



## Department of Distance Education Punjabi University, Patiala

**Class : B.A.III (English Literature) Elective Semester : 6**  
**Paper : Literary Masterpieces : Study of Classics-II**  
**Medium : English Unit : I**

### ***Lesson No.***

#### **CHARLOTTE BRONTE : *JANE EYRE***

- 1.1 : Charlotte Bronte : Introduction
- 1.2 : *Jane Eyre* : A Critical Study of the Text
- 1.3 : *Jane Eyre* : A Critical Study of the Text (contd.)
- 1.4 : Characterization
- 1.5 : Major Critical Aspects

#### **RABINDER NATH TAGORE : GITANJALI**

- 1.6 : Introduction
- 1.7 : Tagore's Works and Gitanjali
- 1.8 : Gitanjali : An Analysis
- 1.9 : Major Aspects of Gitanjali
- 1.10 : Major Aspects of Gitanjali (contd.)

**Department website : [www.pbidde.org](http://www.pbidde.org)**

---

**LESSON NO. 1.1**

---

**CHARLOTTE BRONTE : *JANE EYRE***

**STRUCTURE**

- 1.0 Objectives**
- 1.1 Introduction**
  - 1.1.1 The Genre (Novel)
  - 1.1.2 The Age
- 1.2 The Author**
  - 1.2.1 The Works of the Author
  - 1.2.2 Contribution of the Author
- 1.3 Self-Check Exercise–Activity for the student–I**
  - 1.3.1 Answers to Self-Check Exercise
- 1.4 *Jane Eyre* – (An Introduction)**
- 1.5 The Story in Brief**
- 1.6 Summing-up.**
- 1.7 Self-Check Exercise–Activity - II**
  - 1.7.1 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

- 1.0 Objectives :**
  - (a) To introduce the Genre and the Age.
  - (b) To discuss the life and works of the Author.
  - (c) To introduce the text ***Jane Eyre***.
  - (d) To evaluate the student's ability to write answers.

**1.1 Introduction :**

In this lesson, we shall introduce you to Charlotte Bronte and her work *Jane Eyre*. We shall also introduce you to the Genre of novel, the age of the author and her other important works.

**1.1.1. The Genre (Novel)**

Novel is an important literary genre. Though comparatively new, it has emerged as one of the most popular and major forms of writing. Though poetry and drama came much earlier, novel has gained much in popularity especially in the twentieth century. Moreover, it is the most comprehensive form of writing and has

the potential to portray the life of man in the fullest sense. We may say that the novel portrays life and people. Since novel portrays life in its fullest, it is nearer to reality and depicting reality can also perform a useful corrective function. Reading a novel can be a life enhancing experience. The novel contains the novelist's point of view on human situation. Hence, the novel as an artistic creation has a useful social function to perform.

Thus the novel can be described as a narrative in prose, based on a story, in which the author may portray characters and the life of an age and analyse sentiments, passions and reactions of men and women to their environment. This he/she may do with a setting either of his/her own times or of the past. Further beginning with a setting in ordinary life, he/she may use the novel for fantasy or some portrayal of the supernatural.

The novel may be the last form of literature to establish itself, but since the eighteenth century, its success has been almost alarming. It is the form in literature which has explored most fully the life of ordinary man and found it worthy of portrayal. For some reason, it is the form of literature in which women have competed successfully with men.

### **1.1.2 The Age**

In the nineteenth century England, several changes accrued, shaking the society to its foundations and leaving people in a state of mental turmoil. Old beliefs and convictions were undermined and people were groaning for a life-line in the chaos around them. At this crucial stage literary men exposed the society and its situation. The novelists, especially the women novelists mirrored harsh contemporary realities. They described the squalor in the society and highlighted the need for love, understanding and companionship reflecting materialistic values. In the Victorian era, the middle classes rose in power and importance and the novel was bound to flourish because it suited the taste of the growing middle classes. The middle class reader wanted to read about the identifiable, known and recognisable experience of life, so the novel as an art form was best equipped to present picture of life lived in a given society against a stable background of social and moral values by people who are recognisably like the people encountered by readers. And the novel as was written in the Victorian period has extended its boundaries.

As the Victorian age was torn between faith and doubt, it has become customary to speak of this age as an age of doubt and pessimism following the new conception of man and of universe because of Darwin's studies of the origin of species. However, the view that most of the Victorian literature is pessimistic is erroneous. The writers tried to instill a deeper faith in humanity.

The Victorian novel was presented with wonderful inwardness, different kinds of moral possibility and the actuality of choice. It formed an extension of consciousness and gave life its vitality. The major novelists of the period like Dickens, Hardy, George Eliot, all extended the boundaries of the novel.

The social attack through the novel was exploited quite successfully by Dickens in his novels and it was carried on with documentary exactness by Charles Reed. But in originality, no other novelist could compete with Charlotte Bronte and Emily Bronte. The contribution made by the Bronte sisters to English literature in the 1840s has a unique flavour—a strange pungent mingling of wild romance and domestic realism, of cosmic poetry and local detail. They are belated Romantics who derive from no school, nor have any succeeding writers produced works of similar range. Their originality which gives them a just claim to be considered major writers is definitely praiseworthy. Charlotte Bronte in her *Jane Eyre* and Emily Bronte in her *Wuthering Heights* present with great complexity the detail of the personal passions, education and dilemmas. It is usually said that Charlotte Bronte was an innovator in bringing English fiction into the domain of the writer's own emotional consciousness, and Emily's imagination and the interpretation of the earthly and divine plane of being, these are the masterpieces from Bronte's genius.

In this way the area of the novel as an art form was enlarged. It excluded no life, no society and no profession. Instead of the sequence of trivial adventures, we have now very elaborate studies of life, men, manners and society. The novel had made itself adequate to the needs of the age. It had gained much in vitality, variety and depth. It was richer in colouring, more subtle in observation and more artistic in form. With the novel rapidly establishing itself as the dominant literary form, different kinds of sensibilities came to express themselves in it. Even though the majority of novels produced during the Victorian age continued to handle the problems of man in society and to deal with moral situations as these emerged in a specific social world with specific social and economic characteristics, they are also occasional writers who turned to fiction to express the private passions and explore realms of personal emotion.

The future of the novel may depend on its capacity to add a new dimension by absorbing the poetic experience of life and developing a new kind of poetic prose to express it. The majority of twentieth century novelists, even the best of them were content to repeat with variations what had already been said of the state of men and women in previous generations. But they said it with more freedom and with greater subtlety. They produced works of fiction that were accomplished and popular but lacking in true creative power. What makes them “modern” is a certain heightened consciousness, an awareness of their own responses, moral and amoral, aesthetic and intellectual and the way in which they adopt the work of the

experimenters so as to give an air of novelty to their own productions without imposing any strain on the reader. But they remain derivative.

## 1.2 The Author

Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855), the daughter of a curate of Irish extraction, was born at Bradford in 1816 and passed her youth in the industrial village of Haworth in Yorkshire, in the midst of a bleak countryside. Intellectually precocious like her sister, she wrote stories and verses while in her school days, became a teacher, studied French in Brussels in the school of M. Huger and formed a deep and romantic attachment for her tutor. This experience supplied her with the material for her first novel *The Professor* (a posthumous publication in 1857). *Jane Eyre* (1847) which appeared under the pseudonym of Currer Bell, had a great success. In 1849, was published *Shirley* and in 1853 *Villette*. This came under the authoress's own name. Her life, which had been overcast with much grief, found a short happy respite after marriage in 1854. She died in 1855.

Charlotte was the third in a family of six children. In 1820, Patrick Bronte, her father, who was a clergyman, shifted to Haworth as its incumbent. Her mother died soon after in 1821 and within four years of her death, Charlotte's two elder sisters Maria and Elizabeth, died too. Thus Charlotte came to shoulder the family responsibilities so early in life. She together with her other sisters, was condemned to a life of deprivation, frustration and tragedy. The Brontes shared a life, imaginative as well as physical. Bereft of their mother at so young an age, the Brontes were driven in upon each other's affections like shelterless sheep huddled together to keep out the cold. The Brontes consoled themselves at the Haworth personage with their shared company and literary work. They created for themselves in childhood well-peopled imaginative world, the ideal universe of the Great Glass Town of Angria, which was initially shared by all four, but later shared by only Charlotte and Branwell, and the Gondal of Emily and Anne, whose chronicles are recorded in a remarkable collection of minutely penned tales. This invented existence gave an assurance of permanence and provided them with an escape from the thought of mortality which haunted them because of the deaths of their mother and sisters, which occurred in quick succession. Their tales are valuable because of the light they throw on the psychology of their literary creation as they encouraged the Brontes to undertake writing of a grave nature. The Brontes lived their entire lives at Haworth and their writings bear a deep imprint of the place. The scenic beauty of the landscape, the atmosphere the hardy character of the nature's people and the folklore, have all assisted in the constitution of their novels.

Though Charlotte was perfectly satisfied at being confined to the Haworth personage, which she regarded as a refuge, she could not avoid contact with the external world. Being the eldest, she had to assume the duty of mother, though her

oversensitive, passionate and sensuous nature promoted her to venture into that world and gather the wealth of experience. Her novels are basically powerful creation of a lovely imagination and an intensely individual mind. But at the same time, her themes reveal the involvement with the outside world. Charlotte, like her sister Emily, was a voracious reader reading adult literature even during childhood.

Romanticism is the animating force in the works of Charlotte Bronte. It is romanticism of individual passion. The femininity of the writer explains the delicacy which intermingles with the very outlook upon life. Passion as we have in the novels of Charlotte Bronte, is transfused through and through with moral austerity of a strong religious upbringing. It is coloured by a stoicism, yet sore from an experience in which hardly more than the painful side of the human emotion has been revealed. Under the stern discipline of such trial, Charlotte Bronte turned instinctively and spontaneously to a self-experience that revealed her reserve which no doubt restrained her effusiveness without checking it, but free from display, shorn of all ornament and limited to a kind of sober realism. At the instance of the publisher, and in order to satisfy public taste, there were added certain dramatic elements of somewhat artificial and morbid kind, to which *Jane Eyre* owes at least felicitous features though not the least characteristic. The other novels, less influenced by the search for violent emotions develop round one central theme, the magnetism which subjugates the force of tenderness, be it humble or proud in the love of woman to the commanding radiance of a manly personality. This inevitable theme, in which we touch upon the secret of Charlotte Bronte's own life, leaves no room for deft psychological analysis and shrewd description, pictures from everyday life, even scenes from social history i.e. a school in Brussels towards 1840, Yorkshire at the time of Luddite riots and a concrete interest in *Villette* and *Shirley*.

Charlotte's writing is shadowed by her personal life. Her main characters are manifestations of herself and express to quite some extent, her personal emotions and impressions. The way she translates and sublimates her personal experience and vision of life into art form is commendable. Charlotte Bronte's innate romantic nature is seen to be constantly at war with the constraints and inhibitions that cabined, cribbed confined women particularly in that orthodox society. This conflict between revolt and compliance to a moral code which is a pronounced modern concern in Victorian writers, stimulates her creativity. The conflict is presented through an exploration of romantic fulfilment and conformity to moral principles. Her major concern is the private life of her archetypal heroine, a governess. Although indirectly, her novels also deal with public themes as Charlotte is deeply aware of the outside world.

Charlotte was sent along with her sister to Cowan Bridge school in 1824. The choice of the school was not due to its excellence but due to the special provisions for clergyman's children. Here she experienced the helplessness in the face of the mental and physical suppression at the school. All energies of the authorities were directed to the enforcement of this regime and no attention was paid to matters of hygiene. The two elder sisters contracted tuberculosis and were sent home to languish and die. Embittered by the tragic turn of events, Charlotte blamed the regime for her sisters' death. With her unusual penetration as a child of her age, Charlotte perceived that the humiliations and punishments which her sisters had to undergo were not merely sufferings of the body but also those of the spirit. Her bitter experiences of this school are reflected in *Jane Eyre*.

Initially the sisters had hopes of setting up a school of their own but this plan had to be given up because of the lack of funds and social contacts. Sheer necessity drove them to the profession of teaching. The three younger sisters of the family were entrapped in the education system established by the rich to exploit the sons and daughters of the genteel poor. Governesses were treated as servants and inferiors by those people to whom they felt they were culturally superior. In Charlotte's fiction there is a complete understanding of the pressures of this exploitive system and her own experience showed her the humiliations and loss of identity involved in the struggle to earn one's livelihood. It is possible for us to identify the heroines of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* with Charlotte Bronte and her sisters who have to strive to earn their living and being orphans their sense of absolute desolation is strengthened. These novels have been described as "powerful images of nineteenth century female feeling." Terry Eagleton sums up their situation when he says :

We find in the Brontes, then an abnormally stark opposition between a kind of pre-industrial imaginative creativity feeding off the resources of myth, archetype, rhetoric, melodrama and the felt pressures of a drably spiritless society of whom that imagination must either fortuitously adopt or suffer extinction.<sup>1</sup>

In order to escape the servitude of being a governess, Charlotte decided to take up writing as career to earn a living. She had inherited her father's literary talent and along with her sisters, she achieved in writing, what their father had failed to do. Her temperament and horror of teaching as governess made her take up writing as a career that suited her the most, and she was basically committed to it. A close understanding of her novels reveals her association with the milieu in which she lived and wrote. Her works reflect the socio-political and economic realities of the contemporary society. However, the spirit of these themes is not always without a sting. Charlotte Bronte can handle irony at her will. Her satirical

---

1. Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power : A Marxist Study of Brontes* (London : The Macmillian Press Ltd., 1975), p.12.

picture of the society on the continent is not free from insular stiffness. It is to be noted that Charlotte's works, with their restlessness, are replete with a kind of sly fancy and a pleasing sprightliness of mind. Even the charm of their piquant observation is overshadowed by the great wave of impassioned lyricism, which from time to time sweeps through the pages. The tumult of feverish, agitated or smothered feeling give them a throb of secret life and they appeal to our sympathies. Charlotte's style is seen at its best, when it has the courage to remain simple and allows itself to be moulded by its own inspiration.

### 1.2.1 The Works of the Author

The first step in establishing herself as a writer was Charlotte's publication of poems which came as a joint venture with her sister. In 1846 came this joint publication titled *Poems*. Though this publication did not sell successfully yet the sisters were not discouraged by this. Each of them began to write novels. Charlotte's *The Professor* was rejected by the publishers but in 1847 became an immediate success. Then came *Shirley*, the only novel which Charlotte herself claims to have written with a deliberate intention about the political and economic happenings of the times. As in these earlier novels, in *Villette* also Charlotte touches upon more than one theme. The most conspicuous, however, are the autobiographical and psychological strains in the novel. Here Charlotte seems to be creating her own mental and moral ordeal.

While making an overview of these prominent works of English literary writing, it is necessary to keep in mind a few characteristics of the writer. The foremost among these is the self-consciousness of Charlotte as a woman writer. The point to be noted is that Charlotte did not use her real name but wrote under the name of Currer Bell. Charlotte's fierce desire to be judged impartially without lowering of standard, as was common while judging women authors and to prevent publicity of her personal life made her adopt the male pseudonym. Each time her novels were published, the question of sex in authorship intruded, thus destroying the pleasure of success. Other than this, Charlotte's personal loneliness and inwardness might have also contributed to the use of this pseudonym. In this relation David Daiches comments :

This anonymity which was never officially broken in their life time was not only the disguise which female writers of the period so often thought fit to assume in presenting themselves to the world as novelists, it was also a part of their inwardness, their intense living to themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Charlotte's works are written under the impact of deep-rooted sense of loneliness

---

2. David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature*, Vol. IV (Bombay : Allied Publishers, 1979), p. 1064



and withdrawal. She wrote with a deep emotional intensity. Her quiet and aloof life at Haworth, the untimely and painful deaths of her mother, sisters and brothers, the sad experiences at the Cowan Bridge School and finally her unrequited love for her teacher, give her a disturbing sense of frustration and futility. The emotional intensity and recklessness can be attributed to these experiences of her life.

Another main characteristic in her writing is the autobiographical element. All these personal experiences find place for an expression in her novels. The chief theme in *Villette* is the pupil-master relationship which the heroine, Lucy shares with M. Paul Emanuel. This theme of the pupil-master relationship is also dealt with in her other novel, *The Professor*. While the bitter experiences at the Cowan Bridge School are reflected in *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* embodies a happier experience of school life at the Roe Head School which the younger sisters attended after their withdrawal from the Cowan Bridge School. Hence almost all the novels of Charlotte are more or less self-expression of the writer, who seems to shed her sense of loneliness and deprivation in her novels. Elizabeth Hardwick rightly feels that :

Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* addresses itself to the regrets and consolations of lonely women, to the stoicism and patience they try to command.<sup>3</sup>

This personal note in her writing is, however, complemented by the influence of the contemporary social life. As noted earlier, Charlotte's perception of the world around her was equally sensitive. This is another marked feature of her writing. A close study of her novels proves that like any other writer she was not totally disassociated from the milieu in which she lived and wrote. The Victorian society of this age of transition is considered to have commenced in 1830 the very time at which Charlotte Bronte was at the peak of her creativity. It was the time when the authority of the Church was being threatened, the old system of aristocracy was disintegrating and an economic crisis was building up. Naturally Charlotte too was forced into that whirlpool of conflicts and contradictions. Besides personal consideration, it was the deterioration in the status of aristocracy which caused her to have as her protagonists ordinary men and women.

All these prominent features find a reflection in the novels of Charlotte Bronte.

#### 1.2.1.1 *The Professor*

This was Charlotte Bronte's first completed novel, but was published after her death in 1857, with a 'Preface' by her husband, Arthur Bell Nicholls. The subject is the experience which Charlotte was later to use with success in *Villette*. In this novel William Crimsworth goes to Brussels as a schoolmaster and falls in love with a fellow teacher, an Anglo-Swiss girl. Crimsworth is modelled on M. Heges, who

---

3. Elizabeth Hardwick, *Seduction and Betrayal : Women and Literature*. (London : Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1974), p. 28.

became the model for Paul Emanuel and the influence which makes the story work in the later novel is in the first attempt exercised by the emigrant teacher.

#### 1.2.1.2 *Jane Eyre*

This novel was successfully published in 1847. Jane is an orphan and is in the care of her aunt, Mrs. Reed. She is treated harshly and one day turns on her bullying cousin, John Reed. This leads to her being sent to Lowood Asylum, a charitable institution where she spends a wretched girlhood in appalling conditions. (This school is modelled on Charlotte's memories of the dreadful school at Cowan Bridge which she attended and where her two sisters died). Jane escapes from Lowood. She gains the post of governess at Thornfield Hall. She has in charge of Adele, the illegitimate daughter of Edward Rochester, a man of scant courtesy and cynical humour. Jane is a plain girl with no pretensions of charm but she has wit and spirit and Rochester is drawn to her. He is moody and can be harsh, but Jane is equally attracted towards him and they fall in love. The marriage is prevented at the last moment by Richard Mason's disclosure that Rochester is already married to Mason's sister Bertha. The marriage took place in Jamaica. Bertha Mason's family had told Rochester nothing and he found himself tied to a mad woman. She is now kept in seclusion and under restraint at Thornfield Hall. Jane, shattered by this truth, leaves Thornfield Hall. She wanders across the moors and collapses at the door of Rev. St. John Rivers. She calls herself Jane Elliott. The Rivers sisters, Diana and Mary, are kind to her and St. John gives her the post of a mistress at the village school for girls. Later he discovers Jane's identity and she finds to her delight that she has a family, the Rivers are her cousins. When St. John brings her news of a legacy, she insists on sharing with them.

St. John proposes to Jane. He is a strong character and a handsome man and she is on the point of accepting him, when she receives a powerful spiritual communication. She hears Rochester crying out for her. She hurries back to the Hall and finds it burnt down. The poor mad wife had set fire to the house. Rochester trying to save her was badly burnt. He is blind among other things. "Reader, I Married him." This is the opening of the last chapter. Jane and Rochester settle down serenely and Jane undertakes the care and education of Adele. Rochester's injuries are permanent, but he regains partial sight in one eye enough to enable him to look upon his first born son.

*Jane Eyre* is a love story told with unaffected skill narrated by a woman with a directness that startled the Victorians. Jane was something new in fiction, a woman without much visual appeal, but with something much stronger than that. Jane tells of her love with passion and frankness. *Jane Eyre* is the finest of Charlotte's published novels.

**1.2.1.3 Shirley**

Charlotte Bronte's second published novel appeared first in 1849. The setting is in Yorkshire at the time of Luddite riots, in the later phases of war against Bonapartes. The wool industry of England was paralysed when exports came to a halt and at that time the introduction of machinery was seen as its death knell by many workers in the industry. Charlotte's father Patrick Bronte had once been appointed to the parish of Hartshead-cum Chilton near Dewsbury, when a riot resulted in fourteen men being hanged. In the novel, Robert Gerand Moore, the mill owner, is determined to install labour saving machinery. He is undeterred by the opposition of the workers, who first attempt to destroy the mill in protest and later attempt to kill him. Robert's brother, Louis, is tutor to the wealthy Keeldon family and Robert sees that marriage to Shirley Keeldon would enable him to weather the financial embarrassment of the troubled times, even though he loves Caroline Helstone, the rector's niece.

Shirley rejects him with contempt. She knows he doesn't love her. Then the wars at last come to an end and Robert is freed of his difficulties. The devoted Caroline accepts him and Shirley, meanwhile, is drawn to Louis more and more. The best parts of *Shirley* are the opening chapters and the characterization of the heroine, who was modelled on the author's sister, Emily. The last (third) part of the book (Charlotte Bronte like many writers of her times was a victim of the three volume convention) moves the story of Shirley and Louis and, though the growing love between them is well done, one feels the material is being padded out. Robert Moore was based on Williams Cart-Wright, who was decorated for his post in the historical defence of Rawfold's Mill.

**1.2.1.4 Villette**

This novel by Charlotte Bronte was first published in 1856. The story deals with material which Charlotte had already used in *The Professor*, the first written novel, which was turned down and never published in her life time. Lucy's experiences in *Villette* were based on Charlotte's when she worked as a teacher in Brussels at Constantine Heger's school for girls. The Villette of the title is Brussels. Lucy Deare, an English girl, joins as a teacher in girl's school in Villette, without friends or money. She is also unpossessing but she proves her worth to Madame Beck, the Headmistress. She is befriended, condescendingly, by one of her pupils, the beautiful and vain Genevr Faushave, who boasts about her admirers. Lucy perceives that he is infatuated with Gine and hides her growing feelings for him. One evening, at a concert, Genevr displays her true character and John's infatuation ceases. He now falls in love with Paulina Home and Lucy, nursing her grief in the realization that she can mean nothing to him, buries herself in work.

### 1.2.2 Contribution of the Author

Charlotte was the first to try to break away from the enclosed family circle. She combined scenes from her own life with the far richer and more romantic experiences which she had imagined. Thus her work is grounded in realism, but goes beyond into a wish fulfilment. She had the courage to explore human life, with greater fidelity that was common in her age, though the reticence of her period prevents her from following her themes to their logical conclusion. Her focus is more on men and women and their conditions and she, therefore, writes realistically. She tries to depict the inner life of her heroines. They exist in an alien, hostile world and because of their intense loneliness, yearn for fulfilment in love, but at the same time wish to avoid spiritual destruction. There is a conflict between the flesh and the spirit and the characters are faced with certain moral and ethical choices. These are not merely conventional morals but also individual. The characters suffer deeply, but in the end realise themselves through love without compromising their ideals and principles. They learn to establish a meaningful relationship with the soul mate and attain their identity. Charlotte progresses in her novels to a final realisation of the unavoidable nature of suffering and its mature and dignified acceptance.

### 1.3 Self-Check Exercise — Activity for the Student - I

1. How will you define the term novel ?
2. What are the chief characteristics of Victorian novel ?
3. What kind of a novelist is Charlotte Bronte ?
4. What is Bronte's contribution to the novel ?

#### 1.3.1 Answers to Self Check Exercise :

1. The novel can be defined as a narrative in prose. The novel gives us a picture of the society and a peep into the life of a character. The novelist tries to portray social reality in the novel. The novel has gained much popularity these days.
2. The Victorian novel started with Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy and George Eliot. It depicts the theme of childhood psychology, problems of working class, impact of urbanization and theme of moral earnestness.
3. Charlotte Bronte portrays her personal emotions and impressions and her characters are manifestations of herself. She paints the constraints and inhibitions of orthodox society. In her novels, she tries to bring about a reconciliation of romantic fulfilment and conformity to moral principles.
4. Charlotte Bronte is a psychological novelist. She portrays the inner life of her characters, who feel alienated in a hostile world. She is a great artist in projecting subtle hidden feelings of her characters.

#### 1.4 Jane Eyre (An Introduction)

*Jane Eyre* was completed in 1847 just one year after Charlotte Bronte had begun working on it. The novel was, at first, published in a three-volume edition. The book, in its first edition bore the title *An Autobiography* ed. by Currer Bell. Charlotte Bronte brought out this novel under this fictitious name because she did not want to reveal her real identity to the reading public. The novel became immediately popular on its very first publication and has enjoyed immense popularity ever since. It tells a passionate and tumultuous love-story. It contains a large number of dramatic and melodramatic events and situations. It creates a lot of suspense and many thrills in us. It has an unforgettable heroine in the person of Jane Eyre. Charlotte Bronte has shown here her talent of character portrayal too, though her delineation of Rochester and St. John Rivers is not very consistent or convincing. Whatever its merits and shortcomings, this novel tells a gripping and fascinating story which sustains our interest throughout.

#### 1.5 The Story in Brief

The Novel, *Jane Eyre* has been written in the form of an autobiography since some of Charlotte Bronte's own painful experiences have gone into Jane Eyre's account of her life. The novel is, on the whole, bleak, sad and very depressing. The subject of this novel is the trials and tribulations of the heroine who tells the story. Jane Eyre is almost a tragic figure from the beginning onwards and remains one till the very end when at last she achieves the fulfilment of her deepest desire through her marital union with the man, Mr. Rochester, whom she has loved for a long time. Jane Eyre's pleasant experiences are few and far between and the story is on the whole, very moving and poignant.

*Jane Eyre* is a novel which contains a most interesting and almost, a gripping story. The novel is worth reading for its plot interest alone, apart from other considerations. The story has several well-defined stages. The first stage of the story is Jane Eyre's experiences at Gateshead Hall where she becomes a victim of the callousness of her aunt, Mrs. Reed and her three children. The next stage is Jane Eyre's stay at Lowood School where she spends six years as a student and two years as a teacher. Here one of her most outstanding experiences is her friendship with Helen Burns, who is a disguised portrayal of Charlotte's own sister, Maria, who had died very young of tuberculosis. The next stage in Jane Eyre's life is her stay at Thornfield Hall as a governess to a little French girl called Adele. This stage is the most romantic and also reveals the most painful experiences of Jane's life. Here she falls in love with Mr. Rochester who happens to be an already married man, having a mad wife living in the same house as he himself.

