



**SHIVAJI UNIVERSITY, KOLHAPUR**

**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**Modern Indian Writing in  
English Translation**

(Optional English)  
(Academic Year 2019-20 onwards)

For

**B. A. Part I  
(Semester I & II)**

## Module 1

### SHORT STORY AS A MINOR FORM OF LITERATURE

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#### 1.0 Objectives:

This unit will provide an introduction to the development of the short story as a form of literature. After studying this unit, students will be able to :

- know developments, themes and elements of the short story.
- develop an interest in appreciation of literature.
- interpret texts with due sensitivity to both textual and contextual clues.
- use English effectively for study purpose across the curriculum.
- demonstrate an understanding of short story as an evolving art form that reflects the values and concerns of writers and the societies in which they live.

## 1.1 Introduction:

Story has been existing since the dawn of the human civilization. Different kinds of stories prevail: stories, tales, fables, parables, anecdotes and folk-tales in different languages in all countries. However, the short story differs from them. Only the common thing in them is story telling. Short story is a story first and then it is a short story. The impulses behind short story and other types of stories are the same viz;

1. The curiosity to know others.
2. The desire for self-assertion.
3. Love for story-telling and listening.

As a minor form of literature, a short story is a brief, and therefore easily apprehensible as completed work, usually entertaining, frequently intriguing in both form and content. Short stories tend to be less complex than novels. Usually, a short story focuses on only one incident, has a single plot, a single setting, a limited number of characters, and covers a short period of time.

### The Short Story As A Form of Literature

The short story is a form of literature which has come to us from ancient times. It has its roots in the instinct of curiosity in man. In the beginning, the stories were told primarily by the method of narration, but with the invention of the printing press, the vogue of the story spread widely. A number of stories, belonging to both the Western and the Eastern countries, are now found in such collections as *The Parables of Jatakas*, *Aesops Fables*, *The Buddhist Jataks*, *Arabian Nights*, *Entertainments*, *The Panchatantra* and *The Hitopadesha*.

The short story, often regarded as a younger and perhaps inferior sister of the novel, is genealogically its ancestor, for short stories in some form or the other—myths, fables, Biblical Parables, fairy tales etc. preceded the novel. “The short story is an autonomous genre of literature, cultivated practically in all important countries of the world, with its varying sets of rules and experiments, a storehouse of a nations evolving culture and social or individual concerns, though in humorous slices much shorter, but generally more palatable and hence more popular than novel”

The short story has remained very popular form though Television and Radio compete with the short story in the field of entertainment. The short story has

followed the march of human civilization and become a cultural means of expression.

## **1.2 Content:**

### **1.2.1 Origin and Development of Short Story:**

Story - telling is an ancient art. It is as old as language itself. Walter Allen says, stories are called tales and as etymology indicates, the tale was an oral form. But in the recent times, it is considered as an important form of literature. Oral and written stories were found in the ancient times. Oral stories gave place to written stories. Afterwards such stories were called tales and they occur in *The Old Testament* and *The New Testament*. Most of the early stories were written in verse. The first short prose stories appeared during the Renaissance period. Its example is Robert Greene's *The Conney Catching Tracts*.

When the story was in the form of tale or fable it was fiction. It was classified as fiction because the writing was purely based on imagination. But, in the modern context, the short stories have blending of imagination and a sense of reality. Everyone is born with an instinctive desire to be entertained by fiction. When did this fiction begin? In this context, Grove Day, the author of *Art of Narration* says :

A cave dweller of ancient times sat by the fire, telling his shaggy family and friends about his adventures while hunting a wild pig. Here and there he began adding a few existing touches to make his listeners hang upon his words. Perhaps the pig became a bison, or even a mammoth. The climax of his victorious struggle was applauded by the listeners(Grove, 1971:9).

Like this, the primitive people might have created small stories about animals, birds and plants around them. Later on, in the old days the stories were told to teach moral lessons. It was employed as a tool in teaching moral lessons. The great moral teachers like Buddha and Christ realized that they could convey their great moral teaching through parables or fables. But there is a difference between the earlier tales of adventures or the moral tales of religious teachers and the modern stories. The earlier story-teller told his tales to transport us to an imaginary world of beauty and charm or to bring home some moral truth. Narration becomes fine art especially

in the Orient, in Persia, Arabia and some parts of India. The story-teller was a professional entertainer.

As far as short story in European tradition is concerned the Greeks and the Romans were the first to tell stories in verse. Genesis is believed to be a treasure-house of fine tales. Almost all epics like the *Iliad*, the *Odyseey*, the Edda and Beowulf contain many episodes.

In the Middle Ages some very interesting stories from Italy and France were spread in Europe. The Chief among them was a collection of stories by Baccacio, named *The Decameron* (1353). Then Chaucer wrote one of the Canterbury tales, *The Story of Melibens* in prose before 1400. The stories of Ali Baba, Sindbad, the sailor and others are included in the collection known as *The Arabian Nights* written around 1450. Towards the end of Middle Ages, Sir Thomas Malory wrote the episodic adventures of the rascally Dutch. He published a fine collection of prose tales called *Morte d' Arthur*.

In the Elizabethan period most of the fables and stories like The Celtic fairy Tales (about the lives of saints) came from Italy and other countries. Tales about the lives of saints and many fables came from Italy and other Countries. In this period, Thomas Nash, Robert Greene and John Lyly wrote some very interesting stories in prose. Most of these stories were mere romances. Thomas Deloney was the first Elizabethan to use good prose for writing stories in his *Gentle Craft*. He was the first realist, who wrote good stories about everyday life of the ordinary persons.

In the seventeenth century, the character writers like Earle, Overbury and Herbert showed how to paint a character in a short story. The short story got direction about the plot construction in the Restoration period. The rise of magazines, the founding of a periodicals and news papers provided the opportunity for writing short stories. The leaders like Steele and Addison created a field for essay as well as the tale. They made progress in their *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. The tales that were written were dreams and allegories. But tales in the real sense of the term were written in the *Adventures*, under the editorship of Hawkesworth. One such tale by him was *Amurath*, which liked by the critics as well as the general readers.

In the eighteenth century, Dr. Johnson, Goldsmith and others followed Hawkesworth in writing stories. They wrote stories like *Asem*, an Eastern Tale and

the Adventurer of a strolling player in a delightful style, in which fact and fancy, humour and wit are blended together cleverly.

In the nineteenth century, short story as a literary form became popular. The short story was enriched and systematized by the American writers like Hawthorne, Bret Harte, Henry James, Washington Irving and Edgar Allen Poe. Bret Harte enriched the short story by the introduction of local colour and also he made his short-stories vehicles of single impressions. In the same way Henry James showed how short stories could be made suggestive and how they could be used to describe the mental and psychological states of a character. The British writers followed them.

The short story is relatively new literary fictional prose form. Modern short story has a brief history of 150 years only. The American writer, Edgar Allen Poe is regarded as the father of Modern short story. The publication of his story *MS Found in a Battle* in 1833 is considered to be the first modern, proper short story. His stories are known for his skill of narration and local colour. His technique was different from the earlier short story writers. Poe gave his concept of the theory of short story in 1842 in his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*, a collection of short stories.

The French and Russian masters also helped in the development of the short story in England. They introduced naturalism in the short story aiming at the detail presentation of life in all its realism.

In the beginning of twentieth Century the writers such as, H.G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, H.E. Bates etc. enriched the story. The new Psychological story was brought in by Katherine Mansfield. Joseph Conrad wrote, about sea life, E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence, W.S. Maugham, James Joyce, L.P. Hartley and many more have contributed considerably to the short story.

The short story passed on from U.S.A. to Europe including England. The very well-known European masters of short story in different countries are: Guy de Maupassant and Balzac (France), Anton Chekhov and Leo Tolstoy (Russian), Sir Walter Scott and Mrs. Gaskell (England). Indian writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan etc. have also written short stories in English as well as in their regional languages.

It seems that the extreme mechanization of life due to heavy industrialization is the root cause of the birth of the modern short story. Readers have no leisure to read

longer novels and to witness longer dramas at a stretch in the modern times. Naturally, they depend on modern genre of short story to satisfy their love of the creative arts in one sitting of 15 to 20 minutes. The fragmentariness of the short story suits to the fast life.

### **1.2.2 Definitions and Characteristics of Short Story:**

Many practitioners of short story form have attempted to define short story but it is almost impossible to give a definite definition of the genre. No summary phrase can include in itself the diversity of possible story types, lengths and approaches. Consequently, no one theory of short story form prevails.

Walter Allen in his book *The Short Story in English* (1982) says that the short story before the modern short story came into being, was a manifestation of the romance. Its aim was to entertain. Its province was the extraordinary. The short story deals with, dramatizes a single incident and in doing so, utterly transforms it.

He further says that “the short story should be rooted in a single incident or perception that principally differentiates it from the novel. One should feel that it is the reading that is the fruit of a single moment of, time of a single incident, a single perception”.

According to Edgar Allen Poe, ‘a short story is a prose narrative requiring form half an hour to one or two hours in its perusal’.

W. H. Hudson emphasizes on the singleness of purpose while defining the short story and says: “A short story must contain one and only one informative idea and that the idea must be worked out to its logical connections with absolute singleness of aim and directness of method”.

S. K. Kumar quotes Edgar Allan Poe’s definition, ‘Short story is a piece of prose fiction which can be read at a single sitting, it presents an artistic and unified impression of life through many devices especially theme, characters and action’.

R. L. Stevenson thinks that, “The short story is not the transcript of life but a simplification of some idea of it”.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines short story as: “A kind of prose fiction distinguished from the novel (roman) and the novelette (nouvelle or novella) by its compression and intensity of effect”.

Sir Hugh Walpole's definition is more comprehensive: "A short story should be a story: a record of things happening, full of incidents and accident, swift movement, unexpected development, leading through suspense to a climax and a satisfying denouement".

In the book entitled A Background to the study of English Literature (1950) B. Prasad says, "The short story is not merely a greatly shortened novel".

### **Characteristics of The Short Story:**

In spite of the common aspects, the short story differs from novel on the basis of its peculiar parameters viz. brevity, economy and the singleness of effect. If a short story deviates from these parameters, there is very fear that the short story may cease to be a short story and it may take a shape of a tale or novel. So the main task of a short story writer is to observe scrupulously the above parameters and it is like dancing on a rope. J. A. Cuddon remarks, 'This (short story) is one of the most elusive forms'. The short story is a narrative of interrelated events, involving a conflict and a resolution. The following are essential features of the short story.

#### **1. Brevity or Economy:**

The brevity or economy is an important parameter of the short story relating to its length. The short story is called short story because it has brevity (shorter length). Its usual norm is that it should be in about 3000 to 6000 words in length. The excellent short stories are written even in 1000 words. The brevity, to be used effectively, implies command over language and control over incidents. In a good short story every word and every incident contributes to the final effect. Joseph Shipley states the importance of brevity in a short story, "This brevity dictates the structure".

The short story strictly allows the parameters of economy. It implies the economy of words as stated in the above parameter regarding length. B. Prasad states, "The language of the short story should be a model of economy. Every word in it should contribute to its effect". The economy implies also the economy of incidents and characters. A good short story usually has 2 or 3 characters and a few incidents numbering 4 to 5 with minimum characters passing through minimum incidents. The short story writer effectively shows one dominant personal trait of a character or a single experience of life or a single moral of life. This is done alone in

short story and it is possible due to the small canvas of short story. It is rather a skill to write effective short story with economy.

2. **Short** - A short story can usually be read in one sitting. It is a piece of prose fiction which can be **read at a single sitting** (fixed place and time, social surroundings).
3. **Single Subject**: Short stories usually focus on a single subject or theme. Subjects or themes may range from something as mundane as a daily errand or as thrilling as a ghost tale.
4. **Concise and Simple Plot**: A single, easily contained plot is one of the hallmarks of the short story and helps shape its other characteristics. Its **plot is not very complex** (in contrast to the novel), but it creates a unified impression and leaves us with a vivid sensation rather than a number of remembered facts.
5. **Limited number of characters**: Due to the limitations of the genre, short stories typically focus on just one or a couple characters. As short stories usually cover such brief periods of time, even a single character may never be fully developed. However, historical examples, like some of Geoffrey Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales,' may find interesting ways of involving many different people.
6. **Factual and Poetic Style**: It ought to combine matter-of-fact description with poetic atmosphere.
7. **Unified Impression**: It ought to present a unified impression of tone, colour and effect '**unity of effect**' (Poe). It tries to leave behind a single impression or effect. Usually, though not always, it builds around one character, place, idea, or act.
8. There is often **little action, hardly any character development**, but we get a snapshot of life (slice-of-life story).
9. **Union of Idea and Structure**: There is both a unique union of idea and structure.
10. There is a **limited set of characters, one single action and a simple plot** (often: exposition, complication, crisis, sad / happy ending).

11. A short story very often has an open / **abrupt beginning** and an open or **surprise ending**.

### 1.2.3 Section III: Elements of Short Story:

1. **Plot:** Plot is the soul of short story. Plot means arrangement of incidents. The success of the story depends upon the plot, the action that takes place in the story. It is a series of connected happenings and their results. In order to have a result, we must have an initial event, or conflict. Short story is told in an artistic manner by selecting and arranging the events into a plot with an intention. The short story writer organizes the incidents with a definite purpose to present his ideas or pictures of life or human experiences in a particular way. The short story writer has a small span and space for the development of plot. He immediately plunges into the course of plot and rapidly reaches the end. In the middle of the plot the story points to the approaching end which is surprising, shocking and sudden. Sometimes the end of plot reveals the hidden theme of short story in a flash. The end of the story is considered to be the most important characteristic of short story. The end of short story throws light back on entire structure and gives it a new meaning. There is an unexpected end coming as a shock or a surprise which is called twist ending or ironical reversal of the situation.

**Stages of a plot** – Usually plot has 5 components:

**a. Introduction (Exposition)**

-Sets up the story by introducing the main characters, the setting and the problem to be solved.

-Trigger Incident – The event which begins the plot; introduces conflict

**b. Rising Action**

- The main part of the story where the full problem develops.

- A number of events and /or obstacles are involved that will eventually lead to the climax.

**c. Climax**

-The highest point of interest in the story where the most exciting events occur.

**d. Falling Action**

-Follows the climax.

-It contains the events that bring the story to the conclusion.

**e. Denouement (Conclusion /Resolution)**

-The final outcome.

-The conflicts are resolved and the loose ends are tied up.

**2. Character:**

People involved in the events of the plot are the characters. Characterization is the information the author gives the reader about the character themselves. The author may reveal a character in several ways:

1. His/her physical appearance
2. What he/she says (how they speak and what they say to others – often revealed in dialogue)
3. What he / she thinks (their feelings, hopes and dreams)
4. What he/she does or does not do
5. What others say about him/her and how others react to him/her including the narrator.

**Characters**

- **Protagonist** - The main character or hero in a story.
- **Antagonist** – The person or force that works against the hero, or main character, of the story.
- **Narrator** – The person or character who tells the story, gives background information, and fills in details between dialogue.

**Flat vs. Round Characters:**

- **Flat Character**- A flat character is simple and one-dimensional, usually only there to fill a simple role. Flat Characters are not well-developed, does not have many traits. Sometimes stereotyped, easily defined in a single sentence because we know little about the character. Most minor characters are flat.

- **Round character-** A round character has a complex personality, more like a real person. Round Characters are well developed, has many traits, both good and bad. They are realistic and life-like. They are not easily defined because we know many details about the characters. Most of the major characters are round.

#### **Static vs. Dynamic Characters:**

- **Static Character-** A static character is one who stays the same throughout the entire story.
- **Dynamic Character-** A dynamic character changes in some way during the story. They usually come to some sort of realization that permanently changes them as a result of the events in the story.
- **Foil** – A character who adds contrast to the protagonist.

There are a limited number of characters in short story and therefore their interrelation is very close and tense. There are two types of characters, major and minor. The minor or insignificant characters are kept in the background or drawn with no details. They are called flat characters which have no growth and change. Short story focuses on major characters. A short story writer tries to go deep in the ‘psyche’ of some characters that are round characters.

Short story is a story that happens in the life of someone. Not only human being but also animals and birds also play the role of character. Without character the story may not exist. There must be living being in the story that thinks or acts in order to keep the story going. Considering the limited scope of the short story, it is natural that the number of characters is strictly limited. Generally 2 to 4 characters are present in the short stories. E. M. Forster in his book *Aspects of the Novel* explains the difference between the story and the plot. He says, “The King died and the Queen died” is a story. “The King died and the Queen died because of grief”, is a plot.

### **3. Setting:**

The setting is where (place) and when (time) the story occurs. **Time** can include not only the historical period—past, present, or future—but also a specific year, season, or time of day. **Place** may involve not only the geographic place—a region, country, state, or town—but also the social, economic or cultural environment.

The time and location in which a story takes place is called the setting. For some stories the setting is very important, while for others it is not. There are several aspects of setting of a story. Some of them, or all, may present in a story. The plot, the character and action i. e. incidents – all these do not take place in a vacuum. There is a definite physical background to a story against which the characters move and incidents happen. This background is called setting of a short story. Compared to novel in short story the setting is brief and constant. So, the setting includes the landscape, locale, place, and the scene used as active or passive background of the action. Setting can include atmosphere, the tone and feeling of a story. Setting can vary as per the theme and situation in the story. In a number of stories the setting may just help to create the right atmosphere but in others the setting goes a long way in creating the desired effect. It leads touch of ‘reality’ to the story. The proper selection of setting, therefore, is an essential part of the story teller’s art.

#### **4. Point of View/ Narration:**

The point of view is the perspective from which the events of the story are presented to the readers. The short story writer uses some narrative techniques. He plans an order of events to create a surprise at the end. He uses different techniques of narration. He may use a flashback technique. A flash back technique is that one in which the later events leap into the past to give some meaning to the present. Occasionally a short story writer may use stream of consciousness technique. Its intention is not just to comment but to expose the state of mind of the character by bringing to surface the thoughts and emotions and everything that is floating on the stream of mind. This stream of mind is constantly moving in zig-zag manner touching the past, present and even the future. Similarly, the writer accepts a specific point of view to satisfy the need of his narration. There are two main types of point of view: **first person point of view** and **third person point of view**. In the first-person narration, a character in the story is the narrator and uses the pronoun “I”. The story is told through one character’s eyes and the events. **In the third person narration**, the narrator tells the story about other people and uses the pronouns “they” or “she / he” rather than “we”. There are two types of third person point of view:

1. **Omniscient-** the narrator knows everything about all the characters and the events and can shift from character to character.

2. **Limited** – the narrator may choose to tell the story through one character or a group of character’s eyes.

## 5. **Conflict:**

Conflict is the main struggle or opposition in a story that the protagonist has to solve or face. Conflict in stories is either:

- 1) **External**
- 2) **Internal**

There are 6 main types of conflict.

### **Internal Conflict:**

- Character versus Self:

This is an internal conflict. The character struggles with moral dilemmas, emotional challenges or desires. The conflict is with the character's own conscience or soul. It is a struggle within one’s self; a person must make some decision, overcome pain, quiet their temper, resist an urge, etc.

### **External Conflicts:**

- Character versus Character
- Character versus Society
- Character versus Nature
- Character versus Supernatural
- Character versus Technology

It is the conflict that makes the story interesting and appealing. The conflict is a struggle between two people or things in a short story. The main character is usually on one side of the central conflict. On the other side, the main character may struggle against another important character, against the forces of nature, against society, or even against something inside himself or herself (feelings, emotions, illness).

It is the opposition of forces which ties one incident to another and makes the plot move. It is any form of opposition that faces the main character. Within a short story there may be only one central struggle, or one dominant struggle with many minor ones. Conflict can be straightforward in a single track or it can be complex. In

Premchand's story, "The Shroud" (Kafan), the conflict is many-sided: it is economic, social, moral, emotional, familial, and so on.

#### **6. Theme:**

Theme is the story's message, unifying or central idea. The theme may be the author's thoughts about a particular topic or view of human nature. It is the total meaning of the story. Without theme, the story lacks meaning or purpose. Sometimes the theme is stated, sometimes it is only implied.

The short story writer allows the characters to move in the action of story with an intention to suggest something. His efforts may be to arrive at certain conclusion as a human experience. It may be the truth, a principle operating in human experience, some reflections, some moralizing or visions of life. The theme concerns with the final impression of the story. In short, theme is the authors' commentary on an aspect of human nature or life in general.

