "Woolf's *A Room* has become a project that houses us. In her power, failure and perplexities, she is a major architect and designer of feminist criticism" (Vowlvy 62). Many writers use this piece of work as a tool to represent their suffering. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf suggests that a female writer is always inherited as well as an originator. Her own legacy has crossed colour and class lines in the feminist community. Michele Barrett, writing from a Marxist Feminist perspective, praises Woolf's fruitful and still largely unexplored insight in A Room of One's Own that, "The condition under which men and women produce literature are materially different" (Barrett 1003). At that time, women were under the control of their male counterparts. They did not have their own work or even own money. As a result, they did not have mental freedom. And if they tried to write, they lacked the courage to sign their works. Tillie Olsen used *A Room* to meditate on the silence of women that were more marginalized than Shakespeare's sister, exploring not only gender as one of the "traditional silencers of humanity", but also "class economic circumstances and colors." Woolf's point of view in *A Room* is that of a collective voice, of the literary influence on women writers and it has been explored in the works of some later feminist critics. For example, Jane Marcus in her essay "Thinking Back through our Mother's" emphasizes Woolf's reliance on the work of other women. Woolf knew by experience, how women influence each other. "Far from Harold Bloom's concept of the anxiety of influence, it is rather the opposite, affording the woman writer relief from anxiety, acting as a hideout in history where slide can lick her wounds between attacks on the patriarchy" (Jensen 92).

A Room derives its importance from the several themes it covers. They are the basic principles the women have to gain to be able to write like men. According to the present reading, old topics are the outcomes of one major theme which is financial independence as seen in Michelle Barrett's statement, "If we may prophesy, women in time to come will write fewer novels only but poetry and criticism and history. But to be sure, one is looking ahead to that golden, that perhaps fabulous age when women will have what has so long been denied them leisure, and

money, and a room to themselves" (Barrett 52), to be able to write, there, women ought to cross many obstacles such as gaining the proper education, proper space, and most importantly, money. The material autonomy is of prime importance in determining the position of the female writers. Indeed, *A Room* as manifested in the very title does stress privacy; this freedom is to be independent.

UNIT 16 (B): ALICE WALKER'S REPLY TO VIRGINIA WOOLF – "IN SEARCH OF OUR MOTHER'S GARDENS"

Alice Walker's essay, "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens" (1972), talks about her search for the African American women's suppressed talent, the artistic skills and talents that they lost because of slavery and a forced way of life. Walker builds up her arguments from historical events as well as the collective experiences of African Americans, including her own. She uses these experiences to back up her arguments formed from recollections of various African American characters and events. Walker points out that a great part of her mother's and grandmothers' lives have been suppressed because of their sad, dark pasts. But all of these are not lost because somehow, these are manifested in even the smallest things that they do, and that they were also able to pass it down to the very people that they loved. Our search of our mother's garden may end back to ourselves.

In the essay, Walker criticises Woolf's proposition that a woman needs money and "a room of one's own" if she is to write fiction.

> Virginia Woolf, in her book *A Room of One's Own*, wrote that in order for a woman to write fiction she must have two things, certainly: a room of her own (With key and lock) and enough money to support herself. What then are we to make of Phillis Wheatley, a slave, who owned not even herself? This sickly, frail black girl who required a servant of her own at times-her health was so precarious-and who, had she been white, would have been easily considered the intellectual superior of all the women and most of the men in the society of her day.

…

> Virginia Woolf wrote further, speaking of course not of our Phillis, that "any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century [insert "eighteenth century," insert "black woman," insert "born or made a slave"] would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some, lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard [insert "Saint"], learned and mocked at. For it needs little skill and psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by contrary instincts [add "chains, guns, the lash, the ownership of one's body by someone else, submission to an alien religion" that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty."

Walker, therefore, strongly disagrees with Woolf's opinion and argues that a room along with funds is certainly important for a person's state of being, but the only real necessity for creating works of fiction is the drive to do so. If Phillis Wheatley, a slave who didn't even own herself was able to create great poems through great effort to herself than any other female writer would definitely be able to nurture her creativity, overcoming every obstacle that might come in the way.

CONCLUSION

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is a key text of feminist literary criticism. Written after her deliberation of two lectures on the topic of fiction at Cambridge University in 1928, Woolf's essay examines the educational, social, and financial disadvantages women have faced throughout history. It contains Woolf's famous argument that women must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction. Although Woolf describes this as an opinion upon one minor point, and the essay explores the "unsolved problems" of women and fiction.

Through the fictionalized character of "Mary"- who visits the British Museum to find out about everything that has ever been written about women. Woolf built the argument that literature and history have been constructed by men to traditionally marginalize women. Women are inferior writers or inferior subjects, instead of locating their silence in their material and social circumstances. Women have been barred from attending schools and Universities for intended

or excluded law for an inheritance or expected to Mary during which their time is spent housekeeping and childrearing. Woolf imagines what kind of life Judith Shakespeare - the talented sister of Shakespeare – might have lived, concluding that she, would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty.

It is also an issue of gendered values, Woolf insists that writing in the 1920s, it is, the masculine values that prevail. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. Woolf ends with an appeal to the audience to write all kinds of books, hesitating at no subject however trivial or however vast; Judith Shakespeare would come again if he worked for her and so to work even in poverty and obscurity is worthwhile. Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own* is a landmark of twentieth-century feminist thought. It explores the history of women in literature through an unconventional and highly provocative investigation of the social and material conditions required for the writing of literature. These conditions leisure time, privacy, and financial independence-underwrite all literary production, but they are particularly relevant to understand the situation of women in the literary tradition because women historically have been uniformly deprived of those basic prerequisites.

In her exploration of this idea, Woolf launches a number of provocative sociological and aesthetic critiques. She reviews not only the state of women in literature but also the state of scholarship, both theoretical and historical, concerning women. She also elaborates an aesthetics based on the principle of incandescence, the ideal state in which everything that is merely personal is consumed in the intensity and truth of one's art. Just as Woolf speaks out against traditional hierarchies in the content of her essay, so too does she reject standard logical argumentation in her essay's form. Woolf innovatively draws on the resources of fiction to compensate for gaps in the factual record about women. She writes a history of women's thinking about the history of thinking women; her essay is a reconstruction and a re-enactment as well as an argument.

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ASSIGNMENTS

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of Woolf’s argument in *A Room of One’s Own*.

2. How does Woolf’s essay play a pivotal role in incorporating the major premises of the ‘Second Wave’ of feminism?

3. Comment critically on the technique of narration in *A Room of One’s Own*.

4. Comment on Woolf’s perception of Shakespeare’s imaginary sister, Judith.

5. Critically analyse the basic premises of the second chapter of Woolf’s book.

6. Make a critical estimation of Chapter – 5 from Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*

7. How would you perceive Woolf’s stake on the concept of ‘androgyny’?

8. Comment critically on Alice Walker’s responses on Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*.