Then comes Jane's departure from Thornfield Hall and her sad plight, when,

weary and hungry, she finds it impossible to get any food or shelter till she arrives at the house of a clergyman and missionary by the name of St. John Rivers. Here she has a brief respite from misery and feels quite comfortable till she begins to be pressed hard and almost harassed by St. John's proposal that she should marry him. The final stage in her life comes when she arrives at *Ferndean* and gets married to Mr. Rochester who is now a blind man and whose wife has perished at Thornfield Hall in the course of a fire which she had herself started. All these vicissitudes in the life of Jane Eyre constitute a story of unusual interest.

### 1.6. Summing-up

In this lesson we have discussed the Genre and the Age. We have also analysed the life and works of Charlotte Bronte with special reference to her novel *Jane Eyre* in brief, which is prescribed for you.

### 1.7 Self Check Exercise — Activity for the Student-II

1. When was the novel *Jane Eyre* completed ?
2. What was the title given to the novel on its first edition ?
3. What was the fictitious name under which this novel was written by the author ?
4. Was the novel *Jane Eyre* popular with the public ?
5. What is the story of the novel *Jane Eyre* about ?

#### 1.7.1. Answers to Self-Check Exercise

1. The novel *Jane Eyre* was completed in 1847 just one year after Charlotte Bronte had begun working on it. The novel was at first published in a three-volume edition.
2. The novel on its first edition bore the title *An Autobiography*.
3. The novel was written under the fictitious name Currer Bell by the author because she did not want to reveal her real identity to the reading public.
4. The novel became immediately popular on its very first publication and has enjoyed immense popularity ever since.
5. *Jane Eyre* tells a passionate and tumultuous love-story. It contains a large number of dramatic and melodramatic events and situations. It tells an unforgettable story in the person of Jane Eyre who is the heroine in this novel.

---

**LESSON NO. 1.2**

---

**CHARLOTTE BRONTE : JANE EYRE  
A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE TEXT**

- 2.0 Objectives**
- 2.1 Introduction**
- 2.2 A Critical Study of the Text**
- 2.3. Short Notes (Text-Based)**
- 2.4 Self - Check Exercise — Activity for the Student**
  - 2.4.1 Answers to Self-Check Exercise
- 2.5 Summing-up**

**2.0 Objectives :**

- (a) To analyse critically the text of *Jane Eyre*.
- (b) To evaluate the student's comprehension and understanding of the text.

**2.1 Introduction :**

In this lesson, we are going to make a detailed critical analysis of the text of *Jane Eyre* which is prescribed for you.

**2.2 A Critical Study of the Text :**

After a detailed introduction to Charlotte Bronte and her works in the preceding lesson, we shall now give a detailed analysis of the text of *Jane Eyre*. Before you proceed further with this lesson, you must read the text of the novel. This would benefit you with a better understanding of the various aspects of the book as well as in preparing the short answers which are an important part of your syllabus.

We have already given the summary of the novel in the previous lesson. *Jane Eyre* was written as a reaction to *The Professor*. The writer's resolve to portray real characters and experiences was surrendered after this first novel. *Jane Eyre* was written with a changed attitude. This change, although very much against her principles, was prompted by both inclination and commercial necessity.

To an uncritical reader, *Jane Eyre* would seem to have 'love' as its basic theme, which is not so inevitable an assumption because love had never been so central for the earlier novelists as for the Brontes'. Also the fact that the novel is based on a central character, her experiences, and the resolution of her fortunes in marriage strengthens such an impression. W.A. Craik in her book, *The Bronte Novels*, attributes the success of the novel to this very theme. She writes :

*Jane Eyre* might be called a love story. This would be true in one way, since it shows that the marriage at the end is the moral and artistic culmination of the whole—not merely a convenient rounding off of a whole collection of different kinds of material.<sup>1</sup>

She further writes :

The recognizable novel form—adventure ending in marriage was one of the qualities which made *Jane Eyre* acceptable to the novel-reader of the 1840's.<sup>2</sup>

But what is to be kept in mind is that Charlotte Bronte was not writing merely a love-story. Moreover, such an interpretation of the novel may limit its range and depth. Charlotte Bronte as an innovator enriched the English novel with her 'intensity', which was not only associated with love, but also with other matters such as religious ecstasy and emotional, moral sensitivity. The emotional life of the heroine is the major concern of the novel and all the other aspects such as manners and morals are important as shaping influences.

The novel presents the eternal conflict between the flesh and spirit. Jane tries to achieve self-fulfilment in a manner, whereby social and moral conventions will not be violated and keep intact the forbearing and submissive self which lives by them. Like many of Charlotte's other protagonists, Jane's personality is a fusion of contradictory elements, such as revolt and compliance with the moral code, or in other words, imaginative flights and practicality. According to the story, Jane is a governess, as such, a servant who is chained to the restraints imposed by her social position, which demand industriousness, submission and self-denial. But at the same time, she is an 'upper' class servant, possessing an 'imaginative awareness' and 'cultivated sensibility', which are pre-requisites in a teacher.

The method, Charlotte Bronte chooses, in order to present the internal conflict in her heroine is the fictional autobiography. This enables the writer to reveal the moral and emotional growth of the individual, through self-revelation. The novel consists of five stages, represented by the five places associated with five different periods in the life of the central character. Each place and period projects an external situation and a condition of Jane's heart, and a step in her moral growth.

The book can be studied in four parts. "Gateshead", is a time period from late autumn to January; "Lowood," is January to eight and a half years later; "Thornfield" is October to midsummer, about nine months and "Moor House," is from midsummer to June, about a year. The book ends in "Ferndean", the place and time where Jane lives with Mr. Rochester. Jane Eyre herself tells the story, ten years later. The story unfolds as the chronological tale of Jane's life, through occasional

---

1. W.A. Craik, *The Bronte Novels*, C. Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1968, p. 71.

2. *ibid.*



flashback revelations of the past life.

The opening of the book introduces Jane as an orphan living in the hostile home of her aunt, Mrs. Reed and cousins, John, Eliza and Georgiana. The occupants of this house-hold go to every extreme of mistreatment that Jane receives at their hands. She is both humiliated and isolated, even while she is a part of this family. Recording Jane's own words :

I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there, I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed, or her children or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them. They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathise with one amongst them, a heterogenous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities, a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure, a noxious thing cherishing the germs of indignation as their treatment, of contempt of their judgement.

It is easy to discern Jane's situation in the Reed household. Jane anyhow hates to become an object of sympathy or a passive receiver of all vindictiveness. She comments :

All John Reed's violent tyrannies, all his sister's proud indifference, all his mother's aversion, all the servants' partiality, turned up in my disturbed mind like a deep deposit in a turbid well. Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, forever condemned ?

All this misconduct and the culmination of rage over the past mistreatments finds expression in Jane's violent reaction to John Reed's bullying. He throws a book at her, and Jane attacks him in repercussion. For this, Jane is punished severely. The family including Bessie, the nurse, the Abbot, Mrs. Reed's maid, fail to justify Jane's attitudes against John's misbehaviour and the child is locked in the dreadful Red room. This room is thus described by Jane :

The red room was spare chamber, very seldom slept in ... it was one of the largest and stateliest chambers in the mansion ... This room was chilly, because it seldom had a fire, it was silent ... because remote from the nursery and kitchen; solemn, because it was known to be seldom entered ... Mrs. Reed herself, at far intervals, visited it to review the contents of a secret drawer in the wardrobe, where were stored diverse parchments, her jewel casket and a miniature of her deceased husband and in whose last words lies the secret of the red room, the spell which kept it so lonely in spite of its grandeur."

Jane goes on to state that Mr. Reed had been dead nine years, it was in this chamber he breathed his last, here he lay in state, from here his coffin was borne

by the undertaker's men and since that day, a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion.

This is the 'red room' to which Jane is banished. At first she is full of anger and indignation, but soon self-doubt and anguish grip her. Jane views herself in the mirror as half-fairy and half-imp. Jane's imagination makes her believe that spirit of her uncle, who had died in this room, was haunting the room. She interprets a moving light in the ceiling as the spirit's presence and screams with fear. She further annoys the agitated aunt and is locked back in the room, even while she plunges into unconsciousness.

The opening of the book reveals the sensitive and emotional child of ten being confronted by forces of oppression and cruelty. The set of some main characters of the book are introduced along with Jane's pathetic situation. The red room's experience recurs later in her life. The feeling of being trapped in a room has psychic experience which shows her the way to proceed. The book finds unity in this pattern of foreshadowing and repetition of certain images and motifs.

Jane finds a friendly attitude in Mr. Lloyd. Ironically, Jane feels more secure with this stranger. She feels "an inexpressible relief, soothing conviction of protection, security" in Mr. Lloyd's presence, even when he is not a part of the Reed household, or in any way related to Jane. This new friend recommends to Mrs. Reed that Jane should go away to school. Jane learns about her parents indirectly, by overhearing the conversation between Bessie and Abbott. Her mother had married a poor clergyman and was disinherited for it. Both her parents had died of typhus, when she was still an infant. This method of learning her history by overhearing conversation is the device used by the writer to highlight Jane's isolation in the Reed household. Isolated from the rest of the family, Jane feels a change will be made in her situation. This idea is confirmed by the conversation between Bessie and Abbot. She passes a completely lonely winter. The months of November and December pass without Jane's taking part in any of the festivities. She consoles herself with her doll and the occasional kindness of Bessie. On January 15, Mr. Brocklehurst comes to talk about Jane's entering Lowood. Jane cannot appreciate the countenance of this man, who seems to her quite forbidding. He questions Jane about her religious belief in hell and suggests that her sins might take her there. This boastful man is shocked to hear from Jane that she does not like to read the Psalms. Her frankness annoys him and he brags about his own son's love for the Bible. Jane's reputation is further injured by Mrs. Reed, who misinforms Mr. Brocklehurst about Jane's conduct. Jane interprets her position as follows :

Now, uttered before a stranger, the accusation cut me to the heart;  
I dimly perceived that she was already obliterating hope from the

new phase of existence which she destined me to enter ; I felt, though I could not have expressed the feeling, that she was sowing aversion and unkindness along my future path : I saw myself transformed under Mr. Broklehurst's eye, into an artful, noxious child and what could I do to remedy the injury ?

Mr. Brokelhurst leaves with an impression that Jane is after all full of deceit as he has Jane's seat reserved in the "lake burning with fire and Brimstone". After this pusedo-priest leaves, Jane reacts strongly and tells Mrs. Reed, how cruel she has been. She frightens the self-centred woman and gains her first emotional victory. But soon the feeling of triumph fades into loneliness and despair. Anyhow her defiance and truthful reaction to her bullying aunt strengthens Jane and she gets prepared for her difficult life at Lowood.

In Bessie, Jane finds a companion, who understands her inner turmoil and who lights within her a spirit of courage and strength. The servant advises Jane to be more bold and not to be afraid. She is the only one who wishes Jane goodbye at the time of her departure from Gateshead at the age of ten.

This is one Phase of Jane's life, which winds up on a sad note. At Gateshead, Jane has found little love or understanding. She has grown to learn about the sad history of her parents yet she, in no way, considers herself inferior. The chapter that covers this part of the book reveals the truancy of Mrs. Reed and bullying and selfish attitude of her children toward Jane. Out of this treatment Jane emerges as a strong character, who has the will and defiance to fight for her own meaningful existence. Her sense of imagination is highlighted in her perceiving the presence of her dead uncle in the red room. Her humour reflects in her idea as to how one can avoid hell, that is by keeping good health and not allowing death to take over. Her sense of compassion and love is highlighted by her feeling of comfort in the company of two outsiders, that is Bessie and the rustic physician, Mr. Lloyd. Hence, this opening part of the book reveals much of Jane's character.

Bronte, however, is all set to present her story in a well formed plot. She prepares the reader for the next phase of Jane's life, as Jane says : "Thus was I severed from Bessie and Gateshead; thus whirled away to unknown and as I then deemed, remote and mysterious region." The story is made more realistic by frequent references to the passage of time :

Days and weeks passed. November, December and half of January passed away. Christmas and the New Year had been celebrated at Gateshead with usual cheer.

Chapter V of the book also opens with such a reference to time and makes the story look realistic :

Five O'clock had hardly struck on the morning of the nineteenth of January, when Bessie brought a candle to my closet and found me already dressed. I had risen half an hour before her entrance and washed my face, and put on my clothes by the light of a half-moon just setting, whose rays streamed through the narrow window near my crib. I was to leave Gateshead that day by a coach which passed the lodge gates at six a.m.

After a long and an endless journey, Jane reaches Lowood, where on the first day she meets Miss Miller, an underteacher, Miss Temple, superintendent, Miss Smith, Miss Scatcherd, Madame Pierrot, and a girl friend. This long day is not very encouraging, as it is filled with study, some unsavoury food, and some unkindness. Jane also suffers from an acute feeling of uncertainty. Far from Gateshead, she is in a mental and emotional state of confusion. This school at Lowood has a close resemblance with the Rev. Carus Wilson's Clergy Daughter's school at Cowan Bridge, on the border of Westmorland. This institution lay below the foothills of the Lake District, in a green wooded valley. No vacations were allowed, and the conditions were certainly far from good. The Charity school at Lowood is a portrayal of the inconsistency between outward religious observance and the lack of kindness in the school life. In writing about this school, Charlotte is also conscious of the fatal sickness that her sisters, Maria and Elizabeth had suffered, while at the Cowan Bridge School. Helen Burns, the fictional portrayal of her sisters, represents their experience. Helen is the only comforting company that Jane finds at Lowood. Delicate, and with an unchildlike gentleness and thoughtfulness, Helen annoys her teachers. Miss Scatcherd is the one who treats her with unforgivable severity. Jane draws close to Helen Burns, even when the two believe in opposing philosophies. Helen counsels endurance and Christian forgiveness. Jane believes in loving only those who love her. She is ready to defy those who unduly strike at her. Helen believes in submitting to fate while Jane would fight against her fate. For Helen the idea of eternity is a "rest, a mighty home." Jane expresses her fighting spirit through her dialogues with Helen. The charges alleged against Jane by Mrs. Reed and those reported at the school by Mr. Brocklehurst are removed after a confirmation from Mr. Lloyd. Mrs. Temple makes an inquiry and the positive response from him clears Jane's record. After this Jane sets to work afresh, resolved to prove her worth. Mrs. Temple becomes her ideal.

Soon she loses her friend Helen, when the latter dies in Jane's embrace. With Helen's death also ends the winter at Lowood. Suffering from cold weather also ends, for the spring dawns on. Jane too begins to grow out of the depression, even while she continues to have her apprehensions about life and death, God and His Eternal land of bliss.

"Where is God ? What is God ?"

Helen's strong belief in the "regions of happiness" makes Jane ask.

"Where is that region ? Does it exist ...?"

At the end of this phase of her association with Helen Burns and her experience at Lowood, Jane is left with a feeling that the present is only a little island in a chaotic abyss.

The opening of Chapter X of the book reads as follows :

"Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence.

...I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence."

Out of these eight years, Jane continues as a pupil for six years and a teacher for two more. The conditions at Lowood are improved yet after Mrs. Temple marries and leaves, Jane finds no interest in continuing her stay at Lowood. Her restlessness leads her to advertise for a job and in response, she obtains a position as a governess. After an unattended query to Mrs. Reed, Jane gets ready to set out to another phase of her life. Mrs. Reed does not care about what Jane does, but on the last day before her departure Bessie comes to see her. She reports to Jane the unprosperous condition of the Reed family and also induces in Jane a new confidence to take life bravely. The chapter brings to a close, the first eighteen years of Jane's life and Jane through her psychic guidance sets out to make the best in spite of most ordinary appearance and plain looks. The last line of Chapter Ten hints at Jane's new venture :

"We (Jane and Bessie) parted finally at the door of the Brocklehurst Arms there : each went her separate way; she set off for the brow of Lowood Fell to meet the conveyance which was to take her back of Gateshead; I mounted the vehicle which was to bear me to new duties and a new life in the unknown environs of Millcote." (P. III)

### TEXT USED FOR REFERENCES

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* : Introduction and Notes by Storm Jameson, London; Pan Books, 1967.

## 2.3 SHORT NOTES

### 1. Jane's childhood.

**Ans.** The opening of the book introduces Jane as an orphan, as a dependent in her uncle's house. Her uncle is also dead, and Mrs. Reed, his widow does not care to be kind or humane towards her. Mrs. Reed and her three children, John, Eliza and Georgiana, offer Jane only hostility and feelings of deprivation. She feels absolutely isolated and deprived among them. John is a big bully, and Georgiana and Eliza are selfish and indifferent.

### 2. The 'RED ROOM' — as described by Jane.

**Ans.** The 'Red Room' was a spare chamber, very seldom slept in. It was one of the

largest and stateliest chambers in the mansion. A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, huge with curtains of deep red damask, stood out with a tabernacle in the centre, the two large windows, with their blinds all drawn were half shrouded in festoons and falls of simple drapery. The carpet was red and the table covered with a crimson cloth. The unslept bed was layered with mattresses and pillows. The lone arm chair with a stool in front of it looked like a pale throne.

**3. Jane's experience of the Red-Room.**

**Ans.** The room with its chilliness and vacant surrounding looked haunted and gloomy. Herself, she felt as phantom as she looked into the depth of the mirror. Bessie's evening tales and superstition add to her dismal thought. She broods over her grim situation. Mr. Reed had breathed his last in this room. As a culmination of all this gloom and despair, Jane has a strong feeling that the room is visited by the spirit of Mr. Reed. This scares her, and she screams, finally falling into unconsciousness.

**4. Jane's relationship with Mr. Lloyd.**

**Ans.** After her frightful nightmare in the Red-Room, Jane awakens from her unconsciousness, protected in the company of Mr. Lloyd, the apothecary, who is called to visit upon her in her sickness. Though Mr. Lloyd is a stranger, and does not belong to Gateshead, Jane can easily confide in Mr. Lloyd and feel secure.

**5. Jane's journey from Gateshead to Lowood.**

**Ans.** Bessie is the only one who wishes Jane goodbye when she leaves Gateshead. The long fifty miles to Lowood are both lonesome and tiring for little Jane. The strange surroundings and a feeling of insecurity make her lose all her appetite. The deepening twilight and blowing countrywind lulls her to sleep in the coach and she is awakened by its ceasing motion. She is received at Lowood, amidst rain, wind and darkness.

**2.4 Self-Check Exercise — Activity for the Student :**

1. Describe the early phase of Jane Eyre's life.
2. Who is Mr. Lloyd in the novel *Jane Eyre*?
3. What do you learn about Jane's parents from the story of the novel?
4. Who is Mr. Brocklehurst?
5. What do you know about Bessie?

**2.4.1 Answers to Self-Check Exercise :**

1. Jane Eyre is introduced as an orphan living in the hostile home of her aunt Mrs. Reed and her cousins—John, Eliza and Georgiana. The occupants of this household go to every extreme of mistreatment that Jane receives at their hands.

- She is both humiliated and isolated even while she is a sad part of this family.
2. Mr. Lloyd is quite friendly to Jane and she feels more secure with this stranger than with anybody else. Though he is not a part of the Reed household or in anyway related to Jane, yet he recommends to Mrs. Reed that Jane should go away to school.
  3. We come to know about Jane's parents from the conversation between Bessie and Abbott. Her mother had married a poor clergyman and was disinherited for it. Both her parents had died of typhus when she was still an infant.
  4. Mr. Brocklehurst is a forbidding-looking man. He questions Jane about her religious belief in hell and suggests that her sins might take her there. He is shocked to hear from Jane that she does not like to read the psalms and her frankness and confession annoy him.
  5. Bessie is a companion of Jane who understands her inner turmoil and who lights within her a spirit of courage and strength.

### **2.5 Summing-up**

In this lesson, we have made a critical study of the text. You are advised to critically analyse and evaluate the important characters and situations as revealed in this part of the story.

---

**LESSON NO. 1.3**

---

**CHARLOTTE BRONTE : *JANE EYRE*  
A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE TEXT**

**3.0 Objectives**

**3.1 Introduction**

**3.2 A Critical Study of the Novel — *Jane Eyre***

**3.3 Short Notes (Text-Based)**

**3.4 Self-Check Exercise — Activity for the Student**

3.4.1 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

**3.5 Summing-up**

**3.0 Objectives :**

- (a) To critically study and analyse the text of *Jane Eyre*.
- (b) To evaluate the student's comprehension and understanding of the details of the story.

**3.1 Introduction :**

In this lesson, we shall continue with our study of the text and make an in-depth critical analysis of the incidents, situations and characters in the novel.

**3.2 A Critical Study of the Novel : *Jane Eyre***

This lesson is a continuation of previous lesson (Lesson No. 2). In the previous lesson, we gave you an analysis of first two phases of Jane's life, her situation at the Gateshead, and her experiences at Lowood. In this lesson, we shall give a detailed analysis of the next two phases of Jane's life, her life at Thornfield, where she works as a governess and a teacher for Adele (This phase is not a very long period, even though it constitutes the longest and the most significant part of the book), and her visit to the Moor House, where she lands up after her sad exit from Thornfield. This study also includes the ending of the novel, which is a fulfilling resolution of Jane to finally marry the man she loves. After an inner instinct sets her on the road that brings her to Mr. Rochester, Jane arrives at Ferndean and settles down with her duties and her bonds with her husband.

Jane's life at Thornfield covers a time period of about nine months—October to mid summer. After a sixteen hours ride from Lowood, Jane takes a halt in the Inn at Millcote. This change of scene makes Jane very apprehensive. Addressing the reader directly, Jane says, "... though I look comfortably accommodated, I am



not very tranquil in my mind. I thought when the coach stopped here there would be some one to meet me; I looked anxiously around ... I had no resource but to request to be shown into a private room and here I am waiting, while all sorts of doubts and fears are troubling my thoughts ...”

Jane inquires about Thornfield from the innkeeper and soon learns that there is a man waiting to receive her. Thus she is escorted to the new surroundings. After a two hours drive, Jane enters the vast premises of Thornfield. The exterior landscape of this estate is modelled on a place known as the Rydings, Birstall, about twenty miles from Haworth. Charlotte, in September, 1832 had visited her friend Ellen Nussey at the Rydings. Equally pleasant is the disposition of Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper, whom Jane thinks at first to be the owner. Mrs. Fairfax cordially greets Jane. Soon Jane finds out her pupil to be Adele Verens, who is a ward of Mr. Rochester, the owner and master of the house. In addition to these, the household at Thornfield is inhabited by Leah, a maid, John the coachman and his wife, Sophie, Adele's French nurse, and Grace Poole. Jane is also introduced to the owner of Thornfield, in his absence. Mrs. Fairfax complains of Mr. Rochester's long absence from the mansion and his indifference toward its care. Jane does not seem to be aware of the existence of Mr. Rochester and this surprises Mrs. Fairfax. Jane says;

I had never heard of him before; but the old lady seemed to regard his existence as a universally understood fact, with which everybody must be acquainted by instinct.

This reference to Rochester is significant as it gives a hint about the man's personality and the significant position that he holds in the novel. Jane gets inquisitive about Mr. Rochester's personality, after she has met Adele, his ward, who has a French background. But to all her queries, Mrs. Fairfax can only inform that he is a respected man, both within the family and the neighbourhood. All that she has to say about his character is :

... his character is unimpeachable .... He is rather peculiar perhaps; he has travelled a great deal, and seen a great deal of the world, ... he is clever.

Explaining the peculiarity in his character, Mrs. Fairfax continues to say :

... you feel it when he speaks to you; you cannot be always sure whether he is in jest or earnest, whether he is pleased or the contrary; you don't thoroughly understand him, he is a very good master.

Thus what Jane and her reader gather about Mr. Rochester is that “he is considered a just and liberal landlord by his tenants,” even though, “he has never lived much amongst them.” About the Rochesters, Jane learns (again from the same source) that they have been rather a violent than a quiet race in their time, “now resting in tranquility in their graves.” Mrs. Fairfax further shows Jane the three

floors of the house, the attic, and the roof. While on the third floor, Jane hears a strange laugh which is alarming as well as scaring. Mrs. Fairfax explains that the disturbing laughter comes from Grace Poole, who is a little eccentric. After a round of the house, Jane collects that Thornfield has aspects of gloom, and vault-like strangeness. Still, she finds it equally cheerful and experiences the warmth and kindness in Mrs. Fairfax's attitude and the overall security in the atmosphere. Jane's feeling of good fortune in the indefinite future and her acceptance of the tragic mirthless laugh are both prophetic.

Keeping close to the realistic mode of fiction, Charlotte Bronte keeps reporting the time. October, November and December pass with Jane getting used to the house and its inhabitants. She often wanders in the third floor hall dreaming about her exciting future and constantly being conscious of the strange low laughter that seems to haunt the house. Jane's first encounter with Mr. Rochester is co-incidental and also dramatic to some extent. One January morning, after giving Adele a day off her studies and taking up an errand of posting a letter of Mrs. Fairfax, Jane sets out for a welcoming walk on a winter afternoon. While resting on a stile near an icy causeway, Jane sees a horseman and a dog approach. When the horse slips, the rider's foot is sprained, Jane helps him. He appears dark, forbidding and unhandsome. The first description that Jane gives about him (Mr. Rochester) reads as follows :

... I could see him plainly. His figure was enveloped in a riding cloak, fur collared, and steel clasped; its details were not apparent. But I traced the general points of middle height and considerable breadth of chest. He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow; his eyes and gathered eyebrows looked ireful and thwarted; he was past youth, but had not reached middle age, perhaps he might be thirty five.

Speaking about her experience with beauty, Jane continues to say :

I had a theoretical reverence and homage for beauty, elegance, gallantry, fascination; but had I met those qualities incarnate in masculine shape, I should have known instinctively that they neither had nor could have sympathy with anything in me, and should have shunned them as one would fire, lightning or anything else that is bright but antipathetic.

Encouraged by the stranger's 'frown' and 'the roughness of behaviour', Jane insists on helping him and because she helps him, she feels a kinship with him. When she returns from mailing her letter, she finds that the stranger is Mr. Rochester, her employer.

Jane's encounter with Mr. Rochester leaves a certain kind of effect on her.

Though she does not mention this openly yet in a symbolic way she describes her consciousness of the slow life in Thornfield until this moment. On her return from her venture, she feels depressed to enter the gloomy halls of Thornfield.

"To pass its threshold was to return to stagnation."