#### **7. Dialogue:**

The speech of characters in a story is called a dialogue. Dialogue reveals the emotions, moods, intention and attitudes of the characters to themselves or to others. Dialogue helps us to narrate several incidents only actually happening in short story. So, dialogue is a very good device to report such events and characters' attitudes to readers.

#### **8. Moral:**

Moral is an essential but not a compulsory element of a short story. One of the functions of literature is to teach. The writer is the engineer who constructs the building of literature. A writer hopes to instruct his readers through his writing. In such a case the story has a moral. It may be stated directly or indirectly. Therefore, the presence of a moral is desired feature of a short story. It is believed that through his writing a writer wants to give some lessons to his readers.

#### **9. Title:**

Every short story has its own title. There is no story without a title. Sometimes it is symbolic also. The title should be short and eye-catching. A story without title is like a tree without lives and flowers or a temple without a God.

## 10. Ending:

A short story very often has an open or **abrupt beginning** and an open or **surprise ending**. It usually ends at or soon after the climax; while a novel may reach its climax and then take a chapter or two to tie up all the loose ends. But the short story often leaves much to the reader's imagination. The writer usually 'springs' the surprise end, leaving us to reflect on the unexpected twist and its ongoing significance for the characters and actions. The best beginning, better middle and surprising ending are the features of good story. The success of the story depends upon the end of the story. If the story has been well written there is often much satisfaction from the way the threads have been pulled together to complete the story, even if we find ourselves completely caught by surprise. Many of the most satisfying short stories have the most unexpected, but plausible, endings.

### Check Your Progress:

#### Q. I : Answer the following questions in one word, phrase or sentence only.

1. What is meant by plot?
2. What are the types of characters?
3. What is conflict?
4. What are the types of conflicts?
5. Who wrote the book *The Aspects of the Novel*?

#### Q. II : Complete the following sentences by choosing one of the correct alternatives given below them.

1. The conflict between man Vs society is called .....  
a) Physical      b) Psychological      c) Social      d) Classical
2. The arrangement of incidents is called .....  
a) conflict      b) plot      c) setting      d) point of view
3. .... is an essential but not a compulsory element of a short story.  
a) Moral      b) Character      c) Plot      d) Setting
4. The central character of a story is called the .....  
a) antagonist      b) antagonize      c) Protagonist      d) instigator

5. The time and location in which a story takes place is called as .....
- a) plot   b) setting   c) conflict      d) characterization

### 1.3 Summary:

A short story is a work of fiction, usually written in narrative prose. Short story creates a single impression. It is highly economical with every word. All characters, dialogues and descriptions are designed to develop single predesigned effect. Most short stories revolve around a single incident, character, or period of time, capable of being read at one sitting. Once climax reached, the story ends with minimal resolution. Character is developed to the extent required by the story.

To sum up, the short story is a fascinating form of literature. It operates both on the real and other different levels of experience. It gives many insights into life: personal life, interpersonal life, moral life or socio-economic life. This form has been developed over the years. It is one of the most effective forms of literature in the modern world.

### 1.4 Terms to Remember:

**Characterization:** creation of imaginary people who appear to be real to the reader. The writer gives information about the characters in the story.

**Characters:** a person, animal or imaginary creature in literary work.

**Climax:** action comes to its highest point of conflict.

**Conflict:** a problem in the story that needs to be resolved.

**Diction:** word choice including vocabulary used, word appropriateness, vividness of language.

**External conflict:** struggle (physical or emotional) between two characters or between character and other things. (e.g. nature)

**Fiction:** Imaginary characters and events. Fiction can be entirely imaginary or based on real events.

**Internal conflict:** struggle that occurs in character's mind.

**Narrator:** the person from whose perspective a story is told.

**Plot:** A series of events through which the writer reveals what is happening, to whom, and why.

**Point of view:** the position of the narrator of the story and what the writer sees from that point.

**Protagonist:** Main Character

**Setting:** the place and time where the story takes place.

**Theme:** the story's main idea. The message the writer intends to communicate by telling the story.

### **1.5 Answers to Check Your Progress:**

- Q. I: 1. The proper arrangement of incidents
2. Round and Flat; Static and Dynamic
  3. Conflict is the main struggle or opposition in a story that the protagonist has to solve or face.
  4. There are six types of conflicts :
    - Character versus Self
    - Character versus Character
    - Character versus Society
    - Character versus Nature
    - Character versus Supernatural
    - Character versus Technology
  5. E. M. Forster

Q. II: 1) c    2) b    3) a    4) c    5) b

### **1.6 Exercise:**

Q.A: **Answer the following questions in detail.**

- 1) Write a detailed note on the characteristics of short story.
- 2) Find out the difference between the short story and the novel.

**Q. B: Write short notes on the following:**

1. Plot of the story
2. The characters in the story
3. Setting
4. Conflict in the short story
5. Point of view

**1.7 Reference for Further Study:**

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## Module 2

### SHORT STORY AS A MINOR FORM OF LITERATURE: TYPES

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#### 2.0 Objectives:

This course will acquaint the students with various types of short story. It will examine the short story as a literary space for writers “to restate for themselves their position—politically, socially, and artistically.”

After studying this unit, students will be able to :

- Understand short story as a minor form of literature.
- Learn various types of short story.

- Apply interpretive strategies developed in literary study to other academic and professional contexts.
- Write cogently and with sensitivity to audience.

## 2.1 Introduction:

In the previous unit, you have learnt the nature, the elements, and characteristics of short story. In relevance to that, in this unit you will get acquainted with short-story as a minor form of literature and also its various forms or types.

Short story is one of the minor forms of literature. The meaning of short story is implied in its name only. Short story is very brief in size or length and has a story. It may be defined as a prose narrative, “requiring from an half hour to one hour for its perusal”. It can be read at single sitting. Any subjects, from earth to heaven can be fit for short story. So, H. E. Beats aptly thinks, “Short story can be anything the author decides it shall be”.

A short story typically takes the form of a brief fictional work, usually written in prose. **Anecdotes, fables, fairy tales, and parables** are all examples of the oral storytelling tradition that helped to shape the short story. In fact, '**Aesop's Fables**,' first collected in the 4th century B.C., may have been the first anthology of short stories in Western literature. These early forms were orally transmitted from generation to generation. Some of the earliest stories are found in the Vedas and Upanishads , in the Old Testament. Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* though written in verse are told by travelling pilgrims. Some of the earliest forms were the tales of adventure, based on the great deeds of popular heroes.

The modern short story was originated in the second quarter of Nineteenth century in America. Edger Allen Poe is generally considered as the father of short story. His *An M. S. Found in a Bottle* earned wide reputation. Soon, it became very popular form in Europe through successful efforts of great writers like Maupassant, Bulzac, Chekov, Tolstoy, etc. The short story is recently developed form in English literature. It has made considerable development in Twentieth Century. In England, this form was made popular by Doyle, Kipling, Wells Maugham, etc.

## 2.2 Content: Types of Short Story:

The stories primarily consist of brief accounts of the incidents and events, taken place in the life of characters. In olden days and later on in medieval period, stories were presented in oral form and got transmitted from one generation to another. The literary roots of the short story can be found in oral story telling tradition such as anecdotes, fables, fairy-tales, folk-tales, legends and parables.

### 2.3.1 Anecdote:

Anecdote is the oldest form of short story. It is defined as “short amusing story about real incident or person.” It is a narrative story with a point. The word anecdote is derived from Greek word *anekdota* which means ‘unpublished’; from an-+ ekdotos an- means un- and ekdotos means published; *anekdota* means unpublished items. Later on the term anecdota was applied for short tales that focused on the author’s point.

Anecdote is defined as a short and interesting story, or an amusing event, often proposed to support or demonstrate some point, and to make the audience laugh. Anecdotes can include an extensive range of tales and stories. In fact, it is a short description or an account of any event that makes the readers laugh or brood over the topic presented for the purpose.

Anecdotes and humorous pieces are not only jokes, but exquisite literary devices as well. Their primary purpose is to stir up laughter, to disclose a truth in a general way, or to describe a feature of a character in such a way that it becomes humorous, and at the same time gives us a better understanding of the character. Authors may use anecdotes to illustrate their own theme or impart wisdom or humour to the audience.

Anecdotes may be real or ‘imaginary’, primarily meant for the amusement of listeners. However, it is presented as the recounting of real incidents taken place in real settings in the lives of real persons. Sometimes it will be unelaborated narration of single incident.

### 2.3.2 Legend:

A **legend** is a semi-true **story**, which has been passed on from person-to-person and has important meaning or symbolism for the culture in which it originates. Legend is an old story from ancient times about people and events that may or may

not be true. It is a narrative story dealing with famous or notorious persons or events. It sometimes describes someone who is very well-known and admired usually because of ability in particular area. So legend is considered the story about an admirable person. King Arthur was central figure in the legends making up matter of England. In medieval period large number of stories were created on this legendary figure.

The Grimm Brother defines legend as folk tale historically grounded. Oxford Dictionary defines legend as a traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as historical but not authenticated. According to the Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary, Legend is a story based on real characters or events but magnified by fantasy or admiration. The admired person from society is considered as legend.

History is full of legends that have entertained the people for ages. Legends hail from different cultures around the world. Some are still held as strong beliefs. The most popular legends are Lady Godiva, Robinhood , King Arthur, The Fountain of Youth, Bloody Mary. Though, traditionally told as true stories, legends often consist supernatural elements. There are two types of legends- Folk legends and Urban legends. The popular legends serve as a literary text.

Legend is a popular narration of fantastic events which are generally transmitted by tradition from generation to generation. As they are orally transmitted, the legends are modified in the course of time. There are number of legends, popular among people-The legend of Phoenix who rises from his ashes. The legend of Alexander was used in all poetry. In medieval period the legend of King Arthur served as source of number of romances.

There are different categories of legends and famous legendry figures belonging to them:

1. Children legends: Santa Claus, The mouse Perez
2. Urban legends: Walt Disney, The Alien Rosewell
3. Religious legends: Joan of Arc, Stories about saints and sinners.
4. Legend of Terror: The headless horseman, their miracles, the witches of Salem.
5. Universal legends: Robin hood, King Arthur.

### **Characteristics of Legend:**

1. **Characters:** Characters in legend are limited to small cast. They may be inanimate objects, Gods, or Superhumans. The Gods are super heroes who may appear in human form but maintain immortality and supernatural abilities.
2. **Setting:** Legend generally takes place in the past and the setting is somehow relevant to the culture from which it derives.
3. **Plot:** Plot is a systematic arrangement of events and incidents. The plot of legend includes lots of actions, suspense, and conflict. The characters of legend often encounter calamities and struggle hard with their fate to overcome. Legend offers a moral lesson for life.
4. **Point of View:** Legends are written from third person point of view. The culture, values and beliefs of the society are reflected in the legend. The principal character in the legend can overcome any obstacles to reach his destination.

### **2.3.3 Fable:**

Fable is a short story in which animals or objects speak and is often used to teach moral or religious lesson. In fables animals, plants, inanimate objects or forces of nature are employed as characters. The purpose of fable is to teach lesson about human weaknesses.

In Cambridge Dictionary fable is defined as: Fable is a short story that tells moral truth often using animals as characters. Oxford dictionary also defines, Fable is a traditional short story that teaches moral lesson especially one with animals as characters.

The word fable is derived from the Latin word 'fibula' which means 'a story' and a derivative of the word 'fari' which means 'to speak'. As a literary device fable can be defined as "a brief story with moral lesson". It is generally considered that Aesop, Greek fabulist is the real originator of the fable form. He created fables for the purpose of entertainment but later on became the means of teaching moral lessons. So Aesop's fable were considered the first 'Morality Tales' and they were orally transmitted. These fables have long been used to teach children moral lessons. In India also fables were emerged in the name of Panchatantra and Jataka Tales.

### **Characteristics of Fables:**

- They are fiction in the sense that they did not really happen.
- They are meant to entertain.
- They are poetic, with double or allegorical significance.
- They are moral tales, usually with animal characters.
- Fables are short, and they usually have no more than two or three characters

The salient features of fables are: 1. Fables provide moral teaching. 2. Animals are used as main characters. 3. Fables personify objects and forces of nature.

### **2.3.4 Parable:**

A **parable** is a succinct, didactic story, in prose or verse that illustrates one or more instructive lessons or principles. It differs from a fable. The fables employ animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature as characters, whereas parables have human characters. A parable is a type of analogy. The parable - a short narrative uses metaphor and symbolism to illustrate a moral point. It is a short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle

The Oxford Dictionary defines Parable as “a short story that teaches moral or spiritual lessons, especially one of those told by Jesus as recorded in the Bible.” Parable is one of the many literary forms in the Bible but is especially seen in Gospels of The New Testament. It is considered as a short story and is different from metaphorical statement.

The word Parable is derived from Greek word ‘Parabole’ which means “a throwing beside”. The root meaning of the word Parable means ‘placing side by side’ for the sake of comparison. The Gospel writer identifies a narrative with spiritual meaning by calling as Parables. Jesus gives an example from everyday life to convey the spiritual truth. Parable is one of the Jesus’ favourite devices to preach the masses. Parables of Jesus are recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Parable has the following features:

1. It is easy to recite.
2. It has everyday common circumstance.

3. It teaches religious lesson.
4. It has surprising end.
5. It uses metaphors.

There are three types of parables- didactic, evangelical and prophetic.

### **2.3.5 Fairy Tales:**

Fairy tales have been around for thousands of years, beginning with oral traditions. These fictional stories come from all cultures and many have their own versions of well-known tales in the English world.

Fairy tale, derived from folk-tale is a form of short oral narratives, known to folklorists and is orally passed down generation to generation. It deals with marvellous stories which are always set in the magical world. The magical creatures such as witches, mermaids, elves, dwarves, fairies, nymphs, giants, goblins, dragons etc. play important roles in the development of the wonder tales.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the fairy tale form gained its name as a self-conscious literary form at the hands of French writers. The fairy tales were originally known as ‘Contes des fees’ in French and were translated into English as fairy tales. It was Madame d’ Aulnoy who invented the term *conte de fees* or fairy tale in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. But Charles Perrault was the first great fairy tale author, writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His romantic tales - Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Beauty and Beast earned wide popularity.

In Germany the famous book of Grimm Brothers ‘Household Tales’ known as Grimms fairy tale, appeared in 1812. These German tales inspired Hans Christian Anderson whose Emperor’s New Clothes and The Snow Queen became very popular. In England this fairy tale form was popularised by George McDonald and later by Oscar Wilde.

Fairy-tale is a sub-class of folk-tale. But many writers turned these oral fairy tales into literary fairy-tales. The stories from Panchatantra were written from oral resources. The stories of Grimm Brother have been brought into written form. Hence the oral and literary fairy tales freely exchanged plots, motifs and elements with one another. There are common characteristics of fairy tales:

- Set in the past

- Use some form or variation of "Once upon a time"
- Fantasy or make-believe elements
- Enchanted setting - can include forests, castles, water or kingdoms
- Clearly defined good and evil characters
- Magical elements
- Characters take on unusual forms (giants, witches, dwarfs, talking animals)
- Groups of three (objects, people or events)
- Clearly defined problem, climax and resolution
- Most often they have a happy ending
- Teach a lesson that is important to the culture it came from

Most importantly, fairy tales do not have to include a fairy!

In short, fairy tale is an imaginative story or piece of literature told in a variety of media. These are the stories based on magic and fantastical settings, plots, and characters and happy endings. A quality fairy tale tells a compelling story with a timeless theme. It can be characterized by the story elements (Characters, plot, setting, theme, style, tone, and point of view).

**Check Your Progress:**

A) Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct alternative:

- 1) ..... is called the father of short story.
  - a) Chaucer   b) Edgar Allen Poe   c) Thomas Malore
- 2) The form short-story was originated in .....
  - a) America   b) England   c) Greek
- 3) King Arthur was the legendary figure of .....
  - a) America   b) England   c) India
- 4) The story that is orally transmitted from generation to generation is called .....
  - a) Anecdote   b) fairy tale   c) folk-tale

- 5) ..... is type of story in which animals and objects speak.  
a) fable      b) fairy-tale      c) parable

**B) Answer the following questions in word/phrase/sentence each.**

- 1) Who was Aesop?
- 2) What is fable?
- 3) What is an anecdote?
- 4) What is Panchatantra?
- 5) What are the Gospels?

**2.3 Summary:**

As a minor form of literature, a short story is a brief, and therefore easily apprehensible as completed work, usually entertaining, frequently intriguing in both form and content, and not at all intimidating. Short stories tend to be less complex than novels. Usually, a short story focuses on only one incident, has a single plot, a single setting, a limited number of characters, and covers a short period of time.

Modern short-story writers exhibit a considerable interest in the possibilities of manipulation of form. Edgar Allen Poe first formulated the modern conception of the short story -- which he called the 'prose tale'-- and which he claimed as next only to the lyric poem as the form which 'best fulfills the demands of high genius' (p.622). He insisted that the short story be short, requiring from half an hour to two hours to read; that it be complete, since there is 'immense force derivable from totality' (the emphasis is Poe's); that it be 'conceived with deliberate care' to evoke a 'unique or single effect' (p.623), and that, like the lyric poem, it should 'induce exaltation of the soul' (p.622).

Short story is one of the minor forms of literature. It is work of fiction, written in narrative prose. It consists of minimum characters and events. Short story can be written on any subjects that author decides.

The earliest forms of short story were anecdotes, parables, fables, legends and fairy-tales. These forms were originated in the medieval period but later on flourished as an independent form of literature. These types of short story were orally transmitted from generation to generation. Though these forms were found in oral

forms, they fulfilled the functions of entertaining and educating listeners as well as readers. The study of these different forms of short story will certainly be helpful to student to understand the short story as a form of literature.

## **2.4 Terms to Remember:**

1. Gospels : four books of Bible that contain life and teaching of Jesus Christ.
2. Panchatantra: collection of Indian animal fables written in Sanskrit.
3. Phoenix: A unique bird which rises from ashes is symbol of rebirth.
4. King Arthur: a legendary British leader who defended Britain from Saxon invaders. (5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century)
5. Canterbury Tales: a collection of 24 stories, written by Geoferry Chaucer in 14<sup>th</sup> century.
6. Robinhood: A legendary heroic archer and swordsman, in English folktales.
7. Fabulist: The person who writes fables.
8. Aesop: a Greek fabulist and story teller.
9. Jatka Tales: the stories, related to the birth of Gautam Budha.
10. Mathew Mark, Luke: three of four writers of Gospels.
11. Setting: background place where the action of story takes place.
12. Metaphor: a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else.
13. Narrative: spoken accounts of story.
14. Didactive : educational, informative.
15. Emerge: arise, come into existence.
16. Medieval: of Middle Ages (from 1100 to 1485)

## **2.5 Answers to Check Your Progress:**

A) I – b    II- a    III- b    IV- a    V- a

B) I)    a Greek slave.

II)    A short story in which animals speak and which teaches moral lesson.

III) A short amusing story about real event or person.

- IV) Panchatantra is an ancient Indian collection of animal fables in Sanskrit.
- V) Gospels are the four books of Bible that tell about life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

## 2.6 Exercises:

### A) Write short notes on:

- 1) Anecdote
- 2) Legend
- 3) Parables
- 4) Fable
- 5) Fairy Tale

### B) Write answer of the following question in about 250 to 300 words.

- 1) What are the types of short story?
- 2) What is legend? What are the characteristics of legend?
- 3) What is parable? What are the features of parable?
- 4) What are the characteristics of fairy tale?

## 2.7 Reference for further study.

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**Module-3**  
**A. THE SHROUD**

**Premchand**

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### **3A.0 Objectives:**

After studying this unit you will be able to:

- Understand how man is helpless due to poverty.
- Understand how situation compels man to be selfish.
- Understand complicated nature of human being.

### **3A.1 Introduction:**

Premchand (31 July 1880 - 8 October 1936) is known as Munshi Premchand. He was an Indian writer famous for his modern Hindustani literature and was regarded as the greatest writer in Hindi Literature. He is one of the most celebrated writers of the Indian subcontinent, and is regarded as one of the foremost Hindustani writers of the early twentieth century. Born as Dhanpat Rai Srivastav, he began writing under the pen name Nawab Rai, but afterwards switched to "Premchand".