This feeling of stagnation is symbolic. Jane lingers on around the house before entering. But just as she enters it, a changed atmosphere is all set to receive her. Mr. Rochester has reached home before her. This is followed by a discourteous and abrupt interview by Mr. Rochester. But Jane takes it easy and performs well. On her first formal interview with him, Mr. Rochester tells her that she has "the look of another world." He also talks about strange things, such as Jane bewitching his horse and her waiting "for the men in green". Jane, anyhow, is not perturbed by such peculiar statements. Mr. Rochester surveys three of the paintings made by her and while he analyses them Jane once again takes an opportunity to address the reader directly :

I must premise that they are nothing wonderful. The subjects had, indeed, risen vividly on my mind. As I saw them with the spiritual eye, before I attempted to embody them, they were striking; but my hand would not second my fancy, and in each case it had wrought out but a pale portrait of the thing I had conceived.

After a discussion on Jane's paintings and the relationship between her ideas and her handwork, Mr. Rochester abruptly desires the withdrawal of Jane along with Adele and Mrs. Fairfax. Once back in their rooms, Jane comments on Mr. Rochester's sudden changes of mood. Mrs. Fairfax defends him.

... if he has peculiarities of temper, allowance should be made ... Partly because it is his nature and partly because he has painful thoughts, no doubt, to harass him and make his spirits unequal.

Mrs. Fairfax hints at family trouble between him and his deceased father and brother. Anyhow, the first acquaintance between the two leaves an impression on the reader about their interest in each other. Rochester's constant questioning reveals his interest in Jane and his discourteous attitude does not frighten her. The content of Jane's paintings symbolizes Rochester's way of thinking and Jane's attitude towards life. They also set the mood for the further mode of action in the novel. For several days that follow Mr. Rochester seems to pay little attention to Jane and then he calls for her. In a witty and a humorous tone, Rochester asks Jane if she considers him handsome and she replies in the negative. The conversation between them has a touch of frankness and honesty. Though Jane cannot really understand him, he confesses about his faults apologetically.

I proceed almost as freely as I were writing thoughts in a diary ....  
When fate wronged me, I had not wisdom to remain cool; I turned

desperate, then I degenerated.

Rejecting Jane's idea that repentance is the cure of remorse, Rochester goes on to say :

It is not its cure. Reformation may be its cure; and I could reform—I have strength yet for that – if – but where is the use of thinking if it hampered, burdened, cursed as I am ? Besides since happiness is irrevocably denied to me, I have a right to get pleasure out of life; and I will get it, cost what it may.

This close talk with Jane reveals Mr. Rochester's growing interest in Jane. He has made up his mind to win over Jane, and this he can do by his keen indulgence in Adele. Rochester expresses his keen love and aspiration for Adele, about whom he says :

My spring is gone, however; but it has left me that French floweret on my hands; ... Not valuing now the root whence it sprang; having found that it was of a sort which nothing but gold dust could manure, I have but half a liking to the blossom .... I keep it, rear it rather on the Roman Catholic principle of expiating numerous sins, great or small, by one good work.

Promising to explain this some other day, Rochester wishes Jane goodnight. But he soon resumes his talk and tells Jane about Celine Varens, an opera dancer, who was his French mistress. He had loved her and lavished everything until he discovered her duplicity and lost his love for her. But he took the abandoned Adele (whom Celine reported to be his child) to expiate his sins. Rochester does not think Adele is his child yet he has avowed to take care of her. In between this expiation, Rochester looks at the house and tells Jane that he both likes and hates Thornfield. And in spite of the sorrow that dwells there he would find happiness and goodness here. After this dialogue Jane admits to the reader of her fondness for Mr. Rochester. She thinks how lonely Thornfield would be without him. She also feels sympathetic towards Adele.

That night while she lies awake in her bed she feels some fingers groping on the door of her room. She can also hear the faint laughter that sounded almost demonic. The fear and anxiety prompt her to find Mrs. Fairfax, but on opening the door, she finds a candle burning and smoke coming out of Mr. Rochester's room. She enters his room and tries to wake him. She succeeds in saving him from the fire. Rochester desires the whole matter to be kept quiet. He goes upstairs and Grace Poole is considered to be the originator of the fire. Back in his room, Rochester holds Jane's hand and does not allow her to leave. Finally in her room, she cannot sleep both for joy and for fear. The mutual liking between Jane and Rochester deepens. Rochester is ambivalent about his feelings as he is ambivalent about his feelings

for Thornfield. The words associated with him are 'pain', 'shame', 'impatience', 'disgust', 'hard and cynical'. There is strange 'energy in his voice and strange 'fire' in his look. Yet Jane can perceive the depth of some sorrow that he is trying to overcome. He rebukes her and holds her at the same time and Jane can see that his degenerated interior is looking for some support. Jane's help comes in the form of her role in saving him from the devastating fire. This is the second time that Jane saves him from physical pain. This foreshadows the future support that Jane is to offer to Rochester.

Jane undergoes a phase of anxiety. She both desires and fears to see Mr. Rochester. The incident of fire perturbs her. The house thinks that the fire was from the candle left burning by Mr. Rochester. Jane is unable to understand the mystery even after a talk with Grace Poole. She hopes to see Mr. Rochester, who as Mrs. Fairfax reports, has gone to Mr. Eshton's place at Leas. Mrs. Fairfax also describes the party of Leas and the beautiful women there, especially Blanche Ingram. This information affects Jane. She reproaches herself in dreaming of Mr. Rochester. To regain her balance, she makes a sketch of her own face and an imaginary drawing of Blanche Ingram on ivory. This helps her to gain self-control, the self-control, which later in the book, is so significantly marked in Jane's character. Even while she controls her passions, Jane is disappointed when Mrs. Fairfax says that Mr. Rochester may be gone for a year or so. Lecturing herself for her emotional attachment to Mr. Rochester, Jane wonders if she should leave Thornfield. Soon the news of Mr. Rochester's arrival along with his guests, changes the mood of the house as well as of Jane. Intense preparations fill the time. Even while the mystery about Grace Poole and the haunting laughter deepens, Jane's thoughts are more full of the presence of Mr. Rochester and his guests after they arrive, especially the beautiful Miss Ingram, whom Jane finds beautiful and haughty and sarcastic. Blanche Ingram's presence and her flirtations with Mr. Rochester make Jane realise how much she loves him.

In fact, the presence of these outsiders is used by Charlotte to highlight the personalities of the main characters and even to bring out their inner most feelings. Jane's plainness, poverty, position, disposition are contrasted to those of Blanche Ingram while Mr. Rochester's grim and virile personality contrasts with the handsome but flavourless personalities of the other men present. Charlotte also takes this opportunity to expose that class of society which spoke low and with scorn about the profession of governesses. Charlotte's own sufferings as a governess make her hit back at such society ladies.

Jane analyses Blanche Ingram's character and tries to justify in her own mind the relationship that seems to grow between Blanche and Rochester. Rochester's flirtatious attitude raises a conflict in Jane's mind. She fails to see how

he can adore Blanche Ingram, for she can see what Blanche really is. The party proceeds in merriment. One day Mr. Rochester goes to Millcote. A stranger, named Mr. Mason arrives from the West Indies. He is both vague and unsettled. A Gypsy woman also comes to tell fortunes and the unmarried ladies go to her to inquire about their fortunes. After an encounter with this gypsy, Jane realizes that the gypsy is Mr. Rochester. She is not much taken aback as she had taken precautions to answer all his (gypsy's) questions. She had thought the gypsy to be Grace Poole. On the other hand, the gypsy's disguise enables Mr. Rochester to get rid of Blanche's false love by telling her that he (Mr. Rochester) has no real fortune and also he comes to know the real worth of Jane's love for him. She vows her allegiance to him in every situation. Her love for him by now, is unconditional :

I was forgetting all his faults, for which I had once kept a sharp look out. It had formerly been my endeavour to study all sides of his character to take the bad with the good; and form the just weighing of both to form an equitable judgement. Now I saw no bad.

Mr. Mason's arrival upsets Mr. Rochester. He leans on Jane, regards her with a troubled look. This leaning is once again symbolic. Later in the novel this dependence on Jane becomes quite significant. Jane also by intuition does not like Mr. Mason much. Moreover Mr. Mason, Mr. Rochester's association with him and his stay at West Indies become a mystery for her. In any case, her feelings remain rooted in reason and conscience, her love for Mr. Rochester develops and is not unconditioned.

Jane's curiosity and her anxiety piles up further after what follows. On a well moonlit night, she is awakened by a shrill cry that pierces through the house. This comes out of the third storey, asking desperately for help. From an open inside door come snarling sounds. Jane finds Mr. Mason unconscious in a chair near the bed. He seems to have been bit by some mad person and Jane takes it to be Grace Poole. Mr. Mason is treated by the surgeon brought by Rochester. Jane is intrigued by the dialogue between Mr. Rochester and Mr. Mason. Mr. Mason murmurs;

She bit me .... She worried me like a tigress, ...

Rochester tells him :

I warned you ... it was mere folly to attempt interview tonight and alone.

Mr. Rochester shows keenness to have Mr. Mason disposed off before it is morning and while he sees him go, he says.

... you may think of her as dead and buried .... you may not think of her at all.

After Mason is gone, Rochester prays for peace. He calls for Jane and tells

her that the house is a dungeon and he invites her for a walk in the orchard. Jane expresses her fear of the inner door. She shows her concern for Mr. Rochester. She is also puzzled about Rochester's relationship with Mr. Mason. Anyway, Jane promises her assistance to Rochester in all time to come even while he talks of his marriage with Blanche Ingram. She can concentrate on his welfare even while she is completely bewildered about the happening. The entire atmosphere is that of mystery and confusion.

A respite from this mounting mystery comes with a distraction. Jane after years of a missed connection with Gateshead is summoned by a sick and dying Mrs. Reed. Jane has much faith in presentiments, and dreaming of an infant, at night she thinks it to be foreboding sign of the following sorrow. This symbolic conviction is repeated in the novel. Jane visits her aunt after taking leave of Mr. Rochester, who makes her promise of her early and definite return to Thornfield. At Gateshead, Jane is once again amongst the kins, who either hate her or ignore her to the extent of hostility. Her cousin John Reed is already dead and Mrs. Reed dies hating Jane, in spite of the latter's endeavour to win the old lady's affection. The only consolation for her is that before dying Mrs. Reed informs Jane of a living uncle in Madeira, John Eyre had inquired of Jane years back, but he had been misinformed by Mrs. Reed that Jane had died of typhus. For Jane, this living relative becomes significant and this plays an important role in the plot development of the novel.

On her return to Thornfield, she is met by Mr. Rochester whom she has missed while at Gateshead. Jane has grown emotionally within the past few years. The Reeds cannot hurt her anymore. She returns to Rochester's domain with a strong longing for his love. Yet she undergoes a great emotional turmoil;

I was going back to the Thornfield : but how long was I to stay there?  
... Where was I to go ? ... It was not my home I was going, or to a  
permanent resting-place .... But what is so headstrong as youth ? What  
so blind as inexperience ? These affirmed that it was pleasure enough  
to have the privilege of again looking at Mr. Rochester.

Uncertainty prevails over her future, yet one thing is clear to her that she had never loved anyone better.

Charlotte's constant use of exact time paces the story and gives it an air of immediacy. By this stage in the story Jane finishes her contact with the Reeds and a new kinship is introduced. Yet, at this stage what is of most important concern to Jane is her attraction towards Mr. Rochester. The emotional turmoil within her is fueled with the anxiety about Mr. Rochester's proposed marriage with Blanche Ingram. Yet she does not see any preparations for it.

Another shift in the novel is the technical change, wherein at this stage Charlotte changes to the present tense, when she writes the scene of Jane's coming upon Mr. Rochester at the stile.

They are making hay, too in Thornfield meadows ; ... now, at the hour I arrive ... How full the hedges are of rose. But I have no time to gather any; I want to be at house ... and I see Mr. Rochester sitting there .... Well, he is not a ghost, yet every nerve I have is unstrung for a moment. I am beyond my own, mastery .... I suppose. I do come on ... being scarcely cognizant of my moments and solicitous only to appear calm : and above all, to control the working muscles of my face which I feel rebel insolently against my will and struggle to express what I had resolved to conceal.

The use of this tense is continued only until Jane begins to tell her pleasure at seeing him.

Jane's anxiety finds relief when Mr. Rochester's negative wooing ultimately brings the desired climax. Jane finds it difficult to conceal her love from him and he responds with true passion. But the nature gives symbolic hints of the impending tragedy. The weather changes and that night lightning splits the great horse Chestnut tree. The Eden like Garden has the shadows of evil. Even when Rochester vows that he shall soon have her as Mrs. Rochester, Jane fears that this happiness could not be true. Even Mrs. Fairfax warns her that things may be different from what they seem to be.

Jane's self-respect refuses to accept Mr. Rochester's expensive gifts and she decides to write to her uncle John and inform him that she is to be married. She is conscious of the little fortune that she might inherit from him and she feels more confident with such a thought. She tries to maintain a deliberate distance with Mr. Rochester. Conscious of Mrs. Fairfax's warning and her morality, Jane does not allow too much sentiment. Though Rochester's motives toward Jane are pure, she does not give him any chance of coming too close.

To a modern reader, Jane's resistance and her conversation may look childish, stilled and pedantic, however, she always talks and acts as a mature person . Moreover, Jane's apprehensions always foreshadow the approaching mishappenings. Jane's determination to write to her uncle John is a preparation for hidden disaster. The evening before her wedding Jane still cannot believe that she will be Mrs. Rochester. The dream of a feeble waiting child worries her, these dreams Jane has always thought of as an evil omen. She has also dreamt that Thornfield was a dreary ruin and that she still carried that unknown child, and that when she tried to reach Mr. Rochester, he had disappeared. When she had wakened there was candle light and someone in the closet. She explains to Mr. Rochester, the horrifying experience :



There was a light on the dressing-table and the door of the closet, where before going to bed, I had hung my wedding dress veil, stood open ... a form emerged from the closet ; it took the light, held it aloft and surveyed the garments pendent from the portmanteau ... The shape standing before me had never crossed my eyes within the precincts of Thornfield Hall, ... the height, the contours were new to me. (P 307).

On Rochester's inquiry, Jane describes the figure :

It seemed, sir, a woman, tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging long down her back .... I never saw a face like it ! It was a discoloured face, it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflammation of the lineaments. (P. 307).

Jane cannot be convinced by all the clarifications that Mr. Rochester gives about the ghastly looking creature, who had visited Jane's room and had torn her wedding veil into two. She is confused over the mystery of the strange woman and the reason for her presence in Jane's room on the day before her wedding to Rochester. Yet, in the present state of mind, she accepts Mr. Rochester's explanation, though half heartedly, the measure of her acceptance of all those things, strange unexplained things, is the measure of her trust and love for Mr. Rochester. Jane connects her terror at the vampire in her room with her terror, the time she had fainted in the red-room at Gateshead. This sort of re-experiencing of the same emotions tend to unify the book.

On the wedding day, Jane feels that Mr. Rochester is extremely conscious of some apprehending danger. He seems to be fighting some invisible resistance. This is the significant part of the book. Certain aspects of the plot are resolved. The mystery of the laughter and the vampire visiting Jane's room is finally solved. All Jane's premonitions come true. Just as the wedding ceremony is to take off, two strangers enter the church. One of them Mr. Briggs, a solicitor, announces that Mr. Rochester is already married, so he cannot marry Jane. Mr. Mason who accompanies him is the proof to this statement. Mr. Rochester calls off the wedding in his helplessness. He exhibits his mad wife to the group. On the way down, the solicitor tells Jane that her uncle will be glad to hear that she is clear of the blame. Her letter to her uncle had given Mr. Mason the news of her impending marriage. Jane now learns that her uncle is dying. Dejection takes over her and she locks herself in her room. In her state of mind, she cannot concentrate in prayers.

Jane locks herself up in this state for quite some time and leaves her room only when she is famished. Her pride tells her that she must leave, even though her passions make such thinking difficult. Mr. Rochester pleads with her. He tries

to explain his situation and how he had been tricked into marrying Bertha, who had degenerated into complete madness. Jane forgives him but does not give in to his passions. She refuses his offer to go with him. She advises him to trust in God and in himself. In order to maintain her dignity, and his respect, Jane must leave Thornfield. Mr. Rochester reminds her that she has no relatives, who can care, but she says, she cares for herself and would respect herself. At night Jane dreams of the red-room at Gateshead. The light that had frightened her so long ago turns into human form, who tells her to flee temptation. This is the end of Jane's life at Thornfield.

This part of the book highlights Jane's character and the true love of Rochester. Jane too realizes this love as she once again addresses the reader :-

Reader : I forgave him at that moment, (when Mr. Rochester pleads his genuine love for her) and on the spot. There was such deep remorse in his eye, such true pity in his tone, such manly energy in his manner and beside there was such unchanged love in his whole look : I forgave him all; yet not in words, not outwardly; only at my heart, core. (P. 323)

With this feeling of forgiveness and unshaken love for Rochester, Jane finally steps out of Thornfield. The morning outside is bright and warm but Jane feels only death. She takes an unknown road towards nowhere. This symbolises her state, she has no destination, and she must go. She walks as far as she can and finally takes a coach paying all the money. She has to be taken as far away as possible. She shares her sad condition with the reader :

Gentle reader, May you never feel what I then felt ! May your eyes never shed such stormy, scalding heart wrung tears as poured from mine. May you never appeal to heaven in prayers so hopeless and so agonized as in that hour left my lips, for never may you, like me, dread to be the instrument of evil to what you wholly love. (P. 47)

Jane leaves Rochester and her own situation to God, and moves into yet another phase of her life. After two days of her sad and difficult journey, she lands at cross road. Hunger and fatigue take over and she finds herself desperately looking for food and shelter. She approaches a house, and finds two young girls studying German. Once again, Charlotte Bronte, here seems to be conscious of the memory from her own life. Charlotte, Emily and Anne Bronte studied, so that they might become successful teachers. The reference to the cold and chills also hints at the Bronte's own life on the Moor. Jane too speaks of life in Nature; it becomes for her "the universal mother."

As she watches from outside the house of St. John, he startles her. St. John, who has just come home, takes Jane inside and she is taken into the kind care of

St. John, and his sisters Diana and Mary. Jane introduces herself as Jane Elliot. She learns about her hosts from Hannah, their servant. She is informed that St. John insisted on being a parson, and girls who love to read aim to be governesses (Once again a hint to Charlotte's sisters).

Jane develops liking for the three, as they keep her with generosity and affection. St. John tries to probe into Jane's past, but she refuses to reveal much. He promises to help Jane find employment and she continues to live with them, with this hope. She enjoys the companionship of Diana and Mary and shares their love of the Moor and their pleasure in reading. With St. John she cannot share much. In fact, St. John's character is drawn in contrast with that of Mr. Rochester. He is cold and just. Jane can see that though St. John is faithful to his pastoral duties, he is not content at heart. He preaches with force and zeal, but she can detect the bitterness of feeling. Yet Jane discovers that St. John is not rigid in his recognition of the other's relationships.

Jane accepts St. John's offer to teach in the girl's school, which he plans to start. St. John shows the stern inflexible Methodist temperament, which Charlotte had known in some of her father's curate. St. John now realizes Jane's involvement with human relationships and understands that she may not stay in the Parish for too long.

Anyhow, Jane's love for the Moor reflects Charlotte's own attachment with her home. The relationship of the three girls is replica of the relationship shared among Charlotte and her sisters. Jane's desire for independence in a sheltered asylum rather than to be a governess in a wealthy family, reflects Charlotte's own feelings for her sisters.

The further plot development is carried out by the news of death of uncle John Rivers. Each one of the Rivers receives ten guineas from his legacy. They go for their individual employments. Jane moves into her plain but a bearable cottage; she teaches twenty scholars, both with dismay and a hope for future gratification. St. John speaks to her of his dark period, and his resolution to be a missionary. Observing his unfulfilled love for Rosamond Oliver, Jane understands why Diana and Mary worry for their brother. Her own longing for Mr. Rochester becomes less painful, when seen in the light of St. John's sorrow.

Charlotte deliberately draws parallels and contrasts among her characters. Jane and St. John are almost in the same situation, each one struggling with passions. Yet finally they react in different manner. The parallel between the two turns to contrast as revealed in their dialogue where St. John states that "he is cold and that no fervor infects him" and Jane reacts that she is "hot" and that fire "dissolves ice", St. John can resist the temptation, which he names as the temptation of his flesh. He says he is cold hard man. Jane too tries to control

natural emotions through religion but Jane has warmth whereas St. John lacks it. While St. John is bothered about what others think of him, Jane is more conscious of her own conscience. She knows that even while in the daytime she can control her emotions, she is unable to control her dreams, which are often inhabited by Rochester's presence.

Another revelation brings a change of thought and feeling in Jane's life. Her true identity is revealed to the Rivers as Mr. Briggs is looking for Jane. He leaves Jane a heiress to her dead Uncle John, who has died in Madeira, leaving her twenty thousand pounds. Realizing, that the Rivers are her cousins, for Uncle John is a common relation, Jane feels happy, for she has found both family and wealth. Jane divides the amount equally among all the four and feels a sense of satisfaction.

At Christmas, St. John makes an offer to Jane. While Jane is engaged in the thoughts of Mr. Rochester (She tries to get news of Rochester from Mrs. Fairfax) St. John asks her to marry him and gives her a quarter of an hour to think over. He does not love her, but thinks she will make a good missionary wife. Jane does not mind the idea of going with St. John to India as a missionary but she offers to go as his sister. This is not acceptable to him. St. John's cold treatment is opposed to Mr. Rochester's warmth. Moreover, his commanding spirit tries to possess Jane. His "experiment kiss", seems to "fix a seal to her fetters." Jane in her endeavour to please him feels her own identity to be obliterated. She says :

I daily wished more to please him; but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation. He wanted to train me to an elevation, I could never reach. It racked me hourly to aspire to the standards he uplifted. The thing was as impossible as to mould my irregular features to his correct and classic pattern, to my changeable green eyes and sea-blue tint and solemn lustre of his own.

Jane finds this deliberate life with St. John rather taxing upon her personality. Along with this feeling of being trapped by St. John's captivity, Jane also shares with the reader that Mr. Rochester's memory is still too close to her, to make her think of some one else.

Perhaps you think I had forgotten Mr. Rochester, reader .... Not for a moment. His idea still remains with me, because it was not a vapor sunshine could disperse; nor a sand traced effigy storms could wash away; it was a name graven on a tablet, fated to last as long as the marble it inscribed. The craving to know what had become of him followed me everywhere. (P.426)

Thus, for Jane it is not easy to give into St. John's domineering offer to learn

Hindustanee instead of German, and accompany him to India, as his missionary wife. Even Diana discourages her from doing so, for she can understand the nature of the relationship between Jane and St. John.

While Jane is struggling to fight her submission to St. John, she hears the love call of Mr. Rochester. It awakens the deepest emotions within her :

It did not come out of the air nor from under the earth-nor from over head, I had heard it where or whence, for ever impossible to know. And it was the voice of a human being, a known, loved, well remembered voice that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe, wildly, eerily urgently. (P.448).

Thus powering over St. John's authority, Jane prays and retreats to her chamber and allows only the presence of God to be with her. She prays in her own way different to St. John's but effective in its own fashion.

I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit and my soul rushed out in to gratitude at his feet. I rose from the thanks giving, took a resolve and lay down, unscared, enlightened, eager but for daylight. (P. 449)

St. John thinks that Jane's spirit is willing, but her flesh weak. While Jane's spirit wills to do right, her flesh appears to be strong enough once she knows the will of heaven. With a victorious spirit, Jane leaves Moor House and leaving behind the gloomy and the binding kind of religion as represented by St. John, Jane proceeds to carry out the will of her own spirit.

After a long journey of thirty six hours, Jane once again steps on the premises of Thornfield. Her dream foreshadowing the ruin of Thornfield has come true. Mr. Rochester embodies the symbol of the shattered chestnut tree, but the good strong roots are still there holding him and Jane together. Charlotte's emphasis on stating the time and period with accurate details gives the novel its note of realism. Now at Thornfield, Jane hears from an innkeeper details of the catastrophe that had struck Thornfield. The mansion had caught fire. Mr. Rochester, in his effort to save his mad wife (who jumped from the roof) had been blinded and crippled by losing an arm. Jane learns that Mrs. Fairfax had been pensioned and Adele had been sent to school. Mr. Rochester now lived at Ferndean. Jane immediately hires a chaise to take her to Mr. Rochester. The ending of the story is prolonged. Charlotte Bronte must concentrate on the point that Mr. Rochester had submitted to God. When Jane reunites with him, the book does not end, simply announcing the union of the two lovers. The focus is upon Mr. Rochester's self-realization and his submission to God. Jane comes to him only after his submission. She agrees to become his wife, in spite of his infirmities. Thus the theme of righteousness is highlighted. Jane has after all defied and ignored the formal relations of Mr. Brocklehurst and St. John.

Here is the religion of moral consciousness and her commitment to her ownself. She has lived upto it and Rochester, through his true love for her, has been able to recognize the power of the Almighty. For him, Jane is both a physical and spiritual support. This theme of physical and moral support, which commenced from the first meeting between the two, is well carried out by the novelist throughout the story. Jane, true to her character, offers her services to Rochester and looks after his soul as a committed partner. She boosts up his degenerating spirit. Foreseeing their healthy future she insists that he is not “the blasted chestnut tree” She is more confident of him;

You are no ruin, sir no lightening struck tree; you are green and vigorous. Plants will grow about your roots .... (P. 474).

Mr. Rochester's apprehensions about his union with Jane are resolved after she marries him. She looks after him and after some time he regains enough sight in one eye to see their first born son. Jane is happy and contented. She is also committed to the warmth and affection on his ward Adele. The book winds up on a note of mutual love and understanding with grace of God.

### 3.3 SHORT NOTES

#### 1. Jane's initial impression of Thornfield.

**Ans.** At Thornfield, Jane is received by Mrs. Fairfax, the house keeper, whom Jane first thinks to be the owner. Jane finds out that her pupil is Adele Verens who is a ward of Mr. Rochester, the owner and master of the house. She hears a strange laugh, which is almost scaring. Over all, the house at Thornfield has aspects of gloom and of vault-like strangeness, at the same time there is an air of affluence, kindness and affection.

#### 2. Jane's first meeting with Mr. Rochester.

**Ans.** On a cold January day, Jane goes to mail a letter. While resting on a stile near a icy causeways, Jane sees a horseman and dog approach. When the horse slips, the rider's foot is sprained. Jane helps him. He appears dark and forbidding and unhandsome. Jane feels a certain kinship with him. Mr. Rochester, on the other hand, does not take Jane's help very willingly. He comments on Jane's out of this world appearance and calls her peculiar and selfish.

#### 3. Mr. Rochester's relationship with Adele.

**Ans.** Adele is the daughter of an opera dancer, Celine Varens, who was Mr. Rochester's mistress at one time. Celine had said that Adele was Rochester's child. Mr. Rochester does not think so yet he has taken the abandoned child and has vowed to take care of her. He feels pleasure in carrying out this task that he has taken upon himself. He feels that this “French flower” is the only

“remanant of the gone-by spring of his life.”

**4. Blanche Ingram.**

**Ans.** Miss Blanche Ingram is one of the formal and sophisticated guests that arrive at Thornfield. She is the most striking in the whole party. She is beautiful, but lacks humility and softness. She is both haughty and sarcastic. Conscious of her beauty and affluence, she is shallow in values. She wants to be a wife to Mr. Rochester only because he is a wealthy man. Charlotte has created Blanch Ingram's character as a contrast to Jane's personality.

**5. Mr. Rochester's initial relationship with Jane.**

**Ans.** Mr. Rochester is attracted toward Jane right from their first encounter. His love for her grows with every meeting. But he does not openly reveal his passions. He brings in Blanche Ingram and tries to exhibit some cruelty in his courtship of Jane, by making her think that he will marry Blanche. Although he has every intention of marrying Jane, he takes his time to propose to her. He also disguises as a gypsy to give his wooing a dramatic touch.

**6. The incident a night before Jane's wedding.**

**Ans.** Jane relates only to Mr. Rochester the horrifying experiences that she had in her room on the night before her wedding. She says that she was awakened by a candle light in her room, and found someone in the closet. Her probing exposed a tall, dark woman with dark hair and a fearful ghastly face with deep red eyes. The creature had torn the wedding veil into two pieces and had then peered at Jane before the latter finally fainted.

**7. The mystery of Thornfield.**

**Ans.** Just as Jane and Mr. Rochester are to carry out the rituals of an anxious marriage, two strangers arrive at the church and ask the priest to withhold the ceremony. Mr. Rochester is already married. The two men are, Mr. Briggs, a solicitor from Maderia and Mr. Mason, who has earlier visited Thornfield in mysterious circumstances. Mr. Rochester is not in a position to deny the fact revealed. He invites and shows the party, his wife, who attacks him. Rochester subdues her and calls off his wedding with Jane. Thus the mystery of Mr. Rochester and the strange ways of Thornfield are resolved.

**8. St. John's relationship with Jane Eyre.**

**Ans.** Revelations through the plot reveal that St. John is Jane's cousin. Jane considers him to be like a brother and St. John also mentions this relationship. Yet he proposes to her to be his wife and go with him to India on a missionary trip. Jane offers to go as his sister, but her true and strong passion for Mr. Rochester check her from giving in to St. John's wishes.

Moreover, she cannot endure St. John's possessive attitude towards her.

### **3.4 Self-Check Exercise — Activity for the Students :**

1. What are the four phases in the life of Jane ?
2. Discuss Jane's life at Thornfield.
3. What do you know about Mr. Rochester ?
4. What kind of a character is Blanche Ingram ?
5. Who is Mr. Mason ?

#### **3.4.1 Answers to Self-Check Exercise :**

1. The four phases in the life of Jane as described in the novel are her situation at the Gateshead, her experiences at Lowood, her life at Thornfield, where she works as a governess and a teacher for Adele and her visit to the Moor House where she lands up after her sad exit from Thornfield.
2. Jane's life at Thornfield covers a time period of about nine months (October to mid summer). After a sixteen hours ride from Lowood, Jane takes a halt in the inn at Millcote.
3. Mr. Rochester is a respected man both within the family and the neighbourhood. He is considered a just and liberal landlord by his tenants even though he has never lived much amongst them.
4. Jane analyses Blanche Ingram's character and tries to justify in her own mind the relationship that seems to grow between Blanche and Rochester. Rochester's flirtatious attitude raises a conflict in Jane's mind. She fails to see how he can adore Blanche Ingram, for she can see what Blanche really is.
5. Mr. Mason is a stranger who arrives from the West Indies. He is both vague and unsettled and his arrival upsets both Mr. Rochester and Jane, who by intuition does not like him much.

### **3.5 Summing-Up :**

We have made a detailed critical study of the novel and by now we are familiar with all the important characters and situations in this novel. You must prepare all these questions from the examination point-of-view.



---

**LESSON NO. 1.4**

---

**CHARLOTTE BRONTE : *JANE EYRE***

**(a) Characterization**

**(b) Important Characters**

**4.0 Objectives**

**4.1 Introduction**

**4.2 Characterization**

**4.3 Important Characters**

- 4.3.1 The Reed family
- 4.3.2 Bessie
- 4.3.3 Mr. Brocklehurst
- 4.3.4 Helen Burns
- 4.3.5 Miss Temple
- 4.3.6 Mrs. Fairfax
- 4.3.7 Bertha
- 4.3.8 Diana and Mary Rivers
- 4.3.9 St. John
- 4.3.10 Jane Eyre

**4.4 Self-Check Exercise — Activity for the Student**

**4.4.1 Answers to Self-Check Exercise**

**4.5 Summing-Up**

**4.0 Objectives :**

- (a) To analyse Bronte's art of characterisation.
- (b) To discuss important characters in *Jane Eyre*.
- (c) To evaluate the student's capability to write answers.

**4.1 Introduction :**

In the previous two lessons on Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* we have analysed the novel *Jane Eyre*. Now in this lesson we shall discuss Bronte's art of characterisation and important characters in the novel.

**4.2 Characterization :**

Characterization in Charlotte Bronte's novels is an important aspect. *Jane*

*Eyre* is not over populated with characters. Jane, the main character, is seldom among a crowd. This makes the world of this novel rather sparsely populated. Jane is seen in a small group of people at each stage of her growing up. At the Gateshead, Jane is seen in a small group of Reed family and the attendants. The first people we meet besides Jane herself are the representatives of Gateshead life. Her cousins Eliza, John and Georgiana, her aunt Mrs. Reed; the nurse Bessie and the apothecary Mr. Llyod, are figures outside the family circle, and yet it is with them that Jane seems to show signs of close kinship. In the next stage, the characters grouped around her are Brocklehurst, Helen Burns, Miss Temple and a few others. These belong to the Lowood period in Jane's life. These represent both the authorities and the subjects of this charity institution. With Jane's movement into the next phase of her life, we move to Thornfield, and meet another group of characters who help in revealing Jane's personality and offer scope for development in her character. These characters are significant for the role they play in Jane's life. At Thornfield, we meet Mrs. Fairfax, Adele, Mr. Rochester and his mad wife Bertha. We also meet the Ingrams, whom Charlotte has deliberately created with a purpose of contrast and comparison. The world of Thornfield is also limited in population, except for the parties that offer scope for some expansion in the variety of characters. Yet another group of significant characters, whom we meet at the next station, where Jane arrives, are St. John, his sister Diana and Mary, and Rosemond. Charlotte Bronte creates a vague but sufficient impression of a community at Morton. It is worth noticing here that the writer seems to be transcribing some of her difficulties with lumpish school girls in Brussels both looking at these slow English girls with a forgiving and generous eye, since they are both English and Protestant. At the final stage mention is made about Adele and Mrs. Fairfax, but the active characters by the ending of the novel are Jane herself with Mr. Rochester, arrival of their newly born son.

### **4.3 Important Characters**

#### **4.3.1 The Reed Family**

The Reed Family are a demonstration of Jane's power to overcome her circumstances. Eliza and Georgiana Reed have only the personality necessary to shadow in contrasting forms the absence of human sympathy, because of which Jane suffers. Eliza, the proud indifferent and pampered older daughter of Mrs. Reed is headstrong and selfish. She is extremely money minded and "would have sold the hair of her head if she could have made a handsome profit thereby." She unpredictably grows into a puritanical ascetic recluse. For the pink cheeked, golden haired Georgiana, her curls are essential. They are her virtues, and claims to affection. The simplicity of the representations makes them forceful, and emphasizes the pain they cause to the child Jane. Yet the simple attributes can

be taken and made to work morally when they reappear as grown up young women. Both are credible recreations, since the basis of their characters is the same. Their soullessness contributes to the grimness of their mother's death and the fact that they can no longer hurt Jane and that she can be useful to both is a measure of development. These two characters are in any case deliberately balanced and opposed. John Reed, their brother also belongs to the same kind. He is a spoilt brute. He bullies Jane and in his violence he presents the borrowed power through which he makes a physical expression of his mother's repressed impulses. John accordingly grows up to the disappointment of his mother, who has to bear above all the sorrow of his meaningless suicide. John Reed grows up to be a failure and dies in disgust. Mrs. Reed the mother of these representatives of hollow pride and victims of their own superiority is a more developed person. She charges Jane for the antagonism for the latter. She is authoritative and clever in her management of her household and her tenantry. She is deliberately pictured as a dark-skinned woman. Charlotte does not demand any justification for this character even if Mrs. Reed sticks upto her end, to her conviction that Jane is not to be forgiven. "My last hour is racked by the recollection of a deed which but for you, I should never have been tempted to commit." (p.262) She maintains double standards, and her hypocrisy demands regard from Jane. She is distressed by Jane's passionate defiance in Chapter IV of the novel, hence we are prepared for her death bed when we find her troubled by remorse, though not repentance, while her desire to put herself in the right does not ironically prevent her from still hating Jane.

Her death can only bring to Jane another encounter with death, after having experienced the death of Helen Burns. Mrs. Reed's death brings Jane an understanding about death. She can quietly witness the end of Mrs. Reed, without really feeling any thing more than a sombre tearless dismay at the fearfulness of death in such a form.

#### **4.3.2 Bessie**

Bessie is the nurse at Gateshead. She has as much structural importance as the Reeds. Though an outsider, she has even more effective relationship with Jane. She advises Jane to have more spirit and courage to face life. Jane carries into her later life many recollections out of Bessie's stories and ballads. She is the only link between Gateshead and Jane, after the latter steps out of the first asylum. Bessie becomes conspicuous by being the only person to show any affection for Jane, while at Gateshead. By visiting Jane just before she leaves Lowood, and by being the subject of odd allusions and recollections when other matters are the first concern, she keeps Gateshead in the reader's mind when it could be otherwise forgotten. She connects with all that large part of Jane's perception which expresses

itself by means of folk lore : her stories introduce Mr. Rochester to us; her belief that to dream of children was a sure sign of trouble either to one's self or one's kin prepares us, when Jane dreams too, first for Jane's return to Gateshead and Mrs. Reed's death, and second for Jane's dreams of child just before her wedding, to be seen as a serious omen of disaster.

#### 4.3.3 Mr. Brocklehurst

Mr. Brocklehurst is one of the links between Gateshead and Lowood. With his arrival on the scene comes a hint of Jane's shifting into a new phase of life. He reveals himself ironically and unconsciously to the reader in his own words and behaviour. For the over literal child, he is a personification of self-righteous religion. Mr. Brocklehurst is a typical religious hypocrite. Jane can see him as "a... black pillar! ... the straight, narrow, sable-clad shape standing erect on the rug ... the grim face at the top was like carved mask, placed above the shaft by the way of capital."

The description matched well his formidable appearance and Jane sees him rightly in a ridiculous light. His dialogue with Jane highlights not only his own character, it also sheds much light on Jane's own views on religion and her frankness about them. Mr. Brocklehurst comments on Jane's non-serious approach towards religion thus exposing his own narrow vision :

I buried a little child of five years old a day or two since, ... a good little child, whose soul is now in heaven. It is to be feared the same could be said of you were you to be called hence.

He brags about his own children, and downs Jane for not liking the Psalms. Not being in a condition to remove his doubts Jane can only cast her eyes down at the "two large feet planted on the rug" and sadly wishes to stay far enough away.

Jane continues to view him as "longer, narrower and more rigid than ever" in Lowood. His unkindness and heartlessness are exposed in his treatment towards the girls at the charity school. At the recommendation of Mrs. Reed, he exaggerates Jane's reputation in the school, as a servant of 'Evil One' and introduces her as a liar. Jane can do nothing but hate him. In spite of being terrified of public disgrace, he cannot overlook the irony in the portraits of his wife and children "splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs, even while he strongly objects to any ornament on the school girls. Even a natural curl of Julia (a girl in School) annoys him. He tells Miss Temple, that he would like the girls to be "the children of Grace." Mr. Brocklehurst in any case stands as an example of Charlotte Bronte's rare humours. He is a comic grotesque. (One of the few figures to suggest that Charlotte Bronte learned something from Thackeray, the writer she so much admired).

At Lowood, the other vital characters are Miss Temple and Helen Burns. Though we also have Miss Miller, Miss Scatcherd, and Madame Pierrot, who are

of the stock types, also used by the writer in *The Professor* and in *Villette*. There is also Mary Ann Wilson, inferior to a more serious character, Helen. But she attracts Jane for her wit, worldliness and uncritical friendliness. Mary Ann is one of those few ordinary characters (Like Adele and Mrs. Fairfax) who prevent the action from becoming too intense, and the population far sparse. Moreover, with the realistic characters such as Mary Ann, Miss Gryce and the snoring Welsh women, the time at Lowood is saved from the danger of becoming a morality play. Both Miss Temple and Helen Burns have the literary virtue of being interesting though noble characters. They demonstrate Jane's need simply for human affection, and her power to inspire it before she meets Mr. Rochester and the force of his love is added. They also prove that Jane chooses to acknowledge the positive superiority in others. She admires and respects Miss Temple just as later she submits happily to her cousins Diana and Mary, both for the energy of their characters and for their learnings.

#### 4.3.4 Helen Burns

Helen Burns is presented as a noble spirit and a stoical sufferer. Her chief function in the novel is moral and spiritual. Yet with Jane, her relationship is not merely based on these traits. With Helen, Jane's love of the exotic and sensuous is brought out in her reaction to the book (*Rasselas*) that she reads. In any case, Helen Burns is not entirely angelic. She is an untidy and absent minded girl with whom Jane develops a close relationship of comparison and contrast. Jane is an ordinary human being. She is in no way a saint or a martyr. Even Helen is not shown as a saint. She has the courage and vision which sets her apart and her actual physical sufferings do perhaps represent on a childish plane some equivalent for stoical endurance and Jane sees her as a martyr on at least one occasion for her first moral lesson to Jane. Jane expects resentment and rebellion, and indeed enjoys sympathising with Helen as with a fellow sufferer. But Helen rebukes her for her reaction : "It is weak and silly to say you cannot bear what is your fate to be required to bear." It is through her friendship with Helen that Jane gets to know herself and her world. Helen not only acts as mentor but answers questions patiently and intelligently and shows us Jane discovering normal human content. There is the last stage when Helen is dying, marked by warmth and love and relatively little spiritual exaltation. Helen's spiritual energies are shown while she is still able to lead a normal life, but when she is on her death-bed, Charlotte Bronte delicately emphasises her faith but does not idealize the last movements in a conventional or an over dramatic way. Helen's function in the novel is that of Jane's excessive vengefulness but also its cause, her excessive dependence on human love. She goes beyond the moral diagnosis of Jane and makes explicit the religious framework of the novel. As Jane's friend she makes the progress toward relationship and love.

Charlotte Bronte has used Helen's heroic qualities and weaknesses to make Jane appear more real and representative. Jane's endurance and faith are not meant to be spectacular like the endurance and faith of Helen. Jane is an extraordinary character but her ability to live in the ordinary everyday world and her need for human beings is brought out more clearly by the presence of Helen Burns.

#### **4.3.5 Miss Temple**

At Lowood, Miss Temple makes a precise but a sharp impression on Jane's life style. Her name underlines her function, which is not merely to indicate but also to act in a Christian spirit. Here is the true religion, more of action than of words. In her character, she stands in opposition to the hypocritical and harsh Puritanism of Brocklehurst. Even in her brief appearance, she leaves an impact not only on Jane's mind but also on the readers. She, with her love and generosity, is indeed one of the few redeeming features in the very grim picture of the early nineteenth century education. Charlotte Bronte creates a lively impression in the mention of the ordinary joys that Miss Temple offers to a deprived Jane. A feast of toast and cake in her warm room is more than appreciated by Jane and Helen. In her genuine desire to help Jane, Miss Temple also helps to exonerate Jane from the false charges which Jane has unhappily carried along from Gateshead. She is Jane's unofficial religious instructor, setting the latter's mind in a proper mould. Jane herself admits this formative influence of Miss Temple :

I had imbibed from her something of the nature and much of her habits; more harmonious thoughts what seemed better regulated feeling had become the inmates of my mind, I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet; I believed I was content; to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character.

To Miss Temple's instruction Jane owes the best part of her acquirements. Her friendship and society is her continual solace. Jane comments : "... she has stood me in the stead of mother, governess, and companion". It is with Helen and Miss Temple that Jane experiences her first emotional ties. After Helen's death, Jane can live in Lowood with Miss Temple as her ideal. But after Miss Temple leaves to marry Reav. Mr. Nasmyth, Jane's mind gets distracted and her restless and passionate nature begins to seek new horizons outside Lowood.

#### **4.3.6 Mrs. Fairfax**

At Thornfield there is another change in the type and the presentation of characters. As governess, Jane now has a social as well as a personal position, and the people she meets are consequently seen in their place in society as well as in the individual selves. The first person to come into Jane's contact is Mrs. Fairfax, who is not a mother to Adele, nor lady of the house, but only the housekeeper. But

she is a housekeeper with an air of dignity and respectability. This is how Jane views her even before she arrives at Thornfield.

“Mrs. Fairfax : I saw her in a black gown and widow's caps; frigid, perhaps, but not uncivil : a model of elderly English respectability.”

Mrs. Fairfax is a placid-tempered, kind-natured woman of competent education and average intelligence. She is kind enough to create an atmosphere of affection and compatibility. She is highly class conscious, and even though related to Rochester, she does not presume on the connection. She also cannot appreciate Jane's acceptance of Rochester's proposal for marriage. In any case, Mrs. Fairfax, along with Sophie and Adele, creates an atmosphere of positive good-will, which is a necessary feature of Thornfield. In her nature and compassion she may be grouped with Bessie, considering her concern for Jane and others around her.

#### **4.3.7 Bertha and Rochester**

Other than Mrs. Fairfax and Adele at Thornfield there is Bertha, the mad wife to Mr. Rochester. Her character does not need much description except that Charlotte uses her as the base for the plot where in the writer highlights not only the relationship between Jane and Mr. Rochester but also their dispositions. Jane's relationship with Mr. Rochester lies at the heart of action. Mr. Rochester attracts Jane through the quality of his passions. Jane's strong longing for human love is fulfilled through Rochester's acknowledgement and his concern for her. Jane is solicited by his dark and saturnine appearance and even on their first meeting she feels a certain kinship with him. She can understand Rochester's tortured, passionate and rebellious nature. Her love for him is reciprocal to his true passions. Just as the writer does not present Jane as extraordinarily beautiful, Mr. Rochester is also not handsome. His eyes are dark, irate and piercing with a face that is once again dark and stern. It is after Jane falls blindly in love with him that she can perceive the smile on his lips and sparkle in his eyes. Rochester's temper does change after he decides to marry Jane. More expanded and genial, his temperament becomes more compatible. Rochester's desire for a settled life is as strong as Jane's desire for human love. Though he has a home and people who wait for him anxiously, he has no one with whom he can hold a relationship. There is Mrs. Fairfax, who in spite of being a relation, is greatly conscious of her position as a house keeper. There is Adele whom he had avowed to nurture only with a feeling of remorse. Moreover, she does not bring him any pleasant memories of the past. And above all there is Bertha, who is a constant threat to his peace. Rochester is conscious about his disastrous first marriage, where he was partly a victim of his father's mercenariness and also seduced by his own sensual passion. Though Bertha is described by Charlotte in images of animality and monstrosity, Rochester does not present her as witch or an animal. He always refers to her as a human

being. Moreover, he gains the approval of Jane and Bertha, when he speaks (with genuine passion) about how he was trapped into marriage with Bertha whose family insanity was not known to him, but he was misled not only by his father and brother, but also by his own infatuations. Although Rochester condemns society and his family, he is not given to blind self-pity and emphasises his own responsibility in marrying a woman who excited his senses but displayed 'not one virtue' or quality of mind. In Jane, Rochester perceives a mind that can help him to come out of his own past which is shaded with failure and guilt. And this proves to be true. Jane finally does come to Rochester's help at Ferndean, where he is undergoing a period of repentance and penitence. Rochester's stubborn, headstrong nature mellows with affliction, and he comes to a religious philosophy, which helps him submit to what he feels is the very will of God. He admits he was wrong in trying to marry Jane, even when his first wife Bertha was alive under the same roof. This realization not only saves Rochester from final damnation, he is also rewarded by the divine power. Jane comes back to him, bringing him every bliss of family life.

Another set of characters, who appear at another stage of Jane's life, are St. John and his sisters, whom Jane meets when she lands at Morton in a very desperate situation. She is not only physically famished, but also absolutely evacuated of all feelings of closeness. The characters at Morton are presented in a sharp contrast to anyone at Thornfield. Charlotte Brontë's touch with the rustics is sure. When Jane is starving, their equally unsentimental and unmalevolent treatment without malice, gives a vivid conviction to her sufferings. The characters introduced in this chapter of her life are not too many, but each one of them is created with a purpose.

#### **4.3.8 Diana and Mary Rivers**

Diana and Mary Rivers are warm and impulsive as contrasted with the Reed sisters at Gateshead. Both the sisters are gentle and kind, and offer Jane a relationship of concord and understanding. Diana and Mary are the first women friends Jane has had since she left Lowood, and they represent the pleasures of the intellect. Despite their beauty, they are not at all young lady-like. Charlotte Brontë goes to the extent of introducing in a plot, a sharing of Jane's inheritance with them.

#### **4.3.9 St. John**

The most significant character at Morton, who needs much attention as far as Jane's association is concerned, is St. John who is a finely observed study of a man, who turns egoistical and ambitious in the service of religion. He is the most important single character in the book after Mr. Rochester, and is obviously his antithesis, religious, idealistic, handsome, cold-blooded, seeing in Jane nothing attractive ... not even youth, only a few useful mental points. He is not attractive but he is surely self-centred and ambitious for his self. His decision to become a



missionary saddens his sisters, and he is even against his dead father's wishes. Yet he pursues it with a blind and an unbalanced passion.

His passion for Rosamond Oliver only indicates his deficiency in caring in such a way for a woman so clearly inferior to his sisters. His treatment, solemn using of Biblical allusions are constantly described in terms of marble, and even a pillar, bring him close to the other clergyman, Mr. Brocklehurst. For Rosamond, his attraction is very human, his rejection of her is stoical. On Rosamond's first appearance, where she is described in image of "rose and Lily" St. John appears to her while crushing the snowy heads of the closed flowers with his foot. St. John is drawn as a contrast to Mr. Rochester, both in looks and personality. Mr. Rochester is grim, ugly and maimed. St. John is "beautiful" and "well formed." But under the former's ugliness there is warmth of deep love whereas St. John has little affection and possesses only devotion to duty. This contrast is also drawn in their interaction with Jane. While Mr. Rochester tempts her to subdue her nature. St. John simply wants to use her for the attainment of his religious ambitions. Jane cannot give in to both. Her withdrawal from St. John is based on his attempt to possess her. He wants her to learn Hindustanee and accompany him to India. Jane realizes that he proposes so only with the idea that she would make a good Missionary wife, but she knows the passions would not last very long. With Rochester, she knows that his negative wooing is more human, engulfed in earthly jealousies and frivolities. Her true inner self is called for by Rochester's earnest call.

#### **4.3.10 Jane Eyre**

There remains very little to be said about Jane Eyre as a character. Being the titular heroine, she is almost whole of the novel. Jane calls up emotions every reader must recognize and probably have experienced, though in the novel these are intensified. Jane's terror of bullying boy cousin, her hatred for a dominating and powerful aunt, her close relationships with a school friend and her understanding as a kind teacher, are all echoes to the reader's own past. When Jane's circumstances do become stronger, the reader continues to respond as she goes, and feel the truth of the response. With her passions, Jane combines qualities more rational, equally sympathetic, which every reader vainly claims to possess. She has a sound common sense, the power to see herself as others see her, a robust sense of humour, the power to act right under the most powerful of temptations, and to survive the most testing physical conditions. This is why, Charlotte Bronte creates her heroine as small and plain in both beauty and dress.

The most significant aspect of Jane's character is that she can be understood in her relation to all the other characters of the novel. Although a narrating heroine, Jane does not reveal absolutely all about herself. There is proportionately very little detail of thought and state of mind in the novel. Charlotte Bronte uses dialogue

and action to expose the disposition of her central character. Thought or state of mind when used, is done through objectifying devices such as interior dialogue or the address to the reader. Moreover, the shape of the novel presenting the change of scene and action, gives Charlotte an opportunity to reveal Jane's character in accordance with different situations. The reader can see Jane growing through different phases of her life. Beginning with the child's view and reactions to the life at Gateshead, Jane grows through the more complex life at Lowood, Thornfield, Morton and then Ferndean. Gateshead is plainly a place of torment and torture. Jane's sufferance as a deprived and an isolated child among a family of her kins reveals her as one, who tries to prove herself good. But unable to find any justice, she acts violently to all the insults inflicted upon her. The reader can easily justify her hatred and strong dislike for her cousins and their mother. This life definitely prepares Jane to be strong enough to stand for herself. In fact, the impressions that she carries from Gateshead continue to be the base of her development in later life.