He has been referred to as the Upanyas Samrat (Emperor among Novelists). His works include more than a dozen novels, around 250 short stories, several essays and translations of number of foreign literary works into Hindi.

Premchand is considered the first Hindi author whose writings prominently featured realism. His novels describe the problems of the poor and the urban middle-class. His works depict a rationalistic outlook, which views religious values as something that allows the powerful hypocrites to exploit the weak. He used literature for the purpose of arousing public awareness about national and social issues and often wrote about topics related to corruption, child widowhood, prostitution, feudal system, poverty, colonialism and on the India's freedom movement.

### **3A.2 Content:**

#### **3A.2.1 Section-I**

The father and the son were sitting right in front of the entrance of the shack, beside a fire that had long gone out. Inside, Budhia, the son's younger wife, was writhing in labour pain, Her heart-rending cries made the father and the son hold their hearts. It was a desolate wintry night and the whole village was enveloped in darkness.

'She won't last, it seems,' said Ghisu. 'She has been tossing and turning the whole day. Go in and see what's wrong.'

'Why doesn't she just die, if she has to? What's there to see?' Madho whined piteously.

'You are so cruel. You spent a whole year with her happily, and now you're turning your face away from her.'

'I can't bear to see her writhing in pain, flailing her hands and legs.'

Ghisu and Madho were chamars by caste, and were treated with contempt by the whole village. For every day that Ghisu worked he shirked duty for three. But the real shirker was Madho who sat and puffed at the chillum for an hour after each hour of work that he put in. That is why no one hired them. They wouldn't seek work if they had even a fistful of grain at home. Only when they massed a couple of meals did Ghisu climb up a tree to gather some dry branches which Madho carried to the market to sell. As long as that money lasted they simply ramed about. Faced with starvation again, they would gather dry wood or seek some other work. There was no dearth of work in the village. The peasants who lived there could have given them all kinds of jobs, but they called the duo only when they were desperate and had no option but to employ both to get the work done which could otherwise have been accomplished by one. Had the father-son duo been sadhus, they wouldn't have been required to practice self-restraint for attaining contentment. It was second nature to them.

A strange life they led! They had nothing in the house except for a couple of clay utensils. They covered their nakedness in tattered rags. Even though they were free from the temptations of life they were burdened with debt. They listened to people's insults and abuses with perfect equanimity. They were so destitute that people lent them things without any hope of getting the same back. They would enter other people's fields, steal potatoes and peas and roast them to fill their stomachs. Or they would uproot a few sugarcane stalks and suck the juice through the night.

Ghisu had been living this spartan life for sixty years, and now Madho, like a truly obedient son, was following in his father's footsteps. Rather, he outdid his father in this. At that hour also, sitting by the fire, they were roasting potatoes that had stolen from somebody's field.

Ghisu's wife had died a long time ago. Madho had married only the previous year. This woman had brought some order in the family. She ground wheat or chopped grass and somehow managed to get a seer of flour to feed these two shameless rascals. Since she had come they had become lazier and more laidback than before. They had even started giving themselves airs. If someone wanted to hire them, they wouldn't show any interest, and then demand double the wages. This woman was tossing and turning in mortal labour pain since morning, but the father and the son seemed to be waiting for her to die so that they could have a good night's sleep.

As he peeled the potatoes Ghisu said, 'Just go in and see what's wrong. She must be possessed by an evil spirit. The exorcist will demand no less than a rupee if you send for him. Where will we get the money?'

Worried that if he went in Ghisu might polish off most of the potatoes, Mahdo replied, 'I'm right here.'

'Why don't you go in and see?'

'When my wife died, I didn't budge from her side for three days... She'll feel shy, won't she? I have never looked her face, how can I see her bare body today? She wouldn't know how to react. If she sees me she'll go stiff with embarrassment.'

'I wonder what we do if the child comes. Dry ginger, jaggery, oil-- we have nothing in the house.'

'Everything will come. If God gives a child, those who don't give a paisa now will give something on their own. I had nine sons, There was never anything in the house, but things worked out fine each time.'

It was not surprising to come across such a way of thinking in a society where the condition of those who toiled day and night was not much better than the condition of these two, and where those who took advantage of the weaknesses of the peasants were much better off than the peasants themselves.

Ghisu, it seems, was shrewder than the ordinary run of peasants, and rather than joining their thoughtless herd he had enlisted himself in the group of the sly and crafty ones. However, he didn't have the ability to use the mores of the crafty to his advantage, and that is why others in his group had gone on to become leaders and headman in the village whereas everyone pointed accusing fingers at him. Still, he

had one consolation: no matter how wretched his condition he, unlike other peasants, was able to evade their back-breaking labour and no one could take advantage of his dumb simplicity.

The duo peeled the potatoes and hastily popped them into their mouths. Starving since the previous day they didn't have the patience to let them cool. The outer part of the potatoes didn't feel too hot, but as they dug in their teeth, the hot insides scalded their tongue, palate and throat. The safest thing to do at that moment was to gulp down the burning ember hurriedly and consign it to the place where it would cool down soon enough. So they kept on gobbling up the potatoes frantically even as tears streamed down their eyes from the effort.

Ghisu was reminded of Thakur's marriage, which he had attended twenty years ago. He remembered that extraordinary feast to this day. He said, 'I can never forget it. Never have I been to another feast like this where I could have such a bellyful. The bride's side fed puris to everyone, big and small. Puris fried in pure ghee. And there was curd, three kinds of dry saag, one spicy curry, chutney, sweets and many other things, I can't tell you how I relished it! There was no one to stop you. You could demand anything you wanted and eat as much as you liked. People gorged so much that there was no space for even a drop of water in their stomachs. But the servers kept on dishing out piping hot, fragrant kachauris. They didn't listen to you even if you said no or raised your hand to restrain them. And when people finished eating and rinsed their mouths, they were served paan as well. But I had no desire left for paan as I could barely stand! I somehow managed to reach home and stretched out on my blanket ... The Thakur was large hearted indeed!'

Madho listened to the description of the sumptuous list of delicacies with relish and said, 'I wish someone would feed us like that now.'

'Who'll feed you now? Those times were different. Nowadays everyone is saving money. Stingy in marriage and wedding's, stingy in rites and rituals. What are they going to do with all the money they grab from the poor people? I ask you. They are not tight fisted when it is a question of grabbing, they are so only when it comes to giving'

'You must've stuffed yourself with at least twenty puris?'

'More than twenty.'

'I must've eaten that many. I was a hefty fellow. You aren't even half the size I was.'

They finished the potatoes and drank water. Then they covered themselves with their dhotis, tucked their knees up against their chests and went off to sleep right there beside the ashes of the fire. Like two huge, coiled-up pythons.

Budhia was still writhing in pain.

\*\*\*\*\*

### 3A.2.1 Check your progress:

#### A. Answer the following questions on one word/ phrase/ sentence each:

1. Who was writhing in labour pain inside the shack?
2. How did the whole village treat Ghisu and Madho?
3. When did the peasants call Ghisu and Madho for work?
4. What would Ghisu and Madho do by entering into other people's fields?
5. When people finished eating and rinsed their mouths, what were they served in Thakur's marriage?

#### B. Complete the following statements by choosing the correct alternative:

1. Since Budhia had come, Ghisu and Madho had become more .....  
a) lazier          b) active          c) hard working    d) honest
2. According to Ghisu the exorcist will demand no less than .....  
a) 5 rupees      b) 2 rupees      c) 8 annas          d) a rupee.
3. Ghisu had ..... sons.  
a) five            b) nine            c) two              d) ten
4. Ghisu was reminded of ....., which he had attended twenty years ago.  
a) his own marriage                      b) a neighbour's marriage  
c) Thakur's marriage                      d) Madho and Budhia's marriage
5. Ghisu must've eaten more than ..... puris in Thakur's marriage.  
a) five            b) twenty          c) twelve          d) ten

### 3A.2.2 Section-II

Next morning, Madho went inside the shack to find his wife's body stiff and cold. Flies were buzzing over her face. She was covered with dust and her two stony eyes were staring upwards vacantly. The child in her womb had died.

Madho rushed out to Ghisu and both began to howl and beat their chests. Hearing their lament the neighbors came running in panic and muttered the time-worn consolations.

But there was not much time for mourning. They had to arrange the firewood and the shroud. Money was as scarce in the house as meat in an eagle's nest.

The father and the son went wailing to the zamindar of the village. He hated the very sight of them, and had trashed them a couple of times with his own hands. For stealing, and for not showing up for work after they had promised to. He said, 'What's the matter, Ghisua? What are you howling for? One doesn't see your face nowadays. It seems you don't want to live in this village.'

Ghisu prostrated himself before the zamindar and said tearfully, 'Sarkar, we're in deep trouble. madho's wife died last night. She suffered the whole day. We kept sitting by her late into the night. Gave her all the medicines---the best we could. But she gave us the slip. We have no one left now to prepare a roti for us. Master, we're ruined. My family is destroyed. Now, who will see her through her last rites except you? We spent whatever little we had on her treatment. She can be given her last rites only if you take mercy. We have no one else to turn to.'

Though the zamindar was kind he knew that his kindness would be wasted on these fellows. For a moment he felt that he'd shoo them away and tell them to their face that the corpse might rot for all he cared. They didn't come when they were sent for, did they? Only because they found themselves in a tight spot today did they show up to flatter him. Rascals! But this was not the occasion for anger or revenge. He reluctantly flung two rupees at them but didn't utter a word of sympathy. He didn't even deign to look at them It was as though he was getting a load off his head.

When the zamindar himself gave them two rupees how could lesser mortals like the village banias, shopkeepers or moneylenders avoid making some contribution to the good cause? Ghisu made much of the zamindar's name and some contributed two annas some four. Within an hour Ghisu managed to collect the convenient sum of

five rupees. Some gave grains, others gave firewood. Thus reassured, Ghisu and Madho set out for the market at noon to buy the shroud, while others got busy splitting bamboos for the bier.

The kindly village women came to take a look at the corpse bemoaned the helpless fate of the dead woman and left.

### 3A.2.2 Check your progress

#### A. Answer the following questions on one word/ phrase/ sentence each:

1. What did Madho find the next morning ?
2. What did Ghisu and Madho do when they found Budhia dead?
3. Where did Ghisu and Madho go immediately after Budhia's death ?
4. What did Ghisu do before the zamindar?
5. How was the zamindar by nature?

#### B. Complete the following statements by choosing the correct alternative:

1. The zamindar reluctantly flung ..... at them but didn't utter a word.  
a) a rupee      b) 8 annas      c) two rupees      d) 5 rupees
2. Within an hour Ghisu managed to collect the sum of .....  
a) 3 rupees      b) 2 rupees      c) five rupees.      d) a rupee.
3. When reassured about the funeral preparation of Budhia, Ghisu and Madho set out for .....  
a) the market      b) crematorium      c) the bank      d) home
4. The kindly ..... came to take a look at the corpse of Budhia.  
a) village women      b) neighbours  
c) villagers      d) Madho and Ghisu

### 3A.2.3 Section-III

As they reached the market, Ghisu said, 'We've got enough firewood for the pyre, what do say?'

'Yes, there's enough wood. We only need the shroud now.'

'Let's get a cheap one.'

'Of course. It will be night when the corpse is carried to the pyre. No one will look at the shroud.'

'What an unjust custom! She who didn't have tattered rags to cover her body while alive must now have a new shroud.'

'And it burns to ashes with corpse.'

'So it dose. Now if we had these five rupees earlier we could've bought her some medicine.'

One was trying to gauge what the other was thinking. They kept wandering around in the market until it was evening. And then either intentionally or by coincidence they found themselves in front of a country liquor shop. They entered it together and for a while stood hesitantly. Then Ghisu bought a bottle of liquor and some titbits and, sitting in the veranda, both began to drink. Soon they were drunk.

'What good would it have done if we'd bought the shroud? It'd only be burnt to ashes,' said Ghisu.

Madho looked up at the heaven as though he was reassuring the angles of his innocence and said, 'This is the way of the world. They give thousands of rupees to Brahmins. Who knows whether it bring them rewards in the next world.'

'Rich people have money to burn, let them. What do we have?'

'But what'll we tell people? They'll ask, where's the shroud?'

Ghisu grinned. 'We'll say the money slipped out from the waistband. We looked everywhere, but couldn't find it' Madho giggled. He was exited by his father's unexpected ingenuity and said, 'She was a good soul. Even in death, she saw to it that we were fed well.'

By this time they had finished off more than half the bottle. Ghisu ordered two seers of puris, along with mutton curry, liver pieces and fish fry from the shop

opposite the shack. Madho ran to collect it all in two bowls. The sumptuous fare cost them one and a half rupees. They now had very little money left.

The two of them sat there in all splendor and helped themselves to the puris with the gusto of a lion feeding on its prey in the jungle. No one could hold them to account, and there was no fear of humiliation. They were past the stage of all such sensitivities. Ghisu said philosophically, 'She made us so happy, she'll definitely get rewards for it in heaven.'

Madho lowered his head respectfully to indicate his agreement. 'Sure. Bhagwan, you're All-knowing. Take her to paradise. We pray for her from the depth of our hearts. We have never had such a hearty meal in our whole life.'

After a few moments Madho had some doubts in his mind.

'Dada, aren't we all bound for the same place, sooner or later?' Ghisu didn't deign to reply to such a childish query. He looked at Madho reproachfully.

'What answer will you give her there if she asks why we didn't give her a shroud?' Madho asked.

'Don't talk rubbish!'

'She's going to ask -- you can be sure of that.'

'How do you know that she won't have a shroud? Do you take me to be a donkey? I haven't lived in this world for sixty years for nothing. She will have a shroud, and a much better one than we could have given her.'

Madho was unconvinced. He asked, 'Who'll give it? You have blown up all the money.'

Ghisu was really angry now. 'I'm saying she'll have her shroud. Why don't you believe me?'

'Why don't you say who'll give it?'

'The same people who gave us the money. They won't hand over the money to us any more. If they do, we'll have another feast here. And they'll pay for the shroud a third time.'

As the darkness deepened and the stars shone brighter, the atmosphere in the liquor shop became livelier. If one sang, another reeled, someone else clung to his

friend's neck while yet another held a glass to his companion's lips. There was intoxication in the air. The revelry increased. Some got drunk after just one swing. Many came there only to taste the joy of self-forgetfulness. More than the liquor it was the ambience that made them happy. The sorrows of life brought them here and for a while they would forget whether they were dead or alive or something in-between.

The father and the son were still taking swings from the bottle merrily. All eyes were glued on them. How fortunate they were to have a whole bottle all to themselves!

Having finished the meal, Madho picked up the leftover puris and gave them to a beggar who was staring hungrily at them. For the first time in his life he experienced the pride and pleasure of drinking and being on a high.

'Take it,' said Ghisu, 'eat to your heart's content and give your blessings. She who has earned it is dead. With your blessings she is sure to go to heaven. Bless her from every pore of your body. The money was hard earned.'

Madho looked up at the sky and said, 'She'll go to heaven, Dada, and be a queen there.'

Ghisu stood up and said ecstatically, 'Yes, she'll go to heaven. She hurt no one, harmed no one. In death she fulfilled the greatest wish of our life. If she doesn't go to heaven who will? These fat, bloodsuckers of the poor who go for a darshan of the Ganga to wash their sins and offer prayers in temples?'

This exuberance soon wore off. Fluctuation of mood is an integral feature of the drunken state. Sadness and remorse took over.

'Dada, how the poor thing suffered in life, and now she's dead and gone!' Madho covered his eyes with his hands and burst into sobs.

Ghisu consoled him, 'Don't cry, my son. Be happy that she has been released from the web of maya, from all fetters. She was very lucky she could snap all ties so soon.' And then they both broke into a song: Deceiver, why do you cast such enchanting glances, O deceiver...

The entire shack was drowned in a drunken stupor and the two went on singing. Then they began to dance---They leaped and jumped, staggered and tumbled, made faces and gestures, and finally, crashed to the ground.

### 3A.2.3 Check your progress:

#### A. Answer the following questions on one word/ phrase/ sentence each:

1. What did Ghisu buy from the liquor shop?
2. How much did Ghisu and Madho spend on the meals ?
3. What did Madho do after finishing the meal?

#### B. Complete the following statements by choosing the correct alternative:

1. Ghisu and Madho had ..... of humiliation  
a) a lot of fear   b) no fear   c) a thought   d) a sense
2. Ghisu ordered two seers of puris, along with....., liver pieces and fish fry from the shop  
a) chicken fry   b) boiled eggs   c) mutton curry   d) sweets
3. Madho prayed god to take his wife Budhia to .....  
a) the market   b) crematorium   c) the bank   d) paradise
4. As the darkness depended, the atmosphere in the liquor shop became .....  
a) sad   b) livelier   c) heavier   d) worst
5. Finally, Ghisu and Madho bought ..... shroud for the funeral of Budhia.  
a) a very costly   b) a very cheap   c) no   d) an old

### 3A.3 Summary:

Premchand was a famous modern Hindustani novelist, short story writer and dramatist. His novels and short stories are based on social realism, and feature the problems of the poor and urban middle class. He used literature as a tool for arousing public awareness about social and national issues, and widely wrote about topics such as child-widowhood, corruption, poverty, feudal system, and the Indian Freedom Movement.

Shroud (Kafan) is Munshi Premchand's last short story and unarguably one of his best. The story is a satire on the degradation of human beings and talks about a

father and son who need money to cremate the son's wife after her premature death during childbirth.

It is a story about a low-caste father and his son who work as labourers in a village in Orissa. The son's wife, Bhudia, is near the end of her pregnancy and is in need of medical attention, which the family certainly cannot afford. The poor lady writhes in pain as Ghisu and his son Madhav watch helplessly. Bhudia eventually dies during childbirth, adding to the problems of the father and son. Driven to extreme poverty and despair, they have no money or means to perform the funeral rites for the unfortunate women. They cannot ignore the dead body lying in their hut, and set out to ask the villagers for some monetary assistance. The question is will the villagers reach out to help the unfortunate low-caste family?

'Kafan' which is translated as 'Shroud' in English, describes the degradation of human beings to the lowest level possible. It not only talks about privation of the lower caste in the society but also delves into the depravity of the human soul across all castes, creeds or religions.

### **3A.3.1 Plot of the Story:**

In a small village somewhere in India Ghisu and Madho, father and son respectively, are seen sitting outside their hut in a tense and irritable mood on a dark winter night as Madho's wife Budhia lies writhing and wailing in childbirth in the hut. The whole village is drowned in darkness and gloom. Madho, Budhia's husband, is impatient and irritated at the heart-rending cries of his wife and at one moment even wishes that she were better dead than be suffering such mortal pains. The family lives in utter poverty as the two men are lazy, greedy, selfish and unwilling to work for livelihood. They choose to live on charity, deceit, begging and theft. They are real parasites on the society. As expected, Budhia dies in childbirth with the child also dead inside her. All this while the two fellows are fast asleep! This is a problem for the two loafers as death rites need money, including buying a ritualistic shroud for the corpse. The two men, therefore, resort to their old ways of fund raising through begging and borrowing. Their belief is: No need to worry. God will provide! Ghisu gets two rupees from the village zamindar: the banias and money lenders of the village also contribute out of charity and pity. Thus the two loafers have booty of full five rupees cash in hand. This turns their head. Hungry, greedy and addicted,

they wander off to the village pub where they drink like fish and eat like pigs. They sing and dance and squander the entire money on such revelry. Consequently there is no Money to buy a shroud and perform death rites for the dead wife. Even so they believe that just the money came, so will come the shroud also from somewhere. Dead drunk and with such consolatory thoughts they collapse on the ground.

### **3A.3.2 Characters in the Story:**

#### **1. Ghisu:**

Ghisu is one of the characters in the story The shroud written by Munshi Premchanda. He is the father of Madho and father-in-law of Budhia. He is sixty years old. He is lazy, shirks his duties and wastes his time wandering outside. He drinks along with his own son Madho. He has no qualms or conscience.

#### **2. Madho:**

Madho is Ghisu's son. He is married and Budhia is his wife. She is pregnant. Madho, like his father, is lazy person and he depends on his wife for food and clothing. He doesn't work. He is burdened with debt, steals potatoes and pegs from people's fields and fill themselves. He is a destitute. He doesn't take care of his pregnant wife. When she is writhing in childbirth pains, he doesn't sit beside her. Instead he waits and wants her to die. He spends / wastes all money on revelry leaving the dead body of his wife at home. He is an insensitive person.

#### **3. Budhia :**

Budhia is the wife of Madho. She is pregnant. We see her writhing in labour pain inside the hut. She had brought some order in the family of Ghisu and Madho. She would go for work and bring some food for the two men in house. As a result, the two men had become lazier. She cries a lot in the labour pain. She doesn't get medical help. At last she dies with her child dead inside. The two men, instead of buying the shroud for her, waste the money in merry-making.

#### **4. The Zamindar:**

The Zamindar is a minor character in the story. Ghisu and Madho go to him pleading for help and money to buy the shroud for Budhia. The zamindar rebukes them for not turning up for work. At last he flings two rupees at them but he did not utter a word of sympathy.

### **3A.3.3 Theme of the Story:**

Premchand's stories are full of realism. He describes the problems of the poor and the urban middle-class people. His works depict a rationalistic outlook. He shows his deep concern for poverty in India.

In the short story, *The Shroud*, he tells us how poverty causes degeneration of man into a beast. Ghisu and madho are poor. Both of them steal food from people, don't go for work and therefore, we get angry with their behavior. But given a deep thought, we understand that the real problem is poverty. They don't have a decent house to live, don't have enough land to till and they were not paid properly for their work by the upper-case people. There was a great social inequality. There was a great economic inequality also. Both of them belong to chamar caste which is very low. Money-lenders in the village look down upon them. They yoke them for work without payment. They exploit them physically, socially, economically and culturally. So these so poor people react in a bad way. We feel that both, Ghisu and Madho are bad people. But it is the poverty that has made them greedy, selfish and deceitful.

There is also a parallel thought running throughout the story: the miserable condition of women. The patriarchal system always imposes sorrows and suffering on women, it exploits women and does great injustice to womenfolk. It imposes on them meaningless age-old customs, traditions, morals and manners. The custom of buying the shroud for the dead is useless. People don't buy new clothes when one is living but they have to buy a new piece of clothe as a last rite. The new clothe is of no use to a dead person because it burns along with the corpse. But the people do follow the practice of wrapping the corpse in the shroud without asking a word against it.

The writer has a message to convey us from the story. He exposes the cruelty and injustice done to the lower class people. He criticizes the social system which turns man to behave like a beast. He tries to open our eyes by highlighting social and economic inequality in the village.

### **3A.3.4 Setting of the Story:**

The setting refers to a place where the events in a story happen. The action in *The Shroud* happens in a small village. The village is drowned in darkness of

ignorance, misery, exploitation and superstitious practices. The action takes place late in the evening in a hut. The hut symbolizes poverty and suffering. There is a description of village life. The people in village – The zamindar, banias and money lenders all help Madho and Ghisu to enable them to buy the shroud. Thus all the events in the story take place in a remote village i.e. rural part of India.

### **3A.3.5 The Title of the Story:**

The title of the story must be apt and attractive and suitable one. The title, The Shroud is very proper because it shows the rites to be performed after the death of a person. Here, the woman named Budhia dies in her labor pain. So her husband and father-in-law, being poor, demand money from the people to buy her the shroud. They go to the market to buy the shroud. But somehow their heads turn and they waste the money in drinking and eating. They think that it is useless to wrap a corpse in a new clothes. So without buying the shroud, they return to the village. They think that the shroud will come from people somehow. Thus the whole action of the story moves around the buying of the shroud. It also exposes the meaninglessness and senseless superstition being practical from immemorial times. Therefore, the title 'Shroud' is suitable one. It conveys the message of the story well.

### **3A.4 Terms to Remember:**

**Childbirth** : labour, delivering a child

**Plunge** : jump, drown

**Agony** : pain

**Hither and thither** : here and there

**Contentment** : satisfaction

**Remorseful** : regretful, repentant

**Haunted** : possessed by some spirit

**Contemptible** : hateful, vile

**Relish** : like the taste

**Lament** : express sorrow

**Prostrate** : lie flat on the ground in total submission

**Resentment** : anger

**Deities** : gods

**Infamy** : bad name, ill fame

**Satiated** : fully satisfied

**Swagger** : brag, speak proudly

### **3A.5 Answers to check your progress:**

#### **3A.2.1**

1. Budhia
2. With contempt
3. Only when they were desperate and had no option.
4. Steal potatoes and peas and roast them to fill their stomachs.  
Or they would uproot sugarcane
5. People were served paan as well when they finished eating.

#### **B. Complete the following statements by choosing the correct alternative:**

1. a) lazier
2. d) a rupee
3. b) nine
4. c) Thakur's marriage
5. b) twenty

#### **3A.2.2**

#### **A. Answer the following questions on one word/ phrase/ sentence each:**

1. His wife Budhia dead (his wife's body stiff and cold.)
2. Both began to howl and beat the chest.
3. To the zamindar
4. Ghisu prostrated himself before the zamindar.
5. The zamindar was kind by nature.

**B. Complete the following statements by choosing the correct alternative:**

1. c) two rupees
2. c) five rupees.
3. a) the market
4. a) village women

**3A.2.3**

**A. Answer the following questions on one word/ phrase/ sentence each:**

1. a bottle of liquor and some titbits
2. one and a half rupees
3. Madho picked up the leftover puris and gave them to a beggar.

**B. Complete the following statements by choosing the correct alternative:**

1. b) no fear
2. c) mutton curry
3. d) paradise
4. b) livelier
5. c) no

**3A.6 Exercises:**

**A. Answer the following questions in detail:**

1. Discuss 'Shroud' as a multi-layered story.
2. Critically appreciate the story 'Shroud' in your own words.
3. The story 'Shroud' diagnoses the ills of the society. Explain.

**B. Write short notes on the following:**

1. The character of Ghisu
2. The character of Madho
3. The title of the story
4. Setting of the Story

### **3 B.7 References for further study:**

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## B. LALOO

Sarat Chandra Chatterji

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### 3B.0 Objectives:

After studying this unit you will be able to:

- Understand the naughty nature of little children..
- Understand how it is difficult to overcome mischievousness of one
- Understand how a firm stand taken against tradition can bring changes.

### **3B.1 Introduction:**

Sarat Chandra Chatterji is a very famous novelist and short story writer of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Bengal. He wrote about the lifestyle, tragedy and struggle of the village people and the contemporary social practices that prevailed in his time. He was the master storyteller who created many unique and beautiful characters among them two most famous Characters were 1) Srikanta (Novel Srikanta), 2) Sabyasanchi (Novel Pather Dabi) 3) Devdas (Novel Devdas) 4) Lalu etc . He is one of the most famous writers both in Bangladesh and India. His books have been translated many times.

The story is an amusing tale of wayward boy. Eliciting loud guffaws, giggles and sometimes snickers, the short tale is as distinctly typical of Sarat Chandra as are the melodramatic family dramas. The story, Laloo is narrated by an unidentified friend of Laloo. It tells us about the mischief and reformistic attitude of Laloo.

### **3B.2 Content:**

#### **3B.2.1 Section- I**

When I was a little boy I had a friend called Laloo. That was quite half a century back---- that is, such a long time ago that you children can have no very clear notion of it. We used to be class-fellows in a small Bengali school. We must have been some ten or eleven years of age then. Laloo was infinitely resourceful in devising means by which to frighten people out of their wits, or in getting his own back. He managed to give his mother such a fright by throwing a rubber snake in her way that she sprained her ankle quite badly, and limped for over a week. Furious because of this escapade, Laloo's mother said, 'A tutor must be found for Laloo. He will come in the evenings to do lessons with Laloo, and that will leave him no time for his pranks.'

However, Laloo's father could not concur in this. He had never had a tutor himself, and only after a bitter struggle had he been able to get his education, and succeeded in becoming a flourishing lawyer. he hoped his son would, like him, be able to do his work without anybody's aid. Finally, his class a tutor would be asked to come and reside in the house. Laloo escaped the ordeal for the occasion, but he harboured a grievance against his mother, since it was she who has tried to get him

saddled with a tutor. And Laloo knew that getting a tutor to live in the house was quite as bad as calling in the police.

Laloo's father was a well-to-do gentleman. He had his old house altered into a three-storied mansion a few years before this. Since then Laloo's mother's fervent hope was that she would be able to induce her preceptor to visit her, so that she could offer her respects to him. Being an aged man, her preceptor was unwilling to travel all the way from Faridpur, but now a favorable opportunity had arisen. Having gone to Banaras on the occasion of solar eclipse, the Smritiratna had written to say that on his way back he would stop at her house, and give her his blessing. Laloo's mother's felicity knew no bounds. She devoted herself entirely to making all sorts of arrangements, knowing that her heart's desire was soon to be fulfilled, and that her preceptor was to bestow the dust of his feet on her house. The house would be sanctified by his presence.

The big room on the ground floor was cleared, and a new ribbon-bed and mattress were got ready for the preceptor's rest. One corner of the room was set apart for his prayers, as climbing up to the second floor to the family prayer-room would have exhausted the old man.

Soon after the preceptor arrived. But what a mischance! The sky that day was quite overcast with black clouds, and it rained as hard as it blew; there seemed to be no respite all day long.

What with preparing the sweets and the fruits for her preceptor, Laloo's mother had hardly a free moment the whole day. She broke away from her work for a few minutes just to go to the room, make up the bed, and tuck in the mosquito-curtains. Many topics of conversation having kept the two engaged in the evening, the travel-weary old servant also withdrew for the night. Lulled by the softness of the bed, the gratified old man blessed Nandarani, Laloo's mother, in his heart.

But late at night he was suddenly awakened. The roof seemed to be leaking, and the water-drops found their way through the mosquito-curtain on to his well-nourished punch! How very cold the drops were! Bewildered, the old man jumped out of bed and, as he wiped himself dry, muttered, 'Nandarani has had a new house built, but it seems the blazing sun of these parts has already made cracks in the roof!' The ribbon-bed not being heavy, he managed to drag it and the mosquito-net to another part of the room, and lay down again. But not for more than half a minute! Just as his

eyes were closing, a few more drops just as icy as the first ones fell precisely on the same spot of his anatomy. The Smritiratna rose up again, and pulled his bed to another side of the room, saying, 'Ah! It seems the roof has cracked right across!' Yet again, as he lay down, the cold water dripped on him. He wiped himself dry a third time, and lay down to find that the trouble persisted. Again he shifted his ground this time to another side of the room but it was the same all over again! And now he realizes that the bedding was wet, so that sleeping in it was out of the question. The Smritiratna found himself in an awkward predicament. Being an aged man, he did not want to take the risk of going out of the room in an unknown house, but then staying in the room had its dangers too. Who was there to assure him that the cracked roof itself would not come down on his head? He made his way out on to the veranda in alarm. There was a lantern burning in a corner, but not a soul anywhere—and it was dreadfully dark.

The rain poured down as hard as the hurricane blew. It was hardly possible to stand. Where were the servants? Where shouted out to them, but nobody replied. A wooden bench, used by the humbler sort of clients who came to see Laloo's father, was lying in a corner of the veranda. Finding himself quite helpless, the preceptor sat down on it. His self-esteem received a severe shock, and he realized it inwardly, but what was he to do? The northern breeze carried the rain-drops into the veranda and the cold made him shiver all over. He draped himself in the loose end of his dhoti, and drawing up his knees tried to discover how to get the maximum of comfort possible in the circumstances. The fatigue born of much exertion and many mischances made his muscles completely slack, and embittered his feelings; his eyelids were heavy with sleep. The unusually full repast and the equally unusual night-watching made him emit a belch or two foretelling an attack of acidity : there was no end, he found, to his miseries. And just then there came another unthinkable affliction! The big gnats so frequent in the western districts started serenading him in both ears! At first his eyelids refused to scrutinize this new peril, but his mind clouded over with suspicion: what could be the number of these invaders? The doubt was a matter of a couple of minutes at the outside. The unknown danger became only too clear: the preceptor realized that his tormentors were innumerable. Even the bravest would have quailed the presence of such an army. The irritation caused by their bite was only equaled by the frantic itching that followed. The Smritiratna bolted from the spot, but they gave chase. The room was impossible

because of the rain coming through the roof, and the veranda because of the mosquitoes. he found that the uninterrupted motion of his limbs and the constant rapid waving of his towel had no appreciable effect on their attack.

The Smritiratna began racing from one end of the veranda to the other, and even though it was winter he began perspiring all over! He wanted to yell in his agony, but desisted from such childishness. In his imagination, he saw Nandarani comfortably sleeping in her soft bed, and the other inmates of the house wrapped in carefree slumber. Only his torments were to have no end. Somewhere a clock Struck four. Tired Out, he exclaimed, 'Well, bite your worst, you wretched! Bite as much as ever you can -- I can do nothing!' Shielding his back as well as he could he sat down against one of the walls of the veranda. 'If I survive till the morning,' he said, 'not a moment more shall I stay in these accursed parts. The first train I can catch to get away from here will be the one I shall get into. I now understand why my heart did not look forward to a visit to this place.' Then in a few moments sleep, which effaces all agonies, wiped out the miseries he had faced through the night, and the Smritiratna slept the sleep of the semiconscious.

Nandarani got up the moment it was dawn. She must try her best to serve the preceptor. In her opinion the old man had only had a light meal--though in fact it was quite a substantial one. She had therefore an uneasy feeling that she had not been able to treat her revered preceptor as she should. Now that it was day, she must do her best to make good the deficiencies of the last evening.

Coming down to the ground floor, she found the door open. She felt a little ashamed that her preceptor should have got up first. As she peeped into the room she perceived that he was not in, but what a sight met her eyes! The bed had been shifted from the south side of the room to the north, her preceptor's canvas handbag had moved of its own from the windowsill where she had placed it to the center of the room, the copper vessels, the square of carpet, and the other things that were to be used in making his devotions, were scattered all over the floor -- she could not understand why. She went out and called loudly to the servants, but nobody was up and about. Where then had her preceptor gone out unaccompanied? Suddenly she noticed -- what was it? Something like a human shape huddled in the gloom. She plucked up courage to go near it, and bending forward perceived that it was her preceptor! In unspeakable alarm, she screamed, 'Father! Father!'

The Smritiratna awoke, opened his eyes, straightened himself, and sat upright. Alarmed, anxious, overwhelmed with shame, Nanarani broke into sobs and inquired, 'Father! Why are you here?'

The old man rose to his feet and said, 'There was no end to my tribulations last night, my child!'

'Why, Father?'

'You have had a new house build, my child but the roof seems to have cracks everywhere. All through the night the rain does not seem to have fallen anywhere else than on my person. Whichever was I removed my bed the rain came through the roof. Alarmed lest the roof should come down on my head, I ran out. But did that mean the least respite, my child? Whose legions of gnats and mosquitoes swarmed round me like locusts to suck my blood. I had to fly from one end of the veranda to the other and back again! They have probably drained half the blood from my body, my child!'

When Nandarani noticed the plight of her aged preceptor, whose visit she had so long and so anxiously prayed for, her eyes filled with tears. Yet she protested, 'But Father, there are two rooms just above the one you occupied last night. How could the rain have pierced its way through three roofs to reach you?' As she was uttering these words she suddenly realized that this was probably one of the diabolical tricks of that imp Laloo! She ran to the bed and, feeling it all over, discovered that a large part of it was quite wet, and that drops were still falling from the top of the mosquito-certain, pulling it down she saw a lump of ice in a rag. It had not completely melted even then, and there was a small piece still in the rag. She rushed out of room like one demented and shouted to the servants, to whoever came in her path, 'Where is that infernal Laloo? Never mind your duties, just find out where the rascal is, and then thrash him all the way here!'

Laloo's father, who was just coming downstairs, was aghast when he saw what his wife was up to, and said, 'Whatever are you doing?' 'What can the matter be?'

Nandarani burst into tears and said, 'Either you will have to send your Laloo out of this house, or I shall this very day expiate the enormity of this action by throwing myself into the Ganges!'

'But What has Laloo done?'

'Come in and see what he has done to my unoffending preceptor!' They all went in. Nandarani explained what had happened, and showing him the bed exclaimed 'How can anyone live the same house as this dreadful boy?'

The preceptor now understood all, and realized his own silliness he burst into loud guffaw.

Laloo's father turned his face away.

The servants came back saying, 'Laloo Babu is not to be found anywhere in the house!' And then another man arrived and reported, 'He is at Auntie's House, having his breakfast. Auntie wouldn't let him come.'

'Auntie' was Nandarani's younger sister. Her husband also was a lawyer, and lived in another part of town.

For the next fortnight Laloo did not venture to come near the house.

### **3B.2.1 Check your progress:**

#### **A. Answer the following questions on one word/ phrase/ sentence each:**

1. How did Laloo frighten his mother?
2. Who was invited to come and reside in the house after Laloo's class?
3. Whom did Laloo's mother hope to invite to bless her?
4. What was the name of Laloo's mother's preceptor?
5. What was the name of Laloo's mother?
6. What did the preceptor do when the cold water dripped on him?
7. How did Laloo's mother feel looking at the preceptor's condition?
8. What did Laloo's mother say after preceptor's incident?

#### **B. Complete the following statements by choosing the correct alternative:**

1. Getting a tutor to live in the house was quite as bad as calling in the .....  
a) police      b) enemies      c) relatives      d) Yamraj
2. Laloo's father had a ..... storied mansion.  
a) three      b) single      c) five      d) two

3. Laloo's mother's preceptor was unwilling to travel all the way from .....  
a) the market    b) his Ashram    c) the forest    d) Faridpur
4. The big room on the ..... floor was cleared for the preceptor  
a) first            b) ground            c) third            d) top
5. When the cold water dripped on him continuously, the preceptor tried to take rest .....  
a) in the backyardt                            b) in the Ashram  
c) on a wooden bench                        d) in the room only
6. Laloo's mother saw a ..... in a rag.  
a) lump of ice    b) lump of suger c) lump of mud    d) water bottle

### 3B.2.2 Section-II

As I told you be before, my friend's pet name was Laloo. Of course, he had another name that he went by outside the family circle, but I have no recollection of it. You children must be aware of the fact that Lal, in Hindi, means 'beloved'. I do not know who gave him his pet name, but rarely are men and their names so completely in accord. He was loved by everybody.

When, our schooldays being over, we joined college, Laloo said he must set up a business. He started working as a contractor, having taken a loan of ten rupee from his mother. We would tell him, 'Laloo, your capital is a meager ten rupees!' And he would reply with a smile, 'how much more does one need? That is quite enough.'

Everyone loved him, and he was never out of work. So we now began to meet him frequently on the road, shading himself with an umbrella, getting minor repairing jobs done by a few workmen, Whenever he noticed us, he used to chaff us saying, 'Run along boys! Run along, or there will be an absent-mark in your attendance register!'

When we had been together some years before, at the Bengali school, Laloo was the mechanic for everybody's petty jobs. In the bag in which he carried his books, you were sure to find a pestle, a nail-cutter, a knife with a broken blade, an awl for boring holes, a horseshoe. Nobody knew where he had got these assorted tools from,

but it is a fact that with their help he could do almost anything. Mending the umbrellas of the school, fixing all the loose slate-frames, sewing up garments torn during games -- these and many other such jobs were done by him, without ever a refusal, and done excellently. On the occasion of the Chhat festival, one year, he invested in a few piece-worth of coloured paper and some pith, and made a new type of toy which brought him almost two rupees and a half at the bathing-ghat on the Ganges. And out of this amount he stood us a hearty feed of roasted groundnuts.

The years rolled on, and we grew up into youth nobody could surpass Laloo in the gymnasium. Endowed with exceptional strength and unbounded courage, he did not seem to know what fear meant. He was ready whenever a person appealed to him, and if there was any trouble he could be counted upon to be there first. But he had one besetting shortcoming. If ever he got the opportunity of giving someone a fright he could not control himself. In such a case all --- young or old or his elders -- were one to him. We could not imagine how those remarkably ingenious stratagems by which he frightened people out of their wits flashed on him in a moment. Let me tell you one or two such incidents. There used to be an annual worship of the Goddess Kali, at the house of Manohar Chatterji, a man of the locality. One year, the blacksmith who was to perform the sacrifice was missing, and midnight was about to strike. People rushed to the blacksmith's house, and discovered that he was unconscious because of a stomach-ache. When this news reached the house, everybody was overwhelmed. What was to be done? Where could another person be found, at such an hour, to perform the sacrifice? The ceremony would be incomplete! Somebody suddenly remembered that Laloo could do the work. He had sacrificed a goat on many such occasions. People ran to him, but Laloo, who was asleep, when wakened said 'No'.