At Lowood, life is physically hard and aesthetically repulsive, but here Jane's experiences are more mature and extensive. It is through the congenial companionship with Mary Ann Wilson, Helen Burns and Miss Temple that Jane's intellectual growth takes place. Jane's experiences at many levels expose her to the realities of life and she also finds innermost satisfaction in gaining both worldly and scholarly knowledge. Combinations of good and bad prepare her for the much more subtle experiences at Thornfield. This place has several aspects, and Jane, who at this stage is ready to plunge into new vistas, misses nothing. She enjoys the freedom and happiness embodied into some parts of the house, and its surroundings. She also probes into the sinister and evil embodied in the upper storeys and observes minutely the grand world of society and hypocrite gaiety. These are all directly related to Jane's association with Rochester, and help us to feel the moral weight of what happens. The place and action correspond in highlighting the action of the novel and Jane's reactions, which underline her character. Jane's first meeting with Rochester is arranged in the open. Jane is ready to meet the world and she accepts the challenge of helping Mr. Rochester. She learns about Mr. Rochester's past in the cold wintry garden and gathers strength to assess his conduct and her life. He proposes to her in an 'Eden-like-garden' and Jane's dreams seem to materialize. In all situations, Jane's reason rules her emotions. She accepts the proposal but registers her restraints and lives upon them. Jane's self-respect and her desire for independence allow her to refuse gifts and obligations from Mr. Rochester and she writes to her Uncle John at Madiera. On learning about the truth of Rochester's living wife she is hurt but can understand his situation. Her love for him does not diminish. Yet she does not give into Rochester's sentimental speeches. To preserve her self-respect, she leaves him. This quality she retains throughout the novel. Jane is God

fearing and believes in the ways of Divine Powers. At Lowood, Jane does not agree with Helen Burns, about the latter's view about God, but later she advises Mr. Rochester to look upon God for help. At the same time she preserves her dignity at all costs. This is also the reason that she does not give into St. John's offer for marriage, even while she does consider it. Her freedom is important to her. Jane can never go against her conscience. She is often guided by her sense of the other. Her good working knowledge of psychology enables her to perceive the virtues and flaws of others. While she understands that it would not be easy to handle Rochester as a husband, she can also see that her marriage with St. John could not work, because the passions would die out soon. She can see that his ambitious pursuit for religion can be hinderance in their adjustments. Moreover, she cannot allow anyone to possess her soul.

Jane loves her freedom, but she is not indifferent to the superiority of others. Her sense of respect and reverence for others are highlighted in her regards for Miss Temple and the Rivers sisters. She is compassionate in her attitude towards Helen and Adele. Her generosity and kindness are highlighted in her interaction with these two characters. Her modesty and patience make her acceptable. Her moral strength is often a source of help to other members of the novel especially to Rochester, who is often shown to lean on her in every emergency, and culmination of which comes in the end of the novel where she returns to offer every support to a beaten Mr. Rochester. An inner voice guides her and she reaches Ferndean to take over the services of a protective wife to an invalid Mr. Rochester through her own conditions and affirmations. Her spirit, strong in her first encounter of the book, remains strong throughout. Her development is traced through the crisis in her life. They offer a psychic guidance. It is necessary to study her in light of the plot and theme of the novel.

#### **4.4 Self-Check Exercise — Activity for the Student**

1. Who was Jane Eyre ?
2. What is the role of Miss Temple in the novel ?
3. What do you know about Helen Burns ?
4. Who was Adele Varens ?

##### **4.4.1 Answers to Self-Check Exercise**

1. Jane Eyre was an orphan and she was living with her aunt at Gateshead. Her aunt, Mrs. Reed had three children. She and her three children treated Jane cruelly. Jane hated them all. Jane was moneyless and friendless. Nobody loved her. Her aunt let Jane live with her but she was very unkind to Jane. John, the eldest son of Mrs. Reed used to hit her everyday. He was the cruellest of all her cousins. Jane was very unhappy at Gateshead. She was hated by Mrs. Reed because Mr. Reed loved his sister and her child Jane very much.

2. Miss Temple was the Headmistress of Lowood School. She was a tall and kind lady. She had dark hair and dark eyes and a pale large forehead. Her countenance was grave and her bearing erect. She is very affectionate towards her pupils. She has serenity in her air and refined propriety in her language. She has something which chastened the pleasure of those who looked on her and listened to her.
3. Helen Burns's character has some autobiographical touches. She has been drawn on the model of the novelist's eldest sister, Maria who also died of the epidemic that broke out in the school in which she was studying. No doubt, she was withdrawn by the parents in time but only to die. Helen Burns is an ideal student. She comes from the north of England near Scotland. She is a silent and suffering kind of girl. She has tremendous sense of tolerance and forbearing. She is full of patience and fortitude.
4. Adele Varens was the daughter of a French dancer. Mr. Rochester loved her mother passionately. But Adele's mother eloped with some other man. Mr. Rochester took pity on the girl and began to act as her guardian. Adele was born at Paris. She left Paris only six months ago. When she first came to Thornfield Hall, she could not speak a word of English.

#### 4.5 Summing-Up

We have discussed almost all the characters of the novel. All the characters are important from the point of view of examination.

---

**LESSON NO. 1.5**

---

**CHARLOTTE BRONTE : *JANE EYRE*  
MAJOR CRITICAL ASPECTS**

**STRUCTURE**

- 5.0 Objectives**
- 5.1 Introduction**
- 5.2 Theme**
- 5.3 Narrative Technique**
- 5.4 Self-Check Exercise — Activity for the Student**
  - 5.4.1. Answers to Self-Check Exercise
- 5.5 Summing-Up**

**5.0 Objectives :**

- (a) To analyse the major aspects of the novel *Jane Eyre*.
- (b) To evaluate the student's ability to write answers.

**5.1 Introduction**

We have already analysed the text and discussed all the important characters in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. In this lesson we shall be discussing the major critical aspects of the novel.

**5.2 Theme**

Charlotte Bronte is known as an innovator, and her novel *Jane Eyre* has enriched the tradition of the English Novel. Her most important contribution to the English novel has been the intensity which is the most significant characteristic of this novel. The remarkable handling of intensity in *Jane Eyre* brings a shift in the novel from the external towards the expression of our inner experience, which is exclusively personal. This novel switches from the external to a realistic depiction of an entirely personal and individual experience. Charlotte Bronte excels in her interest in transcribing continuously and circumstantially the interior life of her heroine. The novel as record of an intense spiritual experience may speak for many women, all the same it speaks for humanity.

The novel can be studied at many levels. It deals with the social themes of education and snobbishness and also wider moral themes such as selfishness and selflessness. At another level, the book is also a religious parable presenting the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. All these themes are well related to the development

of central character of the novel. This development and the moral progress can be discussed without seeing the under structure of the rough course of true love. Victorian novels, with very few exceptions, were concerned with the progress through courtship to marriage. *Jane Eyre* is also a kind of novel which takes the love through difficulties to the happy marriage. To many a reader and critic *Jane Eyre* seems to have "Love" as its basic theme. Love does surface as the central theme of the novel, as it does in most of the novels written by the Brontës. The specific study of the central character of Jane Eyre, her character, her experience and the resolution of her fortunes in marriage strengthen the assumption of those critics who have referred to *Jane Eyre* as a love story. In any case, the novel does not remain to be merely a love story. The intensity of feeling, which is prominent in the book, is not centred only upon love. Its greatness lies in the fact that even while the story is based upon feelings of love, there is undoubtedly something more that attracts attention. It is fight for the free expression of personality in love. The theme of the novel, from this point of view is the struggle of an individual consciousness towards self-fulfilment. This longing for self-fulfilment in *Jane Eyre* is romantic. It presents in a way, a historical conflict between new-rationalism and a Byronic romanticism. Jane, therefore, tries to achieve self-fulfilment in manner, whereby, she can keep intact the forbearing and submissive self without violating the social and moral conventions.

Jane is a fusion of the contradictory elements, such as revolt and compliance with a moral code, imaginative flight and practicality. She manages to emerge as a woman, who after going through many facts of life does find satisfying relationships and meaningful goals. Beginning her life as a deprived and a displaced child who always longs for genuine love and sound relationships, she finds it in her final reunion with Rochester. This ultimate relationship of mutual love and understanding satisfies her mind and her passions. It is not simply an ending which assumes that marriage and motherhood is the natural goal for all heroines, but one which completes a detailed proof that this marriage is right for this heroine. At Gateshead, Jane is deprived of love, of security, of education, and of status. She is obviously unloved, and the only relationships she forms, if they are to be called relationships are those of victim with aggressor. It is important to be pointed out how she has collapsed and shrunk under deprivation when she makes her unchildlike stand against her aunt; at considerable nervous strain to herself, but showing the spirit and confidence which are to remain as she grows up. Her intelligence, her imagination, and her reserve, all qualities make her more than a type of unloved child. At Lowood, she finds a disciplined learning which steadies her imagination. She finds confidence in her abilities and a confidence in justice and support, and as she grows up there, she finds the dignity of status and proper

importance. She makes real relationships with her personal friends.

Jane has, of course, special reasons for feeling restricted at Lowood, both in her own strong energy and ardour and in its institutional enclosure. Though her growth and development are not something really out of the world, what is to be marked is Jane's determination to strike out for liberty. Jane must always pay heed to the voice that comes from within her. She must respect herself. This consciousness of the dignity for the self is highlighted best in the most significant episode of the story. At the happiest moment of her life, it is a bitter fact that the man she loves so dearly seems to have cheated her by his bigamous intentions. She does not lose any love for Rochester, yet her dignity must be kept intact. She is tempted by his clarifications and his proposals but she leaves him. Even at this time, when she is really solitary and homeless with no work, no companions, no shelter, Jane maintains her integrity and self-respect. "I care for myself" she has declared in rejecting Rochester. At Morton, Jane is out in the world, faced by the ignorance, the poverty, and the coarseness of life around her. She bravely takes all in her stride and rises up to face another critical situation in her life. While Rochester has tempted her to forego duty and reason for the human love, St. John tempts her to forego the affections and passions for the sake of his ideal of duty and service, which she herself feels is not for her. She resists this temptation as strongly as she resists the earlier one. After her final reunion with Rochester, Jane tells him that he suits her "to the finest fibre" of her nature. Her loss of Rochester makes her feel the appeal of leaving England and finding a mission to fill the void left by torn affections, but this compensation may not bring relief, or satisfy herself. This ultimate satisfaction she can only find from the intuition that comes from within her. This voice from within is complemented by the religious faith that has also developed within her ever since her encounter with Mr. Brocklehurst and her friendship with Helen.

Religious ecstasy is yet another dominant theme of the novel. In her relationship with Helen Burns, Jane finds a religious corrective, in theory at least, to what Helen calls the excessive need for human love. Even while she rejects Rochester's proposal to ignore his living mad wife, and set up a sane world somewhere else, Jane speaks very significantly in the voice of Christian faith on Law and duty. In fact, in Jane's rejection, first of Rochester and then of St. John, there develops significant theme of religion in the novel. By this time it becomes rather clear that *Jane Eyre* is not merely the story of an understandable and familiar process of growth and development, it is also a religious parable. Jane's two crises of temptation are explained and conducted in terms of her

belief in Divine Law. Her wanderings on the moors are studded with prayer and the answer to prayer. The coincidences of her discovery of her cousin's house and the last telepathic exchanges are practical examples of Providential participation in the action. The faith in God is the basis of the novel. The invisible world and kingdom of spirits as spoken by Helen, is suggested at various crises, like the incident in the Red-Room, in the response to Jane's prayer for liberty and servitude, in the rescue from the bigamous marriage, and in later visions and prayers. At times, there is only suggestion, at other time there is an actual reference to Providence. Even the imagery in the novel is highly coloured by religious belief and is often inseparable from Biblical references and quotations. This religious theme can be very well summed up in the following assumption that *Jane Eyre* is a novel, where the characters are not alone or at a distance from a mysterious heaven. Their prayers are answered, their faith is rewarded. The happy ending is not merely a resolution of the rough course of true love but a justification of God's ways to Man. This is also clear in the process of Rochester's conversion, which happens in stages and obviously relies on Christian faith. Rochester's penitence is accepted by God, is rewarded in the form of Jane's return to him. For Jane too, Helen's belief in the invisible world comes to be her own belief.

Other than these themes that make *Jane Eyre* a masterpiece, the novel is also a record of the eternal conflict between the flesh and the spirit, a conflict which is solved when all passion is spent. This theme is also closely associated with the religious undertones of the novel. When Jane Eyre leaves Lowood School, she is put in the world, in spite of her contact with the spiritual in the company of saintly Helen Burns and in the fleshly Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst. To Jane, the greatest thing in life is to be loved by a person, for love of any kind has been denied to her so far. Helen speaks of this love with a conviction, that the Sovereign Hand that created and gave life, also provided with other resources than the feeble self. Before such a notice, to whom the yearnings of the flesh and the spirit are at best indistinguishable, is placed the specious temptation of love, love imagined in its most stirring form, the impetuous and violent love of Mr. Rochester. To such a love, Jane responds with vibrant passions. For her, Rochester becomes almost her hope of heaven. He stands between her and every thought of religion. But behind this idol is Bertha Mason, the haunting mad wife, who becomes a constant danger to Jane and Jane must flee this danger. Her struggle is hard one. She is unwilling to leave Rochester. She says :

I wrestled with my own resolution : I wanted to be weak that I might avoid the awful passage of further suffering, I saw laid before me; and conscience, turned tyrant, held passion by the throat, told tauntingly



she had yet but dipped her dainty feet in slough, and swore that with an arm of iron he would thrust her down to unsound depths of agony.

At last, Jane flies from unrestrained physical passion with all its grossness, and she is guided in her resolve by a vision. In her trance-like dream, the spirit of her mother appears and guides Jane :

My daughter, flee temptation !

Mother, I will.

To Jane, there is offered another choice-the rejection of life, the journey into asceticism with St. John Rivers. Here lies another point of crisis. Shall Jane Eyre, bewildered and hurt by her experience with Rochester, deny the world and all that it has to offer ? Shall she leave the physical completely, without trying to control it, and enter a loveless marriage ? The struggle is long and hard, no less intense than the one which Jane faces before leaving Thornfield. This time, the guidance comes in the voice of Rochester. The world and the flesh have to be reckoned with, their defeat cannot come through a plain denial of their existence. The probability of this voice comes in for argument, but its validity lies in the religious texture of the novel. Jane is called back to the world she had rejected, by its own voice and the voice of its Creator. The final resolution comes simply :

I broke from St. John who had followed and would have detained me. It was my time to assume ascendancy. I mounted to my Chamber, locked myself in; and fell on my knees; and prayed in my way—a different way to St. John's but effective in its own fashion. I seemed to penetrate very near Mighty Spirit; and my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet.

Jane returns to Mr. Rochester and finds that he has passed through his ordeal by fire, both spiritual and physical. It is a changed Rochester, who can speak thus :

I thank my Maker, that in the midst of judgement, He remembered mercy. I humbly entreat my Redeemer to give me strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done hitherto.

They marry, finally, though not in that first violent, physical anguish, but in a calmer, nobler mood, “all passion spent.” Neither flesh, nor the spirit will tear Jane Eyre again. Far from her double ordeal, she has emerged unscratched neither a profligate nor an ascetic, but a woman who has found an equable solution to the symbolic crisis of her life.

### 5.3 Narrative Technique :

The method Charlotte Bronte chooses in order to present the internal conflict in her heroine is the fictional autobiography. She realizes “the possibilities of a first person angle of vision approximating to the author's

experience : that of the solitary governess, observant, and stoical in the strange and uncongenial world of other people's houses .....” (Kathleen Tillotson, “Jane Eyre and the Triumph over Angria,” *Jane Eyre and Villete : A Casebook*, ed. by Mirian Allcott, London : Macmillan, 1973, p. 185). The use of this method and the manner in which she employs it is outstanding in its innovation. There are other innovations too, such as the solution of present mystery through an unfolding of the past. This is effected mainly through retrospection. The heroine is used as a narrator and the incidents viewed through her perspective form a unity. We share the moral evolution of Jane and also sympathise with her both morally and emotionally, but Charlotte Bronte does not permit total submergence of the reader's identity to Jane's. At the time when the reader comes close to losing his individuality and begins to identify imaginatively with the characters, Charlotte Bronte detaches the former from the latter. This is done through a direct address to the reader by the main character. Jane, however, manages to occupy the central place, without ever influencing or obstructing the reader's understanding of events or other characters. This detachment and emotional involvement is one of the work's greatest achievements.

Autobiography involves an apparently simplified narrative view-point : that solely of the narrator of the story, and Charlotte Bronte successfully preserves the impression of simplicity. She never disagrees with Jane, and neither does the reader. Even so, there are many fine distinctions in the degrees of detachment of the writer from the material. They are not immediately obvious or obtrusive on reading, but the effects they have on how the reader perceives what is happening are very considerable and are a vital part of the intellectual and emotional control which despite the more obvious passions one feels throughout the story.

Two important narrative stances are to be marked in the story — it can either be seen or revealed by Jane at the age at which she experiences it or it can be interpreted by Jane who is supposedly looking back at her youth from the age of thirty, the age she claims to be in by the end of the book. Charlotte Bronte uses both stances frequently, even while other points of view are taken up within the main framework in process of the action of development. The eighteen years old Jane, at Thornfield, finds herself visiting the scene of her first suffering and her defiance at Gateshead. While doing so she reassesses both herself and those who hurt her. There are many other instances of retrospection. At Lowood, Jane speaks to Mrs. Lowood for her life at Gateshead. Her activity at Thornfield is shortly punctuated by mental trips to her past life, assessing and analysing her life as a school teacher as in contrast to what her life could have been, had she accepted to be Mr. Rochester's mistress. It is through such revelations that Jane takes us through her emotional and moral growth. The

journey that she takes is not very complicated but her experiences are quite revealing. From the extraordinarily simple and dramatic opening paragraphs, describing individually the Reed family, placed comfortably in the drawing room and Jane reading the borrowed Bewick book by the window of the cold breakfast room, the reader moves to Jane's mature option of her book — a book which sets the sinister tone for Jane's future superstitious agonies in the red-room. The story told at two narrative levels demands the reader to stand away from the emotional experience, and assess it in relation to others, to moral standards, or simply ordinary common life. This is achieved by a shift in the narrator's view, and Jane herself stands away from events, even while she reports on them from different pedestals. Going through the minute details of narrative technique of the novel, it is clear that on the question of attitude to material alone, the first person narrator is being used with great subtlety and with a sure hand. Charlotte Bronte succeeds well in her desire to make her novel a complete vision of life, where one event does more than merely follow another, and events are constantly seen in the light of the significant events which precede and come after them. The constant shifts from past to present action give *Jane Eyre* a method that was almost revolutionary in its time.

#### 5.4 Self-Check Exercise — Activity for the Student

- Q.1. Discuss Charlotte Bronte's blending of 'realistic' with 'romantic' elements in the story.
- Q.2. Jane Eyre is not a Victorian woman dominated by man, but a modern woman confronting man on equal terms, free to feel and speak as she feels. Comment.

##### 5.4.1 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

1. Charlotte Bronte herself was a fine combination of both a realist and a romanticist and its best manifestation is found in her novel *Jane Eyre*. She condemned her sisters for making their heroines look beautiful alone and asserted that she could prove them wrong by presenting a heroine as plain and small as herself who shall be as interesting as any of their heroines.
2. In spite of Charlotte's insistence that her heroine was like herself in physical appearance, Jane Eyre drew from her creator her salient gift of passion. It was this which distinguished her from the previous Victorian heroines and made her story unfit for young ladies to read.

In all her writings, Charlotte Bronte was always her own heroine. Lovingly and with unusual honesty, she explored her own nature, which in its tenderness and strength, its turbulent desires, was her chief source of inspiration. Thus the little governess was the creation not of a man who might have known her from the outside but of a woman who had herself

experienced the slights and humiliations that life inflicts on Jane.

The fiery soul, the pride, the courage, integrity and resolute purpose were all part of Charlotte herself. Jane is willing to take full responsibility for her life, and with her, modern woman may be said to have entered English fiction for the first time.

### 5.5 Summing-Up

We have analysed the major aspects of the novel *Jane Eyre*. Make an attempt to explore the text from other angles also.

---

**LESSON NO. 1.6**

---

**RABINDER NATH TAGORE : *GITANJALI*  
INTRODUCTION**

**Structure:**

6.0 Objectives

- 6.1 Introduction to Indian Poetry in English
- 6.2 Introduction to Rabinder Nath Tagore, the Poet of *Gitanjali*
  - 6.2.1 His Life
  - 6.2.2 Tagore's Placement in Indian Writing in English
- 6.3 Self-Check Exercise: Activity for the Student
- 6.4 Answers to the Self-Check Exercise

**6.0 Objectives**

- a) to introduce the student to Indian Poetry in English.
- b) to introduce the student to Rabinder Nath Tagore, the Poet of *Gitanjali*.
- c) to place Tagore in the tradition of Indian Writing in English.
- d) to evaluate the student's comprehension.

**6.1 Introduction to Indian Poetry in English:**

Indian English poetry claims international recognition. It has developed into a representative and rich literary tradition during the last one hundred and eighty six years. This poetic tradition was laid down, enriched and made memorable by individual poets both major and minor from 1828 till date. The story of the growth and development of Indian poetry in English is one of tradition and experiment, convention and revolt. The most remarkable thing about this genre is that in the course of its development it has not been an imitation of English poetry or aiming at the nearness of English poetry rather it has "developed into an independent tradition that thrives on the meeting of two cultures, the Indian and English", remarks Professor V.K. Gokak in his article "Indian Women Poets in English". (*Indian Literature*, October-December, 1975, p. 63). Indian-English poets have done a great service to Indian culture by giving a poetic embodiment to the ethos and culture of India in a language not their own. Some of these poets became famous abroad on account of their poetic merit and considerable skill in the use of imagery, others notable for their curiosity, value and historicity.

The pioneers of Indian-English literature were elite persons who assumed the role of interpreting the ethos and culture of India to West through

imaginative literature. This they did through poetry and it was associated with the cultural Renaissance in Bengal where English had a creditable influence on the Indian culture. Indian-English poetry took its birth in Bengal itself and early Indian-English Poets hailed from this province of Art and creativity, e.g. Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, Aurobindo Ghose, Sarojini Naidu, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Rabinder Nath Tagore. Since then Indian-English poetry has grown. Prof. V.K. Gokak has divided the history of Indian-English Poetry into six periods. They are:

1. From 1825 to 1850
2. From 1851 to 1875
3. From 1876 to 1900
4. From 1901 to 1925
5. From 1926 to 1950
6. From 1951 to 1965

This is not a water-tight division. But each of these periods strikes some new note, some innovation or a fresh development in this field. For example, the periods from 1876 to 1900 and from 1901 to 1925 may be called the periods of Indo-Anglian Romanticism but this does not mean that after that we do not find neo-romantic poetry. Romantic sensibility is at work even in the post-Independence Indian-English poetry and is not confined only to Sarojini Naidu and Nizamat Jung. Broadly speaking, the history of Indian-English poetry is mainly a development from neo-romanticism to mysticism and to neo-modernism. We can say that from Henry Derozio to Sarojini Naidu, it is the trend of romanticism that can be discerned in the poetry of the period. Toru Dutt was the first authentic neo-romantic poet and Sarojini Naidu the last Indian – English romantic. In between, poets like Manmohan Ghose, Rabinder Nath Tagore and Nizamat Jung deepened its strains. In the meanwhile, Indian English poetry was given a mystical direction by Aurobindo Ghose and Tagore. Sri Aurobindo started the tradition of mystic poetry. Throughout his poetry can be found a strain of philosophical contemplation which gives it a distinctive place in the whole range of Indian-English poetry. Sri Aurobindo hovers over Indian-English poetry from 1900-1950. We find that Harindernath is both a poet of romanticism and mysticism, and Nirodbran's *Sun Blossoms* (1947) and K. D. Sethna's *Artist's Love* (1925) are in the mystical tradition of Sri Aurobindo. G. K. Chettur (*The Triumph of Love* 1932), Armando Menezes, V. N. Bhushan and Adik Seth are free from the influence of Aurobindonian mysticism. They are individual and intensely lyrical and they are in the tradition of romanticism. The poets who have come into prominence by virtue of their poetic achievements are Dom Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel, P.Lal, Shiv K.

Kumar, R. Parthasarthy, A. K. Ramanujan, Keki Daruwalla, Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Deb Kumar Das, Keshar Malik and a host of others. The contemporary poets include workshop poets, quest poets and neo-symbolists of Aurobindo tradition, but these neo-symbolists have moved away from the theme and diction of older poets and there is now a creative bloom. The work of these new poets displays the colours of modernity, post-modernity, thematic variety and superb craftsmanship. Their rejection of romanticism, philosophy, and remoteness from real life of the older poets especially that of Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo is outlined in *Kavita Manifesto* of P. Lal and others of the Writers Workshop, Calcutta. This *Kavita Manifesto* is one of the most significant events in the history of Indian-English poetry. Today much of serious Indian poetry in English is being written, which augurs well for its future. It is characterized by experimentation and innovation, new imagery and realistic attitude, authentic creative urge and equally superb craftsmanship. S. D. Jaggi in his Article "Indo English poetry in the context of World Poetry" rightly observes, "At its best, contemporary Indian Poetry in English has spontaneity and freshness which is lacking in contemporary British as well as American poetry. British poets are today excessively self-conscious about their poetic heritage and are too fearful as a consequence of echoing what has been done." Contemporary poets have been inspired by their new faith in the English language as a creative medium. A. K. Srivastava and Dr. Sunita Sinha aptly observe regarding the concerns of the contemporary poets. "The Indo-Anglian poets of the last 25 years are thus poets of (transition on the threshold of a literary renaissance which had no backlash of) tradition to boast of little historical value, to cherish a grand awakening to the possibilities of a new medium, the sure talent and the timely collusion of the grace and gesture of the right moment."

Overall, we can say that Indian-English poetry is Indian in content and sensibility and English only in form and language, and is a distinctive body of poetry which has gained international recognition.

## **6.2 Introduction to Rabinder Nath Tagore, the poet of *Gitanjali*.**

Rabinder Nath Tagore is a very prominent name in modern Bengali Literature, and he is the first writer, who gained for modern India a place on the world literary scene. He is the true representative of the Indian life and culture, and the main poetic exponent of the spirit of the East. Though Tagore is pre-eminently a Bengali writer and is not generally regarded as an Indian writer in English yet his own English Translations of his writing (in which the originals were often changed, telescoped and transformed) and their influence on the regional literatures in India take him out of Bengal and give him the stature of an all India writer. Tagore was not only a great poet but a great man

also and he has left behind him a great institution, the Visvabharati at Shantiniketan. K.R Srinivas Iyengar very aptly sums up the versatile, and integral personality of the Rishi, the Gurudev, "He was a poet, dramatist, actor, producer, he was a musician and a painter; he was an educationist, a practical idealist who turned his dreams into reality at Shantiniketan, he was a reformer, philosopher, prophet; he was a novelist and short story writer and a critic of life and literature, he even made occasional incursions into national politics although he was essentially an internationalist.

Tagore's active literary career extended over a period of sixty years and he wrote the largest number of lyrics attempted by any poet. He was a great philosopher, a great writer and a widely travelled man. Like Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, Tagore has been the supreme inspiration to millions of people in modern India.