'No! How can that be? An obstacle in the worship of the goddess would mean complete devastation!'

Laloo replied, 'If it must mean that, let it come! I have performed such a sacrifice as a boy, but I cannot do it now.'

Those who had come to call Laloo began to beat their heads in despair. There were only some ten or fifteen minutes left for the hour to strike, and then would follow ruin and confusion. Nobody would survive the wrath of the mighty Kali! Laloo's father came up and ordered Laloo to go. 'These people have come,' he said,

'because they have no other resource you must go.' It was not for Laloo to disregard his father's order.

When Manohar Chatterji saw Laloo his fears were allayed. There was no time to be lost. Instantly a goat was dedicated, its forehead marked with vermilion, a wreath of hibiscus flowers was hung round its neck, and the neck fitted into the wooden sacrificial post. The loud uproar caused by the whole assembly yelling, 'Mother! Mother!' Completely drowned the last piteous cries of the helpless and innocent victim, the sacrificial sword in Laloo's hand flashed up and swept down in an instant, and then the blood jetting out from the slaughtered neck coloured the black earth red. Laloo kept his eyes closed for an instant. The immense din made by the little drums, the big drums, and the gongs came almost to a stop. In due course, the second, goat, which had been shivering at a distance, had the vermilion mark put on its forehead, and its neck wreathed with a red garland, and then the scene of the sacrificial post, the same last agonizing bleats, the many-throated noise of voices calling 'Mother! Mother! In unison, was repeated. Again the bloodstained sacrificial sword in Laloo's hand swept up and came down in the twinkling of an eyelid, the severed body of the victim jerked its limbs a few times as a last protest to some unknown power, and then fell back into repose; the blood from the second severed neck reddened a little more of the crimsoned earth.

The drummers were drumming away like mad, the assembly in the courtyard was making an indescribable noise, and, seated on a square of carpet on the front veranda, Manohar Chatterji was repeating, with closed eyes, the sacred words of prayer, when all of a sudden Laloo gave a savage cry. All noises at once stopped abruptly. Everybody was struck dumb with terror. What could this portend? Laloo's eyeballs seemed to be whirling in his unnaturally widely parted eyes. Suddenly he shouted, 'Where are the other goats?'

One of the household replied, in a terrified voice, 'There are no more goats. We offer only two as sacrifice.'

Laloo swung the bloodstained sacrificial sword above his head a couple of times, and then in a horribly discordant voice he bellowed, ' No more goats! That simply cannot be. The blood has gone to my head -- give me more goats, or I shall offer whomever I can get to hold of, as a human sacrifice. Ma! Ma! Victory to Kali!' He cleared the distance from one side of the sacrificial post to the other in a

prodigious jump, his sword making rapid sweeps in the air. What happened after that was simply indescribable. In a body, everyone ran towards the main gate lest Laloo should catch him. It became a whirlpool of seething humanity, with people pushing one another and scrambling for space in order to slip through. Some fell down, some crawled on all fours to find a way through the legs of those who were standing, some had their faces --- but all this was a matter of moments. And then there was not a soul to be seen!

Laloo roared, 'Where is Manohar Chatterji? Where has the priest vanished?'

The priest was a lean person. He had run away in good time in the midst of the hubbub and ensconced himself behind the image of the goddess. The preceptor of the house, who, seated on a square of kusa grass, had been reading the Chandi, rose up quickly and screened himself behind one of the massive pillars of the veranda fronting the image. But the bulky Manohar Chatterji was incapable of running away. Laloo advanced, caught one of his hands with his own left hand, and said, 'Come and place your neck in the notch of the sacrificial post!'

The sight of the blade in his right hand, couples with Laloo's steely grip, made Manohar Chatterji's heart all but fail. In a tearful voice he began imploring him, 'Laloo, my child, look closely at me, I am not a goat, but a man! I am your uncle, my child, your father is like a younger brother to me.'

'I know nothing about that. The blood has gone to my head and I must make a sacrifice of you. It is the Mother's behest!'

Manohar Chatterji burst out into a loud cry, 'No, my child, it cannot be the Mother's behest, it can never be that -- she is the Universal Mother!'

Laloo shouted, 'Mother of the Universe! You have the sense to understand that! Will you ever again offer goats? And call me to sacrifice them? Speak!'

Manohar Chatterji sobbed, 'Never again, my child! Never again. I am taking a thrice-repeated oath before the Mother, that henceforward there shall be no more animal sacrifice in my house.'

'You are sure?'

'Yes, my child, I am quite sure. Never again! Let go my hand, my child, I must visit the bathroom!'

Laloo released his grip and said, 'Well, go away. I will let you go. But where has that priest gone? Where is the preceptor?' And as he jumped on to the inner veranda with another yell, there arose from behind the image and the pillar the notes of a couple of wailing and terrified throats.

The bass and the treble of the two made such a strange and comical duet that Laloo could not control himself any longer. 'Ha! Ha! Ha!' he roared with laughter, and throwing the sacrificial sword to the ground with a dull thump, he ran quickly out of the house.

It then became obvious to all that Laloo had pretended that the blood had gone to his head, and had played a trick on them. Out of sheer devilry, Laloo had given everybody such a fright and kept it up so long in five minutes everybody come back from his hiding-place into the courtyard. The ceremony of worshipping the goddess had still to be perform, and there had been a sad interruption, but in the midst of the babel of voices Manohar Chatterji repeatedly vowed, in the presence of all assembled, that if he did not have the young scoundrel awarded fifty blows with a shoe by his father the very next morning, he would change his own name!

But Laloo was spared this ignominy. Early next morning he ran away to some unknown place, and nobody could find out where he was. Then, after a week was over, he came back one evening under cover of darkness, entered Manohar Chatterji's house, obtained both his pardon and a blessing, and was thus able to escape his father's wrath. Be that as it may, Manohar Chatterji having made a vow in the presence of the goddess, animal sacrifices on the occasion of the Kali festival ceased in his house from that day.

### **3B.2.2 Check your progress:**

#### **A. Answer the following questions on one word/ phrase/ sentence each:**

1. In the youth who could surpass Laloo in the gymnasium?
2. Where used to be an annual worship of the Goddess Kali?
3. What oath did Manohar Chatterji repeat before the Goddess Kali?
4. What type of person Manohar Chatterji was?
5. How was the priest?

**B. Complete the following statements by choosing the correct alternative:**

1. When his schooldays were over, he started working as .....  
a) a contractor    b) a preceptor    c) a priest    d) a teacher
2. On the occasion of the Chhat festival, a new type of toy made by Laloo brought him almost .....  
a) ten rupees and a half                      b) two rupees and a half  
c) two rupees                                      d) five rupees and a half

**C. Say whether the following sentences are true or false:**

1. At the Bengali school, Laloo was the mechanic for everybody's petty jobs.
2. Laloo was not endowed with exceptional strength and unbounded courage, he was fearful.
3. Laloo's father ordered Laloo to go to sacrifice the goat.
4. Laloo could not catch the bulky Manohar Chatterji.
5. Laloo had pretended that the blood had gone to his head, and had played a trick on them.

**3 B.3 Summary:**

Sarat Chandra Chatterji was given several awards for his contributions to Bengali literature. The story, "Laloo," happens in a small town of West Bengal almost more than a hundred and fifty years ago now. It is narrated by an unidentified friend of Laloo. It covers about ten year's span for the action with Laloo as a school boy on the verge of entering college. The focus is on Laloo's exploits during his adolescent years during his school days. He is the only son of his parents. His father is a well-to-do lawyer and his mother, Nandarani, is a hard working housewife.

**3B.3.1 The Plot of the Story:**

Laloo is a real mischief to his family with the mother always being at the receiving end of his tricks. Once he scares her mortally by throwing a rubber snake on her body. She sprains her ankle badly. She is fed up with son's mischief and arranges to appoint a private tutor to discipline Laloo. This is vigorously disliked by

Laloo, as having resident teacher in the house is like having a policeman under the roof.

Laloo's mother is a devout person. She invites her "preceptor" (guru) to stay in her house as gratitude and respect towards the old man. She believes that the stay of the good man would sanctify her renovated house. However, Laloo does not appreciate the plan and when the preceptor comes to stay in the house Laloo arranges to drip ice-cold water on him while he is asleep. As a result, the poor old man keeps awake throughout the night, tries to sleep in the veranda and is bitten by swarms of mosquitoes. When Laloo's mother knows this and discovers Laloo's tricks he is much ashamed at inflicting insult on her Guru and is livid with anger. She wants to thrash Laloo soundly but Laloo escapes and stays for fifteen days at his aunt's house.

Laloo may be a mischief monger but he is a Jack of many trades and skills. He has a good mechanical brain and he can repair different gadgets skillfully. He is innovative and self-dependent. He wants to set up his own business at an early age.

A completely new side of his personality is revealed in the episode of goat sacrifice to goddess Kali at orthodox believer Manohar Chatterji's worship at his home. It happens that the blacksmith who performs the actual sacrifice is taken severely ill and cannot report for the work. There is no one else who can undertake the responsibility. At this juncture, Laloo's name surfaces for the job as he is such a dare devil. His father also consents. Laloo slices off the heads of two goats vigorously but now the sacrifice as it were has him in its grip. He is drunk with violence and demands more goats to be beheaded. However, there being no more animals, Laloo beings to chase Manohar himself in order to slice his head in the sacrifice! Panic breaks loose in the house and Manohar is mortally afraid. Laloo pretends to be possessed by the spirit of sacrifice and plays the role like a deft, seasoned actor. Manohar Chatterji requests Laloo with folded hands to spare him. Here is Laloo's chance. He makes Manohar take an oath that henceforward he will never in future perform animal sacrifice in Kali worship. The story concludes on this suggestive note.

### 3B.3.2

#### **Characters in the Story:**

##### **1) Laloo :**

Laloo is the central character in the story because it focuses all through on the pranks of Laloo. Laloo is an adolescent son of a small town lawyer. He is a mischief-maker boy and therefore a source of anger and anxiety to his mother, Nandarani. Once he intimidates his mother by throwing a rubber snake at her. As a result, she sprains her ankle badly. She arranges a teacher for him but Laloo insults and troubles him also. But though Laloo is a pampered boy he has mechanical skills of repairing various household gadgets. So everybody liked him in spite of his naughtiness.

Laloo's bad image is erased from our mind in the episode of sacrifice to goddess Kali. He helps Manohar Chatterji by offering his help to cut sacrificial goats. But then he pretends to be possessed by the spirit of violence and chases Manohar with a sickle. He scares Manohar and makes him take an oath that henceforward he will never perform animal sacrifice to Kali. Thus Laloo turns out to be a mature personality who opposes killing of innocent animal.

##### **2) Laloo's Mother :**

Nandarani is Laloo's mother. She is a devout and simple hardworking housewife. She is always worried about the future of Laloo. With a view to educate him well she arranges her own old teacher as a private tutor for Laloo. She also believes that the stay of her guru will sanctify her house. She gets furious when Laloo troubles her guru and expresses her apology.

##### **3) Laloo's Father :**

Laloo's father is a well-to-do lawyer in the town. He doesn't care much about the future of Laloo. He had built a three-storeyed house. He loves Laloo very much in spite of his mischievous nature. He doesn't say a word of anger when Laloo troubles his tutor by pouring on him ice-cold water.

##### **4) Laloo's Private Tutor :**

The name of the private tutor of Laloo is the Smritiratna. In fact he had been guru of Laloo's mother. On request made by Laloo's mother, he consents to be a private tutor to Laloo and lives with them. However, Laloo troubles him by dripping

ice-cold water on him. Laloo's mother begs the teacher's apology. Laloo's mother had a great respect for the teacher. She believes that her house will get purified by his stay.

#### 5) **Manohar Chatterji :**

Manohar Chatterji was a man of locality. He wished to sacrifice goats to propitiate Goddess Kali. But the blacksmith who was supposed to perform the rite did not come. So Laloo is offered to cut the sacrificial goats. Laloo did the work and in a fit of frenzy chased Manohar with a view to kill him. Manohar, greatly scared, pleaded for mercy. Then Laloo made him swear that henceforward he will never in future offer goats to Kali worship.

#### **3B.3.3 Theme of the Story:**

The story Laloo is written by the 20<sup>th</sup> century Bengali writer Sarat Chandra Chatterji. Sarat Chandra was essentially a thinker and a social reformer. During his time Bengal was in the grip of social evils like sati, child marriage, caste, discriminations, untouchability, exploitation of women and poor people, animal sacrifice etc. This unhealthy atmosphere moved Saratchandra deeply. He grew uneasy to see social evils around him. His work represented rural Bengali society and he often wrote against social superstitions and oppression. He was particularly sensitive to the cause of women. Therefore, he wished to give a message to the evil-doers. So his reformist attitude is conveyed to us through the characters of Laloo. At the end of the story, we see how Laloo forces Manohar to swear against animal sacrifice. So here Laloo functions as the mouthpiece of the writer and his reformist zeal is presented through Laloo. Thus the central theme in the story is to expose the social evils and to protest against them. The writer wants society to take 'corrective' action and get rid of the bad social evils and practices.

#### **3B.4 Terms to remember:**

**Resourceful** : having many useful ideas

**Devise** : find out, invent, use

**Sprain** : (painful) twist of limb

**Escapade** : exploits, adventures

**Furious** : very angry

**Harbor** : (verb) to bear in mind

**Grievance** : complaint

**Be saddled with** : have a responsibility

**Well-to-do** : rich, financially sound

**Fervent** : strong

**Induce** : cause to do something; instigate

**Preceptor** : advisor, teacher, Guru

**Felicity** : ease, expertise

**Mischance** : bad luck

**Overcast** : spread over, covered

**Weary** : tired

**Gratified** : satisfied

**Paunch** : pot belly, stomach

**Mutter** : speak unclearly

**Anatomy** : body structure

**Predicament** : unpleasant situation

**Hurricane** : cyclone, storm

**Exertion** : hard efforts

**Scrutinise** : examine

**Invader** : attacker

**Legions** : in great number

**Swarm** : crowd, flock

**Plight** : difficult situation

**Pierce** : perforate, notch holes

**Diabolical** : devilish, Monstrous

**Aghast** : frightened

**Ganges** : river Ganga  
**Unoffending** : harmless  
**Guffaw** : loud laughter  
**Fixing** : repairing  
**Pith** : core  
**Roasted** : baked  
**Surpass** : outdo, defeat, be better (than)  
**Fright** : fear  
**Overwhelm** : affect strongly  
**Obstacle** : hurdle  
**Devastation** : destruction  
**Disregard** : disrespect  
**Blood-stained** : covered with blood  
**Allay** : pacify, calm down  
**Instantly** : immediately  
**Yell** : shout  
**Jetting out** : streaming out  
**Unison** : agreement, harmony  
**Crimsoned** : red  
**Savage** : wild, untamed  
**Dumb** : speechless, mute  
**Discordant** : not in agreement  
**Bellow** : roar, shout  
**Prodigious** : amazing, wonderful  
**Whirlpool** : water running in a circle, vortex  
**Seething** : boiling

**Clamber** : climb

**Vanish** : disappear

**Hubbub** : noisy confusion

**Enscon** : hide

**Screen** : hid

**Massive** : huge

**Steely** : firm, tight

**Implore** : request earnestly

**Behest** : request (noun)

**Bass and treble** : low and high pitch of tone

**Thump** : fall/put down heavily

**Interruption** : break, disruption

**Scoundrel** : dishonest, disreputable

**Ignominy** : ill fame

**Vow** : promise, oath

### **3B.5 Answers to Check your progress:**

#### **3B.2.1**

- A.
1. By throwing a rubber snake
  2. The tutor
  3. The preceptor
  4. Smritiratna
  5. Nandarani
  6. The preceptor went into the verandah
  7. Nanarani felt alarmed, anxious, overwhelmed with shame.
  8. Throw myself into the Ganges.

- B.** 1. a) police  
2. a) three  
3. d) Faridpur  
4. b) ground  
5. c) on a wooden bench  
6. a) lump of ice

### **3B.2.2**

- A.** 1. Nobody  
2. Manohar Chatterji's house  
3. there shall be no more animal sacrifice in my house.  
4. Manohar Chatterji was a bulky person  
5. The priest was lean

- B.** 1. a) a contractor  
2. a) ten rupees and a half

- C.** 1. True  
2. False  
3. True  
4. False  
5. True

### **3B.6 Exercises:**

**A. Answer the following questions in detail:**

1. Critically appreciate the story 'Laloo' in your words.
2. Discuss the theme of the story 'Laloo'
3. Sketch the character of Laloo in your words.

**B. Write short notes on the following:**

1. Smritiratna's visit to Laloo's house

2. An annual worship of the Goddess Kali
3. Laloo's mother

### **3B.7 References for further study:**

Chattopadhyay Sarat Chandra, *Selected Stories of Sharatchandra*. Ocean Paperbacks, 2010

Mukhopadhyay Anindita, Chattopadhyay Saratchandra , *Stories from Saratchandra: Innocence and Reality*. 2018.



## Module 4

### A. A SEASON OF NO RETURN

Gurdial Singh

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## 4 A.0 Objectives:

After studying this Unit you will be able to:

- Understand the superficiality of human relationships.
- Explain how man is caught in trap of time and change.
- Find relationship between the pattern of village and city life.

## 4 A.1 Introduction:

Gurdial Singh is a Punjabi writer, novelist and short-story writer. He was born on January 10, 1933 at Bhaini Fateh, in Faridkot District, Punjab. His father was carpenter-cum-blacksmith. Due to utter poverty he has had to give up his studies while he was still in eighth grade. He began working as an apprentice to his father. The headmaster of the middle school, Madan Mohan Sharma, came to his help and he completed his Matriculation. Against all odds in 1962, he became a teacher of Punjabi in a village. Then he completed B.A. in English and history. In 1967, he completed his M.A. in Punjabi.

He has authored eight collections of short stories, nine novels, three plays and nine books for children. He has translated several of his own works into Hindi. He received the 'Jnanpith Award' in 2000. He is also the winner of Sahitya Academy Award for his novel *The Last Flicker* (1999). Along with the prestigious 'Jnanpith' and Sahitya Academy Award, he is also the recipient of 'Soviet Land Nehru Award' (1986), and 'Bhai Veer Singh Fiction Award' (1992). Gurdial Singh worked and retired as a Professor at a regional Centre of Punjabi University. Now he resides at his hometown, Jaito, Faridkot.

'A Season of No Return' is an extremely sensitive description of the psychological changes that result from interaction between the village and the town. Along with the superficiality of human relationships, the story points out man's exploitative and commercial attitude.

## 4 A.2 Content:

### 4 A.2.1 Section –I:

Early in the morning, the daughter-in-law came into room with a cup of tea in hand and repeated the very same words in her characteristic sweet voice which Kauri

had been hearing for the past one year, “Maaji, pranaam! It’s six o’clock. Pease have your tea.”

After leaving the cup on the mat close to her pillow, she went right back, dragging her chappals along. She didn’t even bother to see whether or not Kauri had woken up. (It is another matter that she had been lying wide-awake since before the dawn. For almost a week now, she hadn’t known what sound sleep was.)

Kauri picked up a tumbler of water lying by her side, walked into the bathroom and started washing her hands and face. The daughter-in-law had left a small, neat towel on the peg already. Using it, she whipped her face clean and returned to her room. After having had her tea in small gulps, she lay down again, pulling the blanket over herself. There was hardly anything she could have possibly done. After about twenty minutes or so, she sat up in her small manji all over again.

At exactly thirty minutes past six, Santokh walked in, holding kaka in his lap and after greeting her with “Maaji, Sat Sri Akal” he promptly handed him over to her. For a while, at least, her heart danced in joy. Seeing an innocent smile on kaka’s face, she felt as though weight had dropped away from her chest. Invoking blessings upon him, she broke into a childish prattle and started conversing with him. Stretching out her hand, she picked up the basket of toys lying on the top of the closet, pulled out a rattle and started shaking it. But every now and then, kaka would get impatient on hearing the tip-tap of his mother’s chappals as she went out of her room and into the kitchen or from the kitchen to the bathroom. Looking towards the door, he would start flailing his arms and legs. Then breaking into slow whimpers, he would look up at Kauri’s wrinkled face. The moment she noticed a woebegone look on his face, she would start rocking him in the cradle of her arms, making noises such as “hoon-haan-aa-aa...” in an effort to calm him down.