### 6.2.1 His Life

Thakur Rabinder Nath Tagore was born on May 6, 1861. He was the grandson of prince Dwarka Nath Tagore and the fourteenth son (Also the youngest son) of Devendra Nath Tagore – a great Sanskrit scholar and the pillar of the Brahmo Samaj Movement. Rabinder had no regular schooling. He was taught by a private tutor and was trained in gymnastics. He began to write verses at the age of three or four and when he was eleven, he began composing poems on serious, sorrowful subjects. Before his thirteenth or fourteenth year, his poems were available in print. He also translated *Macbeth* in Bengali. Rabinder Nath's forerunners Madhusudan Dutt, Iswar Chander Vidya Sagar, Bankim Chander Chatterjee had written marvelous Bengali-poetry, prose and fiction and Tagore was greatly influenced by their work. After Bankim Chander's death, the reading public turned to Tagore for essays, stories, novels and poems. Tagore wrote a long poem, a story in verse called *Banaphul* (A wild flower), and also a remarkable series of lyrics named *Bhanu Singher Padavali*.

On March 8, 1875, Tagore's mother Smt. Sarda Devi expired and this gave a traumatic shock to the poet. At the age of seventeen Tagore was sent to England. The English Romantic poets such as Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth and the great Victorians, Tennyson and Browning exercised a powerful influence on him. He also admired Shakespeare and Sir Thomas Browne. Though Tagore was not a voracious or systematic reader and apparently read at random yet whatever came his way he turned it to a great use. By the time, Tagore was eighteen he had written about 7,000 lines of verse. Tagore also took part in the plays organised by his brothers and sisters and was a good musician since his boyhood. His father too was a great musician. He returned to India in 1880 and wrote his *Valmiki Pratibha*. In 1883, he wrote a musical play, which he later translated as *Sanyasi*, or the *Ascetic*. Another attempt to send him abroad



was made in the next year. But it did not materialize. His two books of poems, *Sandhya Sangeet* and *Prabhat Sangeet* made him very popular.

In 1887 he wrote *The Sea Waves* after the boat tragedy, that took a toll of several hundred pilgrims who were on their way to Puri. This was a very busy period in Tagore's literary career. He wrote more poems and more plays, took part in play acting and play production. During the agitations for the partition of Bengal, he identified himself for a time with the movements and wrote the celebrated poem. Rabinder Nath saluted Aurobindo when Aurobindo was the editor of the **Bande Materam** and was jailed and charged with sedition. But Tagore was not a fundamentalist of any kind, he was basically a humanist and satirized orthodoxy and parochialism in some of his plays and poems.

Tagore also wrote many poems and stories for children e.g. *Sishu*, *Shishu Bholanath*.

Tagore was a great educationist also and in the sphere of education Tagore's idea was that children should be brought up in a simple and rural atmosphere on the ideas of ashrams of older ages. He built a school at Shantiniketan after his own heart, which owed its origin to his father. For this institution Tagore sold his house at Puri and his wife donated her jewellery. Shantiniketan was set up as a home for retirement and meditation, an ashram for cultural and spiritual realization. In course of time, Shantiniketan and nearby Sriniketan became the focal centers of a new experiment which was to bring the cultures of the East and West together. The first thing for the East was to find its own soul and then change East-West dichotomy into a creative unity, and thus achieve a broad base for understanding and purposive activity. Another objective of Shantiniketan was that the cultural front should also be related to the life of the community and education was to include vocational training as well. The keynote of all the activities in Shantiniketan and Sriniketan was to bring harmony. This small school later grew to be a great central university, known as Vishva-Bharati where an international team of dedicated scholars made attempt to work for human understanding. When Tagore was disturbed by the political climate in Bengal he returned to Shantiniketan and sought through the cultivation of solitude and nature, the innermost springs of spiritual life. But when his school was barely one year old, Tagore's wife died. He now wrote his beautiful poems about children called *The Crescent Moon*.

The years between 1903 and 1907 were sad ones for the poet. There were many deaths in the family. He lost his second daughter, Renuka, his father, his youngest son, Shami, one after another. But Tagore did not lose heart and continued to write beautiful works. He was now drawn more and more to his motherland and became a leader of the movement for national

liberation. It was about this time that Tagore wrote his *Gitanjali* in Bengali, and also the famous patriotic hymn, Jana Gana Mana.

When Tagore was fifty he had a great output to his credit and had made Bengali literature hum with excitement and exploration. He was hailed as the national poet of Bengal and on Jan. 28, 1912, a commemoration meeting was held in Calcutta, in connection with his Golden Jubilee, to pay homage to him.

As an escape from this exhaustion, Tagore started translating into English some of his own lyrics and in 1912 when he reached London, he had a whole collection of the translations in his hands. There he came into contact with many British writers and thinkers, specially W. B. Yeats and the artist Rothenstein who inspired him to publish English translation of *Gitanjali* (in 1912, with Yeats's memorable introduction) which won for him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. Henceforth he was not merely the poet of Bengal, but of the whole of the world. After success of *Gitanjali* many volumes of translations either done by Tagore or by others under his supervision and even some original writings in English were published. Tagore now toured widely visiting the countries of East and West.

Tagore did not involve himself too intimately into the political currents in India but he maintained very friendly relations with Gandhiji and Jawahar Lal Nehru. Gandhiji visited Shantiniketan in 1915 and was greatly influenced by him. The British Government had bestowed a Knighthood on the poet in 1915, but the poet renounced it in protest against the Massacre of Jallianwala Bagh. In 1930 when the news of Gandhiji's arrest reached Tagore, he was deeply distressed and called off the celebrations of his seventieth birthday at once.

As the years passed, Tagore became more and more a legendary figure. In his flowing beard and white robes he looked rather a Rishi belonging to ancient India. Though Tagore was getting old and ill, till his last he kept aloft the banner of faith in the future of mankind.

On the 7th of August, 1941 at the age of eighty in the old house at Jarosanki, he breathed his last. The whole nation plunged into grief and mourning. In Dr. Edward Thompson's words, "Not a man only but an age had made its way at last into history. He had summed up in himself a whole age in which India had moved into a modern world".

### **6.2.2 Tagore's Placement in Indian Writing in English:**

Tagore has always held a very prominent place among the Indian literary figures who wrote in English. He translated quite a large portion of his writings into English language. When he reached London with a large collection

of his translations in 1926, he came across many British literary stalwarts and thinkers. Among the most prominent of the English artists, he was inspired by no less than W.B. Yeats and the artist Rothenstein. With their inspiration, he got his Nobel Prize winning English translations of *Gitanjali*. Hereafter Tagore confidently crossed over to the English Literary world. He not only translated his famous Bengali works into English, he also contributed by writing original works of English. (The details of his work are discussed in lesson 7).

### 6.3 Self-Check Exercise: Activity for the Student.

- Q.1 What is the most remarkable feature of Indian-English Poetry?
- Q.2 In which Province did Indian-English Poetry originate?
- Q.3 Which poets gave the Indian-English poetry, a mystical direction?
- Q.4 How did Rabinder Nath Tagore take his early education?
- Q.5 How was the idea of Shantiniketan conceived?

#### 6.4 Answers to the Self-Check Exercise.

- (1) The most remarkable feature about this genre is that in the course of its development, Indian-English poetry has not grown as an imitation of English Poetry. It had not aimed to flourish as a stream of English poetry. Rather, it has developed as an independent tradition that thrives on the meeting of the Indian and the English cultures.
- (2) Indian-English poetry took its birth in Bengal as most of the early Indian-English poets belonged to this Province of art and creativity. The major names that rise to the surface are Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, Aurobindo Ghosh, Sarojini Naidu, Harindernath Chattopadhyaya and Rabinder Nath Tagore.
- (3) Indian-English Poetry was given a mystical direction by Aurobindo Ghosh, Tagore and their disciples. Sri Aurobindo started the tradition of mystic poetry and it developed in the poetry of his disciples.
- (4) Rabinder Nath Tagore had no formal and regular schooling. He was taught by a private tutor. But he began to write verses at the age of three or four, and his poems were also available in print before he was thirteen or fourteen.
- (5) Rabinder Nath built a school at Shantiniketan with an idea of bringing up children in a rural and a simple atmosphere. It was set up as home for meditation and an ashram for cultural and spiritual realization.

---

**LESSON NO. 1.7**

---

**TAGORE'S WORKS AND *GITANJALI***

**Structure**

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Tagore's Works
  - 7.1.1 Juvenile Poetry (Before the Age of 20)
  - 7.1.2 Works of Early Youth (1881-89) – (Age About 21-30)
  - 7.1.3 Works of Mature Youth (1890-1900) (Age 30-40)
  - 7.1.4 Works of Full Maturity (1901-1916) (Age 40-55)
  - 7.1.5 Works of the Last Phase (1917-1941) (Age 56-80)
  - 7.1.6 Works in English
  - 7.1.7 Lectures and Essays
- 7.2 Self-Check Exercise: Activity for the Student-I
- 7.3 Answers of Self-Check Exercise: Activity for the Student-I
- 7.4 Introduction to *Gitanjali*
- 7.5 Self-Check Exercise: Activity for the Student-II
- 7.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise: Activity for the Student-II

**7.0 OBJECTIVES**

- a. to introduce the student to the works written by Tagore
- b. to introduce the student to *Gitanjali*
- c. to check and evaluate the student's comprehension

**7.1 Tagore's Works:**

Tagore was the most versatile genius of his times and a writer who did not leave any genre of literature untouched. His creative genius is multi-splendoured. As a Bengali writer he has to his credit output of many kinds. In addition to his poetry of all kinds in which he is supreme, his writing includes various genres of drama, stories and novels, criticism and belle letters and all kinds of prose, songs and operas and operatic ballets. In all these genres of literature it is not only the quantity but the quality and achievement that gave Tagore a prominent place in the firmament of Indian literary renaissance. From the ceaseless flow of his pen it becomes evident that there was in him the urgency and never ending creative urge, alongwith a fecundity of imagination.

The entire period of Tagore's creative activity can be divided into five

stages, each having its own distinguishable characteristics, but none separable from that of other. It is in fact a continuous stream of verse and music varying at its different stages only in rhythm and depth. All his poems are lyrical and his dramas poetic. Tagore had no genius for epic. "I had no mind" he once wrote "to enter the lists for the composition of an epic poem; but I do not know when my fancy struck your jingling bangles and broke into thousand songs." Though Tagore wrote no epic, his poems and songs, embodying every nuance of human feeling and every sacred throb of nature, make between themselves an epic of the heart of Existence. Originally, all his work is in his own mother-tongue, Bengali, some of which was later translated (not literally, but essentially) into English by the poet himself. In the following categorization of the works written at different periods of his creative career, Bengali names of his works are followed by their English equivalents, shown within brackets with the year of the publication of the original in each case, but the English name does not imply that the work as such is available in English. His works rendered into English by himself and which won him world fame, are discussed separately. Only his published dramatic and poetic works are listed below:

#### **7.1.1 Juvenile Poetry (Before the Age of 20).**

"Kavi-Kahani" (A poet's study) is a fragment of 1185 lines which was published in 1877 when Tagore was only sixteen, in the Bengali periodical *Bharati*, a paper started by Tagore's own elder brother. "Bhanu-Singher Padavali" (songs of Bhanu Singh) was written in imitation of the style of the Vaishnava poets, written under the pen name Bhanu Singh and first published in 1877 in the periodical *Bharti*. *Bhagna Hridaya* (Broken Hearts)-a verse narrative, melodramatic in character was written during the poet's first stay in England in 1877-78, at the age of seventeen. *Valmiki Pratibha*, a musical drama bearing English and British melodies-was written after the poet's return from England in 1880. A musical play, *The Fateful Hunt* was written in 1880. A selection of his earliest verses was published in 1881, under the title *Saisub Sangit*, Songs of Childhood.

Tagore's works written at this stage are mainly characterized by the imitation of the metrical forms and figures of speech and concepts of ancients. It is merely an adolescent heart's wilderness out of which come vague miseries and sentiments which do not touch any genuine depth and are not produced from any genuine consciousness of poetry. But we cannot say that this work has absolutely no ring of poetry in it.

#### **7.1.2 Works of Early Youth (1881-89) (Age About 21-30) :**

Poems : *Sandhya Sangeet* (Evening Songs, 1881) *Prabhat Sangeet* (Morning Songs, 1884) *Chabbi-o-Gann* (Pictures and Songs, 1884), *Kari-o-Kamal* (Sharps and Flats, 1885), including the poet's translations of certain poems of Shelley, Mrs.

Browning, Rossetti and Victor Hugo, *Mayar Khela*, (*The Play of Illusion*, 1889).

Plays : *Prakitir Pratishodh* (*Nature's Revenge*, 1885) was the poet's first important drama.

In this stage of his poetic career, vision of poet was matured. He had many mystical experiences and in his work he throws forth his inner self outwards, a vision of the wonder of ordinary, the effect of which remained throughout his life. His play *Prakitir Pratishodh* embodies his experience. "The finite is the true infinite" which basically expresses the message of his vision and it was a subject on which all his writings have dwelt. This was the beginning of his existential experience which only deepened and became more compact and coherent and coherent in succeeding epochs.

### 7.1.3 Works of Mature Youth(1890-1900) (Age 30-40) :

Poems : *Manasi* (*The Dream Image*, 1890), *Saanstri* (*The Golden Boat*, 1894), *Chitra* (1869), *Chaitali* (*April Harvest*, 1896) *Katha-o-Kahani* (*Stories and Legends*, 1899) containing besides narrative poems, five small musical dramas; *Gandhri's Prayer*; *A Sojourn in Hell*, *Karna and Kunti*, *Sati*. (*Lakshmi's Test*), *Kalpana* (*Imaginations*, 1900), *Kshanika* (*Moments*, 1900).

Plays : *Raja-o-Ram* (*King and Queen*, 1899), *Bivangan* (*Sacrifice*, 1890), *Chitrangada* (*Chitra*, 1892), *Valint* (1897), and three social comedies *Vaikuntha Nath's Manuscript*; *Radically Wrong* and *The Bachelor's Club* written during 1897-99.

This poetic stage marks the beginning of the poet's real and genuine self expression and he realizes that the purpose of his poetry should be the expression of the throbbing pulsation of the heart which was but a vibration of the divine music. We find here the purity of naturalistic poetry.

### 7.1.4 Works of Full Maturity (1901-1916) : (Age 40-55)

Poems : *Naivedya* (*Offering*, 1901), *Utsarg* (*Dedication* 1904), *Samrana* (*In Memoriam*, 1903), *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*, 1910), *Girimalya* (*Songs and Gitali* (1916), *Stray Birds* (1916) and finally *Balaka* (*A Flight of Cranes*, 1916) one of the highest peaks of his poetry grappling with the fundamental problem of "Becoming" and lyrically singing the refrains that change, and movement is basis of Reality.

Plays : *Sarbatsay* (*Autumn Festival* 1908), *Atonement* (1909), *Raja* (*King of the Dark Chamber*, 1910), *Dakghar* (*The Post Office*, 1916), *Achalayation* (1916), *Phalguni* (*The Cycle of Spring*, 1916) are all symbolic plays.

In this phase Tagore's previous experiences take on a symbolic form and attains a religious depth. His realization that "Timeless and the Infinite manifested itself into the finite and temporal form returned into itself" becomes

the central inspiration of his life and works. The poems of this period embody some of the most religiously felt experiences of the deeper life of man and of the universe. *Naivedya* marks the passing from the naturalistic to religious poetry while *Gitanjali*, *Gitimala* and *Gitali*, in the thick of devotional air put forth songs that seem to issue from the very depth of being as offerings of love to some deep, hidden behind the cosmic mask, ineffable person.

#### **7.1.5 Works of the Last phase (1917-1941) (Age 56-80)**

Poems : *Plaltaka*, (*The Runaway*, 1918), *Lipika* (*Letters*, 1922), *Pravahim* (1925), *Purav* (1925), *Mahuva* (1929), *Parishes* (1932), *Punascha* (1932), *Sesh Saptak* (*The Last Diapason*, 1935), *Prantic* (1938), and his last works, (*Rogasa*) *Yaya Arogya* (*Recovery*) and *Sesh Lekha* were all published in 1941.

Plays : *Muktheadhara* (*The Waterfall*, 1922) *Natir Puja* (*The Dancing Girl's Worship*, 1927).

Even in the last phase, the poet has not ceased to grow. The last phase shows an orientation towards the more concrete side of reality – the poet seeing man and things existing as objective acts conditioned by history and picking up scenes and incidents that come up before him in actual life. At the same time he does not lose the basic sense of the deeper reality. There is not much decoration and elegance. The poet now has arrived at wonderful directness and simplicity in technique. Last of all he also sings of his encounter with death ending in the realization that “in the ocean of Rest, the wave and movement both merge.”

#### **7.1.6 Works in English**

The poet translated some of his works into English, but this rendering of his Bengali creations into English was always of the experience rather than of the language. It was so free and spontaneous a rendering that the so-called translated work is a new creation in itself existing separately in its own right and does not give the feeling of a secondhand product.

His works in English, many of them translated by himself and so far published are Poems : *Gitanjali* (1912), *The Gardener* (1913), *The Crescent Moon* (1913), *Hundred Poems of Kabir* (1915), *Fruit-Gathering* (1916), *Stray Birds* (1916), *Lover's Gift* (1918), *Crossing* (1918), *The Fugitive and other Poems* (1921), *Fireflies* (1928), *Poems* (1942), an anthology containing poems, representative of various epochs of his poetic career and include his last poems.

Plays : *Chitra* (1983), *The Post Office* (1914), *The Cycle of Spring* (1917), *Sacrifice and Other Plays – Sacrifice, Malini, Sanyasi, The King and the Queen, Karna and Kunti* (1917), *The Waterfall* (1922), *Red Oleanders* (1923).

#### **7.1.7 Lectures and Essays:**

Directly written in English and published are: *Sahna Lectures* delivered at Harvard University, 1914, *Personality Lectures* delivered in America, 1917, *Creative Unity* (1922), *The Religion of Man Mibbert Lectures* at Oxford University, 1930, *Nationalism* (Lectures delivered in America and Japan, 1917), *Crisis in Civilization*, a speech written for the occasion of the Celebration of his 80th birthday at Shantiniketan, April 1941 was his last message to the war-torn world.

*Reminiscences* (1917), *My Boyhood Days*, *Glimpses of Bengal* (1921), *Lectures to a friend* (1928) are some of his autobiographical works.

*The Home and the World* (1919), *The Wreck* (1921), *Gora* (1924) are his famous novels.

The translations of Tagore's other works are also being done by various scholars.

Though Tagore's work in the English language forms only a small portion of the total of his work yet it contains the essential Tagore and it has assumed under the poet's shaping spirit an individuality, charm and wholeness of its own.

## 7.2 Self-Check Exercise: Activity for the Student-I

- 1) Tagore did not leave any genre of literature untouched. Justify the statement.
- 2) Name some of the poems written in the Early Youth (1881-89).
- 3) Name the symbolic plays written at the age of 40 to 55.
- 4) What is the outstanding feature of the works produced between the age of 40 to 55?
- 5) Write a brief note on Tagore's works published in English.

## 7.3 Answers of Self-Check Exercise: Activity for the Student-I

1) Tagore was the most versatile genius of his times. As a writer, he did not leave any genre of literature untouched. In addition to his poetry of all kinds, he has written various forms of drama, stories and novels, criticism and belle letters and all kinds of prose. He has also written songs and operas as well as operatic ballets.

2) At the age between 21 to 30 years, Tagore wrote the poems *Sandhya Sangeet* 1881, *Prabhat Sangeet* 1884, *Chabbi-o-Goan*, 1884, *Kari-o-Kamal*, 1885. These poems are a part of the work of the Early Youth.

3) The plays written at the age of 40 to 55 years and which come under the category of the works of full maturity, are all symbolic plays. *Sarbatsay* (1908), *Atonement* (1909), *Raja* (1910), *Dakghar* (1916), *Achalayation*



(1916), and *Phalgun* (1916) are the titles of the plays written in this period.

4) The works written in this phase take on symbolic form and attain a religious depth. The poems of this period embody some of the most religiously felt experiences of the deeper life of man and of the universe. In *Naivedya*, one can observe a passing from the naturalistic to religious poetry. Highly devotional *Gitanjali*, *Gitmala* and *Gitali* are an offering of love to some deep hidden behind the cosmic mask, ineffable person. Hence the underlying note is religious and devotional.

5) Tagore translated some of his works into English, but this translation from Bengali to English was so free and spontaneous that the translated work becomes a new creation in itself existing separately as an independent masterpiece. Such English works translated by himself are *Gitanjali* (1912), *The Gardener* (1913), *The Crescent Moon* (1913), *Hundred Poems of Kabir* (1915), *Fruit Gathering* (1916), *Stray Birds* (1916), *Lover's Gift* (1918), *Crossing* (1918), *The Fugitive and Other Poems* (1921), *Fireflies* (1928), and *Poems* (1942). The plays belonging to this category are *Chitra* (1983), *The Post Office* (1914), *The Cycle of Spring* (1917), *Sacrifice* and other plays *Sacrifice*, *Malini*, *Sanyasi*, *The King and the Queen*, *Karna and Kunti* (1917), *The Waterfall* (1922) and *Red Oleanders* (1923).

#### 7.4 Introduction to *Gitanjali*

By the time Rabinder Nath Tagore was fifty, he had made significant contribution to Bengali literature. After the exciting celebrations of his fiftieth birthday in 1912, the poet retired for a short rest to his quiet country house on river Padma at Shelday, wherewith no other motive but to while away his time he started translating some of his poems into English, which he continued during voyage to England the same year. He thought of exploiting the possibilities of the English language as poetic medium.

Talking of the origin of the English *Gitanjali*, he says, "It was then the month of *Chaitra* (March-April), the air was thick with the fragrance of mango blossoms and all hours of the day were filled with songs of birds. When child is full of vigour, he does not think of his mother. It is only when he feels tired that he wants to nestle in her lap. That was exactly my position. With all my heart, and all abandon of leisure I settled myself comfortable in the arms of *Chaitra*, without missing even a particle of light, its scent and its song. In such a state one cannot remain idle. When the air strikes one's bones they tend to respond in music- this is old habit of mine, as you know. Yet I did not have the energy to gird up my loins and sit down to write. So I took the poems of *Gitanjali* and set myself to translate them one by one. You may wonder why such a crazy ambition should possess one in such a weak state of health. But believe me, I did not undertake the book in spirit of reckless

bravery, I simply felt the urge to recapture, through the medium of another language the feelings and sentiments which created such a feast of joy within me in past days.”

The result was the English *Gitanjali*. On June 12, 1912 the poet reached England and showed some of these to his friend William Rothenstein, a renowned artist, who gave them to W.B. Yeats, Stopford, Bradlaugh, C.F. Andrews, Henry Nevinston and to several other literary people who were enchanted with their profundity. All the renowned English poets, editors, and critics were invited, and Yeats read to them translations of a few of Rabinder Nath's Poems. The audience appreciated *Gitanjali*, heartily. Yeats prized this manuscript heartily as he states in “Introduction” to *Gitanjali*, (Madras: Macmillan Co. of India, 1973) P. ix.

“I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me. These lyrics—which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention—display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes.”

This valued manuscript, called *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings) was published in 1912 by Macmillan, London, with laudatory Preface by W.B. Yeats. On its publication it took England by storm. Translated in other European languages in quick succession, the poems stirred the imagination of an entire epoch. And early in 1913, Sturge Moore, an English author and a member of the Royal Society submitted it to Swedish Academy for the Nobel Award. It was a surprise. The other candidate was Emile Faguet, a French writer. A debate followed Verner Von Hidenstam who had by then known *Gitanjali* in Swedish Translation and who was himself awarded the Nobel Prize three years later submitted written contribution adoring Tagore. He wrote:

“I was deeply moved when I read them (the *Gitanjali* poems) and I do not remember having read any lyric writing to equal them during the past twenty years or more. They gave me hours of intense enjoyment. It was like drinking the water of a fresh, clear spring. The intense and loving piety that permeates his every thought and feeling, the purity of heart, the noble and natural sublimity of his style, all combine to create a whole that has a deep and rare spiritual beauty. There is nothing in his work that is controversial and offensive, nothing vain, worldly and petty, and if ever a poet may be said to possess the qualities that make him entitled to a Nobel Prize, it is he.....(Chairman of the Nobel Literature Prize Committee, Anders Osterling, “Tagore and the Nobel Prize” *Tagore Centenary Volume* (New Delhi, Sahitya

Akademi, 1961), p. 203.

Tagore returned to India, to Shantiniketan, and in November 1913, he heard the news of the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to him. Henceforth, Tagore was not only the poet of Bengal, but of India and the world. The Nobel Prize Citation read as follows: "Mr. Tagore, who is fifty-two years old, is a Bengali poet, beloved and worshipped in his own country. He is one of those rare authors, who have produced fine literature in two languages. After a few delicate lyrics in English periodicals he gave us *Gitanjali* or "Song Offerings" and later "The Gardener", both volumes being translations into rhythmic English prose of his own poems in Bengali."

There are some people who refuse to include Tagore among Indian-English poets on the ground that he never wrote poetry directly in the English language. But we must keep in mind that it was not the Bengali *Gitanjali* that thrilled the world and won him Nobel Award. Edward Thompson, the Oxford Professor wrote in his book, *Rabindra Nath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist* (London: O.U.P. 1948, p. 216), "The book has such a rebirth into our Western tongue that a considerable literature has gathered around it." Robert Frost, the American Nobel-Laureate also remarked "Fortunately Tagore's poetry overflowed national boundaries to reach us in his own English. He belongs little less to us than to his own country." (*Tagore Centenary Volume*, p. 298). Miss May Sinclair, the American novelist, writing to the *New York Evening Post* in May 1913, put Tagore higher than Shelley and Swinburne and remarked that *Gitanjali* was more melodious than Swinburne's poetry, and its message was more profound than the subjectivity, intensity and philosophic thought of Shelley. Milton, in her view, was too serious and solemn and Wordsworth often obscure and ponderous. No English lyric poet was therefore, comparable to Tagore. The noted poet and art-critic Ezra Pound, wrote in *Poetry*, "The appearance of the poems of Rabinder Nath Tagore, translated by himself from Bengali into English is an event in the history of English poetry and world poetry..."

Thus we see that it is English *Gitanjali* which brought fame to the poet, Rabinder Nath Tagore.

### 7.5 Self-Check Exercise: Activity for the Student-II

- 1) In what spirit did Tagore take up the project of translating the songs of *Gitanjali* into English?
- 2) What was the reaction of the English artists towards the English translation of *Gitanjali*?
- 3) How did W. B. Yeats respond to the songs in *Gitanjali*?
- 4) Who submitted Tagore's *Gitanjali* for the Nobel Award?
- 5) How would you justify Tagore's *Gitanjali* as an outstanding work

written by an Indian in the English Language?