Thus having managed to humour kaka, she would again make him sit in her lap and start conversing with him, “Beeba kaka will take a little duck! He will buy a motor car ... he’ll drive a car, too!”

And while talking to him, she repeatedly stole a glance towards the kitchen, the daughter-in-law’s room, and the bathroom or just stared blankly at the walls, her ears attuned to the sound of the footfalls. (That moment a strange dread could be seen lurking in her eyes.)

Suddenly as she felt a wave of nausea sweeping over her, she called out, “Santok-h! My son ...”

“I’m coming, Maaji!” Santokh responded from inside the bathroom. And after awhile he came into his mother’s room, dressed in spotless, white kurta pyjama, wiping his wet hair with a towel. He looked at kaka and blurted out, “O naughty one, you’re up to mischief, again!”

“No, son! I had called out to you so that ...”

It was almost as if Santokh had understood her meaning without her having to complete the sentence. So he rushed out, saying, “all right! I’ll get the medicine.”

That very moment, Kauri had an insistent bout of cough. Santokh returned hastily, a glass of water in hand. Putting down the glass on the mat and taking the medicine out of the strip with the other hand, he handed in a sarson-coloured tablet to his mother. As she put the tablet in her mouth, lifting the glass Santokh offered it to her. Once Kauri had swallowed the tablet down with water, he took the glass from her. Then as he came out, picking up the glass and the wrapper he had removed off the tablet, he whistled, making kaka break into a smile.

Now kaka was happy, playing with the grandmother.

At exactly thirty-five minutes past seven, kaka’s mummy came into the room, her wet hair spread over her shoulders. Her shapely lips suddenly blossomed into a smile, almost like the petals of a rose. It was as if she was inviting kaka to break into a smile. Then handing in the milk bottle to Kauri she repeated the same sentence she had been spouting at that hour for the past three months now, “Please Maaji, give kaka his feed.”

Perhaps, it was the first time in three months that Kauri had not responded with her usual warmth saying, “Give it to me, child.” Quietly, she took the feeder and put it to kaka’s mouth. Kaka, too, started sucking at it, without a demur. And the daughter-in-law went back, a smile of satisfaction on her lips.

By quarter past eight, both Santokh and his wife were ready to leave. Going past his mother’s room, all Santokh said was, “All right, maaji, we’ll make a move now.” He went across to the verandah, took his scooter out and kicked hard to start it. Both the husband and wife sat themselves upon the scooter. That very moment, Kauri came out into the verandah, holding kaka. Both of them raised their hands to say ‘ta-

ta' to kaka and sped away, smiles pasted upon their faces and their arms swaying through the air. Sucking his left thumb, kaka kept staring at the scooter, wide-eyed. He didn't break into a wail, though.

Kauri kept standing in the verandah for sometime. She was somewhat surprised wondering where was this neighbour, a Gujrati woman, who always used to come out the moment she would hear the scooter leave? That very moment, her neighbour came out; calling out to her from the verandah of her quarter, she spoke in Hindi, "Bheinji, why don't you come over? Are you feeling all right? All well?" Then taking a little breather, she almost screamed as she said, "Bittu, my son, what are you up to? Oye Bittu! Why don't you come to me?"

Something must have crossed Kauri's mind that she decided not to respond. She looked at her once, smiled and then adjusting her chunni, walked right back in.

As she came in, kaka had already begun to doze off. She set him down on the bed, and with a little patting he went off to sleep. Getting up, as she went towards the kitchen, again she felt somewhat restive. A huge pile of unwashed dishes lay under the tap. It would be quiet sometime before the maid came. But she couldn't possibly touch the dishes. Her son and the daughter-in-law had strictly forbidden her from doing such chores, saying, "Maaji, you must never do such a thing."

Picking up her plate with parantha and curd in it, she came back to her room. As she was about to eat, the very first morsel got stuck in her throat, as it were. With great difficulty, she managed to finish half the parantha. Whatever curd and parantha was left, she covered it with a big plate and put it over the mat. A sudden pain stabbed her back and she lay down towards kaka's feet. For sometime she kept staring at the roof and then her mind started drifting along its own wayward currents.

\* \* \*

#### **4 A.2.1 Check Your Progress:**

##### **A. Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence.**

1. Who comes into the room with the cup of tea?
2. Which words did the daughter-in-law repeat in her characteristic way?
3. What makes Kauri dance in joy?
4. What makes kaka get impatient?

5. At what time did Santokh and his wife get ready to leave?

**B. Choose the correct alternative and complete the sentences.**

1. Kauri had been hearing the sweet voice of ..... for the past one year.

- a) her daughter-in-law                      b) her grandson  
c) Cuckoo                                      d) nightingale

2. Kauri had been sleepless for almost .....

- a) a day    b) a week  
c) a month                                      d) two nights

3. The daughter-in-law offers tea to Kauri exactly at .....

- a) six o'clock                                  b) thirty minutes past six  
c) thirty-five minutes past seven      d) quarter past eight

4. Santokh and his wife had forbidden Kauri from .....

- a) doing household chores              b) talking with neighbours  
c) entering into garden                  d) speaking with the maid

5. .... offers Kauri a tablet and glass of water.

- a) Santokh                                      b) The daughter-in-law  
c) A Gujrati woman                      d) The maid

\* \* \*

**4 A.2.2 Section –II:**

It had almost been a year since she had come here. It was mainly to help her daughter-in-law through the pregnancy. However, this was more of an excuse to find out how attached this daughter-in-law was to her, the one whom her son had married of his own accord, disregarding the wishes of his parents. All their relatives had made a big issue out of it. So much so that she had found it rather difficult to show her face anywhere in the biradari: no marriage procession and no rituals. Who knows which caste she really belonged to but he had insisted on bringing her home and settling in only with her.

After about a year of getting married when Santokh went to the village, no one spoke to him straight. But has anyone been able to separate the flesh from the nails ever? Despite that, Santokh's bapu had suggested somewhat sarcastically, "Bhai, you do whatever you wish to. As if you have ever sought my advice on whatever you've done so far? Don't you worry about me! I could always go to the gurudwara and eat at the langar."

But Santokh's younger brother Gyana was quite pleased with whatever had happened. Right from their childhood, he had always had special affection for Santokh. Pronouncing his judgement, he declared, "Bapu will never talk straight. You take bebe along. We'll manage somehow."

Caught in a dilemma, Kauri had accompanied Santokh, albeit reluctantly. The vision of 'the foreign land' 'thousands of miles away' that she had at the time of leaving home had now been blown to bits ever since she had come here. For a few days, 'this strange land' had almost appeared to be some kind of paradise to her. Her daughter-in-law, whom everyone condemned as someone of a low caste, would always be around to do her bidding much before she could even spell out her wishes. She wouldn't ever tire of saying 'Maaji, Maaji' all the time. Even at the time of delivery, she had seen to it that maaji was not to put any inconvenience in the hospital. On the night of delivery when she had insisted on staying back with her, saying, "Come on child! I'm not really going to sleep on the floor here. I'll go and lie down somewhere in the verandah. You never know, you just might need something at night" her daughter-in-law had refused to relent. She had repeatedly told Santokh that he should take her home as she would be inconvenienced there. Even after coming back from the hospital, she had arranged for a maid who could attend to the household chores so long as she was not in a position to do them herself.

Every Sunday, on visiting the gurudwara Kauri would meet up with several Punjabi women. There was a park outside the gurudwara. Sitting there, people would either make new acquaintances or renew the old ones. She, too, had struck a rapport with a woman of her age, who was from Jalandhar. She would often share her joys and sorrows with that woman. Like Kauri, she had come to be with her son and daughter-in-law. But once she started bad-mouthing her 'bitch' of a daughter-in-law, Kauri would find it impossible to keep listening to her. On one pretext or the other, she would encourage Kauri to talk of her daughter-in-law as well. She was under the impression that Kauri too would be as sick of her daughter-in-law as she was of her

own. Despite her best efforts, when she had failed to get Kauri to talk ill of her daughter-in-law, she began to think of her as ‘the blessed one’. By and by, that woman became somewhat envious of her lot as well.

So many times, Kauri wanted that she should rubbish her own daughter-in-law just for the satisfaction of this woman from Daoba. But what should she say? What kind of problem should she talk about?..... Both the son and daughter-in-law were well placed in their respective jobs: the daughter-in-law was teaching in a college while the son was an engineer in a factory. They had been allotted an official quarter by the government – which was as good as a bungalow. Everything one needs in the house was available at home. In the very first week of her stay, her daughter-in-law had found out all about her needs. Thereafter, she never had to spell out any of her needs. Without having to lift a finger, she would be served everything she required.

Sometimes Kauri would think to herself: what is paradise? Such a wonderful son and daughter-in-law, a grandson as bright as a moon and a house with plentiful of everything – what more could paradise be?

Still, occasionally she would start feeling rather restive, apparently for no reason whatsoever. In the past two months or so, she had told Santokh several times over, “Kaka, please take me back to the village.” But every time he would say the same thing, “What are you going to do there?” Then he would explain to her painstakingly, “I write to Gyana every month. He always writes that bapuji is doing fine - and that bebe should stay here as long as she wishes to. You tell me, are you being inconvenienced here in any way?”

Now what could she say; there was hardly any inconvenience she could think of. Except that she felt restless occasionally. Sometimes, she just wanted to wing her way back to the village. Such were her moments when her nostalgia for home would grow into a nagging obsession to a point where she would start dreaming of her village at night: the open courtyard of the house and the children frolicking about there – Gyana;s son Melu and his daughter Karmi. Their hands dripping with fresh cow-dung, they would be running around the manger, bursting into loud guffaws as they chased each other ... Then she would ranting at them, ‘Weh, why don’t you stop it now? What kind of game is it?’

Occasionally when she had such a dream at night, she would start blubbing all to herself, waking up in the process. Drenched in perspiration, she would first glance

towards the room of her son and daughter-in-law and then sitting up in her bed, start reciting ‘Waheguru-Waheguru’ in the darkness of the night.

Sometimes, she would get rather upset about the fact that this place would neither get so unbearably hot in May-June as to make her yearn for endless glasses of cold water nor would it get so cold in the winters as to drive her to sit next to the fire and warm herself. She had asked Santokh many a time as to why the season always remained the same? Laughing it away, he would often say, “Maaji, don’t you like this season? People in Punjab must be really yearning for this kind of season that never turns.” Once he had explained to her that it was owing to the proximity of the sea that the season remained more or less the same. It had really surprised Kauri to know that there could actually be some connection between the sea and the seasons.

Now everything had begun to appear strange to her, almost like the brown stump of a tree. She no longer liked the sameness of the sweet words her daughter-in-law spoke to her. For the past so many days now each time she came into her room with a cup of tea, tip-tapping her chappals, she would be reminded of her younger daughter-in-law – Gyana’s wife. Her dung-cake like face, short statured, solid body, supple arms and her feet soiled in earth and sand – everything would run before her eyes almost like a movie. That moment she would even get to hear her loud, robust voice – ‘Will you come here or not? ... Should I teach you a lesson, then? ... And then she would suddenly have a glimpse of both the children cowering behind the chulha. Kauri could even hear the soft voice of her daughter-in-law drifting across as she heaved a basket full of dung-cakes over her head, almost tiptoeing out of the house, saying, “Nee bebeji! Just be careful. Don’t let them come after me. There, fighting with each other these two will tear my chunni off.”

Lost in such thoughts, Kauri would often break into a spontaneous laughter. Suppressing it between her lips, she would again start staring towards that door of her room, which led to the room of her son and daughter-in-law.

\* \* \*

#### **4 A.2.2 Check Your Progress:**

##### **A. Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence.**

1. Why had Kauri come to be with Santokh and her daughter-in-law?
2. Why did no one in the village speak to Santokh straight?

3. With whom does Kauri share her joys and sorrows?
4. Why did Kauri find it impossible to keep listening to the woman from Jalandhar?
5. Why did the season remain more or less same in the city?

**B. Choose the correct alternative and complete the sentences.**

1. .... had special attention for Santokh.
 

a) Gyana	b) Kauri
c) Kaka	d) Santokh's Bapu
2. At gurudwara, Kauri meets up with .....
 

a) Gujarati Women	b) several Punjabi women
c) many people	d) her relatives
3. .... becomes envious of Kauri's lot.
 

a) A Gujarati Woman	b) A woman from Doaba
c) Santokh	d) Women of her Biradari
4. Kauri's daughter-in-law was .....
 

a) a college teacher	b) an engineer
c) a clerk	d) a primary teacher
5. .... was condemned by everyone as someone of a low caste.
 

a) Gyana	b) Kauri's daughter-in-law
c) Kauri	d) Santokh's Bapu

**4 A.2.3 Section III:**

She had been walking around in a daze until she saw the maid coming in, and that is when she felt somewhat relieved. For the past few days, even the maid hadn't appeared to be in her usual frame of mind as she had been going about her work in a rather slipshod manner. Very rarely would she discuss her family matters as she would often rush through her work and push off in a hurry. As it is, she had spread

her net so wide that she hardly ever had any time. Often while sweeping the floors or washing the dishes or dusting the tables, when she would suddenly break into a conversation, Kauri invariably found it difficult to tune into her gibberish and so would keep nodding her head, repeating “All right, all right.” As soon as she nodded affirmation, a sudden feeling of peace descended upon her. She wanted to help her out so that after finishing her work in good time, the maid could sit and talk with her. Both of them might be able to share their joys and sorrows. Perhaps, it was the daughter-in-law again who had tutored the maid, for she, too, never allowed her to do a thing. Preventing her from doing the work, she would screech in Hindi, “Maaji, why do you want to deprive me of my livelihood?”

Initially, Kauri used to dislike her immensely. Then she got to know of her problems. She was the mother of five children. Her husband worked as a coolie at the station. As he squandered all his earnings upon himself, he would not even give a counterfeit coin at home. So she had to earn to provide for her children. Now Kauri had even begun to sympathize with her.

But until today, she had not spoken to the maid properly. As soon as the maid left, kaka woke up. She busied herself with his feed. After the feed when he became engrossed with his own games, she began to heat up her food. Once she had finished her meals, it suddenly occurred to her that kaka was already late for his bath. Giving him a hurried bath, she changed his clothes and washed the old ones as well. In the meanwhile, it was already three o’clock. She gave him another feed on finishing which he went off to sleep.

Overwhelmed by a feeling of emptiness within, Kauri came out into the verandah and sat down there. Having returned from their schools, the children of Gujrati, Bengali and Madrasi families were now busy playing, making noises out in the ground. For a while, at least, she did like their commotion but soon enough, she began to get rather impatient with it. Walking in, she felt as though sweat had soaked her down to the skin. It occurred to her that she hadn’t had her bath today. Though she did feel like having a bath, yet somehow she couldn’t muster enough strength to walk up to the bathroom.

That very moment she heard the sound of the autorickshaw outside and after a while the darling daughter-in-law walked in, her purse dangling across her arms. Flashing a smile in her customary manner, she said “Maaji, pranaam” and then

darted a glance towards kaka. Then she shot the same old question, “Did he have his milk properly?” The moment Kauri said “yes” she rushed straight into the bathroom. After a while when she came out, looking at kauri in a surprised manner, she asked, “Didn’t you have your bath today? ... You haven’t combed your hair. Go and have your bath – how hot it is!”

At least, momentarily, she was totally befuddled as to how her daughter-in-law could get to know whether or not she had her bath. She felt reassured in a rather strange way. It suddenly struck her that she should give a befitting retort saying that she had no intentions of having a bath today. But she held her counsel. Quietly, she walked towards the bathroom. The darling daughter-in-law busied herself with making tea.

At half past five, Santokh came back as well. As was his daily routine, two or three of his friends came with him. After greeting Kauri with a Sat-Sri-Akal, all of them walked into the living room. She could constantly hear the sounds of peeling laughter and the tip-tapping of her daughter-in-law’s chappals coming in from the living room. It felt as though neighbour’s son was firing shots with his air gun. This was enough to make her restless all over again.

At about quarter past six, all of them marched out, perhaps for an evening stroll or for watching a film. She didn’t ask any questions. When the darling daughter-in-law came in to pick up kaka, she did mention something about where they were going but the constant buzz in her ears had not really allowed her to hear anything. It was perhaps the roar of the three scooters at a time that made her heart jump into her mouth, as it were. However, once this sound had subsided, the emptiness of the house began to wrap itself around her.

\* \* \*

Not having had a wink of sleep the previous night, when Kauri was about to pick up her cup of tea, the next morning, her hands nearly trembled. Falling off her hand, the cup broke into several pieces. Santokh came rushing in. Looking at his mother’s face, anxiety gripped him the moment he saw beads of perspiration on her forehead. Kauri was sitting, holding her head between her hands – almost as if her head was swimming. Stepping forward and supporting her shoulders, he said, “Maaji, why don’t you lie down.” He could feel that her body was somewhat feverish. Lying down, all Kauri said was, “Son, I’m feeling uneasy.” That very

moment, he got her a tablet and a glass of water. The daughter-in-law had also come in with him. Both of them helped her to sit up and made her swallow the tablet. After about an hour or so, Kauri felt much better. Her attention was again drawn towards the room of her son and daughter-in-law. Hearing Santokh speak in anxious but soft tones, she pricked her ears and with some efforts was able to hear what he was saying. In a very composed manner, he was trying to explain his wife, “What is the way out now?... Even I can see the problems it’ll create; but we’ll engage a maid.”

Kauri felt as though her head was swimming all over again. A sudden feeling of giddiness swept over her. That day, Santokh took leave and came back home after dropping his wife at college. On his way back, he brought along a doctor as well. The doctor examined his mother and told him that there was absolutely nothing to worry.

By the afternoon, Kauri was feeling somewhat settled. She had started playing with kaka as well. After about two hours when he returned, he spoke rather softly, “Maaji, I’ve got your seat booked. It’s on a train leaving next Saturday night. One of our engineers is going to Punjab. He’ll leave you right up to the village.”

Kauri was stunned when she heard it. After a while, she thought of something and said, “Son, it’s up to you... if you’re finding it difficult, I won’t mind staying a little longer.”

“No, it’s all right. Now kaka is grown up enough. We’ll manage somehow.”

...And until the next Saturday, the whole atmosphere in the house appeared somewhat sad to her. Though the daughter-in-law would now speak in a voice sweeter than before and Kauri, too, would always respond to her quiet affectionately; often Santokh would sit with maaji and crack a few jokes as well – but everyone could feel that there was something strange and unfamiliar.

That feeling of estrangement and sadness could end only on Saturday night at seventeen minutes past two. After seeing maaji off with his friend, when Santokh was returning home he suddenly felt so cold that his teeth started chattering. He looked up at the sky; there wasn’t a trace of a cloud anywhere around. Then how could it be so cold? The moment he reached home, he joined two blankets and pulled them over himself. After a long time when warmth had seeped inside his body, he felt a sudden lightness of being. Then his thoughts raced back to his mother but a sudden tide of sleep had already washed over him.

\* \* \*



### **4.A.3 Summary:**

#### **4 A.3.1 Plot:**

Kauri comes to live with her son Santokh to help her daughter-in-law through her pregnancy. Santokh and her daughter-in-law are shown to be the perfect pictures of obedience. Both are more than willing to do their duty by her. They look after the needs of Kauri punctually. They attend to all her physical needs, including the minor ones. Yet somewhere deep inside, Kauri is not comfortable with herself. Santokh's wife delivers a boy and the child is left in the care of Kauri. Kauri provides her love, kindness and affection to the child. Santokh and his wife, being employed persons, lead a clockwork life. Kauri finds it intolerable and constantly yearns to go back to village. There is no one to share her joys and sorrows. Therefore, she suffers from the feelings of loneliness and isolation. Even the maidservant is in her own hurry and has no time to talk with her. So Kauri, being isolated, begins to long for her own home, her own people and her village. As a result of all this, her physical condition worsens. Now the couple thinks the presence of Kauri to be a burden on their purse. They think that the woman's work is over and she is of no more help. So they decide to send her back to the village.

The story is a spotlight on the unchanging plight of Punjabi women on one hand, and exploitative and commercial attitude of modern men on the other. Gurdial Singh shows that modernity has made little difference to the fabric of familial and social relationships. It is hence there has been no significant change in the condition of women like Kauri.

#### **4 A.3.2 Characters:**

##### **Kauri:**

Kauri is central character in the story. She is a middle-aged Punjabi woman. She belongs to a farming community. She has completed her primary duty – to look after the household and rear the children. She is the mother of two sons – Santokh and Gyana. Both of them are married. Santokh is an engineer and Gyana looks after the family land. Her husband is a normal human being. Gyana, his wife and their children are obedient. Her life in the village is happy, natural and informal. It is smooth, without clockwork mechanical haste. However, Kauri's life undergoes a sea change when she is taken to the city by Santokh. She accompanies Santokh

unwillingly and there starts a new chapter in her life. She is expected to help Santokh's wife through her pregnancy and delivery. Santokh is an engineer and his wife is a college teacher. Both behave well with Kauri and look after her needs. Both, being employed, move out and in according to their office timings. Kauri suffers isolation as there is no one to share her joys and sorrows. The formal, mechanical behavior of her daughter-in-law disturbs her a lot. The clockwork haste upsets her. Nothing is smooth for her in the city. She is nothing more than a servant in the house. No doubt that her physical needs are taken care of. But what about her mental and emotional needs? As a result her life becomes formal, lonely, mechanical and loveless. She suffers a great mental agony. She starts feeling restless. She never voices her psychological needs. She starts dreaming of her village. She repeatedly asks Santokh to take her back to the village. But as the couple needs her to look after their son, they just calm her down by raising the point of inconveniences. She couldn't find any reason to go back. The mental agony and feeling of isolation affects her health and she falls ill. Now the couple fears the challenge of possible responsibilities and decides to send her back to the village. As long as Kauri was in healthy condition, they were not willing to send her back. One feels a great sympathy for her suffering. What is heartening about Kauri is that she is treated as an object. In no cases her will is respected. She is just taken for granted. Her wills are crushed under the weight of motherhood and womanhood. Her suffering, doubtlessly, shows the unchanging plight of Punjabi women.

### **Santokh and His Wife:**

Santokh is the son of Kauri. He is an engineer. He lives in a city. He is a man of modern outlook. He believes less in the lesser things like caste or creed. He has married to a girl of a low caste. There were no marriage procession and no rituals. It was a big issue for the biradari. He has married of his own accord, disregarding the wishes of his parents. Only his young brother was pleased with all the happenings. He had special affection for Santokh. He takes Kauri to the city to help his family.

Both Santokh and wife are employed. His wife teaches in a college. They live a mechanical clockwork life in the city. They have no time to sit, speak and understand other people. They are so busy in their life and work that they simply could not understand the psychology of Kauri. They are rather diplomatic and selfish persons. They could not see beyond their self. They attend to the physical needs of Kauri very punctually but couldn't see her mental agony. What they need in the form of Kauri is

an uncomplaining servant. It is so because as long as she was in good health, they were not willing to send her back, but as soon as she falls sick, they send her back. Santokh and his wife are representatives of typical modern money-minded, commercial and loveless material men. They are insensitive to others suffering. They have become puppet-like in the clutches of time. While Kauri represents helpless traditional woman; the daughter-in-law is a modern woman with self-will, competence, economic independence and practical wisdom.

#### **4 A.3.3 Theme/s:**

A good work art contains many themes. Every single reading of a good work provides a new meaning. Likewise “A Season of No Return” has many themes. First of all, it is a story of the unchanging plight of Punjabi women. A woman’s demanding role in the traditional family structure never ends. Her role is decided by the men- initially by husband or by the elders and later on by her son/s. For her entire life she has to carry on the burden of motherhood or womanhood. She is expected to perform these roles selflessly, uncomplainingly and without voicing her wills. This is what exactly one notices in the case of Kauri in the present story. In the story Kauri is taken for granted. No one cares for her freedom of choice or her will in decision making. She simply surrenders to the decisions taken by her sons. She is shifted to and fro without respecting her wishes. She is simply taken as an object for others well-being. She suffers silently. Her plight goes unnoticed. Her sad, helpless and uncomplaining nature makes one to sympathize with her.

Secondly, the story is about the superficiality of human relationships. They are often of an exploitative nature. Many a times we do not discern this exploitation. Even within a family people use one another for their convenience and advancement. In Indian family system members of family are taught to be cooperative tolerant and helpful. In the story Kauri is tolerant, accommodative and helpful. She has learnt to live for others. She does everything for the comfort and well-being of others in her family. Her husband too is tolerant and accommodative. There is no superficiality either in Kauri or in her husband. However, Santokh and his wife are self-centered, self-serving and superficial in nature. With the changing times their habits, needs and minds are changed. They have grown intolerant, money-minded and material. It is hence their relations with Kauri are superficial, mechanical and of exploitative nature.

Thirdly, one can locate the theme of transition in the story. The life of modern man has changed tremendously due to the economic, social and technological changes. This has given birth to new values making the old ones useless and outdated. So the modern man is in a confused state of mind. One cannot say which values are correct. Therefore, we cannot blame Santokh and his wife or Kauri. Santokh and his wife keep pace with the time and they have no other choice. They are caught in the trap of time and change. Kauri is uncomplaining, tolerant and selfless. She is in her middle age and cannot change now. In the process of transition both old and new are likely to be benefitted or suffered.

Lastly, the story can also be interpreted as a picture of the conflict between the rural and urban life. The modern city life is mechanical, formal and it runs clockwise. As against the simple rural life it is more complex. In rural life, there are so many to share joys and sorrows with. In city life, no one has the time to sit and share joys and sorrows. Urban man is caught in the whirlpool of change. In the village interactions are natural, informal and smooth. While Kauri represents rural life, Santokh and his wife represent urban life.

It is an extremely sensitive description of the psychological changes that result from interaction between the village and the town. It is a story of interpersonal relationships. Modern technological and economic development has changed man upside down. Man has become more self-centered and intolerant. Human relationships have become mechanical; superficial. This superficiality of human relationships is the theme of the story. The title suggests man's helplessness in the face of material world. The story also points out man's exploitative and commercial attitude. Thus, the story could be interpreted on different levels. At the end of the story everyone feels "that there was something strange and unfamiliar". This feeling of estrangement is the result the exploitative and commercial attitude of Santokh and his wife. This modern couple busy with their clockwork schedule has to keep moving ahead as there is no other choice. There is no return because they cannot return to the same situation they are made to leave or had left. Hence, the title 'A Season of No Return'.

#### **4 A.3.4 Setting:**

'A Season of No Return' sets in an undefined urban location. However, there is depiction of both the village and city life. There is a transition from a village to a

city. The two settings help to understand the story properly. They show how the pattern of life in city is entirely different from that of the village. The pattern of life in city shows how man is caught in trap of time and change. In the village life is peaceful, restful and unscheduled. It is smooth and without clockwork mechanical haste. In city people work as robots, slaves to the clocks and they have no time to sit, speak and share joys and sorrows. There is almost a total breakdown of communication. It is an unsentimental and pragmatic world where relations have subordinate place. The man in the city is caught in the speed of change and so he has no time to stand and stare. In such a world, when an individual from a village comes he suffocates and almost dies. Thus the shift in setting is apt and serves the purpose of the story.

\* \* \*

#### **4 A.4 Terms to Remember :**

prattle(n) : rapid, irrelevant talk

woebegone(Adj) : affected by or full of grief or woe

morsel(n) : a small amount of solid food; a mouthful

langar(n) : charity kitchen at gurudwara

reluctantly(Adv) : unwillingly

pretext(n) : something serving to conceal plans

restive(Adj) : being in a tense state

proximity(n) : the region close around a person or thing

slipshod(Adj) : marked by great carelessness

gibberish(n) : unintelligible talking

giddiness(n) : a feeling that you are about to fall

estrangement(n) : separation resulting from hostility

squander(v) : spend thoughtlessly

## **4 A.5 Answers to Check Your Progress:**

### **4 A.2.1**

- A.**
1. The daughter-in-law
  2. “Maaji, pranaam! It’s six o’clock. Pease have your tea.”
  3. An innocent smile on kaka’s face
  4. The tip-tap of his mother’s chappals
  5. By quarter past eight
- B.**
1. a) her daughter-in-law
  2. b) a week
  3. a) six o’clock
  4. a) doing household chores
  5. a) Santokh

### **4 A.2.2**

- A.**
1. To help her daughter-in-law through the pregnancy.
  2. Because he had married of his own accord, disregarding the wishes of his parents.
  3. With a woman from Jalandhar.
  4. Because she used to start bad-mouthing her of her a daughter-in-law
  5. Owing to the proximity of the sea
- B.**
1. a) Gyana
  2. b) several Punjabi women
  3. b) A woman from Doaba
  4. a) a college teacher
  5. b) Kauri’s daughter-in-law

#### 4 A.2.3

- A.**
1. She wanted to help her out so that after finishing her work in good time, the maid could sit and talk with her.
  2. The daughter-in-law
  3. The feeling of isolation
  4. Her grandson / kaka
  5. On Saturday night after seeing Kauri off
- B.**
1. b) the maid
  2. b) the maid
  3. a) five
  4. b) mechanical
  5. a) Santokh's engineer friend

#### 4 A.6 Exercises:

**A. Answer the following questions in detail.**

1. Discuss "A Season of No Return" as a story of the superficiality of human relationships?
2. Discuss the different themes of the story "A Season of No Return".
3. Are Santokh and his wife at blame for the suffering of Kauri? Justify your answer.
4. "Kauri suffers as she is caught in the trap of time and change". Illustrate.

**B. Write short notes on the following:**

1. Santokh
2. The miserable plight of Kauri
3. The daughter-in-law
4. The village and city life

#### **4. A.7 Reference for Further Study:**

Gurdial Singh 'A Season of No Return', in *Earthy Tones* tr. Rana Nayar (Delhi Fiction House, 2002).

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## B. REBATI

Fakir Mohan Senapati

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## 4 B.0 Objectives:

After studying this Unit you will be able to:

- Understand about female education and the superstitions concerning it prevalent in the then Odia society.
- Explain about a highly oppressive, conservative and communal social order.
- Find relationship between traditional superstition and the workings of social attitudes.

## 4 B.1 Introduction:

Fakir Mohan Senapati(1843-1918), the most revered writer of Odisha, is the pioneer of modern Odia prose. He had little formal education. He was largely self-taught. He was a versatile man – a schoolteacher, administrator, journalist, nationalist leader, social reformer, scholar and writer. His literary career cannot be separated from his reformist one. He wrote school textbooks on Mathematics, Geography and History. In addition to 20 short stories, he brought out an Odia journal, a news bulletin, and translated ancient epics into modern Odia. His writing primarily deals with social reform and especially with the empowerment of women and the underprivileged.

“Rebati” was the first short story in Odia Language. It was published in 1898 in a journal *Utkal Sahitya*. It is a story in which a girl child is caught between traditional superstition and modernity. It could be read as a proto-feminist plea for women’s education. Set in a cholera epidemic, it is tragic story that examines the workings of social attitudes.

## 4 B.2 Content:

### 4 B.2.1 Section I:

Patpur was a village in the Hariharpur *pargana* in the district of Cuttack. At almost the end of the village stood a house. Four rooms, back and front, a walled courtyard with a well in the middle and a thatched shed that housed the *dhenki*, and a frontage. There was a sitting room at the entrance, which was also meant to receive people who came to pay the rent they owed to the *Zamindar*. Shyambandhu Mohanty, the owner of the house, represented the *Zamindar* as his scribe on a salary

of two rupees per month apart from the extra he could get for doing some odd incidental work for the tenants. The average monthly total came to not less than four rupees, which was good enough for running the household. No, it was more than that. Sufficient, one would say. So there were hardly any complaints from the family about things that were wanting, or had remained undone. Vegetables were grown in the backyard, which also had two drumstick trees. Two cows provided them with a regular supply of milk and curd to go with their meals. The old woman prepared cowdung cakes mixed with husk that served as fuel, and so they did not have to spend much on firewood. The *Zamindar* had allowed Shyambandhu to till about three and half acres of land for himself, and the yield was just enough to serve their requirements.

Shyambandhu was a simple and straightforward man., well liked by the tenants. He went around personally to their houses to collect rent. But while he coaxed them to pay their dues, he never asked for a single *paisa* more. The tenants didn't bother asking him for rent receipts. He would himself scribble something on a palm-leaf and tuck it into the thatched roof of their houses.

There were four mouths to feed in Shyambandhu's house. Husband and wife, the old mother, and a daughter aged ten. The daughter's name was Rebati. Shyambandhu would sit on the verandah in the evenings and sing *bhajans* like *Krupasindhu Badana* or read the *Bhagabata*, by the light of an earthen lamp, while Rebati, sitting by his side, would listen to him. She had been able to memorise quite a few of those songs and it was so pleasing to hear them in her childish voice. Some people from the village would come at times just to listen to her singing by the side of her father. Rebati had learnt one particular song from her father, which gave him immense joy. He would ask her to sing that one for him every day, which she would gladly do.

Two years back, the Deputy Inspector of Schools had stayed overnight at Patpur on his way to the countryside on an official tour. At the request of some prominent men of the village, he had set up an Upper Primary School there after his recommendations to that effect were accepted by the Inspector of the Orissa Division. The teacher was one Basudev, who had graduated from the training school at Cuttack. He was truly a Basudev. Handsome in every way. Never raised his head to look at anyone while walking through the village. About twenty years of age. And very good-looking. Epileptic fits in his childhood had left a scar on his face, the

imprint of the mouth of a heated bottle pressed on his forehead by his mother to ward off the evil spirits. But the scar seemed to suit him, setting off his handsome looks. Basudev had been brought up in the house of his maternal uncle, having lost both his parents when he was a child.

Basudev was a *karan* by caste. Shyambandhu also belonged to that caste. Shyambandhu would visit him at the school on festive days, when *pitha* and other specialties were prepared in his house, and say, “Basu dear, please come to our house this evening, your *mausi* remembers you.” These visits built up a pleasant and affectionate relationship between them. The mother of Rebati would often say when she saw him, “Ah, the poor orphan boy, who is there to look after his welfare!” Basu would spend about an hour almost every evening at their house. And Rebati would shout in joy on seeing him at a distance, “*Basubhai* is coming! *Basubhai* is coming!” Rebati would sing the old *bhajans* she had learnt by the side of her father to him, but to Basudev they seemed new every time.

Once, while talking about things in general, Shyambandhu came to know from him that there was a school for girls at Cuttack, where they could study and also learn household arts like sewing and stitching. It was from that day that he developed a desire to give some education to Rebati, and made it known one day to Basudev. Basu, who regarded Shyambandhu as his father, responded promptly to say, “Sir, I have been thinking of asking you about it for a long time.” So it was settled between the two that Rebati would do some studies. Rebati overheard it all and ran excitedly to her mother and grandmother to announce, “I’ll study! I’ll study!” her mother said, “Okay, okay, you will.” But the grandmother said, “Study? What’s that? She is a girl, what’ll she do with studies? Learn how to cook, prepare sweets and special dishes, paint the floor with *jhoti*, churn the curd. What is studies?”

Shyambandhu was having his meal one day, seated on a low stool in the verandah. Rebati was also eating by his side. The old woman was seated in front and serving orders to her daughter-in-law, asking her to bring another fistful of rice, some more *dal*, another pinch of salt, for her son. Then she started saying in the course of their casual talk, “Well, Shyam, what is this I hear? Rebi is going to study? She is a girl, what will she do with studies?” To which Shyambandhu said, “Let it be. Let her study if she wants to.” Rebati was furious with her grandmother and said, “Get going, you old woman!” And then turned beseechingly to her father, “No *Bapa*, I’ll study.” “Yes, you will,” said Shyambandhu, and the matter ended there on that day.

The next afternoon Rebati was overjoyed to get a copy of Sitanath *babu's Pratham Path* from Basudev and kept turning the pages from the beginning to the end. The pictures of elephants, horses and cattle excited her. Princes are happy to be owners of elephants and horses, some are happy just riding horses, but merely the pictures were enough to gladden the heart of our Rebati. She was quick to show the pictures to her mother and then to her grandmother. "Okay, go away," said the grandmother in a vexed tone. But Rebati talked back to her, more gestures than words, to suggest that she couldn't care less.

It was an auspicious day - *Sri Panchami*. The day meant for the worship of Saraswati. Rebati had taken a morning bath, and was hovering about, in and out of the house, waiting for *Basubhai* who would teach her how to read the book. Formal arrangements for the ceremony of *Vidyarambha*, the inauguration of learning, had not been made for the fear of what the old woman would say. However, that was the idea. So Basu came in due time to teach her the first lessons, starting with the alphabets. And the teaching continued every evening from that day onwards. Rebati progressed fast with her studies in the next two years. So much so that she could read *Madhu babu's Chhandamala* fluently, without a pause.

One night, during dinner time, a certain topic came to be discussed between mother and son. It seemed as if it had been raised earlier, and they were set to conclude it that day. "What do you say, Ma, wouldn't it be a good thing?" asked Shyambandhu. To which the old woman said, "Yes, it will... but have you enquired about the caste?"

"What else was I enquiring about till now? Yes, he is a good *karan*. A poor boy, but high caste."

Rebati was also eating her meal nearby, and the words reached her ears. And God knows what she understood of what was said, but there was a noticeable change in her behavior from that day onwards. She was visibly embarrassed when *Basubhai* taught her in the presence of her father. And was prone to giggle at times, for no good reason, though she would try to suppress it by putting her head down and pressing her lips together. She would silently and just say "yes" when some response was called for. And run away laughingly at the end of the session, trying in vain to close her lips. Every evening she would be at the front door, looking outside, as if she was waiting for somebody. But she would promptly get inside at the sight of





news. He sat at the feet of Shyambandhu and stroked them gently, and put drops of water in his mouth from time to time. It was afternoon when Shyambandhu looked at Basu's face, and stammered a few words in a choked voice. Words that seemed to implore Basu to take charge. Basu burst out crying. Rebati was rolling disconsolate on the floor. The house was all noise and confusion. And it was all over by the evening.

What to do now? Basu was an immature boy after all, for matters such as these, and the others were womenfolk. The village *dhobi* Bana Sethi, about sixty years of age or more, was a man of experience. He was ready to oblige on such occasions such as this, apart from the lure of a new pair of clothes. He presented himself for duty immediately. But that was the only *karan* house in the village, and so they somehow or the other managed the obsequies, between the three of them – the mother, the widow, and Basudev. The morning star had appeared on the horizon by the time they returned from the cremation ground. Rebati's mother felt the urge, immediately after, to go out and ease herself. And the news was all over the village, by the afternoon, that Rebati's mother was no more.

Time and tide wait for no one. There are those whose thrones acquire a canopy over them, some others are whipped even as they remain handcuffed three months had passed since Shyambandhu's death, and quite a few things had happened to the family during that time. There were two cows in his cowshed. The *Zamindar's* agents took them away by force, towards the arrears of land revenue due from him. It was a well-known fact that Shyambandhu regarded the money payable to the *Zamindar* as sacrosanct. Even as one rupee was collected, he would not rest in peace till that was delivered at the *Zamindar's* office. Nevertheless, the question of arrears due from Shyambandhu was of little relevance. The important fact was that the cows yielded large amounts of milk, and that was known to the *Zamindar*. He had also taken back the three and half acres of land that he had allowed Shyambandhu to cultivate for himself. The field-labourer who was staying with the family to help them out, also left the house on the *Dol Purnima* day. There was no use for him anymore when the land was gone. The two bullocks had been sold for seventeen and a half rupees to meet the expenses of the funeral rites. And that left a margin for household expenses for about a month. They could carry on for another month, somehow, by selling or pawning a pot today and a pan tomorrow.

Basu visited them everyday and stayed till late evening, when Rebati and her grandmother were ready to go to bed. But neither of them would accept the money he offered them. He noticed that if he insisted they take some money, it would just lie on an open rack, untouched. So, he gave up trying to help them in that way. He would take a few copper coins from the old woman and buy the vegetables, which would last them for about eight to ten days. The gaping roof was badly in need of re-thatching, and Basu had stacked two rupees worth of straw for the purpose in the backyard. But the job was yet to be done because the period was not considered propitious.