#### 7.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise: Activity for the Student-II

- 1) After celebrating his fiftieth birthday in 1912, Tagore retired for a brief rest in his quiet country house. Here, with no other motive, but to while away his time, he started translating some of his poems into English language. Completely relaxed and energetic, the poet took up the poems of *Gitanjali* with an urge to recapture the feelings and sentiments and project them in the medium of different language.
- 2) The English translation of *Gitanjali* was warmly welcomed and highly appreciated by the English artists in England. It was translated successively into many European languages and impressed all the literary minds.
- 3) W.B. Yeats prized the manuscript of the translation and proudly read it out to the renowned contemporary English artists. He even wrote the Preface for the English *Gitanjali* published in 1912.
- 4) In 1913, Sturge Moore, an English author and a member of the Royal society, submitted *Gitanjali* to Swedish Academy for the Nobel Award.
- 5) Some critics are of the view that Rabinder Nath Tagore may not be considered among the renowned Indian-English poets, as he never wrote poetry in English Language directly, but what cannot be ignored is the fact that it was not the Bengali *Gitanjali* that overwhelmed the literary minds all over the world. Rather it was the English Translation of *Gitanjali* that won him the Nobel Prize. Thus it is fair enough to say that *Gitanjali* is an outstanding work by Tagore, who as an Indian writer excelled others in English literary world.

---

**LESSON NO. 1.8**

---

***GITANJALI* : AN ANALYSIS**

**Structure**

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Five main Streams in *Gitanjali*
- 8.3 Summary of Some Stanzas
- 8.4 Major Themes in *Gitanjali*
- 8.5 Self-Check Exercise-Activity for the Student
- 8.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise
- 8.7 Short Notes
- 8.8 Summing Up

**8.0 Objectives**

- to give a comprehensive introduction to *Gitanjali*
- to acquaint the student with Five Streams of *Gitanjali*
- to explain the content of *Gitanjali*
- to discuss Major Themes
- to evaluate the student's comprehension.

**8.1 Introduction**

Tagore's achievement as a poet mainly rests upon *Gitanjali*. *Gitanjali* is a collection of 103 poems, translated, rather than transcreated from Tagore's various poetical works in Bengali (*Gitanjali* : 51 pieces; *Gitamalya* : 17; *Naivedya* : 16; *Kheya* : 11; *Sishu* : 3, *Chaitali* : 1; *Samarna Kalpana* : 1; *Utsarga* : 1, *Achala* : 1, *Vatana* : 1). Only a limited number of 750 copies of the book were at first brought out by the Indian Society in London. But in 1918 it was given a wide circulation by Macmillan publisher.

In these hundred and three songs, the poet expresses his yearning to merge with God and his joy at imminent union. The poet calls his collection "Songs offerings " to the Creator. The romantic longing of the finite for the merger with Infinite is what imbues the poem with mysticism. These songs are mainly devotional and the book has often been compared with the *Book of Psalms*. The relationship between God and man has here been looked at from different angles – Master and Servant, Lover and Beloved, Boatman and Traveller, Musician and Listener, seer and Seen, Father and son. The images

common to classical Indian love poetry have been used to symbolize this mystical longing, and the poet calls himself the beloved of God. Nalini Kanta Gupta in her book *Poets and Mystics* (1951) remarks, "What an enviable God is this God of Tagore, The Great Friend, the Beloved, the Lotus Flower, the unknown man playing a flute in the boat yonder on the river." The images of the mud-stained traveller, the parched earth in summer, the bride awaiting in the empty house for the return of her lord, the first monsoon shower, the flowers and rivers and the conch shells express the romantic yearning and gain a mystical depth. The world is described as His visible raiment, the stars and planets are his handiwork. He is the abode of peace and the source of bliss. Though an expression of devotional and mystical experience, *Gitanjali* is not religious or philosophical in content. It is a mighty piece of prayer of the devotional nature and a universal experience. The lyrics ring with a joy and affirmation over-stepping all limitations of race and creed. Each poem goes straight to the heart. W.B. Yeats rightly observes, "These verses will not lie in little well printed books .... But, as the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find pleasure, in murmuring them, this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own more bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth". The lyrics are full of romantic imagery, lyrical intensity, imagination and emotion, subtlety of rhythm and depth of feeling. These give to *Gitanjali* its poetry and power.

The poems in *Gitanjali* embrace the whole gamut of tender human feelings of love, devotion, attention, dejection, humility, gratitude. They are of the simplest kind, and there is "a peculiar freshness and sincerity about them" observes M. M. Bhattacharji, in his book *Rabindra Nath Tagore : Poet and Thinker*, (p.93). Yeats also remarks, "A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination." *Gitanjali* is not merely a mystic's language and rambling mysticism, it is the growth of the work of supreme culture, the common soil. It is flowers, rivers, the blowing of conch shell, the heavy rains of the Indian July, or the parching heat that we have a feel of in his poetry. Apart from this, it lightly carries the wisdom of a whole ancient culture and the songs meet the need of the elemental man's – the pure naked man's soul. Its appeal would always be to the essential man. It may not appeal to a mind wedded to thinking and philosophy.

We find here Tagore's basic experience of God who sits in the heart of a thing, the spirit that is the soul of all Existence and which finds its beautiful expression here in the *Gitanjali*. One may examine here anything that came from his Vishva-Bharati, his social, political and religious activities – his talks, lectures and essays, his tirade against selfish nationalism and impersonal

mechanism, his call for the Infinite to come down and ruthlessly trample the Tyrant. One cannot miss in it his unique experience:

“The living touch is upon all my limbs. It is this experience that in a hundred ways and bye-ways, rhythms, images and symbols finds expression in *Gitanjali*.”

## **8.2 Five Main Streams in *Gitanjali***

The close-reading of the 103 songs reveals that there are basically five main streams of thought in these songs.

**8.2.1** There are songs that grow out of the tension between God and man. Man is poignantly seeking God and God poignantly seeking man, the God, who “comes, comes, ever comes.” He comes even if man does not care for him. “The day was” says the poet to God “When I did not keep myself in readiness or thee and entering my heart unhidden even as one of the common crown unknown to me; my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a feeling moment of my life.”

**8.2.2** There are songs that grow out of the paradox of freedom in attachment. Freedom craves for a dwelling place within bondage, feels the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight. The attachment intensifies and releases itself in deliverance and love fulfils itself in devotion.

**8.2.3** There are songs that grow out of the paradox of infinite in the finite. Tagore says in his reminiscences, “The joy of attaining the Infinite within the finite, this has been the subject on which my writings have dwelt.” And indeed, he sings out of the realization that deliverance is to be found not in the Infinite but in the bonds of the finite. In one of his songs he says:

“Deliverance ? Where is this deliverance to be found ? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation. He is bound with us all for ever.”

**8.2.4** There are songs that issue from his touch with the soul of existence, the inwardness of thing, its essence, its beauty and truth which we experience when we have stepped into a sort of oneness with the object.

This soul of existence takes various symbolic forms in *Gitanjali* and in most of his plays, it appears as the poet’s God, life of life, lover and beloved besides as mere ineffable spirit of being and beauty. It also appears sometimes, as a flood of light and mirth: “Light, my light, the world-filling light, heart sweetening light. Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the center of my life, the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love; the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth.”

**8.2.5** There are songs that come out of his experience of the rhythm, harmony and music residing in Nature, at the Center of the Universe. Tagore confirms

in this Creative Unity that "The language of harmony in nature is the mother-tongue of our own soul". He sings in his *Gitanjali*: "The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day, runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measure."

### 8.2.6 Some Comments

When we analyse *Gitanjali* Songs, we find that although each one of them bears its own tune, tone or mood, it merges into one or the other of the above mentioned five main streams. Even these main streams ultimately merge into one. The final song in *Gitanjali* is:

"Let all my songs, gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to Thee."

The impression of all the songs is that there are so many different tunes singing repeatedly, as it were, the same thought, the same feeling, the same experience. In these songs there is very little solid or substantial – no real landscape, no explicit picture of life, no history of the age, no story, even no philosophy. The songs do not describe, they do not even give the satisfaction of certain questions and answers for which we look up in Scriptures. They are like soft melodies which seem only to sing and stir up the inner springs of our beings. The songs give us only the joy of the journey, not the satisfaction of arriving at the destination. They only sharpen the pain of our heart and do not show us the face of the Beloved, they only deepen the mystery for us, and do not lead us out of it. They do not equip us with any message for life but may at moments only direct, "Our eye to a flash of beauty or our ear to some far off melody."

The world of *Gitanjali*, in fact, is a world of feeling that exists for man, man in a world deep and subtle, a world where the lover clasps to his heart the beloved. It is a world of mysterious whisperings and of many unsaid things.

The songs of *Gitanjali* are songs mainly of the closest personal connection between the poet and the Eternal, as lover and beloved, wife and husband, servant and master, friend and friend, as if the poet were trying to approach Reality in a personal way through personal relationships. They are songs constructing out of themselves their own wondrous world in which dawn and evenings, and lazy rooms, various tints of the skies and glorious horizons, flowers and birds, beggar maids, pilgrims and messengers with news, man and nature come in contact with one another and unite at a point in the inner heart of the poet and show their pangs of love and longing for the ever far, and yet the ever near Master of the 'whole' world. These songs are not to be intellectually understood, but to be heard and felt by the heart within. The awareness is stirred by them to sense the touch of someone



from a far. These poems mostly tell the story of man's confrontation with his own self or with the 'cosmos' and is told through the medium of personal sorrow, loss or pain and so these songs continue to be sung and will continue for a long time to come.

### **8.3 Summary of Some Stanzas**

#### **8.3.1 Song I**

The poet feels that he enjoys an unending life. As he leaves his physical body and dies, God gives him a fresh life and he is alive again.

The poet undergoes spiritual experience; he feels that God blesses him and touches him and the poet composes a rich poetry.

#### **8.3.2 Song II**

The poet is filled with pride; soon he weeps over his folly of nurturing ego in himself. Only as a singer, he gets near God. When he sings the songs in praise of the Lord, he forgets the difference between him and God and he calls the Lord his friend.

#### **8.3.3 Song III**

The poet listens how the Lord sings. The music that God produces illumines the world. The poet cannot sing; he cries in confusion. However, he is attracted by the melody of Lord's music.

#### **8.3.4 Song IV**

The poet promises to God that he will keep his body pure because the Lord will touch his body time and again. God has given him reason (knowledge); so he will keep away from falsehood. He will also drive away all evil thoughts out of his heart because God will dwell in his heart. He will remember God whenever he acts or does any job.

#### **8.3.5 Song V**

The poet aspires to sit, face to face with God and enjoy the bliss of His company. Away from the sight of God, he would be working in endless worldly labour and would have no rest.

#### **8.3.6 Song VI**

The poet prays to God that He should take him away and utilize his services, for this is the proper time for him to have communion with the Lord.

#### **8.3.7 Song VII**

The poet wishes to be simple and straightforward in his poems or address to the Lord. His poetry is of no value before the Lord who is the master poet.

**8.3.8 Song VIII**

The child who wears a gaudy dress and is decorated with jeweled chains round his neck will not enjoy his play; his dress would create problems and disturbances. He would not play freely for the fear lest his clothes may get spoiled. The poet wants to play the game of ordinary human life without any moral restrictions.

**8.3.9 Song IX**

Man is a fool, as he thinks that he is carrying the burden of his life on his own shoulders. It is the Lord who carries all the burdens. Man should have faith in Him.

**8.3.10 Song X**

God lives among the poorest; the lowliest and the lost. The poet who suffers from ego can never reach God who dwells in the company of the poor.

**8.3.11 Song XI**

God does not live in temples and shrines. He is there where the farmer is ploughing the land where the path maker is breaking stones. Man should not run after salvation or deliverance from the bonds of creation. He should work hard, for work is Worship.

**8.3.12 Song XII**

The journey of life is long and difficult. Man has to pass through the wilderness (deserts and difficulties) of the world before he reaches his destination, i.e. before he meets God.

**8.3.13 Song XIII**

The poet lives in the hope of meeting God, but still the time is not proper for his union with the Lord.

**8.3.14 Song XIV**

The poet feels contented with the gifts of nature – the sky, the light as well as with this human body and the life and the mind that God has given to him.

**8.3.15 Song XV**

The poet wishes to sing songs in praise of the Lord. He prays to God to give him strength to offer “silent worship” to him.

**8.3.16 Song XVI**

The poet wishes to see God, face to face, and offer his obeisance to Him.

**8.3.17 Song XVII**

The poet is waiting for love to give himself up at last into God's hands.

**8.3.18 Song XVIII**

The poet feels restless and lonely without the company of God. He finds it difficult to face rainy hours (the hurdles of life) without the grace and blessings of God.

**8.3.19 Song XIX**

The morning will come. Good days will usher in. The darkness of ignorance will disappear and the poet will listen to the voice of God. Then he will sing the words of God in his poetry. Lord's melodies will break forth in his poetry.

**8.3.20 Song XX**

The lotus bloomed in the heart of the poet. He got enlightenment - wisdom. But he was not aware of it. He was longing for communion. He felt that it was near as "This perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth" of his own heart.

**8.4. Major Themes in *Gitanjali***

In *Gitanjali* Tagore deals with a variety of themes : nature, sorrow, patriotism, the union of human soul with God, ecstasy of surrender, and so on. Sufferings for him have their value, and sorrow is the price we have to pay for the realization of truth. The poet asks:

How will you conquer sorrow if you flee from it?

Melancholy reverberates throughout his songs, the dramatic exchanges between the devotee and the Lord in *Gitanjali* too are 'melancholic with my tears of sorrow.'

So far as Tagore's patriotism is concerned, he was a great lover of his country and wanted to see it united. He loved his country and wanted to see it a land, 'where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free; Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; Where words come out from the depth of truth; Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection; Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit; Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever widening thought and action; Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake'.

He was deeply rooted in India's cultural heritage. He once wrote:

I love thee Bengal, land of gold,

I do not want to die in this beautiful world,

I want to live in the midst of my men.

But Tagore was not a narrow-minded patriot. He was influenced by the

western tradition during his formative period. However, whatever he learnt he made it distinctly his own. Therefore, the translation of his poems into English, as Ezra Pound observes “is an event in the history of English poetry and of world poetry.” He was a poet of international spirit and thinking.

Apart from the themes of patriotism, sufferings and melancholy, the songs reveal the basic theme – the poet’s quest for truth.

He is ever a seeker of truth and strives to penetrate deep into the ultimate reality of life. The opening song of *Gitanjali* incorporates a longing for something. “The infinite gifts come to me only on the very small hands of mine. Ages pass and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.”

Tagore seeks union with God and through that he seeks realization of truth beyond man’s understanding. The entire work of the poet and especially his *Gitanjali* is inspired from the beginning to the end by his pursuit of ‘Thee’ – an attempt at his identification with the Lord. The poet sings:

‘I have ever loved thee in the hundred forms and tunes.’

In the earlier poems it could be a wistful adolescent’s makebelieve form of a woman, or a ‘Deity’ of love and loveliness. In the *Gitanjali* period, it is ‘life of my life’, ‘light of my light’ ‘my friend’ (‘Through what mazy death of gloom art thou treading thy course to come to me, my friend’ ‘my mother’, ‘my darling’, ‘my God’, ‘The holy one’. ‘The wakeful being; it is the Eternal and the Endless and the Great Beyond, playing on his flute; and so on). Suddenly then the tone changes, the rhythm becomes tempestuous; the wistful gaze of the lover disappears and ‘Thee’ turns to be ‘the Destroyer’ ‘the Cruel one’, ‘the terror of Truth’, ‘the Infant Shiva at whose every step of wild dances things totter and tumble’. And yet, at the same time it is ‘the stillness of my mother’s gaze on my face, the scent of the morning service in the temple’, the grace inhering the Universe. And it is a glimmer of gold, in rushing brooks, in flowering trees, in the smile that dances at the corner of dark eyes; the soul of Existence. In all these cases it is a person seeking God. The stance then changes. It is not now his personal self vis-à-vis God (This relationship, however, is not entirely lost), but his concern with the world of history, a world ‘wild with the delirium of hatred.’

Stark realities confront and distress him. The axis again changes. It is now neither the individual world nor the world of history; it turns cosmic. But through this all the same ‘Thee’ continues to pursue the poet. In the depth of the night, ‘She appears as a wakeful pressure’, or as ‘an incorporeal light at the farthest shore of evanescent things’ or as the enigmatic ‘She’ scattering herself in the endless paths of the world’. Whatever the occasion – be it the heart’s agony or joy, or nature, society and war – all apostrophes,

all declamations, all prayers directly or indirectly go to 'Thee'. It could be 'God', or 'Goethe's Eternal Light 'That' leads us on and upward' the force wearing its eternal secret, invisible, visible? It could be Bliss, Heart, Love, God or Wordsworth's "a motion and a spirit that impels all thinking things, and objects of all thought, and roles through all things." Whether it is its, 'It' or 'She' or 'He', it pursued him over like the sound of heaven : 'He comes, comes, ever comes, every moment, every age, every day and every night he comes, comes ever comes' (*Gitanjali* Song No. 45).

And if he tries to move aside to avoid His presence. 'I escape Him not' (*Gitanjali*, Song No. 30).

Through all his work the poet is trying to get the meaning of the inescapable 'thee'. If we grasp the rhythm in Tagore's pulses and his pre-occupation with the enigmatic thee, we can get a clue to the understanding and appreciation of his poetry.

### 8.5 Self-Check Exercise – Activity for the Student

- Q.1 Which are the various themes that Tagore deals with in *Gitanjali*?
- Q.2 What is the significance of sorrow?
- Q.3 What prayer does Tagore offer for his motherland?
- Q.4 Why do we consider Tagore a seeker of truth?
- Q.5 In what friendly ways does the poet address the Lord?
- Q.6 What is the significance of 'Thee' in Tagore's poetry?
- Q.7 What is the role of Shiva in *Gitanjali*?

### 8.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

1. The poet deals with the themes of nature, sorrow, the union of human soul with God.
2. Sorrow is essential for the realization of truth. The poet asks: "How will you conquer sorrow if you flee from it?"
3. The poet prays that his country should be a great land where the mind is without fear; where the head is held high and where knowledge is imparted free. His countrymen should attain generosity and broadmindedness and rise above the shackles of caste, colour and creed. Truth and perfection should reign over his country.
4. Tagore is a seeker of truth. He wants to attain the knowledge of ultimate reality. He also endeavours to seek union with God.
5. The poet addresses the Lord as "Deity of Love", 'my friend', 'my mother', 'my Darling', my God', 'The holy one', so on.
6. 'Thee' is the Infinite or God. The poet uses the word 'Thee' mostly in

- relation to God.
7. Shiva is the Lord who is assigned the role of Destruction (parlaya). He is the Destroyer, while Brahma is the Creator and Vishnu is the Preserver of the universe.

### 8.7 Short Notes

Q.1 Write a short note on *Gitanjali* and the Book of Psalms.

Ans. *Gitanjali*, a collection of 103 songs, is compared to the Book of Psalms because like Psalms, these songs are mainly devotional songs. In these songs the poet expresses his yearning to merge with God and shows his joy at an imminent union. The romantic longing of the finite for the merger with the Infinite imbues these songs with mysticism and the poet himself has called these songs 'Song Offerings to the Creator.' The songs are expressions of devotional mystical experiences and ring with joy of affirmation transcending all limitations of race and creed.

Q.2 Write about the various symbolic forms that the soul of existence takes in *Gitanjali*.

Ans. The soul of existence takes various symbolic forms in the poem. It appears as the poet's God, life, Lover and beloved, as ineffable spirit of being and beauty. It also appears sometimes as light and mirth: 'Light my light', 'the world filing light', 'the eye kissing light', 'heart sweetening light'.

Q.3 How does the poet try to approach Reality in the songs of *Gitanjali*?

Ans. In the songs of *Gitanjali*, the poet tries to approach Reality in a personal way through personal relationship. That is why the songs mainly deal with the closest personal relationship between the poet and the eternal, as lover and beloved, wife and husband, servant and master, friend and friend. Here man and nature come in contact with one another and unite at a point in the heart of the poet, showing pangs of love and longing for the ever far and yet ever near Master of the world.

### 8.8 Summing Up

Dear student, in this lesson, we have made an attempt to acquaint you with the content of Tagore's *Gitanjali*. The book reveals the spiritual development of the poet as he longs for his union with the Lord. You have also learnt about the various themes contained therein. In the next lesson we shall take up other important aspects of *Gitanjali*.

---

**LESSON NO. 1.9**

---

**MAJOR ASPECTS OF *GITANJALI***

**STRUCTURE**

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Mysticism in *Gitanjali*
- 9.3 Self- Check Exercise- Activity-I
- 9.4 Answers to Self-Check Exercise
- 9.5 Philosophy in *Gitanjali*
- 9.6 Imagery
- 9.7 Self- Check Exercise- Activity-II
- 9.8 Answers to Self- Check Exercise
- 9.9 Summing up

**9.0 Objectives**

- Ø to analyse major aspects of *Gitanjali*
- Ø to discuss Mysticism in *Gitanjali*
- Ø to illustrate Philosophy in *Gitanjali*
- Ø to explain imagery in *Gitanjali*
- Ø to evaluate the student's comprehension.

**9.1 Introduction**

In lesson No. 8 we have analysed the text of *Gitanjali*, explained its content and discussed the major themes. In this lesson, we intend to discuss other major aspects of *Gitanjali* which are important from the view point of examination.

**9.2 Mysticism in *Gitanjali***

Tagore's achievement as a poet mainly rests on his English *Gitanjali* and other English renderings of his poems that came after it. His reputation in the West, which was at its height in the second decade of this century, depended on his mysticism. Almost all those who commended his English *Gitanjali* including Yeats appreciated Tagore's mystical insight. Tagore is primarily a lyrical poet. But he is not concerned with mysticism in the technical sense, yoga or spirituality. He is not a mystic in the sense in which Sri Aurobindo is. One of the critics has rightly remarked, "A misunderstanding must be dissipated. Tagore's reputation as a predominantly

‘mystic’ poet should be exercised.” Critics have made much of Tagore’s mysticism and this has obscured his real greatness as a poet. Nevertheless there is a marked mystical tendency in *Gitanjali* which imbues his lyrics with colour and depth, intensity and lyrical appeal. Dr. Gurumurthi has rightly observed that “The *Gitanjali* contains some of the finest expressions of his mystic experience and has a place equally in the mystic literature of the world as the finest poetry of our time.”

The merger of the Finite with the Infinite is what constitutes mystic sensibility. This we find in *Gitanjali* which is pervaded by the poet’s yearning to merge with God and his joy at an imminent union.

“At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.”

Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar aptly interprets *Gitanjali* as a mystic’s journey to the highest goals. He says, “*Gitanjali* is verily the recordation of the vicissitudes in the drama of the human soul in its progress from the finite to the infinite. And the progress is necessarily conceived as a battle, as a journey and as a continuing sacrifice, culminating in a total offering of all in self- surrender, so that by losing all one may gain all.” The yearning of the finite soul as beloved for the merger or union with the Infinite or God as lover is a major component of the vision of the mystics all over the world. But Tagore comes closer to the Sufi mysticism in his divine love conceived in human or earthly terms. The influence of Sufi mysticism is profound in *Gitanjali* in which the poet adopts the role of beloved of God. In Sufi mysticism we find the identity of the individual and God of the lover and the beloved, and the world is seen as the manifestation of God. This Sufi strain of mysticism is quite evident in *Gitanjali*.

Erotic analogy for mystic union is frequently employed in Sufi mystic poets and here is one such example in *Gitanjali*:

“My song has put off her adornments. She has no pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our union; they would come between thee and me; their jingling would drown thy whispers”.

Another aspect of Tagore’s mysticism is that, unlike many true mystics he believes in the world of the senses, his is a sensuous mysticism: “No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight” – *Gitanjali*.

This aspect pervades *Gitanjali* and accounts for the poet’s passionate love for nature.

Thus, though Tagore is more than a mystic, he is also less than a mystic. His is a secondary mysticism. He is not primarily a mystic like William



Blake but his mystic experience is literary. It lies mainly in his romantic longing for the Divine. His God is a friend, beloved – an object of Nature, someone afar. He gives importance to the role of senses in human life. Prof. Humayun Kabir says, “His poems and songs are full of images and themes which remind us of ecstatic experience, but we also have a keen sense of the facts of daily life. His works and phrases have an authenticity of expression that can be borne out of personal experience. Nuances of feeling are fused with moods of nature in a way which have few parallels in the world of poetry.”

The poet like a mystic undertakes a journey to the unknown. He experiences an extension of his personality, his soul seeks a union with the Lord. There are then moments of ecstasy and eternal bliss. The poet feels the eternal pressure every where. At this level of experience beauty and truth become one and the same thing. The seeker sees “into the life of things” and his vision embraces entire humanity. He sings with immense joy:

“My home is everywhere”. For him everything is now clothed in a celestial light. He discards meaningless rites and rituals. He says:

“Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads.”

Wordsworth called spiritual pleasure a “mood” since he could not distrust the sense experience. To Blake, the ecstatic moments were fleeting in nature. Before Blake could understand them or find palpable pattern in them the bliss would vanish. Tagore and Aurobindo, on the other hand, could stay in that blissful state for a long time. Sri Aurobindo remarks:

“I am drunk with Glory of the Lord.

I have looked alive upon the Eternal’s face”

In Whitman this unity with the higher consciousness is established after some effort while Tagore and Sri Aurobindo reach this stage so easily. For Indian sages all problems are the problems of harmony.

Thus we find that Tagore was a romantic and a mystic poet in the Vaishnava tradition and he was greatly influenced by the Bhakti movement, by Chaitanya and Kabir. The religious pattern, however, is not artificially imposed on his poetry. In fact, the religious and the poetic are blended beautifully in artistic terms. In order to accomplish the mystical attitudes the poet has employed well-chosen symbols. The triumph of Tagore lies in embodying the mystic consciousness on which he has tremendous hold. In the words of N.K. Gupta, “Tagore is in direct line with those bards who have sung of the spirit, who always soared high above the falsehoods and ugliness of a merely mundane life and lived in the undecaying lights and beauties of a divine consciousness” (Nalini Kant Gupta, *Poets and Mystics*, Madras, 1951, p.63)

The impact of Tagore’s mystical poetry was very overwhelming on the themes and styles of the later Indian poetry. The later Indian poets were

tempted to write mystical poetry in the manner and spirit of Tagore. For example Harindra Nath Chattopadhyaya is mystical in his verse and constantly expresses a desire to remove his false self and to discover God. In the wake of Tagore's success as a mystic poet there has also been an impression among critics of Indian poetry that true Indian poetry is mystical. J.H. Cousins writes, "It is this quality of spiritual vision that seems to be the supreme characteristic of Indian poetry." *The Renaissance in India* (Madras, 1918, p. 171).