The old woman was not seen crying all day long, as she used to. She would now do so only in the evening. Eventually she would throw herself down on the floor and fall asleep in the process of crying. She was not able to see well anymore, and seemed to have almost lost her senses. And though she was crying less, she had started abusing Rebati. She had concluded that all their sorrows and misfortune were due to Rebati. Because she had dared to study. That was why the son had to die, and then the daughter-in-law, why the field-hand had left them, and the bullocks had to be sold, and why the *Zamindar's* men took away the cows by force. Rebati was an accused girl of ill omen and evil ways. She had also lost her own eyesight because of Rebati's studies. Tears would stream from Rebati's eyes when she was reviled by her grandmother. She dreaded then to stand by her side. She would go to the backyard or to some corner of the house and keep sitting there, as though petrified, covering her face with both hands.

Basu was also found guilty by the old woman because it was he who had taught Rebati the first lessons. But she was not in a position to tell him anything, as the household would get totally paralysed without him. More so, when the demands of the *Zamindar* had not yet ceased.

Rebati was not a child anymore. No one had heard her speaking nor seen her moving outside the house, since the day she had lost her parents. For some days she had been crying loudly, but now there was only a silent and incessant flow of tears. That tiny little heart of hers, and the soft and delicate mind that went with it, had suffered a breakdown. Now there was little difference for her between day and night. She could not make herself believe that her father and mother were indeed dead and would never come back. She had lost her appetite, and spent sleepless nights with the image of her parents always in her mind. She sat down to eat, only for fear of her



a) Shyambandhu

b) Bana Sethi

c) Basudev

d) the grandmother

#### 4 B.2.3 Section III:

Five months had passed since Shyambandhu's death. It was the summer month of *Jestha* at midday, when Basu visited them. He hardly ever came at that time of the day. The old woman opened the door for him, grudgingly. Then Basu said, "Grandmother, the Deputy Inspector will be talking to children of primary schools in this area about their studies at the Hariharpur police station. The children of all schools will have to be there. I have also been informed. I have to take our children there tomorrow morning. I'll be away for five days."

Rebati, who had been standing behind a door and listening to him, felt like she was struck down. She saved herself from falling, and managed to sit down on the floor, holding on to the door. Basu bought rice, salt, cooking oil, and brinjals which would last them for about five days, unloaded it all in the courtyard, bowed down to the grandmother, and bade them goodbye the next Saturday, just before the evening had set in. "Look my son, don't go wandering about in the sun, take care of your health, and don't forget to eat something in due time," said the old woman and heaved a sigh. Rebati kept staring at Basu. It was different from the way she used to look at him earlier, when she would lower her eyes as Basu looked back at her. But she was not inclined to do so now. Basu's eyes were also not behaving the same as before. When he wanted to keep looking at her, and still more, but couldn't. There was no pulling back now. Their eyes met, and it was not possible for either to withdraw them. However, Basu left eventually, and the evening grew dark. But Rebati was still there, looking unblinkingly at the void. She gave a start when she heard her grandmother calling her. And then she realized that it was darkness all over, both inside and outside.

Rebati was counting the days. It was the sixth day since the departure of Basu. She had not stepped out of the house since the death of her parents, but she had already been twice around the front door, going out and coming in, within the morning hours of that day. It was about six in the evening when the school boys had started to come back from Hariharpur that the news came that the teacher was struck by the dread disease on his way back, at the foot of a banyan tree, near Gopalpur. He had to go out four times, successively, to ease himself, and passed away towards

midnight. The villagers were vocal in condoling his untimely death, while the children and womenfolk could not help crying aloud. Some said, “Ah! How handsome he was!” while some others said, “Such a sweet and gentle soul, wouldn’t even hurt a fly!”

Rebati heard about it, and so did the grandmother. The old woman kept crying till she choked and could not cry any more. And she said, “Poor boy, did you have to lose your life like this in a foreign land, and due to your own fault?” Which meant that he had committed the sinful act of teaching Rebati and that is why he had to go. Rebate was lying prostrate somewhere in the house after getting the news, with not a sound from her lips. The day passed, and the next day the grandmother shouted when she could not find her anywhere – “You Rebati! You Rebi, you rotten miserable wretch!” Not being able to see well, she realized that the girl had a high fever and had lost consciousness. She pondered over the situation for a long time. About what she could do, and whom she could ask for help. But she could not think of a way out. So she flew into a rage and said, “You have brought all this on yourself and so what’s the remedy?” Rebati had fallen ill because of her studies, so what could she do?

Rebati seemed to have sunk into the earth. Eyes closed and no response when you called her, not even a whimper. So it went on for six days. The next day Rebati called out a few times, when the old woman heard her. When she found her and felt the body, it was cold to touch. The girl would give a grunt when called. She also fixed her eyes on her grandmother, and started saying things that did not make sense. Any *kaviraj* would then have said, citing a *shloka* or two, that this stage was truly the last stage. Given to terrible thirst and delirium. But the old woman thought that there was reason to be happy. Rebati was now speaking after all, while she was totally silent earlier. She had opened her eyes, and was asking for water. The body was also not hot any more. She thought that the poor girl had not had even a drop of water in the last six days, and should get well with some food inside her. So she went out saying, “You keep sleeping. I’ll get something for you to eat.” But she could not lay her hands on even a few grains of rice in all the pots, pans, bags, and baskets she ransacked frantically. She sat down for a long while with a long-drawn sigh, not knowing what to do. She could perhaps have understood, if her eyesight had not been affected, the mystery of how the groceries that she sat thinking about it, and eventually, a leaking pot, used normally for carrying water, came to her hands, all the

rest having already been disposed of. She set out with that one to the grocery shop of Hari Sa, to see if she could get something for it in exchange.

Hari Sa could very well guess the situation when he saw the pot in her hands. And when she told him about her intentions, he took the pot in his own, examined it all over, and said, “No, no, there is no rice left in my house. That apart, who’ll give you any rice for this leaking pot?” It was not as if he had no rice to spare. He was only trying to drive a hard bargain. But the old woman was thunderstruck when she was told that she couldn’t get any rice. She kept sitting inert and speechless. How do I feel the girl, now that her fever is gone and she is ready to eat, she wondered. It was getting dark. She looked again at Hari twice over, and got up to leave with the pot in her hands, saying, “Well, let me go and see what the girl is doing.” That was when Hari said, “Give it to me, let me see what is there.” He gave four measures of rice, half a measure of pulses and some salt in exchange for the pot. The old woman came rushing back to the house. She had not applied even a twig to her mouth in the morning to clean her teeth, and so you can imagine the state she was in. She called Rebati the moment she reached the house. She thought that the girl would have recovered from her illness by now, and would be in a position to draw water and cook the rice. So she got terribly angry when there was no response from the girl, and started shouting again, “You Rebati, you Rebi, you miserable rotten wretch!”

Meanwhile Rebati was getting deeper into a state of unconsciousness. She felt an intense pain all over her body, which was getting more and more cold, and a terrible thirst seemed to thrust her tongue inwards. She felt like going to some cooler place. She came rolling along from inside the house to the front verandah. But it did no relieve her. She moved back all the way to the verandah that over-looked the backyard. The day had passed. Strong winds were blowing. Rebati surveyed the backyard – This is where *Bapa* had planted the plantain tree, the flower-stalks have started coming up, and soon it will bear fruit. Some two years back *Ma* had planted a guava tree, and how I had run instantly to the well to fetch water for the plant! The tree has grown and has started flowering too.... Then she remembered her mother.

Darkness had covered all the trees and plants by now, and she could not make them out any more. But she could see the sky, and found the evening star twinkling with an incessant glow. Rebati could not take her eyes off from the star. It seemed that the star was growing in shape, it was like a disc now, and was getting brighter and brighter... Ah! What a beautiful image in there! It was her dear mother, all love





begin. Within two years Rebati manages to learn Odia alphabets and reading and writing. Meanwhile Shyambandhu thinks of marrying Rebati with Basudev. But soon there follows the misfortune of Shyambandhu's family. Shyambandhu and his wife die of cholera one after another. Rebati and her grandmother have to sell the two bullocks to meet the expenses of the funeral rites. The *Zamindar* takes back the land given to them for cultivation. He also takes away the cows by force. The grandmother sells the belongings one after another to meet the daily needs. Basudev comes forward to help them in their distress. Earlier Rebati had a soft corner for Basudev, but now Basudev too develops affection for Rebati. One day Basudev also dies suddenly. Rebati becomes completely alone. The grandmother strongly believes that all this happened due to Rebati's education. She starts abusing Rebati. After the death of Basudev, the completely broken Rebati falls ill. She gives up food and dies. The old woman also meets her tragic death in the end. Thus there occurs a complete destruction of the whole family.

#### **4 B.3.2**

##### **Characters:**

We come across some eight characters in the story. They are: Shyambandhu and his wife, his mother, the *Budhi* and his daughter Rebati; Basudev; the *Zamindar*, Hari Sa and the village *dhobi* Bana Sheti. However, some are round and some are flat. Round characters are complex and undergo development while flat characters do not change throughout the course of the story. Some characters do not appear directly but they play important role in the sense that they help the reader understand the socio-economic and cultural system of the time. Let's study them:

##### **1. Shyambandhu Mohanty:**

Shyambandhu Mohanty lives in a village named Patpur. His family comprises of four people: He and his wife, his mother and his daughter Rebti, aged ten. He owns a big house. He works as a tax collector for the *Zamindar*. His salary is two rupees per month. He gets a few extra rupees for doing some odd incidental work for the tenants. Thus his monthly average income is not less than four rupees. Besides, the three and half acres of land and two cows are more than enough for running his household. He respects his mother, helps his wife and loves his only daughter, Rebati. Thus he is a family man in the true sense of the word.

Shyambandhu is a simple and straightforward man. He is honest and dutiful. The kind-hearted Shyambandhu is well liked by the tenants. He is a God-fearing man. He teaches Rebati Odia *bhajans* and scriptures. He learns of a girl's school in Cuttack and requests Basudev to teach Rebati regularly. It symbolizes his awareness and understanding of the fast-changing world. He is the supporter of modernity. He is eager that his daughter should have education. He acts as an agent of change. He engages a private tutor, Basudev, for Rebati's teaching. As a good father he dreams of marrying Rebati with Basudev. However, he falls a victim to cholera epidemic. Before death he requests Basudev to look after his family after his demise. Significantly enough, his untimely and tragic death affects the family adversely and puts an end to Rebati's education. Shyambandhu stands for the progressive and modern outlook.

## **2. Rebati:**

Rebati is the ten year old girl of Patpur village. She is the darling daughter of her father. Like her father, she is fond of singing *bhajans*. She regularly sings before Shyambandhu. She has a strong desire to seek education. In spite of the opposition of her grandmother, her education begins at home. She progresses fast in her studies. Within two years she could read fluently, without a pause. Shyambandhu raises a subject of her marriage with Basudev and a noticeable change occurs in her behavior. She develops a kind of affection for Basudev. Shyambandhu's untimely death puts an end to her education. Then the family is reduced to great a poverty. She suffers a breakdown. She loses appetite, spends sleepless nights and reduces to skin and bones. With the death of Basudev her life, as if, comes to an end. She gets disappointed and stops going out and falls ill. The memories of her parents haunt her all the time and her condition worsens day by day. She gets deeper into a state of unconsciousness and dies a tragic death.

Rebati is the product of conservative and orthodox society. She represents the womenfolk who stand for female education and emancipation. She is a girl caught between traditional superstitions and modernity. The whole story revolves around Rebati's education.

## **3. The Grandmother:**

Rebati's grandmother is the custodian of a conservative social system. She is the dominant female figure in the story. She supervises many things including the

serving of food to Shyambandhu at the time of dinner. She plays a strong role at the time of major family decisions. She believes that girls should never be educated, instead, they should learn about household chores. She raises the age-old questions: Study? What's that? What will she do with studies? She opposes the very idea of Rebati's education. She feels contended on the issue of Rebati's marriage with Basudev. However, the cruel hand of Fate takes away both her son and daughter-in-law through the agent of cholera and everything comes to an end. The miserable and helpless grandmother sells pans and pots to meet the daily needs. She throws herself on the floor and cries all day long. She loses her eyesight, and holds Rebati's studies responsible for it. The orthodox and superstitious minded grandmother strongly believes that Rebati's education is responsible for all the misfortunes. She considers Basudev equally responsible for the tragedy. She begins to regard Rebati as a girl of ill omen and evil ways, and treats her cruelly. But she tries to feed Rebati during her illness. The miserable, helpless and the blind old woman meets her tragic death in the end. The grandmother represents the social attitudes of the time.

#### **4. Shyambandhu's Wife:**

Shyambandhu's wife goes unnamed in the story. Like most of the Indian women of her time she has no prominent role to play in the family decisions. She is a simple housewife, a dutiful wife and a lovable mother. She looks after her husband, her daughter and mother-in-law. She is a happy and contented woman. She is docile and doesn't have much say in the family matters. She likes the idea of Rebati's education. She feels sorry for Basudev being orphan. Hence, often on festive days she invites him to her house. After her husband's death, she also becomes the victim of cholera epidemic and dies.

#### **5. Basudev:**

Basudev is a teacher in an Upper Primary School of Patpur. He has graduated from the training school at Cuttack. He is a handsome and good-looking youth of about twenty years. During his childhood, he had epileptic fits which left a permanent scar on his forehead. But the scar adds a grace to his personality. He is very simple and straightforward man. He is a sweet and gentle soul. Having lost both his parents in childhood, he had been brought up by his maternal uncle.

He is a *Karan* by caste. He often visits Shyambandhu's house. Shyambandhu's wife invites him on the festive days and serves him sweetmeats. These visits develop

a pleasant and affectionate relationship between them. He informs Shyambandhu about a school for girls. He, thus, instills in him a desire to provide education to Rebati. He tries to create a progressive awareness of value of education. He works as a private tutor for Rebati. In the hours of crises, he rushes to Shyambandhu's house even at the risk of his life. He tries to help them in every possible way. After the death of Shyambandhu and his wife, he looks after Rebati and her grandmother.

In the course of, he feels attracted towards Rebati. At one point of time their eyes meet, however, the love story doesn't flower as the love-birds fall victim to the ways of Providence. He goes to Hariharpur and on his way back dies of cholera. His untimely and tragic death affects Rebati very badly and soon she too meets her tragic death.

He stands for the agent of change. He represents modern and progressive attitude. He also represents hope. He wishes for emancipation and empowerment of women.

#### **Other Minor Characters:**

The *Zamindar*, Hari Sa and the village *dhobi* Bana Sheti are flat characters of the story. They stand for the well-established socio-economic system and culture of the society. They exploit the poor and needy in their own way. They are opportunists. They stand for the workings of social attitudes. These characters help the reader to understand the socio-cultural-economic ethos of the time properly.

#### **4 B.3.3**

##### **Theme:**

Rebati's plea for education is at the centre of the story. Female identity and empowerment is the theme of the story. The story is about female education and the superstitions concerning it prevalent in the then Odia society. Through the grandmother's blind and superstitious nature the writer has presented the traditional biased approach. The main plot of the story revolves around Rebati's education. The story deals with the life and sufferings, and the tragic end of Rebati. The story also presents the conflict between values: progressive verses orthodox. Fakir Mohan expands the dimension of the conflict by highlighting four evils in the society. They are – poverty, ignorance, exploitation and orthodoxy. The writer gives us a very grim

picture of poverty prevalent in the rural parts of India. He describes the heart-rending story of Rebati's family after the death of both her parents. Ignorance has made their lives miserable. Due to ignorance, they fall prey to superstitions and remain far away from progress. Rebati's grandmother takes education as an ill omen only because of ignorance. She cannot think beyond the institution of patriarchy. In the story Rebati's mother and grandmother represent the womenfolk of the rural India. Thus, it is a touching tale of the universal female condition. Senapati has also presented the cruel workings of the feudal system in the story. The *Karans* like Shyambandhu have to work, traditionally, for *Zamindars* as record-keepers and accountants. The *Zamindars* exploit these poor people in their own way. While women are exploited in their families, the poor people are exploited by the *Zamindars*. Both the women and the poor people suffer their lot silently without voicing their sufferings. Rebate has to suffer without her fault. The *Zamindar* takes away almost all the belongings of Rebati's family after her father's death. Even Hari Sa and the village *dhobi* Bana Sheti exploit the grandmother and Rebati in the times of their crises. This kind of exploitation is but the natural consequence of poverty and lack of education on the part of the sufferers. This is what Senapati tries to highlight through the question of Rebati's education. He just wants to eradicate all these evils by providing education to women. Rebati is just a small part of his larger scheme. What he wants to focus is that if women are educated most of the prevailing bad practices will come to an end. With women's education, orthodox beliefs and superstitions will come to an end. He wants show us that education is a pious work; hence he engages Basudev and Shyambandhu (Both are Lord Krishna's names) to bring about a desirable change in the society. Thus Senapati's concerns are primarily with social reform and then with the empowerment of women through education.

#### 4 B.3.4

##### **Setting of the Story:**

Written in a colloquial style, the whole drama of the action of the story takes place in village Patpur. The choice of both the setting and characters are significant. 1898 was the period when there was feudal system in Orissa and in Cuttack district a few new schools for girls were established. The story written against this backdrop has its own significance. Shyambandhu and Basudev are *Karans* by caste. *Karans* of Odissa then worked for *Zamindars* as record-keepers and accountants; they also served in the field of education as teachers. Thus the names of the places and

characters and the plot lend the story a kind of authenticity. Further, the feudal system and the exploitation by the *Zamindar* make the story a realistic document. The other issues like poverty, ignorance, orthodox thinking and superstitions form the background of the setting.

#### **4 B.4 Terms to Remember:**

scribe (n) : someone employed to make written copies of documents

coax (v) : sweet talk

scribble (v) : write carelessly

*Karan* (n) : a caste in Odisha. *Karans* worked for *zamindars* as record-keepers and accountants; they also served in the field of education as teachers

beseech (v) : ask for or request earnestly

vex (v) : disturb especially by minor irritations

embarrassed (Adj) : feeling uneasy and self-conscious

giggle (v) : express joy, laugh

#### **4 B.5 Answers to Check Your Progress:**

##### **4 B.2.1**

- A.**
1. Patpur
  2. two rupees
  3. about three and half acres
  4. not less than four rupees
  5. Basudev
  6. Basudev
  7. The grandmother
  8. on *Sri Panchami*
- B.**
1. c) Odisha
  2. b) Odia
  3. b) ten
  4. a) scribe
  5. a) four
  6. b) Karan

7. b) maternal uncle
8. d) Cuttack
9. b) twenty
10. c) epilepsy

#### 4 B.2.2

- A.**
1. on a spring day of *Phalgun*
  2. Shyambandhu
  3. Basudev
  4. Shyambandhu
  5. The village *dhobi* Bana Sethi
  6. By selling the two bullocks for seventeen and a half rupees
  7. Because she believes that all their sorrows and misfortunes were due to Rebatī's studies
- B.**
1. d) cholera epidemic
  2. a) an old woman
  3. a) The *Zamindar's* agents
  4. c) the *Dol Purnima* day
  5. d) the grandmother

#### 4 B.2.3

- A.**
1. Because he had committed the sinful act of teaching Rebatī
  2. Because of her studies
  3. The owner of grocery shop
  4. The grandmother
  5. The grandmother stands for orthodox beliefs in the story
- B.**
1. a) Hariharpur
  2. c) Gopalpur
  3. d) cholera epidemic
  4. a) Hari Sa
  5. d) high fever

#### **4 B.6 Exercises:**

##### **A. Answer the following questions in detail.**

1. Discuss “Rebati” as a tale of female education and emancipation.
2. Discuss the social realism depicted in the story.
3. Discuss “Rebati” as a touching tale of the universal female condition.
4. “Rebati” is about female education and the superstitions concerning it prevalent in Odia society. Discuss.
5. Fakir Mohan examines not the workings of the fate but of social attitudes in “Rebati”. Discuss.

##### **B. Write short notes on the following:**

1. Shyambandhu
2. Rebati
3. Basudev
4. The Grandmother
5. The Cholera Epidemic

#### **4.B.7 Reference for Further Study:**

Fakir Mohan Senapati ‘Rebati’, in *Oriya Stories*, ed. Vidya Das, tr, Kishori Charan Das (Delhi: Shrishti Publishers, 2000).

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