### 9.3. Self-Check Exercise-Activity For the student-I

- Q.1. What does Srinivasa Iyengar say about mysticism in *Gitanjali*?
- Q.2. What is the role of senses in Tagore's mysticism?
- Q.3. What is the observation of Humayun Kabir on Tagore's mysticism?
- Q.4. How would you like to explain the mysticism in Tagore's poetry?
- Q.5. What is the impact of Tagore's mysticism on Indian Writing in English?

### 9.4 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

1. Srinivasa Iyengar says that *Gitanjali* is a mystic's journey to the highest goal. It records the progress of the human soul from the finite to the infinite. It reveals the poet's self-surrender and continuing sacrifice to attain spirituality.
2. Tagore does not believe in the repression of the senses. He says, "I will not shut the doors of my senses. The delight of sight, hearing and touch will bear thy delight". Through his senses Tagore wants to have a physical vision of God. He wants to sit face to face with God.
3. Humayun Kabir says that Tagore's poems remind us of ecstatic experience. We also have a keen sense of the facts of daily life.
4. The poet undertakes a journey to the unknown. He seeks a union with God.
5. Tagore's mysticism has inspired his successors and contemporaries to develop the notion that true Indian poetry is mystical in nature.

### 9.5 Philosophy in *Gitanjali*

In *Gitanjali* Tagore draws largely upon the rich association of Indian philosophy and recaptures its theme and spirit. The songs thrive on Hindu mysticism and present a complex of thoughts. However, *Gitanjali* does not have a single spinal cord of philosophy running through it. The poet, nurtured in a religious home, imbibed from the early years, the love for God. That is what we find in this collection of wonderful songs and in it Tagore seeks a perfect order of human existence. The nature of life, the mystical joy, the sense of inadequacy as a devout, a desire for death, the deep dedication to God. A dislike for material allurements, the befriending of companionless people on

earth, the waiting for God, these are found in *Gitanjali*. There is a call from the other shore of life, and the poet is reminded of Eternity.

"Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou empty again and again and fillest it ever with fresh life." *Gitanjali* is a poem of detachment from the material world, and full of devotion for the Master. It seeks an escape from the busy life of man. Not earth but the supernal regions tempt the poet's soul.

"I know that the day will come when my sight of this earth shall not be lost, and life will take its leave in silence, drawing the last curtain over my eyes."

"Men hasten to the King's Market. All the buyers and sellers are there. But I have my untimely leave in the middle of the day, in the thick of Work."

In *Gitanjali* the poet casts a meditative glance at the stern reality of death. Death is not painted as dark, grey, or fearsome but as white skinned. The poet has given considerable thought to the theme of death. For example, in the following song the poet says:

"On the seashore of endless world, children meet. Tempest roams in the pathless sky; ships get wrecked in the trackless water; death is abroad and children play."

The call from the other shore, the emptiness, the groaning of the sky, the power of renewal in death, the dryness of the heart, the sad music of the cosmic variety, etc. tell us of the dark cell in the poet's mind. Though life and death have been created as twins by Tagore, there is a strong case to prove that death always holds strongly over his thoughts. There are even the traces of fear of death.

"I shrink to give up my life."

We find the philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita* in *Gitanjali*. The poet says in Song IX that a man who thinks that he carries the burden of his life on his shoulders is really a fool. Actually it is God who carries the burden of all the human beings because he is the doer. Tagore's concept of the self-surrender at the feet of God is essentially Vedantic. He considers himself to be a beggar begging at the door of the Lord.

But we also find that there is a lack of newness in thought processes in *Gitanjali*. The entire volume rests on the columns of faith which Tagore gets from the other sources. There is certain deadening of the mental faculty which is something serious, particularly when the pieces assume the metaphysical importance. *Gitanjali* is spiritually charged, the poet looks forward to the divine merger, but no philosophic synthesis is evolved. Though there is no single philosophy, the spiritual message the songs contain is universal.

## 9.6 Imagery:

Tagore employs beautiful and rich imagery in his lyrics. There are numerous poetic similes, romantic metaphors and suggestive symbols in *Gitanjali* which are worth noting for their mystical depth, freshness and sheer poetic beauty. The imagery is pervasive in the entire collection and gives a kind of unity to it. The imagery is also a means of concretizing the poet's emotions and enhances the poetic charm of a poetry that is already emotionally powerful and touching.

Tagore's imagery is drawn from a variety of sources. They are the nature (Indian seasons) different times of day – evening, morning noon, sunrise, sunset, the heavenly bodies – the sun and the moon, the earth and the sky, birds and flowers, trees and rivers; Indian classical mythology (the *Bhagvata Purana*), classical love poetry and the personal world. Dr. H.M. Williams observes in this connection, "The imagery pervasive, but not startling, is taken from Nature and from Indian classical mythology, especially the Krishna Radha source."

Now we shall discuss these sources separately.

Most of the poetic and illustrative images used in the *Gitanjali* are largely drawn from Nature. While it is expressive of Tagore's passionate love of Nature and his minute observation of its beauties and charms, it has also given his work a pastoral touch and natural freshness. The imagery that the poet uses time and again consists of the images of bird, light, river, cloud, evening and the Indian seasons. The metaphors of Indian seasons are poetically and impressively used by the poet to express his yearning of God. Here is an illustration of his major employment of Nature images to express his longing or a tryst with the divine.

The rain has held back for days and days, my God, in my arid heart. The horizon is fiercely naked, not the thinnest clear of a soft cloud, not the vaguest hint of a distant cool shower. Send the angry storm, dark with death, if it is thy wish and with lashes of lightening startle the sky from end to end. But call back, my 'lord, call back this pervading silent heart, still and keen cruel, burning the heart with the dire despair.'

'Let the cloud of Grace bend low from above like the tearful look of the mother on the day of the father's wrath.'

Like Wordsworth, Tagore is led to his vision of God by external nature and believes that Nature and God are one and the same. Tagore accepts nature as real and expresses his love of it which equals only his love of God, through the use of poetic images drawn from natural objects: 'Like a rain cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers, let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.'

Tagore uses nature images to symbolize his yearning to merge with God and his joy at an imminent union - the parched earth in summer, the first monsoon shower, the flower, and rivers etc. Here is an example, 'Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee.'

Thus one of the striking characteristics of Tagore's poetry is the predominance of nature imagery.

Secondly, Tagore's imagery is mainly romantic. It is rich and extremely luxuriant and is a prominent source of much of his poetic power. Romantic feelings are conveyed through equally romantic images which are polished and bejeweled. Here is an example:

'At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits of joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.'

The romantic imagery is also a major attraction of his love poems, e.g. "Lover's Gift" and "Fruit Gathering", "This romantic imagery is also characteristic of his imaginative spirit. "We can note a memorable romantic image in the following songs, "Deity of the ruined temple/The broken strings of vina sing no more your praise/The bells in the evening proclaim not your time of worship/The air is still and silent about you."

In your silent dwelling comes the vagrant spring breeze. It brings the tidings of flowers-the flowers that for your worship are offered no more.

'Your worshipper of old wonders ever longing for favour still refused. In the eve, when fine showers mingle with the gloom of dust, he wearily comes back to the ruined temple with hunger in his heart.' Tagore has also used myths and imagery from Indian classical mythology. For example, Tagore uses the legend of Radha and Krishna's love search through the tempest.

'I can see nothing before me. I wonder where comes thy chariot. But what dim shore of the ink-black river, by what far edge of the frowning forest, through what mazy depths of gloom art thou treading Thy course to come to me, my friend'.

In the following lines, the imagery of Lord Krishna playing the flute is unmistakable.

"This little flute of a reed thou has carried over hills and dales and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new."

The poet through such imagery not only emphasizes the immortality of the human soul, but suggests that ups and downs in life are nothing but the melodies played by Krishna.

Thus we find that Tagore has used rich imagery in *Gitanjali* which makes it a poetry of high order.

**9.7 Self-Check Exercise-Activity for the Student-II**

Q.1. What is Tagore's attitude towards Death in *Gitanjali*?

Q.2. What kind of philosophy do we find in *Gitanjali*?

**9.8 Answers of Self-Check Exercise-II**

1. Death is a stark reality. It is inevitable. However, Death is not dark, grey or fearsome but "white-skinned". In one of his songs, the poet says, "On the seashore of endless world, children meet. Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships get wrecked in the trackless water, death is abroad and children play." However, we find traces of fear of Death - "I shrink to give up my life."
2. We discover the philosophy of the *Bhagvad Gita* in *Gitanjali*. The poet says in Song IX that a man who thinks that he carries the burden of his life on his shoulders is really a fool. Actually it is God who carries our burden, for he is the doer. Tagore's concept of the complete surrender at the altar of God is essentially Vedantic in nature.
3. Imagery is drawn from nature, heavenly bodies, Indian classical mythology and classical love poetry.
4. Hint : Read the text carefully and bring out the instances.

**9.9 Summing up**

In this lesson, we have discussed mysticism and philosophy in *Gitanjali*. We have also analysed Tagore's use of imagery in *Gitanjali*. These aspects are very important from the point of view of examination. Please prepare them thoroughly. In the next lesson, we shall discuss some other important aspects of *Gitanjali*.

---

**LESSON NO. 1.10**

---

**MAJOR ASPECTS OF GITANJALI**

**STRUCTURE**

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Gitanjali as a Devotional Poem
- 10.3 Self-Check Exercise-Activity for the Student – I
- 10.4 Answers to Self-Check Exercise – I
- 10.5 Tagore as a Lyric Poet
- 10.6 Tagore's Achievements
- 10.7 Self-Check Exercise-Activity – II
- 10.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercise – II
- 10.9 Summing up

**10.0 Objectives**

- To discuss *Gitanjali* as a devotional poem
- To explain Lyricism in *Gitanjali*
- To analyse Tagore's Achievements as a Poet
- To evaluate the student's comprehension

**10.1 Introduction:**

In lesson No. 9, we discussed Mysticism, Philosophy and Imagery in *Gitanjali*. Now in this lesson we are going to analyse *Gitanjali* as devotional poetry. We shall also be discussing Tagore as a poet.

**10.2 *Gitanjali* as Devotional Poetry**

*Gitanjali* is mainly a collection of devotional songs. It has been compared with the *Book of Psalms*. There have been Vaishnava poets and Saiva poets who seek God as a child seeks his mother, as a lover seeks his or her beloved. There have been many gifted singers intoxicated with the love of the Divine turning this love into the purest poetry. Tagore here has given a fresh and new mould to the use of India's devotional poetry. 'The imagery, the conceits, the basic experience, the longing, the trail, the promise, the realization, all have the unique Indian flavour and taste.'

'Its familiarity was its recommendation to India, its apparent novelty was its recommendation abroad', remarks K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar. Here the relationship between God and man has been looked at from different angles – Master

and Servant, Lover and Beloved, Boatman and Traveller, Musician and listener, Seer and seen, Father and son. The world is His visible raiment: the stars and planets are His handiwork. He is the abode of peace and source of bliss. 'The songs in *Gitanjali* embrace the whole gamut of tender human feelings – love, devotion, affection, detection, humility, gratitude. They are of the simplest kind, and there is a peculiar freshness and sincerity about them.'

M. Abbe Bremond once declared that 'pure poetry aspires to a condition of prayer. Such poetry is half a prayer from below, half a whisper from above, the prayer evoking the response of the whisper provoking the prayer, and always prayer and whisper chiming into song. *Gitanjali* is full of such poetry. The opening song of *Gitanjali* is a prayer of this kind. "Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again, and fillest it ever with fresh life."

The human body is the temple of the soul, the human soul is the temple of God. The human soul is nothing unless it is inhabited or 'filled' by the spirit. Birth and death are but the filling and the emptying the man by the spirit, and the individual is significant as he may seem to be the partaker of God's immortality. The poet sings it in the second song, "This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternal new."

The lifeless flute comes to life when the Lord of Brindavan plays upon it forever, piping song forever new. The human soul is not God's Temple, it is also Krishna's flute. The poet not only emphasizes the immortality of the human soul but suggests that ups and downs in life are nothing but the melodies played by Krishna. The poet sings:

At the immortal touch of thy hands  
my little heart loses its limits in  
joy and gives birth to utterance,  
Ineffable.

The infinite gifts come to me only,  
On these very small hands of mine.  
Ages pass, and still thou pourest,  
And still there is room to fill.

The phenomenal world in which the 'individual plays his obscure part is actually the *lila* or the drama of the Supreme and to know this, one should participate in the total joy, in a great song. The songs of the devotee guide him to the very threshold of Reality as the poet sings:

'Ever in my life have I sought thee with my songs, it was they, who led



me from door, and with them have I felt about me searching and touching my world.'

They guided me all the day long to the mysteries of the country old pleasure and pain and at last, to what palace gate have they brought me in the evening at the end of my journey?

In the last instance the devotee is seized with marvellous contentment, and so he makes a final offering of his riches to the Supreme.

In one salutation to thee, my God

Let all my sense spread out and touch this world at thy feet .....

Let all my songs gather their diverse strains into a single current and flow to sea of silence in one salutation to thee.'

The one hundred three songs in *Gitanjali* form mighty piece of prayer and pleading and exultation integral with the main musical theme, other notes too are occasionally heard. Though *Gitanjali* is devotional, it does not follow the old, beaten path. In one of the songs, the poet asks the superstitious, ritualistic worshipper.

'Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads ! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut ? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!'

He is there with the tiller, the stone- breaker and the honest labourer. It conveys *the Gita* ideal - yoga is skill in work.

The ideal of 'escape' from the world's demands is puerile and vain : 'Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found ? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all for ever.'

The devotee is aware that some people are blind and seek Him in the wrong places or in the wrong way while others are crushed by their own cowardice and dare not seize the freedom that would end their misery.

'My debts are large, my failures great.

'My shame secret and heavy; Yet when I come to ask for my good, I quake in fear lest my prayer be granted'.

The waywardness of man is endless, the varieties of human wretchedness are endless, slavery and misery form number-less patterns. For this purpose, faith from below and grace from above are needed to end them once and for all. The devotee expresses his sense of regret and repentance. 'The songs that I come to sing remain unsung to this day. I have spent my days in stringing and unstringing my instruments.'

The sense of estrangement from the Maker also over - powers him. "He,

whom I enclose with name is weeping in this dungeon. I am ever busy building this wall all around, and as this wall goes up into sky day by day I lose sight of my true being in its dark shadow.'

The devotee knows that Humility so much emphasized in Christianity is the means of communication with the Master who sits on the throne: "Here is the footstool and there rest the feet where live the poorest and lowliest and lost.'

Boundless admiration for the Master's skill in Music overwhelms the disciple: "I know not how thou singest, my master, I ever listen in silent amazement. The light of thy music illumines the world."

The relations of the lover and beloved are obvious in the following lines:

"Clouds heap upon clouds and it darkens. Ah, love, why dost thou let me wait outside the door all alone?"

The music and the devotee in the poet utters aloud:

'In one salutation to thee, my God,

let all my senses gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.'

The poet here establishes an inseparable link with the Greater soul.

Thus we find that *Gitanjali* consists of the various moods and modes that a devotee has when he prays to God.

### 10.3 Self -Check Exercise - Activity for the Student-I

- Q.1 What is the definition of Devotional poetry?
- Q.2 What is devotional about *Gitanjali*?
- Q.3 What does the poet aspire for in this poem?
- Q.4 Discuss Tagore's attitude towards the worldly duty.
- Q.5 Explain Tagore's views about rituals.

### 10.4 Answers to Self Check Exercise-I

1. Devotional poetry dwells on the spiritual and mystical experiences of saint-poets like Guru Nanak, Tulsi Das, Kabir, Sur Das and other saintly poets. It is a religious poetry. It explains the communion of human soul with God. Devotional poetry aspires to the condition of a prayer.

2. *Gitanjali* explains that man is significant because man partakes the element of God's immortality. The poet says - "Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure." Birth and Death are just filling and emptying the man by the soul. *Gitanjali* also illustrates the idea that human soul is the temple of God. It is also Krishna's flute. The poet also emphasizes the immortality of human soul. The poem also contains the Vedantic philosophy of complete

surrender and devotion at the feet of the Lord.

3. The poet aspires for his union with the Lord.

4. For Tagore, the work is worship. He says our Lord has taken upon himself the burden of the whole creation. We must do our duty sincerely and fulfil our obligations according to the best of our capacity.

5. Tagore is against rituals-against the telling of beads in the temple.

### 10.5 Tagore as a Lyric Poet :

Tagore is no doubt regarded as a mystic poet and there are mystic tendencies also in his work, yet he is primarily and pre-eminently a lyric poet. He is indeed one of the great lyric poets of the world. His *Gitanjali* is purely a lyrical creation where many poetical ideas and lyrical thoughts are scattered. Tagore's creation of lyrics helped in the development of the genre of lyrical in the Indian-English literature. We find that the major voices in older Indian -English poetry are lyrical. For example, Toru Dutt displays an exquisite lyrical talent in her shorter poems though she could not do best in the longer poems. Manmohan Ghose is another lyrical poet, but he was not satisfied with mere lyrical gifts. Other contemporaries of Tagore such as Ghose, Sarojini Naidu and her brother Harin could not establish themselves as lyrical poets but Tagore can be singled out as one who remains supremely a lyrical poet from first to last. His individualism points to his towering poetic stature.

As a lyric poet, Tagore's range covers a period of more than sixty years. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly remarks, " Tagore wrote probably the largest number of lyrics ever attempted by any poet. His entire poetic output is characterized by poetic ethos, lyrical intensity, melodiousness, sonority and beauty of imagery.' Dr. K.N.Joshi observes 'his sense of rhythms, his daring invention of new meters, his power of yoking sound with sense, entitle him to the rank amongst the foremost lyric poets of the world.'

Tagore's lyrics are noted for their simplicity and directness of expression. The poet's sincerity of feeling and vividness of imagery combine with the rhythmic flow of words and give the reader or hearer the impression that the poet's mystic yearning is harmoniously fused with deep human passion and significance . The main features of lyrical poetry are its humanistic essence with a spiritual love of nature and man, the expression of the beauty and splendor of the earth.

The characteristic feature of Tagore's lyrics is their sing song quality. They are songs of matchless beauty and deep feeling. *Gitanjali* is a collection of songs offerings to the creator. These lyrics are not literary like those of Sarojini Naidu and Manmohan Ghose. They are also unlike Arnold's lyrics since they aim at being sung and not read, though they retain the meditative

beauty of a reflective lyric. Here is an example of a reflective lyric.

'I know not how thou singest my master.'

"I ever listen in silent amazement." The light of the music illumines the world. The life breath of the music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through obstacles and rushes on. My heart longs to join in thy song, but vainly struggles for a voice. I would speak, but speech breaks into song, and I cry baffled. "Ah, thou has made my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master."

No doubt, Tagore's Indian-English prose-poems do not have that musical beauty and evocative power of the original Bengali; but they are among the best of the lyrics. Thompson says, "Tagore is essentially a lyricist and the beauty of his religious lyrics is adequately presented by the English *Gitanjali*, a book that will stir men as long as the English is read." In fact, the chief characteristic of Tagore's poetry is its lyrical tone.

Tagore's lyrics deal with the themes of love, mystical yearning for God and love of nature's beauty and also with the Edenic world children. Love is the key word to describe his lyric poetry.

His poems, broadly speaking, can be divided into four types of lyrics: love lyrics, nature lyrics, religious lyrics and lyrics which deal with the theme of childhood. His love lyrics are notable for passion, lyrical intensity and romantic imagery. Sometimes he is a religious devotee and at other the beloved of God. In those passages in which he assumes the role of the beloved of God, poetry reaches its highest lyrical intensity. This is the role he adopts for himself in *Gitanjali* and in other collections also but the lyrics in this collection are the superb ones.

The lyricism of Tagore rests on rhythm and selection of musical languages to create verbal music. His prose poems work through musical and incantatory rhythm. There is smoothness and sweetness and melodiousness in his lyrics and the language chosen for these lyrics also has musical touches.

In nut shell, we can say that the greatest quality of Tagore's lyrics is that they touch our heart and are fresh in their outlook and power of appeal. Krishna Bagchi rightly remarks about the ever lasting appeal of these lyrics. Whatever may be the changes as time passes in people's reaction to it, travellers again and again will hum *Gitanjali's* songs on highway, and men rowing upon rivers and lovers will murmur them because the songs meet the need of the elemental man's, the pure naked man's soul. Its appeal would always be to the essential man, it may be to a mind encrusted with thinking. The songs are there not to be intellectually understood, but to be heard and felt by the heart within. Awareness is stirred by them to touch someone from afar."

The fusion of feeling, imagery and music in his lyrics makes Tagore one of the best lyricists in the history of Indian-English literature.

### 10.6 Tagore's Achievements as a Poet

Tagore is above all, a poet. His own testament is 'I am a poet and nothing else'. Even his plays abound in poetry. Tagore had a many sided genius which combined in his *Gitanjali* philosophy, poetry, as well as patriotism. Tagore drew his sustenance from Sanskrit philosophical and literary tradition, devotional poetry of India, English Romantics and Sufi mystics. Though he was full of poetic imagination yet he had intense faith in traditional poetic practices. Love has been the most inspiring theme of his poetry, whether it is spiritual love or amorous love.

Tagore's poetry ranges from romanticism to mysticism. The romantic phase of his poetry is its earlier phase and it gave way to the mystic and spiritual phase. The dominant tone of his later poetry to which *Gitanjali* belongs is spiritual and philosophical but what gives unity to his poetry is its intense lyricism. Tagore outshines not as a religious poet but as a lyric poet for his outstanding imagery, romantic imagination, authenticity of emotions and musical richness as evidenced in his lyrics. As love is the dominating theme, lyrical gifts manipulate his expression and diction. Tagore's poetry abounds in mystic sentiments and his spirituality is clothed in literary imagery and musical rhythm. Tagore and Sri Aurobindo started a tradition of mystic poetry in Indian-English literature but Tagore does not sacrifice poetry to spirituality. Rather his poetry is a poetic fusion of poetry and mystic feelings. He is a combination of Keats and Wordsworth on the poetic level of sensuousness. He is not a poet who denies the world of senses and ends in intellectual abstraction.

Tagore is a poet of humanity and his poetry is a poetry of man. He imparts a universal message of peace, love and joy. His poetic greatness is classical as he transcends the barriers of time and space. His poetry is full of spiritual richness, and his God is above any doctrine and dogma. Hence he is unhappy over the spiritual death of the mass of mankind. He criticizes disillusionment and meaninglessness in the modern times. Tagore's poetry gives a message of hope.

Tagore's contribution to Indian-English poetry lies in the matter of form also. He gave to Indian-English poetry a new form of prose poem. He made a solid technical achievement in his 'powerful manipulation of a free verse form and poetic prose'. His experiment with a new poetic form and techniques in his English *Gitanjali* was an innovation long before T.S. Eliot came out with his new poetic techniques. A prose poem has its own pattern of repetitive devices, parallelism and contrasts. Tagore's style has been imitated by a host of Indian-English poets such as Anand Acharya, Puran Singh, P.R. Kulkarni, Purohit

Swamy, Mrs. Budhey, K.S. Venktaraman and a few others.

Secondly, the Indianness of Tagore is an open secret. His poetical ideas, sentiments, imagery and philosophy, all are basically Indian. But he transported them into the English language with great success. As a successful poet Tagore demonstrated the flexibility of the English language. While this shows his wonderful mastery of a foreign language as a poetic medium, it also points to another area of his achievement. In the opinion of Dr. C. Paul Verghese, "His greatest contribution is the innovation of an incantatory rhythmic prose which he almost perfected as a medium for the rendering of his own poetry into English. He has shown that the English language could be a suitable vehicle of Indian sentiments, thoughts and imagery." This quality of Tagore makes him a great Indian-English poet.

Tagore is also the master of speech, lord of the word. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee rightly called him 'Vak-pati'. Words came to him singing and dancing and he wove them into a hundred bewitching tunes, a hundred rhythmic patterns. One salient feature of Tagore's later poetry is its utter simplicity. These poems are dedicated to man and God, where he has shed all the earlier adornments of language. The simplest of human situations are used to reveal his experience of the divinity. The diction also takes on the directness and simplicity of common speech. There is an immediacy of experience in them. Words have become lucid, and transparent, and the purest music is almost everywhere.

Summing up we can say that Tagore's poetry is universal in appeal. Today he is a poet of national and international status. His ultimate place will be not simply among India's poets, but among those of the world.

### 10.7 Self-Check Exercise-Activity-II

- Q.1 Why do we consider Tagore a mystic poet?
- Q.2 Why is Tagore regarded as a lyric poet?
- Q.3 What is the important feature of Tagore's lyrics?
- Q.4 What is Tagore's contribution to Indian-English poetry?
- Q.5 Explain Tagore's poetic diction.

### 10.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercise-II

1. There are mystic tendencies in Tagore's work. The poet aspires to have a union with God.
2. Tagore has written a large number of lyrics. He dwells on rhythm and musical-notes in *Gitanjali*. There is smoothness and melody in his lyrics. His lyrics reveal musical intensity, sonority and beauty of imagery. They are simple and direct. Thompson says that Tagore is essen-

tially a lyricist.

3. The important feature of Tagore's lyrics is their sing-song quality. They contain deep feelings. They have reflective and meditative quality. They reveal mystical yearning for God.
4. Tagore has influenced several Indian-English poets writings in English. The philosophy he portrays is essentially drawn from the *Bhagvat Gita* and metaphysical tradition of India. His experiment with a new poetic form is a great innovation which has attracted Indian poets like Purohit Swamy, K.S. Venkataraman, Subho Tagore, Anand Acharya, Puran Singh and others.
5. Tagore is a great literary artist. He employs apt images and metaphors in his poetry. His imagery is mostly drawn from nature and Indian metaphysical tradition. Words come to him singing and dancing and he weaves them into rhythmic patterns.

### 10.9 Summing up

In this lesson we have discussed Tagore's lyricism and his achievements as a poet. You should prepare all the important aspects of *Gitanjali* such as major themes, philosophy, imagery, mysticism, and lyricism. You should also be able to discuss Tagore as a poet. If you want to fetch good marks in the annual examination, you should quote lines from *Gitanjali* to substantiate your answers.

### SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the contribution of Tagore as a writer.
2. Give an estimate of Tagore's *Gitanjali* and its contribution to the growth of Indian Poetry in English.
3. Discuss the Five main streams in *Gitanjali*.
4. Discuss *Gitanjali* songs as poems of Bhakti in the great Indian Tradition.

### Short Notes in about 100 words each

1. Philosophy in *Gitanjali*.
2. Lyrical Elements in *Gitanjali*.
3. Devotional Elements in *Gitanjali*.